

**Series: GREATER THAN... May 20, 2007**

**GREATER THAN MY PAIN  
Job 42:2-3**

**I. INTRO**

A. As I thought about pain and questions and “**How could you allow this, God,**” a number of images came to mind:

\*The image of the twin towers burning—and then collapsing as people ran for their lives

\*The image of crying, devastated people and parentless children on the beaches of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Malaysia after the 2004 tsunami sucked 275,000 people out to sea to their deaths.

\*The scenes from Hurricane Katrina that flooded 90% of New Orleans leaving horrific damage and 1500 people dead.

\*And every hour of every day in our world people die stupid, unnecessary deaths. Every 2 ½ seconds, a child dies of hunger. **Why?**

1. But the **Why?** questions suddenly get very personal when pain rocks our world. Back in the 70's, I traveled for a year with this singing group. We were having our year-end party, laughing, reminiscing, looking at pictures—when the picture suddenly flashed on the screen of a bad accident we'd been in where a number of team members were hurt—and when the picture flashed—there was this stunned silence.

-I took a trip through the **Why?** file in my own heart—pictures, memories with question marks over them.

\*Like Joanne, the close friend I mentioned a few weeks ago, accidentally shot and killed by her cousin.

\*Like standing on the shore of Lake Erie with the parents of a boy from my youth group, Robbie, while scuba divers from the US Coast Guard searched for his body.

\*Like Pat, one of our closest friends, dead from cancer at the age of 44—leaving two young teenage boys.

\*Like Keith Green, musician and leader who had a **huge** influence Lori's and my lives—and Blaise's—killed at the height of his ministry along with 3 of his children—in a fiery plane crash.

\*And I have other pictures too painful to put up here or talk about.

2. And you have a **Why?** file too, don't you? Filled with pictures with question marks over them. Experiences that **just don't make sense.**

-And for some of you, this goes way deeper—deep into a place you don't even want to visit because it still aches. It's still scarred and bruised. I mean, this experience doesn't just have one question mark over it; it's like an impressionist painting—only made up of millions of different colored question marks instead of dots.

B. Today I want to take you into a deep picture of God. To be honest, it may be too much. This is no flannel-graph lesson of a smiling clean Jesus with a spotless robe, sparkling smile—holding a little lamb. This picture of God is mysterious. It's painted in darker shades.

-Some people just turn away when they see this mysterious side of God, where the good guys don't always win; where the room's filled with anxious reporters, and God doesn't come to the microphone. He leaves the mystery hanging. Some people like a God

who's predictable; a God who will live in the box we create for Him. A God who can be controlled and predicted and even manipulated.

-It's only fair to tell you that the picture the Bible paints of God's character is spotless—and predictable. But the way He works and what He sometimes allows isn't. And He won't fit into any box you have. He can't be controlled or manipulated. If you want a true picture of God—it includes the parting of a sea, the creation of the universe, the raising of the dead—**and** people, faces cupped in their hands asking, "Where's God?"

-His power is breath-taking; His compassion is spotless; His love is higher than the heavens, deeper than the ocean. And yet He won't be put on trial where we are judge and crown attorney and jury. We can scream, threaten, protest, boycott, beg—but He retains His right to say **no** to our plan for His life, and **yes** to a higher plan we don't—and may **never** understand. So, are you ready to go deep, cause that's where we're going! And there's no story that takes us there like the story of Job!

## II. JOB: WHEN GOD CUTS TOO DEEP

A. In this story, Job starts out where most of us would like to be. His resume is impeccable! Not only is he wealthy and well-known and influential—his renown as a lover and follower of God is known through the world of that day. His integrity in his lifestyle, business dealings, and care for the down-trodden were legendary.

-And Job's life was dripping with the evidence of God's blessing. He's at a stage in life where his 7 sons and 3 daughters are independent—and they seem to be living honorably too. And Job has incredible assets. Given his 3000 camels, he was very likely in the "container ship" business of 2000 BC, buying and selling in foreign markets. Seeing that he had 500 teams of oxen, he must've had a mega-farm of some kind. Aside from the sound of 7000 sheep baaing and 500 donkeys braying, Job was doing **really** well.

