

Better to Know God than to Know Why

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- [0 : 00] Good morning. I think it's still morning. My name is Y Plummer. I am not Kevin Smith.
- ! For those who are visiting, Kevin Smith is preaching at Hickson Presbyterian at this moment. So! you get me this morning. We will be in the book of Job.
- If you don't know where that is, open your Bible to the center and turn left. Job 42.
- Job 42. Beginning in verse 1.
- Hear the word of God. Then Job replied to the Lord, I know that you can do all things. No purpose of yours can be thwarted.
- [1 : 13] You asked, who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, listen now and I will speak. I will question you and you shall answer me.
- My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.
- This is God's word.
- Through the hearing, through the reading, through your spirit. As you help us better understand you through your word.
- It is in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen. You may be seated. Have you ever asked the question, why?
- [2 : 41] That is my constant question. I think it's part of my name. It's part of why people have called me why over the years. I keep asking, why?
- And there comes a time in every Christian's life when we ask God, why? Why is this happening to me? Why is this so painful? Why won't God just tell me what is going on?
- Well, Job was no different. He was a righteous man, a faithful servant of God, and yet he suffered beyond imagination. He lost his wealth, he lost his health, he lost his children.
- His friends insisted there must be a reason. Maybe he had sinned, maybe he needed to repent. But Job was not satisfied with speculation.
- He wanted to know the answer. He wanted God to explain why. But when God finally did speak to Job, he didn't give Job an answer.
- [3 : 52] He gave Job a revelation of himself. And in that moment, Job learned something that we all need to learn. That is, knowing God is better than knowing why.
- Most of us know the story already. And I'm going to read us the story of Job in various parts of Job. And I'm going to start at the beginning. And I'm going to be reading it to you.
- And I'm going to read it in the NIV. I know we use the ESV, but I like the way the NIV presents the story, how it reads. So beginning in Job 1, the story goes.
- In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shentened evil. In Job 2 to 5, we learn that he was very wealthy.

He owned thousands of animals with servants and ten children. Job regularly sacrificed to God on behalf of his children just in case they had sinned. He was a righteous man.

[5 : 01] The story continues in verse 6. One day, the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, where have you come from?

Satan answered the Lord, from roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it. The Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth.

He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. 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 now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.

The Lord said to Satan, very well then. Everything he has is in your power. But on the man himself do not put a finger. Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

[6 : 11] Well, the story continues that Satan comes down and attacks Job. He loses his livestock. He loses his servants through raiders.

His children are killed by a windstorm that collapses their house. And we see Job's response in verse 20, chapter 1, when it says, Well, the story continues into chapter 2 of Job.

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? And Satan answered the Lord from roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.

Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth. 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 because for no reason.

Skin for skin, Satan replied, A man will give all he has for his own life. But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh, and he will surely curse you to your face.

[7 : 49] The Lord said to Satan, Very well then, he is in your hands, but you must spare his life. So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.

Then Job took a piece of pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, Are you still maintaining 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 says.

And the story continues with the introduction of Job's three friends in Job's 2.11. When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Timonite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Amethite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they sat 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.

[9 : 12] Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him because they saw his great suffering, how great his suffering was.

And I think the wisest thing they could have done was to sit with Job those seven days and if they had only kept their mouths shut. But as we all know, they did not keep quiet.

Each had a reason to explain why Job was suffering. Eliphaz the Timonite said suffering is God's correction. Eliphaz argues that suffering comes on God's, as God's discipline and correction, not necessarily punishment.

He appeals to his own observation and a mystical vision that he had in the night saying that no man is pure before God. His basic theological position was that God disciplines the righteous.

But when they go astray, and so suffering is kind of a corrective. So you're only being corrected. Consider that nobody innocent ever perished, Job.

[10 : 26] Well, that was Eliphaz. Then we have Bildad, the Shuhite. He says, well, God is just. So something must be wrong.

Bildad asserts that God is perfectly just and would never pervert justice. If Job is suffering, he or maybe his children must have sinned. He advises Job to seek God, promising that if Job would repent and was upright, then God would restore his prosperity.

His basic theological position was that God always operates according to justice. The innocent prosper, and the wicked suffer. Zophar was probably the most harsh.

He implies that Job's guilt must be worse than it really is, more than he realizes. And he insists that Job is suffering as a direct result of some, perhaps, hidden sin that Job doesn't know about.

And his theological position is God punishes sinners directly and proportionately. So Job's situations proves his guilt. I wonder if we've ever done this ourselves when we try to advise people who are struggling with something, an illness, a sickness, that they can't quite explain.

[12 : 01] I wonder if we tend to give advice like that too. I remember when my cousin, husband, died in a freak accident.

He was riding his riding lawnmower and it flipped over and killed him. And I went to comfort my cousin and I can remember throughout the day and into the funeral, she kept asking me, why, why, why did this happen?

