

“Oh, That I Knew Where I Might Find Him” (Job 22–27)

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Where is God? Or, to put it the way it’s usually asked, “Where *was* God?” Where was God when that earthquake tore apart that city, that region of that country? Where was God when the tsunami killed thousands of people? Where was God when I was depressed? Where was God when my body was falling apart? Where was God when my marriage was falling apart? Where is God now that I need him?

These are questions that many people have asked through the centuries. Where is God? Why can’t I sense his presence? Why does he seem so silent? These are important questions. And these are questions we find asked in the pages of the Bible. Today, we’re going to think about this question as we continue to look at the book of Job.

Here’s what we’re going to do today. First, I’m going to recap what we’ve seen so far in the book of Job. Second, we’re going to look at the third round of dialogue between Job and his friends. Third, we’re going to consider why God seems to be so absent in our pain, and what we can do when we’re hurting and when other people are hurting.

So, without further ado, let’s quickly summarize what we’ve seen so far in the book of Job. Somewhere in the Middle East, east of Israel, roughly four thousand years ago, there was a righteous man named Job. He feared God and worshiped God rightly, and God blessed him with wealth (thousands of animals) and a large family (ten children). In heaven, Satan questions why Job worships God. Satan tells God that Job worships him only because God has given Job good things. In other words, Satan claims that Job only worships God out of self-interest. Satan says (more or less), “If you take away those things, and even his health, Job will curse you to your face.” So, God allows Satan to strike at Job. Bandits come and steal some of his animals and kill many of his servants. Natural disasters kill some of his animals, his servants, and all of his ten children. Job even develops a terrible, deadly skin condition that leaves him covered in boils and blackened, festering skin. Does Job curse God? No. Job mourns, but he also worships God. He understands that God has the power to give and to take away.

At this point, Job’s three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to comfort him. They sit with him for a week in silence, quietly supporting their friend. Then Job bursts out in lament, cursing the day he was born, wishing that he was dead. Then, his friends try to tell him to

accept God's discipline. They assume that Job has done something wrong, something deserving of punishment. They know that God punishes the wicked. Since Job is suffering, they assume that he deserves it. Neither they nor Job know of God's conversations with Satan. None of them realize why Job is suffering.

For his part, Job insists that he is innocent. He believes that God is attacking him. He doesn't understand why this is happening. He demands to talk to God. He wants someone to come between God and him. He needs an arbiter, a mediator, someone who will be able to make sense of this situation. As we saw last week, we saw that Job thought that God would come to his aid to defend him against God. In other words, he thinks that God is to blame, but that God will also redeem him.

This week, we'll see the final round of dialogue between Job and his friends. As we've seen, Job's friends can't comfort him. Instead, they accuse him. They are truly "miserable comforters" (16:2). This last cycle of dialogue is shorter than the others. Eliphaz and Bildad speak, but Zophar doesn't. Apparently, he doesn't have anything new or more to say.

So, let's begin with Eliphaz's speech in chapter 22. Here is the beginning of his speech, the first three verses:

¹ Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

² Can a man be profitable to God?

Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself.

³ Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right,
or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?¹

Eliphaz begins by asking if any man, even a blameless one, can be profitable to God. "No human being can live a life holy enough to demand anything from God. Eliphaz is arguing that Job is approaching the height of hubris by demanding vindication from God."² No matter how righteous Job is, he has no right to speak to God this way.

Eliphaz then switches gears quickly. He asks a rhetorical question in verse 4 and accuses Job in verse 5:

⁴ Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you
and enters into judgment with you?

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 325.

⁵ Is not your evil abundant?
There is no end to your iniquities.

Job's friends have assumed that Job is guilty. Now Eliphaz starts to accuse Job of specific sins. In the next several verses, he accuses Job of exploiting the poor, not taking care of widows, and crushing orphans. Here are verses 6–11:

⁶ For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing
and stripped the naked of their clothing.
⁷ You have given no water to the weary to drink,
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.
⁸ The man with power possessed the land,
and the favored man lived in it.
⁹ You have sent widows away empty,
and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.
¹⁰ Therefore snares are all around you,
and sudden terror overwhelms you,
¹¹ or darkness, so that you cannot see,
and a flood of water covers you.

There's no reason to think that any of these accusations are true. Since Eliphaz couldn't convince Job to confess a sin, he starts inventing sins that Job must have committed.

