



THE GREATEST MAN IN THE EAST

Job 1:1-5

It is an age-old question: “Why do the godly suffer?” The book of Job addresses this issue through the sad experiences of the godliest of the godly—a man named Job.

There’s a rather humorous proverb that says, “Life is a tough proposition, and the first hundred years are the hardest.” One author put it this way: “Life and tough stuff go hand in hand; they often appear as gradually intensifying storms.”¹

And that raises a question, doesn’t it? In fact, it is probably one of the oldest questions in human history: “Why do we experience trouble, sorrow, and pain?”

Such trials can come through a natural disaster, an illness, a bankruptcy, or a broken relationship. Some troubles are sudden and devastating. Other problems in life are ongoing—almost as if they want to wear your spirit down over time.

What do you say to someone who asks, “Where in the world is God?”

Well, let me tell you, Christians tend to be too quick with answers to that question. They offer some trivial reminder that God is always good, maybe a happy verse or two, a promise that, “I’ll pray for you!” and a slap on the back that leaves the sufferer still confused and lonely.

These are the age-old questions, beloved:

- Why do the righteous suffer?



Standard pictures Sumerians in variety of domestic activities

- Where is God when tragedy strikes?
- If God is all-loving, how can he allow human suffering?
- Does God really care about us?
- Why is God silent while we suffer?²

Now, if I were to ask you where I should turn to find answers to those questions, and you said to me, “Let’s turn to the book of Job,” you would be heading in the right direction. The book of Job tackles the toughest questions in the human heart.

One author wrote about a country preacher on the radio, preaching on the book of Job. His sermon title was, “I Can’t Eat by Day, I Can’t Sleep by Night, and the Woman I Love Don’t Treat Me Right.”³ Well,



that's a pretty good summary of Job, in less than twenty words.

Now before we dive in, let me give you some observations about this book.

First, the book of Job is mostly a long poem. The poem starts in chapter 3 and goes all the way to chapter 42 and verse 6. Before the poetic form begins, we have chapters 1 and 2, which form the prologue; and then after the poem ends, the final eleven verses in chapter 42 give us the epilogue.

Job more than likely lived during the days of Abraham or perhaps even earlier. The fact that we see him here in chapter 1 offering burnt offerings to God on behalf of his children places him before the law of Moses. That is because after the law, only the priesthood can offer sacrifices. However, before the law was given during the days of Moses, Job—just like Noah and Abraham—is seen offering sacrifices to God.

Let me also mention that the book of Job contains the longest passage in the Bible in which God the Father speaks—four chapters in all. Job also contains the longest passage in the Bible in which Satan speaks. You see, Job is going to pull back the curtain and give us an eyewitness account of a conversation between God and Satan—and every time I read it, I am amazed.

So, this old book, composed by Job and more than likely edited later by Moses, deals with the age-old questions we still ask today—questions about suffering and pain and the troubles of life.

Now verse 1: “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.” You might read that statement and wonder if this is a true account—a man living in the land of Uz sounds more like the Wizard of Oz to some people.

Well, Uz was a real place. It was named after Noah's great-grandson through the line of Shem, who settled in this southern region around the Dead Sea, later known as Edom. And if there is any doubt that Job existed, Ezekiel the prophet wrote that Daniel, Noah, and Job were all godly men (Ezekiel 14:14).

Job is not going to suffer because he lacks faith; he is about to suffer because of his faith.

God describes Job for us here in verse 1 as “blameless, and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” It's as if God wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Job is not going to suffer because he lacks faith; he is about to suffer *because* of his faith.

And now we are invited onto his estate, where we discover his incredible fortune here in verses 2-3:

There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants [or household staff], so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.

Everybody knows Job. And he is that rare individual who is both wealthy and godly.

Next, we are told about his spiritual interest in his children:

His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day [that's a reference to their birthdays], and they would send and invite their three sisters to



eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” (verses 4-5)

In other words, Job cares about the spiritual condition of his children. They are grown and on their own. They have their own homes and their own families. But Job still cares!

We live in a generation when we too easily hand our children to youth leaders, schoolteachers, and camp directors with the attitude, “Here, you teach them; you instill godly values and character in them; you lead them.” There’s nothing wrong with collaborating with other godly leaders, but Job becomes an example of a shepherd who did not hand off his responsibilities to others—and he certainly had a busy life.

Do you see what God is doing here? God is introducing us to the best representative of a godly man living on Planet Earth. He is going to teach us two life-changing, perspective-changing lessons.

First, God’s people are not immune to trouble. I know what others might be saying, but beloved, according to God’s Word, Christians are not vaccinated at conversion against suffering. And those who teach that nonsense are going to experience their own chapter of suffering—because we all do.

But let me say it a little differently, and this is what causes us so much trouble: second, *godly people are not exempt from trouble*. Not just God’s people, but *godly* people suffer. And that’s when Satan whispers in your ear, “God isn’t fair,” or “Maybe you weren’t godly enough.”

