

# **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

## **Job 1–2**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Open your Bibles to the Book of Job. If you've forgotten where that is, it's right before the Book of Psalms and after the Book of Esther. We're beginning a new series that will take us through the Book of Job. The series title is borrowed from a book title by Wesley Baker. I don't lay claim to any originality to the title. It's "More Than a Man Can Take." So with equal rights I'll say, "More than a man or woman can take." This time we're going to look at chapters 1 and 2 in the Book of Job and its message: I can't believe this is happening to me.

### **I. Just a few words about the background on the Book of Job.**

**A.** We really don't know anything about the author and the date for the Book of Job. It could be the earliest book in the Bible; it may be a later book. The author never identifies who he is, but several names have been put forward. Some have thought that maybe Job wrote the book himself. Others say Elihu, who gives a number of speeches in the book. Some have said Moses wrote it. Others have said Solomon, Isaiah, Hezekiah, or Baruch—a friend of Jeremiah's. The list can go on. I suppose anyone's guess is as good as anyone else's. The author is never identified.

We do know that the book is absent of references to Jewish institutions, which may suggest it's a rather early work. For example, there is nothing in the book related to the monarchy or kingship of Israel. There's nothing related to the priesthood or to the Torah, the Law, the temple. There are no references to festival times such as Passover or Pentecost or atonement. It seems that perhaps a book that was written later—maybe during the days of the kings or after the exile—

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

would have included references to some of those kinds of things. So their exclusion may suggest a very early time for the book.

**B.** We also can read through the book and realize that its tone and historical setting are very patriarchal. Wealth is measured in terms of livestock. Job is serving as his own priest, not utilizing the priesthood that would come into existence later as the Old Testament chronicles the development of God's people. We know that Abraham's wealth, for example, is measured in terms of livestock. And in a sense, Abraham served as his own priest to God and was even willing to offer his son Isaac on the altar. So what may be suggested here in the Book of Job is a period of time that may be contemporary with Abraham.

**C.** There's also some discussion as to what kind book Job is. The Holy Spirit has not clarified the matter for us as to whether we should treat Job as a purely historical book; whether we should understand that Job is not a history book but is, in effect, an extended parable; or whether the Book of Job is part history, part parable—that is, partly based on a historical event but is expanded in a parable or story form. We shouldn't discount the possibility that the Book of Job is a lengthy parable inasmuch as Nathan, for example, uses the form of a parable to convey spiritual truth to King David in 2 Samuel 12. The parable that Nathan used was of the wealthy landowner who had all kinds of livestock and sheep, and a family that had only a pet sheep that even ate at their table. The wealthy landowner came and seized the little pet sheep and killed it. The religious truth conveyed in that story does not depend on its literal historicity. The story is a means through which great truth is conveyed.

Jesus used this himself in the parable of Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in hell. By means of a story, He conveyed a very real truth. So Job may be an example of an extended story line.

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

The reason for indecision as to whether Job is all history, all parable, or part history/part parable can be seen very easily in the fact that Job's placement is immediately after the historical books of the Old Testament but immediately before the poetic books: the writings of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and the like. So the book is a natural bridge between history and poetry.

If the book is extended drama or story form meant to convey truth, then it seems that some of the theological problems created by the book are cleared up. Part of wisely interpreting Scripture is understanding the form by which the Scripture is coming to us. When the Scripture, for example, speaks in hyperbole—an over-exaggerated statement intended for effect—it does not require us to be literal. For example, when Jesus said, “Cut off your hands, pluck out your eye, and cut off your feet,” He is not intending to be literally obeyed at that point. If He had, the early disciples would have walked around very maimed and blinded. He intends to be understood metaphorically or symbolically. The same things can be applied when we come to poetic writings. There is a different way of understanding their content as compared to historical works. So there's trade-off between the two.

One thing that compels me to lean more toward the view that Job is extended drama based evidently on real circumstance is that Job tends to be a very highly stylized book—very neat, almost neater stylistically than what real life would involve. For example, Job had the ideal numbers of children—seven sons, three daughters. He had the ideal numbers of livestock—five hundred oxen, five hundred donkeys. And then there are the ideal numbers of duplication at the end, suggesting a kind of story line device.