1. But how **good** Job had it lasts only 5 verses. The real story is about a good man, and what happens in his relationship with God when the bottom totally—and inexplicably fell out of his life.

-Totally without warning, a knock at Job's door suddenly changes his life forever. You've probably been there. This breathless servant tells him that a raiding tribe, the Sabeans, have attacked his employees, killed every last one of them, and stolen his livestock. He's not even done, when **another** servant comes in and tells him that a bad lightning storm and fire have killed the shepherds and the sheep. Another raiding tribe, that same day, killed his employees and stole his camels. You can **live** through loss of your stuff, right?

-But the final servant carries the worst news of all. His sons and daughters were having dinner together when a tornado hit the house they were in and collapsed it on top of them. In one day, almost everything Job loved and worked for is gone. Poof! What's even stranger than this loss is Job's response. He falls on his face in agony—but says, in essence, "All I have has been given to me by God—and it's **His** to take if He wants it back. I will **still** worship God!

2. But life gets harder. Job gets sick. Like, not the flu—a horrible skin disease described in the story as painful boils all over his body. They hurt, they're infected, and they itch. We find him out on the town dump, wearing sackcloth—and scraping his boils with a broken piece of pottery.

-Anyone here know how envy and jealousy works? Well, all the people who've envied Job now move in for the kill like a pack of hyenas. They show up to mock him. See, cause everybody knows that things like this only happen to people who

screw up; people who tick God off. And there are always people who want to say, "See! We knew it was too good to be true! **No one's** that good!"

3. So, Job's lost his business, his wealth, his children, his reputation, his health—what else is there to lose? It gets worse. Job's wife comes out to the dump to visit him and hisses in his ear, "Why don't you just curse God and die, Loser!" Actually, she didn't **say** loser—but that's what she meant.  
-Again, Job's response is absolutely amazing. **We take the good days from God—why not also the bad days?" Not once through all this did Job sin. He said nothing against God (Job 2:10 Msg).** Job affirms a very important truth here—one that Lori has often reminded me of: **God doesn't owe me an explanation for what He does or allows! He's not accountable to me!**
  4. Enter—Job's buds. Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhahite, Zophar the Naamathite, and Dadgum the termite. Actually I just threw that last one in—but it sounds like it fits. They traveled a **long** way to keep him company; comfort him. When they saw him—it blew them away—in fact, they barely recognized him. And seeing the depth of his pain, all they did for a whole week was sit there in the ashes with him. **Then** they started talking—and **that's** when things went off the rails.
  5. What they did was so **typical** I need to talk about it. Basically, they were trying to help Job answer the **Why?** question. See, the thought is, "If you can figure out **why** this is happening, you can correct, and it will stop. Typical guys, they want to **fix** things!
    - a. This same warped theology gets preached on TV almost every week. "God **never** allows anything but blessing to come to people who who please him, right? **Right?** Good = God's blessing. Evil = Pain/discipline. So, if bad things are happening, figure out where you went wrong, do what's right—then send money to us—and you'll have this incredible arc of blessing that goes up and to the right.
    - b. So, Job's friends are basically saying, "Job, **think!** You **must've** done something wrong, or this wouldn't be happening to you. Sift through your life and figure out what's gotten God ticked off with you!"  
-The problem these guys have isn't their sense of who God is—that He's just, loving and powerful; their problem is their assumption that they have God figured out. That God is controllable. Do what He wants—He always blesses; screw up, and He doesn't.
    - c. Job finally cuts loose—and talks about his hurt; about God's silence—I mean, it's just the words of a man in pain. Remember the words from Bruce Almighty, "**Smite me, Almighty Smiter!**" Well, these are actually pretty close to what you hear in Job, and what you hear from David when he's in pain. These guys are **not** worried about hurting God's feelings! "Where are you? Why have you gone to lunch when I need you most?"  
-So, for 34 chapters this frustrating dialogue continues, "You sinned!" "No I didn't!" "God, show up and say who's right and who's wrong!"  
-See if you can pick up on Job's frustration: **I've had all I can take of your talk. What a bunch of miserable comforters! Is there no end to your windbag speeches? What's your problem that you go on and on like this? (Job 16:1 Msg).**"
- B. This, friends, is life in the crucible. By the way, the crucible is a hot, dirty place where metal gets heated and purified. The crucible is when everything that once seemed to be

going so **right**, is now going wrong. One thing after another hits you like a pile-driver, pushing you further and further into a bottomless swamp.

