

# Growing wise through suffering

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 24 June 2012

Preacher: Sam Low

[ 0 : 00 ]     Father God, we thank and praise you for the chance to gather. We thank you for your word and that you are a God who wants us to know him. You're a God who has revealed yourself. And we ask that as we look at this chapter tonight, that you would give us insight, that your spirit would work, that we might hear what it is you are teaching us, Lord.

And ultimately, we ask that the result would be that we would know you better and see you more clearly. Amen. So as I said, we're in the middle of a rosy series in the book of Job.

It's just a small part of our wisdom series, but we are three weeks in now. And so the question that I want to ask us is, what have we learned so far? We are 28 chapters into the book, or 27 technically, not including today, chapters into the book.

We've heard argument and response from Job's friends and then back to Job. But the question is, have these arguments actually taken us anywhere in this book? Is Job any better off now than he was in the first two chapters?

For those of you who possibly are in your own times of difficulty or struggle or trial, have the words of advice from Job's friends given you any light in your situation?

[ 1 : 17 ]     Have Job's responses shown you a path through your time of darkness? I'm guessing probably not, because it feels like after 27 chapters, the only progress that we've made is that Job's situation is now worse.

In chapters 1 and 2, we saw him lose his family, his house, his slaves, his livestock, his everything. And you would think it can't get any worse, but all that's happened in the 25 chapters after that is that Job has now a strained relationship with three of his friends, because they are arguing with one another about the cause.

In fact, his own character is now on the line as well, because they're saying, Job, it's your fault that you're suffering. You've done something wrong and God is punishing you. So rather than making the prospect of suffering seem somehow lighter, if anything, the book of Job is making it seem worse.

Seeming like when you try and fix the problem when you're struggling, you just spin the wheels and work your way down and down. And look, the harsh reality of this book is that even once we reach the end of Job, we still don't get an answer to his question, why am I suffering?

We spent a bunch of time last week trying to figure it out, but the reality is at the end of 42 chapters, God doesn't answer. At least he doesn't answer that question.

[ 2 : 45 ]     He doesn't sit Job down and go, well, you know, I've got a plan. I'm doing this here and this here and you fit in in this bit and it needs to happen. He doesn't answer. And that might be frustrating for you to hear, especially if right at the moment you're in a time of your own pain.

But I need to be clear with you that if it's an answer to that question that you need, Job won't give it to you. If it's an answer to the question, why am I suffering?

Why is this happening to me? The Bible does not offer it. But chapter 28 has something better.

Chapter 28 doesn't give you what you might be looking for, but I believe firmly that it offers you a better answer. This chapter is different to every other chapter in Job.

This chapter jumps out of the conversation that's been happening back and forth between his friends. This chapter is written like a poem. It sits there in three distinct sections. And it's basically Job's summary of what he has learnt over the course of his suffering.

[ 3 : 53 ] It's Job's summary of his insight. After all this back and forth and all this bad advice and everything that's happened, this chapter is kind of like the high point of Job. Even though it's not at the end, this is the pinnacle of his understanding of his situation.

And in this chapter, he gives us the key to growing through suffering. The things that he shares with us in this chapter are the difference between us growing bitter instead of growing better.

Now, Steve told us last week that suffering is compulsory in life if you're a follower of Jesus. Reality is it's going to happen to just about everyone. But if you're a follower of Jesus, suffering will come.

But he also told us that growing through that suffering is optional. How you handle it when it comes, how you respond, that is in your court. And here in this chapter, Job wants to give you his insight.

He wants to guide you in your time of difficulty and doubt. And I've noticed in conversations over the last couple of weeks of this series that a lot of us are suddenly realising we don't really know what it means to suffer.

[ 4 : 57 ] Now, I'm not presuming that for everyone. I know that there are some people in this room who have experienced more pain than any of us would ever wish on our worst enemy. But for some of us, we sit here and we live in comfy houses.

We have good families. We have good jobs. We have nice cars. We have good public transport. We have a meal all the time. We have a great after party after church. And it's hard for us to think through what would it mean to experience suffering.

But I want to tell you that having this insight now is really, really important. And I'm going to show you why as we work our way through this book.

Two key things in this chapter that Job has discovered that he wants to share with you his insight. First one is there in verse 1 all the way through to 19. Wisdom cannot be found.

Wisdom cannot be found. Job begins by marvelling at the incredible advances of man. If you look there, he gets excited about how humans have mined the earth, how they have discovered the precious riches of the world, how they have harnessed natural resources as fuel and other things.