And I'm the pastor and I'm coming and I didn't want to give her theology and I felt kind of weak just saying, well, God knows.

He is with you. It just felt so weak. But I knew better than to be like Job's friends though. Job just wants to know why.

And most of the book of Job is Job defending himself and his position against his friends' accusations. And throughout, he keeps asking, why? Job 3, 11, why did I not perish at birth and die as I came out of the womb?

[13 : 10] Why were there needs to receive me? Job 3, 20, why is life given to those in misery and life to the bitter of soul? Job 3, 23, why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?

Job 10, 18, why did you bring me out of the womb? Would that I had died before eyes had seen me. Job 13, 23, how many wrongs and sins have I committed?

Why do you hide your face? Job just wants to know why. He wants a courtroom where he can present his case before God.

He is convinced that if he could just get God to explain to him why this is happening, he could endure it. How often do we believe if we just had answers, it would make us feel so much better?

Have you ever sat in a plane and the plane wasn't moving from the taxiway, it was just sitting there at the gate, and you wondered, why are we sitting here?

[14 : 26] This is taking an awful long time. I think I would feel better if I just knew why. What about if when you're sitting on the highway in traffic, and do you have a tendency to just kind of pick up your phone and go to Google Maps and to see how long the red line is there?

And so, at least you know. But knowing why really isn't a comfort. You may get an answer, but it doesn't change the reality.

Well, Job does get his answers. It takes most of the book because it's Job and his friends arguing back and forth.

But finally, Job gets exactly what he wants. He gets God. In chapter 38 of Job, God speaks, but God does not answer Job.

In chapter 38 of Job, it reads, Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm, and he said, Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?

[15 : 39] Brace yourself like a man, and I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you understand.

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know. God can be sarcastic. Who stretched out a measuring line across it?

God goes on like this for another 36 verses. And into chapter 39 of Job, where we read, Do you know when the mountain goats gave birth?

Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you count the moths till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? Going on for another 28 verses.

Into chapter 40, verse 2, the Lord said to Job, Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him.

[16 : 43] Well, Job is kind of undone at this point, and he tries to get in a word in Job 40, verse 2. He says, I am unworthy. How can I reply to you?

I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answers. Twice, I will say no more, but God is not through with him.

In Job 40, verse 6, the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He says, Brace yourself like a man, and I will question you, and you will answer me. And the Lord continues on in chapter 44, another 14 verses, and into chapter 41, the whole of chapter 41, God is telling Job about himself.

And so finally, we get to Job 42, and Job finally says, I know that you can do all things, and no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

You asked, who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. He said, listen now, and I will speak.

[17 : 56] I will question you, and you will answer me. My ears heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

Job doesn't get an explanation. But he gets something better. He gets God. And that's enough.

Imagine with me, if you would, what would have happened if God had told Job why he was suffering? Let's think about some scenarios.

You know, Job might have been relieved with the explanation, but still confused. Job might have asked, really God? You had a wager with Satan and I was the object.

Is that just? Is that fair? Or Job might have shifted the whole thing into a transactional mindset.

[19 : 03] Knowing it was a test, he might have made passing the test the focus instead of deepening his relationship with God. His faith would become more performance-based, striving to win instead of worship.

Job might have never gained the depth of knowledge he found in God's self-revelation. Job's suffering and his unanswered prayers drew Job into a personal encounter with God, not just an explanation.

If God had explained everything up front, Job may have never said, I heard you by the hearing of the word, but now my eyes have seen you.

Lastly, it might have produced some pride in Job if Job had known the story and not humility. Think about if God had told him, Job, this is all for a purpose.

Thousands of years from now, people are going to read this story and they're going to be encouraged by your testimony. Think about what I've done to Job's ego. Oh, really?

[20 : 22] I can endure this? I'm going to be famous one day. Mmm. But God did not give Job an explanation because he had something better for him, knowing God.

J.I. Packer in his book Knowing God makes the following, asks the following questions. What were you made for to know God?

What aim should you set for yourself in life to know God? What is eternal life that Jesus gives knowing God?

John 17 3 says, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. J.I. Packer goes on to ask the last question.

What is the best thing in life bringing joy more than anything else? Knowing God. Jeremiah 9 23 reads, thus says the Lord, let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understand and knows me.

[21 : 54] We may never know why in this life, but we can know God. He is wise. His plans are higher than our plans.

He is sovereign. He controls everything for his glory. He is good, even when we don't understand why.

So if knowing God is better than knowing why, how do we live? How do we live this out?

But before I answer that question, let me just say this, it is okay to ask why. You know, Job spends most of the book wrestling with the why question, why God, why God, and God does not rebuke him.

Now he does rebuke his theologically inaccurate friends, to be sure. In Job 42, 7, we read, after the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz and Timemi, I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.

[23 : 15] God was not pleased with his friends, but very pleased with Job, because Job brought his quarry to God. Bring our quarries, our concerns, even our anger, to God in prayer.