-Sometimes, like Job, even the people closest to you don't understand. And when you try to talk honestly about your feelings, all they do is make you feel bad about it.

Sometimes they give pat answers like, **let go and let God!** Or, **Maybe God is trying to teach you something!** When Lori and I were at the height of our struggle with infertility—after all these surgeries and embarrassing tests, one friend said, “Do you think if you went out and bought baby furniture and baby clothes and toys, maybe God would honor your faith by giving you a child. I.e., **you don't have enough faith!**”

-Know what I've found with people? The **best** counsel comes from people who've been in a crucible, not a bubble! If you're counseling people in pain, your **best** words are your **presence**, not your advice. I've found that my words to people in crisis have dwindled with time—right down to, “I don't know! I **really** don't know—and I don't understand.”

1. I've researched this story quite a bit, and my sense is that Job's greatest pain came from God's silence—not his loss. He felt abandoned by the One he'd loved and served all his life. He's **lost his best friend!** I've sometimes felt that. You're at this excruciating point in life, and you say, “God, **show me the way! I'll do what you want, no questions asked. Just speak!**” Silence.

-And Job in essence asks, “What's **that** about? Don't good friends talk to each other? Aren't good friends **there** for each other when life falls apart?”

2. Let me say this about Job—or maybe about you or one of your friends:

\*When you're suffering, some days are so dark you can't see the light.

\*There are times, in suffering, when what you're going through is **so** extreme, you lose all hope.

\*Sometimes you even forget what relief feels like, or where it is.

3. Sometimes when life hits the wall, we forget to breathe. I find it fascinating that when the Bible describes the Holy Spirit, the word for Spirit is “breath.” When we can't catch our breath—He, Holy Spirit, Holy Breath—a **Person**—becomes our Breath. Unseen, sometimes unfelt—He enters our pain. What helps, sometimes, is to make this a conscious process.

-I call it my **Breathing** prayer. I breathe out my weakness, my frustration, my pain, my aloneness, my anxiety—and consciously say, “Spirit of God—if you have **ever** been with me, be with me, in me now. As I breathe out my weakness, fill that empty space with your strength; as I breathe out my pain and frustration and anxiety—fill that vacuum with grace, hope and healing. As I breathe out my anger with You—fill that ugly place with your beauty and greatness!

-Sometimes, see, when you're in pain, all you can do is breathe. See, in your pain, you may not **feel** God—but He's there!

C. Let's talk about God. What do you believe about God? See, this is where the story gets really, **really** deep. There are a **lot** of people in this world who, when they encounter pain and suffering, have completely and totally ditched the idea of a good, loving and compassionate God. And the truth is, it doesn't seem to make sense, does it?

1. Do you mind me telling you from an outsider's perspective what would weird me out about this story? It's the fact that God seems to making a deal with the devil—and Job is the poker chip! I mean, that's how the whole thing starts out—that all the angels have assembled before God, Satan saunter's in, and God brags on Job. Listen to how Satan responds:

**"So do you think Job does all that out of the sheer goodness of his heart? Why, no one ever had it so good! You pamper him like a pet, make sure**

**nothing bad ever happens to him or his family or his possessions, bless everything he does—he can't lose! But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away everything that is his? He'd curse you right to your face, that's what (Job 1:9-11 Msg)."**

-And then God gives him permission to touch everything Job has. And when that doesn't work—he gives permission for Satan to go after Job's health. That's a little scary, isn't it! To think that God might say, "Have you seen Ken?" "No, God. Don't do it! Not me!"