Maybe you are there right now. You are wondering if living for the Lord has been worth the effort—the commitments you made to marriage and family, the efforts you made at integrity and honesty, your reverence toward the Lord, the efforts of parenting with biblical purpose. All of it just seems to be unraveling, and you’re wondering why. You were expecting a soft cushion right about now, but instead, you’ve been placed in the furnace of affliction.

Well, hang on; without Job knowing it, there is a conversation taking place beyond the constellations—a conversation between Satan and God that is about to change Job’s life forever.

And we will listen in on that conversation in our next Wisdom Journey.

In preparation for this study, reflect on any suffering you have or are enduring that has remained a mystery to you.

What is at stake that Satan would especially target those who are striving to live righteously before God? Consider these truths as you muster the faith to keep living for the LORD: Romans 8:38-39; 16:20, 1 Peter 5:8-9

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Getting Through the Tough Stuff* (W Publishing Group, 2004), ix.

² Adapted from Steven J. Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Job* (Holman Reference, 2004), 1.

³ Charles R. Swindoll, *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance* (W Publishing Group, 2004), 5.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





EXHIBIT A

Job 1:6-12

Is it possible to worship God even when He takes everything away from us? This is the question facing us in the book of Job, and the test case will be the godly man Job himself. He will be God's Exhibit A—to answer the question with a resounding, “Yes!”

D. L. Moody, a faithful American evangelist from the late 1800s, once said, “I believe Satan exists for two reasons: first, the Bible says so; and second, I’ve done business with him.”¹ I’ve battled him too, and so has every Christian.

Now don’t misunderstand. The powers of hell and the powers of heaven are not on equal footing. It is not a battle between two equally strong forces, and we are biting our nails to see who wins.

God has already won—from eternity past. The devil just doesn’t want to concede without a fight. So, while the war has been won, there are daily skirmishes.

Scripture tells us that Satan is like a lion prowling around the earth, seeking someone to devour, or discredit (1 Peter 5:8). And what Satan despises most of all is a believer who will trust God with his life.

Charles Spurgeon, the famous nineteenth-century pastor in England wrote:

Satan hates to see happy Christians glorifying God. He is well aware that mournful Christians often dishonor God by mistrusting Him, so if he can worry us until we no longer believe in the goodness of God, he will have robbed God of his praise.²

Is that really Satan’s chief delight? Well, for the first time in recorded Scripture, the curtain is pulled back in the heavens, and we get to hear a conversation between God and Satan regarding the faithful life of Job.

God is about to give Satan permission to attack everything Job has in life. God is going to turn Job’s life into “Exhibit A”—evidence that it is possible for a believer to worship God through tears and trials. Of course, Job doesn’t know that just yet.

The conversation begins now in Job 1:6:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.



Edom



This expression “sons of God” can refer to angels, as it does later on in Job chapter 38. Here, the angels are called to give an account of their activity, and Satan is among them.

If you have been led to believe that Satan does not have access to God because God can't be in the presence of sin, you have been misinformed. First, there is no place that God isn't present—He is *omnipresent*. Second, Revelation 12:10 informs us that Satan actually accuses the believers before God, day and night.

So, here's what Satan is doing to this day:

- He goes to God and accuses you before God. Then he comes to you and accuses God before you.
- Satan tells God you are not worth keeping. And Satan tells you that God is not worth following.
- Satan reminds God that you are sinful, and then he reminds you that God is silent.
- He whispers, as it were, in God's ear that you are unfaithful to Him. And he whispers in your ear that God is unfaithful to you.

The name *Satan* is actually a reference to this kind of activity. It means “adversary”—you could even render it “prosecutor.” His chief objective is to accuse and prosecute.³ Let me tell you, he is not make-believe. He is not a funny little cartoon character in a red suit with a pointy tail and a pitchfork.

He was created by God as a member of the cherubim class of angels—the highest order. He is both beautiful and evil, stunning and destructive. He hates you, and he hates the God you belong to through Jesus Christ, who conquered him at the cross.

Now back to this conversation here in verse 7:

The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”

By the way, God is not asking Satan where he has been because God has lost sight of him; God knows exactly where Satan has been, but Satan doesn't want to admit it. The Hebrew verbs here inform us that Satan has been analyzing someone. He's been watching someone, probing around for weaknesses.

So, the Lord asks Satan a more direct question in verse 8: “Have you considered my servant Job?” Literally, “Have you set your heart on My servant Job?” God effectively says, “I know you have been watching Job, my faithful servant; you would love an opportunity to destroy his testimony, wouldn't you?”

