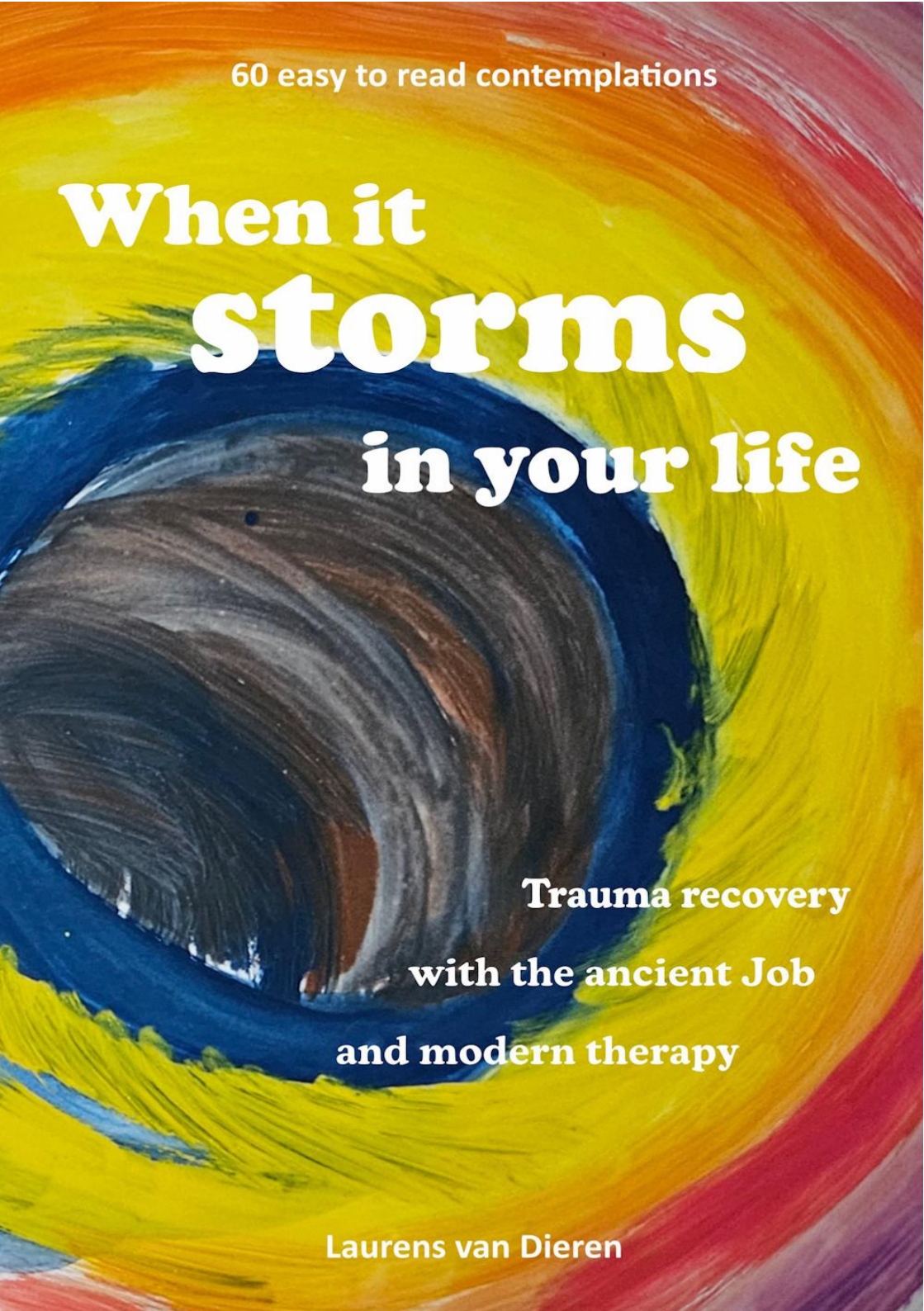




60 easy to read contemplations

When it storms in your life

**Trauma recovery
with the ancient Job
and modern therapy**

Laurens van Dieren

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Illustration front cover: This is the first creative exercise I made at Pastoral Center Hezenberg. It depicts the storm and the black hole I was in. As I was painting the whirlwind with the black hole, I suddenly saw God's presence surrounding the storm – first a yellow circle and then the other colors of the rainbow. God was surrounding me and holding me. Finally, I saw a green hill, telling me that there was life beyond my storm. This gave a glimpse of hope in my storm. See also contemplation 37.