The access of Satan to God also carries with it some interesting conclusions. If the book is intending to be conveyed to us as straight history, then we must ask: How in the world does

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

Satan have daily access to the throne of God? Hasn't Satan fallen from heaven? Isn't he now out of the heavenly courts? How is it that Satan and the other angels have such easy access to God? If the book is solely history, then we have all kinds of problems trying to figure out where Job fits in the fall of Satan from heaven to earth. But if Job is literary story or drama, then a story has the liberty to create things in order to give us intentions or to give us the subtle complexities of the deeper truth that stands behind it. So this may be involved.

There's also a very tight literary structure in the Book of Job. An introduction, followed by a series of speeches from Job 1:6 through 42:6. The series of speeches falls into two different periods: two interviews of God with Satan, and the dialogue of Job with his friends. That dialogue, spanning chapters 3–37, consists of four rounds of speeches that each friend makes with Job. Then that's followed by four speeches made by Elihu, another character introduced into the drama. Then the book is followed by a conclusion—an epilogue—at the end.

**D.** Job is a book that speaks out universally to everyone whose suffering appears to be disproportionate to their crimes. In Job's case, he has a perfect righteousness. But the Book of Job inevitably speaks to anyone who is suffering, who looks up to heaven and says "God, I didn't think I was that bad of a person to deserve this. Why is this happening to me?" Job, in this sense, is a theodicy. He is trying to assess how a good God can allow evil to occur, especially to an innocent person. It is evident from studying the Book of Job that Job is working out his problems within the context of faith.

There are two different ways you can work out the problem of suffering. One is to stand outside the circle of faith and be the cynic. In this case, you ultimately don't arrive at anything other than the fact that either there is no God, or if there is a God He doesn't really know what He's doing. But if you work out the problem of suffering within the context of faith like Job, then you must

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

work through a kind of intensive struggle. This is the drama that is going on in the Book of Job.

The person of faith struggles at the relationship between the greatness of God and the goodness of God, because the person of faith knows that God is both great and good.

But this creates a problem, for if God is great, then He could stop this suffering that is going on.

If God is good, He would stop the suffering. So how can He be both great and good? We wrestle with that when we look at the problem of evil and suffering in our own lives.

That's sort of a backdrop, a summary of looking at a possible interpretation for the book and how we'll approach it. Now we move on to Job 1 and 2 and its four subsections.

### **II. The first subsection is Job 1:1–5, which gives us a description of Job's piety—that is, his walk with God and his prosperity.**

“In the land of Uz [We're not exactly sure where the land of Uz is. It's often thought to be the area east of the northern end of the Dead Sea toward Edom] there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. [We must think of him here as kind of a Bedouin living in a tent, whose life was measured in terms of livestock, children, servants, and standing in the community.] His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, ‘Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ This was Job's regular custom” (NIV).

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

If we summarized these five verses, we'd find a man whose life is in order. To use a proverbial phrase, he has all his ducks in a row. Here's a guy whose life really lines up right.

**A.** Notice what's first with Job: God is first. His spiritual priorities are listed at the top, and they're stated both positively and negatively.

His positive qualities are that he is blameless and upright. This does not mean to convey that Job is sinless as Christ was. It is simply meant to convey that if you put a microscope on his life, you would find a man of rigorous moral convictions who really has no undesirable kind of thing in his life, no secret deal at work. Here is a "what you see is what you get" kind of man. He's a good and true kind of person. A pillar of the community, he's the sort of individual you can build society upon. He can be depended upon in terms of his righteousness, his moral dealings, and his walk with God.

Negatively stated, it's noted that he feared God and shunned evil. "Feared God" is taken in the biblical sense here in that he had awe and reverence for God. It didn't mean that he shook at the thought of God. It simply meant that God was the one to whom he gave the utmost respect in his life. As Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (NIV). If we start out respecting God above all other things, then all other things will fall into place. Fears in life will fall into their appropriate place too if we have ultimate respect to God first.

So Job shunned evil and put God first.

**B.** The second thing about Job is his family was second. Again this shows that his life had great order to it. He had seven sons and three daughters—a kind of idyllic family, especially in a Near Eastern context where sons inevitably counted for more than daughters in terms of stature in the community. As a general rule, daughters did not even have property rights in the Near Eastern society. In many Near Eastern societies today they still don't.