2. But I do have to admit that the question that gets raised here is very profound. Do I love and serve God because He's worthy of my praise and service—or do I love Him because of his blessings—or because I'm scared *not* to?
  - Whatever you think of this story, God obviously gives permission for Job to be **tested**. Why would He even **allow** that?
  - Many of you saw Karen Pascal's docu-drama of C.S. Lewis, **Beyond Narnia**, that tells the story of Lewis's romance and marriage to Joy. When he lost her to cancer just a few years later, this brilliant man's faith went into crisis mode. He didn't **stop** believing in God—he just began wonder if God was some kind of a monster; a sadist.
3. This story comes to a dramatic conclusion. God does show up, and He really doesn't answer Job's questions or demands at all. It's like he straps him in his chair and turns on the Discovery Channel. **He** asks the questions. So, Job—you want to understand the deepest ways of how I work—do you even understand nature? Can you tame wind and whales and wasps? O, yes, and can you explain how to make an ocean that maintains perfect chemical balance and is **7 miles** deep in places? Hmmm?
  - Now, to be honest, if Job had wanted to be cheeky, he could've said, "Okay, God. **So you know way more than me—so what does that prove about MY suffering?**" But he doesn't. I want you to listen to two segments of what Job says. **During** his suffering—and **after** his suffering:
    - But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold (Job 23:10 NLT).** As Job is writhing in misery—you can still hear the ring of hope in his voice. That this is a test—not punishment. And that it will be over some day. And when it is—what's going on in Job's soul will be purer and more valuable than ever.
    - When God shows up at the end of the story and speaks and questions, listen to Job's response:
      - "I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you. You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me (Job 42:2-3 NLT).**
    - Job discovered a God who was greater than his pain.
4. Just on the surface, I want you to think about what's happened here. Satan gets humiliated; God's people truly love Him for **Who** He is—not because He's a sugar Daddy.
  - Job's friends learn that God can't be reduced to formulas for blessing.
  - And though Job is scarred in the fire, he's refined. He becomes a hero of endurance; revered by anyone who's ever been in pain for his honesty with God.
  - And we learn something really deep about God and about life. We learn that the point of our existence is not gold-plating and bubble-wrapping this little dot we call

life. Life is **way** more profound than that. And some of the tools God uses to shape our souls for eternity are tools we don't like; such as suffering, pain, disappointment, and hardship. My question is--can you deal with a God who doesn't always do what **you** think He should?

### III. GOD IS IN CONTROL...BUT WON'T BE CONTROLLED!

A. We really do get quite narcissistic in life, don't we? There's this story about this little girl walking with her Mom in this storm where it's pouring rain with these flashes of lightning. The Mom noticed that every time the lightning flashed, her daughter would turn and smile. It happened several times, and the Mom finally asked, "Why do you keep turning and smiling every time there's lightning?" Her daughter said, "Well, it's because when God takes my picture, I want to smile for Him!"

-It's a cute story—but we **really** oughta stop thinking that we are the center of all storms by the time we're adults, right? That life is all about us? That we're the center of every story? That God is obligated to be our personal genie and do what **we** want Him to do—come when we call Him—like the family dog?

1. There's one interesting note in the story of Job that may give us some insight into where he landed on this. It's found early in the story. Let me read it.

**His sons used to take turns hosting parties in their homes, always inviting their three sisters to join them in their merrymaking. When the parties were over, Job would get up early in the morning and sacrifice a burnt offering for each of his children, thinking, "Maybe one of them sinned by defying God inwardly." Job made a habit of this sacrificial atonement, just in case they'd sinned (Job 1:4-5 Msg.)**

-Now, I don't know Job's motives. But I wonder if this was all a kind of insurance policy. The words, **Just in case** say something. "What can I do to insure that God smiles on my kids and keeps them from disaster?" Any of you ever done that? I have.