What readers say ...

This isn't a book... it's a gate that opens, and you will not come out the same way you came in.

Every page holds something that belongs to you: a wound you thought had healed, a memory you tried to forget, or a question that has haunted you for years.

Laurens van Dieren doesn't offer easy advice. Instead, he takes you to the heart of the trauma, then shows you how to rise stronger and stronger.

You'll understand why you sometimes crumble in certain situations, why the same relationships keep repeating themselves, and why you fear things that haven't even happened yet.

Sometimes you'll feel like the book is reading you, not the other way around.

If you've weathered at least one storm in your life... prepare yourself. This book will change your perspective on the world and yourself, and teach you patience and strength, just as the Prophet Job taught us.

George, a traumatized refugee

Laurens's request for me to read along with his reflections on Job and respond to them has been incredibly valuable and has set me on the path to deeper recovery and healing. The recognition and acknowledgement from Job have deepened my relationship with God into a renewed personal relationship with God the Father.

Group member Corinda from the Hezenberg

How wonderful to receive a lived-through perspective on Job from an expert with experience, rather than a theological one. These reflections offer hope, peace, and comfort. They warm my heart.

Therapist friend Sijko-Jan (†2024)

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Foreword

This book was born during the most difficult period of my life, a time ushered in by some major losses. It began in 2010 when God called me and my family back to the Netherlands. We had been living in the Middle East for 14 years, where we felt at home and where I saw much fruit on my labor. Strangely, I could not find a replacement for my responsibilities as director and leader, so I continued the work from the Netherlands and traveled back and forth.

Because of the Arab revolution in the spring of 2011, I had to close the doors of the language school in which I had invested so much. It felt as if my life's work had been demolished.

I was trying to find my place in the Netherlands and did my best to do what I believed God and everyone else was asking of me. In the summer of 2011, my 18-year-old son said, "Daddy, where are your feelings?" I was deeply shocked as I didn't understand him.

That became the starting point of an inward search. What was he missing and what were my wife and others missing in their contact with me? The more I opened up to learn, the more vulnerable I felt. As if I was laying on the operating table for open-heart surgery.

Occasionally something was opened up or cut away and then sutured or left open.

Meanwhile, the losses piled up. When I visited my second homeland in the Middle East in 2013, I was stopped by customs. "You are a persona non grata," I was told. Like a criminal, I was put on the next flight back to the Netherlands under police escort.

Back home, I focused on the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of Arabic speakers. That way I still lived with one foot in the Middle East. With the other foot, I could not quite ground myself in the Netherlands. Painful memories from the past regularly surfaced, making me feel vulnerable and unsafe. Fortunately, there were compassionate people who tried to help me. When I told them about

my childhood, it was quite clear to them why I struggled so much. I had grown up without a father, as he died shortly after my birth, and I functioned as a substitute child for a brother who had died at the age of two. In addition, my soul was severely damaged by emotional neglect and abuse, which had led me to flee from my parental home at the age of nineteen, but I had always carried the injuries with me.

As I came to the end of myself, I began to experience burnout symptoms. I felt overwhelmed by the needs of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees I helped, while seeing no fruit on my efforts. Trying hard I could not meet my own expectations. Depressive thoughts and feelings increased and from the summer of 2015 I had severe panic attacks. On top of all this, I was suffering badly from side effects of the antidepressants I had been taking for years. A search for a more suitable kind of medication followed, but every time the side effects were worse than the benefits. The last drug made my life so dark that the desire to be dead dominated everything.

I recognized much in the Biblical Job who, at the depth of his suffering, cursed the day of his birth. Fortunately, I had people around me who supported me and prayed for me. I felt like the paralyzed man brought to Jesus by his four friends. Job was even on his own, or so it seemed. I was always surprised by the support I received amid disappointments from others, especially the refugees I was trying to help.

