

Understanding *Job*

*Reflections on the meaning and purpose
of Job's suffering*



Lim Kou

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Feedback and comments on this book are welcome and can be e-mailed to: feedback@godandtruth.com.

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Preface



The content of this book is based on eight messages preached in a local congregation in 1986 as part of a series of messages, *Appearance and Reality*. It is neither a commentary nor an exposition on the entire Book of Job.

Understanding Job is an attempt to understand the person Job, his state and the meaning in his heart, and how he fared before, during and after the severe trials that came upon him. It is also an attempt to understand some major issues in the Book of Job and a number of difficult questions that confront the reflective reader. For example:

- Why did God allow Satan to attack Job so severely?
- Why does the Scriptures hold Job up as a very positive example for us and why did God speak favourably of him and yet also rebuke him in strong terms?
- Why did Job falter in spite of his moral and spiritual stature? Were his failures serious? Was it feasible for Job to overcome in the difficult context he was in? How could he have done so?
- Did God answer the questions that perplexed and disturbed Job? If He did not, how were Job's problems resolved? Why did God answer Job the way He did?
- Is there significant meaning in what Job went through and are there important lessons we can learn from the Book of Job?

The Book of Job is a very profound and meaningful book in the Bible. There are deep truths that God seeks to teach us, but He does so in an indirect manner. Unlike the epistles in the New

Testament, in the Book of Job, God speaks through a story, a historical narrative, a true account of an episode in a person's life.

Several unusual features stand out in the Book of Job. For example:

- It offers a rare glimpse into the spiritual realm, right into the heart of spiritual warfare.
- It records conversations between God and Satan about a man, Job.
- It reveals Satan's tactics in afflicting God's children, and how God, while allowing the attacks, drew a limit to Satan's sphere of operation.
- It discloses to us that despite Job's exemplary character, or more accurately, because of it, God allowed Satan to test him through a series of onslaughts.
- It paints a scenario where the main characters, Job and his friends, were neither aware of the conversations between God and Satan, nor had any recognition of the existence of Satan and his working in the situation.
- It devotes four chapters to speeches by God addressing a specific individual, Job.

All these hint at the Book of Job being a significant book through which God intends to teach us deep and important truths. We therefore need to ponder prayerfully over these profound truths and respond deeply to them so that they can become a part of our life.

The messages on which this book is based were preached in the context of a shared experience in the outworking of church life. I am thankful to God for the continuing fellowship, encouragement and prayer support of the brethren over many years.

The publication of this book is itself an expression of church life. Several brethren have contributed in specific ways, including transcribing and editing the messages, proof reading and preparing the book for publication.

As an expression of fellowship in learning, growing and serving the one true God, this book is offered free as a gift to God's people.

If you have no further use for this book, please pass it to someone who may benefit from it.

May this book lead you to a deeper worship of our wonderful God and to an unwavering faith in and commitment to Him and His ways. May it also help you to appreciate more deeply the Scriptures He has inspired for our learning.

Preface to second edition

I am thankful to the Lord for His provision and undertaking in many ways. I have received much encouraging feedback from brethren in different parts of the world on the first edition of *Understanding Job* and on the two subsequent books *The Two Kingdoms* and *Man of Faith*. I am thankful for brethren in other countries who have helped in the printing and distribution of these books. It is a meaningful expression of fellowship and oneness among God's people in the universal church.

For this second edition of *Understanding Job*, questions have been added at the end of each message for personal reflection and group discussion. This is in response to requests by readers. There is no change to the text of the messages for this second edition.

Lim Kou

The State of Job



It can often be difficult to understand the meaning of what a person is going through. What appears to be can be very different from the reality. This is well exemplified in the life of Job. In this series of reflections, we will consider the story of Job, gleaned from it important lessons about life.

The story of Job

The Book of Job is an unusual yet interesting book of the Bible, but one that is not easy to understand or appreciate. Some find it baffling, as it seems to raise more questions than answers.

The story of Job begins with a commendation on Job's character. He was held up as an outstanding example of a righteous and godly man, and someone deeply appreciated by God. He worshipped God sincerely and scrupulously.

Unknown to him, dark storm clouds were gathering. One day, in the heavenly realm, an event occurred that would have a profound impact on his life. Satan came before God and cast serious doubts about the genuineness of Job's faith in God. He instigated a challenge to test and reveal Job's faith for what it was. With God's permission, Satan surprised Job with a succession of attacks that devastated his family and estate, and brought him untold personal misery.

In the midst of his trials, Job's friends came to stand by him. There were several rounds of speeches, with each of his friends taking turns to speak his mind and share his understanding of the plight that Job was in. Job countered with his own reasoning and arguments and in the process vented his complaints from a vexed spirit. He made highly improper remarks that attributed wrongdoing to God

and contained false allegations against God.

These events culminated in two long speeches by God, resulting in Job repenting and worshipping God and being restored to a position of blessedness and plenty.

Questions that confront us

As we read through the Book of Job, a host of troubling questions may surface in our minds for which there are no ready answers.

- Why did God allow Satan to attack Job so severely? Why did God allow Job to suffer so terribly? Is there any meaning to what Job went through? Was God having a game, a wager with Satan, and was Job used as a mere pawn?
- The Scriptures holds Job up as a positive example for us in Ezekiel 14:14 and James 5:11 and God spoke very favourably of him, saying Job spoke of Him what is right (Job 42:7-8). Yet it is also recorded that God rebuked Job for his highly improper remarks about Him. How do we reconcile these contrasting and seemingly contradictory aspects in the story of Job?
- Did Job fare well during the trials? Was God pleased with him?
- In what areas did Job falter? Why did he falter? Were they serious? If Job's failures were serious, why was he commended by God and held up in the Scriptures as a positive example? If they were not serious, why did God rebuke him in strong terms?
- Was Satan triumphant?
- When God answered Job, why did He do so in that way? Did God's reply answer the questions that perplexed and disturbed Job? If it did, how did God's answer address them? If not, how were Job's problems resolved? Why did Job not receive the answers to some of his pertinent questions even at the end of the story of Job?
- What significant lessons can we learn from this book?

Some Christians may say that the Book of Job confirms one point—that the problem of pain and suffering in this world is beyond our understanding. They may say that Christians can only take comfort in the Cross, which assures us of God's love and care for us.

However, thoughtful study and prayerful consideration of this book can reward us with rich and satisfying spiritual treasures of profound truths that can help us greatly in our walk with God. The Lord willing, we will ponder over these issues and find answers to these troubling questions.

The story of Job can be appreciated from different angles. For a start, we will approach it from the angle of trying to understand Job *before, during* and *after* the trials that he went through. We will observe Job's analysis of his own situation, what others thought of him and how they treated him, and we will examine the true state of affairs.

Before the trials

The Book of Job opens with very positive statements about the character of this man.

Job 1:1-3

1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

2 Seven sons and three daughters were born to him.

3 His possessions also were 7, 000 sheep, 3, 000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

Exemplary character

The Scriptures pronounces Job an exemplary character, a man who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. He had a big family, was wealthy, and God blessed him with an abundance of material possessions. He also had a good reputation and was the greatest man of the east.

God Himself used these very striking words when He spoke about Job:

Job 1:8

The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.”

God specifically singled Job out in His conversation with Satan as one who lived an exemplary life. The qualities in Job are what God looks for in men—blamelessness and uprightness of character, one who knows what it means to properly fear God and who turns away from evil.

Religious man

Job 1:5 shows that Job was also careful with religious observances.

Job 1:5

When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, “Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually.

From the context, it is clear that these were not merely external observances. Job not only longed in his heart for what was good, he was also careful to observe and do what he recognised he should.

Intimate friendship with God

Some time later, Job entered a period in his life in which he was in intense difficulties and pain. During that time, he recounted his relationship with God before the trials came upon him.

Job 29:2-5

2 “Oh that I were as in months gone by,
As in the days when God watched over me;
3 When His lamp shone over my head,
And by His light I walked through darkness;
4 As I was in the prime of my days,
When the friendship of God was over my tent;
5 When the Almighty was yet with me,
And my children were around me;

From these verses, we can see how intimate Job's relationship with God was. He was conscious of God's presence with him and goodness towards him. He knew that God cared for him and watched over him. He was faithful in his walk with God and he walked by God's light. Job felt then that he was in the prime of his days.

Job testified that God regarded him as a friend. The Scriptures records only a few instances of those considered as God's friends. Abraham was one and Moses, another. Their relationship with God was very intimate. It was said of Moses that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). According to the Hebrew lexicon, the word in the Hebrew text translated "friendship" in Job 29:4 may be translated as "intimate friendship" and is translated in this way in the New International Version. This is all the more remarkable when we consider the fact that Job lived long ago. God's revelation to the people of his time would generally be far less than what we have today.

God's blessings, Job's righteous ways and social status

In Job 29:6-11, Job went on to describe in graphic terms the richness of his life and God's provision for him. He also recalled the reputation he had with others.

Job 29:6-11

6 When my steps were bathed in butter,
And the rock poured out for me streams of oil!
7 "When I went out to the gate of the city,
When I took my seat in the square,
8 The young men saw me and hid themselves,
And the old men arose and stood.
9 "The princes stopped talking
And put their hands on their mouths;
10 The voice of the nobles was hushed,
And their tongue stuck to their palate.
11 "For when the ear heard, it called me blessed,
And when the eye saw, it gave witness of me,

In Job 29:12-17, he went on to describe his attitude, his ways and his life. He cared for others and was helpful to the needy and

the oppressed. He was concerned about justice and intervened on behalf of those who were unjustly treated.

Job 29:12-17

12 Because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
And the orphan who had no helper.
13 "The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me,
And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.
14 "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
My justice was like a robe and a turban.
15 "I was eyes to the blind
And feet to the lame.
16 "I was a father to the needy,
And I investigated the case which I did not know.
17 "I broke the jaws of the wicked
And snatched the prey from his teeth.

In Job 29:21-25, we see how others respected his counsel and his words. There was a certain authority and position that he held before their eyes. He even sat as chief among them.

Job 29:21-25

21 "To me they listened and waited,
And kept silent for my counsel.
22 "After my words they did not speak again,
And my speech dropped on them.
23 "They waited for me as for the rain,
And opened their mouth as for the spring rain.
24 "I smiled on them when they did not believe,
And the light of my face they did not cast down.
25 "I chose a way for them and sat as chief,
And dwelt as a king among the troops,
As one who comforted the mourners.

This, then, was the kind of situation Job lived in before the trials descended on him. God blessed him materially and was watching over his life in obvious ways. He enjoyed a good reputation among men. Because the appearance and the reality were in the same direction, Job himself could easily recognise that he was in favour

with God. So could others.

If someone were to ask us how a person in such a situation is getting on, I believe our reply would be, “He is fine” and, “He is getting on wonderfully.” If the person himself were asked the same question, the answer would invariably be the same.

During the trials

Now let us consider the trials that came upon him. During the trials, the picture appears very pathetic. Suddenly, his possessions, his wealth and his sons and daughters were all taken away. He was reduced to poverty and pain. He was severely afflicted in the body and he suffered emotionally and mentally too.

Loss of possessions and children

Calamities rained upon him in quick succession. We read this in Job 1:13-19.

Job 1:13-19

13 Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

14 a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,

15 and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young

people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

The Sabeans and Chaldeans attacked and took away his oxen, donkeys and camels. They slew his servants mercilessly. The “fire of God”, a likely reference to lightning, struck and burned up the sheep and the servants. That was not all. Even his son’s house collapsed, burying his sons and daughters. All these happened in a very dramatic way. In a flash, his possessions, wealth and his children were all gone.

Bodily afflictions

Not only that, we read in Job 2:7-8 that Job began to suffer very severely from bodily afflictions of sore boils.

Job 2:7-8

7 Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

You can imagine how difficult a situation it must have been for Job. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, he was afflicted with sore boils. He sat among the ashes, scraping his wounds and was in very great pain. We see a very pathetic picture of personal suffering in Job 7:4-5.

Job 7:4-5

4 “When I lie down I say,
‘When shall I arise?’

But the night continues,
And I am continually tossing until dawn.

5 “My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt,
My skin hardens and runs.

Ostracised by society and those he loved turned against him

Adding to his pain was the treatment he received from his friends, relatives and servants as he narrated in Job 19:13-16.

Job 19:13-16

13 "He has removed my brothers far from me,
And my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.
14 "My relatives have failed,
And my intimate friends have forgotten me.
15 "Those who live in my house and my maids consider me a
stranger.
I am a foreigner in their sight.
16 "I call to my servant, but he does not answer;
I have to implore him with my mouth.

As Job no longer appeared to be blessed by God, but instead seemed to be under the judgement of God, his relatives no longer cared for him in the same way as before. His intimate friends had forgotten him in spite of all the good that he had done for them in the past. Even his own servants had no respect for him.

Seeing his physical state, his wife and brothers loathed him, and even children and his associates turned against him, as we read in Job 19:17-19.

Job 19:17-19

17 "My breath is offensive to my wife,
And I am loathsome to my own brothers.
18 "Even young children despise me;
I rise up and they speak against me.
19 "All my associates abhor me,
And those I love have turned against me.

Instead of bringing comfort, the very people whom he loved were against him. They added to his pain, making it more difficult for him to bear with the situation. There seemed to be no one who offered him true comfort at this time of great trial and need.

Undoubtedly, Job was going through a very difficult time. He was despised and mocked, even by those who were despised and rejected by society. In Job 29, Job recounted how God blessed and undertook for him in various ways obvious to all and the great respect others had for him, but now, in Job 30, he painted a picture of contrast and began with a "But".

Job 30:1-10

1 "But now those younger than I mock me,
 Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock.
 2 "Indeed, what good was the strength of their hands to me?
 Vigor had perished from them.
 3 "From want and famine they are gaunt
 Who gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation,
 4 Who pluck mallow by the bushes,
 And whose food is the root of the broom shrub.
 5 "They are driven from the community;
 They shout against them as against a thief,
 6 So that they dwell in dreadful valleys,
 In holes of the earth and of the rocks.
 7 "Among the bushes they cry out;
 Under the nettles they are gathered together.
 8 "Fools, even those without a name,
 They were scourged from the land.
 9 "And now I have become their taunt,
 I have even become a byword to them.
 10 "They abhor me and stand aloof from me,
 And they do not refrain from spitting at my face.

Lack of support from his wife

Even his wife was not understanding or supportive towards him. It would have made a great difference to Job had his wife stood by him and encouraged him to be true to God. But instead we read in Job 2:9 that his wife did the opposite.

Job 2:9

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity?
 Curse God and die!"

Misunderstood by his three friends

In Job 2:11, we read that Job's three friends came to him with the express purpose of sympathising and comforting him.

Job 2:11

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place,

Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him.

But instead of comforting him, they spoke words that hurt. These were some hurting words that Eliphaz, one of his three friends, spoke:

Job 22:4-11

4 "Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you,
That He enters into judgment against you?

5 "Is not your wickedness great,
And your iniquities without end?

6 "For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause,
And stripped men naked.

7 "To the weary you have given no water to drink,
And from the hungry you have withheld bread.

8 "But the earth belongs to the mighty man,
And the honorable man dwells in it.

9 "You have sent widows away empty,
And the strength of the orphans has been crushed.

10 "Therefore snares surround you,
And sudden dread terrifies you,

11 Or darkness, so that you cannot see,
And an abundance of water covers you.

Seeing the condition that Job was in, and the calamities that came upon him, they misunderstood him and accused him of wrongdoing and sin. They wrongly concluded that God was judging him for his wickedness and his sins.

What they said about Job is a contrast to what we saw earlier, that Job was someone who cared for others and that God had pronounced him a blameless and upright man, one who feared God and who turned away from evil.

Such false accusations from friends, especially during times like these, must have been extremely difficult to bear. His friends attributed to him things that were not true. Their words tormented and crushed Job.

Job 19:2-3

2 “How long will you torment me
And crush me with words?

3 “These ten times you have insulted me;
You are not ashamed to wrong me.

They could have helped and encouraged him and given him solace, but they did not. Their words provided no comfort at all.

Job 16:2-5

2 “I have heard many such things;
Sorry comforters are you all.

3 “Is there no limit to windy words?
Or what plagues you that you answer?

4 “I too could speak like you,
If I were in your place.

I could compose words against you
And shake my head at you.

5 “I could strengthen you with my mouth,
And the solace of my lips could lessen your pain.

Job’s friends assumed that there must have been wrongdoing on Job’s part because of what was happening to him, and they made assertions about his sins and how God was now judging him. How they wronged Job at this time of his greatest need!

What we see taking place between Job and his three friends serves as a caution to us. We must be very careful not to wrong others, bearing in mind that, at times, reality can be very different from appearance. Thus, in situations that are more complex and difficult to understand, we must be slow to conclude and not be overconfident in our assessment.

Job thought God was against him and afflicting him

But what was perhaps most difficult for Job, a God-fearing and righteous man, was his perception that God was against him, and that he seemed unable to reach out to God and to sense His fellowship and grace upon his life. Knowing the presence of God and His favour and grace is vital for a person to go through a time like this well.

Job thought that the calamities that came upon him were arrows of the Almighty and that God was against him (Job 6:4). He thought that he was the target of God (Job 7:20), that God was angry with him (Job 19:11) and was persecuting him (Job 30:21).

Job 6:4

“For the arrows of the Almighty are within me,
Their poison my spirit drinks;
The terrors of God are arrayed against me.

Job 7:20

“Have I sinned? What have I done to You,
O watcher of men?
Why have You set me as Your target,
So that I am a burden to myself?

Job 19:11

“He has also kindled His anger against me
And considered me as His enemy.

Job 30:21

“You have become cruel to me;
With the might of Your hand You persecute me.

In his own mind, Job did not think that his suffering was because of his sin. Yet he found there was no way out for him. All the people around him were against him. They misunderstood and condemned him. He also felt that God was against him, yet he could not sort it out with God. His cry to God was met with silence and that left him in a helpless state.

Job 30:20

“I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me;
I stand up, and You turn Your attention against me.

Job wanted to know why God was afflicting him in this way. As far as he knew, it could not be that God was judging him for his sins. He was perplexed and wanted to reason out and discuss with

God what was happening to him (Job 23:3-4). But he could not find God (Job 23:8). It would appear that at that time, Job and his friends did not understand the existence and work of Satan and they believed that Job's misfortune came from God.

Job 23:3, 4, 8

3 "Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!

4 "I would present my case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.

8 "Behold, I go forward but He is not there,
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;

Indeed, a situation like what Job was facing can be very frustrating, discouraging and difficult. Who could he turn to in his moment of need? He did not understand the meaning of what he was going through. Worse still, he also misunderstood this very crucial issue, thinking that God was against him, which we know was not true.

The point we should take careful note of is this: it is not only others who may fail to understand what we are going through, but we ourselves may not understand accurately or may even misunderstand what we are going through.

Our assessment of such situations

If someone were to ask us how a person going through such times is getting on, I think most of us would say without hesitation, "Terrible!" If the person going through such trials were asked the same question, his answer would likely be no different.

But is this way of thinking correct? Why do we say "terrible"? What is our perspective? Why do we tend to answer in this way when we go through such situations?

After the trials

We will now consider briefly what happened after the trials. The passage in Job 42:7-8 tells us that after the trials, Job was commended and vindicated by the Lord Himself.

Job 42:7-8

7 It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.

8 “Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.”

We can make two observations from these verses: Firstly, Job's three friends were in the wrong and secondly, God actually appreciated Job. On the whole, God was pleased with him even though, as we shall see later, Job was not faultless. God said that Job's friends had not spoken of Him what was right as Job had. Besides, God told them to go to Job and offer burnt offerings for themselves and that Job would pray for them.

God also restored the fortunes of Job and blessed the latter days of Job more than the beginning. His material possessions increased twofold (Job 42:10-12). He had another seven sons and three daughters, and lived to a ripe old age (Job 42:16-17). Thus, we see that God commended, vindicated and appreciated Job.

After the trials, the picture of Job's life is more obvious. If we were asked how a person in such a situation is getting on, the likely answer we would give is “Fine” or “Good”. If the person himself were asked such a question, his answer would not be any different.

Appearance and reality*When appearance and reality match*

We can see that before and after the trials, it was easy for others to recognise that Job was blessed and that he had God's approval, that God's favour was upon his life and he was faring well. Because the appearance and reality were similar, it was easy for others to recognise this fact.

When appearance and reality do not match

But during the trials, the appearance was vastly different from the reality. It was difficult for others to understand what was taking place and how Job was faring. The people around him asserted quite confidently that he was not faring well. They thought that he was not in God's favour and that he was being judged and punished by God for his sins. Even Job himself misunderstood the situation, thinking that God was against him.

The point for us to note is this, that when the outward circumstances are unfavourable for a person, there is a tendency to conclude that he is not faring well.

The reality during the trials

But what was the reality in that situation? To answer this, we can ask ourselves two questions: Firstly, did the calamities and trials come upon Job because God was unhappy with him and disapproved of his life? Secondly, was Job in a bad state and faring badly during the trials?

Did the trials come upon Job because God disapproved of his life?

It is clear that this was not the case. In reality, the opposite was true. The trials came upon Job because of his righteousness and God's appreciation of him. God had such confidence in Job that He allowed Satan to put him to the test. The passage Job 1:8-12 shows clearly how the machinery was set in motion, how Job came under the trials.

Job 1:8-12

8 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

9 Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

10 "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11 "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."

12 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.

We see from this passage that Satan challenged God's pronouncement on Job's character. By questioning "Does Job fear God for nothing?" he was in effect saying that Job's fear of God and his apparent good conduct had no real quality in them. He responded well merely because God had been blessing him materially, making a hedge around him, protecting him and blessing the work of his hands. Everything was going on well for Job, and his outward circumstances were favourable and pleasant.

Satan went on to spitefully say that if God were to put forth His hand and touch all that Job had, that is, if his surroundings and possessions were all adversely affected, Job would surely curse God to His face. In other words, there was no real quality in Job's love for God and in his fear of God. In the face of this challenge, God was willing to let Satan put Job to the test (v. 12) because He knew that there was substance in Job's life; there were genuine, good qualities within him.

The first test was one in which God allowed Satan to afflict Job in relation to what he had. But God placed a limit on what Satan was allowed to do: he could not touch Job in his personal being.

Although his possessions and his sons and daughters were taken away, Job continued to respond positively, worshipping the Lord (Job 1:20-22). With that response, Satan was not pleased. Because Job had weathered the first test unscathed, Satan wanted to go further and afflict Job in his body. Satan then said, "Put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face" (Job 2:5). God had sufficient confidence in Job to allow Satan to afflict him in his body, but did not allow Satan to take away his life. God said, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life" (Job 2:6).

