

**When Life Falls Apart**  
Job 1:1-22

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Kelly Lemon<sup>1</sup> was an active 12 year old kid who loved theater and snowboarding. She couldn't wait to start Grade 7. She lived a pretty normal life those first 12 years. But on July 29, 2000 all that changed. Her family was returning home from summer holidays in preparation for the start of the school year. She was in the car with her Mom, her sister Jamie who was 17 and her brother JD who was 15. They faced a 24 hour drive home.

Her brother had just gotten his learner's permit and was driving. Kelly's Mom sat in the passenger's seat. Jamie and Kelly slept in the back seat. Suddenly, Kelly woke up to the most horrifying sound of her brother screaming and yelling profanities she had never heard from his mouth. She sat up just in time to see a guardrail in front of her. Then everything went black.

She woke up to the sound of sirens, with the world spinning around her. She writes "seven paramedics hovered 2 feet above my face. When they noticed I had regained consciousness, they shouted, "She's awake! Can you feel your toes? Can you feel your fingers? How many fingers am I holding up?"

In utter confusion I screamed, "I don't care about my toes! What happened? Who are you? Where is my family?" One paramedic lowered his voice. "Kelly, everyone is alive. Everyone survived." "Survived? Survived what?" "Your family was in a serious car accident but everyone is okay."

Her Mom came over to her. Kelly could see her fighting back tears and trying to keep her voice calm. "Kelly . . . I am here. Can you feel your legs, honey?" Kelly replied, "Yes, but Mom, where is my arm? Where is it? I can't feel my arm! I can't move it! Is it attached?" Her Mom's voice began to crack as she looked at Kelly's arm. "Kelly, you just have a deep wound in your arm, and it probably hit a nerve, but don't worry – you'll be able to move it really soon." She did not know that Kelly would never again

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from John Walton, The NIV Application Commentary: Job (Zondervan, 2012)

have a functioning right arm. Kelly's Mom then said "You get to go on a helicopter ride! Isn't that cool?" As they hoisted Kelly onto the gurney, she fell back asleep.

What happened? Kelly explains: "We had been on the straight and monotonous Midwest roads for hours. Thirty minutes into J.D.'s driving shift, he began daydreaming about snowboarding, and two seconds later the Land Cruiser went off the road, down into the ditch. He turned the wheel with all his strength, but the weight of the trailer was too much. The car collided with the guardrail going 80 mph, hitting the passenger side door; the car flipped over the guardrail and rolled five times before it slid to a stop in the cornfield. At point of impact, my body shot out the side window, with my head breaking through the glass, and my body wrapped around the guardrail. As my head went through the window, the frame of the car smashed against my right shoulder on my way out, shattering the collarbone into dust and causing all five main nerves, also known as the brachial plexus (which controls that fourth of my body) to snap from the spinal cord. My right arm was torn at the armpit, causing significant blood loss. The accident broke my left collarbone (in addition to shattering the right), punctured my liver and spleen, broke all the bones in the left side of my face, and paralyzed one fourth of my body."

So began Kelly's journey. She went through multiple surgeries. She was promised that she would likely regain use of her right arm. She had a nerve transplant. She experienced excruciating pain. And this all happened in the United States where their private health insurance coverage soon ran out. Some of her surgeries made the pain worse. They tried to paralyze pain nerves and multiple medications to ease her suffering. None of it worked.

Kelly was just a normal 12 year old kid going on with life. In an instant, her life was turned upside down. Thankfully, Kelly was a Christian. She had a faith in God who she turned to in the immediate aftermath of the accident. But as she journeyed through the next years, her faith and belief in God would be severely tested. Why did this happen to Kelly? If God is a good, powerful and loving God, why would He allow something like this to come into her life?

Well –meaning Christians often scramble to answer such questions. “Maybe there was sin in Kelly’s life and God needed to get her attention. Maybe there was sin in her family and God would use this to draw them back to Him. If she just had enough faith, she could ask God to heal her and He would.” Kelly was by no means perfect. But there was no unconfessed hidden sin in her life. Nor was there some hidden family secret. She seemed to have plenty of faith. Did Kelly deserve this?

