

We Have This Hope
Holding On To Hope When Our Questions Are Unanswered
Job 1:21 & 22
Layne Lebo
April 25, 2021

How many times over the past year have you found yourself saying, “*I sure hope things return to normal soon*” or “*I hope COVID doesn’t interfere with _____?*” As the pandemic dragged on did you ever find yourself becoming discouraged and losing hope? Our staff landed on the theme of hope for this sermon series as we discussed author Tod Bolsinger’s observation that the disruption caused by the COVID pandemic revealed 4 significant “lacks” in local churches: a lack of discipleship, a lack of community, a lack of leadership development and a lack of resilience among followers of Jesus. Our staff especially resonated with Bolsinger’s observation about lack of resilience. The lack of notable difference in response between followers of Jesus and those who make no profession of faith, to life during the pandemic has been troubling. We developed this sermon series and the 50 Days of Hope initiative to help anchor us in the hope we have in Jesus. The image of the anchor comes from the theme verse for our sermon series found in Hebrews 6:19: “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*” This morning we’re going to look closely at the life of Job—a man who embodied hope in the midst of severe hardship.



The Old Testament character Job is often associated with the virtue of patience. Have you ever heard the statement, “*He or she has the patience of Job?*” When I was a kid, I enjoyed competitions in Sunday School or at home that involved answering questions from the Bible

and a frequent question—referring to Job—was, “*Who was known as the man of patience?*” Last week I questioned the statement in Hebrews, “*Abraham waited patiently for the promises of God to be fulfilled.*” Abraham and Sarah maintained faith in God and hope that his promises would be fulfilled, but to characterize their waiting as patient seems overly positive. Similarly, Job responded to hardship in an amazing way, but his response can’t accurately be described as patient—at least the way we normally think of patience. Words like *persevering*, *long-suffering* or *resilient* more accurately describe Job’s response. In James chapter 5 verse 11, James the brother of Jesus and a prominent leader in the early church challenged his readers to hold on to their faith in the middle of suffering. He wrote, “*As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*” James 5:11

42 chapters—an entire book in the Old Testament—are devoted to Job’s story, and chapters 1 & 2 of Job tell us the unique circumstances surrounding Job’s hardship. I’ll read verses 6-12 of chapter 1 and then chapter 2 verses 1-6.

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.”

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.”

“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 lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. Job 1:6-12

The rest of chapter 1 details how Job lost his children, his servants and his livestock. Chapter 2 continues Job’s saga...

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 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 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.”

“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 bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.” Job 2:1-6

Chapter 2 goes on to explain that in addition to everything he’d lost, Job was inflicted with painful sores from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. Job had been stripped of all his possessions, all his family—except for his wife—and now, he was also tormented physically. The remaining 40 chapters of this book recount Job’s response to God; his visit by 3 friends who encourage him to renounce his sin, so God will relent; Job’s defense of himself to his friends; a visit by a young man who comes with more advice for Job; and at last, God’s response to Job. Covering 42 chapters in a 30-minute sermon is an impossible task, so I want to try and summarize Job’s story with some key points...

First, I find it significant that as readers, we’re given the backstory to Job’s ordeal, but God never told Job what precipitated the hardship he walked through. As is often the case for us when we go through hard times, **Job had no answers for all his questions, no context to be able to understand everything he was walking through.** He was forced to rely on his faith in God and in the hope he placed in Him.

As the Book of Job concludes, God rebuked Job for overestimating his own knowledge and wisdom and assuming he had more answers than he did, but God also affirmed Job. The 2nd important thing I want to note about Job’s response is that **God commended Job for speaking truth about God’s nature and character and for hanging in there.** Maintaining hope in God doesn’t mean we don’t question Him and wonder why bad things are happening to us. Hope is clinging to the truth of who we know God to be and maintaining our trust and hope in Him even when circumstances dictate otherwise.

Finally, as I reflect on Job's response, a bulldog comes to mind. **Job was like a bulldog** hanging onto a bone someone was trying to snatch from his jaw. No matter what he faced, Job clung to what he knew of God's nature and character. He questioned God, at times demanding answers from Him. He vigorously defended himself against his friends' accusations that he had to have done wrong or God wouldn't be punishing him. He continually maintained his own righteousness before his friends and God. And he refused—even against his wife's advice—to give up on God and die.

Listen to some of the statements Job made which demonstrate the faith he placed in God and the hope he maintained, even amidst great hardship.

- After Job lost everything, at the end of chapter 1 he said, *"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 & 22
- After Job was afflicted with sores his wife said, *"Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"* Job replied, *"You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?"* Job 2:9 & 10
- In the midst of responding to his 3 friends Job said, *"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him."* Job 13:15

Job's hope and the faith he placed in God wasn't passive. He didn't sit idly by, casually assuming everything would be alright, because God was in control. That's not typically what placing our faith and hope in God looks like, and yet we seem to assume that trusting in God and hoping in Him means we'll never struggle. That's rarely the case. I've asked Phil Byers to share with us this morning. Phil, I've known you for a long time and at our Christmas Eve service you shared about challenges you've walked through in your life. What are connections you make between Job's story and yours and what has hope looked like for you when your questions remained unanswered?

Phil Byers

As I reflected on Job's perseverance and his choice to maintain faith and hope in God even when he had many questions that were unanswered, I was reminded of the Apostle Paul and the exchange he had with the Holy Spirit that's recorded in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 7-10. The parallel I see is between Job being clueless about what was happening to him and

Paul—who had seen God do many miracles in response to his prayers for others—not understanding why God wouldn’t answer his prayers to have his “thorn in the flesh removed.” God didn’t answer Paul’s prayer the way he’d hoped, but his promise to Paul, and to us, is that while we may not understand why difficulties are happening in our lives, we can maintain faith and hope that God’s grace is sufficient for us and that his power is made perfect in our weakness. I find that incredibly reassuring. Follow along as I read from 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 7-10.

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Phil, can you share with us what the statement, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,”* has meant and continues to mean for you?

Phil Byers

We tend to think placing our faith in God and maintaining hope in his promises is steady and unwavering—that we glide through life untouched by the doubts, pain and uncertainties of life, but as we’ve seen in looking at Job’s story and in listening to Phil share, hope isn’t easy and it doesn’t always look pretty. I like the picture of hope as a bulldog refusing to let go of a bone that someone is trying to take away. The author of Hebrews in chapter 11 verse 1 says, *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”* **What is God asking you to hold onto Him for in hope—with confidence and assurance in spite of what you currently see?**