Some may wonder why God allowed Satan to afflict Job so severely and make him suffer so much.

It is helpful to pause here and reflect so that we can better

appreciate the life of Job and the meaning of what he was going through, and to realise that his pain and suffering were not in vain.

There is a critical issue involved here, which is vital to the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose. The issue is:

Can man develop genuine, deep moral qualities within and have genuine, deep love for God and the truth, independent of and whatever the outward circumstances?

Do we really love God and the truth and seek to live accordingly at all times, or do we do so only when it is convenient, when the circumstances are easy or because of God's blessings that we can enjoy? Can man develop such qualities and maintain them even in the midst of adverse circumstances?

Not only that, it is also very important for us to consider *the degree to which we can develop such qualities*. What is the degree of the quality of life, character and moral stature that we have attained? These are important issues. God values these qualities in man and they are very important in His kingdom.

Furthermore, we should note that the difficulties that Job went through, although very severe and trying, need not have negative effects upon him in the area that really matters, and that is, the moral and spiritual quality of his being. Instead, they could help him in his personal development. And as we reflect upon it, we can justifiably conclude that Job did emerge from the trials a wiser and more mature man, as we shall see subsequently.

However, if we simply look at the difficulties from the angle of pain and suffering, we may say, "It is a terrible picture" and wonder why God allowed Satan to afflict Job in that way.

We may also wonder at times why we have to go through severe testing and trials. Let us learn from the story of Job, that the difficulties and pain we go through need not have negative effects upon us and we do not have to go through them in vain. We can emerge a better person. But in many of our contexts, there are other issues to consider, for example, whether the difficulties we go through are a result of our own failures and weaknesses.

Was Job faring badly during the trials?

We will now consider the second question: “Was Job in a bad state, and faring badly during the trials?”

On the whole, God was pleased with Job and how he went through the ordeal. Job was not in a bad state, though others looking at his outward circumstances and hearing some of the words he uttered might have thought that he was. His three friends were angry with him. And while others around him despised and condemned him, we have seen that God commended, vindicated and blessed him more than at the beginning.

Having said that, I want to point out that Job did falter to some degree during the trials. For example, in Job 3, we read that Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He wished he had not been born. He felt that it was meaningless being born if he had to suffer in this way. Although the trials were very difficult, such an attitude was not right. We read of his complaints in Job 3:11, 20:

Job 3:11, 20

11 “Why did I not die at birth,
Come forth from the womb and expire?
20 “Why is light given to him who suffers,
And life to the bitter of soul,

He felt that it would have been better if he had just died at birth. He also faltered, as indicated in several passages, for example, Job 9:20-24, 10:1-3, 19:6, 10, 11 and 21:4. We shall continue to examine in greater detail how serious his failures were in subsequent messages of our reflections on Job.

The other point to note is that although God commended, vindicated and blessed Job, He did not ignore his failures but addressed them in Job 40:1-2 and Job 40:6-8.

Job 40:1-2

1 Then the Lord said to Job,
2 “Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Let him who reproves God answer it.”

Job 40:6-8

6 Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm and said,
 7 “Now gird up your loins like a man;
 I will ask you, and you instruct Me.
 8 “Will you really annul My judgment?
 Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?

It is clear from the way God spoke here that He was not totally pleased with Job. Some of Job's remarks were clearly improper and he himself subsequently acknowledged that this was so. He retracted them and repented.

Job 42:3, 5, 6

3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel with knowledge?’
 “Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
 Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”
 5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
 But now my eye sees You;
 6 Therefore I retract,
 And I repent in dust and ashes.”

However, we need to recognise that the significance and blameworthiness of Job's failures should be considered in the context of the severity and intensity of the afflictions and trials that he was going through.

God considers all relevant factors

There is an important principle for us to take note of. As in the case with Job, when assessing the significance and blameworthiness of a person's failures, God does take into consideration the severity and intensity of the trials and afflictions, and all the relevant factors in operation in the given context. We need to bear this principle in mind for our own lives and those of others.

In Job's context, we saw how his possessions were all taken away and destroyed so quickly, one after another. His sons and daughters died. He was severely attacked by the evil one from many angles and suffered intense physical, mental, emotional and spiritual pressure and pain. It must have been very difficult for him to bear. He was

misunderstood, taunted, mocked and wrongly accused of wrongdoing. It is evident that the evil one was taking advantage of the adverse circumstances that Job was in and was attacking him in his spirit. We see an indication of this dimension of spiritual attack in Job 17:1.

Job 17:1

“My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished,
The grave is ready for me.

Here, Job lamented, “My spirit is broken.” There is a sense of brokenness of spirit that is positive, that is, when it refers to contriteness of spirit. But this is not the sense meant here. The meaning here is that Job was harassed, and he felt difficult and was negatively affected in his spirit. He expressed it as “anguish of my spirit” in Job 7:11:

Job 7:11

“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit,
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

Job 7:14 tells us of the frightening dreams and terrifying visions that he had.

Job 7:14

Then You dost frighten me with dreams
And terrify me by visions;

Job believed that it was God who frightened him with dreams and terrified him by visions, which was a grave misunderstanding. However, Job was probably right in thinking that what he was experiencing had a supernatural source. It was very likely the work of the powers of darkness. This manner of attack on Job orchestrated by Satan was within the scope of what God had permitted Satan. We see that Job’s various faculties were being oppressed and attacked in many different aspects. He was going through a very difficult time indeed.

And as we have noted earlier, Job was unaware that Satan was

afflicting him and therefore he wrongly concluded that God was against him. Though he tried, he seemed unable to reach out to and sort things out with God. He could not sense God's approval and fellowship, nor His presence and enabling. For someone like Job who deeply loved the Lord and the truth, his wrong conclusion that God was against him and the silence of God would probably be the most difficult and painful aspects of his experience. This was further compounded by the fact that there was no one who encouraged and supported him at this time. Thus, it must have been very difficult for Job to exercise his will to choose to carry on in the truth, and in faith, trusting God.

Job's positive qualities

Several verses in the Book of Job indicate to us that there were significant positive inward qualities in Job, even while he was perplexed and suffering intensely in this way. Let us take a look at some of these verses.

Immediately after all the calamities that came upon him, with his sons and daughters having all died, and his possessions and wealth all gone, we read in Job 1:20-22:

Job 1:20-22

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Job did not grumble, murmur or blame God at this stage. Instead, he worshipped God in the midst of intense suffering. This is something very remarkable. In spite of the fact that he wrongly thought that God had taken away so much of what was precious to him, when in fact it was Satan at work, he trusted in God's sovereignty and continued to bless the name of the Lord.

Later on, we read in Job 2:9-10 that when he was afflicted with

boils and was in very great pain, his wife instigated him to “curse God and die”. But Job chided her for speaking foolishly.

Job 2:9-10

9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”

10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Though he mistakenly thought that God was the One who was afflicting him, he still put it this way, “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” We see from here that Job’s attitude to life was that he would accept everything, even difficulties and afflictions, that God saw fit to come upon his life. This attitude revealed the quality of his love for the Lord and faithfulness to God.

In chapter 6, verse 10, Job said:

Job 6:10

“But it is still my consolation,
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

In his deep pain, Job basically remained true to God and to what he had come to understand from God. Though he faltered, he still loved the Lord and sought to honour God and to abide by His words. Some of the things that he said in these verses might not be accurate or wholesome, but basically they were in the right direction and they revealed some of the deep things in his heart.

Job 13:15, 18

15 “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

18 “Behold now, I have prepared my case;
I know that I will be vindicated.

No matter what happened to him, even if God were to slay him, he said, “I will hope in Him.” Though Job did waver during the

trials, deep in his heart he still had confidence and hope in God, which he affirmed from time to time. He could not understand why he should be afflicted in that way and he wanted to argue his case before God, but in the end he still trusted and hoped in God. He knew that he would be vindicated in the end. He had the confidence that God is reliable and just, although, at that moment, he did not quite understand how to sort it all out.

Job 16:19

“Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
And my advocate is on high.

Although many people did not understand him and they despised and wronged him, Job knew that he had a witness in heaven and that he could appeal to his advocate on high. This showed his confidence in God in spite of the fact that he could not properly reconcile what was happening to and around him. As was pointed out before, we must remember that these events happened in the context of Job’s limited understanding.

We see in Job 23:3-7 further evidence of his faith in God.

Job 23:3-7

3 “Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!
4 “I would present my case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.
5 “I would learn the words which He would answer,
And perceive what He would say to me.
6 “Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power?
No, surely He would pay attention to me.
7 “There the upright would reason with Him;
And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.

Though he sought for God and seemed unable to find Him, yet he still believed in Him. He knew that God would not overcome or condemn him simply because He is more powerful.

Job believed that God would pay attention to him if he had genuine grounds to present his case before the Lord. He knew

that if a person is upright, he could reason with God (v. 7). He also knew that God is not an arbitrary God who deals with men without any proper basis. He still held on to the belief that God is reasonable and would vindicate and deliver him. Despite all that was going on, he still clung on to his belief that God is a good and reliable God who would deliver the upright.

We see this train of thought again in Job 23.

Job 23:10-12

10 "But He knows the way I take;
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
11 "My foot has held fast to His path;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.
12 "I have not departed from the command of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my
necessary food.

Job affirmed his conviction that God knows what was going on and what was in his heart. Though he did not understand the work of Satan and felt that God was testing him, he still believed that because his attitudes were basically good, God understood him and that he would emerge better than before. He knew that in going through all these, he "shall come forth as gold", meaning that everything would turn out for good in the end. He knew he would come forth a better person, refined like gold, of precious value.

And he went on to say in verses 11 and 12 that he still walked in the way he believed God wanted him to, not turning aside from it. He still treasured the words of God, seeking to be faithful to God and not departing from His commandments. He valued the words of God more than his necessary food. This then was the kind of attitude within Job basically, although there were indications of failures and wavering within him, which we will be examining more carefully in subsequent messages.

What we have considered helps us to understand that what is precious and of primary importance to God is the quality of our inner man. It is not merely the external conduct or the words from our mouth, but the qualities that are within us that matter.

Concluding remarks

We have seen that though there was evidence of failures, on the whole, Job fared rather well, and God was pleased with him. Of course, he could have fared better. But given the context that he was in, God was still pleased with him.

In Ezekiel 14:14, Job is held up as one of three examples of men of righteousness with whom God is pleased. We have already seen earlier in the Book of Job itself how God had commended and vindicated him. Here, in the Book of Ezekiel, God wanted to highlight people who were righteous, whom He was pleased with. The context here is about a nation sinning and how God was stretching out His hand against the nation to destroy it, and in verse 14 God said,

Ezekiel 14:14

even though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves," declares the Lord God.

The verse opens with the phrase "even though" to emphasise the outstanding moral qualities of these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job. Even though these three men were outstanding in the quality of righteousness, they could only deliver themselves, not the sinful nation they were in the midst of.

Noah was singled out in a time of widespread wickedness, corruption and violence on this earth. God judged and destroyed the world by flood, but Noah was highlighted as a man who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord", "a righteous man, blameless in his time", one who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:5-11). Daniel was described as a "man of high esteem" (Dan. 10:11), a man whom God was very pleased with for his attitude, character and life. Likewise Job, the man we are now considering, was described as an upright and blameless man.

When James in his epistle discusses the subject of patience in the midst of trials, he refers to Job as an outstanding example of one who endured and was blessed.

James 5:11

We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

In this verse, James is not referring to those who endured trials in the sense of just managing to go through them, but those who had gone through them well. They are the ones who are blessed. Job is highlighted because what he went through was extremely difficult, and yet on the whole, he came through it well.

In the light of what we have considered of Job, what he went through and how he went through it, what should be the answer to the question "How was he getting on?" Should we say, "Terrible!"? We tend to answer this way because of the difficulties and adverse circumstances that come upon a person. But the reality is that Job fared rather well in the midst of all the trials and difficulties. To answer "terrible" would not be an appropriate answer.

If we respond in this way, it is clear that we need to adjust our perspective in life and the way we view things. Our focus should not be on the things that come upon us, even though they may be very unpleasant and difficult. Instead, we should focus on the inward qualities within the person, his response to the situation and the choices he makes. The situation may be difficult, but it could also be an important time of learning and positive development. This is how God regards us and views the situation and this is what counts.

Question for reflection and discussion

Share your understanding of Job, what he went through and how he fared: before, during and after the trials.

Message 2

The Posture of Job



In this and subsequent messages, we shall reflect further on Job's failures and what we can learn from them. We shall seek to answer a few questions: Why did God rebuke Job? How and where did Job falter? Why did he fail and what is the significance of his failure? We will also be considering the important issue of the proper posture that we should adopt before God under all circumstances.

As we consider the subject of Job's failure, we need to bear in mind that on the whole he fared rather well relative to how many others would have under similar circumstances.

Let us look at what the Lord said to Job at the end of the Book of Job and also Job's response.

Job 40:1-8

- 1 Then the Lord said to Job,
- 2 "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Let him who reproves God answer it."
- 3 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
- 4 "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
- 5 "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer;
Even twice, and I will add nothing more."
- 6 Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm and said,
- 7 "Now gird up your loins like a man;
I will ask you, and you instruct Me.
- 8 "Will you really annul My judgment?
Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?"

In this passage, we see the Lord rebuking Job for contending with the Almighty and reproving God (v. 2), and for annulling His

judgement and condemning Him (v. 8). It was improper for Job to have done so. Job recognised that he had spoken carelessly (vs. 4-5).

We look further at chapter 42:

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
 2 "I know that You can do all things,
 And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
 3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
 "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
 Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."
 4 'Hear, now, and I will speak;
 I will ask You, and You instruct me.'
 5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
 But now my eye sees You;
 6 Therefore I retract,
 And I repent in dust and ashes."

Job, realising that his words and conduct were improper, said, "I have declared that which I did not understand" (v. 3). He recognised that God was the One who was in a position to instruct him (v. 4) and not the other way round (Job 40:7). He then retracted the statements that he had made and repented (v. 6).

As we reflect on Job's failures and the Lord's correction, one key area we need to pay attention to in the outworking of our faith is our relationship with God and our response, attitude and posture towards Him under all circumstances. I wish to highlight the phrase "under all circumstances" because we may express to the Lord from our hearts and with our lips what may seem to be correct and proper, but will we continue to maintain that posture under all circumstances?

The proper posture towards God

What, then, is the proper posture we should have towards God, the One who is almighty, perfect, loving and all-wise? Briefly, it should be *one of worship and submission to God in a spirit of humility, even during severe testing and perplexing situations*. This ought to be the posture taken by Job during the testing that he went through, and this is what God would have appreciated if Job had been able to maintain it.

This is a crucial issue for us to grasp and to settle definitely in our own lives, especially in the context of the last days and as we prepare for difficult times ahead.

We should also see that adopting such a posture is vital to the kind of relationship and faith that God looks for in His children. Friendship with God must take place in the context of faith and humble, joyful submission to God at all times, whatever the circumstances. The Book of Job can teach us much on this subject.

Job's posture during the initial period of testing

In the last message, we saw how Job sought to hold fast his integrity and to continue in the path of righteousness in the midst of severe trials and attacks by the evil one. We saw how the Scriptures holds him up as an example of a righteous man and as one who endured. However, we also noted that he did falter. It is very helpful for us, then, to reflect further on his failures and the reasons why God rebuked him.

Before we look at his failures, let us look at Job's posture during the initial period when the trials came upon him.

Job 1:20-22

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

21 He said,

“Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I shall return there.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

The context of the above passage shows that it was a very trying time for Job. Yet his response was rather commendable and was in line with what was mentioned earlier about the proper posture towards God, that is, one of worship and submission to God in a spirit of humility.

In spite of all that had happened, Job arose, tore his robe, fell to the ground and worshipped. He worshipped God in the midst of what many would consider as disasters or tragedies.

Although Job thought that God had caused him the misery, he still blessed the name of the Lord and did not blame Him. The word “blame” literally means “ascribe unseemliness to” (see margin of NASB). Job did not “ascribe unseemliness to” God, that is, he did not think God had done anything that was improper. He did not grumble or blame God because he recognised that whatever might happen, God is still God, and that the proper posture on his part was one of worship.

Later on, when Satan again appeared before the Lord, the Lord showed appreciation for Job’s steadfast faith, praising him yet again as a blameless and upright man.

Job 2:3

The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.”

Next, we see Satan, with the permission of God, increasing the misery of Job by causing his body to be covered with sore boils. When his wife told him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!” (v. 9), we see Job responding admirably.

Job 2:10

But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job recognised that it was wrong and foolish to be angry with God or to blame Him. He willingly submitted to whatever God saw fit for him to go through, whether they were pleasant or adverse times.

Up to this point in time, there was no indication of any improper response or posture on the part of Job. His attitude and posture were basically healthy. However, as time passed and as the story unfolded, we see Job beginning to falter.

Job's failures

The first evidence in the Scriptures of Job faltering is found in Job 3. We do not know how long the interval was before Job began to falter after his positive response in Job 1 and 2. We read in Job 2:11-13 that Job's three friends came to comfort him after they heard of all the adversity that had befallen him. It must have taken some time before they arrived. They sat with him seven days and seven nights not speaking a word, for they saw that his pain was very great. Then Job poured out his woes.

Wrong words, wrong spirit

Job 3:1-3

1 Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.
 2 And Job said,
 3 "Let the day perish on which I was to be born,
 And the night which said, 'A boy is conceived.'

We can see that both the content of the words uttered by Job and the spirit in which they were spoken were not right. The whole of Job 3 is basically in that direction. Let us examine a few other verses from that chapter.

Job 3:11, 13, 20

11 "Why did I not die at birth,
 Come forth from the womb and expire?
 13 "For now I would have lain down and been quiet;
 I would have slept then, I would have been at rest,
 20 "Why is light given to him who suffers,
 And life to the bitter of soul,

Job not only felt that the days were very difficult to go through, he wished that he had never been born, and worse, he cursed the day of his birth. Such a response was not right.

You may ask, "Can't a person in circumstances as difficult and painful as these feel that it is better not to have been born? How, then, should he go through times such as these? Should the person simply grit his teeth and say, 'It's all right, the pain isn't that great?'"

What we can do in difficult times

In going through times like these, there are a few things that we can do. We can tell the Lord how we feel. We can tell Him that it is very difficult, and that we do not understand why we have to go through such times. We can ask Him to help us to understand. We can express to Him that we find it almost unbearable, and are concerned that we will not be able to take it. We can cry out to God for grace to strengthen us to go through such times well.

In the midst of the difficulties, we must maintain the proper posture of worship of God, submission to Him and faith in Him and in His undertaking, recognising that He is the perfect Almighty God.

We should check ourselves to see that we are faithful to God. We should sort out our lives and put right whatever is wrong. Having done all these, we can then exercise faith in God and have legitimate confidence in Him undertaking for us.

We can also express to God that though we may be perplexed with the circumstances, we know that He understands what is going on and that He is sovereign, perfectly wise and loving. Because of who He is, we are willing to go through whatever He sees fitting for us to go through, and we desire to learn whatever He desires to teach us in those situations and, by His grace, we will honour and glorify His name.

However, if we perceive that the powers of darkness are involved, we should take a stand to reject and resist what comes from them. Having done that, we must be prepared to go through with the right spirit whatever the Lord allows us to go through.

Sometimes, especially when situations become almost unbearable, we may entertain thoughts such as what Job did, wishing we had never been born. But one who loves God and trusts in Him should not entertain such thoughts. The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

If we love God, trust Him and are faithful to Him, then, however difficult and perplexing situations may be, we know that all things will work out for our good because God will cause it to be so. We should not wish we had never been born. To do so would reflect lack of faith in God and what He has assured us through the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 8:28.

We shall now look at other passages indicating how Job had faltered and why God rebuked him. We will concentrate on how he faltered in his posture and response towards God, in particular, in the areas of the spirit of worship, submission and humility.

Improper allegations against God

Job 10:1-3

1 "I loathe my own life;
I will give full vent to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
2 "I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me;
Let me know why You contend with me.
3 'Is it right for You indeed to oppress,
To reject the labor of Your hands,
And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?

We see here that Job again expressed how he loathed his own life (v. 1). He felt that God was treating him as a target, inflicting all these pains on him (v. 2). He further alleged that God was the One oppressing him, and at the same time looking favourably on the schemes of the wicked (v. 3). These things ought not to be attributed to the perfect God; they were improper allegations against God's character. Let's look at another verse:

Job 19:6

Know then that God has wronged me
And has closed His net around me.

Job claimed that God had wronged him and that is tantamount to saying that God is unjust. We know that this accusation must be wrong. God is the perfect One; He is just and loving and will not do

any wrong. The irony is that while Job claimed that God had wronged him, it was actually Job who had wronged God.

In Job 40:8, we see God rebuking Job, saying, “Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?” Why did God rebuke Job in this manner? This was because Job attributed wrongdoing to God to maintain his point that he was in the right. As far as he could understand, he did not deserve the afflictions, which he thought were from God. He therefore concluded that God had wronged him. To maintain his innocence, Job made accusatory statements against God. In that sense he condemned God that he might be justified.

These allegations against God flowed forth from Job’s misunderstanding of the situation. However, it is not the misunderstanding of the situation we are concerned about primarily, but how it affected his posture towards God.

In Job 19:10-11, Job attributed various things to God that were wrong and inaccurate.

Job 19:10-11

10 He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone;
And He has uprooted my hope like a tree.
11 He has also kindled His anger against me
And considered me as His enemy.

It was wrong for Job to say that God broke him down and uprooted his hope. It was also wrong for him to say that God regarded him as an enemy. If there is any true hope within us, God will never uproot it. Rather, He is the One who gives us hope. To put it in a better way, God Himself is our hope. Thus, we see that Job’s wrong understanding and improper response resulted in him saying what he did.

We move on to Job 21.

Job 21:4

“As for me, is my complaint to man? And why should I not be impatient?”

When Job asked, “Is my complaint to man?” he was in effect saying that his complaint was to God or against God (NASB margin:

“to” or “against”). Job added another rhetorical question, “Why should I not be impatient?” The “I” in the phrase “why should I” literally means “my spirit” (margin of NASB). Within his spirit, he felt rather impatient and he was here complaining. He felt that he was justified to respond in that way. But there is no justification for a man to become impatient and to complain to or against God about what God allows him to go through. To have such a spirit is wrong and is inconsistent with healthy faith and a proper posture towards God.

We will look at another related passage.

Job 9:20-24

20 “Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me;

Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.

21 I am guiltless;

I do not take notice of myself;

I despise my life.

22 “It is all one; therefore I say,

‘He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.’

23 “If the scourge kills suddenly,

He mocks the despair of the innocent.