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

But Job had a quota—seven, the ideal number of sons, and ten children altogether, again an ideal number.

Sometimes from our evangelical perspective we read Job 1:4 and immediately leap to conclusions that the Scripture is not teaching. We say, “Look at the horrible state Job’s grown children were in. They were off holding feasts in their homes and eating and drinking. Bad kids!” But we read “eating and drinking” in terms of carousing and getting drunk. That’s not the thought here. The thought, again, is Near Eastern. These were good kids, and when the day’s work was done they liked to enjoy one another’s company. They spread a table for one another and had good things to eat and drink. There was hospitable company. There was something better to do than watch television. They had a great time together. That’s the point of the story. They were wonderfully close.

Isn’t it great that a family of ten children can be so close that they set aside times all during the year to have dinner together? And all of them have a good time and then move on.

Job was so convinced of the well-being of his children that the only thing he really feared was that they would curse God secretly in their hearts. He does not appear to be at all worried about their morality. He doesn’t appear to be worried about any outward act of disobedience to God.

The one concern he had was that maybe, secretly in their hearts, they might curse God and do something that he wouldn’t be able to see or other people wouldn’t be able to see.

That, by the way, will become the crux of the story. Job feared such a possibility for his children as a parental concern, and that would be the point in which Job himself would be tested: Would he curse God in his heart?

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

The “positive confession people” locate Job’s problem right here—where Job is saying, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” They’ll say that he let fear into his life, and when you let fear into your life, whatever you fear will come upon you.

But there was never a problem with Job’s children. We are never told that they ever cursed God in their hearts. We’re never told that Job cursed God in his heart, but only that his wife was ready to do that. So that wasn’t one of Job’s concerns in this passage, and the criticism doesn’t bear out.

Secondly, twice in chapters 1 and 2 we see the direct vindication of God upon Job. God brags to Satan, the adversary who comes before Him, and says, “Have you seen My servant Job? He is blameless and upright.” I would say that anyone whom God gives the stamp of approval has got to be OK in spite of what the positive confession people say. If God said Job was OK, he was OK. Job was simply acting as a priest over his own house. He had good kids, well-behaved kids, loving kids, a close-knit family. And when they were grown, he continued to act as priest on their behalf. I don’t think you could find a more model representation of a father than what you see in these verses about Job.

**C.** His third priority was work. Job’s identity is described in terms of his possessions. He was prosperous, and there is no stigma attached to his wealth. His possessions, though they were great, did not corrupt him. We must somehow get rid of the “poor me” mentality that assumes that if a person has large financial reserves then they are inevitably selfish. Such may not be the case at all. Such was not the case with Job.

In fact, in Job 31:16–22, Job protests his innocence over what has happened to him and makes an eloquent statement for his wise use of funds. He says: “If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

fatherless—but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow—if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things” (NIV). By his own testimony, Job is not simply consuming his wealth upon himself. He’s used it for others. He doesn’t feel guilty about having it. It’s part of the warp and woof of his life.

That constitutes the introduction to Job. He is a man with three priorities: the Lord, his family, and his work. This sets up the second part of these first two chapters.

### **III. Next is the first test in Job 1:6–22.**

The picture before us is one that a Near Easterner could understand—the picture of a chieftain whose foreman has come to give an account. The story shows the Lord God in a sense of bringing together the foremen, his angels, from their various responsibilities for a time of information about what is happening. It’s a time of interrogation back and forth.

So one day the angels come to present themselves before the Lord. And Satan—our Bible says Satan, but the Hebrew uses the definite article in front of it. “*The Satan*,” means “the adversary.” Obviously from our New Testament understanding of this, “the Satan” so identifies himself with the manner and operation of Satan that we find it easier to simply say Satan. But in the book he is “the Satan,” the adversary. Perhaps this is the term used of the devil before he acquired the formal name Satan. The adversary comes before the Lord.

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the Lord, ‘From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it’” (Job 1:7, NIV). This opening dialogue

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

between God and the Satan, the adversary, is classic in that it shows the idea that Satan feels like he's the one who really knows what's going on. He's saying, "God, You've been up here and remote. But me, I've been going up and down the earth and I really know what's happening." We sometimes may feel that way. God leads a rather sheltered life, but the devil knows what's going on. You should have seen the parties that the devil went to recently! God didn't know what was going on at all.

