

“Your God is Too Small” // Job 38–42 // *Not God Enough* 1

Go Eagles... Amen?

- First, their quarterback is taking seminary classes and wants to be a pastor after the NFL, and if they win the Super Bowl he’s more likely to go ahead and retire, so if you cheer for the Patriots it’s like you are pulling for keeping a guy out of ministry
- Second, God hates pride and he brings down the haughty so down with the Evil Empire. Amen?

SBC President

Let me address something really quickly here before we get started... because a few of you may have noticed that my name was again placed in nomination for President of the Southern Baptist Convention. **A few months ago, I was approached by some leaders** asking if they could do that, and after a lot of consultation with our elder team and the consent of my supervisor, Veronica, we believed we at least ought to take the step of making ourselves available.

The election is not until June, and it is usually a 2-year term. But **let address 3 questions** that just popped into some of your heads:

3 questions:

- **What does the SBC President do?**
 - Probably not as much as you’d think
 - It is a volunteer position
 - And basically your role is to represent the 16 million or so SB’s in pioneering new mission initiatives, establishing priorities, and setting a tone for engaging culture

Works Consulted:

“When God Seems Inactive,” “When God Seems Late,” “When God Seems Uncooperative,” Craig Groeschel
“Job,” The Bible Project

- **Will it take you away from the Summit Church?**
 - Like I said, it is a volunteer position, so I’ll continue to do everything I do here
 - Not at all: Our elders’ standard
- **Since when did we become SBC?**
 - There are obviously parts of the Convention we aren’t excited about and don’t represent us...
 - But on the whole, we are very grateful... 158 missionaries/ It would cost us over 6 million/yr but we are able to send freely because of the cooperative efforts of all these 46K churches.
 - The **way my wife and I understand** it...
- **I would request your prayers...**

Anyway, now you’ve heard it from me.

BIBLES—JOB

We are starting a new sermon series today called *Not God Enough.*

It corresponds to a new book I have by that title, called *Not God Enough: Why Your Small God Leads to Big Problems.*

Now, let me go ahead and acknowledge to you: I’m a little sheepish about doing a message series around a book I just wrote, because I know it may look like I’m using this platform to promote a personal book. **I get that.** Honestly, I would ask the same question.

But there are 2 reasons our leadership team encouraged me to do a few messages on this theme...

- **First, the books I write are an OVERFLOW of what God has taught me here at the Summit Church,** so the message in this book is 1st and foremost for you.
 - Which is why I dedicate the book to you. In the acknowledgements, I reference a line from Martin Luther’s

book *Freedom of Conscience*, where he warns prospective pastors against aspirations of teaching the global church. Instead, he told them, focus on your local church, and if the global church feels like you have something helpful to say to it, it will come to you. **I then said, “To that end, every book I have written has been written first and foremost for The Summit Church in the Triangle, which I have been privileged to pastor now for sixteen years. I love its members, and our pastoral team is the greatest group of people ever assembled on earth. The Summit congregation are such a grateful and generous people. They have patiently listened as I worked through the questions this book addresses, and many more, weekend by weekend. They truly yearn to see God in all his glory.”**

- (So, I hope you feel loved. Group hug?) **The point is that this message** is first and foremost for you, so I wanted to press into it for a few weeks.
- **Secondly, I will tell you, as I have told you before, that I am committed to never making any money off of you with anything we sell here.** The proceeds from everything we sell here at the church goes right back into the ministries of the church and none of it comes to me or anyone else.
 - (The 1st time I released a book I told you that I was donating all the proceeds from the book to feed hungry children... but that’s not true either. I don’t make anything from what we sell here.)

Here’s the big idea behind *Not God Enough*: Almost all of our spiritual problems—things like doubt, apathy, unhappiness, or insecurity—come from a view of God that is too small.

As Americans, we prefer a God who is small; a God we can manage, predict and control. That kind of God feels safe to us. We can **understand** him, **explain** him; he doesn’t embarrass, confuse, contradict us or make us mad.

But this is simply not the God we encounter in the Bible. The God of the Bible is the opposite of small and manageable. He is big. He is not just big, he is bigger than big. He is bigger than all the words we use to say big. He defies our abilities to categorize or describe him. **Most Americans want a God who is only a slightly bigger, slightly smarter version** of us. But the God of the Bible is something altogether different.