[ 6 : 05 ] We're smarter than the animals. They don't know what's going on under the surface of the ground, but we can dig down and find things. We've discovered things that no one else knows about. And if we were to add to this hymn now, remembering this was written thousands of years before Jesus, we could add amazing advances like we've walked on the moon.

We've cured diseases and we seem to make progress each and every day. Our capacity is increasing. There's new inventions, new cures. And you have to wonder, will there come a time when we've discovered everything there is to discover?

That's kind of Job's point is we are discovering stuff. We are figuring stuff out. We are the pinnacle of creation and we're working out how everything else around us works. But in the midst of him going, wow, aren't we good?

His conclusion in verse 12 is still, where can wisdom be found? Even though we have learned so much, even though we can figure out that there's things under the earth that you can't see with your bare eyes, where can wisdom be found?

See, we've increased our knowledge, but wisdom still eludes us. Wisdom and knowledge for Job are not necessarily the same thing.

[ 7 : 23 ] Knowing information and living wisely are not necessarily directly related. There might often be some overlap, but here Job is saying all those discoveries don't count towards wisdom.

Now, it's worth us taking a step sideways at this point and actually being clear what we mean when we say wisdom. We need to define wisdom because that's what we're looking for. That's what this series is about.

That's our goal. And I want to say that wisdom is defined by purpose. So living wisely has to be anchored to an ultimate goal or an ultimate purpose.

And see, our problem is that when we experience suffering in our lives, our goal becomes immediate. It becomes, I need to survive this suffering. I need to escape this suffering. I need to get to the other side.

And we lose sight of the fact that our lives actually have a purpose already. Suffering doesn't change the purpose of our lives. All of life, all of creation, all of the earth, all of you, exists from God, for God, and to God.

[ 8 : 27 ] The purpose of everything that exists is to glorify God. That's why He made it. The Bible says it's from Him, for Him, and to Him. And therefore, wisdom is the ability to do that purpose.

The ability to give God the glory and honor that He deserves in every situation and circumstance that we face, including suffering. One writer defines wisdom a little bit more compactly than I do.

He calls it competence with regard to the realities of life. The ability to handle reality. And that's not a bad definition as long as we understand that the ultimate reality is God.

He is the thing that defines all other reality. Let me give you a personal example of what this looks like in our own lives. When I was about 14, I started to deal with my own family disintegrating.

So my parents' marriage fell apart. My mum, she was already there, I guess, but she started living as an alcoholic.

[ 9 : 36 ] My older brother moved out of the house. And so me and my younger siblings were left living in the house with Dad's key card. And basically, we went into survival mode. It became about trying to just get through and act like we were normal so that people weren't always asking, are you okay? Are you okay?

Okay. So we wanted to go to school just like everyone else. We wanted to pretend that we were fine, that everything was normal. And the only way that I could think of to handle that situation was to blame my dad and to harbor all this hatred towards him so that it was his fault.

And if it was his fault, then I was justified to do whatever I wanted without any consideration for him. And I figured, I'm 14, I can't look after anyone else, so I'm just going to look after myself. And so I didn't think about anyone else.

All I cared about was being normal and trying to pretend that my life was continuing on and that this didn't affect me. All I cared about was getting to the other side of this divorce and everything that was going on.

But can you see that God has a design that's bigger than that for me? God's design, according to the Scriptures, is that I would forgive my family in spite of what they've done.

[ 10 : 44 ] That I would honor my parents in spite of the mistakes that they had made. That I would care for my younger siblings. But worldly wisdom, the wisdom that we come up with, excuses me, doesn't it?

And I can see you. In your eyes now, you're saying, it's okay, Sam. You tried your hardest. That was a difficult situation. You did the best that you could. But this isn't about whether I feel okay about it now.

This is to show you that when we figure out a situation, when we apply logic and reason, the wisdom that we come up with isn't even close to true wisdom.

Because we become so absorbed in our situation and circumstance that we lose sight of the God-given purpose for our lives. And if we fail in the day-to-day circumstances of life, how much more will we struggle when the flame of suffering is added into the process?

The first thing that Job has learned in his life and in his suffering is that wisdom cannot be found. No amount of sitting around with his wise friends will enable him to figure out the best path forward.

[ 11 : 59 ] No amount of sitting down and reflecting and applying reason will enable him to find wisdom and the path that God has designed for him. No amount of effort will unveil wisdom for those who seek it.