24 “The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;

He covers the faces of its judges.

If it is not He, then who is it?

Job made a very serious false allegation against God in verse 20 when he said that though he was guiltless, God would declare him guilty. The righteous God would never do such a thing. In reality, our gracious God provides the way for the guilty to be forgiven by sending His only begotten Son to bear the punishment due to all of us.

It was equally serious for Job to allege that our loving, compassionate God “mocks the despair of the innocent” (v. 23).

Then comes this crucial rhetorical question at the end of verse 24, “If it is not He, then who is it?” As far as Job could reason out, it must be God, and not anyone else, who had caused him such suffering. In saying that, it showed that he did not bear in mind that there could be things beyond his understanding.

Although we have a fuller revelation than what Job had, our understanding is still imperfect. There are things that we do not understand, and there will be times when God in His perfect wisdom chooses not to reveal these things to us. But there could also be things that we do not understand because of our own failure and lack of diligence in seeking to understand them.

Whatever it is, it is important that we should not simply reason out according to our finite minds and draw conclusions on that basis, especially when they contradict fundamental truths like God's justice, love and perfection.

The proper posture to adopt

The main issue that we wish to concentrate on in this message is the quality of commitment, faith, posture and attitude that God desires to establish in us. It can be stated in this form:

An unwavering faith and confidence in God and His ways accompanied by unceasing worship, praise, thanksgiving, appreciation and humble, joyful submission to God and His perfect wisdom, together with steadfast love and commitment to Him and to the truth whatever the circumstances.

This is the posture that we should adopt and it is the basis for true, stable and deep fellowship with God. But you may ask, "How do we attain to such a quality of faith and relationship with God?" To answer this question, I would like to consider with you three important related areas.

1. Knowledge of God

The first area concerns our knowledge of God. Many of us have a reasonable knowledge of God that is sufficient for us to commit our lives to Him wholeheartedly. We should be able to recognise that committing our lives wholeheartedly to God is a logical, reasonable and meaningful step to take and one that will lead to a life that is fully satisfying and fulfilling.

2. Unquestioning commitment to God

The second area is unquestioning commitment to God and submission to Him and His ways. By “unquestioning”, I do not mean that we cannot ask God questions, but that we do not doubt God whatever the circumstances we may be in.

If we do not have sufficient knowledge of God and confidence in Him as the perfect Almighty God, then it is difficult to wholeheartedly commit ourselves to Him. If this is the case, it is important for us to first seek to know God and learn to trust Him.

But even if we have sufficient knowledge of God and recognise that He is the perfect Almighty God, it does not necessarily mean that we will automatically love Him and be committed to Him wholeheartedly. We still have to choose to adopt such a stand. It is a commitment that we have to deliberately make. This is a very crucial point. It is also in this area that Christians often falter or are significantly lacking, even though they know that it is a very logical, reasonable, meaningful and fulfilling posture to adopt.

3. Love for truth, goodness and righteousness

The third area concerns our love for truth, goodness and righteousness. How much we love truth and are committed to it is closely related to the quality of our character, the longings of our heart and the direction of our lives in moral issues. This is very important to God as He is the perfect moral Being. Though God can and wants to help us in this area, it is still very much related to man's choice and the direction of life he is committed to.

Just as in the second area of unquestioning commitment to God, having a deep love for and commitment to truth is an area often lacking in man. This has resulted in many problems, including that of giving greater freedom to the powers of darkness to work in our lives.

Relationship among the three areas

If we reflect on these three areas, we will find that they are all closely related and impact on one another. Let us examine them in greater detail, starting with how the first and the third areas are related.

How knowledge of God and love for truth, goodness and righteousness affect each other

If we want to deepen our knowledge of God and develop greater confidence in Him, we need to deepen our love for truth, goodness and righteousness. Because God is true, good and righteous, He will reveal Himself and relate deeply with those whose hearts are set in that direction. I do not mean that we must be perfect or extremely good, but that our hearts should be set in that direction, longing for what is true, good and righteous.

Let us reflect on the words of the Lord Jesus that emphasise this relationship.

Matthew 5:8

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

What does it mean to “see God”? It has to do with the revelation of God, appreciation of who He is, and coming to know and experience Him. And who are given this privilege? Those whose hearts are pure. Being “pure in heart” is both a state and a direction. The state of our hearts must be clean and pure, and must not be harbouring evil. The heart also has a direction, which is the longing for and commitment to what is good, righteous and morally pure. This kind of longing and direction is important if we want to know God deeply and experience Him, and to know His revelation and blessing in our lives.

In the Beatitudes, the Lord Jesus also mentions:

Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

To “hunger and thirst for righteousness” refers to the deep longing and hunger rising from within for what is good, righteous and noble in the sight of God. When we truly hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will experience a deep satisfaction that comes from God. He will be pleased to relate deeply with us and we will come to know His blessings. God is the only One who can truly satisfy

us, not with things, but with Himself.

In the same way, as we get to know God better and as our fellowship with Him deepens, He will intensify and purify our love for truth and righteousness. The Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of Truth, will help us to appreciate and love goodness, purity, righteousness and truth. He will teach us, mould us and nurture us, and will seek to draw forth from and deepen in our hearts these moral qualities.

As our knowledge of God and fellowship with Him deepens, He will have greater freedom to work in our hearts and the character of God will become more and more formed in us. This in turn will cause our love for truth, goodness and righteousness to become increasingly wholesome, purified and deepened as they are very much part of God's character.

How knowledge of God and love for truth, goodness and righteousness help us commit our lives to God

We shall now examine how knowledge of God and love for the truth will tend to move us in the direction of a wholehearted commitment and submission to God.

If we love truth, goodness and righteousness and are committed to it, when we come to know who God is, that He is perfect, unchangingly righteous and good, sovereign and almighty, a God of perfect wisdom whose plans and purposes are good and righteous, we would then be led in the direction of placing full confidence in Him, and we will be more prepared to be fully committed and submitted to Him. We would not feel shaken, uneasy or doubtful and we can humbly and joyfully submit to Him whatever the circumstances.

We should come to see that it is meaningful and logical to commit ourselves fully to such a God. More importantly, we should come to see that having a deep relationship with such a Being, the perfect Almighty God, should be our deepest longing because it is the greatest privilege and one that will fully satisfy.

As we dwell on this subject, remember that the main issue we are trying to address is, "How can a person attain to the correct posture of unwavering love for God and submission to Him?"

Proper posture attainable but not many attain and maintain it

I would like you to meditate on this rhetorical question:

What more can such a man ask for in life than to have quality relationship with such a God and to walk with Him, submitting fully, joyfully and willingly to whatever He sees fitting for him to go through?

Note that I use the phrase “what more can such a man”. I am not referring to any man, but one whose heart and longing is for the truth and for what is good and righteous. If we have such longings in our hearts, what more would we ask for in life than to have this kind of quality relationship with the perfect Almighty God who is true, righteous and good and to live a life of joyful submission to Him. Our primary concern would no longer be whether a situation is pleasant or difficult. Instead, it would be to go through well whatever situation the Lord sees fit for us to go through, in fellowship with Him and in joyful submission to Him.

What other kind of life can we properly and meaningfully choose? There is none. Any deviation from this will be a deviation into darkness and destruction because we will be deviating from the light, truth and goodness. To whatever degree we deviate from it, to that degree we will be moving in the direction of darkness and destruction. Though there may be pleasures of a temporary nature, they will not truly satisfy.

From what we have considered, we can paint this scenario: When there is love for truth and a sufficient knowledge of God, they will affect each other positively, leading to deepening love for God and for the truth. With passing time, as we properly commit ourselves to God and submit to Him, we will more and more be walking in the ways of God. There will be increasing knowledge of God and greater appreciation of the truth. All the three areas of knowledge of God, love for the truth and commitment to Him will become progressively better and our life will continually spiral upwards.

Is such a life attainable? Yes, it is. But although such a scenario seems very logical and reasonable, it often does not turn out this way. Where then does the problem lie?

Difficulties in attaining and maintaining the proper posture

The root issue is the direction of the heart, the longing and willingness to commit oneself to this kind of life. While such a life is attainable and is one that we can choose and set our heart upon, and while God is always willing to help us move in this direction, there is a price to pay, and the unwillingness to pay the price is the main reason why many are not able to attain it. The price that one has to pay can come in two forms:

1. Testing, trials, pain and hardship

Such difficulties will be part and parcel of the lives of those who seek to live in total commitment and submission to God. In the face of various difficulties and suffering, we must be willing to remain committed to this kind of life and pay the price for it.

2. The need to exercise self-control, to be disciplined, diligent and consistent

The three areas that we have been talking about do not happen automatically. Our moral input is crucial to the meaning and quality that we can attain. We have to make a commitment and continually choose to work out our lives accordingly with all diligence and discipline. In the midst of the trials and pains that will accompany such a life, we must remain steadfast, submitting ourselves to the perfect will of God, rejoicing in Him, seeking to learn from Him, drawing near to Him and continually affirming our love for and commitment to the truth. We must continue in this path however difficult and painful it may be, recognising that such a life will not be lived in vain, and that it is not only the most meaningful life, but also the only life that is worth living.

We need to bear in mind the presence of the weakness of the flesh, the temptations of the world and the powers of darkness at work. This helps to explain why we often fail. There may be a positive desire within us, but the flesh is weak. We need to look to the Lord to help us overcome the weaknesses of the flesh, the world with all its temptations and distractions, and the powers of darkness who

seek to discourage us, deceive us, lead us astray and deter us from choosing the right direction.

In the presence of these difficulties and temptations, such a life would not be attained with ease. It does not keep spiralling upward, getting better and better on its own. But it can and should be attainable if we steadfastly choose and adopt the correct posture and commit ourselves to the Lord because the great Almighty God desires to strengthen and enable us to attain to such a life. And if God is for us, who then can be against us? (Rom. 8:31). We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us (Rom. 8:37). In Christ we can overcome the weaknesses of the flesh, the world and the powers of darkness. Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus our Lord (2 Cor. 2:14).

The Lord is calling us to this kind of life

Let us pay attention to the words of the Lord Jesus.

John 8:12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

The Lord Jesus says that He is the Light of the world. The "Light" encompasses and embodies what is true, good and righteous. So if we love what is true, good and righteous, we will know whom we should love and whom we should turn to.

He also says, "He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life." The Light of life is closely related to what the Lord Jesus means when He says in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." The Lord is referring to the abundant life, the life of God, the life of positive moral values and goodness, the life that God intends us to live out. This is the kind of life that we have been talking about, a life that continues to spiral upwards positively. But such a life is possible only for those who follow Him.

The Lord Jesus also mentions the need to count the cost of following Him.

Luke 9:23

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

The Lord is calling us to this kind of life, but we have to make the choice. God will not decide for us. He will not impose His will upon us. Anyone can have this kind of life; anyone can choose to follow the Lord Jesus. But we have to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily. The cross communicates to us, among other things, the pains, the hardships, and the trials that will come upon us when we are faithful to God. This is supremely exemplified in the life of the Lord Jesus when He had to endure the Cross in obedience to the Father. The word "daily" emphasises the need for consistency, day by day carrying our cross.

Let us continue to look at the two verses that follow:

Luke 9:24-25

24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

We may have many things of this world, but of what use are they if we forfeit our eternal well-being? If we cling on to our life, we will not be able to find the true life that God intends for us. But if we are willing to fully give up our lives to God, to submit to Him, to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Him, we will enter fully into the abundant life that God intends for us.

We have to choose this direction of life continually, doing so diligently and faithfully in a disciplined way, exercising self-control, and be willing to pay the price of hardships, pains and trials along the way without wavering or deviating. In the midst of it all, God will strengthen us and see us through. His grace will be sufficient for us. We will experience the fellowship of God, and the joy and peace of God. And we will have the assurance that our life will not be lived in vain, but will instead bear abiding fruit.

Concluding remarks

The key issue we have been considering is the quality and steadfastness of a healthy posture towards God, which relates to submission to God and commitment to Him. This in turn is related to the quality of our love for and commitment to the truth, and our knowledge of God and confidence in Him as the perfect Almighty God.

Submission to God and commitment to Him is a definite choice, a definite stand that is adopted. It is not something that we move into haphazardly, but one taken with understanding and conviction. It is not something done blindly or emotionally. It is a choice we make because we recognise that we should love what is good and true and that we should commit ourselves to that path. In addition, as we recognise that God is true and good, we therefore love Him and commit our lives fully to Him.

It is possible to have a healthy quality of submission and commitment to God without waiting for our knowledge of God to be very deep. There may be varying degrees of knowledge of God when we make such a commitment, but with passing time, it can become deeper and deeper. We should not wait until our knowledge of God is very deep before we are willing to commit ourselves fully to God. A reasonable degree of knowledge of God is all we need, and that is not difficult for each one of us to attain to, especially with the availability of the Scriptures and in the light of the Cross and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

When we submit to God without qualification, the quality of our life and faith will increase rapidly and our knowledge of God will then have a proper basis for development. When this is coupled with a love for the truth, God will be very pleased to reveal many things to us, help us understand them and teach us how we ought to live. He will also enable us to know Him and experience deep fellowship with Him. It is therefore very crucial for us to adopt the posture of wholehearted, unwavering love for God and commitment to Him and His ways.

But if we do not adopt this posture and do not have love for the truth, we may keep on telling the Lord how much we want to know

Him, but will find that our wish will remain a wish. This is because it is inconsistent for the perfect, moral God to relate deeply with those whose hearts are not set in the direction of righteousness and truth, and who are unwilling to commit themselves to the truth and to the God of truth.

Compared with Job, we are in a better position to respond well. We have a much fuller revelation and understanding of who God is, the realities in the spiritual realm and how we should live our lives. Job did not have the Scriptures as we do, in which God reveals much of Himself in many different ways. The Scriptures clearly reveals to us the issues of eternity, the kingdom of God, the work of the powers of darkness, what God has done for us and provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, His love for us, and the kind of life we can have in Him. Many of these issues are extremely relevant and meaningful in helping us adopt the posture that we have been talking about. In many of these areas, Job's knowledge and understanding would be rather deficient. Furthermore, what most of us have to face in life is generally far less severe compared to what Job went through.

Given the advantages that we have over Job, and our relatively easier circumstances, if we still grumble, disobey the Lord, go our own way, or lack joyful submission to God, what then will be God's verdict on us?

Let us look at a passage in the letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:37-38

37 For yet in a very little while,
He who is coming will come, and will not delay.
38 But My righteous one shall live by faith;
And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

The letter to the Hebrews was written during a time when Christians suffered difficulties and persecution. This is revealed in the preceding verses 32-36. In verse 37, the writer, referring to the coming again of the Lord Jesus, tells us that "... in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay". Our time on earth is short. Whatever the difficulties we face, they are only for

a short while. Can we not then be faithful to the Lord just for this short while? If, instead of committing ourselves to Him and submitting to Him, we waver and shrink back, the Lord will not be pleased with us.

Finally, the writer to the Hebrews adds this word of encouragement,

Hebrews 10:39

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

May this be true of us, that we do not shrink back to destruction. If we do, we would be walking in the path of darkness and destruction. Let us then persevere in faith. This is the life that God is calling us towards. The righteous one must live by faith. Let us affirm to the Lord that this is the kind of life we have chosen, and by His grace, we will seek to live it.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is the posture a believer ought to adopt in his relationship with God? Why is this posture important?
2. Did Job maintain this posture during the trials? Elaborate.
3. What important factors can enable us to attain to and maintain this posture? Why is it difficult to attain to and maintain this posture?

The Failures of Job



In the first message we considered how various people treated Job rather badly and regarded him to be in a poor state during the trials because he appeared that way to them. In reality, God appreciated Job and, as we saw at the end of the Book of Job, vindicated and commended him.

We also considered Job's context and the severity of the trials that he went through to appreciate how difficult it was for him so that we could understand why James 5:11 commends him as one who endured patiently in spite of the fact that he did falter in the midst of the trials and said various things which were improper, and why Ezekiel 14:14 holds him up as an example of a man of righteousness. Under the very difficult circumstances, though he faltered, he fared relatively well.

In the second message, we considered what ought to be our posture, response and attitude towards God under all circumstances. We saw that this is a crucial issue for us to grasp and to settle clearly in our own lives. The proper posture that we should adopt is one of unwavering faith and confidence in God and in His ways, accompanied by unceasing worship, praise, thanksgiving, appreciation and joyful submission to God and to His perfect wisdom, together with steadfast love and commitment to Him and to the truth whatever the circumstances. This is the basis for a proper, deep and stable relationship with God.

In this message, we shall concentrate on analysing Job's failures. Specifically, we want to seek answers from the Scriptures to the questions, "Why did Job falter? What were the areas of weakness in him?"

Job's commitment to truth and righteousness

It is helpful for us to remind ourselves that there were significant positive qualities in Job's life. In particular, Job had a deep love for and commitment to truth and righteousness. This was a strong point in his life. We can see this aspect of his life from several verses in the Scriptures.

Job 1:1 describes him as a man who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. We read of God's appreciation and commendation of Job in like manner in Job 1:8 and 2:3. The words used to describe Job in these verses give a clear indication of righteous living and commitment to righteousness and goodness. In Ezekiel 14:14, Job was held up as an example of a man of righteousness.

This quality of righteousness in the life of Job was likely to be a major factor that enabled him to fare rather well even though the trials were very difficult. Job 27 reveals more on this aspect of Job's life.

Job 27:5-6

5 "Far be it from me that I should declare you right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 "I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go.
My heart does not reproach any of my days.

Righteousness and integrity meant much to Job and he held fast to the fact that he had been basically living righteously. This enabled him to continue in the ways of God generally, because the ways of God are righteous and good. Note the following words Job uttered when he was going through the difficulties.

Job 23:11-12

11 "My foot has held fast to His path;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.
12 "I have not departed from the command of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my
necessary food.

Though he could not find God (Job 23:3), and was troubled by various queries in his mind as to why God allowed him to go through

the difficulties, he continued to keep the ways of God and did not depart from God's commandments because he loved righteousness and goodness. He treasured the words of God's mouth because he recognised that God's ways are righteous and good. From his recollection of the past as narrated by him in Job 29, a strong feature that comes through is Job's sense of justice and concern for the poor and the oppressed. He was a man deeply committed to righteousness and goodness.

Deficiencies in Job

However, Job did falter in the midst of the severe testing because there were deficiencies in him. We can identify three related areas of weakness:

1. Deficiency in knowledge of God

Job apparently had difficulties in this area. We see evidence of this in Job 9:

Job 9:20-24

20 "Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me;

Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.

21 "I am guiltless;

I do not take notice of myself;

I despise my life.

22 "It is all one; therefore I say,

'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'

23 "If the scourge kills suddenly,

He mocks the despair of the innocent.

24 "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;

He covers the faces of its judges.

If it is not He, then who is it?

Job thought that God was against him even though he had been living righteously. He also thought that God was unfairly afflicting him though he was guiltless. These thoughts about God were wrong because the perfect God will neither go against those who are truly righteous nor declare the guiltless guilty. Job was not sufficiently clear and steadfast in his knowledge of God and faith in Him as the perfect

Almighty God, One who does not make mistakes. If he were clear, he would have known that the words he had spoken were not right and he would not have said that God had wronged him (Job 19:6).

Such misconceptions, misunderstandings and wrong ideas affected Job's confidence in God and his posture towards God during the trials. In other words, Job did not have unwavering and unquestioning faith in God. Instead, he wavered with regard to the being of God and His ways.

However, Job did not hold such wrong notions of God in a firm way; neither was his faith and confidence in God that shaky. In reality, Job had a reasonably deep faith in God and confidence in Him. We have already seen how at the beginning, despite facing severe trials, he continued to worship God and how God commended and appreciated him. In the first message, we referred to several verses that indicate that even as Job wavered and faltered in the midst of the severe testing, he still affirmed from time to time his faith in God and God's justice, ways and words. It is worth referring once again to some of these verses to highlight this point.

Job 6:10

"But it is still my consolation,
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

Job 13:15

"Though He slay me,
I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

Job 13:18

"Behold now, I have prepared my case;
I know that I will be vindicated.

Job 23: 10-11

10 "But He knows the way I take;
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
11 "My foot has held fast to His path;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.

Job believed that God knew what he was going through and that when God had tried him, he would come forth as gold. He believed all that he had been going through would make him a better person. Although he was perplexed, disturbed and had expressed doubts about the character and being of God and His ways, there were also firm positive affirmations. Job continued to treasure the words of God; he still expressed an attitude of trust in Him.

As we reflect on the total picture, one thing about Job stands out, and that is, although Job had faith in God, he was not sufficiently steadfast in his knowledge of God and confidence in Him. This was one main reason why he wavered.

We should of course bear in mind that Job did not have the Scriptures as we have today. There is much revelation in the Scriptures about God that Job did not have access to. Apparently Job was unaware of the activities of Satan and the powers of darkness. He lacked knowledge in many areas that we can have today. However, although much precious truth has been revealed in the Scriptures for our understanding, many believers today are sadly lacking in knowledge and conviction pertaining to various basic issues of the Christian faith.

I will move on to another area where Job failed in the midst of the severe testing.

2. Deficiency in spirit of humility before God

We shall examine a few passages.

Job 21:4

“As for me, is my complaint to man?
And why should I not be impatient?”

The spirit of Job’s words was not right. Job felt that he had the right to be impatient. His complaints and impatience indicated that he lacked a spirit of humble submission to God and His ways.

In Job 3, when Job cursed the day he was born, both the content of his words and the spirit in which they were spoken were wrong. This also revealed Job’s improper posture towards God. If he had properly understood his relationship with God, he would have

realised that it was wrong for him to have that kind of attitude. Though some may say that it was his pain, suffering and frustration that made him utter such words, his response did indicate deficiency in the spirit of humility and humble submission to God. Let's consider another verse, Job 19:6.

Job 19:6

Know then that God has wronged me
And has closed His net around me.

The manner of utterance of these words was not proper. If Job had maintained his proper position before God, he would not have spoken in this way. Job could have said, "I don't understand why God is allowing these things to happen to me or why God is doing these things to me." We see a similar failure in the following verses:

Job 10:1-3

1 "I loathe my own life;
I will give full vent to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
2 "I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me;
Let me know why You contend with me.
3 'Is it right for You indeed to oppress,
To reject the labor of Your hands,
And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?

Job gave vent to complaints and the bitterness of his soul. When we read Job 1 and 2, we could see that, compared to many others, there was a relatively meaningful reality of the spirit of humility and humble submission to God within the heart of Job. However, it was not sufficiently wholesome, deep and unwavering to withstand the prolonged severe testing he went through.