-Wouldn't be great to have a list of things we could do, prayers we could pray—a **just in case** kit to crack the heavenly code on how to have a cancer free, accident free, heart-ache free life and then die in your sleep at 98 with a stomach full of good food? Think of how much time and energy and money goes into trying to sandbag our lives—and the lives of those we love—against any kind of danger. It takes money to do that—and we've got more money than anyone else in the world. Problem is, God doesn't **fit in** our box!

-Life didn't work like that for Job, and it doesn't work like that for us, either.

2. Are you interested in some of the lessons the Book of Job **does** teach us about God in the context of our pain?

a. The first thing is that God is never shocked by the things people say when they're in pain. Can you imagine the God of the universe saying, "Gasp! I had **no idea** you felt like that! I'm so **shocked!**" The prayers of the Bible are actually pretty blunt. Don't hold back!

b. Second, if you're going to know, love and follow God—you **have** to leave room for mystery. When Job's life hit the wall, God doesn't show up and say, "Oh, Job! I'm so sorry to upset you with this. Let me explain..." God's in charge. We're not. Sometimes, to be honest, God seems mysterious, elusive, silent and invisible.

-What we **do** know is God's character. He is the most trustworthy, compassionate, kind, gentle, loving, generous being in the Universe. How

does that fit with our suffering and loss and pain? ***I don't know!*** See, that's where ***faith*** comes in.

-The best picture I can think of is this: Imagine that a masked person came up to you, cut open your stomach, and took all your money. Pretty awful, isn't it? Change the scenario from the street to the OR. We call it ***surgery***.

-Let's change it a little more. If you were to take a 4 year old to Sick Kid's hospital—and take him or her on a wordless tour through the ***whole*** hospital, including the ER, the operating room where children are having delicate brain surgery, heart transplants, orthopedic surgery, chemotherapy, ***what would they think?*** They would think the adults in that building were a bunch of monsters who hated and tortured kids. Is that what ***Sick Kids Hospital*** is about? ABSOLUTELY NOT! They are among those most dedicated to children in the world.

—What we ***don't*** get is that our understanding of God is infinitely ***less*** than a 4 year olds understanding of a hospital. What we ***don't*** get is that we ***eternal*** beings who live in a dot called life where we are being ***shaped*** for eternity. 80 years seems like a ***lot*** to us—but in comparison to eternity?...Not much at all.

-There's a statement in Rom. 11:33-35 where Paul has a tiny glimpse of the plan of God. He says:

**Have you ever come on anything quite like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep wisdom? It's way over our heads. We'll never figure it out. Is there anyone around who can explain God? Anyone smart enough to tell him what to do? Anyone who has done him such a huge favor that God has to ask his advice (Rom. 11:33-35 Msg.)?**

-The truth is—we don't ***like*** being called limited, finite and small—even in comparison to God! We think God ought to center his plans around us, ask our permission, do things the way ***we*** want them done. And a lot of times He doesn't!

- c. When I read the ***whole*** story of the God of the Bible—not my favorite name it/claim it verses, know what I find? That it includes stories of people who don't get well; people who do not easily get over their problems; and people who hurt, who fall, who fail—and ***by GRACE***—sometimes succeed!
  - d. Something else I've learned from the Bible. There are three words describe my level of understanding—especially of the tough stuff: ***I don't know!*** But God does. He doesn't ***reveal*** everything—but He does ***know*** everything. And ***He does all things well***—even when I'm not particularly crazy about ***how*** He does them. But, then, He's God, ***I'm not!*** I'm clay—***He's*** the Potter! I'm the follower—***He's*** the Leader! I'm the servant—***He's*** Lord and Master of All. And, again, ***He doesn't owe me an explanation!***
- I have two choices when I face the pain of this world. I can resist, rebel and walk away. That's what Charles Templeton did—walked away from his faith as a pastor here in Toronto—and chose atheism. I can still believe in Him, but pull a tantrum and declare Him unfit for the deepest part of my worship. Or—I can adjust my life to His choices and listen, learn, adapt, and trust that He is the most just person in the universe.