Notice here that Satan cannot touch Job without God's permission. He cannot touch you either, apart from God's plans for your life. Well, Satan the prosecutor now smarts off, saying:

“Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? . . . But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” (verses 9, 11)

Satan's argument is, “Of course he follows you because it's paying off.” If Satan were making this accusation against you today—that the only reason you love God is because Christianity has been a good deal for you—would he be right? You say, “I'm not that way!”

Well, what happens when Christianity doesn't seem to pay off? What happens to your trust when you're in the hospital? What happens to your prayer life in the emergency room, in bankruptcy court, or out there beside a grave marker?

Job has no idea this conversation is taking place in heaven. And don't miss that this is really an attack on God. As Warren Wiersbe notes, Satan is saying, “You are not a God worthy of worship! You have to pay people to honor You.”⁴ That's bribery!

So, God responds in verse 12:



*What happens to
your prayer life in
the emergency room,
in bankruptcy court,
or out there beside a
grave marker?*

“Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Now maybe you're thinking, *Oh my, look what God is going to risk here. What if Job fails? This is quite a reckless move on God's part!*

Beloved, contrary to what you might read today, God is not reckless; He has never risked anything. How do you risk something when you know the future? God already has planned this out moment by moment.

But Satan is not omniscient (all-knowing). He doesn't know what Job will do—maybe God *will* lose.

Well, I can assure you, God is going to play Satan like a puppet on a string to fulfill His purposes. And understand this: God isn't entering Job into untold suffering just for Job's growth and trust; beloved, God is doing this for you. He is going to give human history an inspired record of one man who will become Exhibit A—evidence that it is possible to worship God in the midst of suffering.

Do you want to make Satan back down? Remind him of Job and how he was defeated by this one man who refused to dishonor God.

Now let me summarize what we have learned about our enemy from this conversation:

1. Satan is loose, but he is on a leash held by God.
2. Satan is brilliant, but he is not omniscient, like God.
3. Satan is unable to act without permission from God.
4. Satan's power is limited by the purposes of God.
5. And Satan suffers a crushing defeat when a believer continues to worship God, even through tears.

I'm praying that will be your story today.

What do you do when it seems that Christ's intercession for you is far away, not working or quiet? What do you do with the doubts? In what ways does Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34 crush Satan's accusations against you as a believer? How do these intercessory promises encourage you to keep going while you're experiencing the enemy's attack?

God is very practical when it comes to His true followers internalizing His truths (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Think of practical ways you can display the five truths above in your home, work, locker, or car so that they become boosters to your faith and maybe conversation starters for unbelievers in your life.

¹ Steven J. Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Job* (Holman Reference, 2004), 23.

² Charles Spurgeon, *The Suffering of Man & the Sovereignty of God* (Fox River Press, 2001), 7.

³ John C. L. Gibson, *Daily Study Bible: Job* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 10.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Patient* (Victor Books, 1991), 16.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





NO SILVER LINING IN SIGHT

Job 1:13-22

When life deals one cruel blow after another and there is no silver lining behind the dark clouds, that is when we most need to fall before God in humble worship. That is when we learn to worship Him for who He is rather than for who we expect Him to be.

Perhaps the most difficult tests in life are the unexpected ones that arrive without warning. You might be facing one of them today. One of the surprising truths we have already discovered in the life of Job—who is about to face unexpected and severe suffering—is that his godly life did not protect him from suffering; in fact, it actually invited suffering.

Now some people might say, “Yes, but this cloud of suffering has a huge silver lining. I’ve read the last chapter, and Job has ten more children, and everything turns out wonderfully.”

Well, let me encourage you not to run to the end of the book just yet. And remember, even though Job will have more children in the future, he is not going to get back the children he loses.

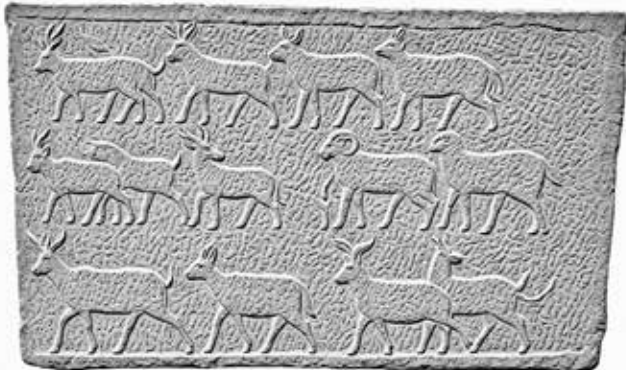
And Job doesn’t know what is ahead of him. In fact, he doesn’t know about a conversation in heaven in which Satan has accused God of bribing Job with good things in life to get Job’s worship in return. Job doesn’t know what we know—that God has allowed this cloud of suffering to invade his life in order to give us all an example of how to handle the storms of life.