And here’s the irony: **Only a God like that is capable of explaining life’s mysteries,** giving us a real sense of purpose in the world, and igniting our passions.

It’s like the British philosopher **Evelyn Underhill** famously said, “A god small enough to be understood is not big enough to be worshipped.”*

- You have to choose...

Solomon calls this “the fear of God,” and says that it is necessary for any proper relationship with God: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” (Prov 1:7).*

- That **verse means that without a trembling awe** before the majesty of God, we’ll never really know God, or trust him, or walk with him.

This is the step that, for many years, I tried to skip in my faith. *If you’ve been around here for any length of time, you know that I have tried to be honest with you about the struggles with belief I’ve had throughout my life. **Hard questions** I didn’t really have great answers for.*

- **Like—why is there so much suffering in the world?**
 - I mean, I get that God can use some pain for good purposes, but what possible good could God have had in the **holocaust**?
- *Or, how does the concept of hell align with a view of a loving God?*
- Or how about this one: *If Christianity is true, why do so few people believe it, relatively speaking? And why isn’t **God doing more***

about it to get people saved? Why not send an angel down to preach the gospel?

- A couple of summers ago my family and I worked for a week with a group of Syrian refugees, and my eight-year-old daughter asked, “*Dad, if God loves these people so much, why doesn’t he fix all this?*” I told her, “He is, sweetheart. He’s using us to do it.” That’s a standard pastor answer, of course. But **not satisfied, she pressed back**, “But why doesn’t he do something about it... *himself?*” I think it’s a fair question. Why not send that army of angels we’ve heard so much about and make the war in Syria go away?
- **Maybe you have had some of these same questions.** Maybe others.

And sometimes I thought, “You know, the fact that I can’t understand or explain these things may mean God doesn’t even exist.”

((Eventually, I came to believe because I became genuinely convinced that there really was no other explanation for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ other than the fact that he was who he said he was.

But even after coming to that conviction, I had trouble really loving God. How could I love and feel close to a God who so confused and bewildered me so much? ***(Y’all, I wanted to love him—I knew other people who seemed to.*** I know a woman in our church who tears up every single time she starts talking about God’s grace. I wanted to be like that. I knew how to fake it—I knew how to shake my head and squint my eyes and grunt at the right times. Some of you are like, “Wait, I’ve seen you make that face when you were talking with me!” **Yes. I acted the part,** but a lot of times the emotions weren’t there.))

I’ve come to see that one of my primary problems in all of this was a conception of God that was too small. I thought of God as just a slightly bigger, slightly smarter version of me; a God that I should be able easily to understand and explain.

But that is absolutely not the God of the Bible, and that conception of God is **just not able to sustain** faith. Only by grappling with the size of God that I developed the ability really to believe.

So, in this first message I want to unpack the experience of the man in the Bible who had more questions for God than anyone else I know of. In fact, his **name has become synonymous with confusion** and doubt. His name is...

JOB

We’re going to be in chapter 38, so let me give you a quick overview of chapters 1–37.¹

First, we don’t know much about Job. He is said to be from “Uz.” **Where is Uz?** Scholars don’t know. They assume you have to follow the yellow brick road to get there.

Furthermore, **we don’t know what time period Job lives in.** Or even what nationality he is. We know he’s not an Israelite because he doesn’t have an Israelite name.

But this lack of detail, scholars say, is intentional, because evidently the author doesn’t want us to get fixated on Job’s particular historical situation; he wants us to focus on the questions raised by Job’s suffering—questions that are universal—questions everyone asks.

¹ Much help here from *The Bible Project: Job*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQwnH8th_fs

All we are told in Job 1:1 is that Job is a “blameless, upright man,” which is a Hebrew way of saying, “a really swell guy.”

- It means that he helped little old ladies cross the street, always ate all his vegetables and turned in his library books on time. He read every word of the “terms and condition” on his new iPhone updates. Just a **stellar fella**.

