

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday,
January 8, 2012, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

JOB 19:21-22

21 Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
22 Why do you, like God, pursue me?
Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?

THE CHALLENGE #2
ALONE

In 1969 the rock band, Three Dog Night reached number five on the Billboard 100 chart with the song, *One*. The song's opening lyrics say, "One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do. Two can be as bad as one, it's the loneliest number since the number one." They don't write songs like they used to, do they?

According to Wikipedia, *One* was "written by Harry Nilsson after calling someone and getting a busy signal. He stayed on the line listening to the 'beep,beep,beep,beep...' tone, writing the song. The busy signal became the opening notes of the song."¹

Have you ever really wanted to reach out to someone only to have a busy signal get in the way? Have you ever been in conflict with someone in your life and tried to reach out only to have your efforts rebuffed? Have you ever felt betrayed by those closest to you? Have you ever been in a strange place, a foreign country, a business trip in a new region and felt completely alone? Have you ever been lost in the woods, alone on a lake, home alone for a couple of weeks, new at college with no one that you know from home? Face it, we've all be alone. We can all recall times in our lives where we felt absolutely lonely. We've felt like we have no one to comfort us; no one to protect us; no one to befriend us; no one who understand us. That may be where you find yourself today. I heard an expert on men's ministry once say that if there was one word that could be used to describe the majority of men in America today it would be the word *lonely*.

Experts suggest that there are two types of loneliness. The first type is called social loneliness. This type of loneliness happens when we are isolated from our families and friends. It's what happens when a college student finally finds the freedom from parents that first week of college and then realizes that he or she is really kind of lonely for home. It's what happens when a businesswoman is on a trip away from home and she misses her family. It's a very common thing.

The second type of loneliness is also very common. It's called emotional loneliness. This happens when we feel like we don't have a soul with whom we can share our deepest concerns. It's when we feel like there is no one who understands what we are

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Is_the_Loneliest_Number

going through. It's not just when we are struggling. Sometimes it's that we have no one to celebrate our accomplishments with. Some of the loneliest people that I know are those who on the outside seem to have it all together. I remember a conversation that I had with a supervisor at a large organization. His paycheck was the envy of almost everyone on staff. He had been promoted from within the organization. He told me, "Brian, I'm lonely. I used to have people invite me out to lunch. Now, I only get an invitation if I'm the one doing the inviting. I used to be privy to all of the office conversations. Now, more often than not, I feel like the subject of that office gossip." He was incredibly successful and incredibly lonely.

If you have been reading along in *The Challenge* this week, you have begun reading the book of Job. It's a journey that you will finish later this week. This may or may not be your first journey through this Old Testament book. Some of you are wondering why after just a few days in Genesis, we switched books and started reading Job. Well, that's because we are reading through the Bible chronologically, or as the events happened. The events of Job happened shortly after the curious events that occurred at the Tower of Babel, events which were chronicled in Darrin's sermon last week.

If you are into numbers, consider this: Genesis 1-11 comprise of 2,000 years of Bible history. The rest of the book covers another 286 years. So, the book of Genesis covers 2, 286 years. The Bible is comprised of 4,100 years. Over ½ of the Bible is recorded in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 12 we are introduced to Abraham, who was a contemporary of Job. Job was the great grandson of Abraham's brother, Nahor. And, what a man Job was! Listen to how Job chapter one introduces us to him.

1 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.

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?"

I'm trying to stay a couple weeks ahead of the congregation on this year's challenge. When I read verse 8, I wrote down the following on my YouVersion notes. "No one on planet earth lived a life as righteous as Job. I wonder who God would say lives like Job

today. How would I respond if God allowed to happen to me what happened to Job? I hope I never have to find out. Job truly did have an amazing faith.”