Well, here’s comes the storm cloud, in Job 1:14-15:

There came a messenger to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

Bandits from southern Arabia came and stole his livestock and killed all the field hands.¹

Before Job has a chance to ask a question, verse 16 reports:



Flocks captured by the armies of Tiglath-pileser III



While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

This must have been an incredible fire because it trapped and killed all 7,000 sheep and all the shepherds who worked for Job.

Before Job can even catch his breath, a third messenger runs up with more bad news:

“The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” (verse 17)

These fierce warriors from northern Mesopotamia swept down and stole 3,000 camels and killed anything else that breathed. Only this messenger made it out alive.

So, Job has effectively lost his businesses, his fortune, and his workforce. And if he thinks for just a moment that at least he still has his family, the fourth and final messenger races up, no doubt weeping, and says here in verses 18-19:

“Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

This seems to be that annual birthday party, where the kids all gathered to celebrate, as we mentioned back in verse 4. A powerful wind, probably a tornado, sort of just appeared out of nowhere and seemed to target this particular house, and it collapsed. “Job, all ten of your children are dead.”

It’s as if all the forces of heaven and earth have conspired against this godly man. No reassuring voice speaks from heaven, saying, “Take heart, Job, Satan is testing your faith. Stand strong.”

No, the heavens are silent, and they will remain silent for a long time.

Maybe you have tasted this kind of suffering. Maybe you are like the woman whose husband left her for a younger woman. She had two children she now would raise on her own. Then about the time the courts refused to give her adequate alimony, she was diagnosed with cancer. She moved in with her elderly parents, into their small, two-bedroom home with their limited income and failing health.

She was the faithful believer; *she* was the one who walked with God. There’s no silver lining around her cloud either.

According to the Job narrative, each of these messengers interrupted each other as they delivered the heartbreaking news. I pulled out a stopwatch and read these four messages, at about the same pace Job heard them. It took me thirty-nine seconds to read them all.

In just thirty-nine seconds, Job’s life was changed forever; in thirty-nine seconds, he learned that he had lost everything.

Now, because we have been given the inside story of the conversation between Satan and God, we can be sure Satan and his demons are hovering over this scene, waiting—just wishing—for a word of blasphemy from Job, just one.

It might have been immediate, or it might have been several hours, but the next verse, verse 20, tells us what happened next. First, “Job arose, and he tore his robe.” Tearing this outer garment indicated someone’s broken heart. Then he “shaved his head.” This



was the custom of expressing a loss of personal honor—of being completely devastated and humbled by circumstances.

Satan hopes now is the moment when Job will raise his fist toward heaven and curse His silent, evidently uncaring God. Oh, but verse 20 says he “fell on the ground and worshiped.”

He prostrated himself and began to worship God.

If you are like me, you would want some answers, some explanations, before you would start worshipping God. Not Job. His response provides us with at least two convicting lessons about suffering.

First, *unexpected trials remind us of what really matters in life*. Job says here in verse 21, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.” You are born without anything in your little hands, and at death, your hands are empty again.

Suffering has a way of separating the temporary from the eternal; and when things are going well, we tend to lose that focus. As one author noted, after a hurricane no one goes running through the neighborhood crying that his cordless drill is missing or his golf clubs have been washed away. Suffering has a way of “prying our fingers off the stuff we love.”

The second lesson is this: *unexpected suffering reminds us that everything is on loan from God*. Job says at the end of verse 21, The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” And verse 22 concludes, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.” I like to think that the only sound of cursing in the universe this day was from the lips of Satan, who had failed.

As Job lies here in the dust, he says with great wisdom, “The Lord gave me everything I had; it belonged to

Him to begin with.” Beloved, it isn’t necessary to understand God’s plans before we bow in His presence.

Some time ago I was handed a poem, which I included in my message at the funeral of a little four-year-old girl. This family’s testimony was like Job’s. They trusted God’s promises, even though they had no real explanations.

*My Father’s way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache,
But in my soul I’m glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.*

*Tho’ night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break,
I’ll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.*

In what ways can you relate to Job and this suffering woman? What feelings are stirred? What thoughts about God are brought to the surface? Who in your life might also be able to relate to these circumstances?

In what ways do the closing two lessons above influence your thinking about the times when your own suffering felt as though God wasn’t engaged with you or was working against you?

¹ Francis I. Andersen, *Job*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 86.

² Max Lucado, quoted by Erwin Lutzer, *Where Was God?* (Tyndale House, 2006), 51.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





A MONUMENT OF PRAISE IN THE VALLEY OF DESPAIR

Job 2:1-10

Job is sorrowing and for good reason. He has lost everything, including his children. But his suffering is about to increase with the onset of physical torture. He is also about to demonstrate that even in the midst of such suffering, a child of God can glorify the Lord.

The citizens and farmers of Enterprise, Alabama, had a deep problem. Their entire economy rested on cotton, and that's about all the farmers planted. But then a small beetle made its way north from Mexico and on into Alabama by 1915. A few years later, all the cotton fields were eaten bare by this little bug known as the boll weevil. The farmers were facing bankruptcy and the rest of the town with them.

