

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 29, 6-min. Video Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's jump right into this explainer and tackle something we all face – the fundamental human dilemma of suffering. You know, whenever we approach an ancient text like the Book of Job, we carry a lot of heavy baggage with us. We bring our pain, our confusion, and honestly, our deep-seated need for explanations.

We look at this massive, poetic masterpiece, and we just assume it's going to act as a definitive roadmap for human pain. And all that baggage usually boils down to one burning question, right? Why do good people suffer? It's this age-old expectation that we naturally assume the Book of Job is just going to neatly resolve for us. We think that by the end of the final chapter, God will sit Job down, pull back the cosmic curtain, and give him a comprehensive, bulleted list explaining exactly why the tragedy happened.

We accept a tidy resolution that we can just copy and paste into our own lives. Well, prepare to be shocked, because you absolutely will not find that answer in Job. Throughout the entire narrative, Job is never told why he suffered.

The scholar Dr. John Walton points out that there is literally no reason or cause found in Job's behavior for his immense suffering. It completely subverts our expectations. If you came to this text looking for the definitive why, you're going to be left empty-handed.

To truly understand this book, we need a massive paradigm shift. Notice the contrast here. When we experience suffering, our knee-jerk instinct is to look to the past.

We stare into this tangled mess of a situation, trying to reverse-engineer our pain to find a cause. But Dr. Walton suggests we should be looking to the future instead, seeking purpose. Attempting to ask why about the past is honestly a futile endeavor.

Instead, we really need to orient ourselves toward what God might do next. But here is an even tougher pill to swallow. There may very well be no reasons.

I know, right? Our modern inclination is to think, well, okay, maybe I can't know the reasons right now, but I'll find out in heaven. We have this mental image of lining up at some magical reasons booth in the afterlife to finally get all our explanations. But Dr. Walton warns us not to count on it.

Our experiences often stem from living in a world of non-order and disorder. The terrible things that happen aren't always the result of specific hidden reasons. Sometimes they're just the result of the world being the way that it is.

Which brings us to section two: don't put God on trial- the job mistake. So when our why goes persistently unanswered, it is incredibly easy to slip into a very specific kind of arrogant mistake. This is what we can call the Job mistake: trying to make God defend himself.

When we demand answers, we're basically calling God into court and expecting him to answer for what he's doing in the world. We assume we're entitled to a defense, but expecting God to just hand over his divine blueprints is way above our pay grade. And it's entirely beyond our capacity to even discover.

And this brilliantly illustrates why we can't outdo God. We fall into this wild illusion that if we were given the reins of the universe, we could somehow run it better. Actually, in chapter 40 of the text, God offers Job exactly that.

He rhetorically tells Job to just give it a shot and see how it goes. The reality is God's explanations are completely beyond our comprehension. We think way too simplistically about how a cosmic God operates, and simultaneously, we think way too highly of our own understanding.

Let's move to section three, serving God for nothing, the real question. Okay, so if the book isn't about answering the why of suffering, what is it actually about? Well, the core concept is something called disinterested righteousness. Basically, it means being willing to serve God for absolutely nothing in return.

This was actually the challenger's real accusation against Job right at the beginning of the text. Does Job fear God for nothing? The challenger implies that people only follow God because of what they get out of the deal. So the real question becomes, do any of us truly serve God if there are zero benefits attached to it? I mean, think about the benefits we naturally rely on in our faith: eternal life, forgiveness, salvation, daily blessings.

We don't earn these, sure, but we heavily, heavily depend on them. I want to challenge you right now. If every single one of these benefits was completely removed from the table, would you still serve God? Are we serving him for who he is, or are we just in it for the transactional rewards? Section four, the Abraham parallel, Genesis 22.

To really grasp this profound concept of disinterested righteousness, we've got to look at the story of Abraham in Genesis 22, when he's asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac. We so often view this simply as a tragic test of losing a child, but it was far, far more than that. Abraham was putting the entire divine covenant on the altar.

Think about the domino effect. No Isaac means the family line dies out. No family means no promised land.

No promised land means no ultimate blessing for the world. Sacrificing Isaac literally meant Abraham was giving up everything God had ever promised him. This completely reframes the evolution of Abraham's faith.

Previously, his faith was essentially about believing in order to gain a promise. God asked him to do something, and God promised something better in return. But in Genesis 22, that whole dynamic just vanishes.

Abraham stood to gain absolutely nothing. In fact, he was actively believing while simultaneously watching everything he could have gained go up in smoke. And this is exactly why God's specific response in Genesis 22, verse 12, is so vital.

God says, now I know that you fear God. Notice what God didn't say. He didn't say, now I know you're in it for the benefits.

Because Abraham was willing to give up the very promises of God, it proved he wasn't just in it for the rewards. It is literally the ultimate historical example of disinterested righteousness in action. Which leads us to our final part, section five: trust when reason fails.

So we've totally dismantled the expectation of finding a why. And we've explored the immense challenge of disinterested righteousness. So what are we actually supposed to do with our suffering? I want you to really soak in this powerful realization from Dr. Walton.

Trust comes in where reason has failed. If our experiences are totally beyond explanation, and if reasons are fleeting or completely non-existent, then trust is the only possible response left. Think about it.

If we had all the answers, if everything made perfect logical sense all the time, we wouldn't need to trust at all. Trust is specifically designed for the dark spaces where reason simply cannot reach. And this leads us to the ultimate partnership.

True faith, according to the book of Job, means we must affirm God's justice even when it is entirely unseen in our current circumstances. We literally have to devalue those personal benefits in our minds. Instead of acting like consumers of divine blessings, we are called to become active participants, partnering in his cosmic plans.

We must value the relationship itself far above any tangible reward we might get out of it. And that brings us to the lingering question I want to leave you with as we wrap up this explainer. Do you serve God for nothing? It is for sure the most challenging, provocative question the book of Job asks of us.

I highly encourage you to take some time to evaluate your own motivations today. Are you just in it for the benefits, or are you ready to partner with God, trusting him deeply, even when all the reasons are stripped away?