Think about that for a minute. There is someone living on planet earth today that is the most righteous person on the planet. It's not me. It's probably not you. And, if you and I knew who that person was, we'd want to be around them. We'd want to experience the joy that person has. We'd want to be mentored by that person. We'd want our kids to hang out with that person's kids and our grandchildren to hang out with his or her grandchildren. We would want to know his or her secret to intimacy with God. We might feel jealous of the person on occasion. We might not like the fact that they seem so super-spiritual. We might be intimidated by them. But, my guess is that the most righteous person on planet earth reflects the character of Christ so well, that they are not only a joy to be around, but that they are constantly changing people around them for the better. I've got to believe that is the type of person that Job was. I mean, he even offered sacrifices for each of his children after their family festivals, just in case his children had sinned. What a Dad! What man! So, holy was Job that God said, “that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil.”

Some of you were the teacher's pet in school. You teacher treated you with special honor because you earned it. There are some who might say that Job was God's pet. God took great pride in His servant Job!

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.

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.

Never had anyone in the history of planet earth endured such a day. Job lost everything; all of his children, all of his wealth, gone in one day! Only his wife and a few faithful friends remained. And his response blows me away! Job worshipped God in the darkest of days!

Do you know anyone like that?

When our friends Mike and Sharon lost their twelve-year-old son in a freak accident I was asked to preach the funeral sermon. What do you say? What do you say to a family who has honored God with their lives, served Him, boldly told others about Him, given to Him, served in short-term missions, taught Bible studies, tried their best to be godly role models and then had God take their only son? I'll never forget listening to Sharon say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." People who walk with God, know that God walks with them through the darkest of days. In the worst trials, God somehow gives strength to move forward as we rely upon him. Job understood that.

By Job's second chapter, Satan has come back and says something to the extent of, "Job follows you now, because he still has his health. Let me attack his body and he'll curse you, God!" God allows Satan to attack Job's health, but not take his life. Look at Job 2:9-10.

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." 10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job still honors God. And then the attacks come from Job's closest friends. Three men, named Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar begin to question Job's integrity. Surely, Job must be a very wicked, closet sinner for God to allow him to be attacked in such a serious way!

From Job chapters 4-31, these three men and Job will have a long discourse about what Job must have done wrong to deserve God's punishment. It's tragic, really, because Job did nothing to deserve what was brought upon him. He was the most righteous man in his day and age.

In Job 18, it's Bildad's second chance to tell Job everything that Job has done wrong. He basically tells him if he would repent then everything will get better. Listen to what Chuck Swindoll has written about this encounter.

"Here's the way Bildad thinks. God is just and God is fair. God not only punishes the wicked, He blesses the righteous. If you repent, God will bless you and relieve you of your affliction. If you don't repent, He'll keep judging you and your pain will continue. *Repent!* Here's the snag: Job isn't in need of repenting, because he hasn't done anything wrong. But, like some folks to this day, Bildad's theology doesn't have room for mystery. Everything is black or white. If you obey, you will be blessed. Those in God's will enjoy great prosperity and good health. But if you suffer, you're *out* of God's will. He wants *everybody* well. What flawed theology! Since God is sovereign and powerful, if He wanted everybody well, we'd all be well. After all, He's God . . . but it's not like that.

He's running the show, if you will. He deliberately allows sickness. For mysterious reasons beyond our comprehension, He permits pain. And then, there are other times for reasons that are not clearly revealed, He tests us. The point is, He is in charge. That means we're not. If we pray for the healing of an individual, and healing doesn't occur, we are not to conclude it's his or her fault. Because *God doesn't want everyone well*. Please read that sentence again.

Paul prayed three separate times that his thorn in the flesh would be taken from him. And the Lord answered, 'No, no, no.' Paul not only stopped praying for relief, he accepted God's firm no as final. Then he responded with an acceptance speech that cannot be improved on:

He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

What a magnificent, mature response! Paul was willing to accept the mystery of God's will in leaving him with the affliction after he had urgently prayed for relief three times! (But) Bildad left no room for mystery."²

As I read through the book of Job these past couple of weeks, I was impressed with the fact that much of what Job's three friends said was true. You see, it's a little bit of truth mixed with lies that can impact all of us in a negative way. It can get us to doubt. It can get us off track. It can get our eyes off of God and onto ourselves and our situation. And even, Job, the most righteous man on earth, when hit time and time again, began to question.