Questions like these naturally arise when something like this happens. Many on the outside of such situations try to explain them perhaps in an attempt to deal with their own discomfort. But such explanations and simplistic answers are of little comfort to those suffering and their loved ones. So how do we make sense of a situation like this?

Today, we enter into a book of the Bible that deals with a situation similar to Kelly’s and similar to some of your lives or the lives of people you know or love. You or your loved one live with pain or some disability or some chronic condition. You might have asked “why did this happen to us? What are you doing God? What are we supposed to do now?” You may have heard some of these simplistic explanations of you may even have offered some of these to others. But this book points to a very different approach.

It follows the story of man named Job. Some of you may never have heard of this book. You came here thinking I was going to talk about the workplace and your Job. So you will be introduced to this story and its reflections. Others have read this book. You’ve probably had varied experiences with it. It is 42 chapters long. The first 2 chapters tell the story. The next 39 chapters are written in poetry containing speeches by Job, his friends and God himself. The last chapter brings an end to the story. But it does not resolve the story with a fairy tale ending where everyone lived happily ever after.

The same is true for Kelly. I had the privilege of talking with her this week. She lives with extreme chronic pain. She has never regained the use of her right arm. Her pain seems intimately connected to barometric pressure changes. It did not end happily ever after. We will follow her story throughout this series.

Job contains many surprises and unexpected turns. But we must dig for and ponder them. And if there is one thing I would ask you to do as we approach this study, it is this – try to set aside all your pre-conceived ideas of what this book is about. Even set aside the questions you think it answers or questions you seek an answer to. We might be asking questions that the book does not address. Yet we force it to answer our questions and then come to wrong conclusions. So as much as is humanly possible, I invite you let Job speak to you anew and afresh. Let it pose the questions and provide answers. Ask God to speak to you through the depths we are about to dive into.

We start today with Job 1. **Job 1 unveils some deep wisdom that challenges our own understanding of how the world works.** It starts in the very first verses of this book. So please find Job in your Bibles, chapter 1. And let's begin.

### **Job 1:1-5**

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. 3 He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. 4 His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

We meet a man named Job who lived in a place called Uz . Not Oz but Uz. We don't know exactly where this land might have been. But all suggestions fall on the east side of the Jordan River somewhat removed from the Promised Land. So the narrator does not claim Job is an Israelite. But he was a God fearing man. He was blameless, upright and turned away from evil. He was not perfect. But he did strive to live a faithful life before God and he showed it with his actions. He not only avoided doing wrong. He rejected wrong. Though imperfect, Job lived a life that glorified and honored God.

He also enjoyed the good life. He had seven sons and three daughters. Seven and three are both numbers of perfection or completeness in Hebrew thinking. So Job has been blessed with a perfect

number of sons and daughters. In the ancient world, multiple children were considered a great indication of God's favor.

But Job was not only blessed with family. He enjoyed material prosperity. 7000 sheep; 3000 camels; notice the 7 and 3 again. Job would require numerous shepherds and ranchers to oversee such vast flocks. Yet he also owned land. 500 yoke of oxen worked the land. 500 donkeys along with 3000 camels brought supplies, transportation and trade for his vast enterprises. The narrator concludes Job was the greatest of all people in the east.

Job has many children and great wealth. But his family also experienced great joy. His sons held a feast on their particular day and invited their siblings to join them. So we get a picture of young unmarried adults gathering together for a feast. Each son apparently has a house. Each son has a feast day on which they throw a party for their family. And each feast went on for a few days according to the beginning of verse 5.

So Job has multiple apparently healthy children, great economic resources and a joyful family. But then we come to verse 5. What is going on in the latter half of verse 5? Job wants to consecrate his children. Job offers a burnt offering for each one of them. Job reasons that the children may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. He continually offers sacrifices for them.