There is a place to ask God to help us understand the perplexities that we are going through, but the spirit with which we do so is important. We must take care to nurture a spirit of humility in our relationship with God. If we can understand this area well and attain a high quality of humility in our lives, it would have a significant bearing on the freedom with which God relates with us and on the

depth of our relationship with Him. If the quality of humility lacks depth, in the midst of severe testing and baffling circumstances, the powers of darkness can easily magnify and manipulate this area of weakness.

We see how this deficiency in the spirit of humility affected Job in his response and how as the situation developed, his spirit, as seen in his interactions with his friends, became worse. Had he maintained a spirit of humility, Job would have fared better.

In the end, Job recognised that he had uttered improper words about things he did not understand. He then repented in dust and ashes, retracting the wrong words he uttered and regretting that he had a wrong spirit and posture.

Having a spirit of humility is very critical not only in a proper relationship with God but also in our relationship with others. It also has a significant bearing on a person's general well-being because it is an important aspect of the state of his being.

We shall now consider the third related area of weakness.

3. Deficiency in posture of unquestioning submission to God

We took some time to consider this important issue in the second message. We saw how Job failed to maintain a posture of healthy worship and submission to God during the severe testing and the perplexing situations that disturbed him greatly.

What I wish to draw your attention to is the point that Job's improper responses to God during the trials bore significance beyond just those specific occasional lapses. The failures were likely to be evidence of something deficient in the heart of Job, that is, in the very area of adopting a clear, settled posture of unwavering, wholehearted love for and commitment to God and humble submission to Him and His ways.

It is likely that these deficiencies were present within the heart of Job all along although he appeared to be going on rather well before the trials. During the trials, these deficiencies became manifest. Because these areas in Job's life were not sufficiently deeply settled within his heart, he wavered and faltered in the midst of the severe testing.

The posture that Job could have adopted

Job could have adopted a clear, settled posture even before the trials and then affirm that posture in the midst of the trials. It is helpful to distinguish such a posture from the posture that we might adopt on a specific occasion.

Before the trials, Job's deficiencies within his heart might not have been apparent to those around him or even to Job himself. And this is true also in many different areas of our lives. At times we are not aware of our own deficiencies until they are manifested during difficulties and trials.

It would appear that Job failed to properly reflect on his relationship with God and to adopt a sufficiently high degree of healthy posture of unwavering commitment and submission to God and His ways. He had sufficient knowledge of God to be able to adopt this posture before and during the trials, and God also expected it of him. He knew that God is great and good and he loved truth and righteousness. Thus, he could have done better. But he failed to do so and God rebuked him for his failure.

It is very important for us to deliberately and firmly adopt this posture in our hearts; it is an important basis for a deep and stable relationship with God. We should not merely try to submit to God as each difficult situation or issue confronts us. Rather, before difficulties arise, we should have thought through our relationship with God and come to this definite commitment and posture towards Him.

After adopting such a stand and posture, we must continue to be prayerful and work out this posture accordingly by choosing to submit to God as each situation confronts us. The meaning and importance of adopting this kind of posture is the main subject matter of the second message.

The deficiency in this stand and posture adopted is related to a deficiency in the spirit of humility and in our knowledge of God. When the spirit of humility is deficient, it affects the quality of our submission to God. The less definite and clear we are in our knowledge of God as the perfect and almighty God, the more difficult it would be for us to wholeheartedly commit ourselves to Him and submit to His ways.

It is feasible for us today to have more knowledge than Job and so it can be easier for us to adopt this kind of posture. However, even for Job, he could have done so because he had sufficient knowledge of God for him to adopt this posture. He knew the existence of God and that He is the great, almighty and good God. Let us look at a few scriptural passages that speak of this.

Job 23:6, 13, 16

6 “Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power?...

13 “But He is unique and who can turn Him?

And what His soul desires, that He does.

16 “It is God who has made my heart faint,

And the Almighty who has dismayed me,

Notice in these verses that Job had knowledge that God is almighty. At the same time, he also recognised God’s moral goodness and moral qualities, and that God is one to whom worship is due.

In Job 1, we see Job being described as one who was “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil”. These qualities are all related. Why do we turn away from evil when there is fear of God in our heart? It is because God is a moral being with a morally perfect character. Job knew that and it had a bearing on his turning away from evil and carrying on in the path of uprightness (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Job also loved truth and righteousness and was committed to that path.

In Job 1:20, we read that when calamities befell him, and even though he thought that God was behind them, he still worshipped God. Why did he do so? Clearly, although he did not understand what was happening to him, he knew that the posture of humble submission to God and His ways was the proper posture to take before God. Job continued to adopt this posture in spite of his wife’s instigation to curse God and die.

In Job 29, we see evidence that Job understood the moral qualities that God requires of men. He knew that because God is morally perfect, He blesses those who live righteously. Here, we read that Job recognised God’s watching over him, God’s blessings and God’s

friendship with him are associated with his righteous life and positive moral qualities.

The main point to note then is this, that Job had sufficient recognition of God as one who is great and good, and one of perfect moral character and moral qualities. He had sufficient knowledge to enable him to adopt the proper posture of unwavering, wholehearted commitment to God and to the ways of God, especially as he was a man who loved righteousness and truth. However, he failed to come to that deep, definite posture of commitment to God and His ways. He had failed to adopt this posture to a sufficiently high degree, and that was a primary reason he faltered.

In the midst of severe testing and perplexing situations, Job could not reconcile what he was going through with the goodness and justice of God, and thus he began to waver and to question God and His ways.

He should not have questioned God in such an improper manner. If the correct posture was adopted, he could have expressed to God that he could not understand the meaning of what he was going through. But because of deficiency in his posture, he went to the extent of attributing improper conduct to God, saying that God was unjust, and that God had wronged and punished him although he was guiltless. This deficiency in the posture adopted was related to and aggravated by his deficiency in the spirit of humility and knowledge in the sense explained earlier in this message.

Such a situation can easily take place in our lives if the posture of unwavering, wholehearted commitment to God and His ways has not been properly thought through and adopted. If this is the case, as we go through various hardships and bewildering situations in life, the evil one can plant doubts in our minds causing us to murmur, complain and question God. We can easily entertain improper thoughts, and once we do this, our life will start to go downhill, our faith will be shaken and we will no longer be able to continue walking properly with God.

In the case of Job, his commitment to righteousness and goodness helped him to continue in the ways of God. He persevered though he had queries.

Believers in general live lives of a much poorer quality than that of Job. If a person of such commendable character as Job could waver and falter under intense trials, how can we overcome during such times of trial unless we properly resolve this issue in our lives? Otherwise it will be relatively easy for the evil one to overcome us with his attacks and pressures.

If Job had adopted the proper posture and maintained it during the trials, he would have continued to worship God the way he did at the beginning. He could do so without ignoring the perplexing issues or pretending they did not exist. Instead of doubting, murmuring or complaining, there would be the continued posture of worship and expression of his faith in God because of the posture already adopted and reaffirmed from time to time. He could, with a proper basis, entrust himself to the righteous and faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Pet. 4:19).

If we continue to do what is right to the degree that we understand, we can with proper assurance entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator. Even when events and situations come upon us that we do not quite understand, we can rest in the knowledge that He who is perfect and sovereign knows what we are going through and that He cares and will undertake.

Job could and should have continued in that way. He could express to God that the suffering was great, that he was perplexed and that he found it hard to bear. He could have asked God for a deeper experience of His grace and enabling, and also for understanding, should God see it fitting to reveal.

Similarly, when we are confronted with puzzling issues, we can prayerfully ask God for understanding, if He sees it fitting to help us understand. God may at times not reveal to us because He deems it inappropriate for us to understand at that point in time or even in the future. There could also be other reasons or failures in our lives that cause us not to be in the position to understand.

Even if God does not explain to us after the trials are over or even until the end of our days on earth, we can still humbly submit to Him, recognising that He is the God of perfect wisdom and love.

Such a posture that we have been talking about is reasonable; it

can be adopted and worked out. God has demonstrated His love for us beyond any doubt. If we were to adopt this posture and work hard at it, it would lead to an ever-deepening quality of life, faith and walk with God.

In other words, trials and difficulties can, instead of being detrimental to our lives, be instrumental in deepening our walk with God, increasing the quality of our lives and our faith and in helping us learn what God desires to teach us. They could be the means by which our lives are purified, our character developed and our fellowship with God enhanced. But if our attitudes are wrong, we may miss out on many truths and principles that God may desire to teach us in the midst of the trials. This is the thrust of James 1:2-4.

James 1:2-4

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Trials and testing can help us move towards being “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”. They can help us in the development of our being, in learning the truths and principles that God may desire to teach us and in the deepening of the quality of our personal relationship with God.

Job’s posture at the end

In the case of Job, though having better understanding would have been helpful, that was not essential to his adopting and maintaining the proper posture, even during the trials. The way God answered and dealt with Job and Job’s response to God at the end of the biblical account show that it was not essential for Job to know the answers to the perplexing issues in order to adopt the proper posture. Even at the end of the Book of Job, we see that God neither granted Job understanding of the meaning of what he went through, nor addressed the very perplexing issues that Job raised. Until the end, Job did not recognise Satan was at work in the situation. But by then,

his posture was correct. He humbly submitted to God and His ways.

Let us look at some verses in Job 40 and 42 to see Job's posture at the end.

Job 40:3-5

3 Then Job answered the Lord and said,

4 "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?

I lay my hand on my mouth.

5 "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer;

Even twice, and I will add nothing more."

Job recognised that he had spoken improperly and he would now lay his hand on his mouth. He had allowed words to come forth from his lips that were improper, which indicated that something was amiss in his heart.

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job answered the Lord, and said,

2 "I know that You can do all things,

And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'

"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,

Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

4 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.'

5 I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;

But now my eye sees You;

6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes."

In this passage, we see Job "repenting in dust and ashes". His posture before the Almighty God was one of humble submission. Though God did not answer his perplexing questions, Job recognised that this was the proper posture and he adopted it.

But what brought about the change in Job when God did not answer his questions specifically? God did speak at the end, but what was the thrust of His words and how did those words bring about the change in Job? These are questions we shall address in the next message.

Question for reflection and discussion

Discuss the deficiencies in Job manifested during the trials.

God's Correction of Job



In the last message, we analysed Job's failures and saw that although Job had strong commitment to truth and righteousness, in the midst of severe testing, pain, suffering and perplexities, he faltered. We saw that a major reason for his failures was the deficiency in adopting a definite posture of wholehearted, unquestioning and unwavering love for God, and commitment and submission to Him and His ways.

I would term this kind of decisive posture as *posture adopted* and distinguish it from *response posture*. *Posture adopted* is a definite stand that we take even before we encounter any situation, and one that we continually seek to maintain in whatever circumstances we encounter. On the other hand, *response posture* is a person's posture in response to specific situations.

There was deficiency in the *posture adopted* in Job before and during the trials. Job's failure to respond well during the trials would be a failure in his *response posture*.

These two expressions that I have used are not found in the Scriptures. They are just a convenient way of differentiating the two kinds of posture. It is helpful to keep in mind this distinction as we go along.

We also noted in the last message that Job's problems were compounded by a deficiency both in the spirit of humility and in his personal knowledge of God. However, Job had adequate knowledge of God's goodness and greatness for him to adopt the proper posture, and God rebuked him for failing to do so and for doubting and questioning Him and His ways.

This observation that Job had sufficient knowledge for him to

adopt a proper posture is substantiated by the way God dealt with Job and the way Job responded at the end of the story. We saw that God, in answering Job, did not grant Job understanding of the meaning of what took place or address the perplexing issues in his mind. In fact, many people reading the story of Job may wonder why God spoke in that way, seemingly not addressing the issues at hand. They may wonder what was the relevance of God's words in the context.

And yet, when God manifested Himself and spoke, Job was able to recognise that his posture during the trials was wrong. He repented and humbly submitted himself to God and His ways. We can say that his *response posture* at the end was correct.

What brought about the change in Job's posture? What was the basic thrust of God's speeches and how did they contribute to the change in Job? What can we learn from the way Job's problems were resolved?

These are the questions we shall be considering in this message.

The thrust of God's speeches

Two aspects come through rather strongly in God's speeches:

- God's majesty, greatness and power
- God's wisdom and knowledge

Together with these two aspects is the fact that God is the creator of all things, the sovereign ruler and provider for His creation. This fact contributes to the sense of His greatness, power and majesty. It also projects His wisdom and knowledge. In God's speeches, His greatness, wisdom and knowledge were set in stark contrast against man's weaknesses, limitations and relative ignorance.

The way God answered Job was meant to help Job recognise and respond properly to Him, and it did help him indeed. Consequently, Job adopted a proper posture of worship and humble submission to God and His ways, even when the situation was still perplexing and trying.

The contrast between the Almighty God and Job

We shall examine a few passages from the Book of Job to substantiate this point, starting from chapter 38, when God began His speeches.

Job 38:1-6

1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,
 2 “Who is this that darkens counsel
 By words without knowledge?
 3 “Now gird up your loins like a man,
 And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!
 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
 Tell Me, if you have understanding,
 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know.
 Or who stretched the line on it?
 6 “On what were its bases sunk?
 Or who laid its cornerstone,

In verse 1, we read “the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind”. This presentation brings across the sense of majesty, greatness and power. This is supported by verses 4-6. God is the One who has the power and the wisdom to lay “the foundation of the earth” and to “set its measurements”. In contrast, where was Job at that point in time? God challenged Job, “Tell me, if you have understanding.” Clearly, Job lacked understanding of these things whereas God knows all things.

Verses 8-12 of the same chapter paint a similar picture of God being the creator and sovereign ruler of the universe.

Job 38:8-12

8 “Or who enclosed the sea with doors
 When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;
 9 When I made a cloud its garment,
 And thick darkness its swaddling band,
 10 And I placed boundaries on it
 And I set a bolt and doors,
 11 And I said, “Thus far you shall come, but no farther;
 And here shall your proud waves stop?”
 12 “Have you ever in your life commanded the morning,
 And caused the dawn to know its place,

God is the One who governs His creation and sets the boundaries for the operation of nature. He is in total control of all things such as the sun rising and day and night. There is a sense of order in

nature that is related to God's knowledge and wisdom. We see this also in verses 31-33.

Job 38:31-33

31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
Or loose the cords of Orion?
32 "Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
And guide the Bear with her satellites?
33 "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,
Or fix their rule over the earth?

The above passage refers to the heavens and the stars and shows God's power over the stars of the heavens and extending right across the universe. He brought them into being and keeps them in their order. The phrase "the ordinances of the heavens" refers to the law and order that God places over everything in the physical universe, controlling how they move and operate.

Earlier on in verse 3 of the same chapter, we read,

Job 38:3

"Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!

Job had said that he wanted to present his case before God and argue it out with Him. When God said, "Now gird up your loins like a man", it seems that He was saying, "All right, I will now speak to you and you face up to it like a man."

Notice how God addressed Job in His speeches. God repeatedly spoke in the form of rhetorical questions where the answers are obvious to all. As God asked these questions, it would have come through clearly to Job who he was in contrast to God, and that it was clearly improper for him to adopt that kind of posture and attitude towards God.

At the heart of God's speeches is the declaration of His greatness, power, wisdom and knowledge. Man's life span is short whereas God exists from eternity to eternity. Man's understanding is limited whereas God knows all things. Man does not have the power to do

the things that God has done, such as the creation of the universe and the regulation of the operation of nature. Before such a God, man should recognise his proper position. He is but a finite being with limitations and one who is relatively ignorant. The thrust of the two speeches of God in this direction was so strong that Job was put in his proper position.

In verse 36, God contrasted man's wisdom with His, saying,

Job 38:36

"Who has put wisdom in the innermost being
Or has given understanding to the mind?

The answer to the above question is obvious. True wisdom and understanding come from God. If God is the One who has placed wisdom in our innermost being, can we be wiser than God? How could Job speak the way he did, as if he knew better than God? In the same way, who has given understanding to man? It is God. Could Job then have better understanding than God? That is the thrust of God's words: man's wisdom and understanding are far, far removed from that of God.

Job 38:39-41 speaks of God's provision and sustenance of His creation.

Job 38:39-41

39 "Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
40 When they crouch in their dens
And lie in wait in their lair?
41 "Who prepares for the raven its nourishment
When its young cry to God
And wander about without food?

God in His wisdom and greatness has not only created the whole universe and nature, but has also provided for it and sustained it. Indeed, this is a very complex and difficult task, and only a great God can do all this.

Job 40 records the second speech by God. Again, the sense of

power and majesty of God comes through. For example, we read in verse 6 that “God answered Job out of the storm,” and in verse 9:

Job 40:9

“Or do you have an arm like God,
And can you thunder with a voice like His?

Here God was not trying to frighten Job, but rather, when He asked, “Or do you have an arm like God...?”, He was referring to His power and greatness. This term “arm” is used in the same sense when the Scriptures refers to God delivering the Israelites out of Egypt with an “outstretched arm”.

Further on in the same chapter and also in chapter 41, we read that God also created two powerful creatures: the Behemoth and the Leviathan. Here God was communicating the message that He is a great God and that His greatness is evident in the powerful creatures that He has made.

Job 40:15-16, 23-24

15 “Behold now, Behemoth, which I made as well as you;
He eats grass like an ox.
16 “Behold now, his strength in his loins
And his power in the muscles of his belly.
23 “If a river rages, he is not alarmed;
He is confident, though the Jordan rushes to his mouth.
24 “Can anyone capture him when he is on watch,
With barbs can anyone pierce his nose?

Job 41:1, 8-10

1 “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?
Or press down his tongue with a cord?
8 “Lay your hand on him;
Remember the battle; you will not do it again!
9 “Behold, your expectation is false;
Will you be laid low even at the sight of him?
10 “No one is so fierce that he dares to arouse him;
Who then is he that can stand before Me?

Impact of God's speeches on Job

As God manifested Himself and spoke in this way, Job's own position and ability were set in stark contrast against God's majesty, power, knowledge and wisdom. Job recognised this and his *response posture* towards God was corrected.

It should be noted that this change in Job's posture occurred while the perplexing issues were still present. In spite of this, Job knew that he should have continued to worship God and submit to Him rather than question and doubt His character, justice and ways. Job came to see that he could not understand or reconcile the bewildering issues because of his own limitations, lack of knowledge and wisdom. He realised that he should not have drawn wrong conclusions based on inadequate knowledge and wronged God while seeking to justify himself (Job 40:8).

God did not specifically answer Job's allegations. But when the sense of His greatness and wisdom came through to Job, Job immediately recognised that the root of the problem was his wrong approach. God is always God; He is the perfect Being and He will do no wrong. Similarly for us, although there may be many perplexing situations that arise, we must not, no matter what happens, reason out and question God or talk about Him and respond to Him as if He is less than God. This is a very important point for us to grasp, to learn well and never to depart from.

Romans 3:3-4 is helpful in our present consideration.

Romans 3:3-4

3 What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

4 May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written,

"That You may be justified in Your words,
And prevail when You are judged."

In the above passage, the apostle Paul is saying that we must be careful never to nullify the faithfulness of God in the way we reason things out. It is always wrong for us to have the notion or to cast aspersions that God is in any way unjust or improper in His

judgements. There may be issues or situations that baffle us, but we must be careful not to reason things out in such a way as to conclude that God is imperfect. Our starting point must always be that God is God, and that He is perfect, faithful and true, and His attributes are unchanging. We then try to understand all issues from this starting point and never contradict this foundational truth in the process.

Once Job recognised this and corrected his *response posture*, it should move him towards a higher quality of *posture adopted*. This should be true not only for Job, but for each one of us. The way God manifested Himself to Job and spoke to him has been recorded in the Scriptures for our learning and is meant to help us respond appropriately in our contexts. In the end it is not simply the *response posture* for that situation that matters, important though it is. What is critical is that our *posture adopted* must be one of unwavering and unquestioning submission and commitment to God and His ways.

Job could recognise that although his circumstances were very trying, he should not be “the faultfinder contending with the Almighty”. Job also recognised that it was totally out of order for him to reprove God.

Job 40:2

“Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Let him who reproves God answer it.”

Job 40:4

“Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?
I lay my hand on my mouth.

As God spoke and manifested Himself in those ways, Job was struck afresh by his insignificance compared to who God is. How could he still try to justify his position? He knew that he was wrong and he said, “I lay my hand on my mouth.”

Job 40:7

“Now gird up your loins like a man;
I will ask you, and you instruct Me.

Here God was telling Job, “You are in no position to instruct Me; you know very little.” As the questions were raised, Job knew that he was in no position to answer them. Rather than instructing God, he needed God’s instruction. He acknowledged God’s greatness, power and sovereignty. He also recognised his lack of understanding, and that he had uttered improper words and said things beyond his understanding.

Job 42:2-4

2 “I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
“Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”
4 ‘Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask You, and You instruct me.’

When God spoke, what came through to Job were not mere concepts. It was a direct personal experience of God and revelation of God resulting in a clearer recognition and appreciation of God and who He is. This led to a proper posture of repentance and humble submission to God as we read in the subsequent verses.

Job 42:5-6

5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;
6 Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes.”

Because of this fresh experience of God, Job repented. The “dust and ashes” in verse 6 communicates a posture of humble submission to God. This was the correct *response posture* that Job adopted at that point in time. He should then go beyond that and make it a definite *posture adopted*, one that he would commit himself to and constantly affirm.

No significant new revelation

Noting Job’s positive response to God, we may think that the issues

are now settled, but it is necessary for us to probe deeper.

If we reflect further on God's answer to Job, we see that not only were the puzzling questions in Job's mind unanswered, but also in the thrust of God's answer, there does not seem to be any significant new teaching or revelation of God and His ways that Job was previously unaware of. We have evidence of this in Job 9 to 12, which show that Job had reasonable recognition of God's goodness and greatness.

Job 9:5-12

5 "It is God who removes the mountains, they know not how,
 When He overturns them in His anger;
 6 Who shakes the earth out of its place,
 And its pillars tremble;
 7 Who commands the sun not to shine,
 And sets a seal upon the stars;
 8 Who alone stretches out the heavens,
 And tramples down the waves of the sea;
 9 Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades,
 And the chambers of the south;
 10 Who does great things, unfathomable,
 And wondrous works without number.
 11 "Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him;
 Were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him.
 12 "Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?
 Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?'"

Here Job spoke of God's power in nature: removing the mountains and overturning them, shaking the earth out of its place and commanding the sun not to shine. The words, phrases and concepts used here show some parallel with what we saw of God's speeches in Job 38 to 40. In particular, Job referred to God in verse 9 as the creator of the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades. These are also the terms that God used in His reply to Job. Job's rhetorical question in verse 12, "Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?" revealed his knowledge of God's sovereignty and power, that no one can restrain what God wants to do. Job recognised that God is vastly different from man. Job 10 reveals further Job's knowledge of God.