And God hears us. God does not have a problem with Job's questions. And God could have told him everything, but God has something better, knowing himself.

Because knowing God is better than knowing why. And if this is true, how do we live it? And so I just want to give you three take-home applications.

Seek, trust, rest. Seek God, not just answers. Instead of asking for an explanation, pursue a deeper relationship with God.

I love Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3.16. And he prays that according to the riches of his glory, he prays that he might grant you strength with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and established in love, I have another translation in mine, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

[24 : 55] Pray that daily. Let that be your go-to prayer that you would know the length and the height and the breadth and the width of the love that God has for you.

Seek God, not just answers. Secondly, trust God. Trust God's character. God's silence is not a sign of his absence.

God can be trusted with your life. The Bible is the word of God. It can be trusted. It's his story.

It's history. It's the history of reality. It's the history of creation and the fall and redemption and restoration. it tells us about our creator and it describes his character.

And I can think of no better place for the description of God's character than when he gave it to Moses who wanted to see God's glory. And God told him that he could not see his glory but that he would hide him in a rock and cover his face and that he would pass by him.

[26 : 12] And he tells him we can see what he saw from Exodus 34 5 when it says the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him Moses proclaiming his name the Lord.

And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming the Lord the Lord the compassionate and gracious God slow to anger abounding in love and faithfulness maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness rebellion and sin yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished he is just he punishes the children and their children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation and so filled with compassion and graciousness and love yet he is just but how can he be just among people who have sinned the way we have in Adam and that brings us to the last one and that is rest rest in the reality of the ultimate unanswered why the greatest why ever spoken was when Jesus was on the cross and said my God my God why have you forsaken me and God didn't answer

Jesus because in that moment something incredible was going on the silence was the answer the father didn't respond to Jesus with words because the cross was the answer Jesus was not forsaken because he sinned he was forsaken because we sinned in Adam the silence was not indifference it was the cost of redemption and Isaiah reminds us it was the will of the Lord to crush him for our sake this was the moment that the wrath we deserve fell on him and he became our sin bearer Jesus asked the question why so that we would not have to ask that question in a sense

Jesus question was our question he was standing in our place crying on our behalf his why is our why why am I alone why am I in pain why doesn't the world make sense he was abandoned so that we could have God's presence because he was forsaken we will never be forsaken Jesus reminds us I will never leave you nor forsake you and actually there was an answer to the plea in Psalm 22 which begins my God my God why have you forsaken me but ends in verse 29 when it reads all the prosperous of the earth eat and worship before him shall bow all who go down to the dust even the ones who could not keep themselves alive posterity shall serve him he shall be told of the

Lord to the coming generations they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn that he has done it it is finished in Jesus Christ and like Job Jesus didn't get an explanation Job never got a reason neither did Jesus but both trusted the one that they knew sees from the beginning Job said though he slay me yet I trust him Jesus said into your hands I commit my spirit Jesus trusted God he trusted his character we are in Jesus all the good all the good that Jesus did we are in all the bad that we did Jesus took on our behalf the interesting thing is that

[30 : 57] Job's story actually has a happy ending in Job 42 we read the Lord blessed the latter days of Job's life more than the first he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and a thousand yoke of oxen and donkeys and he also had seven sons and three daughters and God restored him but not of all our stories end happily on this earth sometimes we go to our grave not understanding why but our story does have a happy ending because we are in him who rose from the dead we are in him who is sitting at the right hand of the savior even now and what happens to Jesus happens to us and although we will continue to ask why I get the impression that once we get there and once we see him face to face I don't think we're going to ask why anymore

I think all of our whys are going to disappear but in the meanwhile we need to remember that knowing him is better than getting answers and we're reminded in 2nd corinthians 4 17 which reads we need to remember that this is a light momentary affliction that we are going through it doesn't feel that way but it's preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look to the things that are seen and not to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal we are encouraged to look to Jesus for all the unanswered questions the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of

God let's remember these things and let's go to the Lord in prayer our gracious heavenly father God and king we worship you the only sovereign God the only righteous savior the only one that we can actually ever really depend on and we pray for your grace now for there might be some here who don't even know the savior who don't know you and I pray for them I pray that they would give their lives to you that they would just repent right now and their questions about reality and we are all struggling with this question of why are we here what are we doing what is the purpose I pray that you would give them the knowledge of yourself and that they would repent even now but for my brothers and sisters who struggle like I to even to the end even though with our senses we don't feel you always but that we can trust you because you have given us your word through your scripture the revelation of yourself and we can trust these words so when we go through the shadow of the valley of death when things are scary for us

I pray that we would remember who you are that you are good that you love us that you prepared a place for us and that we would begin to see this life as a road as a trip that we're on in order to come to know you better and to give you glory and that is our purpose in spite of the difficulty in spite of the sufferings that you would turn our whys into how can I know you better Lord Jesus I pray these things in the blessed and precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ Amen Please stand for closing song to