Why? What does this reveal about Job? What understanding of God does Job appear to be acting upon? Well at first it seems like he's just being a good father. He just wants to make sure they didn't offend God in some careless way. But if Job was really convinced about this would he not instruct them? Would he not teach them to offer burnt offerings? Or might Job think God is petty? Job seems to think that if one of his children might have accidentally or intentionally cursed God, something bad might happen. So instead of waiting for that day, Job seems to be trying to preempt it. "If I just keep the burnt offerings coming, I'll build enough good will towards God that should compensate if one of my kids blows it." Job seems to have no understanding of God's grace. It's more like appeasing or bribing

God to overlook things. That's exactly like the pagans worshipped. They offered food and sacrifice to their gods to keep them happy.

Verse 5 gives us a very subtle clue of a major upheaval that's about to occur in Job's understanding of the way the world works. This view is called the retribution principle or pay back. It goes like this – If you are good, God will bless you. If you are bad, God will punish you.

Now you might be sitting there wondering “what's wrong with that principle?” There is truth in it. If someone lives a life that honors God, he or she will experience blessings from God. These are promised throughout Scripture. And in the wisdom literature, especially in Proverbs, this principle is repeated over and over. If you fear God, He will protect and bless you. If you mock God and go your own way, you will face the consequences. This explains a lot. It seems to be the motivation behind Job's offer of sacrifice on behalf of his children.

But it doesn't explain everything. This is one piece of wisdom that we must take from this book. **The retribution principle doesn't explain everything. (1:1-5)** The belief that “if you do good, it's guaranteed that God will reward you and if you do bad, its guaranteed the God will punish you” does not completely explain reality. We all know people who have no fear of God that seem to be doing very well in life. There are people like Kelly and some of you who have not done evil yet experience some great hardship. We may think, “I can't believe the ancients thought this way.” But this belief is alive and well in our world today. Many people expect life to be a precise moral calculus – “If I live a certain way, life will turn out a certain way.” But Job confronts our expectation of a predictable life and a predictable God. The story continues in verse 6.

### **Job 1:6-12**

**6** Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. **7** The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” **8** And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a

blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" 9 Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around 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 stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." 12 And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Now I don't know about you, but this paragraph has always bothered me. What is Satan doing in God's presence in the first place? Aren't God and Satan a bit too friendly? Do God and Satan make little wagers and use people as their pawns?

But some understanding about the literature and language has really helped me and I hope will help you deal with this paragraph a little more. First, it was a common belief in the Ancient Near East that the gods held a council in the heavens. Some of them were polite. Some were mean. Sometimes they argued. But the decisions they made affected people down on earth. And they were all equal. There was no supreme god who ruled the others.

Notice how different this account portrays the heavenly council. There are not multiple, equal gods that have come together to make decisions based on consensus. There is one supreme God – the Lord. The sons of God present themselves before him. These are likely angels of a high order. But notice Satan is among them. If you look closely at your Bible and its footnotes, hopefully you will see something beside the word satan. The text literally says "the satan" meaning "the adversary" in Hebrew. So this actually does not say the personal name "Satan." It talks about the adversary – a chief mischief maker – an opponent. It seems it is unusual that he is there. "The Satan also came among them." The Lord sees this and immediately speaks to "the Satan." He draws attention to Job. "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil?" The Lord's words dispel any doubt in our minds about Job's innocence.

The satan does not dispute Job's uprightness. But he questions Job's motivation. "Does Job fear God for no reason? You've blessed him and protected him. But if he were to lose it all, he would curse

you to your face.” The satan shows no respect to the Lord. He doesn’t say “my Lord” or “your servant.” He accuses the Lord with the direct address – “YOU have put a hedge around him. YOU have blessed him. So YOU’RE behind Job’s devotion.” The satan is cynical. He believes that nothing and no one can be genuinely good. He knows enough about religious people to conclude that many are in it for what they can get out of it.