Job 10:8-9, 12

8 'Your hands fashioned and made me altogether,
And would You destroy me?
9 'Remember now, that You have made me as clay;
And would You turn me into dust again?
12 'You have granted me life and lovingkindness;
And Your care has preserved my spirit.

In verses 8 and 9, we see that at a time when Job was still wavering, he recognised God's creative powers. He knew that God is the One who had created him. In verse 12, we see that Job also knew that God had granted him life, was loving towards him, and had preserved him. Without God's preservation, he would not be able to continue existing.

In chapter 12, we read,

Job 12:10, 13

10 In whose hand is the life of every living thing,
And the breath of all mankind?
13 "With Him are wisdom and might;
To Him belong counsel and understanding.

Job was also aware that God is the One who sustains all living things. Therefore, he declared in the form of a rhetorical question, "In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?" Yes, God is in control. Job knew that in his heart; he also recognised that God is wise and mighty.

Job also appreciated other attributes of God such as His justice, impartiality and majesty. We see this in Job 13:7-11.

Job 13:7-11

7 "Will you speak what is unjust for God,
And speak what is deceitful for Him?
8 "Will you show partiality for Him?
Will you contend for God?
9 "Will it be well when He examines you?
Or will you deceive Him as one deceives a man?
10 "He will surely reprove you
If you secretly show partiality.

11 "Will not His majesty terrify you,
And the dread of Him fall on you?"

Job could see that if we speak what is unjust, even if it is on God's behalf, He will not be pleased because He is a just God. And if we deceive others or show partiality, God will reprove us because He is an impartial God who disapproves of partiality. If we do such things, will it be well when God examines us? The answer is "No" and Job knew it.

Job's failures revisited

Why is it that during the trials, Job did not seem to recognise or even be conscious of the fact that his posture was improper? During that period, he felt that he had spoken justly (Job 27:3-4) and that God had wronged him (Job 19:6). He also felt that he had the right to be impatient and to complain (Job 21:4). He wanted to argue out his case before God (Job 23:4, 7).

However, when God finally spoke, Job could see that his posture towards God was unacceptable and he then corrected it. *Why was there this change in the end and what brought it about?* To answer these questions, it is helpful for us to revisit the reasons for Job's failures, which we have considered in earlier messages, and how God subsequently corrected the problem.

We may go through similar situations in life and it will serve us well to understand what happened and how we can ensure that we do not falter in like manner.

In this regard, it is helpful to note two related aspects to Job's failures:

1. Deficiencies in Job

We noted there was a deficiency in the definite, decisive *posture adopted*. It was a posture not properly thought through, formed and adopted. There were also other deficiencies within Job, such as that of not having a sufficiently healthy spirit of humility.

2. Job's approach and response during the trials

He was not careful to focus on God and to seek to understand

God's perspective, that is, how God would have viewed the situation. He became preoccupied with the circumstances, with himself and his struggles, difficulties and pains, and with his point of view and the thoughts that were going through his mind. He failed to maintain the proper spirit of worship and submission to God, which he had at the beginning of the trials. Because of this failure, there was a loss of proper perspective.

The first aspect of Job's failures affected the second. Job's deficiency in adopting a definite posture of wholehearted, unquestioning and unwavering love for God and commitment and submission to Him and His ways, together with other deficiencies in Job, affected the way he went through the intense trials. Because the *posture adopted* was not properly developed and maintained, when situations became very difficult, doubts about the character and ways of God can easily arise.

It is very important that our *posture adopted* should be a definite, unwavering posture of commitment and submission to God and His ways. This must be the starting point and continually affirmed throughout our lives in every situation we go through. It should be the basis on which we view or seek to understand the situations we go through and how we ought to respond. To the degree our *posture adopted* is not definite and decisive, to that degree we become vulnerable, especially in the context of the powers of darkness at work, whether it is indirectly through circumstances, or by direct harassment and planting of doubts and confusion in our minds. Given the weakness of the flesh and human frailties, doubts and confusion can easily creep in and our position will become shaken. It is then easy for us to fail in our *response posture* during specific situations. The ease with which this happens is tied in with the degree of indecisiveness in the *posture adopted*.

However, even with deficiencies in the *posture adopted*, it is still possible for us to choose to go through specific difficult situations well, focusing on God, drawing near to Him, affirming our faith in Him, worshipping Him and submitting to Him. Although it is difficult, we can still choose to do so. This is the healthy *response*

posture that we can adopt. That is why it is helpful to make a distinction between these two aspects, namely, the deficiencies in Job, and the way he went through the situation.

In the context of making such affirmations and adopting a proper *response posture*, various weaknesses in our lives may become clearer to us, even those we may not be aware of previously. These are the very ways and opportunities by which God seeks to mould us, transform us and nurture our lives. If we respond properly, we can recognise the weaknesses and seek to correct them. We will then make progress in our lives, including an improvement in the *posture adopted*.

However, we find that this was not the way Job went through the trials. He failed to maintain his focus on God in the midst of the severe testing, something which he could have done. Instead of focusing on God and enhancing, nurturing and developing his relationship with Him, he began more and more to dwell on the difficulties and the perplexities. Consequently, he was not able to see the issues so clearly.

Job lost the proper perspective and it led to a sense of frustration. As we read what he said, it is clear that he had lost his rest and peace in God. There were inappropriate remarks such as cursing the day he was born. He could not even recognise his own deficiencies. He thought that he was speaking justly and that God had wronged him. He did not realise that his conduct, words and posture were unseemly.

When we maintain a proper relationship with God and focus on Him, we are less likely to be frustrated because even though we may not understand the situation that we are facing, we can still have the comfort of God and the confidence and peace in God.

However, when the process that we see in Job operates in our own lives, then problems, perplexities and difficulties easily loom larger and seem more complex than they actually are. Simultaneously, the quality of our worship, fellowship, posture and confidence in God dwindles. When we fail to maintain a proper focus on God and to adopt the right approach, we will not be able to have good fellowship with God. This will affect our perspective, understanding

and perception of things such that they become distorted and our conduct and response will become improper. If we persist in that direction, we will degenerate morally and spiritually.

Both aspects that help us understand Job's failures are important. Firstly, we need to correct any deficiency in the *posture adopted* and other deficiencies in our lives. Secondly, we need to have the correct approach and response to situations. We should spend much time before the Lord, thinking through how we can deepen and strengthen the quality of the *posture adopted* and also the correct approach and response to situations. In this way, as we go through various situations, maintaining fellowship with the Lord, our weaknesses and the way to deal with them will become clearer to us. It will then be feasible for us to deal with them effectively.

How God corrected Job's problems

How did God's manifestation of Himself and His speeches bring about the desired results? There are three aspects to take note of and it is helpful to understand how they work:

1. The content of God's speeches

The content of God's speeches helped Job recognise who God is and man's limitations and proper position and what ought to be the *posture adopted*.

In His speeches, God manifested Himself and projected a clear sense of His majesty, greatness and power, as well as His wisdom, knowledge and sovereign rulership over His creation. This helped Job to recognise his improper conduct, words and posture, and also enabled him to attain the proper *response posture* of worship and humble submission to God. These were brought to the forefront of Job's consciousness and consideration, rather than the perplexities that blurred many issues. With such an understanding, although the perplexing issues remained, they faded into the background. God wanted Job to recognise what the starting point should be.

In many situations of life, though we may have some understanding of relevant truths and principles, they either remain in the background or we do not know how to apply them appropriately or to bring them into the proper place for consideration. We need to prayerfully ask

God to help us in this area.

2. Bringing the focus back to God

Job had been dwelling too much on the circumstances. So God brought him back to focus on Himself. Thus when God spoke, He spoke about Himself, His creation, nature, and His power and majesty. When the focus was brought back to God, issues could be seen more clearly, including Job's personal deficiencies and failures.

3. The presence of God and His speaking

When God manifested Himself and spoke, He communicated a positive spiritual reality and ministry in the situation. This helped Job to recognise the truth and also enabled him to have a proper response. It helped to “clear the air” and helped Job to be free from the sense of blurriness, thus enabling Job to have a clearer, sharper and deeper insight into the truths that he already had some recognition of. Job seemed to indicate this when he testified after God had manifested Himself in this way.

Job 42:5

“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;

Here, Job was not referring to the physical “hearing” and “seeing”, but in the spiritual sense—that by comparison, he had now gained a deeper insight into who God is, that he had been helped to rise beyond “hearing” the Lord to a significantly richer level of appreciation, of “seeing” the Lord.

In addition, the presence and the communication of God would also have strengthened him in the choice and response that he should make, because the presence of God and the way He spoke had a strengthening and positive effect. This positive effect does not come about automatically; Job had to be open and receptive to God and to the truth.

The positive spiritual reality and spiritual ministry mentioned above can come to us directly from God or indirectly through the ministry of others. Others can help us to enter into and experience

it, thereby helping us in the direction of truth. They can help us both to see and be strengthened to act upon the truth.

Positive fellowship can have such an effect and we may have experienced it ourselves. After fellowshiping with another believer, we may sense that although he has not really shared with us any truth that we do not already know, yet there is a change within us for the better. We find that we are more able to perceive things, understand issues and go through perplexing situations than before the time together.

Besides other people helping us, we can also choose to enhance this “positive spiritual reality and spiritual ministry” ourselves as we go through situations of life. We do this by humbling ourselves before God, seeking and worshipping Him, correcting the attitude of our hearts, praying over the issues and trying to understand how we should look at these issues from God’s perspective. It must not be merely outward expressions and empty words but genuinely seeking the Lord and opening our hearts and lives before Him. As we do so, we may experience the sense of positive spiritual reality and the Lord ministering to us.

However, at times, this in itself may be insufficient for us to resolve our problem, and we may need others to help us come out of a bind. This is in order, and this is how God desires the body of Christ to work out together, with members helping one another.

Concluding remarks

In this message, we have sought to understand how and why Job’s posture towards God changed after God spoke to him. We saw that the manifestation of God and His speeches helped Job in two main areas. Firstly, it turned Job from dwelling on his own problems and sufferings to focusing on God and seeing things from God’s perspective. Secondly, by revealing His majesty, power, wisdom and knowledge, Job came to see his own human limitations and lack of knowledge and understanding. He recognised his personal weaknesses and failures and took corrective action, humbling himself and taking his proper place before God. Not only did Job respond properly on that occasion at the end of the story, it is very likely that there was also a higher quality of *posture adopted*.

It is important for us to reflect over and learn well in these two areas:

1. *The definite, decisive posture adopted*

Because God is God and He is always good and right, we would gladly adopt a settled, unwavering posture of love, faith, commitment and submission to Him. We need to think through this critical issue carefully and pray over it so that we may be deeply convicted and have a clear basis for adopting such a definite posture. This must be the firm foundation of our Christian life. It is important for us to see clearly that it is foolish and dangerous for us to depart from this posture.

In specific situations, we would then affirm our *posture adopted*. This is the *response posture* in each situation. The *posture adopted* is very helpful as it enables us to more easily make the affirmation, even when situations are difficult, because the *posture adopted* has already been carefully thought through and decided upon. Instead of questioning the foundational area when difficult situations arise, we will maintain our faith in God and our confidence in Him and not be easily shaken.

2. *The approach to situations in life*

The second area that we have to carefully think through is how we should approach situations of life. We have to learn what it means to concentrate on God, focus on Him and seek to understand things from His perspective instead of dwelling on and becoming overwhelmed by the problems, difficulties and sufferings.

If we continue to learn deeply in these two areas, it will help us to go through life's situations well and in the process enable us to recognise weaknesses in our lives. And as these weaknesses are brought to the surface, we can then take appropriate measures to correct them. Instead of grumbling and murmuring, and blaming God for the difficult situations that we encounter, we learn to be positive and emerge from the whole experience a better person.

Question for reflection and discussion

How did God deal with Job and correct him?

Some Observations on Job



In this message, I wish to make five observations and draw some lessons from Job's experiences and the issues involved. In the process, I will clarify some issues we have touched upon in the previous messages. The five observations I will make relate to:

1. Perplexities during times of severe testing
2. Honesty and openness to truth
3. The significance of Job's deficiencies and failures
4. The posture of unwavering faith in God and humble submission to Him and His ways
5. Who we submit to

1. Perplexities during times of severe testing

When we go through times of severe testing and are perplexed by the difficulties that confront us, we tend to respond in an improper manner. Our spirit is often negatively affected and we tend to murmur and complain within our hearts even when there are no obvious outward manifestations.

We saw in the previous messages that when Job was perplexed by the trials that came upon him, he raised many questions and issues and made several improper remarks. It is helpful to note that God did not rebuke him for raising questions, but for his unwholesome posture and for the negative spirit from which the questioning arose. Of course, God also rebuked him for the improper remarks.

There is a place for us to express to God our perplexities and to ask Him to help us understand what we are going through. It is not only legitimate but also often healthy for us to do so. Going through

situations of life passively and with resignation is not a mark of spirituality. There are many things that the Lord desires to teach us in the circumstances of life. It is therefore proper for us to look to the Lord, pray over the issues, and ask Him to help us understand. But we should not do so in a demanding manner and we must guard against a spirit of complaining or doubting God, or attributing deficiencies to God's character and His ways.

Instead, we should maintain a proper posture of worship, humble submission and affirmation of faith in Him. We must be prepared to submit to His perfect wisdom and to what He sees fitting for us to go through. And even if God does not answer our questions or does not answer them according to our expectations, we must be prepared to submit to Him.

In this regard, I wish to make some brief observations based on God's evaluation of the remarks made by Job's friends.

Remarks of Job's three friends

Job's friends seemed to have many ready answers to his questions. They tried to speak on behalf of God and justify Him. This might appear commendable, but they were reproved rather than commended by God because their remarks were neither sound nor appropriate in the context. We see in Job 42 how God rebuked them:

Job 42:7

It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.

As I understand it, when God said that Job's friends "have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has", He was making a comparison between Job and his friends concerning the things that they had uttered, that what Job had said was better than the comments of his friends, which sounded appropriate but did not properly represent the truth of the situation or of God's character and ways. Some may take God's statement to mean that Job had spoken what was right of God, and they may then seek to justify all

that Job had spoken throughout the Book of Job. This understanding would not be accurate. We've seen that Job did make improper remarks about God for which God rebuked him. But comparatively, Job's remarks were closer to the truth.

Job 42:8

"Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

We see in verse 8 that God rebuked Job's friends and termed their conduct and remarks as "folly". We need to take care not to err in like manner, speaking in a way that appears spiritual, knowledgeable and concerned, but in reality, it is not in line with the truth or with God's character and ways.

2. Honesty and openness to truth

Speaking from the heart

Although there were negative features in Job's response, there was also a positive aspect in that Job was honest and he spoke straight from his heart. He also loved truth and righteousness and desired to walk in them.

Job 27:3-6

3 For as long as life is in me,
And the breath of God is in my nostrils,
4 My lips certainly will not speak unjustly,
Nor will my tongue mutter deceit.
5 "Far be it from me that I should declare you right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 "I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go.
My heart does not reproach any of my days.

We read at the beginning of the Book of Job how God expressed

appreciation for Job as one who loved righteousness, feared God and turned away from evil. In the above passage (Job 27:3-6), Job said that he would continue to hold on to his integrity and would not speak what was deceitful.

Some people may use this point of honesty as a cloak for improper conduct. Honesty is good, but being honest does not mean we should express without restraint whatever comes to our mind and always give vent to how we feel. Some people may try to justify themselves for doing so by saying that they were “just being honest” when in reality they failed to exercise self-control. If they were really honest, they would have recognised that their words were improper and spoken out of a negative spirit. They may claim that they were being honest, but in reality they were not. Thus, they have failed on both counts of self-control and honesty.

In such situations, the proper response is to exercise self-control and reject whatever is negative and improper in our thoughts and feelings. Yet we must be careful not to pretend and say things we do not believe in or things we do not mean. Some may think that being spiritual and being positive require them to say things that sound nice although they do not mean or believe in them. They may say them merely to please others or because they think that such words seem more appropriate for Christians to utter. But if the words do not come from our heart, we should not say them. God can see through our outward conduct and the words that we utter. He knows the reality within us.

God hates hypocrisy; He desires truthfulness in our being. Therefore, we should not pretend and say things we do not mean. If there are negative thoughts and feelings within us, we can honestly acknowledge their presence and seek to resolve and overcome them by God's enabling. If there are issues that are disturbing us, we need not pretend they do not exist. We can honestly bring them before the Lord in an appropriate manner and in the right spirit. However, where it is improper or inappropriate to express any of these troubling thoughts to other people, we should exercise self-control and keep silent.

Openness to truth and correction

All of us do falter and it is important that we be open and teachable so that we can be corrected. Openness to truth and correction is

part of being truly honest in the scriptural sense. An honest man is one who is prepared to face the truth properly.

We see such a quality in Job. Not only was he honest and one who spoke from his heart, he was also open to truth and correction. When God manifested Himself and spoke towards the end of the Book of Job, we see Job receiving the truth and responding properly. He repented and humbled himself. In the end, Job emerged a better, more mature and stable person. Though he faltered, he did learn, and in all likelihood, the *posture adopted* was of a higher quality compared to that at the beginning.

It is helpful to note that Job did not merely say sorry to God but he also recognised the truth and the significant issues involved. He knew where he had been wrong and he responded in an appropriate manner. This is the meaning of true learning. Let us see a portrayal of this in Job 40:3-4,

Job 40:3-4

3 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
4 "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?
I lay my hand on my mouth.

From this passage, we see that Job recognised his insignificance. In response to God's manifestation of Himself, Job realised that one basic problem during the trials was that he forgot his proper position and his limitations. He also realised that he had spoken rashly and in ways that were improper. This aspect is more clearly expressed in Job 42.

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
2 "I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."
4 'Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask You, and You instruct me.'
5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;

But now my eye sees You;
 6 Therefore I retract,
 And I repent in dust and ashes.”

The above verses show that Job clearly recognised the improper response in his conduct, speech and posture; he also understood his limitations. This led to his repenting and retracting the wrong things he had said. We can also see the sense of humility coming through. Repenting in dust and ashes and the words he spoke indicate Job's recognition of God's sovereignty and greatness and that he had spoken things that he did not understand. They also reveal his willingness to adopt the proper position of worship and humble submission to God.

We should learn from Job to be open to the truth and to the Lord's correction and to know where we have gone wrong so that we can make progress in our lives. What we see at the end of the Book of Job is a very beautiful picture of the posture that man should adopt and of how man should respond to God.

3. The significance of Job's deficiencies and failures

In our analysis of Job's failures, we noted his deficiencies in the area of the spirit of humility and the *posture adopted*. There was also something amiss in the way he went through the trials. He failed to maintain his focus on God and lost the proper perspective. I now wish to make some observations in regard to the significance of Job's deficiencies and failures.

a. Job was not significantly deficient in these areas and he did not fare badly

Although Job did falter during the trials, in reality he fared better than most people would have if they were to go through trials of a similar nature and intensity.

We read in Job 1:20 that after many calamities had come upon him, including the loss of his children and possessions, Job, manifesting a spirit of humility, “fell to the ground and worshiped”. Job fared rather well although the trials that came upon him were sudden and difficult to take. He had the right posture and his focus was on God.

Even after he had been severely afflicted with boils, he stood fast on his convictions although his wife instigated him to speak improperly:

Job 2:9-10

9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”

10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

In spite of the wrong notion he had that God was behind his sufferings, his response was healthy as can be seen in his worship of God and in his spirit of humility and posture of submission to God. When his wife urged him to “curse God and die”, he rebuked her for the ill-advised suggestion. At the end of the trials, although God did rebuke Job for his failures during the trials, He also commended him.

b. Although not significantly deficient, they involved significant issues

Although Job did not fail badly, significant issues were involved. These issues are vital to our lives and relationship with God. They are very important for wholesome development and the quality of our being. This is the reason God rebuked Job the way He did and also the reason for our spending considerable time reflecting on these issues.

c. The powers of darkness will take advantage of these weaknesses

Under severe testing and pressures from the powers of darkness, weaknesses within us surface and become exposed and magnified. I mention “surface” and “become exposed” because sometimes we may not be conscious that we have these deficiencies. For example, Job might not have been aware of these deficiencies in his life before the trials. The picture we see at the beginning of the Book of Job, and also the way Job recalled how he had walked before God, do not give any

indication that he was aware of deficiencies in these areas. In reality, they were present and became obvious during the severe testing.

Likewise, we may be unaware or have only a vague idea of weaknesses within us, but we may not realise their extent and seriousness. When they are exposed and magnified during testing, others observing us, and even we ourselves, may be surprised that we can exhibit such ugly traits in our words and conduct.

So let us be humble, prayerful, open and willing to acknowledge when the Lord shows us our deficiencies. Let us not justify ourselves and rationalise our words or conduct and, as a result, fail to learn. This can easily take place and is a common occurrence. Let us instead take corrective measures and not allow these weaknesses to become worse.

The powers of darkness seek to take advantage of our weaknesses and cause much problems and hindrances, not only in our development and our personal walk with God, but also in God's work, thus bringing dishonour to His name. It is helpful for us to recognise our deficiencies at an early stage so that we can nip them in the bud.

d. Our vulnerability to and magnitude of failure are related to the degree of deficiency and severity of testing

How vulnerable we are to failure is related to the degree of deficiency within us and to the severity of the testing, including the intensity of the spiritual pressures. When the deficiencies are great and the pressures are intense, we are extremely vulnerable and can easily fail badly. However, it is still feasible for us to cry out to God to help us respond appropriately by His gracious undertaking and enabling.

When we see a person failing rather significantly, we should not quickly conclude that that person has serious deficiencies in his life. There could be other contributing factors that we may not be aware of. It could be that the deficiencies are not so serious, but the spiritual pressures are very severe.

This can be seen in the case of Job. Although the deficiencies within him were not so serious, under extremely severe testing from various directions, he did falter and uttered words that were highly improper.

On the other hand, the failure of another person may appear rather mild, but in reality there may be significant deficiencies present, resulting in him failing even in the context of relatively mild testing. Let us therefore take care not to conclude wrongly.

e. To fare well in our walk with God, it is crucial to settle these issues definitely and decisively

It is crucial that we understand and resolve these issues definitely and decisively, adopting the correct posture and attitude towards God and truth, and in the way we go through situations. Otherwise, we will more easily succumb to the attacks of the powers of darkness, be taken advantage of and manipulated by them.