Instead of packing his bags and leaving, one farmer decided to plant different crop—a crop that would not be destroyed by the boll weevil, a crop that had been promoted by a former slave turned schoolteacher named George Washington Carver.

At the end of that year, the farmer's peanut crop was so prosperous that he paid off all his debts and had money left over. The next year the other farmers began planting peanuts, and they all prospered.

Now for the last 100 plus years, visitors to Enterprise, Alabama, have been able to admire a monument placed in the middle of the town—in appreciation for the boll weevil.¹ Imagine people raising a monument as an act of gratitude for a crisis that led ultimately to a blessing.

Unknown to the successful farmer and businessman Job, a deadly pest is moving into his territory. It isn't a beetle; it's Beelzebub—the devil himself.

In a matter of only thirty-nine seconds, Job has learned from four messengers that he is now bankrupt and bereaved of his ten grown children. He doesn't know it yet, but God has allowed the devil to take everything Job has in order to reveal the power of God in the life of His faithful follower.

Satan had predicted that Job would curse God if he lost everything, but he was wrong. At the end of chapter 1, we read these amazing words: “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”



Amulet thought to have healing powers by pagan worshipers



The trouble is, the devil isn't finished with Job, and God is going to allow even more suffering.

Now, chapter 2 of Job begins this way:

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

(verses 1-2)

Of course, God knows where Satan has been. Satan is still scrutinizing the life of Job, and no doubt he is infuriated that Job hasn't blasphemed God because of all he has lost.

So, the Lord comes right to the point here in verse 3, saying to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job?" The answer is obvious. One author said this would be like asking freshmen guys in college, "Have you considered girls?"² What else are they doing their freshman year?

Well, Satan is furious, and he responds in verse 4, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life." He wickedly implies here that Job was more than willing to sacrifice the skin of his children as long as he kept his own skin.

Satan then adds in verse 5, "But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." In other words, "Make Job suffer physically, and he will surrender his faith."

And once again, God delegates authority to Satan while at the same time limiting his activity. "And the

LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life'" (verse 6).

As soon as Satan gets this permission from God—and don't overlook that fact, beloved—only after he gets permission can he do anything to Job, verse 7 tells us:

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

The Hebrew word for "sores" can be translated "boils" and is the same word used for one of the ten plagues in Egypt (Exodus 9:9). These boils are only the beginning. Job will suffer some twenty-five ailments during this time.

He will experience itching (chapter 2), loss of appetite and feelings of dread and fear (chapter 3), and dizziness, insomnia, and hardened skin that oozes with pus (chapter 7).

"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"

I'm not trying to be gross—we just need to realize how he suffered. We will find that he struggles in chapter 9 with not being able to breathe and in chapter 19 with weight loss, and with constant pain and high fever, to the point that even his bones ache and burn (chapter 30). Satan just turns the corkscrew of suffering, hoping Job will curse God.

Verse 8 tells us that Job "took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes." Notice here, Job is not lying at home on clean



sheets with private medical staff. He's sitting in the ashes.

This is a reference to the landfill in the ancient towns of the Middle East. Each town had a place outside the gates where garbage was taken. Periodically, the rotting garbage would be burned for sanitation.³ This was where dogs fought for something to eat and where lepers and beggars lived. And this is where Job is—sitting in the softness of ashes from a recent burning of trash.

Beloved, get a better look at him here: his entire body is oozing with open sores; his eyes are swollen from crying; his clothes are caked with dirt and blood; his breath is short and strained; his face is gaunt and his cheeks sunken. Here sits the man introduced to us earlier as the greatest among all the people in the east.

Now he sits at the town dump, rocking back and forth in pain and despair, oblivious to the dogs and the beggars, and scratching himself with the blunt edge of a piece of pottery for relief. His mind is still grieving over ten fresh graves and the loss of everything. He remembers every child and every special moment when he had the blessing of God. But now, where is God? Maybe God is not worth following after all. Satan leans in. Surely Job will curse God now.

Then in verse 9, Job's wife arrives and begs him to curse God—to abandon God and die. I think she is saying what everybody else is thinking. I also think she is one of the most misunderstood women in the Bible, which is why I am not even going to talk about her right now. I want to take our next study to examine Mrs. Job.

But for now, Job says to her, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (verse 10). I can't believe he said that! Let me repeat it: "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive

evil?" And then we're told, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

Let me tell you something, beloved: Job has just raised a monument of praise in the valley of despair. You would think Job would throw in the towel and quit, yet he raises his voice and effectively says what you and I need to say today: God is worth our worship on the mountaintop and down here in the valley as well.

What characteristics and attributes are revealed about God that He sends good into a believer's life and uses evil to His good purpose in that same believer's life? How does what is revealed encourage you? Who in your life might also be encouraged by this truth?

