Financial Turmoil and One's Faith*

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[The following was inspired by the sizable stock market decline in late October 1997.]

As you no doubt are aware, the U.S. stock market has moved wildly during the past few days, losing 13% of its value during the past week before today's 4.7% rise and record trading volume. During the past few days, the Hong Kong market has lost one-third of its value. Tokyo's market continues setting record lows. Most East Asian currencies have devalued by at least one-third. Latin American and European markets are moving sympathetically. No doubt some people here today have lost tens of thousands of dollars. My paper losses are slightly smaller, but I, too, was affected.

The markets' correction reminds me of perhaps the first recorded financial collapse when Job's vast fortune disintegrated over the course of one day.

> One day when Job's children were having a feast at the home of their oldest brother, a messenger came running to Job. "We were plowing the fields with the oxen," he said, "and the donkeys were in a nearby pasture. Suddenly the Sabeans attacked and stole them all. They killed every one of your servants except me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."
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> Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Lightning struck the sheep and the shepherds and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."
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> Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Three bands of Chaldean raiders attacked us, took away

> the camels, and killed all your servants except me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."
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> Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Your children were having a feast at the home of your oldest son, when a storm swept in from the desert. It blew the house down and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."
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> Then Job got up and tore his clothes in grief. He shaved his head and threw himself face downward on the ground. He said, "I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing. The LORD gave, and now he has taken away. May his name be praised!"
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> Job 1:13–21 (TEV)

Obviously, market corrections occur regularly.

Different news media reacted differently to Monday's drop. *The Wall Street Journal* called yesterday "Bloody Monday" and had a headline "The Carnage in Stocks," but most of the articles' tones were calm. On yesterday's "The Newshour with Jim Lehrer," an interviewer tried his hardest to convince his two guests that yesterday's movement was a panic, but they remained steadfast in their statements that trading was orderly. Vanguard's WWW site (`http://www.vanguard.com`) contained articles about staying the course. Yesterday, National Public Radio newscasters were calm, but this morning's 16% drop in Hong Kong revealed their anxiety. *The San Jose Mercury News* ran a headline "Stocks in Chaos."

How should we react when turmoil strikes financially or personally? Should I be as calm as I am, having lost thousands of dollars, or should I be as excited as my apartmentmate running to the WWW, reading the newspapers, and talking excitedly to friends and brokerage houses? How should we react when we lose a job? When we lose a spouse, as several of us recently have experienced?

How did Job react to losing all his wealth and his children in one day? Job 1:22 states, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing" (NRSV). Job, and we, have the ultimate insurance plan: God. God was, is, and will be. Secondly, Job maintained faith in God. He questioned, he complained, he argued with God, but he maintained his faith. We should too, since we have the Best, Jesus.

Job was prepared. Before he lost his financial fortune and his family, he had regularly contributed to his savings plan: he had developed his faith in

God. For example, Job 1:5 states

> He would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings. . . .
> This is what Job always did. (NRSV)

As Christians, we also prepare. We come to church to learn about God. Here, we develop friendships, through which we grow. We learn to reach out to others. We regularly pray. We study the Bible.

So when turmoil in life strikes, we just need to remember:

- We have God.
- He is our long-term plan. That is, we have eternal life.
- Our work so far has laid the path through the turmoil toward tranquility. It may not be easy, but
- we just need to keep the faith.