To the degree we are deficient in these areas, to that degree our lives will be unstable and vulnerable to the pressures and attacks of the evil one. We will be tossed to and fro and will experience doubts, fears, discouragement and even despair. We will be more easily deceived and be more likely to compromise or go astray. When this happens, we are not able to persevere well in the truth, and will become unreliable, not only to people, but also to God. This reflects on the quality of our moral character and moral steadfastness.

4. The posture of unwavering faith in God and humble submission to Him and His ways

In the second message, we spent much time considering the vital issue of the proper response, attitude and posture towards God under all circumstances, that is, the importance of attaining and adopting the posture of:

An unwavering faith and confidence in God and His ways accompanied by unceasing worship, praise, thanksgiving, appreciation and humble, joyful submission to God and His perfect wisdom, together with steadfast love and commitment to Him and to the truth whatever the circumstances.

We saw that for this to come about, it is needful for us to have sufficient knowledge of God and confidence in Him as the perfect Almighty God. I would like to elaborate on this point. It seems to

me that at this stage of God's progressive revelation, it is not so difficult for us to have sufficient knowledge so as to adopt a proper posture, provided we are *open and seeking, and have a deep love for truth, goodness and righteousness*. This is because, apart from general revelation in creation, God has clearly revealed Himself concerning who He is and His greatness, goodness and perfection. He has done this in many ways, including the following:

a. In the Scriptures

God has clearly revealed in the Scriptures who He is, His greatness, goodness and the perfection of His being. All who have access to the Scriptures can study, reflect upon and absorb the truths into their lives.

b. In sending the Lord Jesus into the world as our Saviour

The Lord Jesus came to reveal to us who God is by the way He lived His life, through His teachings, and especially in the way He died for us at the Cross. Together with His resurrection, ascension and Second Coming and the meaning and implications of these events, we can be significantly helped to understand and appreciate who God is, His love for us, His moral character, greatness and perfection, and what ought to be our proper response to Him.

c. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

We are living in the period after Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit has been poured out. The Spirit of God comes into our lives to reveal, teach and convict us of the truth. Although the Scriptures is available, without the Holy Spirit helping us to understand what is presented in it, it is difficult for us to really appreciate who God is. However, if we are willing to respond to God deeply, the Spirit of truth will work in us, grant us insight into the truth, strengthen and guide us through all situations of life, and help us in our personal relationship with God.

d. Fellowship of the brethren and church life

God also provides us with an environment, that is, church life, where we can learn and grow together and support one another.

e. Testimony of others

Whether through the Scriptures, through the reading of church history and Christian biographies or through personal contact, as we come to know of people who have lived for the Lord, who have committed their lives to the Lord fully, and who have found God to be faithful and true, we begin to realise that such a life is not only feasible but also truly enriching and satisfying.

The various areas (a to e) that I have mentioned are very helpful towards a growing understanding and conviction of who God is, what He has done, His plans and purposes and what our response to Him ought to be. If we are open to the truth and if there is a personal response to God, we will move towards a personal experience of the fullness of life in the Lord Jesus Christ that arises from commitment to the perfect Almighty God. As we do so, increasingly we will find that God is true to His word and true to what He has revealed Himself to be. We will also find that our walk with Him will become increasingly meaningful and the posture we are able to adopt will increase in quality.

Contrasting Job's context with ours

With regard to adopting the correct posture before God, let us contrast Job's context with ours. Job lived very long ago, before the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he was not from Israel, but from the land of Uz (Job 1:1). He did not have the Bible or church life as we have, and good fellowship appeared lacking in his context. He also did not have the whole background of God's dealings with Israel. The Book of Job contains no reference to the laws of Moses or God's mighty works in Israel's history, for example, the miracles in Egypt, the Exodus, the years of wandering in the wilderness, the Crossing of the Jordan or the Fall of Jericho. It could very well be that the accounts recorded for us in the Book of Job occurred before these major events in Israel's history.

During the trials that Job went through, he had little positive encouragement from others to live well but instead received discouraging remarks and treatment.

However, although Job's context is vastly different from ours, God has other means of meeting the needs of people like him and in ways that we may not fully appreciate or know of.

In contrast to Job, we are in a privileged position. But with this privilege comes responsibility. God will hold us responsible and accountable for the light, knowledge and opportunities that are available to us.

Some people have the notion that since more knowledge means more responsibility they would rather know less though opportunities for knowing more are available.

This of course is an erroneous and dangerous notion to hold. The truth is that God will hold us accountable not only for what we know, but also for the lack of knowledge due to our neglect to avail ourselves of the opportunities He has provided. To spurn such opportunities is a very serious matter. Are we guilty of having such a notion?

Ultimately, the crucial issue has to do with what is in our heart. Is there a hunger for the truth? Is there the willingness to pursue the truth? Is there openness to the truth? If these are present in our lives, then it is not difficult for us to come to a reasonable degree of knowledge of God because the avenues are open to us. We can then meaningfully adopt the proper posture of unwavering faith in God and commitment to Him. *The real issue is: do we want to live out the truth?*

We need to spend time to prayerfully reflect upon the kind of posture we should adopt even before we encounter difficult situations. We will then be more ready to go through them. In the end, it has to do with our recognition of who God is, who we are, and our relationship with Him. *It is the quality of our response to God that matters, which is a reflection of the attitudes within our hearts, our moral longings and what we really want in life. Do we really long for what is good and true?* If we do, we know that they are found only in God and in a wholehearted commitment to Him and His ways.

5. Who we submit to

In regard to the posture of unwavering, unquestioning commitment and submission to God and His ways, one very important qualification to bear in mind is that *this posture and attitude is towards the true and living God*. If we are not careful about this qualification,

we can expose ourselves to serious danger.

We should not submit ourselves to just any mighty and supernatural being. When we have an unusual or supernatural experience or when we receive an impression of guidance, we must not passively and uncritically assume that it is of God. This qualification is especially important for those of us who desire earnestly to fully commit ourselves to God.

We must make sure that our posture is towards God and that whatever may happen to us, we will always continue to maintain the proper attitude and posture of submission to the true and living God. At the same time, we should also take a definite stand to reject and resist whatever is of the powers of darkness.

If we are uncertain whether an experience or impression of guidance is of God, we should not act on it, thinking that it is an act of unquestioning submission to God. However, we can still affirm and tell God that we are fully submitted to Him, but because in this particular spiritual experience, we are unsure of its source, we are not going to move carelessly, rashly or quickly. We must be slow to open up our hearts and lives to receive such experiences and impressions unless we are clear they are of God.

Likewise, when we go through trials, we should not passively accept them, thinking that this is what it means to adopt a correct posture of submission to God and His ways. Rather, as we continue to worship God and affirm our commitment to Him and submit to Him and His ways, we should at the same time take the stand to reject and resist all that comes from the powers of darkness.¹ Job did not and could not take such a stand because, as far as we can see from the record in the Scriptures, Job was unaware of the existence of Satan and the powers of darkness and their activities.

We should also seek God's help to understand accurately the situation and the issues involved, to know the steps we should take, and to strengthen us to act accordingly.

¹ The stand we should take and the way to discern and counter the attacks of the evil one are covered in greater detail in other messages (for example, AR202-217) posted on the website www.godandtruth.com.

At the same time, we should learn well the spiritual lessons and principles that God desires to teach us through such situations. One important lesson is that of developing the quality of endurance. This quality is vital when we face times of trials. By this, I do not mean merely “gritting the teeth” and surviving the situation. Rather, true endurance is expressed in a lively looking to God for wisdom, for enabling, and in learning the precious things that God desires to teach us and to remain faithful to Him.

Besides the quality of endurance, during such times, God also desires to help us have a clearer recognition of the deficiencies in our lives and what to do about them, the attitudes and behaviour of men, the realities in the spiritual realm, the activities of the powers of darkness, and of who He is and how we can glorify Him through it all.

Personal reflection

Let us examine our lives. Do we easily become disturbed during times of testing? Do we doubt God and complain against Him? Or is our commitment to God of a sufficiently meaningful degree that whatever may come, we would submit to Him because of who He is, the perfect Almighty God? Are there areas that hinder us from adopting this posture?

Although Job's attitudes and ways were generally commendable, it seems that he did not think through these issues adequately and therefore did not adopt such a posture to a sufficiently high degree though it was feasible for him to do so in his context. It resulted in serious problems when he went through very severe testing. How about us? Will we fare well? Let us learn from what Job went through and look to the Lord to help us resolve this issue deeply. Let us also identify and deal with the weaknesses in our own lives.

Question for reflection and discussion

What are some lessons we can learn from the story of Job?

The Silence of God



Reflective readers of the Book of Job may find various issues rather bewildering. Some may wonder why God would allow someone who is innocent and righteous like Job to suffer so intensely for apparently no good reason. Besides, his sufferings did not seem to benefit anyone.

Others may feel that Job was an innocent, helpless object of contest between two powerful, supernatural beings—God and Satan. He appeared to be like a toy or a plaything in a game between these two powerful beings.

I have heard this sentiment being expressed by a non-Christian contemplating the existence of God and the happenings in the lives of men. It seemed to him that, if God does exist, we are merely His playthings.

There are also those who may wonder why God did not address Job's perplexing questions when He spoke at length at the end of the story. Job did raise legitimate questions and issues of significance. Furthermore, some may wonder about the relevance of the content of God's long speeches to what was happening. Why did Job not seem disturbed or dissatisfied with God's response but instead repented and worshipped God although God did not seem to have addressed the issues he raised? Thus, the beautiful ending to the story of Job may appear unrealistic.

Such thoughts can easily come to those who do not subscribe to the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, and these people may express their views in their writings or in other ways. Sadly, some believers may come under the influence of such views without being conscious of the implications. Over time, they too begin to question the character and ways of God and the authority of the

Scriptures. Ironically, an important lesson that the Book of Job is trying to teach us is that we should not question or have doubts about the character and ways of God.

What then should we do when we are confounded by some of the difficult issues that arise from our reading of the Book of Job? Should we put them aside and not think about them? The answer is clearly no. It is not only legitimate for us to try to understand them; it is our responsibility to do so, prayerfully looking to God to grant us insight. In fact, the Book of Job, if properly understood, can teach us many deep and meaningful truths.

What we have to guard against is the drawing of improper conclusions that contradict the perfect character and ways of God or other truths that are clearly taught in the Scriptures. We do not have to be unduly disturbed if, after prayerful study, we are still unable to grasp some of the issues involved. We can defer them for the time being. In the future, we may be able to understand them. Since the Scriptures is inspired by the infinitely wise God, we cannot expect to understand all the issues straightaway.

Theme of message

In this message, I want to concentrate on the issue of *why God did not answer Job's perplexing questions* at the end of the story of Job, as recorded in the Scriptures. What I will cover can help us in several ways, for example:

- Appreciating the beauty, meaning and depth in the Scriptures; the value of studying the Scriptures; and the need to exercise care in the way we interpret difficult passages and grapple with issues
- Appreciating the wisdom of God
- Learning important lessons pertaining to the life of faith

Did God treat Job unfairly?

We may be puzzled why God did not answer Job's perplexing questions. On the face of it, it may appear that God had treated Job unfairly, brushing him aside because He is greater and more powerful,

and thus Job had no choice but to submit.

It may also seem that God did not show any understanding towards Job in his intense suffering and plight, especially as we look at the way God spoke and rebuked Job. Job had lost his possessions and his sons and daughters. He had been misunderstood, abused and wrongly accused. He had suffered intense physical and emotional pains as well as spiritual pressures and afflictions. Yet, when God entered the scene in Job 38 and spoke, He did not show any sympathy or empathy towards Job.

Job 38:2-5

2 "Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?
3 "Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!
4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding,
5 Who set its measurements? Since you know.
Or who stretched the line on it?"

In the above passage, we see God rebuking Job and asking him a series of hard questions. There is no indication of Him sympathising with Job and his sufferings and pains. In Job 40, we see a similar thrust:

Job 40:1-9

1 Then the Lord said to Job,
2 "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?"
Let him who reproves God answer it."
3 Then Job answered the Lord and said,
4 "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?"
I lay my hand on my mouth.
5 "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer;
Even twice, and I will add nothing more."
6 Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm and said,
7 "Now gird up your loins like a man;
I will ask you, and you instruct Me.
8 "Will you really annul My judgment?
Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?"

9 “Or do you have an arm like God,
And can you thunder with a voice like His?”

When we read passages like those above, we may get the impression that God was simply exerting His power to subdue Job and force him to submit to Him. We may then have negative feelings about God, thinking that He was unfair to Job. And yet we know that God’s response to the situation must have been a wise one because He is the God of perfect wisdom.

Such unfavourable sentiments that may come to us is a reminder that sometimes a person’s response or conduct may appear to be harsh and lacking in understanding, yet in reality it may be a wise and appropriate response.

But more importantly, it is crucial that we do not harbour or entertain negative thoughts or feelings about God. We must be mindful that the evil one is actively at work to evoke and promote within us such negative sentiments.

Does God demand submission on the basis of His power?
God is not One who will demand submission on the sole basis of His power. Job, even in the midst of his trials, pains and perplexities, could recognise this and was confident that God is not such a God. We see his thoughts in Job 23:

Job 23:3-7

3 “Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!

4 “I would present my case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.

5 “I would learn the words which He would answer,
And perceive what He would say to me.

6 “Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power?
No, surely He would pay attention to me.

7 “There the upright would reason with Him;

As Job says in the above passage, God is open to reason and not One who would simply overwhelm and overcome us by the sheer

weight of His almighty power. To have contrary thoughts is harmful and dangerous. Yet at times, we may subconsciously hold on to such concepts in our minds.

If our basis of submission is power, that is, if we submit to a being simply because he is very powerful, we can end up submitting to Satan because he is also a very powerful being. We may end up doing evil things, while still thinking we are obeying God. God does not want us to submit to Him and worship Him merely because He is powerful.

Related to this is that if we worship God on the premise that He is very powerful, the meaning of true worship is dealt a mortal blow. This erroneous approach in worshipping God hits at the very heart of true worship. True worship involves a positive moral dimension. It involves a positive moral response from our hearts, which may not be present if we worship God merely because He is powerful.

We have to be clear about our reasons for worshipping, loving and serving God wholeheartedly. Is it merely because God is powerful? No. We do so because He is both great and good, because He is perfect in His being and ways. More crucial than the issue of power is the moral perfection of God. If God is not morally perfect, we cannot properly worship Him. The Scriptures reveals very clearly both God's moral perfection and His almighty power. Both of these realities in the being of God are vital to a meaningful, wholehearted worship of God and to our submission to Him without reservation. They assure us of the good and perfect will of God and that His guidance and instructions are absolutely reliable and ought to be followed.

We also saw that Job had sufficient recognition of God's goodness and greatness. Therefore, we must not interpret the story of Job in the wrong way, thinking that God had been unfair to Job and forcing submission upon him.

Was God silent because He had no adequate answer to Job's questions?

We may wonder whether it would be helpful to Job if God had answered his perplexing questions. If Job had understood God's

intentions for the trials, would it not be helpful for his personal development and would it not enable Job to have a clearer basis for joyful, wholehearted submission to God? This may sound reasonable, but, as will be explained shortly, the approach that God adopted as recorded in the Scriptures is better and more effective.

Some may think that God did not attempt to answer Job because there is no adequate or satisfying answer to the problem of suffering, at least not one that man on earth can understand. In fact, this point may sometimes be put forward as the main lesson or one of the main lessons of the story of Job.

In reality, the way God responded to Job's situation, the content of His speeches, and the fact that He did not answer Job's puzzling questions were *deliberate, very appropriate, meaningful and effective* in the context and were an expression of His perfect wisdom. God did not brush Job aside. Neither did He treat Job in a contemptuous manner, nor fail to show an understanding of how Job felt.

It is recorded in the Scriptures that even to the sinful, rebellious nation of Israel, God was gracious and did not simply brush them aside. This is illustrated in Isaiah 1:18-20.

Isaiah 1:18-20

18 "Come now, and let us reason together,"

Says the Lord,

"Though your sins are as scarlet,

They will be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They will be like wool.

19 "If you consent and obey,

You will eat the best of the land;

20 "But if you refuse and rebel,

You will be devoured by the sword."

Truly, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Here, we find that God was displeased with the nation of Israel because they had committed many sins that were deeply provocative to Him. Yet, in such a context, God was willing to reason out with them, saying, "Come now, and let us reason together".

In the case of Job, even though he could not fully understand all the issues, there was still much that God could have helped him understand if that was the best thing to do. For example, God could have helped Job recognise and understand the existence and work of the evil one, the issues that were important for his development, and the meaning behind what he was going through. Hence, we can say that God remained silent not because He had no adequate answer to Job's suffering, but because He had other reasons for doing so.

Why did God not answer Job's perplexing questions?

If we reflect on the reasons for God's silence with regard to Job's perplexities, we can see that there are deep, meaningful and vital issues for Job and for us to learn. I see at least two main reasons and I will state them as follows:

- The need to learn to trust God fully and without wavering while going through difficult and perplexing situations
- The need to appreciate the underlying issues that are crucial to our relationship with God and to a life of faith

1. Trusting God fully without wavering

If we desire to attain to a high quality of faith, it is very important that we learn to trust God fully and without wavering while going through difficult and perplexing situations. This was one key lesson that God wanted Job to learn.

As objective observers of what took place in the life of Job, we can see that the appropriate response of Job in the midst of his suffering and perplexities ought to be that of persevering in unwavering faith in the great and good God. Likewise, we need to apply this posture and attitude to our own lives because it is an area that believers are very vulnerable in and will be tested on from time to time. If we do not resolve this issue deeply, then when we are severely tested, we may experience a crisis that shakes the very foundation of our faith in God and our relationship with Him. Even in the absence of severe testing, queries and doubts may arise occasionally in the minds of some. This kind of faith is

superficial, has little quality in it and can easily be shaken especially in the context of living in the fallen world, the weakness of the flesh and the evil one actively at work.

To have a relationship with God and a faith that is stable and of quality, we have to settle this issue very deeply and definitely, bearing in mind that God is infinite in His knowledge and wisdom, while man is finite with many limitations. Isaiah 55:8-9 contains helpful words for us in this direction:

Isaiah 55:8-9

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

The above passage emphasises the greatness of God with regard to His thoughts, His wisdom and His knowledge in comparison with finite man and his limitations. We will not be able to fully understand God's mind and ways. There may also be things inappropriate for us to know.

How do we firmly resolve this issue of trusting God in the midst of difficulties? To do so, we need to recognise that our faith must be grounded in the person and being of God. He is the Almighty God of perfect love, faithfulness and wisdom, whom we have come to know and believe. As Paul puts it in 2 Timothy 1:12,

2 Timothy 1:12

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed;
for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is
able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

Paul was not only willing to suffer but he could rejoice in his sufferings (Col. 1:24). One main factor that helped him to carry on properly as he went through various difficulties was his deep conviction that he knew whom he believed in. His confidence and faith in God were grounded in his knowledge of the being of

God, independent of situations and issues.

Similarly, our faith should be grounded in the being of God, and should not be conditional on or linked to situations and issues. Otherwise, it will always be unstable. Our faith in God can be maintained without wavering because God is unchangingly perfect, wise and faithful. We know that this is true and so we can continually and steadfastly trust Him and carry on untroubled in the midst of issues beyond our understanding.

At the same time, we recognise that though we may be perplexed and may not have answers to our questions, the all-knowing God is never perplexed and He is sovereignly undertaking.

2. Underlying issues that are crucial to a life of faith

The second reason for God not answering Job could be because of the underlying issues that are crucial to a life of faith. What were the real issues involved in relation to Job's failures? Was it merely a lack of knowledge? Was it merely perplexing questions in his mind that were not answered?

Wisdom of God's approach

By not answering Job's perplexities, it helped Job (and it also helps us) to reflect on them and come to a deeper appreciation of the underlying issues that are crucial to quality faith and relationship with God. These issues are related to deficiencies in Job and God wanted them to emerge and be made clear to him. By dealing with the situation the way He did, God helped Job to see clearly that it was not essential for him to receive the answers to his perplexing questions in order to respond appropriately. Instead, there were deficiencies within Job that he must recognise and deal with deeply.

If God had answered Job's perplexing questions, it may not come through so clearly and powerfully to Job and to us that the real problem did not lie in the unanswered questions, but in the deficiency in his posture and the spirit of humility, and the loss of focus on God during the trials. Furthermore, these issues would have become blurred. Job might then attribute his failures to the perplexing questions that confronted him instead of recognising the need to take corrective

measures for the deficiencies within him. He might believe that once his perplexities were resolved, he could respond well to God.

The beauty and depth of Job's response at the end might have been hindered if God had answered his perplexing questions. He might not have come to the point where he could worship and humbly submit to God and continue to believe in the greatness, goodness and wisdom of God, even while still severely afflicted and in deep pain, and while still unaware that it was Satan who was afflicting him.

As Job recognised his areas of deficiencies and took corrective measures, his pride and improper ways of speaking to God were cast away. He recognised what the proper position before God should be and this led to a higher quality of faith and deeper relationship with God.

Through the manifestation of two aspects of His being in His speeches—His majesty, greatness and power, and His wisdom and knowledge—God struck at the root of the underlying issues and corrected Job's real problems of improper posture, lack of humility and the loss of focus on God.

If God had adopted a different approach

Supposing God's approach to Job was more "sympathetic" and "understanding", what then would be the outcome and meaning of Job's response? If God had spoken to Job along this line: "Well, Job, I know that it has been a very difficult time for you. I understand how you feel and though you have faltered, it is understandable that you have spoken in the way you did because of the severity of the testing, and this has been accentuated by many baffling questions in your mind. To help you respond properly, I will explain to you what has been happening. I will now answer all your perplexing questions."

Now, would this approach have been better? If we reflect on it, we will appreciate that the meaning and positive outcome of the whole experience that Job went through would have been significantly compromised.

And yet, many of us may prefer to be dealt with in this way by God, directly or through His servants, even though at times

it would have been better that we are given the same treatment as Job. The “sympathetic” and “understanding” treatment that we prefer may not always be the most appropriate or the most effective because the clarity of issues may be blurred and the depth of response could be hindered.

In trying to appreciate the way God dealt with Job, we noted that a basic problem and deficiency in Job as manifested during the trials was the lack of humility. We saw this in the improper words used, and in his conduct and posture towards God. There was a demanding tone, and Job wrongly attributed deficiencies to the character and the ways of God. There was also the lack of reverence for God in some of his words. On some occasions, a spirit of arrogance came through. Though we need to bear in mind the severity of the trials that he went through, still the problem of a lack in humility was something God was very concerned about.

