

Aunt Jemima's Story

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[Job 42:1-6, 10-17](#), Psalm 34:1-8, 19-22, Hebrews 7:23-28, Mark 10:46-52

The Book of Job is a deep theological and philosophical dive into a very difficult question that people have always struggled with. It dares to ask the question why bad things happen to good people. But, as we read the end of the book this morning, I am struck by another question that is just as difficult to deal with. Of course, the book tells the story of all of these terrible things that happen to Job. He loses all of his possessions to marauding bands of warriors, all ten of his children, seven sons and three daughters, are killed in a tragic accident and he deals with sickness so severe that it leaves him in constant pain and suffering.

About Recovering from Trauma

Of course, all of that tragedy does set up the difficult discussion of the question of why these things happen. But that is not really what the end of the story is about. In many ways, the end of the story raises an issue that is just as important for our present circumstances as the question of why bad things happen. At least, it leads me to ask the question how we can recover from trauma, from our losses and the really bad things that happen to us.

In some ways, the end of the Book of Job is a perfect picture of recovery. After losing everything, including his own health, Job gets it all back. He recovers physically. He gets his wealth back. And this is presented as a precise calculation. Wealth, in that world, was mostly measured in livestock and so Job gets back precisely twice as many sheep, twice as many camels, twice as many oxen and twice as many donkeys as he had before. Don't tell me that's a coincidence; there's got to be a message in something as exact as that. In the same way, Job gets his children back and this is, once again, quite exact. He lost seven sons and three daughters and gets back exactly the same number of both. Again, this is no coincidence.

Recovery is not as Simple as that

So, there you go, right? Everything lost has been given back. Trauma over. All's well that ends well. Except here is the problem. Recovering from trauma is never as simple as just getting everything you lost back. Never. And you might think, based on these details, that the Book of Job totally fails to reckon with that reality. It suggests a completely happy ending. But I'm not so sure about that. I think that if we play close attention to the story of that recovery, we might see how hard Job and the people around him had to work at it. But to understand that, I think we may need to consider the story from the point of view of somebody who lived it, maybe, say, as Job's eldest daughter might have told it. That's right, we need to hear Aunt Jemima's story.

Job's Sorrow

Come on, children. Come and sit at your Aunt Jemima's knee because I have a story to tell you. You need to hear this story because my father, your great grandfather, Job, is coming to visit later this afternoon. You need to know this story before he comes. Your great granddaddy had some terrible things happened to him many, many years ago. He lost everything that he held dear, not only everything that he owned but also everyone that he loved.



He had ten children in those days, seven strapping sons and three beautiful daughters. But he lost them all in one tragic accident. Oh, my beautiful babies, you have no idea how much Job wept for those children.

And your great granddaddy tried for days on end to understand why such things had happened to him. He knew he had done nothing to deserve such tragedy. He spoke to his friends trying to find an answer and, in the end, he spoke to God and God came to answer. Now, did God ever explain to Job why such terrible things had to happen to him? Not really. God just sort of overwhelmed Job by talking about all the complexity of the universe until Job just gave up his arguments. Sometimes, you see, we never do get a clear answer to that question of why bad things happen to us.

You Can't Replace Children

But the good news is that your great granddaddy got through it all. He survived and came out the other end of all of his struggles. He got all of his possessions back, in fact twice as much as he had before. And, blessing of blessings, he had ten more children – seven sons and three daughters. I was the first of those children.

And this is what you need to know today, children. Job loves me and all his children and he loves his grandchildren and, you, his great grandchildren. He loves you so much. But when he comes today, it may not seem that way. Instead of smiling and laughing, he will probably weep when he sees you. He'll weep because you remind him of those children that he lost.

No matter how many children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren he has, they cannot possibly replace even one that he lost. Lost children never work that way, never have and never will. I know that sometimes people, trying to comfort someone who's lost a child, will say that. They'll say, "Can't you just have another one?" That can sometimes be the hardest thing for a grieving parent to hear, because they know they just want the one they lost back.

Living with the Fear

What's more, having once lost so much, Job also lives with a fear of losing it all again. That has made it hard for him to just enjoy the things that he has and to show love. Recovery from loss – especially the loss of children is just that hard. So be gentle and loving with your great grandfather, it is what he needs most of all.

The Trauma of Generational Loss

Children, I don't think that many people understand how hard it is to recover from this sort of trauma, especially when a whole generation is lost. I heard about a tribe once – they lived far away from this land of Uz – but they were invaded by a foreign people who came in and occupied all their territory.

These new settlers treated the people who had been living there forever as if they were ignorant savages. They decided it would be better if their entire culture were eliminated. And so, they took all of the children of the people of this tribe away from their parents. They took them and put them in schools where they were not allowed to speak their language or practice their culture or religion. Many of these children were also abused in various ways.

The Challenges of Survival

But, much to the disappointment of the settlers, the original people survived. Many of their children died, but the people survived. But survival itself brought its own challenges. For the children did not know who they were anymore. And, when they had their own children, they had no parenting models to follow. So, even after the original destruction had come to an end, the effects of the trauma kept on being passed

down from generation to generation to generation.