When the candle was almost out, I stopped all my work and went to pastoral center Hezenberg for seven weeks of intensive therapy. That turned out not to be enough, so in 2017 I participated in a six-month intensive program at a mental health center.

With a lot of the psychological help offered, I wondered if it was biblically sound. To my surprise, I found all kinds of principles in the story of Job. These discoveries became the starting point of this book.

One day I watched a video about chronic trauma. It explained that you become traumatized when you are powerless in a dangerous situation

- when there is no way out by fighting or fleeing. Chronic trauma develops when this happens over a longer period of time. I recognized this immediately. How often as a child I had felt powerless and thought, "When I am bigger, I will defend myself." At Hezenberg, I got to know other guests who were also traumatized and found a lot of recognition. And when I thought about Job again, I saw how he too was powerless in what all happened to him. Job was traumatized!

In this book, I take you through those events and reflect on how Job dealt with them. If you are traumatized and have PTSD symptoms, I hope my discoveries will be of help to you. But even if you are struggling with other storms in your life, in which you feel powerless, I believe you will benefit greatly from this book.

If a contemplation speaks to you, I encourage you to reread it. Do not read on until you feel it is the right time. It is tempting to read a piece every day as a quick injection of hope. That's what I leaned toward in my most difficult time. But when I ruminated on something, things really changed and the growth I so longed for took place.

With all my heart I wish you that growth,

Laurens

Thank you

I would like to express my thanks to the following people. Without them, this book would never have existed:

The traumatized fellow sufferer who shared with me what each contemplation in this book did to her in her process. The therapist friend who stood with me for many years, supporting me in the whole process of trauma recovery. The friend who did creative therapy with me several times at her home. My wife, who listened to me for many hours and cheered me up time and time again and held out reality when I was sinking in quicksand. Finally, my son who longed for connection so much that he honestly pointed out to me what he was missing, which led me down this whole path.

1. The person: a human being like you and me

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.

Did Job really exist or is the book of the Bible an allegorical story? There is something to be said for both interpretations.

On the one hand, the conversations in heaven and the extreme suffering of the main character fit more among the stories of Greek mythology. In this regard, the book primarily has a symbolic value with insights into the spiritual world and into the big issue of innocent suffering. There Job can symbolize the struggle of the individual, but also of the people of Israel or the church fellowship.

On the other hand, there are indicators that Job is a historical person. For example, there are references to peoples who really lived and to a known coinage of the time¹ and Job's friends are described in the manner common in the Middle East. Based on all the information in the book of Job, it is even possible to make a reasonable estimate of where and when Job lived.² In addition, Job is cited by other writers in the Bible as a man who really lived (Ezekiel 14:14,20 and James 5:11). Throughout the centuries, the Church Fathers have also viewed Job as a historical person.

Only after the Enlightenment, when man elevated his own ability to think as the highest way to discern reality, was this questioned. For example, it became irrational to believe that the conversations between God and Satan could become known to humans. Nor does it

¹ The Hebrew word for money piece in Job 42:11 is Qesitah, this is also mentioned in Genesis 33:19 and Joshua 24:32

² Probably Job lived at the time of the patriarchs and was even a descendant of Abraham and Ishmael. See the study *Who was Job* on the website www.godlovesishmael.com.

befit a loving and omnipotent God to allow an innocent human being to suffer so much at the hand of Satan.

These are understandable and recognizable thoughts. Yet herein lies a danger. When we determine what is or isn't true on the basis of our own understanding, we limit ourselves to our own capacities. Paul wrote of human wisdom that God the Creator far exceeds it (1 Corinthians 1:19ff). I challenge you to leave the question of intense innocent suffering and other thorny issues surrounding Job for a moment and allow God the space to speak to you.

This book sees Job as a man who really lived and who literally lost everything in his life, right down to his health. This brings his experiences and struggles close to us today. We are not only dealing with a beautiful inspiring example, but may take comfort in the thought that a man like us suffered intensely and came through it.