² Chuck Swindoll, *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance*, (Dallas, W Publishing Group, A Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004), pp. 149-150.

I would have. I'm sure many, if not all of you, would have questioned too. When we deal with unspeakable anguish, pain and sorrow, questions soon follow.

Wronged by His Friends (vs. 1-4)

Job 19 is a chapter for those who have ever felt all alone in the world. Job had reached that spot. In verses 1-4 you see a man who felt wronged by his friends.

- 1 Then Job answered and said:
- 2 "How long will you torment me
and break me in pieces with words?
- 3 These ten times you have cast reproach upon me;
are you not ashamed to wrong me?
- 4 And even if it be true that I have erred,
my error remains with myself.

It's interesting that Job begins his response with the words, "How long," because those are the very words that Bildad used to begin his attack on Job. Look at the verbs that Job uses to describe what his friends have done to him. How long will you torment me, break me, cast reproach on me, wrong me. Those are passionate words. They show just how deeply his friends' words have wounded him.

If you have ever been wronged by the friends that are closest to you, you know that pain that comes with that. It can feel unbearable. And, it's not like the attacks came just once for Job, they came over and over again.

The tongue can be such a powerful weapon for destruction. Job desperately needed wise counsel. Instead he received just the opposite. Job's friends remind me of the type of person spoken of in Proverbs 12:18.

18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

The Difference Between Builders and Wreckers

Chuck Swindoll included the famous poem, *The Builder*, in his chapter where he taught on Job 19 in his book, *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance*. I want to include that poem here, because I think it's message is thought provoking and timely.

I saw them tearing a building down,
A group of men in a busy town,
With a hefty blow and a lusty yell,
They swung with zest,
And a side wall fell.
Asked of the Foreman,
"Are these men skilled? The kind you would hire if you had to build?"

He looked at me, and laughed, “No, indeed! Unskilled labor is all I need.
 Why, they can wreck in a day or two,
 What it has taken builders years to do.”
 I asked myself, as I went my way,
 Which of these roles have I tried to play?
 Am I a builder with rule and square,
 Measuring and constructing with skill and care?
 Or am I the wrecker who walks the town,
 Content with the business of tearing down?”³

I think we know the category that Job’s friends fell into. They were wreckers. They carelessly used their words for destruction instead of building up. What about you? How have you used your words with the people in your life? And, how would you have felt if you were Job? His friends weren’t acting like friends. He felt alone.

Wronged by God (vs. 5-12)

It wasn’t enough that his friends had turned their back upon him, Job finally felt that maybe God had too. Look at verses 5-12.

5 If indeed you magnify yourselves against me
 and make my disgrace an argument against me,
 6 know then that God has put me in the wrong
 and closed his net about me.
 7 Behold, I cry out, ‘Violence!’ but I am not answered;
 I call for help, but there is no justice.
 8 He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass,
 and he has set darkness upon my paths.
 9 He has stripped from me my glory
 and taken the crown from my head.
 10 He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone,
 and my hope has he pulled up like a tree.
 11 He has kindled his wrath against me
 and counts me as his adversary.
 12 His troops come on together;
 they have cast up their siege ramp against me
 and encamp around my tent.

God was silent, distant, He had stripped Job of his glory. Job’s hard work, his fantastic parenting, his holy living, had resulted in what? Where was God?

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever cried out to the heavens and said, “God, why are you so distant? Why have you allowed me to go through the trials I am experiencing? Why, God? Why?”

³ *Ibid.*, p. 156

Job is describing the desperation that comes when it feels like prayers are no longer answered, Divine guidance has been taken away, your good reputation has been stripped away, hope is gone, and the positive relationships that you had with friends, family and God are no longer present.

Wronged by Family and Other Friends (vs. 13-22)

My guess is that some of you are there. Some are feeling that desperation today. A new year is here, and the hope of a better life has come with it, but you're afraid to hope. Listen, it wasn't just his friends, and his God that Job had felt betrayed by. It was his family too. At least, the family that remained. And, it was his other friends.