Why is it important for us as believers to be mindful of how we live in the "valley of despair?" (Hint: Matthew 28:18-20)

¹ "Boll Weevil Monument," Wikipedia.org.

² Steven Lawson, *When All Hell Breaks Loose* (NavPress, 1993), 48.

³ David McKenna, *Job* (Word, 1986), 47.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





MRS. JOB

Job 2:9-10

Job is not the only one suffering. Behind the scenes his wife is dealing with the loss of her children and watching her beloved husband endure physical and emotional agony. Her brief appearance opens our eyes to the lonely pain experienced by secondhand sufferers.

Around 1 million people are touched with a variety of illnesses due to exposure to something you might not even notice. It can cause asthma, respiratory problems, and middle ear infections.

Exposure to it has caused cancer and heart disease—thousands of people die as a result of it every year. If you haven't guessed by now, it's simply called "secondhand smoke." People suffer greatly from it, even though they have never touched a cigarette or a cigar themselves—they just live with someone who smokes.

Countries and individual states have passed laws regarding secondhand smoke. Restaurants and airports and schoolyards forbid smoking. Why? Because the danger to others is now well known.

There is something today that is more dangerous than secondhand smoke. I like to call it "secondhand suffering." This is the suffering of those who are exposed to the suffering of others—their spouse, their child, their parent, or a close friend. Secondhand suffering is dangerous and discouraging, in its own unique way, in the hearts and lives of those who can only watch someone they love, suffer.

When we left off in our study in Job, he was at the city dump. There in the place where lepers and beg-



Drawing of a woman from a cave wall

gars live, he is sitting on a heap of ashes left by the burning of garbage.

He is suffering the loss of his ten children and the effects of some twenty-five different physical ailments. When Job and his wife had gotten married years earlier, they had no idea they would endure such a nightmare of sorrow and calamity and loss. Now their lives have been turned upside down.

What gets lost in all this is the woman who not only directly suffered the loss of everything and everyone dear to her but now is also forced to watch her husband suffer. If Job is the epitome of suffering, his wife



becomes the epitome of secondhand suffering. Both can be deadly to faith and trust in the sovereign plan of God.

Let's call her Mrs. Job. Rabbinical tradition believes she was Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. While it's clear that Job lived before, or during the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we cannot be sure Jacob's daughter was Job's wife. What we do know is that she appears briefly in chapter 2 when Job has moved from their home—which they may very well have lost in bankruptcy—into the town garbage dump.

She says to him here in verse 9, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.”

One scholar translated this, “Renounce God, and die.” Another puts it, “Bid farewell to God, and die.” In other words, she is saying, “Turn your back on God, abandon your testimony of faith, which is the only thing keeping you alive, and let God put you to death.”

She is basically crying out here, “Job, it's obvious God has given up on you. Why don't you give up on God!”

Now Mrs. Job has been viewed as an evil woman for suggesting such a thing. I want to take a closer look here; and I will tell you ahead of time, I personally do not believe she was trying to get Job to sin as much as she was simply trying to end Job's suffering.

The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible is called the Septuagint. It was translated 250 years before the time of Christ. It's even quoted in the New Testament.

However, at points the Septuagint actually adds to the Old Testament, as it does here. In the Septuagint account, Mrs. Job has a much longer message to Job. Now I am not saying this is biblical, but it reflects an ancient tradition and may give us some potential insight into what has driven her to suggest Job renounce God and then let God put him to death.

Here are her words in the Septuagint:

“How long will you endure, saying, Behold, I will wait yet for a little time, looking for the hope of my

salvation? Behold, the memory of you has been blotted out from the earth, [our] sons and daughters, the travail and pain of my womb, whom with toil I reared for nothing. And yet you yourself sit in the decay of worms, passing the nights under the open sky, while I am a wanderer ... from place to place and from house to house, waiting until the sun goes down, so that I may rest from my toils and from the pains that now grip me.”

Later, the Septuagint adds that she cut off all her hair and sold it in order to buy food. By this account, she has reached the point of despair. As far as she is concerned, God has abandoned them. So, she is presented as effectively saying, “Job, I can't stand to see you suffer any longer. Renounce God and be released from your misery.”

Now, beloved, I am not defending what she is recommending, but I believe we ought to try understanding her.

Secondhand suffering can be as painful as suffering firsthand. And the problem is, second-hand sufferers tend to feel guilty about expressing their own pain.

Let me offer some timeless truths about secondhand suffering we see acted out here in the life of Mrs. Job.

First, secondhand suffering can be as painful as suffering firsthand. And the problem is, secondhand sufferers tend to feel guilty about expressing their



own pain—turning the spotlight on themselves. So, they often suffer quietly.