Eliphaz then accuses Job of thinking that God doesn't see wickedness committed on the earth, or that God doesn't care about what evil happens on the earth (see vv. 13–14). But that's not what Job has said. Job has said simply that the wicked don't always pay for their sins in this life (21:7–18).

Eliphaz then urges Job to confess his sin. When he does that, good things will happen. Look at verses 21–28:

²¹ “Agree with God, and be at peace;
thereby good will come to you.
²² Receive instruction from his mouth,
and lay up his words in your heart.
²³ If you return to the Almighty you will be built up;
if you remove injustice far from your tents,
²⁴ if you lay gold in the dust,
and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed,
²⁵ then the Almighty will be your gold
and your precious silver.
²⁶ For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty
and lift up your face to God.
²⁷ You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you,

and you will pay your vows.
28 You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you,
and light will shine on your ways.

Now, if Job had committed sins, Eliphaz would be right. To turn away from sins, to repent, is to “agree with God.” That’s really the sign that someone has put his or her trust in God. Agreeing with God does bring peace. We should treasure God more than gold. He should be our gold. (Interesting trivia: the name “Eliphaz” means “My God is pure gold.”³) When we turn to God, when we are reconciled to him, he hears our prayers. When we turn to God, his light shines upon us. God does deliver those who are not innocent, because he forgives them. But Eliphaz is wrong to assume that Job has committed some sin that has caused all of this pain and suffering.

Job doesn’t respond directly to Eliphaz’s speech. Instead, he complains and he says that God is distant. Look at chapter 23, verses 1–7:

1 Then Job answered and said:
2 “Today also my complaint is bitter;
my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.
3 Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his seat!
4 I would lay my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.
5 I would know what he would answer me
and understand what he would say to me.
6 Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?
No; he would pay attention to me.
7 There an upright man could argue with him,
and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.

“Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!” Job wants most to speak to God. He wants God to answer him. He wants to enter into the courtroom with God. He wants God to declare that he is innocent. But the problem is that God is silent. Job doesn’t sense God’s presence. Where is God?

Job is searching for God, but cannot find him. Look at verses 8 and 9:

8 Behold, I go forward, but he is not there,
and backward, but I do not perceive him;
9 on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him;

³ Ibid., 333n17.

he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him.

Job goes forward and back, to the left and to the right, but God cannot be found. One of the most painful aspects of Job's experience is the loss of God's blessing. He feels that God has abandoned him. Actually, it's worse than that: Job feels that God is punishing him, which doesn't make sense, because Job swears that he is innocent. Let's read verses 10–12:

- ¹⁰ But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.
¹¹ My foot has held fast to his steps;
I have kept his way and have not turned aside.
¹² I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.

Job knows that when God has finished examining him, God will see that Job is gold. Job has not abandoned the way of God. He has not acted against God's commandments. God's word has been his daily bread (cf. Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).

There is a bit of irony here. Job isn't suffering because of some sin he has committed. Job knows that. We, the audience, know that Job is suffering because God is demonstrating that Job worships him purely, not for any other gain, but simply because Job trusts God. But through this process, Job is being refined. He will come out gold, but only after going through a lot of pain. Job isn't a great sinner, but he still has more to learn about following God. Job has to learn to trust God, to be patient. Job has to learn that he is not God. He cannot demand that God do this or that.

Job still needs to learn to trust God even when he can't find God. He has to learn to trust God when everything good is stripped away from his life. Many theologians have noted that real spiritual growth is only found in the moments when our lives are shattered, when we find out that we are not in control. That is true for Job and it is true for us. As the philosopher Peter Kreeft says, "The illusion that is destroyed is not the self itself but its usual standpoint in which I am I, the center, and God appears on my screen somewhere. *This* self is illusion and God shatters it by reversing the standpoint: we appear on his screen. We are his object, not he ours."⁴ Kreeft also says, "all of us must learn to lose everything but God, for all of us will die, and you cannot take

⁴ Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 80–81.

anything with you but God.”⁵ When God takes away our gold, we will either despair or realize that, all along, God was the only true gold there is.

While Job is searching for God and insisting that he is innocent, he also realizes that God is going to do whatever he wills. And this thought terrifies Job. Look at verses 13–17:

- ¹³ But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back?
What he desires, that he does.
¹⁴ For he will complete what he appoints for me,
and many such things are in his mind.
¹⁵ Therefore I am terrified at his presence;
when I consider, I am in dread of him.
¹⁶ God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;
¹⁷ yet I am not silenced because of the darkness,
nor because thick darkness covers my face.

