

ONE



Loss and Disorientation

*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
blessed be the name of the Lord.*

Job 1:21

It could have happened this way . . .

Lifting her face for the warm breeze to caress, Mrs. Job hummed. *What a lovely day! Just the kind that makes me feel God is smiling upon me.*

The river irrigation system had made it possible for good crops this year, and her husband's farms had done well. The livestock flourished. Her husband sat in the city gates doing government work, as he did every day when he wasn't checking on farms or animals. At this very moment, their ten children feasted at their eldest son's home. Like Mrs. Job, her friends reveled in the comfort of their lives. Families were cared for, servants supervised and busy, and benevolent duties overseen.

As Mrs. Job plied her needle through the fabric and a delicate

embroidery design began to emerge, she pondered that tonight it would be only her and her husband for dinner. Since their ten children were all at her eldest son's home, perhaps she and Job could have a quiet, intimate evening together. She smiled softly.

Job sat at the city gates, an elder who daily judged the affairs of men. Mrs. Job's chest swelled with pride. How fortunate she had been to marry such an influential man! Job was known all over the region for his wisdom, righteousness, and wealth. He could have looked higher for a bride, but he chose her!

And how he loves the children! What father rises early to offer sacrifices for the souls of his children? I am so privileged.

The filmy draperies softly swayed with the gentle wind through the covered terrace where Mrs. Job sat contented. The day was warm, but here she could rest with her cloth and needle and let down her veil. She pushed her fingers through her hair to loosen it slightly.

Right then, Job staggered into the house, looking like a wild man. His clothing was torn. His bare head had been shaven. What was this?

"Husband!" she cried as she dropped the embroidery and ran to him. "What happened?"

Tears poured from his reddened eyes, and he gathered her close. "Oh, my dear," he moaned. "They are gone! Everything is gone! The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" His arms cradled her gently, and he rested his chin upon her head as quiet sobs shook his frame.

Alarm stabbed at Mrs. Job's heart. She struggled to lean back and see his face.

"What are you saying? What do you mean? What is gone? What has the Lord taken away?"

A great shudder went through Job, and a sigh came from deep within him.

"Come, sit down." He led her to a bench.

“What?” she demanded.

He took her hands in his. “My dear,” he began—and stopped. Again he opened his mouth as if to speak, but then shut it and shook his head.

As she waited, tension built between her shoulder blades. Her back grew stiff as she sat straighter. She stared into his ashen face and saw new lines.

“Today the sun ceases to shine upon us. Messengers have come to me one by one with tales of calamities. The Sabians raided our livestock and killed our servants. What animals left were burned to death by a mysterious fire from heaven. While he was still speaking, another messenger said the Chaldeans formed bands and stole our camels and goods and killed those servants too. Each escaped alone to tell me.” Job released one of her hands to run his own across his eyes and grabbed the edge of his tunic to wipe his face.

Mrs. Job froze in dread. *No. This couldn't have happened—all in one day?*

“Wife,” he said as he took her hand in his again, “there is more.”

She jumped up and screamed. “No! No, not more!” She covered her face with her hands.

“While our children dined in our eldest son's home today,” he hesitated and gulped, “suddenly a great wind came across the four corners of the house and—it fell on them.” He wiped his eyes again, then keened, “They were all killed. Only one servant escaped to tell us.”

Job stood in time to catch his sobbing wife in his arms.



Meanwhile, in the book of Job . . .

A challenge brought it on. Who would have thought it?

As the biblical story of Job opens, we see God on His throne and the angels around Him. Evidently the devil, the adversary known as Satan, could saunter in and present himself haughtily before God.

“So, where have you come from?” God asks Satan.

I imagine the devil leaning arrogantly against a pillar, with his arms crossed. “I’ve been wandering around the earth, patrolling.”

“Have you seen my servant Job?” God asks, smiling, as He considers this faithful friend on earth. Job trusts God, and that pleases Him. “There is none like him on all the earth, blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil.”

“Oh yeah, sure,” says the devil arrogantly, still propped by the pillar. “You’ve built this hedge around him, and I can’t even get close to him. You let me at him, and he’ll curse You to Your face.”