Now, there's not much arguing this point when you look at the kind of advice that Job's three learned friends were giving. Wisdom is certainly nowhere to be found in these early pages of Job.

But look at where this discovery leads him. Having figured out that in his situation he can't find the answer for himself, have a look at verse 20. Where then does wisdom come from?

Where does understanding dwell? If it can't be found, if I can't attain it somehow, then where does it come from? Because some people live wisely.

Some people live the lives that they were designed to by God. In fact, I think Job has wisdom even though he doesn't realize it all the way through the book.

[ 13 : 04 ] Job has it all along and so he wants to know where does wisdom come from? As we wrestle with suffering and difficulty, how can we find a path through?

And the second thing that Job learns asking this question is that wisdom belongs to God. Look at verse 21. It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air.

Destruction and death say only a rumor of it has reached our ears. God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells. For he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.

When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it. He confirmed it and tested it.

Wisdom is the domain of God alone. Because if wisdom is understanding the realities of life, all of those realities being accountable to him, if wisdom is the ability to understand how our circumstance fits with someone else's circumstance and how all of history is working together towards the ultimate aim of glorifying God, then a necessary prerequisite for wisdom is to be able to see all of those circumstances, is to have been there from the beginning and to be here till the end.

[ 14 : 28 ] And God alone can claim that. God alone is eternal. God has laid out his plans and his plans are beyond our understanding. Even if we could somehow raise ourselves up and look down on all of history, we would lack the capacity to understand what it is that God is doing.

Even if God was to try and explain it to us, it's beyond us. There's a passage in Isaiah 55 that tells us exactly that. It says in verse 8 of Isaiah 55, Wisdom is not found in the details of our lives and our suffering.

It's not found in experience. It's not learned from mistakes. What we learn from mistakes is how to make new mistakes that we hadn't thought of before. Wisdom belongs to God alone.

Because he alone can see all. He alone knows all. And he alone has mapped a path through all. God is wisdom.

His ways are beyond our comprehension. And so the key verse of this book, and I think the key verse of all the wisdom books in Scripture, is here in chapter 28 and verse 28.

[ 16 : 00 ] Having looked at wisdom and appraised it, having confirmed it and tested it, God says to man, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. And to shun evil is understanding.

God's told us what wisdom is. He's unveiled the unfindable mystery. Fear the Lord, shun evil. It's so simple.

It's almost frustrating. Maybe even a little unsatisfying. If you were to put yourself into Job's shoes, would this verse be an encouragement?

If you had just lost your family, your house, your health, everything that you owned, would fear me be an encouragement?

In the dark times in your own life, as you wrestle with God, demanding an answer for why this is happening, would fear me be sufficient?

[ 17 : 15 ] Because that's the only answer that God gives. And the thing is, for Job, it was sufficient.

It took him some time to get there, but for Job, fear me was enough for him to see the wise path through his suffering. And so with the time that we've got left, I want to wrestle with you with three questions.

If fear the Lord, is the thing that we need, not just when we suffer, but in all of life, if that is wisdom, if that is the guiding principle for us to live well, then we need to ask the questions, what does fear of the Lord look like?

In my life, in my day to day, what does it look like to fear the Lord? Secondly, how do I do it? How do I train myself? How do I teach myself? And lastly, I just want to see what difference does it make to fear God when I'm suffering?

How does that change anything if I fear God? Those three questions I want to try and answer with you. Firstly, what does fear of the Lord look like? Now, when we hear the word fear in the same sentence as God, those of us who have been around church for a little while really quickly want to get God off the hook.

[ 18 : 40 ] And so we want to soften off that idea of fearing God and so we add in fear God but He's loving. Fear God but He's gracious. Fear God but He's merciful. But before we start defining God by the things that we want to hear, let's look at the Bible and see if there are some helpful examples of what it looks like to fear God.

You can scribble these down to look at them in more detail later on if you want to. You could go to Isaiah 6. When Isaiah's eyes behold God, he falls down on his face in terror knowing that he is unworthy.

Knowing that he is faced with a holy God who is powerful and just and has every right to destroy Him in that moment. In Luke's gospel when Jesus helps the disciples with a miraculous catch of fish, suddenly Peter is confronted with the holiness and power and majesty of his Lord and again he falls on his knees and he says get away from me Lord.

I'm a sinful man. I don't deserve to even be in your presence. And finally and perhaps the most significant example is Jesus himself is said to fear the Lord.