- B. I think, at the very core of our trust when we don't understand is believing—even in the shadows, even when it feels awful--that God is ultimately doing something good in our

lives. If you look at the heroes of the Bible, you won't find a single one of them who didn't go through a really, really tough time. They wondered, "Where's God?" or "Why this?" But it was the **journey—the tough times** that made them people we hold in awe.

1. Noah is asked by God to build this giant ship in his back yard—and then fill it with two of each animal on the planet. It takes him 100 years to do it. It's like this giant object lesson—people come from miles to see it—and he tells them all, family friends, what God is up to. But not a single person apart from his immediate family listened. And Noah lost every single friend and extended family member in the flood. Noah had to **trust** when he didn't understand.
2. Joseph is this 17 year old kid, doing some immature bragging about the dreams he had. The hatred of his brothers launches him on a horrible, agonizing 12 year journey that starts with him as a slave—and just gets worse from there—to where he ends up in prison. Then he finds, when he's made 2<sup>nd</sup> in command in all of Egypt, that God has been preparing him to save the entire Jewish race from starvation. He's a hero.
3. Moses? It's no different. He makes one attempt to free the Israelites from slavery, fails, and spends 40 years on the backside of the desert—until God asks him to try again. He didn't want the job! He makes excuse after excuse about why he wasn't the man—and finally says, quite bluntly, "**I** don't care about their suffering! Please send someone else! I have some sheep to watch and I'm **very** busy!" -But God prevails--and Moses, as he goes through all kinds of agony and hassle in doing this—from grumbling to outright rebellion—says to God, "These people of **yours?** Why did you ever ask me to do this? **You** deal with them! This wasn't my idea!" But there comes this moment, when the people worship this little golden cow—and Moses lays his life on the line for them. "Please forgive their sins. If not, blot **me** out of your book." In intense fire of leadership, Moses becomes this magnificent person who's willing to lay his life on the line for his people. -And the point is—there are **lots** of things about life we can't control. In fact, life takes a **lot** of twists and turns we never, **never** expect. We do, however, have control over one thing. That's **who** we become in the crucible of life.
4. That's what we see in Job. He complains, whines, demands that God meet him face to face and explain himself. He protests his innocence, calls his friends a bunch of windbags—implies, even, that God doesn't know what He's doing; that He's torturing the wrong man. -But his faith was the bedrock of his life. He had made it clear in the whole thing, **I'll serve and honor God—even if He KILLS me!** But the most profound prophecy to come out of his mouth was, **But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold (Job 23:10 NLT).** And he did. He will forever be remembered as the one who lost everything...but his faith. And he was so relieved to find out at the end of it all—that the God he'd staked his life on was still in control—even if He didn't do what Job wanted and expected Him to do.
5. The most important thing is to hold on to your hope. The story of Job's horrible season of life was just a tiny slice of the whole thing—probably a year or two at the most. To keep your hope, you **have** to realize that. You have to realize that the heartbreak, the pain, the mess you're in is a slice, a CAT scan of your life right now. You have to realize that it's so close to you—it's all you see right now. And, especially, the question **Why?**, although it was Job's burning question—and it's ours—it's not the right one, cause there may never be an answer to it in this life.

The right question is **What?** What do I do at this juncture? And **Who?** Who will I trust?

-Here's my sense of things. We will go through tough things—**whether or not** we love and trust God. It's a whole lot easier to go through pain and disappointment **with** God than pain and disappointment **without** God.

#### IV. CLOSING

- A. The picture made of question marks right now is this. My Mom and Dad were faithful to God all their lives—and **never** wavered in trusting Him. They loved and gave and served their whole lives—but the end of the story doesn't seem to be one of reward. Dad retired at almost 80—and died 11 months later. My Mom is dying of cancer. I want to yell, "It's **not fair!**" Strangely enough, my Mom's not yelling that. She's at peace about whatever the future holds.
- B. What I've learned is that God can't be bribed, manipulated or controlled—no matter how many people you have praying at Him. But He **can** be trusted. And that's my choice.