God replies to Satan, “All right, then. Go ahead and touch all he has, but do not touch his person.”

Picture the speed with which the head demon straightens up, turns with military precision, and marches away to “touch” God’s prize. What excitement must drive him to do his dirty work!

This brings us to the day in which the Job couple lost everything. The Scriptures describe Job rising to his feet, tearing his robe, and shaving his head in grief. Then he fell to the ground to worship God.

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,” he cried. “And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

And in all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (Job 1:6–12).

Understanding Disorientation and Transition

Loss. It’s hard to bear.

How long does it take for disasters like accidents, tornadoes,

floods, fires, mudslides, illness, or—death—to happen? In only a moment, life changes forever. Maybe it's a lingering loss, but it brings bewilderment with it.

We plan our lives. We study to enter a career we believe will bring us satisfaction, renown, and success. We start families we hope will make us proud. Then events and our loved ones disappoint us. A life-changing disaster hits us, and we don't know what to do with that.

Perhaps our sorrow becomes a rage that keeps us locked into a place in time. We are hurt, angry, and unable to function as we assimilate what a horrible life circumstance has happened to us. Possibly we are desperate and afraid. How do we deal with perplexing and swirling emotions and questions?

I can relate to Mrs. Job's anger at God in allowing her world to crumble around her. I had always dreamed of living a perfect life. My spouse would be a romantic hero to me and a wise sage to our many obedient children.

My dream crumbled early on when my husband became addicted to prescription drugs, and other mental issues began to surface. At times, I would go off alone just to yell at God. He had known my dreams—why did He allow this kind of life? I lived neglected and rejected. My husband could not support the family in long-term employment, so I became the breadwinner.

Invariably, my anger would burn, and fear stood up front and center. *What will happen to us?* I would wonder. Then I would plot and plan and try to fix everything myself. After all, I had to hold it all together; there was no one else.

I suspect Mrs. Job had no need to grow her spiritual roots very deeply. She was married to a kind man—a pillar of the community, and wealthy. In her culture, she went from her father's house to her husband's house. Maybe she never thought about the trials of others as she planned a sumptuous wedding feast that probably would have included the cream of the society in which she lived.

She led a privileged life. Giving to those not as prosperous as herself might have been ingrained as the right thing for the upper classes to do. She may have given alms to the poor, but perhaps the troubles of the unfortunate did not overly concern her.

She would have set about making a home for a prominent man who sat in the seat of the powerful in the city. She bore him ten children. For a woman, that was a crowning feat. It made her important too. She may have enjoyed her social position, leaving the spiritual development to her husband.

Then the losses struck, and she had no underpinning to sustain her. She may have had no idea what she should do next.

In contrast, though Job did not understand, he decided to trust that God knew why these misfortunes had befallen him. It seemed that God trusted Job to remain a steadfast witness no matter the provocation.

Living with adversity is complicated. Often, we walk stoically through life, putting on a brave front and pretending we don't need anyone's help. When something goes wrong, we fake it, because we think we can handle it. We don't think clearly. If asked, we may deny anything is wrong. Perhaps we fool ourselves by denial. This way, we can go for some time before we trip over the obvious. We might cover our eyes and ears as we sob, like Mrs. Job, or we might cry out our grief before God and move forward into it like Job.

Not every loss or change comes through trauma. Sometimes it's a job switch or a move to a new home or a new neighborhood. It could be something seemingly simple, but it knocks us off our balance, and we are disoriented. Life is not what it was before. We wonder what's next.

As we move into our "new normal," it's okay to be distracted and confused. It is temporary. There is no need to try to operate as usual. Disorientation is a shock absorber for our souls. It cushions us from harsh realities until we are ready to face them. I believe this

is one of God's tender mercies to keep us in a safe place until we are ready to move into the next phase of life.