We can see that Job is in despair because he says things that don’t seem to match up. In chapter 7, he says that God looks at him too much (vv. 19–20). In chapter 10, Job says to God, “leave me alone” (v. 20). Now, Job says he is searching for God, but he is “terrified at his presence.” Job does and does not want to find God. He wants to hear from God but he is afraid of God at the same time.

In chapter 24, Job claims that God does not punish the wicked. He questions whether God is just. Look at verse 1:

Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty,
and why do those who know him never see his days?

Then Job complains about the wicked people who move landmarks, take other peoples sheep, and exploit the poor (vv. 2–4). People cry out for help, “yet God charges no one with wrong” (v. 12). The people who hate light and love darkness (vv. 13–17) prosper and then are no more. They don’t seem to be judged, despite what Job’s friends say (vv. 18–20). Job says, in verse 25,

If it is not so, who will prove me a liar
and show that there is nothing in what I say?”

Job’s friends can’t show that he is a liar. The best that Bildad, the last of the three friends who speak, can do is repeat something ideas found in Eliphaz’s first and second speeches. This is Bildad’s entire speech, in chapter 25:

⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹ Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

² “Dominion and fear are with God;
he makes peace in his high heaven.
³ Is there any number to his armies?
Upon whom does his light not arise?
⁴ How then can man be in the right before God?
How can he who is born of woman be pure?
⁵ Behold, even the moon is not bright,
and the stars are not pure in his eyes;
⁶ how much less man, who is a maggot,
and the son of man, who is a worm!”

Bildad brings nothing new to the discussion. He says that God rules over all. His armies are beyond number. How can a mere mortal be right in his eyes? Even the moon and stars are pale compared to God’s light. How, then, can a man, a mere worm, ever hope to receive God’s favor?

It’s pretty hard not to see how unhelpful Bildad’s little speech is. In fact, it might be so short because Job cut him off. When Job speaks in chapter 26, you can tell he’s had it with his friends. Look at the first four verses of chapter 26:

¹ Then Job answered and said:

² “How you have helped him who has no power!
How you have saved the arm that has no strength!
³ How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
and plentifully declared sound knowledge!
⁴ With whose help have you uttered words,
and whose breath has come out from you?

Job’s words are bitingly sarcastic: “You’ve been a great help to the weak. You’ve really shared your wisdom with me. Thanks for dropping all that knowledge on me!” Then he wonders, “With whose help have you uttered words?” Perhaps he’s hinting that it’s not God’s help, but Satan’s. After all, as I said a couple of weeks ago, by falsely accusing Job, the friends are doing the work of the accuser.

Then Job says that God is all-powerful, yet we hardly understand his mighty works. Let’s read verses 5–14:

⁵ The dead tremble
under the waters and their inhabitants.
⁶ Sheol is naked before God,
and Abaddon has no covering.
⁷ He stretches out the north over the void

- and hangs the earth on nothing.
- ⁸ He binds up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not split open under them.
- ⁹ He covers the face of the full moon
and spreads over it his cloud.
- ¹⁰ He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters
at the boundary between light and darkness.
- ¹¹ The pillars of heaven tremble
and are astounded at his rebuke.
- ¹² By his power he stilled the sea;
by his understanding he shattered Rahab.
- ¹³ By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.
- ¹⁴ Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways,
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

That passage can be a bit difficult to understand. We have to remember that it's poetry, and sometimes images and references can be a bit difficult to figure out. What Job is saying is that the realm of the dead, known as Sheol and Abaddon, lie bare before God. He sees into them and the dead tremble. God has also set up the universe to be his temple. He suspends planets in space. He has arranged the clouds to do his bidding. He has created the boundaries of the earth and of light and darkness. He has power over the sea, and even over the creature known as "Rahab" and "the serpent." In Jewish thought, Rahab was known both as Egypt and "the angel of the sea, who rebelled at the creation of the world."⁶ Rahab represents the forces of evil, even Satan himself. Job is saying that God is in control of the whole of the universe. And yet, we these are just the outskirts of his ways. There's more to God than we know. And even what we know is a mere whisper to us. How can we understand the thunder of his power when his great acts in creation are something we hardly pay attention to?

In the last chapter that we'll look at today, chapter 27, Job says that God has "made my soul bitter" (27:2). This is something that Job says often (3:20; 7:11; 9:18; 10:1; 13:26; 21:25; 23:2). Still, Job knows he is innocent. He says that as long as he breathes, he will not lie (vv. 2–3). He says, in verses 5 and 6:

- ⁵ Far be it from me to say that you are right;

⁶ L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. H. Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1901), 6:8, quoted in Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 90. See the other biblical references to Rahab: Ps. 87:4; 89:10–14; Isa. 30:7; 51:9–10.