In Isaiah chapter 11 this is prophesying that Jesus would come and it says this the spirit of the Lord will rest on him the spirit of wisdom and of understanding the spirit of counsel and of power the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

[ 20 : 04 ] And verse 3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. Fear is not necessarily a negative description in a relationship.

Jesus delights in his fear of God. He delights in it and it's the appropriate response to God. It's the inevitable response to God. When you meet God and you see him for his glory and majesty and power the creator of the universe the sustainer of the universe the one who is over all things the only right response is to fall on your knees in fear.

But that doesn't make it a negative thing. It's not dissimilar really to the way that we relate to our parents. Our parents love us and care for us mostly love us and care for us and provide for us and do all those sort of things but they also discipline us and we know we have a healthy fear that we need to live according to the rules that they have given us or there are consequences.

It doesn't mean that there's no love but fear is the right way to relate to somebody who has power and authority over us and that is the relationship we have with God.

So the result of fearing God is that we get to see God as most important. We get to see Him as the one who is driving the agenda of our lives. We get to see Him as the one whose agenda matters.

[ 21 : 35 ] Fear of the Lord enables us to care about what He cares about and not just what we care about. It lifts our eyes to Him who is powerful Him who is sovereign Him who is in control and fear of the Lord enables us to not need all the answers as to when and why.

The answer God gives to Job in this book is it's me. I'm in control. You don't need to know what's going in this situation. You just need to remember I'm God.

I've got all the power in the world. There is nothing that compares to me. I am good beyond your wildest dreams and I love you more than anything. That's all you need to know. For Jesus fearing God meant trusting Him and obeying Him all the way to the cross.

And for us in our lives it means we trust God and we obey Him even when and especially when He doesn't give us the details. When He says go we go. When He says stop doing something we stop doing it.

It means we trust God even when He doesn't need to give us all the answers. Can you see that wisdom cannot be simply about knowledge? You cannot learn this.

[ 22 : 53 ] We don't come to know God simply by studying not even just by reading the Bible. It's part of it but not until God reveals Himself in the Bible by His Holy Spirit are we able to know His heart and His mind and His character.

And see wisdom then is more about revelation. It's more about God showing us Himself and that becoming the guiding principle for our lives because God alone is wisdom and only as He makes Himself known can we share in it.

As I was studying this passage this week and trying to understand what does this mean in our circumstances what keeps this from being just a trite slap in the face that says suck it up when you're suffering.

and I came across this story which was really helpful. Apparently in Wales there's a valley in Wales where they raise sheep tend sheep whatever they do with sheep and they have an issue there with a parasite and if it's left untreated effectively these sheep will be eaten alive by these parasites.

And so what the shepherds are forced to do is once a year they gather the sheep and they have to submerge them into antiseptic. This is not something that the sheep look forward to. Sheep are not swimmers and in the story they explain that basically the shepherd's got to force these sheep into the vat and the dog is on the other side barking at them to make sure they don't jump out the other side and the sheep's trying to spin around and climb back out and the shepherd has to force it under head and everything eyes, nose, mouth, all under in the antiseptic before it can be let out and put back out to pasture and you feel this tension that the shepherd cares for his sheep.

[ 24 : 36 ] He probably wants to explain why he has to do this. If you could just let them know why this is helping them. But have you ever tried to explain something to a sheep?

It doesn't matter how much you want to do it, it's not going to work because we operate on a different level of reality to sheep. We understand things that they will never understand.

We interact with things, we reason, we logic in ways that they are not capable of. And it's the same with God when he's interacting with us.

God exists in a reality that we can't even begin to comprehend. He is eternal and infinite. And so even if he was to try and explain to us why he's doing things, we couldn't understand it anyway.

And so all we're left with is to just look at the shepherd and know that the shepherd looks after us, feeds us, provides for us, and to trust.

[ 25 : 46 ] There is a lot for us to learn from Job's journey about what it looks like to fear God because he does go on a journey. This book is 42 chapters long because it takes time to wrestle with the things that he is wrestling with.

The truth of God's sovereignty and character doesn't switch off the pain that Job is feeling. It doesn't make everything suddenly better.

In fact, if you look at Job chapter 1, one of the first things we learn about Job is that he fears the Lord. He's had the wisdom all along, but it's taken him time for that wisdom to apply, that wisdom to shape his steps.

He's been through the steps of crying out and yelling at God and demanding answers. And so the Bible is not saying wisdom solves everything. The Bible is not saying live well and everything will be fine.

In your pain and in your depression and in your suffering, it is right to grieve and to mourn and to feel sad and to cry and everything else that goes with dark times in your life. What wisdom does is it shows you the path through those times.