Until then, this is a time to wait. Pastor Rod Cosgrove, at Garland Alliance Church in Spokane, Washington, preached about this one Sunday. He said, "Sometimes life puts us in a crisis where things have unexpectedly changed. Uncertain of what to do next, we often go back to what we've known before—a familiar place, a familiar person, or perhaps to a familiar community. We do this hoping it will maybe make things clearer, that we can figure out what happened and reassess where we stand in the hopes that we will eventually find our way through the unfamiliar place."¹ He went on to caution his hearers not to make hasty decisions in a moment of crisis. It might be best to wait for a while, and then ask God for clarification.

This event that crashed in on us may not be what we expected, but we have God's Word to tell us He is working out a solution for us. Paul wrote, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). God is shaping us for His purpose, and that takes time.

Disorientation can occur anywhere. All it takes is being out of place or out of our comfort zones. I had an opportunity to go to China some time ago. What an adventure! I was to meet the team I would join once I arrived. After nearly a year of planning and spinning details, I boarded an airplane alone, and with trepidation, for my first trip abroad. What if I missed something? What if I got lost? What if no one met me? What if . . .

I landed safely in Beijing after a twenty-plus-hour airplane ride. The night sky showed through the skylights of the terminal as weary travelers were all herded to customs. Somehow, I found my way through to the baggage carousel, only to discover that my baggage had not arrived with me. Tingles of fear radiated to my

fingertips. What should I do? It was nearly midnight, Beijing time. Everywhere I looked, signs were written in Chinese. The people around me spoke Chinese. How would I find help at that time of night? How could I find out about my luggage? The panic mounted and my heart pounded. I could even feel it in my temples.

I had never felt so helpless. I'm a take-charge kind of person, and "helpless" was not in my vocabulary.

I stood alone and isolated. *God, help me! I'm afraid! I can't function in this alien place!* Then I heard in my mind: *Calm down and think. I am here in China too. You are not alone.*

For the next hour, I struggled through the language barrier in the luggage claims office, filling out papers and arranging for the Beijing airport to keep my bag locked up for a week until I could return to claim it. When it arrived the next night, I would be across the country. With those arrangements made, I prayed my greeter would still be waiting for me. I sighed with relief when I saw her. Thank You, Lord.

Our God is with us. He promises to be with us in every circumstance. He is our comfort. When we call upon Him, He rushes to our side to comfort us.

The companion of disorientation is transition. A new normal. Most of us would not choose this way, but we find we have been thrust into it. How long will it last? Is what we feel typical? Can't we simply get over it and go back to what we were doing? Other people around us don't seem to go through this. Sometimes merely coming to the place of making the transition is confusing. What if we get stuck?

Transition is not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes it's a very good thing. Whichever it is, change is essential. Growth cannot happen without it. When disorientation hits, perhaps we are at a growth point. It could be a signal to change direction.

We realize we can't do what we did before. It doesn't work anymore. We must find new ways of living, of doing things.

Without losses that throw us into change, it's doubtful we would ever find our true potential. The mystery is that through the disorientation and the transition, we find roots of strength in God as He stretches and develops us into the creations He always meant for us to become.

Seth Godin has said that coming and going matter far more than what happens in the middle: "We mistakenly spend most of our time thinking about, working on and measuring the in-between parts, imagining that this is the meat of it, the important work. In fact, humans remember the transitions, because it's moments of change and possibility and trepidation that light us up."²

If waiting is good while experiencing disorientation, then what kinds of actions could we take in preparation for transition?

We stop motion.

We listen for His voice.

We draw on Scripture verses we may remember.

We deliberately calm our emotions.

We let Him draw us deeper into trusting Him when everything around us screams panic.

We let companions show us new paths ahead, instead of resisting their wisdom.

Then we move forward.

Living with the Mystery of God

Have you ever wondered what you could observe if the veil were lifted and you could glimpse beyond the here and now? I'm not sure I want to know what's in the future. How about you? What if we don't like it? It's possible we could see our efforts bring success. That would be welcome. It's also possible we might see disasters. Uh-oh.

Certainly, it would be our preference to understand the reasons why, but comprehending may not make events easier or harder to handle.

Only God knows all things. Perhaps that's for the best in the long run of life.