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 me for any of my days.

Job holds fast to his integrity. That's what God said to Satan in chapter 2, verse 3: "He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Job knows he is innocent, though his friends say otherwise. Job even threatens them. He suggests that they are his enemy and that they will be judged (vv. 7–23).

Now that we've come to the end of today's passage, I want to think more about what some people call the "hiddenness of God." Why is it that God seems hidden from us? Where is he? Why won't he reveal himself?

This is a problem for people who aren't yet Christians and it's a problem for believers, too. So, let me direct the next few minutes to anyone who doubts the existence of God.

A number of atheists believe that there simply isn't enough evidence to believe in God. If there is a God, why is he so hidden? Over forty years ago, the philosopher Bertrand Russell, a notorious atheist, was interviewed. This is part of that interview:

I asked, "Let us suppose, sir, that after you have left this sorry vale, you actually found yourself in heaven, standing before the Throne. There, in all his glory, sat the Lord—not Lord Russell, sir: God." Russell winced. "What would you think?"

"I would think I was dreaming."

"But suppose you realized you were not? Suppose that there, before your very eyes, beyond a shadow of doubt, *was* God. What would you say?"

The pixie wrinkled his nose. "I probably would ask, 'Sir, why did you not give me better evidence?'"⁷

I suppose atheists like Bertrand Russell don't think God exists because they can't see him. But, of course, we can't see God. Though God is omnipresent, God is spirit. And the only physical manifestation of him is Jesus, the Son of God who became man. But Jesus is in heaven, the realm of God beyond human reach.

That answer may raise other questions. Why should God be in heaven where we can't see him? And that's why it's so important to know the story of the Bible. In the Bible, we're told that

⁷ Leo Rosten, "Bertrand Russell and God: A Memoir," *The Saturday Review*, February 23, 1974: 26, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1974feb23-00025:28>, accessed March 9, 2017.

in the beginning, God made a good world, unspoiled by corruption. And he made human beings to know him. He dwelled with human beings in paradise. But the first human beings didn't trust God. They doubted God's goodness. They wanted to be God. So, they didn't obey God's commandments. And, as a punishment for that sin, God told the first human beings to leave his paradise. In fact, because God wants his paradise to remain free of sin, he had to evict them.

So, a short answer to the question, "Why can't we see God?" is, "Our sin." Isaiah 59:1–2 says,

- ¹ Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
- ² but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear.

Notice that sin has caused a separation between God and people and that sins have also caused God to hide his face from us. Sin is the problem that has forced a wedge between God and human beings. And when I mean sin, I mean the presence of sin in God's creation, not necessarily the sins you have committed. And, yet, all of us have sinned against God. We fail to recognize God, and he is the very reason anything exists. We fail to live for God. We fail to obey him. We fail to make God our gold.

Some people can accept that concept, but they want more evidence. They say, if only we could see God, we would believe. This week, I read a quote from a philosopher who said he would believe in God if the heavens were torn open and a Zeus-like figure spoke to him.⁸ But if people saw God that way, would they really believe? Or would they assume that they saw a hallucination, or that they had been drugged, or that perhaps they were deceived through a special effect created by the latest technology?

Jesus said that even if certain people saw miracles, they wouldn't believe. In his parable of the rich man and Lazarus, a rich man goes to Hades after he dies. He tells Abraham to send Lazarus, a dead man, from heaven to tell his still-living brothers to repent. Abraham says, "They

⁸ Norwood Russell Hanson, "What I Do Not Believe," in *What I Do Not Believe in Other Essays* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), 313–314, quoted in Michael J. Murray, "Coercion and the Hiddenness of God," in *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 241.

have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” In other words, the brothers have the Old Testament. That’s enough to know that God exists and that they should turn to him. The rich man says they will repent if someone comes back from the dead to deliver a message. Abraham says, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31; see vv. 19–31 for the whole parable). If people won’t respond to God’s revelation in Scripture, they won’t respond to a miracle.

But even if they saw God in such a frightening way, would they believe in his existence, or would they love him and trust him? Even Satan believes in God (James 2:19). But Satan doesn’t trust that God is good or worth serving. There will be a day when everyone sees Jesus and every knee will bow and confess that he is Lord (Phil. 2:9–11). But some will bow the knee in terror, not worship, and they will be condemned to a life outside of God’s presence because they failed to trust Jesus.