In this questioning of Job’s motivation, we find our own motives for loving God suddenly on trial. **Do you love God simply for who He is or does your faith depend on the benefits?** Is God so good that he can be loved for himself, not just for his gifts? Can a man or woman hold on to God when there are no benefits attached? People often shape their view of God based on how their life is going. So if life is going well, God is good. If life goes poorly, God is bad or evil or unjust or negligent or uncaring. Are such conclusions justified? Or do they expose that we love God for His blessings more than Himself? Job will soon face this test. Some of you are finding out in this life right now or you will find out at some point in the future. If you lost everything would you still love God?

And then the storm hits.

### **Job 1:13-22**

[13](#) Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, [14](#) and there came a messenger to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, [15](#) and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” [16](#) While he was yet speaking, there came another 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 yet speaking, there came another and said, “The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” [18](#) While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, [19](#) and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” [20](#) Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. [21](#) And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” [22](#) In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.



Four messengers come with news that Job's happy world has collapsed. Job has been bankrupted. 2 terrorist attacks and 2 "natural" disasters rob him of his wealth and children. Surely this man would prove the Satan right. Surely, he would curse the Lord whom he had offered burnt offerings to on a regular basis. Yet Job's response is one of mourning and faith. He tears his clothes – shaves his head – falls on the ground and worships. Then in a great statement of faith he declares "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job does not wonder if some evil has caused this. He does not console himself with the fact that robbers, lightning and cyclones were a normal part of life in the east. He attributes it to the Lord. He lays responsibility for these actions at the Lord's feet. Yet at this point, it is not a charge against God but a confession of faith.

What are we to make of this? If the story ended here, we might be tempted to conclude that the major gain from this passage is a role model for responding to suffering. Just like Job, we can mourn but worship the Lord through hard times. But this is a narrative. It simply reports what happened. It's not telling us how to live or respond when something similar happens. And as we move through this book, we will discover that not all of Job's responses are commendable. This is a descriptive text not a prescriptive one.

What does it describe? For the third time, in verse 22, it reminds us that Job is innocent. "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong." So perhaps the simplest yet profound message from this first chapter goes like this - **There is such a thing as "innocent suffering."** Job was blameless and upright – verse 2. The Lord says "Job is blameless and upright" in verse 8. In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Verse 22. So people; as much as we are tempted to go back to the good old retribution principle to try to make sense of this, we cannot do it. The retribution principle does not explain everything. Maybe there's someone here today that needs to let go of that false guilt that you've been carrying. Sometimes our suffering results from choices we've made. But other times it has nothing to do with the way we lived or the extent of our faith. You're convinced that because of something

you did, this bad thing happened. Or maybe you're convinced that God's punishing you for something. But that may not be the case. That may not be at all.

This was one of the things Kelly had to work through. As she began to process her injury, she had questions. "Immediately after the accident my response was not like Job's. I was not angry, but I wasn't praising the Lord for the event either. I was more confused than anything else. I knew the truth in the Scriptures that told me the Lord would bring good from the trials, but I just could not see it; nevertheless, I had to rest my faith on that truth. After about three years, my perspective began to change and I started to see the work that God was doing in me through the situation. I finally came to the point where I could praise him for his faithfulness in the events that took place."

In talking with Kelly this week, I discover that though her story did not end with a happily ever after, it has not ended. Kelly got married. She started a photography business. This is a picture of Kelly from her photography website. She shared that in the past year God has been impressing upon her that it's time to use her story for his glory. So she has been speaking and sharing. She has started a blog called "A Life Modified." Kelly Lemon Photography. I would encourage you to visit this blog. There she journals and has videos on what it's like to do life with one arm. She is very excited about what we are doing and how we are telling her story. She would love to hear from you. You can comment on and correspond with her there. There is hope and life even after a tragedy or through a chronic situation.

The retribution principle does not explain everything. Do you love God for who He is or more for His benefits? There is such a thing as innocent suffering. The depth of God's wisdom is deeper than anything we can even imagine.

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