Who would want to know if there is a disaster looming? Then again, maybe we would mishandle successes if we knew what awaited us. Recognizing that God is sovereign allows for us to learn and grow unreservedly, even if we make mistakes.

How often do we take the time to contemplate mystery? It's amazing to think God identifies every star in the sky by name. Every star's exact location. And how long it took for its light to reach our gazes on earth. It's inviting to sit on a quiet beach in the refreshing evening coolness, to contemplate the vastness of the universe as the moon simmers on watery ripples.

"The heavens declare the glory of God . . . day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge" (Psalm 19:1–2).

The sun "rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat" (Psalm 19:5–6).

On that same beach, the daytime looks far different. The sunlit, translucent waves roll in on our toes in shades of blue, green, and white. The sky is still vast, but we can't look up without shading our eyes. The heat warms our skin. We can consider the many facets of the sun, described in the Scripture above, as racing across the sky above us. God put it there to sustain life.

But we are mostly in a hurry. We just want to get answers so we can move on. Our schedules demand it. Other times, the *why* is squeezed from our grieving hearts.

It's beyond us to understand the unfathomable depths of God. He is eternal, holy . . . other.

He is indiscernible from a human perspective. His depths are greater than we can plumb, even if we have eternity to try.

Human history is moving toward a culmination that God ordained from the beginning. What looks like chaos to us has an order to it that will be revealed at the right time.

It's okay not to have all knowledge.

But God doesn't leave us without hope. This eternal, holy, unfathomable God knows each one of us inside out. He loves us.

Sandy's Story

At 10:37 on Saturday morning, March 22, 2014, as neighbors went about their usual routines, a massive mudslide changed the Oso community in Washington State forever. Forty-three people were lost that day, and surviving members of those families still grieve.

Sandy lost her brother and his family, the youngest only four years old. Sandy remembers hearing the news Sunday morning while she was at church. She immediately tried to call her brother, but to no avail. As the news unfolded, a surreal horror settled over her.

"I remember those days seemed like slow motion. Waiting for news and watching it on TV and realizing, *This is my family!* It just couldn't be real."

Authorities requested relatives provide identifying marks. Sandy shared her brother's, and then she sat glued to the television as one body and then another were found. A week passed before rescuers uncovered her brother and his stepson.

"That was just like them. They did everything together," Sandy observed. As the news came, her mind fuzzed up and she couldn't quite absorb the truth. *This really happened*, she kept reminding herself.

Sandy, her husband Bill, and her sister Connie traveled to the site, but were not able to view it the first time. Family members were protected from seeing their loved ones extracted from mud and debris. But they did check in with the Red Cross at a staging area. Other organizations were there as well. They talked with FEMA workers.

The disaster disrupted all normal life. Fresh anguish rolled in waves as each family member was found; one here and one there over a period of several weeks.

During the second trip to the Oso site, Sandy and Bill met with FEMA workers, and two Billy Graham Rapid Response Team chaplains went with them to the site.

“My brother and sister-in-law had recently moved there not long before the mudslide. They were excited about their retirement cabin on the river. We hadn’t even gone over to see it yet, so I had no point of reference as I looked on the scene,” Sandy explained. That, too, was disorienting as she tried to place her family, in her mind, somewhere on the hill before the cataclysm.

The chaplains spent a lot of time with Sandy and Bill, listening. “At that time, it was so good to be with other Christians.”

Two or three people were still missing at that point, including Sandy’s four-year-old grandnephew. They prayed at the site.

“We tried to be mindful of the presence of Lord,” Sandy said. “The chaplains were like a protection around us. When we couldn’t function, they would ask the questions for us. We could depend on them to start prayer and take care of things. Everything was a blur.”

During the third trip over, Sandy and Bill learned their grandnephew had finally been found. “This was a blessing; he was our last one. Still, I can’t say there was closure—how can there ever be closure? And what does closure mean, anyway?”

A passage of Scripture kept popping up from different sources to give Sandy encouragement: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:3–5).

