Still, Job was understandably confused, and he let God know about it. Job complained. He suffered the criticism of his friends who insisted Job did something to displease the Lord. Job wallowed in despair. Who wouldn’t? We cannot fault Job for being human. Job suffered range anxiety: he was at the limit of his endurance, running on empty, and without the power to change his circumstances. We’ve all been there; if we’ve suffered loss, we understand Job completely.

In this demoralized state, says Frederick Buechner, Job asked some unpleasant questions. If God is all God is cracked up to be, how come houses blow down on innocent people? Why does a good woman die of cancer in her prime while an old man who can’t remember his name or hold his water goes on in a nursing home forever? Why are there so many crooks riding around in Cadillacs and so many children going to bed hungry at night? Job’s friends offer an assortment of theological explanations, but God does not offer even one.

God doesn’t explain. God goes nuclear. God asks Job who he thinks he is anyway. God, who is responsible for Job’s poor health, impoverishment, and loss of family, grows impatient with Job’s whining. Enough was enough! God appears in a whirlwind and delivers a series of rhetorical questions that emphasize the vastness and incomprehensibility of divine wisdom and power. God lets Job know in no uncertain terms that Job’s understanding is severely limited because, among other things, Job is a mortal and cannot see the big picture. God reminds Job that God is God, and Job is not.

God’s scolding (chapters 38-41) begins with a sharp rebuke: “Gird up your loins like a man. I will question you, and you shall [answer] me” (38:3). “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (38:4), says God. The onslaught continues: “Who determined its measurements — surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone…” (38:5-6). God is unrelenting in God’s rebuttal of Job’s complaints. There is a limit to what we can know and how far we can push back against God. Trying to explain the kinds of things Job wants explained would be like trying to explain Einstein’s theories to a little-neck clam. (Buechner)

God does not reveal God’s grand design. God reveals God’s Self. God does not show why things are as they are. God shows God’s face. Job is totally humbled when the divine interrogation is over, and Job says, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5). Job begins to mumble an apology: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (v. 2).

God’s rebuke is not a condemnation of Job for his complaints. Instead, God puts Job’s suffering into a broader cosmic perspective and challenges Job’s assumption that he or any other mortal can fully comprehend the will and purposes of the Almighty. When Job said, “I know that you can do all things,” he is uttering something he knew all along: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God” (19:25-26). Job was a righteous man who worshiped an Almighty God whose own assessment of Job was this: “There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil’” (1:8). Thus, as rough as Job’s situation was, he had no need to feel “range anxiety” because God was not going to leave Job in the lurch.

Carmakers are savvy enough to provide safeguards so customers will not run out of power. Electric vehicles will warn you if you leave the range of all known chargers. The car knows the remaining range and distance to your end point and will recommend a specific speed reduction to ensure you reach your destination. As the range gets below 10% remaining, the battery symbol turns yellow and then red. These warnings are very hard to ignore. If you run out of charge on the road, according to the Tesla website, “it will be in spite of the best efforts of the car. You have to ignore a significant number of warnings. The kind of warnings that get your attention.”

If carmakers can come up with safety measures to keep us running, do you not suppose our Creator, who watches over us as a mother “comforts her children” (Isaiah 66:13), will also be there in our hour of need? God gives us all the warnings and information we need to be safe on life’s highway. A lot of it is just common sense. We also have a sacred owner’s manual that tells us about the nature of the God we worship and reminds us to follow the narrow path, and not the broad one that “leads to destruction” (Matthew 7:13). The owner’s manual also describes how we will suffer breakdowns and how to avoid them. When we feel like giving in or giving up, it is despite God’s best efforts to keep us on the road.

What we are talking about here is the providence of God. *Providence* comes from the words, “pro” which means “before;” and “video” which means “to see.” Providence is the divine attribute of “seeing before.” God sees what will happen before we do. God hears our prayers before we say them. God provides for us even before we know there is a need. But, if we’re being honest, we know there are often experiences in life thatcount against the notion that there is a loving and caring God who can “see before.”Job is a case in point. Indeed, the question of whether we can trust the providence of God is one that consistently perplexes theologians, philosophers, and faithful people.