2. The person: a celebrity

Job 1:1 That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God.

In the first verses, we immediately find a description of the main character in the book. This occurs, as is common in Hebrew, in two stages: first, a general picture of him is painted (verses 1-3), followed by a detailed account of how he lived (verses 4 and 5).

This can also be seen in the description of the creation story, where the main line is given in Genesis 1 and all sorts of details are mentioned in the second chapter. So the core of who Job is can be found in the verses 1 to 3.

Before you read it in the Bible, I want to ask you to take a moment to consider how people are described today. What is mentioned first about celebrities? Isn't it the achievements that set him or her apart from the rest? That might be a sports achievement, political or social influence, success in business or financial wealth. Or perhaps an achievement in the realm of religion.

And the description of Job? Three things are mentioned: his character traits, his family and his possessions. This seems like the reverse of today. We would start with the achievements and then possibly something about his private life. A person's character is actually rarely mentioned. In other words, we look first at what someone has done and only then at who he is. Could that be because perhaps the celebrity's character is lacking? Did he or she accomplish the great feat at the expense of others?

Job first of all had the reputation of being a sincere man who feared God and who turned away from evil. That, along with his great possessions, made him the most significant person in the Middle East.

Even today you can see that God looks at the heart. He cares more about who you are than what you do.

Maybe you picked up this book because of the struggles in your life and are now wondering, how can this help me? I encourage you to reflect on your priorities in life. The following questions can help you. Who are you? What are you known for? And: how do you want to be remembered later?

Perhaps you discover that some of your struggles stem from unhealthy goals in your life. Or maybe God is allowing difficulties in your life to shift your focus from "doing" to "being"?

3. The losses: livelihood for present and future

Job 1: 15 I alone have escaped to tell you.

When we read in the first chapter about all that Job lost, we understand that it must have been very hard for him. But do we feel what he felt? Let's translate the situation to our time. Job was a multimillionaire and had made it in life. In a short time, however, Job lost all his real estate. His profitable factories went up in flames and his stock market value collapsed, causing him to lose even his bank balances and his pension. His cars and RV and luxury yacht had disappeared without a trace. And as if that wasn't enough, his insurance companies found clauses, so that they didn't have to pay out anything. Job lost everything he had built up to live a comfortable life and even lost his retirement provision.

Now all the material things were still replaceable, but to make matters worse, his precious children also died. Not one or two, but all of them - in one swoop! Job was a loving committed father and took good care of his sons and daughters. He did not deserve this.

What went through Job's mind? The Bible is silent about his very first reactions. I can well imagine that he must have thought, "What the messenger is telling me now is not true." When the second and third and finally the fourth came, he could no longer deny reality. A huge disaster had occurred in his life.

What must he have thought when he heard about the death of all his children? He loved them dearly and always did his utmost so that they were accepted by God and that nothing stood between them and God. Possibly he tormented himself with thoughts such as: "If only I had warned my children not to celebrate so much." Or, "If only I had warned them about the bad weather. I saw the sky getting overcast." Perhaps he prayed desperately, "Lord, where have I been negligent?"

As we get to know Job better through the stories, we see a man who lived with great integrity; a very pious and sincere man. Consequently, he was not at all to blame for the events. This must have made it extra difficult to come to accept the losses. There was no explanation whatsoever for what had happened to him.

Where are you in your process of dealing with the losses in your life? Have you gotten to the point of accepting what happened to you? Are you still fighting to limit the damage? Or are you living as if the harm didn't really happen to you?

4. Job's first response to his suffering: acceptance

Job 1:21 The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away.

We have seen how Job lost tremendously and even in a super short time. This might perhaps happen in a war situation or because of an earthquake. Still, that person would probably have a small reserve, say, in their bank account. Job literally lost everything he had - without any cause by himself.

How did he respond? I imagine that he thought for a moment, "Lord, I have always tried so hard and loved You with all my heart. Why didn't You protect me? Why did You leave my family?"