God doesn’t just want people who are terrified of him. He wants worshipers who love him. He wants people who will trust him even when they don’t know everything about him—even when they can’t see. Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead. But when he saw Jesus and touched him, he believed. Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Faith is not belief in the absence of all evidence, or believing something that we know not to be true. Faith is trusting even when we don’t know everything. Faith is trusting God even when we don’t see him.

But we can see the evidence of God. The Bible says we all know that God exists because we live in his world (Rom. 1:19–20). We can’t see an invisible God, but everywhere we can see his clues.⁹ We see clues in the order of the universe and the order of our own bodies. We see design in everything from the starry skies to the molecular machines in our cells. From physics to biology to the longing of our hearts, there are clues of God every we look, if only we would search for them and see them rightly.

If anyone is interested in some of the evidence for the existence of God, they can find some articles on our website. The latest one I put there is a long article I wrote on something

⁹ See Chapter 8: “The Clues of God,” in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead, 2008).

called the design argument. I also have written about evidence supporting the truth of the resurrection of Jesus and how the very existence of the universe points to the existence of God.¹⁰

The problem isn't the evidence. The problem is that we don't see rightly. Because we worship idols, we suppress the truth about God (Rom. 1:18–25). We don't see, think, and desire rightly. We exchange the truth for a lie. We're like blind people, groping in the dark for a God who is right in front of our faces (to use the language of Acts 17:27). Generally, the real question isn't, "Why is God so hidden?" The real question is, "Why do we hide from God?" It's interesting that that is what happened in the Adam and Eve story. After they sinned, they hid from God and God came looking for them (Gen. 3:6–9). That's what still happens today.

Since we're blind to God's existence, we need him to reveal himself to us. We need him to speak to us. We believe that God spoke through prophets in special times and places. These are the writings that we have in the Bible. Not only that, God spoke through his Son. The one true God became man in Jesus of Nazareth. While still being God, Jesus also was—and is—truly man. He spoke and taught. He performed miracles. And he suffered and died to pay the penalty for our sin, so that the separation between God and humans could be erased. He rose from the grave to show the penalty was paid in full and he ascended into heaven to present himself as an eternal sacrificial offering for our sin. Anyone who trusts in Jesus is no longer separated from God.

I suppose I would agree with Blaise Pascal that God has his reasons for giving just enough light to be found, but not so much so that we become proud. If it were too easy to find God, we wouldn't be aware of our sinful condition and the pain of living in a fallen world. But if there were less light, no one would ever find God.¹¹

But that doesn't mean life is always easy for Christians. Christians may wonder why God feels so distant, so quiet. This is particularly true during our dark times. A few weeks ago, I read a quote from C. S. Lewis in his book, *A Grief Observed*, in which he mourns the loss of his wife.

¹⁰ Visit <https://wbcommunity.org/articles>.

¹¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin 1995), 236/578 (p. 73): "There is enough light to enlighten the elect and enough obscurity to humiliate them. There is enough obscurity to blind the reprobate and enough light to condemn them and deprive them of excuse." 446/586 (p. 139): "If there were no obscurity man would not feel his corruption: if there were no light man could not hope for a cure. Thus it is not only right but useful for us that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed, since it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness as to know his wretchedness without knowing God." (The two different numbers given before each quotation are two different systems of numbering Pascal's fragmentary thoughts.)

He said that God felt present when he was happy, when he felt like God wasn't needed and was something of an interruption. But when Lewis was in pain, he felt that God was distant and silent.¹² I recently read another lament, this time written by the philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff. His son, Eric, died in a mountain climbing accident at the age of 25. Wolterstorff wrote his *Lament for a Son* in response. In that book, he writes,

Noon has darkened. . . . And where are you in this darkness? I learned to spy you in the light. Here in this darkness I cannot find you. If I had never looked for you, or looked but never found, I would not feel this pain of your absence. Or is it not your absence in which I dwell but your elusive troubling presence?¹³

These men are not alone. The Psalmists often feel as though God has hidden his face from them. Consider Psalm 10:1:

Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Or consider Psalm 13:1:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

There are many other passages like this in the Psalms.¹⁴ And we saw this in Job 13:24.

Why do you hide your face
and count me as your enemy?