Job 10:1-4 gives an example of Job's improper spirit:

Job 10:1-4

1 “I loathe my own life;
I will give full vent to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
2 “I will say to God, ‘Do not condemn me;
Let me know why You contend with me.
3 ‘Is it right for You indeed to oppress,
To reject the labor of Your hands,
And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?
4 ‘Have You eyes of flesh?
Or do You see as a man sees?

The tone reflected in the words of Job was irreverent and there was a lack of the spirit of submission to God.

Instead of adopting a “sympathetic” and “understanding” approach, God's approach was to answer Job out of the whirlwind. By doing so, it came through strongly to Job that he had limitations, was a finite being, and that it was improper for him to speak to the majestic, great and wise God in that manner. God needed to put Job in his proper position and to help him realise that it was

wrong for him to speak in that manner to God or about God.

It was necessary for Job to humble himself before God first before the issue of answering his perplexing questions could be considered. In the spirit and state that he was in, he would not be so receptive to God nor be able to consider the issues properly.

Rather than not being understanding towards Job, God understood him perfectly and dealt with him effectively according to what was most appropriate in the situation.

In all likelihood, Job did learn rather deeply as a result of the whole experience. He was transformed inwardly as the deficiencies within him were dealt with. The quality of his faith in God and relationship with Him were enhanced. He became better equipped to face future difficulties and testing. Should he encounter other perplexing situations in the future, he would less likely doubt and question God's character and ways because God had helped him come to a point of proper submission and worship in the midst of severe testing even without his perplexities having been addressed.

What can we learn for ourselves?

As we appreciate the way God dealt with Job, we should also learn to appreciate the way God deals with us. Instead of murmuring and complaining or entertaining doubts when situations are problematic and bewildering to us and when the evil one plants doubts in our minds about God's goodness and fairness, let us appreciate and affirm our faith in God's sovereignty and His perfect wisdom. This should be our response even when we are unable to understand what is taking place and why God allows us to go through various trials. He is the perfect Teacher and our loving heavenly Father. He knows how to take care of us and train us.

And this includes the disciplining hand of God upon us when He rebukes us for various reasons, including deficiencies in our lives. It is necessary for us to respond positively to God's disciplining hand as part of our walk with Him. It may be painful and we naturally do not like it, but it is good for us especially if we are stubborn and unrepentant or if there are deficiencies and attitudes in us that require more painful dealings.

Hebrews 12:5-6 tells us the correct attitude to adopt when we are disciplined by the Lord:

Hebrews 12:5-6

5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,

Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;

6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives."

When God disciplines us, it is part of His expression of love for us and He wants to deal with what is deficient in our lives. The goal of God's discipline is positive, that we may share His holiness (Heb. 12:11).

Hebrews 12:11

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Although the disciplining is painful, if we respond well, it will produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Our response and attitude towards God have a bearing on the way God deals with us, especially in the area of discipline and what He wants to teach us. If we are more open, humble and teachable, God may not need to discipline us so severely and painfully. On the other hand, if we are stubborn, proud and unteachable, He may have to deal with us in a very painful way before we will awaken and learn. But remember, all this is done in love.

Should God have, after the whole episode, answered Job's questions?

Finally, one may ask whether it would have been helpful to Job, after his proper response at the end, for God to help him understand what happened, for example, to instruct him on the existence and work of the evil one.

It could well be that God did help Job understand and that

is how we now have the whole story before us as recorded in the Scriptures. That is, the source of the story of Job comes from Job's understanding as God revealed to him after he had learned the lessons.

However, we cannot be certain that God did help Job understand. The fact that the Scriptures is silent on this point is meaningful and there is perhaps something important that God desires to teach us. God in His perfect wisdom may or may not explain certain things to us and we may not even understand why. But our faith in God and proper posture towards Him can and should continue. He may explain to us if He sees it fit, according to His perfect wisdom. But His silence should not perturb us. On our part, we should continue to adopt a healthy attitude, look to God, try to understand whatever is profitable and trust that in His perfect wisdom and sovereignty, God would do what is the best.

God may at times leave certain questions unanswered because of deficiencies or wrong attitudes within us. Often it is due to the lack of diligence on our part to seek for the answers. There are many things that God wants us to understand as part of our total development and partnership with Him. Prayerful consideration of issues and seeking to understand them from the Lord can help us to grow well and enable us to participate more fully and effectively in the fulfilment of His purposes.

Spiritual poverty and a poor level of understanding of the things pertaining to God's kingdom are common among God's people. This state of affairs is not in line with the will of God. He has revealed an inexhaustible wealth of knowledge in the Scriptures for our learning so that we can be properly equipped. Sadly, we have failed to appreciate much of it because of our lethargy and lack of spiritual hunger. We fail to make full use of all the opportunities that are available to us to attain to a fuller and more wholesome understanding of the truth.

But at times, it may not be due to these unhealthy features in our lives. There may be issues that God would not explain to us for the time being because it is not suitable for us at that stage of our development. We may not be able to understand or receive such knowledge properly at that point in time. Knowing more may become

burdensome and weigh us down. There may be other issues that God would not explain at all during our time on earth. There could be issues too difficult and complex for us to grasp and receive properly due to our limitations as finite men.

Whatever the reasons, we need to trust God's perfect wisdom, love and faithfulness, and we must learn to respect and submit to His sovereignty, realising that He knows what is best and what He is doing.

Let us be earnest and diligent to seek to understand whatever God wants us to know. There is much that God desires us to understand and grasp, which we often neglect and for this neglect we will have to give an account. This is a serious matter that has far-reaching implications for our eternal well-being and God's kingdom. On the other hand, let us not be perturbed by the fact that there are areas and issues that God in His perfect wisdom may withhold from us.

This approach and attitude is part of the posture that I have been emphasising in these messages on Job—a wholehearted, unwavering love for and commitment and submission to God and His ways under all circumstances. If we love God and submit to Him, it means that whatever areas He sees fitting and good for us, we will pursue them relentlessly. If there are perplexing issues that He sees best not to help us understand, we would still worship, love and submit to Him wholeheartedly.

Question for reflection and discussion

Why did God not answer the questions that perplexed Job even till the end of the story of Job, as recorded in the Scriptures?

Was Satan Triumphant? Was God Satisfied with Job?



In this message, we will reflect on the following three issues pertaining to the ordeal of Job:

- Was Satan triumphant in his challenge to God concerning Job?
- Was God satisfied with how Job went through the testing and with the outcome?
- What is the meaning of the episode? Why did God allow Job to go through so much pain and suffering and why did He allow Satan to afflict him so severely?

1. Was Satan triumphant in his challenge to God concerning Job?

We have seen that Job faltered during the trials and was rebuked by God. But does this mean that Satan had triumphed in his challenge to God concerning Job? To put it in another way, did Job fail the test that God allowed him to go through in relation to Satan's challenge? To answer this question, we need to look more closely at the substance of Satan's challenge.

Satan's challenge and attack

Job 1:8-11

8 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and

upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.”

9 Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing?”

10 “Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11 “But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.”

In these verses, Satan was challenging God’s pronouncement on Job. He was not prepared to accept God’s statement about Job’s character. He insinuated that there was no true uprightness or true fear of God in Job. As he put it, “Does Job fear God for nothing?”

The word “fear” can be translated as “reverence”. Satan was implying that Job appeared to have reverence for God and to be upright because God blessed him materially and had made a hedge about him and all that he had (v. 10). The meaning is that God was protecting Job and what he had. If God were to remove the protection on Job, including the material blessings and the comforts of life, Job would curse Him (v. 11). Thus, he charged that Job neither had true fear of God nor true uprightness and that he appeared to be so only because of various advantages and material benefits.

This is a very significant issue for us to reflect upon. Many seek to honour and obey God believing that He will bless them materially. As long as they receive such blessings, they will be pleased with God and will worship and rejoice in Him. But if the material blessings were withheld and they were to suffer deprivation, they will begin to walk according to their own desires and the ways of the world.

Job was severely tested in this area. We see in Job 1:12 that God permitted Satan power over what Job had.

Job 1:12

Then the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.”

God allowed Satan to afflict Job in what he had, but not on Job himself. Satan began to distress Job with a series of calamities that were clearly not coincidences or mere natural disasters. As a result,

Job's possessions were plundered or destroyed and his servants and children killed. The hedge about Job was removed and Satan systematically and thoroughly stripped him of the outward material blessings and comforts of life.

Job's response and God's verdict

What was Job's response when these disasters occurred?

Job 1:20-22

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord."

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Although Job was deprived of his physical possessions, his servants, and most tragic of all, his children, he continued to worship God. He recognised that all that he had came from God. If the Lord should be pleased to take them away (though we know in this instance it was not God who took them away but Satan who had done so, with God's permission), he would continue to bless the name of the Lord. Under the terrible circumstances, Job responded admirably. He did have true reverence for God. He passed the test and proved Satan wrong.

We look at God's verdict on what had happened.

Job 2:3

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job?

For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause."

Job held fast to his integrity. He continued to be a blameless and upright man despite the extreme difficulties he faced. With that, Satan was greatly displeased, and he mounted another challenge.

Further attacks by Satan

In Job 2:4-5, we read that Satan disputed God's verdict on Job. He claimed that if God were to afflict Job in his body, he would curse Him.

Job 2:4-5

4 Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

5 "However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face."

This is another relevant area for us to reflect upon. When we are severely afflicted in our being, will we continue to worship and love God, and truly rejoice in Him? Some people may appear to go through adversities well or even to speak positively but within their hearts, there could be bitterness, murmuring and no true rejoicing in God. Is this true of us?

In Job 2:6, the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." In other words, God permitted Satan to afflict Job personally and in his body, but not to kill him. We see here a manifestation of God's sovereignty. God drew a limit to what Satan could do to Job.

Satan then began to cruelly afflict Job's entire body with sore boils (v. 7). Job sat among the ashes and took a potsherd to scrape himself because of the physical affliction (v. 8). The pain that Job suffered was very great (v. 13).

Job remained steadfast

When Job's wife noticed that Job was still holding fast to his integrity, she said to him, "Curse God and die!" (v. 9). But Job responded in a truly remarkable way:

Job 2:10

But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job was prepared to continue walking with God and worshipping Him even though he suffered terribly. Again Satan was proven wrong.

We see that up to this point, Job fared rather well. He demonstrated genuine moral qualities and true reverence for God. He loved the truth and was a man of righteousness. He did not merely appear to have these qualities because of God's protection over him or because he had been blessed with abundant material wealth.

Job began to waver

However, as we continue to read the story of Job, we notice he began to falter. But why did he falter? Was it in line with Satan's insinuations about him, in the direction of Satan's challenge? Was it because he lost all his possessions and suffered personal pain? Was it because he could not endure the pressures of society upon him, having lost his reputation and being misunderstood and despised by others?

We have seen how Job suffered greatly in various aspects of his being—physically, mentally, emotionally and also in his spirit. No one seemed to truly understand him or give him true support and comfort in his hour of trial. Above all, Job thought that God was the One who was against him and afflicting him and he was unable to reach God for an explanation of what was happening to him. Indeed, how many of us can go through properly the afflictions that Job went through?

Yet, in spite of the harsh afflictions that came upon Job, let us take note of three points.

a. Job did not curse God as Satan had predicted

Satan had said that if God were to remove His protection from Job, Job would curse Him. Even Job's own wife provoked him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). She probably did it under Satan's instigation so that Satan might be proven right. However, despite all the afflictions engineered by Satan and the instigation of his wife, Job did not curse God throughout the trials; he also did not abandon the worship of God or stop walking in the truth. On this score, Job did not fail God in the manner Satan had predicted.

b. Job was committed to truth and righteousness

Throughout the trials, Job continued to love truth and righteousness. Although it was not perfect, his heart was set in that direction. He did not discard the values he held dear out of frustration, bitterness and anger or because he was deprived and afflicted.

c. Job's basic failure involved questioning God, His character and ways

Job faltered during the trials, not because he had no true reverence for God or that he was not prepared to endure suffering and deprivation. Rather, it was because he was perplexed and disturbed with his situation, and because he was unable to reconcile what he was going through with his faith in the good and just God. He also felt that he did not have recourse to sort out his perplexities with God and to obtain justice. He could not “find” or reach God and this aggravated his sense of frustration.

This was compounded by other deficiencies present in him, such as an inadequate posture of unwavering commitment and submission to God and His ways, and the lack of a humble spirit. In the context of the severe afflictions, Job became overly conscious of the adverse circumstances he was in and failed to maintain his focus on the greatness and goodness of God and began to waver and, at times, questioned God in an improper manner.

Job vindicated God's appreciation of him

From our reflections, we can say that Job worshipped God and lived a life of truth and righteousness not simply because of the hedge that God had built around him. This point comes through in a striking manner at the end of the story in Job 42. We see that while Job's perplexing questions remained unanswered and while he was still suffering pain and deprivation, Job repented, and he worshipped God and submitted to Him. It was only after Job repented that God restored his fortunes.

We can say then that Job did vindicate God's appreciation of him expressed in Job 1 and 2. He passed the test of Satan's challenge to God concerning him.

Personal reflection

There are two issues that I wish to bring to your attention. Firstly, even though Job did not falter primarily because of his suffering and deprivation, they did affect him. They contributed to the pressures upon Job and, together with the deficiencies within him, caused him to lose his focus on God and to question God and His character and ways.

Secondly, the challenge of Satan to God does not concern only Job, but also the whole of mankind and God's intentions for man. Job had demonstrated by his life that it is possible for man to genuinely love the truth, walk in righteousness and worship God, independent of outward blessings, material well-being and the comforts of this life.

If we profess to love the truth and worship God, but do so only when there are outward blessings, it is not true worship. If we waver when the outward blessings on our lives are adversely affected, the meaning of our worship of God and love for truth and righteousness will be brought into question.

True worship of God and true righteousness are independent of outward blessings in our lives. We worship God because of who He is—the One who deserves our worship—and not because by doing so, we can have material advantages and the comforts of this life. Similarly, we should walk in truth and righteousness out of the conviction that this is how we should live.

This, I believe, is an important lesson that God desires to teach us from the Book of Job. What is the quality of our love for God? How pure is it? Do we really love truth and righteousness? Will we continue to do so even when we are severely afflicted and deprived? Will we continue to love God and walk in the light as children of light? The answers to these questions are vital to the meaning of true moral and spiritual qualities of a person, which God desires to nurture in us.

These moral and spiritual qualities within a person form the basis for a deep and meaningful relationship and fellowship with God and with others. The more we nurture and develop these qualities (by co-operating with the Holy Spirit in what He seeks to bring about in our

lives), the richer will be our lives and the deeper and more meaningful will be our relationship with God. However, if we love God and rejoice in Him only when He blesses us with the comforts of life, then that kind of relationship with God is superficial and not precious to Him.

2. Was God satisfied with Job?

The second main issue we want to consider is: Was God satisfied with Job and the way he went through the testing? We can look at this issue from two angles.

God was satisfied

From one angle, we can say that God was satisfied with Job because he fared commendably compared with how many others would have fared in similar circumstances. He passed the test of Satan's challenge and insinuations, even under trials and afflictions of the severest kind, and thus vindicated God's appreciation of him. We see God commending Job not only before the trials began (Job 1:8), but also at the end of the whole episode (Job 42:7-8). God commended him for speaking what is right. This is likely to refer to how Job conducted himself during the trials although it may also include the repentant attitude he had towards the end. Taken as a whole, we can say that God appreciated the qualities in Job's life.

God was not satisfied

But from another angle, we can also say that God was not really satisfied with Job and how he went through the trials. He rebuked Job in strong terms for speaking in an improper manner. We read of the rebukes in passages such as Job 38:1-4 and Job 40:1-8. In the latter passage, we see God reprimanding Job for being the faultfinder contending with the Almighty and reproving God (v. 2), and one who would annul God's judgement and condemn Him so that he might be justified (v. 8).

Why was God not really satisfied with Job and why did God rebuke him so sternly? How can we reconcile this with what was said earlier, about God being satisfied with Job? I will offer two reasons:

- *God expected more from a person like Job and had expected him to fare better.* Notice how the Scriptures, in Job 1:1, 3 and 8, portrays him as one who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil and the greatest of all the men of the east. Job was a man of moral and spiritual stature.
- *The seriousness of the issues involved in Job's failures.* Job was found to be deficient in his posture towards God and in the spirit of humility. These are important issues to God and have significant implications to a person's relationship with God. They have to be dealt with effectively and deeply and cannot be glossed over, especially for a person like Job, who had the potential for a high quality relationship with God.

God's rebuke of Job may appear harsh, but it befitted the occasion and achieved the desired result. It led to Job repenting and adopting a proper posture of humble submission and worship of God, not of a superficial kind, but a posture that had depth and quality in it.

God was satisfied with the outcome

Thus, we see that while God was not satisfied with Job for his improper posture during the period of testing, He was satisfied with the outcome. In Job 42, we see that God restored the fortunes of Job, increased all that Job had twofold and blessed his latter days more than his beginning. Job had a deeper relationship with God as a result of the trials. But how deep it was, we do not know. It would depend on the depth of Job's response at that point in time in Job 42:5-6, and how he nurtured his life subsequently. The fact that Ezekiel 14:14 held Job up as a man of righteousness suggests that Job continued to fare well. The way the apostle James refers to Job as a positive example of the outcome of the Lord's dealings is consistent with this picture (Jas. 5:10-11). The outcome of Job's story is a happy one and we can rejoice in it.

Reflection: God's way of dealing with us

In the previous message, I pointed out a lesson we can learn from the way God dealt with Job. I will now elaborate on it. Often, we

prefer to be dealt with gently, gradually and leniently rather than strictly and firmly, whether directly by the Lord or indirectly through His servants. But this is not necessarily more helpful for us. When we falter and are not dealt with firmly, it may be because we are not in a position to receive it properly due to the lack of qualities within us. So, the Lord may not deal with us in that way even though it is better for us if we are able to take it and respond well. Let us therefore not always prefer to be treated gently and leniently.

When God wants to bring out the best in a person's life, He may subject him to strict discipline. Any slight deviation or slackening may be quickly pointed out or dealt with. But God may not point it out to those who are lax and complacent.

However, I am not suggesting that this is the only way to understand God's dealing and we should not take it as a licence to treat others strictly and harshly, saying that it is good for them. There is certainly a place for gentleness in the way we treat others just as God often treats us and deals with us gently.

Likewise, let us also not think that when the Lord deals with us strictly and severely, it must be because we have good qualities within. It could be because of our stubbornness that God has to resort to this way of dealing with us before we will pay heed.

God deals with us in different ways and for different reasons. Let us therefore learn to be discerning and not conclude wrongly one way or another.

3. Appreciating the meaning of the episode

The third issue to consider is the appreciation of the meaning of the whole episode. Some people who read the Book of Job may have the sentiments that this book is just a terrible record of intense suffering. Questions may arise in their minds: Why did God allow Job to suffer so much? Why did God allow Satan to afflict Job so severely? Was Job a mere, helpless object in a contest between God and Satan? Is there any good coming out of this episode?

To answer these questions, we need to first see very clearly that it was definitely not a game between two powerful beings. Very significant issues were involved. God in His sovereignty and wisdom permitted Satan to afflict Job as part of the outworking and fulfilment

of His ultimate purpose and intentions for Job.

God had dual aims in allowing Satan to test Job: Firstly, it was *because of His love for Job and concern for his ultimate well-being*. Secondly, it was related to *the establishment of His eternal kingdom*.

Comparison with Joseph

We can compare what happened to Job with what happened to Joseph who suffered at the hands of his brothers. There is a similar principle in operation.

Genesis 50:18-20

18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?"

20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

Out of jealousy and with evil intent, Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt. Although God had allowed it, His intentions were different. He meant good and He did bring about good, that is, to preserve the lives of many people during the famine. The adverse circumstances that God allowed Joseph to go through as a result of his brothers' negative conduct were also helpful for Joseph's learning and development and to equip him for the role that God intended him to fulfill as ruler over Egypt.

Similarly, God, while allowing Satan a certain measure of power to operate, intends to bring good out of the evil design and intentions of the evil one.

However, it is important to take note that although God intends good to come out of such situations, the outcome may not always be good. *Rather than being a mere, helpless object, man's response and the way he exercises his choice (with God's enabling) are crucial to the outcome*. And often, the outcome will affect not only the life of the one concerned, but also the lives of others and God's eternal kingdom.

Examples of the apostle Paul and King Saul

Let us look at the apostle Paul and his response when he was severely afflicted, buffeted, harassed and opposed by the powers of darkness. He writes in Ephesians 6:12 that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against... the spiritual forces of wickedness”. While God had allowed Satan to operate with evil intent, His intentions for Paul were good. On Paul’s part, he responded well and constantly exercised his will to choose God’s ways. He was able to testify near the end of his life that he had fought the good fight and that a crown of righteousness awaited him. The positive significance of Paul’s response extended far beyond himself; he contributed significantly to the building of God’s kingdom.

On the other hand, King Saul, as king of Israel, was in a favourable position to do good and to positively affect many lives. Instead, he gave room for the powers of darkness to work in his life, and became an ugly, negative and destructive person who committed many evil deeds.

What, then, should be the proper perspective towards Satan at work and trials and difficulties that we go through? The apostle Paul puts it very beautifully in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

In this passage, Paul tells us that when we encounter trials, we need not lose heart. If our attitude is right and we respond well, such trials would result in our inner man “being renewed day by day” and the outcome will be an “eternal weight of glory”. The glory of the outcome would make the difficulties we go through seem like

“momentary, light affliction”. The “eternal weight of glory” or positive outcome that can come about is so much more significant that Paul uses the unusual superlative expression “far beyond all comparison”.

However, such a frame of mind and perspective as we go through trials and difficulties is possible only if we learn how to perceive the issues of life from the eternal perspective (v. 18).

The meaning of what Job went through

Coming back to Job, what is the meaning of this episode in his life? I will summarise them in the following main points:

a. Man can have genuine moral qualities

Through this episode, God is demonstrating an area of truth vital to the fulfilment of His eternal purposes for man. That is, it is feasible for man, in spite of his weaknesses and frailties, to develop genuine moral qualities and to love God and truth independent and regardless of circumstances and maintain them in the midst of adverse circumstances. Job vindicated God’s confidence that this is feasible for man.

When Satan issued the challenge to God, he was questioning the very foundation of God’s kingdom and the fulfilment of God’s purpose for man, because if man has only superficial reverence for God and love for righteousness, there would be no real basis for the fulfilment of God’s purposes and the outworking of His kingdom.