That's the kind of mentality that the adversary comes before God with. So since Satan is so sure he knows what's going on down on earth, God basically says to him, "Since you've gone up and down the earth, surely you've noticed My servant Job. Have you considered him? There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright—a man who fears God and shuns evil."

This is also the exact description given of Job in verse 1. God is the defender of His person Job. I think we need to note that this again represents a classic understanding of the biblical idea of God. He is for His people; He's the defender of His people.

In New Testament theology we have Jesus as our advocate. Perhaps we do not approach Job's moral faultlessness, but we do have Christ's faithfulness or His righteousness upon us. So when the adversary seeks to accuse us, the New Testament tells us we have an advocate in Christ Jesus in the heavens. The same thing that the adversary, Satan, tried to do to Job, he also attempts to do in the Book of Zachariah. In Zechariah 3, Satan says Joshua is unfit to be a priest since he has soiled garments. God refuses to see the soiled garments and says, "I put clean robes on him." God springs to the defense of His people, which ought to alter some of the ideas of God being down on us and being against us. That's a lie that Satan is always wanting to feed into our lives. Romans 8 says if God is for us, who can be against us? God is on our side. He's the one who is backing us. Job makes that point rather eloquently.

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

Satan, however, wants to dig up dirt. His reply to the Lord is very cynical: “‘Does Job fear God for nothing?’ Satan replied. ‘Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face’” (Job 1:9–11, NIV). Satan is a cynic. He doesn’t believe that people have good motivations. He believes that God’s viewpoint of Job is too idealistic and that Job’s righteousness is pretty thin. If you take away all the protective layers that God has allowed to be built around Job, God will find that Job isn’t as righteous as He thought he was and will have to rearrange His attitude about His people. We always find that whenever we encounter the Satan, the adversary of our souls, he is indeed the cynic who doesn’t believe that good can happen.

This initial kind of reply of the Satan to God—that Job is serving God because he’s protected and nothing ill has ever happened to him—raises the question as to whether there is a relationship between the good life and good luck. As children growing up, we are almost instilled with the teaching “Do good and everything will be all right.” Ever heard that? But if you do wrong...

This carries over into spirituality. For example, I deeply believe in tithing and practice it in my own life. But sometimes people treat tithing as though it were a talisman, a sort of magic rabbit’s foot you rub. If you do that, somehow everything in your life will be OK for the rest of your life. You’ll never have another problem. Or, if you’re really trusting the Lord, there’s no reason you ought to ever be sick. There is a relationship to trusting the Lord and good health, financial prosperity, and all these things. If we trust the Lord, then He puts a hedge around us.

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

I think Scriptures bear out that often there is a relationship to really trusting the Lord and good physical health, because good physical health often arises from good mental attitudes. We know that there's an interesting phenomenon of upward social mobility in the Pentecostal ranks. Why has this occurred? Because as people put into operation the principles that Scripture teaches, they tend to become more prosperous because they're thinking rightly and walking in God's pattern. I think there is a relationship between obedience to God and life's goodness. The problem, however, comes when we say that there has to be a necessary connection and we don't make room for the many exceptions that occur.

That's what's wrong with the positive confession interpretation of Scripture. There's never an exception made. It's always, "You live right, you've got the good life. If you don't have the good life, you're not living right. Correct your life and you'll get the good life." But we know there are wicked people who prosper, and there are righteous people who suffer.

So quite unknowingly to Job, a deal is struck. It often seems to us that there's something going on behind our backs that we don't know about, and that's why things happen to us. There is a sense that the Book of Job is teaching us that whatever happens to us first passes by the throne of God. I think that's a legitimate deduction. Paul in 1 Corinthians says that God himself will not allow you to be tested beyond that which you can bear. If He will not allow it, then that means somehow there must be some kind of approval for the test.