Why does God feel so distant to his own children? Perhaps we can't see him because we're not looking for him. Perhaps our eyes are fixed on idols, or we're treasuring up sin. Perhaps we're suffering and the trauma of that suffering darkens our minds. We all know it's hard to make sense of everything during our suffering. But why is that when we cry out to God in times of distress, he can seem to be distant, uncaring, and quiet?

Perhaps God is causing us to grow in those moments. Perhaps that is when he is shattering our erroneous conceptions of him. Perhaps he is teaching us patience. Perhaps he is showing to us that our faith in him is real. After all, until faith is tested, until our trust in God is challenged, we'll never know if it's real or just something we're playing at.¹⁵ Perhaps we are

¹² C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 5–6.

¹³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 69.

¹⁴ Ps. 27:9; 30:7; 44:24; 55:1; 69:17; 88:14; 89:46; 102:2.

¹⁵ “Deep suffering focuses on the question of whether God is for real” (Craig G. Bartholomew, *When You Want to Yell at God: The Book of Job* [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014], 59). “Your bid—for God or no God, for a

asking him the wrong questions. After C. S. Lewis asked God questions about whether he could see his dead wife again, he thought more about his experiences. He writes,

When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But a rather special sort of ‘No answer.’ It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze. As though He shook His head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, “Peace, child; you don’t understand.’

Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are there in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask—half our great theological and metaphysical problems—are like that.¹⁶

Peter Kreeft says this about Job: “God will not answer Job because God is not the Answer Man. He is not the Answerer, the Responder. He is the Initiator, the Questioner.”¹⁷ God doesn’t exist to serve us. We exist to serve him. And, as Lewis acknowledges, we’re probably asking God for the wrong things.

But if you feel like God is silent and distant, what do you do? The important thing to do is to continue seeking him. Make use of what are called the “ordinary means of grace.” Read your Bible, even when you don’t feel like it. The Bible is God’s word. When you read it, God is speaking. It may not feel like God is speaking to *you* in particular at that moment, but he is. Pray. It may not feel like God is listening, but he is. Push through those feelings. Keep worshiping with your brothers and sisters in church. God can speak to you through them, too. In fact, one of the ways we experience God is through our Christian family. If you’re suffering and struggling, the worst thing you can do is remove yourself from their company. So, if God feels distant, hang in there. Keep doing the things that he wants us to do. Read the Bible. Pray. Worship. Serve in the church. Give to the church and those who need. Sing hymns and songs. That really works for me.

And, as I have said every week, look to Jesus. Jesus knows what it’s like to feel abandoned. When he was arrested, his friends hid. When he was on trial, no one came to his

good God or the Cosmic Sadist, for eternal life or nonentity—will not be serious if nothing much is staked on it. And you will never discover how serious it was until the stakes are raised horribly high, until you find that you are playing not for counters or for sixpences but for every penny you have in the world. Nothing less will shake a man—or at any rate a man like me—out of his merely verbal thinking and his merely notional beliefs. He has to be knocked silly before he comes to his senses. Only torture will bring out the truth. Only under torture does he discover it himself’ (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 38–39).

¹⁶ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 69.

¹⁷ Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life*, 80.

defense. When he was on the cross, he felt abandoned by God. As strange as it is to say, Jesus knows what it's like to pray a prayer that God didn't answer, at least not in the affirmative (Matt. 26:36ff.). And when he was dying on the cross, Jesus felt abandoned and forsaken by his Father. Turn to Jesus. Read about him. Read his words. Talk to him. Sing to him. He knows how you feel and he knows what you're going through.

And what do you do if you see people around you suffering? Don't be like Job's friends. Not only do they false accuse him, but they don't help. Notice that they talk a lot about God, but they never talk to God. They never pray for Job. That's very significant. They never pray for Job. So, pray for those who are hurting. But do more than that. Talk to them. Hug them. Do something that helps them. Do something that demonstrates you care. This is what Nicholas Wolterstorff said after his son died:

What do you say to someone who is suffering? Some people are gifted with words of wisdom. For such, one is profoundly grateful. There were many such for us. But not all are gifted in this way. Some blurted out strange, inept things. That's OK too. Your words don't have to be wise. The heart that speaks is heard more than the words spoken. And if you can't think of anything at all to say, just say, "I can't think of anything to say. But I want you to know that we are with you in your grief."

Or even, just embrace. Not even the best of words can take away the pain. What words can do is testify that there is more than pain in our journey on earth to a new day. Of those things that are more, the greatest is love. Express your love.¹⁸

¹⁸ Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 34.