Second, those who care for people who are suffering can reach points of despair even quicker than their loved ones. Look at Mrs. Job—she has already decided that Job's life is not worth living. She has already reached the point of despair. And why not? She has lost ten children. She has lost her livelihood and friends and home. Her husband once sat at the gates as a respected leader, the renowned man of the east. Their honor is gone, and as far as she is concerned, their hope is gone too.

In the Hebrew text, these verbs, “curse” and “die” are imperatives. I picture her falling on the ashes beside her husband and weeping, “Job, I can't take it anymore.”

Third, secondhand sufferers have their own personal lessons to learn from God. Job responds to his wife here in verse 10, saying, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak.”

Now that might appear to be harsh but notice here that he doesn't call her foolish. Rather, he says, she sounds like one of those foolish women who don't know the Lord. In other words, “Sweetheart, this isn't like you. You know God better than that. I know you're grieving and disillusioned, but this idea of cursing God and dying is the talk of women who do not know God like you do.”

Then Job teaches her here in verse 10 by reminding her of a profound truth: “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil [that is, adversity]?” God is in control. Life is receiving everything from the hand of God—good and bad, easy and difficult, painful and joyful. We don't resign from God; we receive from God. And God knows what He is

doing, even when He doesn't send us any explanation.

I am encouraged that we have no record here of any rebuttal from Mrs. Job. There are no heated words in response to his kind rebuke and gentle reminder that God has a right to withhold an explanation. Perhaps there is a revival in the heart of Mrs. Job as she sits there on the ash heap next to her husband as they continue to wait on God.

In what ways can you relate firsthand to the reality of “second-hand suffering”?

How do the insights of “Mrs. Job” affect the way you may be suffering secondhand?

Who in your life might be encouraged by the insights seen in Mrs. Job's life?



Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

Job 2:11-13

We have all heard that actions speak louder than words. But sometimes it is simply our presence that speaks loudest and most eloquently. It is this ministry of presence that brings so much comfort and encouragement to those who are suffering.

I want to introduce you to a powerful ministry that I simply call the ministry of presence. This takes place when you show up in the life of someone who is suffering or discouraged.

You don't come to give that person your favorite verse or a pep talk. No, you show up and listen, and serve, and communicate love and support. You don't have to be trained for this ministry; you don't have to be eloquent or experienced. You just need to show up. Let's watch it take place in the life of Job.

Now in Job 2:11, we are introduced to three of Job's friends—three counselors—and let me just say that here in chapter 2 they get it right. It will all go wrong as soon as they start talking. But for now, we read in verse 11:

When Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment [a pact] together to

come to show him sympathy and comfort him.

Eliphaz is mentioned first, more than likely because he is the oldest. In each of the cycles of speeches made by these three friends, Eliphaz always speaks first. He alludes to himself in chapter 15 as a gray-haired man, older than Job's father. Eliphaz may have been around seventy-five years of age.¹ His name means, "God is fine gold." He was likely a wealthy and influential leader in his hometown in southern Arabia.²

The next man mentioned here in verse 11 is Bildad the Shuhite. Bildad does not show up anywhere else in the Bible. He is from Shua, a region named after



Ancient Egyptian calendar



Abraham's youngest son by his second wife, Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2).

It's possible that Bildad and Shuah knew one another; if so, Bildad may have benefited from the wisdom of Abraham's youngest son. What we *do* know is that Bildad was a friend of Job. That alone speaks highly of him.

The third and final friend mentioned here is Zophar the Naamathite. He is always the last to speak and therefore probably the youngest of the three. He's from Naamah, a region more than likely between modern-day Beirut and Damascus.

These three friends had heard the devastating news concerning Job, which took some time to reach them. It took even more time to correspond back and forth, but they agreed to travel together to encourage Job. One author said that if you have *one* friend who will drop everything and come running to you in your time of need, that is wonderful. To have *three* friends like that is truly amazing.³

We have no idea how long it took to make their trip—it could have been six months before they arrived. And when they do, somebody evidently points them toward the town dump, where Job is now living among the ashes.

We read in verse 12, "When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept." The Hebrew text informs us that these men literally wailed in grief and shock.

Verse 12 also says, "They tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven."

Tearing the robe from the neck downward toward the heart was the customary way of expressing that your heart was torn or broken. And since Job is filthy, they essentially join him by soiling their own hair and clothing with dust.

And now we are told in verse 13:

*They sat with him on the ground
seven days and seven nights, and
no one spoke a word to him, for*

*they saw that his suffering was
very great.*

Let me tell you, beloved, this is a powerful ministry of presence. And these friends get it right with at least three responses.

First, *they identify with Job in his physical condition*. If Job is sitting out here on the ash heap at the town dump, they will sit out here with him. They will just ignore all the townspeople who come out to stare.