But the test works itself out in devastating swiftness, so that Job does not immediately discern either the hand of Satan or the hand of God behind the test. Rather, there are natural disturbances and warlike things that happen. His servants are killed, and only one is left. Notice again the stylistic device—only one servant in each occasion is left. Fire comes down and burns up the sheep and servants, and only one servant is left to bring the news. The camels are carried off and

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

the servants put to the sword—and only one is left. A mighty wind demolishes the house where his children are at dinner, and one messenger comes to tell what has happened. Job 1:20 says that at the conclusion of this test, after the four messengers had come, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. These would be typical, traditional, Oriental expressions of grief. Then he fell to the ground and worshipped.

But let's pause there for a moment and think what you would say or I would say if that happened to you or me. In *On Death and Dying*, a book made famous a few years ago, author Elizabeth Kubler-Ross says that people go through five stages when they confront loss or tragedy in their life: denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance. I'll grant you that later in the Book of Job we'll find some anger and depression, but right off the bat Job never denies what has happened. He doesn't start out by saying, "This can't be happening to me. I don't believe it." There is no anger expressed. There is no depression initially surfacing. There is no bargaining. Right from the start Job shows that mentally and spiritually he has a hold on health by coming almost instantly—almost too easily—to a point of acceptance. He's going to back off that acceptance as we go through the Book of Job, and he'll struggle a lot with the idea that it's OK to struggle. But what is interesting is at the outset he has the ability to embrace it and say, in effect, a word of acceptance to the Lord: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21, NIV). The King James says, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." In other words, my children came to me after I was born, my property came to me after I was born. I started out with nothing; I've now gone back to nothing. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

What a response! It staggers us to think that a person could make that kind of response after losing children whom they loved, property they possessed, and servants they cared for. Job's response is much different from the Greek stoic response, which would be "Grin and bear it. Don't feel emotion. Don't feel disappointment. Don't feel loss. It's part of life." Job expresses real feeling. He will reveal himself as a man of intense feeling, but he comes to this point of acceptance.

A modern prayer teaches us to accept by saying, "God, give me the grace to accept what cannot be changed, strength to change what can be changed, and wisdom to know the difference." Job knew right at the outset there were some things that could not be changed and he accepted them. So he survives the first test.

#### **IV. This sets the stage for the second test in Job 2:1–10.**

"On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And the LORD said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the LORD, 'From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it. [The same old line: too bad you're so uninvolved. I've been going up and down the earth, running around to and fro, seeing what I can see. I know what's going on down there.] Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason'" (Job 2:1–3, NIV). God is still backing Job. It should be noted that the Satan does not at all admit that he failed to win the first deal. Instead, Satan says in verse 4, "Skin for skin." He is ready now to move on to another level, and he is unwilling to concede that he lost the first round. This is always a

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

characteristic of the devil—refusing to concede defeat and twisting the facts. He'd make a good propagandist because of his inability to tell truth and instead offer disinformation.

So the next deal that Satan proposes is this: “A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face” (Job 2:4,5, NIV). Satan here is saying, “You touched his outer life, his family and property. But now touch his skin, touch that inner shell of his life, and he's going to curse you.”

God says, “OK. Job's going to pass this test too, because I have the utmost confidence in him.” Notice God's motivation for the treatment of Job is not to inflict Job with suffering but to show everybody what a great servant he is. Job can absolutely be counted upon no matter what happens to him. Job is still going to have faith.

So the approval is given. Satan becomes the agency of the illness, but it occurs within God's permissive will.

There has been a lot of speculation as to what Job's illness was. From verses 7 and 8 we have this description: “So Satan went from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes” (NIV).

Some have said that Job's illness was perhaps leprosy. This is doubtful, because his friends wouldn't have come to him if he'd had leprosy. Some have said it's the Near Eastern disease of elephantiasis. We don't know for sure what it was, but we do have descriptions from Job himself as to what some of the symptoms were:

Emaciation that may be associated with anorexia. Job says in 19:20: “I am nothing but skin and bones; I escaped with only the skin of my teeth [or my gums, perhaps inferring that all his teeth had fallen out]” (NIV).

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

Then he has fever. “My skin grows black and peels; my body burns with fever” (Job 30:30, NIV).

He’s subject to fits of depression. “I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning” (Job 7:16, NIV).

And in 30:15, he says, “Terrors overwhelm me” (NIV).

He has weeping. “My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes.” (Job 16:16, NIV).