One evening, while Sandy watched TV, she saw a musician

playing music in a bar. He was playing for the Oso victims. When his interviewer asked him why, he said that as part of the community, he needed to help, to give back. So he did what he could: he played music and gave the donations to Oso families.

“I was struck with what he said. I asked myself, ‘What can I do?’ I thought then, *I can pray.*” A friend, who was herself a Billy Graham Rapid Response Team chaplain, introduced Sandy to the organization, and she went through the training. Since then, Sandy has served with the group in several states after major disasters. She is helping and giving back. She is now asking questions for stunned families who can't think during trauma.

“It's an honor and a privilege to come alongside people, be a presence for them, and listen to their stories. They need the same compassion that we needed in those initial stages of despair. I can pray for them as they grieve.”

Through participation in the chaplain program, Sandy can help others in their time of trauma, and she feels the presence of God.

“We have to stay focused and connected with God, or there is no abundant life. Jesus *is* the Abundant Life. I hear Him saying, *The closer you are to Me, the more life and peace you have.*”

God Knows the Whys

Have you considered that the Evil One may consider us as pawns in a challenge too? What an uncomfortable thought! Perhaps mystery is a good idea after all.

The truth is that human beings *are* hostages in a cosmic struggle. In the beginning, the Scriptures tell us, God made a perfect man and woman and placed them in a perfect world setting—a garden where they would lack nothing.

The adversary, the devil, then attempted to thwart God's perfect plan. He tempted the human beings who followed Him. Their fall from grace as they agreed with the devil resulted in a curse on

all humankind. But God made a provision in sending His Son, Jesus, to die on a cross to redeem us back to God. In His resurrection, Jesus once again opened a way for us to live with God forever in a perfect relationship. It's our choice, then, to be set free by the sacrifice of Jesus or to live in the bondage of the curse.

Salvation is being worked out on the earth until God's predetermined time frame. Through the instructions given to us in the Bible, we do spiritual warfare in an unseen arena.

We must be on our knees before God in prayer because we have an Enemy after our souls—one who wants us to ignore God and lead a self-absorbed life without Him.

I certainly don't want to be a pawn. I intend to stand strong with roots into the Spirit of God. How about you?

Another nugget of wisdom Pastor Rod passed on to us was this:

Don't lose heart.

It may seem like little is happening, or that the right thing isn't happening, but that's not entirely true.

God has plans for our lives. It's true that He brings wonderful good out of the bad things that happen.³

Hope is possible once we can leave the whys in God's hands. There is a freedom to move forward. In his book *The Healing Path*, Dan Allender said, "Hope is not naïve desire but a calculated risk that declares, whatever the loss, it is better than remaining where we were."⁴

What a relief to grasp that we are not alone in our catastrophes. God is always present with us and understands every blow that falls. His compassion is ceaseless, and His mercies are new for us every morning. He is closer than a cry away.

He works in places we don't see. While we may show a masked face to the world, God works in those depths we don't reveal to anyone—including ourselves! He follows His own plan, and the

results benefit everyone involved—even if it doesn't look so very good to us at the time.

It's not up to us to fix it.

Our part is to wait on answers in God's time.

To trust He will accomplish His purposes.

Precisely as He designs.

And pray.

Patty's Story

Touched as several friends experienced breast cancer, Patty felt God's call to do what she could to support them. She would listen, drive them to appointments, and make herself available as needed. She opened her home to her friend Diana, and for a year Patty served her until Diana passed away.

Then came the dreaded diagnosis—now applied to Patty. At first, shock overwhelmed her. After helping friends, Patty herself had contracted breast cancer. She knew only too well what could lie ahead. Rather than bringing life to a halt, Patty wanted to rush into “fixing it” as quickly as possible and get it behind her. “I wondered how this was going to affect me. Would people treat me differently?”

“I'll be there for you,” her son, Johnny, assured her; she would not be alone. Patty's friends who had gone before her and survived also rallied around her. This brought Patty to the place of transition.

With all the support, medical wisdom, and a game plan, Patty said, “I know God's got it!”