But then, **right after this brief introduction**, we get whisked off to heaven where God is apparently having a staff meeting, and **among God’s staff is a particularly feisty fella called**, “The Sa-TAHN.” In Hebrew, this means “The Accuser” or “The Prosecutor.”

And the Sa-Tan raises a critical challenge. He says, *‘You know, God, the only reason people serve you is that it’s in their own self-interest.’ They serve you because you give them stuff. Let them suffer and they’ll give you up.’*

So, God says, **“Alright, take Job.** You can take everything in his life from him that he loves, and you’ll see that he values me for me.”

And for the next 2 chapters, that’s what happens. Satan takes everything from Job. (Interestingly Satan doesn’t touch his wife. I’m not sure what that means. You can almost hear another demon saying to Satan— “Hey, you forgot to take out Job’s wife.” And Job says, “No, we’re going to leave her. That’s intentional.” She turns out to be pretty cranky.)

At this point in the narrative, you should be asking, *“Wait—what? Why in the world would God allow this?”* And then we’d expect the rest of the book to provide answers to this question. But that’s **not what we get**.

Chapter 3: Enter Job’s friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Zophar the Na’amathite, and, the shortest man in the Bible, Bildad the Shuhite (get it, shu-height? You’ll want to write that down).

These men try to explain Job’s suffering using the best of ancient wisdom.

- FWIW, they seem to be halfway decent friends. They sit with Job in his misery and try to comfort him.
- Basically, they say to Job, *“Look, we know God is just. And we know everything happens for a reason. So, the fact that you are suffering means there is a reason God is doing this to you.”*
- **But Job pushes back:** “That’s not true. I’m not saying I’m perfect but I’m innocent of anything that would warrant this.”
- **And so, they hold the line:** “Look, Job, there has to be something. God is just and everything happens for a reason. So, think hard. What is it?”
- And **this goes on for 37 chapters**.
- **Finally, Job, exasperated, says**, “Listen, guys. You’re wrong. And the more you talk, the worse I feel. Your talking is not helping.”
 - It reminds me of the story of the man who gets pulled over. The officer says, “Did you know how fast you were going?” man says “no”; wife says, “Yes you did.” Did you know tail light was out? “Oh yes, he’s known for months.” Why are you not wearing your seat belt? Took it off when you were coming up. “No, you never wear it. Finally, the man yells, “Woman, would you SHUT UP?!” Officer: Does he always treat you this way? “Only when he’s drunk.” **Stop talking! You’re not helping!**
- And so, his friends, exhausted of their wisdom, leave one-by-one, and Job sits there, still confused.
- **The point: *The wisdom of the ancients has been spent, yet the mystery of suffering remains.***

And then, finally, chapter 38, God shows up. And Job says, *“At last. I’m going to get some answers.”* But no. Instead, God shows up and starts to ask Job a bunch of questions: 64, to be exact.

He says things (38–39) like:

- “Job, were you around when I shaped the earth?”
- “And what were you doing when I put the constellations together?”
- “While we’re at it, where do storms come from and can you predict when they are coming?”
- There’s even **some really random, odd questions** in there, like:
 - Job, **how much do you know** about the reproduction habits of goats? (39:1)
 - Or, why are ostriches so ugly? (Not kidding: 38:13).
 - **And, Job can you explain Grape Nuts?** Job, they are neither grape, nor nuts. Can you explain that? (OK, just kidding, that last one isn’t in there. But there are a lot of mysterious questions.)
 - And as you are reading, **you might be like, “I get the big questions, but why all these little ones?”**
- **The point is to show *perspective*.** God is saying: “Job, if you can’t even fathom all the mystery behind natural things, are you really in place to understand ***eternal things?***”
 - **You see, the assumption that Job and all his friends are working off of is that they know enough about the world to analyze and understand God’s ways.**
 - But God says, “Actually, your perspective on the world is quite puny. **Mine is YUGE.** You don’t even understand simple things like constellation creation or ostrich ugliness. **And see, if you don’t understand** the mystery behind finite things like this, do you really think you are in a place to hold court on me?”
 - **To understand infinite justice, you need to have infinite perspective.**
- **And then, chapter 40, God says, “While we are at it, Job, would you really like to run the world for a day?”** You really want to punish every little act of injustice in every instance? Do you know how many different things are happening in the world at one time and how many things are interconnected?