For God’s kingdom to flourish, it requires genuine moral qualities, true reverence for God and true love for one another. It must not be merely because of material advantages and the comforts of life that we worship God and obey His commandments. The apostle Paul puts it this way: the kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

b. God’s purposes in suffering are meaningful

In allowing Job to go through the fiery trials, God intended Job to attain to a higher quality of character, faith and relationship with God. This took place through an exposure of the deficiencies in

Job, thus allowing Job to address them and take corrective measures. Job emerged from the trials with a higher quality of humility and a better posture of worship and submission to God. He might also have learned the importance of going through situations of life focusing on God rather than being overly conscious of the circumstances and difficulties.

Whether or not Job had any understanding of God's intention, in the midst of his suffering and stumbling, he did utter words of truth:

Job 23:10

"But He knows the way I take;

When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Job affirmed that he would emerge a better person through the testing that he was going through. While Job's suffering was temporary, the positive development of his being and the quality of his relationship with God were not only meaningful while on earth, but had eternal significance.

c. Greater effectiveness in service

The positive development in Job's being and character and in his faith would not only have benefited himself, but would also have resulted in a more effective testimony and positive impact on the lives of others for the remaining years of his life. Job 42:16-17 tells us that he lived another 140 years, and died "an old man and full of days":

Job 42:16-17

16 After this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations.

17 And Job died, an old man and full of days.

The trials and testing would have helped him relate with others and minister to them with greater understanding and deeper humility. This would likely have taken place, given the lesson on humility that Job himself had to learn, having been despised, rejected, mocked,

misunderstood, and having experienced perplexity, the loss of property and loved ones, and suffering severe bodily pains. Having gone through such experiences, he would be in a better position to understand the suffering of others.

Even his experience of failure and his subsequent repentance would have helped him to be more understanding towards others who fail. If Job's weaknesses had not been exposed, if his life had been plain sailing, it would have been more difficult for him to empathise with human frailties and failures. Besides, he could be under the false notion that he did not have those deficiencies. That would be a wrong understanding of himself. Thus it was helpful that Job's deficiencies were exposed.

However, it does not mean that we have to experience failures to understand and empathise with others. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life but He is understanding towards us, with all our failures and deficiencies. But for many, the experience of failures is helpful. We become more understanding towards others who fail, yet without condoning their wrongdoing or sin just as God did not condone Job's wrongdoing but dealt with it definitely. Job had to repent so that he could continue on well and enjoy the blessings of God.

As we go through trials, the critical issue is to go through them well and with good attitudes. If this is so, the trials can be rather helpful. Through them, the weaknesses in our lives are often exposed and dealt with. Our lives will then be developed and purified and we will be more equipped for ministry. Positive qualities already present could also be deepened and strengthened.

d. Job's contemporaries could benefit from Job's experience

Job's three friends and all who knew or subsequently heard of what he had gone through could also learn much from his experience.

e. Job's story benefits Christians through the centuries

Through the centuries, readers of the Scriptures can benefit much from the record of Job's story. That's the chief objective of considering these issues with you in this book.

Together with what has been covered in the other messages, one

important lesson we can learn from the story of Job, which is in line with the words of assurance of the apostle Paul in Romans 8:28, is this:

Whatever may happen to us, however difficult the circumstances and the afflictions of the powers of darkness, however improper and unfair the treatment by men, we can be assured of meaning in what we are going through and positive outcome for our lives as long as we continue to love God and persevere in faith.

f. God was glorified through this episode

This is a corollary to point (a). The whole episode that Job went through glorified God. The way God dealt with Satan's challenges and the way He dealt with Job manifested His wisdom and vindicated His purpose in the creation of man. Satan might have cast insinuations on Job's character and faith and sneered at God's purposes, yet through Job, God has shown that His purposes for man are not a futile dream. In the context of all the frailties and weaknesses of man, it is possible for him to genuinely worship and love God, and truly live a life of truth and righteousness.

It will come to pass that there will be moral beings with positive moral and spiritual qualities, who freely choose to love and worship God, and love one another in truth and purity, now and in eternity.

g. This episode manifests God's sovereignty

This episode underlines the truth that God is on the throne and whatever takes place, including the work of the powers of darkness, can only be within the framework of what God allows. Because God is perfect and loving, we know we can have true security. We need not be anxious or fearful as long as our hearts, our will, our direction and our longings are aligned with His. We are safe in Him; our well-being and security are assured.

The story of Job, instead of giving us a feeling of helplessness and sadness, is a story that should lift our hearts and spirits and give us deep confidence in God and in life, knowing who God is and His intentions for our lives.

Concluding remarks

Having seen the experience of Job, let us reflect on the following questions. Do we have the right perspective towards suffering and pain? Are we willing for our deficiencies to be exposed? Are we willing to be corrected and to repent? Do we purpose in our hearts to vindicate God's intentions for our lives, not allowing the evil one to triumph over us, but instead overcoming his evil designs?

Let us co-operate with God to bring about the good that He intends in our lives and through us, in the lives of others. If there are areas in our lives that are hindering God's working or that are open to the manipulation of the powers of darkness, let us sort them out before God and allow Him to deal with them so that we may be purified.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Was Satan triumphant in his challenge to God concerning Job? Elaborate.
2. Was God satisfied with how Job went through the testing and with the outcome? Elaborate.
3. What is the meaning of the whole episode? Why did God allow Job to go through so much pain and suffering and why did He allow Satan to afflict Job so severely?

Understanding the State of a Person and How He is Faring



Very often, when asked the question, “How are you?” or “How are you getting on?”, if our circumstances are comfortable and pleasant, we would answer, “I am fine”. On the other hand, if our circumstances are adverse and we are in pain and suffering, we would answer, “Not good. Terrible.”

Is this how we should view ourselves or other people? Why do we tend to respond in this way? What is the proper response to questions like these?

As I was thinking about these questions, I was reminded of an amusing incident. A Christian brother once asked another, “How are you?” Without much hesitation, the reply came, “It is *well with my soul*.” When the first believer heard this unexpected reply, he thought it was a rather strange answer.

Although the reply was unexpected and sounded awkward, it is in fact more meaningful than the usual replies we receive because the second believer focused on what really counts—the state of his inner being rather than the outward circumstances.

In this eighth and final message, I will highlight some lessons we can learn from the story of Job pertaining to understanding the state of a person and how he is faring. I shall consider them in the following 12 points:

1. A person's circumstances do not determine how he fares

The circumstances that Job was in do not tell us how he was faring, or whether God was pleased with him and approved of his life at that point in time.

When Job was severely afflicted, his friends and others around him believed that he must have done something wrong, and that he was faring badly. They were overly influenced by the adverse circumstances that came upon him. Job himself was also unduly disturbed by his afflictions.

Likewise, we are often overly influenced by considerations of outward circumstances in understanding how a person is faring. For example, when the person's life is plain sailing and his circumstances are favourable, we tend to think that he is faring well. On the other hand, when the person is assailed by many difficulties and afflictions, we tend to regard him as not faring well.

But the truth of the matter is that it is not the circumstances of a person that determine how he is faring but how he is responding. This leads me to the second point.

2. It is what goes on within a person that counts

What counts is what went on within Job, including his heart, attitude and response before and during the trials. I said "before" the trials because it is also relevant to know what was within him then. What we should look for is the quality of his relationship with God, the kind of love he had for God, his faith and obedience towards God, and how God viewed him. These are the real issues rather than what came upon him.

In other words, the reality within a person as he goes through the circumstances is what counts rather than the circumstances themselves. We should also take care not to look merely at his outward conduct and response; otherwise we may have an inaccurate picture of the reality, unless the outward response reflects the inner reality. This leads me to the third point.

3. A change in outward manifestations does not mean there is an inward change

The inward state of a person may be basically the same, but outwardly it may manifest itself in different forms and may appear rather different to other people in the many dynamic circumstances of life.

For example, even if the inward state of Job were not very different before and during the trials, outwardly we may see great variations in his conduct during the different periods because of the severity of the afflictions that came upon him. During the trials, we see that Job complained and made improper remarks about God. However, this may not be due to a significant change in Job's inward state during the trials. It is likely that there existed deficiencies within him before the trials, but they were not manifested until the trials came upon him. If we do not appreciate the nature and intensity of the difficulties that Job went through and the meaning of his response, his outward conduct may give the impression that he was faring very badly and that his inward state had deteriorated considerably.

On the other hand, we should also not conclude that Job's inward state was exactly the same before and during the trials. It could be different, depending on how Job went through the situations, what he focused on, and how he chose at that point in time.

4. Intense trials can be helpful experiences

Many would regard intense sufferings and trials as very bad experiences. Many people reading the Book of Job would tend to have the feeling that Job went through a terrible time. But should we view such situations of life as very bad experiences? In reality, what Job went through was rather helpful, and God intended the trials to have positive results for Job himself and as opportunities for him to be a good testimony. James 5:11 seems to be speaking of God's intentions for Job through the trials.

James 5:11

We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

James is referring to people who go through trials and sufferings well and are blessed. He highlights the example of Job and says, "You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome..." In the margin of the New American Standard Bible it is noted that "outcome of the Lord's dealings" literally means "end of the Lord". The Greek word translated here as "outcome" can also have the meaning "goal", that is, what James is saying here can also have the meaning "goal of the Lord". In allowing Job to go through various trials, God had a goal in mind, one that is consistent with His compassion and mercy. God was not merely letting Job go through a difficult time, but rather, He intended it for his good. However, if Job had responded poorly, God's good intentions would not have been realised.

Amid the trials and intense sufferings, Job did falter. But he did not go downhill all the way. He repented, learned from the experience and emerged a better person. Of course, it would have been better had he not faltered, but all things considered, the whole episode did not turn out detrimental to his life. And the summary of the apostle James on the outcome of the Lord's dealings with Job was that he was counted amongst those who endured and were blessed. He is an example of one to whom God showed compassion and mercy during times of trials and testing.

Thus it is important that we go through difficult situations well. They need not be a bad experience for us as God intends them for our good. Even if we do falter, it does not mean we will emerge poorer. If we repent, we can still learn precious lessons. Despite our weaknesses and failures, we know that we can still choose to respond well to God and be determined to be faithful to Him from that point on. This is a strong encouragement to us in our journey of faith.

Man's tendency is to focus on the outward circumstances and to view afflictions as bad experiences. This should not be the way we view life. Instead, we should be more concerned, whether for ourselves or for other people, with the inward being or the ultimate well-being of the person. If this is our focus, we will not conclude wrongly when we see someone going through suffering. Instead,

we will be concerned about how he is going through it and what it means to his life in the ultimate sense, that is, in his inward being. This is how we should be looking at life's situations and this is what God is really concerned about. This leads me to the next point.

5. Do not be unduly bothered by circumstances we go through

I say "unduly bothered" because it does not mean that we ignore the circumstances. Yet we should not be preoccupied with them even if they are difficult and trying and seem to "hit" us from different directions.

How we go through situations is more important than what we go through. This is what we should concentrate on rather than allowing ourselves to be unduly disturbed by the difficult circumstances. However, we should ensure that what we go through is what God sees as appropriate for us. We must not venture into or remain in a situation that God does not desire us to be in.

For example, because of lack of wisdom, we might venture into a dangerous or unhealthy situation. If this were the case, it would be wrong to think that it is all right so long as we concentrate on how we go through it.

This is something we need to be prayerful about. Is the situation we are in one that the Lord wants us to be in? If it is, we should concentrate on going through it well; if it is not, we should come out of it.

Or, to put it in another form, *our well-being does not hinge on whether the situation or the circumstance we are in is easy or difficult, but on how well we go through it, so long as it is one that God desires us to be in.* This requires us to maintain good attitudes, look to the Lord for wisdom, guidance and enabling, and learn well what the Lord desires to teach us.

We should not waste our energy lamenting or allow ourselves to be weighed down and be discouraged by difficult circumstances. We should instead continually affirm in our hearts that God is sovereign and that He loves us and cares for us. Whatever the outward

appearance and circumstance may be, God will cause all things to work together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). As we seek to be faithful to God, we can affirm this truth, take heart and carry on with a positive attitude.

6. God considers all relevant factors when assessing how we fare

In addition, it is also helpful for us to recognise that God gives allowance and He weighs and views us bearing in mind how difficult our circumstances are. Therefore, when we falter in the midst of difficulties, it does not necessarily mean that we are faring poorly. Neither should we think that if the situation were easier we would fare better.

We see this principle in operation in Job's life: that God still deeply appreciated him even though he faltered because, in view of the intensity of the trials, his failure was understandable though not excused. It is therefore inaccurate to conclude that he was in a bad spiritual state during the trials. In fact, his spiritual condition was better than that of those who despised, rejected and mocked him, and in comparison, many in similar straits would not have fared as well as him. This principle helps us understand why James referred to Job as an example of "those blessed who endured" despite his having faltered during the trials.

In our understanding of ourselves and of others, *we often deduce wrongly because we fail to bear in mind the many factors in operation.* And it is the operation of this principle that explains why two persons may outwardly appear to be faring similarly when in reality there is a significant difference in the quality of their lives and how they are faring. The circumstances they are in and the pressures upon them may be very different. The one who appears to be faring worse may in reality be faring better because his circumstances are more difficult. And sometimes the pressures upon a person may not be obvious or easily recognisable. Thus, we should learn to be slow to conclude.

7. Although the circumstances in a person's life do not determine how he fares, they are not irrelevant

Understanding the circumstances a person is going through and why they are taking place can help us understand his state and how he is faring. Let me cite a few examples:

a. Expression of God's displeasure

Calamities that come upon a person may be an expression of God's displeasure with sins in his life or because of his refusal to repent. It is thus an expression of God's disciplining hand.

b. Exposure of weaknesses in our lives

On other occasions, God may allow afflictions or certain circumstances to come a person's way because of weaknesses in his life that the Lord desires to expose so that corrective measures can be taken.

c. For positive development

But at times it may not be negative features that the Lord is dealing with, but more that the Lord desires positive development in the person's life. In such a situation, the Lord may highlight certain areas in his life in a more obvious manner so that he can work hard at them.

d. Learning various things

It could also be that the Lord desires to teach us various things—understanding ourselves, developing our character, understanding people or the realities in the spiritual realm, that is, about God Himself, the principles in the spiritual realm, the powers of darkness, how they operate and how we can fight the good fight.

Failing to learn

If we are careless, we may not learn what God intends for us. We may go through various situations without much reflection or seeking the Lord or understanding what we can learn. For example, the Lord may allow the powers of darkness to afflict us so that we can

understand their mode of operation, how to resist them and how to have a clearer understanding of the realities in the spiritual realm. However, if we are not prayerful and reflective, we may not realise that He desires to teach us these lessons in order that we may be properly equipped to be effective soldiers in God's army. So even if we look to the Lord for strength and grace to go through the situation, we may still fail to learn about the realities in the spiritual realm, spiritual warfare and how to fight the good fight of faith.

This is a very important point to take note of, that is, *the Lord desires to teach us much through life's experiences*, first for our own personal development, and then to be effective servants of the Lord. If we are walking with the Lord, we can view these situations as part of *His training programme* for us.

Thus, apart from maintaining healthy attitudes of not murmuring and of looking to the Lord for grace and strength, we should seek to understand what the Lord desires to teach us and what we can learn from the situations of life, including gaining a better understanding of ourselves and other people.

Different levels of learning

In trying to understand the meaning of what a person is going through and how he is faring, we should be slow to conclude, even if we can discern God's disciplining hand on his life. The reason is that there can be different levels of learning and development in different people's lives even for similar areas of truth.

For example, God may discipline a person in a particular area while He may appear to approve of it in the life of another. The second person may appear to be faring better than the first person in that area. In reality, the opposite may be true. The reason for this seeming incongruity is the difference in God's expectations of the two persons. The first person has attained a higher level of maturity and God expects more of him and does not accept the way he has been conducting himself in that area. But for the one who seems to be faring better, in reality he is not but God accepts his conduct at that point in time because of his lower level of maturity.

Our understanding of this area can help us appreciate God's

stern rebuke of Job at the end of the episode and, at the same time, His commendation of him. The apparent discrepancy can be partially explained by the fact that in comparison with his three friends, Job was at a higher level of spiritual maturity and was faring better than them and so God commended him. However, God also rebuked Job sternly because He expected more from Job.

8. Some perplexing situations cannot be properly understood unless God enlightens

In some perplexing situations especially those involving the spiritual realm, it is difficult to properly understand the meaning of what a person is going through unless God enlightens and reveals. For example, neither Job nor those around him understood the meaning of his suffering because they could not perceive what was happening in the spiritual realm. And they could not unless God revealed it to them. How could they when apparently they did not even know the existence of Satan? When they tried to reason out with their limited knowledge, wrong conclusions easily resulted. This was true not only of Job's three friends; even Job himself concluded wrongly about the meaning of his trials.

Thus, there are a few points for us to bear in mind:

- It is important that we seek to understand what is happening in the spiritual realm.
- We need to seek God's revelation and wisdom and not focus on the outward, superficial aspects of what is happening.
- At times, due to our own failure, we do not understand the meaning of perplexing occurrences. But at times, God in His wisdom chooses not to reveal to us at that point in time, or even later on.
- We must be careful not to draw wrong conclusions based on insufficient knowledge.

9. It is easy to draw wrong conclusions

Even Job, who had an unusually high degree of godliness, could be so seriously misunderstood, despised and mocked by those around

him. They concluded that he was a terrible sinner when they saw him being sorely afflicted. They held this view despite the fact that Job had lived many years prior to this “dark period” in his life, and those around him would have witnessed the life he lived, the values he held, and how God greatly blessed him. In fact, they used to hold Job in high regard before the trials came upon him.

Let us therefore be on our guard, for we may make the same grave mistake of wrongly concluding about others especially in situations that are difficult to understand or when there are indications that complex underlying issues are involved. We must be careful not to jump to conclusions or be over-confident in our assessment of a person, his state and the meaning of what he is going through. We must be prudent with our comments about the person, either to others or to the person directly, as well as be careful with the counsel we may give. To wrong a person can be a serious matter. We should be prayerful in trying to understand what is going on and what approach we should take. At times, the best approach may be to keep silent or to just say some words of encouragement.

But having said this, it is helpful to note that not every situation of life is complex and difficult to understand. There are many situations that are obvious to those who are perceptive and prayerful. Let us therefore not be overcome by a sense of uncertainty and be paralysed into passivity for fear of making a wrong assessment of a situation or a person. If we are, we will become ineffective for the Lord.

10. We need to develop deep and genuine qualities within

Having considered at length what Job had gone through, and the issue of appearance and reality, we must recognise the importance of developing deep and genuine qualities within and not be content with an outward appearance of having fared well.

Some appear to fare well because they are not facing significant adversities. Others appear to be getting on fine because they are avoiding hard and uncomfortable issues of life and in avoiding them, they compromise in the way they live their lives. They steer themselves away from the narrow path that God desires them to walk because

they fear the pressures that might come upon them. Sadly, this is common among believers.

Our ultimate concern should not be to appear to fare well, but to ensure that genuine and deep qualities are being formed within us. If our attitudes are good and our hearts are earnest in seeking the Lord, even when we fail, He will help us to learn and grow in the process. We should therefore face the issues of life honestly instead of avoiding them or compromising the truth. Otherwise, the Lord will be displeased with us for not being true to Him and we will fail to live and learn as true children of God.

This is relevant at every stage of our lives. The basis for true quality service to God lies in the development of genuine qualities within. Without true qualities within, our service may appear to be good, but in reality, lacks real worth. Unless these deep qualities are formed within us, we will be incapable of attaining to the quality of being that God intends for us and to the depth of relationship that God desires us to have with Him and with one another, which is important not only for now but also for eternity.

11. Appearance can be similar to or different from reality

The story of Job illustrates that appearance can be similar to as well as different from reality. Before and after the trials, Job appeared to be faring well and many considered him to be so and he was. Thus, appearance and reality were similar during these two phases of his life.

However, during the trials, those around Job concluded that he was in a bad state because of the calamities that befell him. But they were wrong in that the calamities did not come upon him because he was in a bad state or that God was displeased with him. On the contrary, it was because God appreciated him that He allowed Satan to afflict him in that way. We've seen that even in relation to how Job conducted himself during the trials, though he did falter, taken as a whole, he was in a better state and faring better than those around him. But others concluded wrongly because they were merely looking at the outward appearance of things. Thus, during this phase of his life, the reality was rather different from the outward appearance of things.

12. Not sensing God's presence does not mean that God is absent

Although Job did not sense God's presence and fellowship during the trials, God did not leave him to fend for himself. It might have appeared that way to Job. He tried to reach out to God, but felt He could not be found. In fact, as we have seen, Job thought God was against him, that he was God's target and that the afflictions of the evil one were arrows of God that came upon him (Job 7:20; 6:4).

Although he could not recognise God's presence and fellowship, in reality, God was sovereignly watching over him and was deeply concerned for him and his well-being and did not allow the evil one to go beyond what He had permitted. God deeply loved Job and was primarily concerned about his moral and spiritual development, but Job was not conscious of it.

When we go through life's situations, we should be primarily concerned about our inward state, our attitudes, and whether we are faithful to God. If our attitudes are good, even when God does not seem to be near, or does not answer our prayers the way we expect, we can be sure that He is deeply concerned for us as His children and is sovereignly watching over us, caring and providing for us, and ensuring that there will always be a way for us to respond triumphantly in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever our feelings and the outward appearance of things, we must act on the basis of our knowledge of who God is, His sovereignty, His love, His concern for us and His intentions for our lives.

We should take pains to reflect on scriptural truths such that they become living truths and not mere words from the pages of a book. We need to ask the Spirit of God to make them real to us. We should exercise faith in God, in what is recorded in the Scriptures, and in what He has promised, rather than be subjective or allow ourselves to be adversely affected by the outward appearance of things that is contrary to reality. This is especially important during times of difficulty and perplexity.

Conclusion

In this concluding message, we have reflected on lessons we can learn from Job's experiences on the subject of *Appearance and Reality*

and in particular about understanding the state of a person and how he is faring.

Let us now spend some time to reflect over our lives. Are we preoccupied with the externals or are we concerned about the ultimate realities in our lives, in the lives of others and in the kingdom of God? Do we hastily conclude based on appearance? Do we know how to look to the Lord to perceive the realities in the spiritual realm concerning ourselves and others and whatever the Lord may desire to teach us through the situations we go through? Let us be deeply concerned with developing genuine and deep qualities within and not be content to simply appear to fare well.

Let us ask the Spirit of God to search our hearts to enable us to recognise our true state, our deficiencies and the lessons He desires to teach us. We need to learn these lessons well. Let us also confess our wrongdoings and weaknesses to the Lord that He may wash away our sins and help us overcome our weaknesses.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What are the lessons we can learn from the story of Job concerning understanding the state of a person and how he is faring?
2. What can we learn with regards to the way God's children should view and approach the trials of life?