Sleeplessness. “When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn” (Job 7:4, NIV).

Sores. “My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering” (Job 7:5, NIV).

Nightmares. “You frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions” (Job 7:14, NIV).

Putrid breath. “My breath is offensive to my wife” (Job 19:17).

Haggard looks. “When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him” (Job 2:12, NIV).

Itching. “Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it” (Job 2:8).

As Job is in this terrible shape, his wife comes to him. It’s the only time she’s mentioned in the book. Perhaps there’s a reason for that. If she’d been mentioned more, Job may have been tested beyond his point of endurance. “His wife said to him, ‘Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die.’ He replied, ‘You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’ In all this, Job did not sin in what he said” (Job 2:9,10, NIV)

Job’s wife sees no hope in the restoration of Job’s fortunes. Job’s friends are different. They see hope that Job will be restored—provided Job repents. They believe there’s a connection between sin and suffering. So they’re going to say to Job, “Everything is going to be great. Just repent.”

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

Job's wife says, "It's all over, Job. The only thing left to do is to die. And you know how to die—curse God." She evidently may be associating cursing God with death. Perhaps God would strike him dead or perhaps she's encouraging Job to think of suicide. Again, never once in Job's suffering does he contemplate suicide.

Job passes the second test as he did the first. He says, "If we accept good from God shall we not also accept trouble?" He has something here that I think is a help for us. In the troubles of life, one of two things can happen. We can either lower our view of God or we can raise the level of our faith. The assault upon Job is to lower his view of God. "Job, God is against you. God has it in for you. How could you ever trust God when He's done this to you?"

You may have felt like that with some of the things that have happened to you. How can I trust God when the person I thought I was supposed to marry ran off and married somebody else? How can I trust God when I made an investment that seemed to be a very good thing? I committed my finances to the Lord, and I prayed about this investment—and I lost every dime of it. Where was God in that whole deal? How can I trust God when, at the very height of my productivity, I'm struck with this very debilitating illness—perhaps a terminal illness? How can I trust God when the one I love the most was suddenly ripped from me in a moment's time by death? How can I trust God? How can you ask me to love Him and believe in Him?

Tragedy comes to us and seeks to lower our view of God. The only antidote to lowering our view of God is to raise the level of our faith. That's exactly what Job purports to do. "God, I served You when it's comfortable, but I'm also going to serve You when it's uncomfortable. I blessed You when You've been good to me. I'm going to bless You when evil has happened to me. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

Sometimes I've found that the people with the greatest faith are ones who are the most ill and the most devastated. That's why I get highly offended by people in the positive confession movement who lay this incredible bondage of guilt on suffering people and claim their suffering is still in them because they haven't enough faith. Many times a person is very comparable to Job, who is truly righteous and blameless before God, fearing God, and doing no sin. They are being called upon to believe God at a level of faith that is far beyond the level of faith someone is having who is driving around in a Cadillac.

The great thing about Job is he raises the level of his faith rather than lowering his view of God.

### **IV. This brings us to the fourth and last section of these two chapters: the initial arrival of Job's friends.**

“When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was” (Job 2:11–13, NIV).

I wish the book of Job ended there. That's the perfect place for this to end. The friends start out in these verses by being ideal comforters. Let me share with you the three ways they were ideal comforters. They tell each one of us how we can minister to people who are going through sorrow through hospitalization or tragedies in their lives. I think if we follow the steps of these three friends and avoid the critical mistakes we see from chapter 3 on, we'll be great helpers to people going through trouble.

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

**A.** First thing, they came. When people are going through tough things, the tendency is to go the other way. We sometimes do it under the guise of “They’re so busy. They don’t want to be bothered. They want to be left alone in their tragedy.” That is sometimes true. A person will want to sort of withdraw to themselves to kind of work through it. But there is something powerful about reaching out and being personally present. Being present by means of a call if a physical visit is impossible. If a call is impossible, being present by a note, a card, or letter of some kind. These friends didn’t simply hear about Job’s suffering and stay where they were and send good mental thoughts and vibes his way. They took the trouble to organize a trip to be with him. That had to mean the world to Job. To someone who is going through a death, a tragedy in the family, an illness, it means all the world that people will come and keep coming as long as the time of loneliness and sorrow and deep need is there. They came.