- **(It reminded me of that scene from Bruce Almighty where** God lets that shining star of theological brilliance Jim Carrey play God for a day and all these prayers are coming in. “How do you understand it when this prayer contradicts this prayer over here...”)
 - **At the end of chapter 40 God basically says, “This is quite a bit more complicated than you thought, isn’t it, little man?”**

And then the book ends. God ends up restoring everything to Job, 7-fold, but we never get real satisfying answers to the question of why this all happened in the 1st place. **Neither did Job.**

All we get are more questions, but these questions make 5 crucial points about the size of God.

God’s Answer to Job:

1. “My power is sovereign”

- In this book we see God’s **absolute power** over creation, angels, even Satan. We see that Satan does nothing except by permission!²
- And we see that **God has purposes in creation** that go far beyond our purview.
 - **For example,** God talks about watering a land where no one lives (38:26)
 - It reminded me of what **C. S. Lewis** talks about...
 - The point is that not everything in creation is **for** man! Sometimes God does things solely for himself.
- The one thing we do know about Job’s suffering was that **its ultimate purpose** was to bring glory to God. God was demonstrating his glory to Satan and all the angels through Job’s suffering.
- And I know some of you, you might say, “Well, **that’s a hard thing to live with**—that God is using my suffering for his glory,” but I’m

² Job 1:6, 12; 2:1, 6

telling you that is the secret to a happy, fulfilled life. **You, and all the world, exist for God's glory**, and when you realize that, you'll find a joy and satisfaction you've never known, because you were **created to live** that way.

2. "My perspective is infinite"

- The climax of God's argument comes in **42:3**, when God says **"Who is this that dares question my judgment without knowledge?"***
- **"Job, if you don't even understand the mystery** behind natural phenomenon like storms and stars, are you really in a place to understand the purposes of the *eternal* God above them?"
- There is a problem philosophers call **"problem of evil."** It was first **stated by** Epicurus (though I think you see it here in Job)— *"If God is all loving and all powerful..."* Missing premise. Wisdom. The question is: If God's power vs. mine and his wisdom vs. mine?
 - **I've told you before: Do a thought experiment with me about how much higher God's power is than mine.** Think about how much power it would have taken to create the known universe. **Even if you don't believe—if there is a God, how much power must he have?** Astronomers estimate the number of stars at more than 3,000 billion trillion. Septillion.

(Now, if you're like me, numbers like million, billion, trillion, or a septillion tend to sound all the same after a while. One million seconds ago. Do you know what you were doing a million seconds ago? Middle of the previous week. 11 days.

What about a billion seconds ago? Do you remember what you were doing then? That's 31 years and 8 months ago. Some of you, of course, can't remember what you were doing then because there was no "you" to speak of. Sometime in the 1980s. The compact disc player had just been released. Rambo was saving our world from certain destruction. The Jedi were returning for the first time.

How about a *trillion* seconds ago? How long ago do you think that would be? A couple centuries back? A trillion seconds ago was 29,672 BC. The 1st Rocky movie had just come out.

Now think about the fact that there are at least three *billion trillion* stars, each one putting out roughly the same amount of energy as a *trillion* atom bombs *every second*. **Some are so big** they defy description—like Eta Carinae in our own Milky Way, which is **5M times** brighter than our sun!

And these stars exist in an expanse we simply cannot comprehend. The Hubble Telescope is now sending back faint, infrared images of galaxies we didn't even know about, estimated at 12B light years away. And there are likely more beyond that.

All of them were created in a **single moment with a single word** from God.

I compare that to my power: My mattress. Watts: 60, I'm powering a lightbulb!

If his wisdom is as high above mine as his power is above mine, the most rational conclusion is that there will be some things beyond my immediate ability to understand!

- **It is entirely possible that** God has beautiful purposes **that he is working out that we just can't see yet.**
- **Bart Ehrman** says he lost his faith because of the presence of "purposeless evil"? But there is a huge assumption behind his claim of "*purposeless* evil." **That if there is a purpose**, he'd be wise enough to detect it. Isn't it rather arrogant to assume that with our limited knowledge we would be able to perceive every purpose of an infinitely wise God.