The unpredictability of human experience can shake our trust in divine providence. God does not promise us a rose garden. We will grapple with personal setbacks, loss, and unanswered prayers. Adversity often leads to feelings of doubt, disillusionment, or anger. In these moments of existential crisis, the apparent silence or absence of God can strain our faith and test the limits of our trust in or belief in God’s goodness.

So how do we navigate the tension? How can we reconcile our belief in divine providence with the realities of human experience? One approach is to embrace a *theology of mystery and paradox*, acknowledging that human understanding is limited in its ability to comprehend the ways of God. Job understands this when he says, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (v. 3). Rather than seeking definitive answers or explanations for his suffering, Job finds solace in embracing uncertainty and living with faith amid ambiguity. “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (v. 5).

So, what about our range anxiety? Well, a recent survey by Green Car Reports found that among EV owners, 95% had never run out of power while driving. Furthermore, 77% no longer worried about it. Perhaps this is due to the number of safeguards an EV has before running out of power. In other words, the car is looking out for you. It has its own providential system that warns you, instructs you, and helps you in every way possible. That is why the apostle Paul advises us: “Do not worry about anything” (Philippians 4:6). God has your back. It is hard to stay on the right side of road of life without total and unyielding trust in the providence of God. It is foundational to our faith. Even in times of adversity or uncertainty, like Job, we can find comfort in the belief that God cares and that God’s purposes will ultimately prevail.

Prayer: O God, who has promised that all things will work together for good to those that love you, grant us patience amidst the tumults, pains, and afflictions of life, and faith to discern your love, within, above, and beyond the impartial destinies of this great drama of life. Save us from every vainglorious pretension by which we demand favors which violate your love for all your children, and grant us grace to appropriate every fortune, both good and evil, for the triumph of the suffering, crucified, and risen Lord in our souls and life. In whose name we ask it. Amen. (Niebuhr)

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**Range Anxiety**

Reformation Sunday, October 27, 2024 [Job 42:1-6, 10-17](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+42%3a1-6%2c+10-17&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Two nuns are driving down the road when, suddenly, they run out of gas. They spot a gas station about ahead. Looking for something to use as a gas container, they find a bedpan. Seeing no other choice, they grab the bedpan and head to the gas station. They fill the bedpan and head back to their car. Just as they start to pour the gas from the bedpan into their tank, a policeman drives up and stops to help. Confused, the policeman looks at the nuns and the bedpan and says, "Ladies, I don’t share your religion, but I admire your faith."

Running out of fuel is a real fear! There is even a name for this fear: "range anxiety." Range anxiety is when you are afraid that your vehicle has insufficient energy storage (fuel or battery capacity) to cover the road distance needed to reach the intended destination and thus stranding you on the road. This is a real fear, especially among electric vehicle owners whose car batteries don’t always have the range needed or who cannot find charging stations in convenient places.

Range anxiety is a fear most of us experience at some point. You are out in the middle of nowhere. The fuel gauge is on “E”! You get stuck on the side of the road and the next town is 89 miles away. And you are convinced that the 18-wheeler blasting down the highway toward you is being driven by an axe-murderer. It feels like being in a Stephen King novel!

Applied to life, range anxiety expresses the worry that we’ve reached our limit, that we cannot go on, and that we do not have the power or bandwidth or stamina to go the distance. It is not a stretch to say that Job felt range anxiety. Job is at the limit of his endurance, his tank is empty, and his remaining power is running out.

Job deserves our sympathy, perhaps even our pity. It was not that long ago that Job lost his oxen, donkeys, sheep, servants, camels, seven sons, three daughters and his health on one terrible day (see 1:13-19). He had sores and boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet and was as skinny as a fiddle string. These calamities came at the hands of the Sabeans, Chaldeans, “the fire of God,” and a “great wind.” Job’s wife advises him to curse God and die, but Job will not. Surprisingly, Job is rather stoic about it: “‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord’” (1:21). If only we could all be as matter of fact about life’s calamities!