

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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God Rules Over All

Has there been a time when you quit worshipping God during a struggle?

Has there been a time when you persisted in worship through a struggle? What did that look and feel like?

How might you defend yourself against the enemy's attacks knowing God allows him authority over your circumstances but not your life?

Job 1:8-12 – ⁸The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” ⁹Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰Have you not put a fence 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. ¹¹But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” ¹²The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

I) The Lord Gave...

Sometimes, everything goes right for us. These times might stretch on until our deep struggles are a faint memory. Those of us aware of God's hand of provision praise Him for these blessings. If those near us struggle, we experience it from the perspective of one in the eye of the storm. Perhaps this provokes us to wonder if God is present in their struggles and what that means about the nature of blessing. It's an inconvenient thought, one we would rather ignore. It is this peculiar thought that is at the center of God's chosen relationship with Satan. God shares this wisdom with us in the Book of Job.

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◆ **Great rewards:** For Christians, times of peace and prosperity feel like the proper outcome for honoring God. Some interpret this as the natural result of living according to God's wisdom. Others, an overt reward for obedience. Whatever the mechanism, we perceive that righteous living produces life's pleasantness. When we encounter Job, these two aspects are intertwined. First, we are told of his large family and prosperous life, summed as him being "the greatest of all the people of the east (Job 1:3)." Then, God Himself says to Satan that "There is no one like [Job] on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil (v8)." It's odd that what we expect as a conclusion is the opening passage of text.

◆ **Unconditional love:** That's because this text is not another version of how God provides for and protects us. Instead, this text examines one of the fundamental questions about our relationship with God. It does so through the person of Satan, also translated as *Accuser*. Satan asks God the hard question: "Does Job fear God for nothing (v9)?" This question pierces our heart, forcing us to contemplate God independent of the good He does. Put another way, do we love and obey God simply for who He is and for our existence?

II) The Lord Has Taken Away...

This story elevates the nature of the question to dramatic heights. Most of us are not considered the "greatest" in our community nor "blameless and upright" by God. This creates the effect of Job having a lot to lose and no just reason to lose it. Satan seizes upon this fact. Our accuser, convinced that the created is glorious independent of God, challenges God to test the one who He has offered as the example of righteousness. Satan believes our hearts treasure our circumstances and that we worship for that end.

◆ **Spoiled:** Satan sees what we see. Our Father is generous. Satan enumerates the Father's provisions, declaring "Have you not put a fence 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 (v10)." Peace and safety over his family, prosperity in his work, wealth in many possessions. Satan knows God made us to perfectly enjoy His creation and will not tempt us to sin. He uses this to setup his attack on our character by challenging God to diminish the expression of His glory.

◆ **Bite the hand that feeds:** Satan reveals his true belief to God in his accusation. He presumptively accuses us of worshipping our possessions. He tells God to "stretch out your hand now, and touch

all that he has, and he will curse you to your face (v11)." This worldview is what drives Satan, is how he attacks us, and is precisely what God uses to examine each of our hearts. It both offends us as we cannot imagine being guilty of this accusation and terrifies us as we have not really plumbed the depths of possibilities to discover our truth. God's generosity is so profound that few of us have taken a full inventory to realize all that would be lost. Satan has.

III) Blessed Be the Name of the Lord...

Now we get to the crucial point. God rules over all His creation, including Satan, and uses every created thing to fulfill His purposes. We might be tempted to explain this scenario in ways that defend God and absolve Him of responsibility for what Satan does to Job. We are wiser if we seek His purpose for the existence of one convinced creation is greater than the Creator and how that can be for our good. This is the narrow, hard path that leads into the kingdom of heaven. This provokes serious reflection on spiritual realities, the power of faith, and what it means for God to be sovereign. We will come out the other side knowing the fulness of our own heart.

◆ **A jealous God:** The Bible illustrates God's desire that we love Him above everything else over and over. He tells us "You shall not bow down to [idols] or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God (Exodus 20:5)." Knowing Abraham would not sin, God directly commanded that he sacrifice his son. God uses situations to purify our hearts and increase our faith. Here, He tells Satan, "Very well, all that he has is in your power (Job 1:12)." God uses Satan's distorted love of creation to shatter the boundary between faith and certainty. Will we remember God's promises and believe He will honor them regardless of how impossible they appear? Do we love the source of life more than life itself? Satan is the instrument God uses to fully probe these questions.

◆ **Abundant life:** That's all Satan is—an instrument. God grants him limited authority, saying "only do not stretch out your hand against him (v12)," then later, "only spare his life (Job 2:6)." Satan has no authority to kill us, only to tempt us into death. Through Jesus, God promises us abundant, eternal life. Life's pains and pleasures come and go. If we hold firm to the promise of abundant life and the presence of Christ, we become aware of an unrivaled joy in the privilege of glorifying our Creator. The joy of freedom. The joy of choosing to love God and life in a way no one and nothing can touch. This is God's purpose for Satan, that we discover our invincibility in Jesus.