The Bible is silent about what went through Job immediately after all the losses. We do know that after hearing the bad news, he stood up and bowed down in worship (1:20). Job very quickly found peace in his suffering. He turned to an existential level of life and realized that he had come into the world naked, without any possessions, and that he would not be able to take any of his earthly achievements with him into death (1:21). Since he had received everything from God, he could accept that God also took away again, resulting in the famous statement "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken." God was not to blame in this. He had the freedom to give and take as He saw fit. Thus, Job continued to honor God in word and deed.

Notice that the Bible says nothing about how Job felt. It does not say that he accepted suffering with a smile on his face, as if it were a gift to be thankful for. It says only that he did not sin and did not attribute anything inappropriate to God (1:22).

Job's reaction to suffering reminds me of Abraham when he was instructed to sacrifice his son. Abraham immediately sprang into action. He got up early and went to the place God had said (Genesis 22:2-3). What was the secret of these men to accept God's will so

quickly? I can think of only one possibility: they had an intimate relationship with God and knew themselves to be safe with Him. Setbacks and difficult tasks were not signs to them that God no longer loved them. No, they knew their Lord. They walked with Him as their ancestor Enoch had done. Job offered sacrifices to God for his sons (1:5), not out of religious duty but out of sincere devotion to his Lord.

And you, how do you know God? If you are struggling right now, I encourage you to hold on to what you have experienced with or of God in the past. And when you are doing well, invest time to know God better. Then you will be strong in times of need and difficulty. You will stand firm in the confidence that He loves you.

5. The losses: incurably ill and abandoned by your loved one

Job 2:7 He struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

This Bible verse informs us how Satan struck Job with sickness. His body was covered from head to toe with sores. The Hebrew word used here has no clear contemporary equivalent. Some believe it was a form of leprosy, while others think of smallpox. Exactly what it was is not so relevant. The main issue is how much suffering the disease caused. Much is found about that in the book. First, Job's skin itched badly so that he scratched himself with shards (2:8). Furthermore, his skin festered and worms feasted on his open flesh. Scabs formed in some places and sometimes hard pieces of skin tore open and formed painful fissures (7:5). Job stank terribly out of his mouth (17:1) and he got so skinny that his bones stuck to his skin (19:20). He became so disfigured that even his closest friends did not recognize him at first (2:12)!

Now Job didn't have just a few sores spread over his body. Have you ever had a boil and can you remember how irritating it was? As a child, I once had some sores on my buttocks and couldn't sit still on the hard wooden chair at school. At home on the couch, things were a bit easier. Job, however, never found relief in any position. If he stood, the soles of his feet burned under his weight, if he sat down, his seat hurt, and if he lay down, he felt continuous pain in his head, back, arms and legs. As a result, Job could hardly sleep.

That would be enough to make anyone despair. Job, however, had even more to endure. Because the sores were contagious, he had to spend his time in solitude outside the city. People shunned him and naughty boys laughed at him (30:1), some even spitting on him (30:10). Thus, the most significant and respected man of the East was

humiliated and rejected as an outcast. For anyone who has spent his life in the gutter, that is already traumatic. What must it have been like for Job?

Finally, the love of his youth, his faithful companion, turned against him. "Curse God and die," she said to him. Here was Job, a broken man and even without the support of his wife.

In verse 10 we read how Job dealt with his intense pain and sorrow. His eyes remained fixed on God. Instead of cursing or swearing, he remained faithful to his Lord. He accepted that God had taken away good things and even allowed evil things. I went through a time where I struggled so much with pain in my life that I considered rejecting God. I came to a cross-road, where the choice was to remain faithful to Jesus or leave Him and follow my own desires. Indeed, how many people have chosen to leave because of the pain in their hearts?

If you are tempted to give up or have lost faith in God, know that you are not the only one struggling. Hang in there, He is with you.

Job 2:6 "The LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand."

In my darkest time I felt like a toy being shaken in Satan's hand. Yet, when I began to express my feeling in an image, I suddenly saw myself within a ball. Jesus surrounded me, limiting the direct impact of Satan. The transparency meant that the darkness was almost palpable present. Still, beyond it the Father shone His light all around us.