From the beginning, Patty says it was no accident she had always been called to support her friends in their fight against breast cancer. God knew she would need this experience. Patty's trust in God continued to grow as she moved through treatment.

Patty has moved into recovery. “I asked the ‘Why me?’ ques-

tion at first. But now I see. It's important to connect with people when you go through something like this. As I look back, I can see how God orchestrated everything to this point."

She is thankful to be cancer-free and blessed that she didn't have to go through chemo or radiation.

Patty leads a Life Group for her church. Her ladies thank her for her ministry of prayer among them. Mirroring the Old Testament prophet Samuel, Patty tries to hear what God says daily. She invites Him, "Speak, Lord; Your servant is listening."

"Something happens every day. God gives me opportunities to listen, then to go and do."

There are different ways to hear from God—possibly as many ways as there are people. God created us in His image. Patty quoted her pastor: "What does God sound like? Why, He often sounds like you!" His voice is easily recognizable by each person. He talks to us in ways that are already familiar to us.

God will always meet us at our point of need. He brings us confidence that He will never leave us nor forsake us, no matter how desperate our situation appears to us. He is present with us and always ready with hope, and He will be there on the other side of our trauma waiting for us. The light is ahead. We only need to keep walking forward.

Dealing with It

Life is not forever on this earth. We are left asking, "How am I going to deal with it?"

We have several options.

We can throw temper tantrums. Does it help? No. Does it make us feel better? No. Does it make the problem go away? No.

We can try to control our outcomes. But disasters will come along, and often they are not controllable by human beings.

There is a place for grieving, but don't wallow too long. Your spirit needs joy to balance grief for survival.

We can face it. Accept the reality. Maybe it will go away; maybe it won't. But if we mean to move forward in life, we must face those things we dislike or fear. We must deal with it.

We can go to our knees and surrender our lives to God. He is the only One with answers. He loves us like no other. He has the plan for our lives.

God's Plan

When we have surrendered our lives to God, we surrender our right to ourselves. We join His family. We join His team. He has a plan that He is busy working out for—big picture—His creation, humankind. We are part of that plan. We are not autonomous. Each of us is a strand woven into God's big-picture plan.

Bad things that happen aren't what God would want, because He is all good. Before the fall of man in the garden of Eden, God had a very different plan for us—one with love, companionship, and walking with Him in the cool of the day, face to face with Him. But with rebellion came disease and disasters.

The devil is *still* stomping around trying to steal from us, kill us, and destroy us.

In spite of the devil's tantrums, God's plans remain. He can use the catastrophes of our lives to bring about the changes in us to prepare us for the glorious eternity that is yet to come.

After the great flood disaster in which Noah obeyed God and built an ark, God placed a rainbow in the sky as a symbol of His assurance that He would not destroy humankind with a global flood again. After it rains, look at the rainbows arching the sky and remember that God's promises to us are true.

Yes, Dealing with It

Remember God loves us so much, He sent Jesus to give us eternal life.

He carefully plans for each one of us, even when we don't understand His strategy. We are His design and not our own.

Take each day as it comes with thanksgiving.

Take encouragement from reading His Word.

Reach out to community.

Accept help from community.

Trust Him with everything (even the ugly days!).

Believe God. It's our decision. Every time.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him. (Romans 15:13 NIV)

Meditation Questions

1. Can you relate to Mrs. Job's shallow spiritual roots? What will you do about it?
2. How do you cope when life changes overnight and leaves you with a new reality?
3. How have you reacted when panic overwhelmed you in a situation?
4. In your changing circumstances, what would it take for you to be able to say, like Job did, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord"?
5. What does it take for you to "turn the corner" and move on in the face of change or tragedy?
6. Would you be willing to let God use your circumstances to lead you into a new focus for your life?

Journal Question

Can you think of a time when you suffered through disorientation and transition? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about God? Take time to write it down and ponder.

Prayer

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Lord, our hearts are stunned by the losses we have endured. It makes no sense to us. We wonder how we will recover from the devastation. We have fallen to our knees with the despair of it all. We bring our hearts before You. Only You can hold us up.