- 13 "He has put my brothers far from me,
and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me.
- 14 My relatives have failed me,
my close friends have forgotten me.
- 15 The guests in my house and my maidservants count me as a stranger;
I have become a foreigner in their eyes.
- 16 I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer;
I must plead with him with my mouth for mercy.
- 17 My breath is strange to my wife,
and I am a stench to the children of my own mother.
- 18 Even young children despise me;
when I rise they talk against me.
- 19 All my intimate friends abhor me,
and those whom I loved have turned against me.
- 20 My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh,
and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.
- 21 Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
- 22 Why do you, like God, pursue me?
Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?

Everyone who mattered in Job's life had turned against him. He was all alone.

Verses 23-24 show us the one wish that he had. He wished that his words would be preserved so that future generations could learn something from his pain.

- 23 "Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
- 24 Oh that with an iron pen and lead
they were engraved in the rock forever!

Swindoll writes, "When I first read that, I was reminded of our sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln, on the nineteenth of November 1863. He stood at Gettysburg surrounded by the horrendous aftermath of that bloody battle, with bloated bodies still

lying in the fields under the sun. He stood with this simple little speech written by his own hand. For sure, he believed his words would soon be forgotten.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

Realizing how permanently his words have been etched into everyone's memory, each time I read his speech I think, 'Mr. President, our nation will *never* forget what you said in that address!' Most of us are unable to remember all that those soldiers did there, but we'll never forget the immortal words Lincoln spoke there.

Job had no idea that his words would survive him. Yet – thin of it – God chose to include them in His eternal Word! Along with Scriptures like Genesis 1, Psalm 23, 1 Corinthians 13, and Revelation 22, we call to mind Job 19:25-27 to this day!"⁴

25 For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
27 whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!

Job knew that in the end, God wins. In the end, all of the pain, all of the suffering, all of the misery that comes this side of heaven, cannot compare to the glory that we will experience once we are in God's presence. This world is not our home. While we are here, we will have trouble. There will be times where we will question God. There will be times when we feel all alone. Job worked through his suffering by replacing the feelings of despair with hope. Hope is a powerful weapon. As alone as Job felt, it was a mistake to think that God wasn't with him. Sometimes God is silent. But, He is always there. He knows what you are going through. Sometimes He is even the One who is allowing you to go through the pain, because in it He is producing something of infinite worth and everlasting value.

I spoke about some of Paul's sufferings earlier in this message. I want to leave you with these words from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth.

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

I bet that most of us can confidently say this morning that we don't ever want to go through what Job went through. I'm pretty sure that most of us never will. He is this incredible example of faithfulness to God in the great storms of life. God would eventually restore Job. He would bless him with more wealth, more children, more prestige than he ever had before. Job would eventually experience joy again, but he knew that real joy came out of the relationship that he prioritized with God in his life. I want to close with a challenge to all of you. Sometimes in the trials of life, we lose perspective. We allow hope to be crowded out by worry or pain. Our feelings can easily betray us.

Somebody once shared an acronym with me that I'm sure many of you have heard. It's the simple acronym, H.A.L.T.

The acronym stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely and Tired.

When we are experiencing any one of these four symptoms, we are especially vulnerable to all types of spiritual and emotional attack. The person who struggles with addiction can find himself relapsing. The person who struggles with depression can find herself in a freefall. The person who feels all alone can truly shut off the rest of the world. And, I could go on and on. I believe that greatest solution for when we find ourselves losing hope is to halt, spend some time with God, get in the Word, take some time for yourself, take a nap, have a meal, spend time with a friend, pray, and get perspective.

Job had all kinds of voices telling him what to do. The one he needed to hear from the most was God. God was silent for a time, but in Job 38-42 God spoke. You'll read those chapters this week, as you go through the Challenge. As you do, allow God to show you once again, just who He is, and what He came to do. If you are God's child, God has not and will never abandon you – no matter how hard it gets, He walks with you each step of the way.