That's exactly what Job didn't want to happen for his family, and he worked hard to make sure it didn't. And so, children, I'm going to tell you what measures he took because you might need to take similar measures some day.

Accept Help from the Right People

This is the first thing that Job did that helped him to recover. He accepted help. This is exactly where too many people fall short. When you've been through a really hard time, when you have struggled mightily and just barely managed to survive, there is a tendency to withdraw. After all, you don't really want to talk about what you went through. That stirs up too many difficult emotions. And you can also feel this real need to be self-sufficient. But it's just not going to work. Recovery, real recovery that lasts, always happens within a larger community of support.

So Job found that community of support. He had to be choosy. Not every friend was going to be helpful to him. In particular, the three so-called friends who came and argued with him that he must have deserved all of these bad things that happened to him, they weren't going to be much help. So, he prayed for them, but then he just let them go on their way.

But then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all that he had gone through. They understood. And to them, Job could really talk about everything he had gone through and all of his emotions. And that, just that, was a necessary step for his recovery. It allowed him to begin to build his own story of what he had gone through and what it meant. And that became the beginning of a new story of who he was and where he was going from there.

Accept Other Kinds of Help

So, the sympathy and listening ears they brought meant a great deal. But they were also the beginning of his financial recovery as well as each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. So, my darling grandchildren, never forget that you need the help of good and trustworthy friends in order to recover from your trauma.

Job's Emphasis on his Daughters

But there was something else that father Job did that truly saved the future generations of his family, something that I will never forget. It was about his children. He had seven new sons and three daughters. But here is the funny thing, if you go and look at the records of his family, you will not find the name of any of those sons anywhere. Now, Job loved his sons, there is no question about that! But he lived in a world that put all the emphasis on sons. They were the ones whose names were supposed to live on. They were the ones who were expected to build the future. But Job, after all he had gone through, decided that recovery for the future of his family needed to be led from someplace else.

Job had three daughters. I, Jemima, was his first born, and then Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. And you all know those names because your great-grandfather resolved that no one would ever forget his daughters. He knew that they would be the best leaders for the recovery from trauma. He even made sure that his daughters would inherit an equal portion of all his property with his sons, something that is quite unheard of in our world, as you know.

Women are a Key to Recovery

Job did all of this because he understood something that people too often fail to realize: there can be

no recovery from tragedy if women are not a key part of it. There was a time when banks and development agencies tried to help whole countries recover from poverty or natural disasters by making investments, but they made a mistake. They chose only to invest in the traditional economic drivers like government and established industry. It was often not successful, sometimes driving corruption and embezzlement and often leading to a high failure rate. But they discovered something. When they gave loans to women, even very small loans to start some small enterprise, it almost always drove economic growth that helped the whole community.

This may have something to do with how women prioritize family and community and want to build for the next generation. It certainly has something to do with how women are often the carriers of important traditions that they keep and pass down, kind of like I'm doing when I tell you this story today. Well, Job understood this.

People told him that he shouldn't make so much of his daughters, that he shouldn't let them inherit alongside his sons. But Job knew better than anybody the trauma that he had been through, and in order to make sure that the scars of that trauma didn't get passed down to the next generation and the next until it came to you, this was the wise decision that he made. If you ever get the chance to help people recover from trauma, you need to keep this in mind as well.

End of Story

Well, children, that's the story that Aunt Jemima has for you today. Great granddaddy Job will be here very soon, so you all go and you put on your best clothes and wash your faces and get ready to greet him with the biggest hug any patriarch has ever received.

The Challenge of the End of the Book

I know that people often turn to the Book of Job as they try to process the very difficult question of why bad things happen. It is a useful book for that, even if it doesn't give crystal-clear answers, probably because there are no crystal-clear answers. So, I've always loved the book for how it helps us to deal with that question.

But I've always had problems with the ending. Yes, it does say that, in the end, Job got everything back that he lost including a whole set of replacement children. But that always troubled me because I have tried to minister to many people who've gone through traumatic loss, and I know that just getting back what you lost is not the same thing as recovering. I also know that it never helps a parent get over the loss of a child when you suggest that they can just have another one.

But this time as I read the story, especially as I reflected on Jemima and her sisters, I realized that there is more to the story than that, and it really does lay out some of the steps that actually do help a person to recover from such devastating loss.

Dealing with your Trauma and Loss

So, if you have suffered that kind of trauma, or if you know someone that you love who has, I would counsel you to never underestimate the impact of the wounds and the scars that you carry. They are serious and they do not just affect you, they can also be passed down in your family. Be wise like Job and take steps to deal with your trauma. Find safe and supportive people that you can trust who will listen to you and help you process your experience. In some cases, you may need someone who has been professionally trained to do that. Do not be afraid to ask for help, we all need it sometimes. And make investments in the people who will build a better future for yourself and your family and everything you want to leave for the generations yet to come.