That’s one way we can best help people who are going through tough times.

**B.** Another thing is they empathized. They tore their robes; they wept loud. They sprinkled dust on their heads. They got right down in the dirt with Job. They took their place with him and they sat there for seven days and seven nights. By doing that, they basically said, “We’re with you.”

**C.** A third thing they did is be silent. They didn’t offer advice; they didn’t quote Scripture. There are two ways you can quote Scripture when a person is going through difficulties. Scripture can be wisely and well-quoted to encourage. Or it can sometimes be used by people as sort of a wedge, saying, “If you’d only done this.” Instead of becoming a healing, the Scripture quoted becomes kind of a burr in the person’s need and sorrow and tragedy in life.

One of the best things we can do for people who are going through a tough time is just to be there and put our arms around them. Ezekiel 3:15 says, “I sat where they sat and I was

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

astonished.” The best thing we can do is sit there. What amazing discipline these friends had—to sit there for seven days and seven nights and not say anything.

We’re going to go through a lot of these friends’ bad points as we go through the Book of Job, but that is one positive thing to be said of them. I don’t think I could sit seven days and seven nights anywhere and not say anything. But the empathy of Job’s friends for him was so great that they sat there with him in amazement and supported him with their presence.

Those are three great rules for being comforters.

I said the title of this message was “I can’t believe this is happening to me.” I really tricked you with that title, I’ll confess. I knew that would help get you interested, because we’ve all felt that way when we’ve been staggered by something. It’s interesting to note that Job doesn’t take a viewpoint of life like that. That’s our response, not Job’s. He accepts what is happening to him and goes on with his faith in God. It’s all the more amazing when we realize Job didn’t have the Scriptures as a source of comfort. He didn’t have the prophets as a source of hope. He didn’t have the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an anchor. Now, because of God’s gift to us in the Scriptures, in the prophets, and, last of all, in Jesus, we have all those things—added aids to face the dilemmas and tragedies of life.

Job will struggle with his suffering. Chapters 1 and 2 are not the whole story. To say that a person has an encounter with suffering and comes to a quick, neat, clean conclusion and then handles it without ever struggling again is to misread Scripture and misread Job. A person who is going through an avalanche directed against him has many struggles and many cycles.

Sometimes it seems there is a whirlpool, and when you get out of one you wind up in another.

That’s a lot of the way Job is going to be for a while until he finally emerges at the end. But he’s a man who begins with a fixed compass.

## **I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

### **Job 1–2**

We can head into any storm in our life with the attitude of “Though he slay me yet will I trust Him. I have received good from the hands of the Lord, will I not also receive trouble?” (Job 13:15). If we can ask the Lord for the mental and spiritual health to have that kind of attitude, it is so much more helpful as we face the problems of life that will for sure come to each one of us. If the Lord tarries, every one of us is going to have a family member who dies. Every one of us is going to have a family member who has a terminal illness. Every one of us is going to have a friend that experiences some sort of tragedy. And every one of us is probably going to go through some major loss in our lives. All of us will hit those hard times, and the Book of Job will be a help to us if we'll let it.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, we close this time of encounter with Your Word this evening to ask that You will apply it to our hearts. We look over Job's life and ask some reflective questions. We seek to have priorities that are right in our own hearts—priorities of putting You first, then our families, and then the things that are about us. We want to thank You for the confidence You have in us. We stand tonight before Your throne. We can't see that representation visually, even as Job couldn't see the encounter in the heavens with You and the adversary. Yet we stand because of Christ in the heavens. We know that we're seated with Him in heavenly places. We already assume the position of rest, and we're clothed with Christ's righteousness. All that the enemy can dig up on us—which seems so real to us—You are already defending and saying, “That is my righteous servant, clothed with the righteousness of My Son.” Lord, it's good to know that You're backing us. We believe, Lord, that Your Spirit in us is strong enough for any test that we face. I ask, Lord, for Your special help upon people who, right now in their lives, are going through a Job

**I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME**

**Job 1-2**

kind of experience. Be a comfort and help to them. May Your Word be a healing oil applied upon the wounds of their lives. We ask these things, Lord, in Your name. Amen.