- **Like I told you: One of our core problems is that we don't think of God as that much bigger than us:** only a *slightly smarter* version of us.
 - **But does that make any sense** when we think about how big he had to be to pull off creation?
 - *It's like we think of God as a being with huge, powerful, star-creating muscles but a little, itty-bitty, teeny-tiny head.*
- **Job**, in response to this, says: *...Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."* **Job 42:3****
 - **IOW, I didn't realize how dumb and limited I was**—now that I see how big you are, I realize I had the wrong posture in my questions.
 - **Your questions are great**—ask them. But have some sense to the magnitude and wisdom of the God to whom you are asking them.

3. "My purpose is guaranteed"

- **One of the most encouraging things in this book is** we see that because God's power is sovereign and his perspective is infinite, even Satan's attempts to attack God's people only further God's purposes.
 - Think about it: **All of Satan's attacks on Job yielded a book** that has provided encouragement to countless believers down through the centuries. Do you think that's what Satan had planned?
 - *This book is a big ol' gotcha shoved right in Satan's face.*
- **Don't we see this all throughout Scripture? Satan's strategy to defeat the sons of God only serves to provide salvation for the sons of men.**
 - **We see it in Acts:** Every attempt by Satan trying to stomp out the church leads instead to its expansion.
 - The best illustration is the **CROSS**...
 - God took the worst day and turned it into the best day. **Is it Bad Friday or Good?**
- **And believer, God is doing the same thing with your struggles.**

- **If you think about it**, you can probably already see some of the good things behind some of what God is doing:
 - **I think here of the words of British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge:** *"Contrary to what I would have expected, I look back now on experiences that at the time seemed especially devastating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything of value that I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence has been through affliction, not through comfort and ease."*
- **Some of you can see that, can't you?**
- **Here's the perspective of Job:** *If already we can look back and see a good purpose for some of the suffering in our lives, don't we think given infinite time and perspective we'll see a reason for all of it?*
- **Sometimes what God is doing**, he is doing in you:
 - Sometimes God lets us suffer in order to chastise or correct us—to bring them back (We see that in **Jonah**)
 - Sometimes it is so that he can work salvation in others (**think Joseph**)
 - Sometimes, however, it just to make us love him more. **That's what we see in Job**
- **Suffering is how God shapes you for himself.**
 - **Martin Luther**, said as soon as God chooses you, he lets the devil afflict you to turn you into a "real doctor" of the word. Luther said, "I credit the devil, the pope and all my other persecutors with my deep knowledge of the word. Through the devil's raging they have turned me into a fairly good

preacher, driving me into the gospel in to depths I never would have reached without their affliction.”³

- This is **what this gospel is all about**: Satan’s strategy to defeat the sons of God only serves to provide salvation for the sons of men.
- **Believer, this is what he is doing in your suffering.**

4. “My promise is everlasting”

- My favorite verse in this book, hands down, is 19:25: **“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.” Job 19:25**
- Few things about the verse: **“In the end.”** In eternity. The last scene in the book of Job is **God restoring to Job 7-fold** of all that he lost.
 - **7 is a picture of eternity.** In this scene we are given a glimpse of what eternity will be like, when God restores to us all we have lost and gives us perfect joy.
 - **I love Psalm 16:11:** *“In your presence is the fullness of joy, and at your right-hand are pleasures forevermore.”* **Fullness:** joy that could not get any stronger. **Forevermore:** joy that could not last any longer.
- **Think, how long is eternity?** The whole life you’ve lived so far will be like just the 1st few seconds a never-ending day. Your life is just a brief ellipsis compared to the expanse of eternity.
- **That means that** compared to eternity, what we go through here in life is nothing!
 - **Mother Theresa**, compared to eternity, the worst things on earth are like nothing more than a bad night in a cheap hotel.
- **Recognizing that is the key to coping with suffering in this life.**
 - **C.S. Lewis**, *“If you look at this world as a place to find happiness, you’ll be miserable and confused. If you look at it as training, you’ll find purpose and joy.”*

5. “My presence is pledged”