Appendix 5: Overview of Bible verses

Job 1:1	1. The person: a human being like you and me
Job 1:1	2. The person: a celebrity
Job 1:8	53. God's confidence in us
Job 1:15	3. The losses: sustenance for present and future
Job 1:17	11. Because God is love ... others can choose how to treat you
Job 1:21	4. Job's first response to his suffering: acceptance
Job 2:7 one	5. The losses: incurably ill and abandoned by your loved one
Job 2:9	6. The losses: your theology is no longer correct
Job 2:11	7. The losses: endless struggle
Job 3:21	8. Job's second response to his suffering: despair
Job 5:19	9. Because God is love ... does He protect you?
Job 6:2	16. Job asked of his friends: acknowledge the pain
Job 6:3	10. Because God is love ... you need not remain a victim
Job 6:3	20. Job asked of his friends: endure my words
Job 6:15	17. Job asked of his friends: remain faithful
Job 6:24	18. Job asked of his friends: be honest
Job 6:26	19. Job asked of his friends: judge not.
Job 7:3	48. Job's recovery: God does everything in his time
Job 7:11	21. Job's third response to his suffering: anger
Job 7:14	56. Interpretation of feelings
Job 10:4	15. Because God is love ... He has done something about evil
Job 13:9	25. A normal person
Job 15:6	24. About being true to yourself
Job 16:13	23. Feelings and thoughts
Job 19:2	58. The vulnerable child
Job 19:25	22. On inner strength
Job 21:2a, 3a	13. Because God is love ... you can choose how to deal with yourself
Job 27:3	55. Therapy as a Christian in a secular institution
Job 28:20	26. Job's final speech: wisdom sought
Job 29:2	27. Job's final speech: his longing for the past
Job 29:16	14. Because God is love ... we can work good things

Job 30:1	28. Job's final speech: summing up his suffering
Job 30:19	29. Job's final speech: confused about who God is
Job 31:24	30. Job's final speech: he holds fast to what he has done well
Job 31:40	36. Job's fourth response to his suffering: resignation
Job 32:2	31. Elihu's speech: introduction
Job 33:9-10	32. Elihu's speech: answer to Job's first proposition
Job 33:32	12. Because God is love ... you can choose how you treat others
Job 34:9	33. Elihu's speech: answer to Job's second proposition
Job 35:3	34. Elihu's speech: answer to Job's third proposition
Job 36:3	35. Elihu's final speech: God is good.
Job 37:23a	50. Looking back on Job's life: be open to a miracle
Job 38:1	37. God's response to Job: the storm
Job 38:2	38. God's answer to Job: Who do you think you are?
Job 38:4	39. God's answer to Job: What are you capable of?
Job 39:20	40. God's answer to Job: Who takes care of the animals?
Job 40:7	41. God's answer to Job: Can you stop the unjust?
Job 40:20	42. God's answer to Job: Who is above evil?
Job 42:2,6	44. Job's fifth response to his suffering: acceptance
Job 42:3b	60. Radical acceptance:
Job 42:5	43. Job's response to God
Job 42:6	54. A healthy self-image
Job 42:7	59. Directing your life
Job 42:10a	45. Job's recovery: reversal after forgiveness
Job 42:10b	46. Job's recovery: double blessings
Job 42:10b	57. Recovery takes time
Job 42:17	47. Job's recovery: a full life
Matthew 14:10	51. And if it doesn't end well?
Matthew 28:20	52. If you feel that God has forsaken you
James 5:11	49. Looking back on Job's life: the fruit of perseverance

Good to know

This book is also available in Dutch and Arabic. More information can be found on www.trauma2growth.com

An online course is coming of 20 lessons in 4 modules to recover from childhood trauma. If you would like to receive updates about the course, please write to info@trauma2growth.com

If you have any questions or comments about the book or if you wish to share how the book has impacted your life, you are warmly invited to write Laurens at the above email address.

The purchase of this book enables the spread of the book for free in other languages, such as in Arabic, to help traumatized people in the Arab world and other places.

Therefore, if you received this book from another person, please *do not* pass it on to others and please *do* consider purchasing your own copy.

Thank you for your support,
Laurens