[ 27 : 04 ] The Bible licenses you to feel how you feel. As Christians, if anyone ever says to you, you need to smile because the Bible says rejoice, I give you permission to slap them lovingly.

Because Job is red from weeping. he's sitting on the ground scratching at his sores with a piece of pottery and it takes time to process things.

Job's fear of God allows him to ask questions but not deny God. Job refuses to curse the God who made heaven and earth even though his wife says that's what he should do.

Job's fear of God means that he will not doubt the character of God's goodness and mercy even though his friends spend 27 chapters trying to convince him that it's his fault and God is angry.

That's a really crude summary of the first part of Job but it's not that far off the mark. But because Job fears God, because Job knows God, he refuses to doubt the character of God's goodness.

[ 28 : 14 ] And Job's fear is enough of an anchor to keep him from falling into complete despair and giving up on life itself. One of the amazing things through the book of Job, and Steve pointed it out last week, is that progressively as Job responds to his friends, he gets more confident.

At the beginning he wants to die. He says, God, just kill me. That'd be better. But by the end, or by chapter 19 even, he's able to cry out, my Redeemer lives.

And do you know why? Each time his friends try and accuse him of something, each time his friends offer false wisdom and bad advice, he's forced to go back to the God who he fears.

He's forced to go back to the ultimate reality for his life, the ultimate purpose, and he starts saying, no, you're wrong because my God is loving. No, you're wrong because my God saved his people out of Egypt.

No, you're wrong because I know my God. And as he reminds himself of God's character, he's able to say with confidence, my Redeemer lives.

[ 29 : 22 ] He knows that God will save him because that's who God is. On the basis of the God that he followed, Job persevered.

Even though by the end of the book he still can't see why it happened, even though he still can't see what God is doing and remember we get to see behind the scenes. We know that God is showing off. It's what the book of Job is.

It's God showing off that he is more satisfying than anything in the world. Satan's trying to convince him, no, Job will give up on you, he won't go the distance, but God says, no, I know Job and he knows me and no matter what you take off him, if he has me, he will stay true.

And our hope's no different. we don't need details in our life because we've got plenty to base our trust in God on.

In good times and in bad times, we can look to Jesus. When we suffer, we can look to the one who suffered for us. When we are unsure, we can look to the one who reveals God completely.

[ 30 : 31 ] We can look to the one who shows us the character of God, who shows the mercy and the compassion and the holiness and the majesty and the humility and the sovereignty and the power and the unfailing love, we can look to Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, you can be sure that suffering will come. We can be sure that life will kick us when we're down, but in Jesus we find the wisdom of God so that we can not just survive, but we can live and flourish and rejoice even in those deepest, darkest moments.

I think it's really important that Job begins, the book of Job begins by telling us that Job feared the Lord, that he already had the wisdom. I want you to think right now, you are not yet facing suffering.

You are Job in chapter 1 before Satan rocks up and starts causing trouble. It matters that we learn to fear the Lord in the good times and the mediocre times and the middle of the road times in preparation for when suffering comes.

Because the God that you know now is the God that will need to sustain you when everything else is gone. The Bible more than allows you to have sad emotions.

[ 31 : 54 ] If anything, I think it affirms it. So if you need to cry sometimes, do it. But I think the key in this chapter to growing wise in suffering is being able to let go of that question, why?

Being able to let go of that need to know the details. Because God hasn't answered that question. God hasn't promised to give you the details and even if he did, you couldn't do anything with them.



You couldn't comprehend them. The key to growing wise in suffering, the key to being wise in your life is not knowing everything that's coming. It's fixing your eyes on Jesus.

Fixing your eyes on a God who is love. On a God who is just. On a God who gave his only son so that you would know how much you matter to him.

Maybe like Job, when you face trial, you will need to remind yourself of the God that you follow. Of his love and of his grace and of his sacrifice.

[ 33 : 10 ] And so I want to finish up by reminding you tonight because I'm sure that some of us, even now, are crying out to God, why? Why is this happening?

And so I want you to hear the words of hope and confidence and peace that we have in our risen Savior from Romans chapter 8. What then shall we say in response to this?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died. More than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake we face death all day long.

[ 34 : 20 ] We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. But no, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. When suffering comes, fear God. Remember the God who gave everything for you and he and his answer will be sufficient.

That's why it is ■■■uma not on purpose, happen to life. Inheritory Everybody Got What what what what What what what the both imagine we Video