- **“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.” Job 19:25****
- I wonder what Job was thinking about when he wrote that?
- Because, see, **we know it even more than** he did: We saw our Redeemer come and stand on earth with us!
- **Why was he here? He came** to take our punishment in our place so we would never be separated from God again.
- **Yes, I am wounded sometimes;** but he was wounded for me so I could be eternally healed. **Yes, I sometimes feel abandoned,** be he was abandoned for me so I could be eternally embraced.
- **That means his mercy is ever-present with me** and I **never have to worry about what he is doing** in my life.
- **He stands by my side because he stood in my place.**
- I love the words of **A.W. Tozer** here: **“With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?”**
- **I may not know exactly what God is doing in my pain,** but the cross shows me what my suffering can’t mean. It can’t mean that God has forsaken me or he’s lost control. **Think about the cross.**
 - **God’s love. Rom 8—***He that did not spare his own son*
 - **God’s control.** If there were ever a time when it looked like God was absent or had lost control. But there, God was doing his greatest work.
- And **that’s what he’s doing** right now through your pain. It may feel to you like a dark night of the soul but God is working in it the power of resurrection.
- **Your Redeemer came and stood** in your place—entered into your pain for you, took death for you—and **now stands victoriously by**

³ “As soon as God’s word becomes known through you, the Devil will afflict you and make a real doctor of you and will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love Gods word...for I myself owe my papists many things for oppressing and frightening

me, so that through the devil’s raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian, driving me to a goal I would have never reached.”

your side in the resurrection, promising you that one day you'll stand with him eternally.

- **So, in your pain, you have his presence.**

This is what God showed Job:

- *My power is sovereign;*
- *my perspective is infinite;*
- *my purpose is guaranteed;*
- *my promise is everlasting and*
- *my presence is pledged.*
- *(And yes, they all start with P! What else do you expect from a presumptive SBC President)*

Job wanted answers; God gave him presence. And that presence was enough. As soon as Job saw who God was, Job was satisfied. Before he was restored.

In fact, when God finally appeared, Job was so busy repenting that he did not have time for any further questions. His rage was now directed at himself: *"...I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."* (Job 42:6, NIV)

When you see the beauty of Christ, you stop asking the why and start trusting the Who.

You think you need explanations you can understand. **You are like Job's friends**—you think, "God if you would just explain it all to me I'd be satisfied). What you really need is a revelation of a God who is big enough—who is GOD ENOUGH—to work all this mess out for good, and faithful and loving enough that he promises he'll do just that.

A revelation of God, not an explanation of suffering, is what God gives to us. And it is enough. **This has been the experience of countless suffering believers down throughout history.** Corrie Ten

Boom, who suffered for years in a Nazi prison camp, wrote, ***"No matter how deep our darkness, the love of God is deeper still."***

MUSIC

I heard a talk this week by **Steve Saint, whose father was** murdered on the beaches of Equator several years ago. There was a particularly hostile tribe there, called the Aucas, that was untouched by civilization. 5 men, called the "Auca 5," tried to establish contact with them and they were all murdered.

Later, Steve was part of a group that went back to that same people and ended up making friends with them. He **led to Christ** the man that murdered his father.

In fact, in one of most remarkable grace stories I've ever heard. He baptized the very man who killed his father, Mincaye, and adopted him as his kids' grandfather.

He said: "Why is it that we want every chapter to be good when God promises only that in the last chapter he will make all the other chapters make sense?"

Don't we see God will do this with all our stories in eternity?

You may be in a chapter with Job... Believer your Redeemer lives!

Elisabeth Elliot, the wife of Jim Elliot who also was murdered, said, wrote: "God never gives a thorn without his added grace, he takes the thorn to pin aside the veil which hides his face"

That's the message of Job. Can you say to God with him:

- *Your power is sovereign;*
- *Your perspective is infinite;*

- *Your purpose* is guaranteed;
- *Your promise* is everlasting and
- *Your presence* is pledged.

And it is enough. I may not know why I am suffering, but I know my Redeemer lives...

So, riches I heed not nor man's empty praise
Thou my inheritance, now and always
Thou and thou only, first in my heart
High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art