Earlier in verse 11, we were told that these friends came to sympathize with him. The Hebrew verb translated "show him sympathy" means more than a quick hug. It means literally to "shake the head or rock the body back and forth" as a sign of grief.⁴

You might do that today when you hear the news of someone's thirty-nine seconds of unexpected suffering. All you can do is cover your mouth with your hands and shake your head and rock back and forth in stunned silence and sorrow.

*Those who offer the
ministry of presence
don't show up to
talk; they show up
first to watch, to
weep, to listen.*

That's what they do with Job. Job is no longer crying alone; he has three grown men out here at the town dump crying with him. And they weep and wail over all his tragic losses.

By the way, have you ever been to the town dump where you live? Have you ever driven out to a landfill to drop off a truckload of trash? It will take your breath away. The smell of rotting garbage and the screeching of birds makes you want to drive away after about



seven minutes. Imagine being there for seven hours. How about for seven days? Verse 13 says, “They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights.”

Second, *they join Job in his time of sorrow and grief*. Seven days and seven nights was the customary length of time for mourning the dead. They are holding an impromptu memorial service for the loss of Job’s ten children. They’re not asking Job to cut his sorrow short. They’re joining him in this time of grief.

Have you ever noticed that no one is ever invited to a funeral? Invitations are never mailed out.⁵ Word spreads, and friends just show up. And if they cannot come, they send flowers, notes, or cards to communicate to the sufferer, “Count me in; I’m there with you, all the way.”

Third, *they allow Job the opportunity to speak first*. Don’t miss this—underline it in your mind—they will allow Job to speak *first*.

When we show up at the bedside or home of someone who is suffering, we are tempted to say something to break the silence—something profound or wise. These friends got it right by remaining quiet. Those who offer the ministry of presence don’t show up to talk; they show up first to watch, to weep, to listen.

This is a good reminder, beloved, that the Bible is not a bandage, as if we can just stick some favorite verse on someone’s grieving heart and make it better. Scripture isn’t an aspirin. We can’t say, “Here, take two of these and call me tomorrow when you’re better.”

Physical injuries take time to heal. So do the internal injuries of the heart. If you haven’t learned it by now, learn it from this scene. You don’t eliminate sorrow; you share it.

A pastor and his wife went through a painful time after the loss of their eighteen-year-old son in an accident. He wrote:

I was sitting, torn by grief. Someone came and talked to me of God’s dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly, he said things I [already] knew were true. I was unmoved, except I wished he’d go away. He finally did. Another came and sat beside me for an hour and more; listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply and left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go.⁶

Beloved, let’s offer to others this kind of comfort—it’s the ministry of presence.

What did you learn about your approach to suffering from observing Job’s friends? How will your approach to suffering change by what you’ve learned? What heart-attitudes must you have, in order to make your presence with a sufferer meaningful to them?

¹ William Henry Green, *Conflict and Triumph* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 57.

² John E. Hartley, *Job*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 1988), 85.

³ See Mike Mason, *The Gospel According to Job* (Crossway Books, 1994), 49.

⁴ Hartley, 85.

⁵ See Charles Swindoll, *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance* (W Publishing, 2004), 50.

⁶ Ibid., 53.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





HITTING ROCK BOTTOM

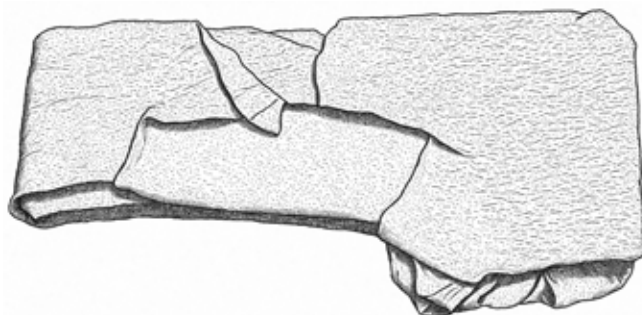
Job 3–7

Intense suffering can drive even a godly person like Job to despair. Many of us have been there ourselves and too often found no one who could understand and encourage us. This is why the divinely inspired book of Job is so important to us and all suffering people.

Chapter 3 begins the poetic portion of the book of Job, which will continue all the way through chapter 42 and verse 6. Chapter 3 also begins three cycles of dialogue; each cycle includes speeches by Job and each of his three friends.

You might remember that Job's three friends have been sitting quietly with him out there in the garbage dump where the trash was burned to ashes—and they have been there with him for seven days. Now finally, Job speaks, and he pours out his heart with bitter anguish and hopelessness. His despair has brought him to the point that he no longer wants to live.

One author described this third chapter of Job as “one of the most depressing chapters in all the Bible”; few sermons are made from this chapter; few verses are memorized or remembered for their warmth. It may very well be the lowest point in the book of Job.¹



Stone engraved with the song of Ullikummi

Job's suffering has brought him to the bottom of the pit; he has reached the valley of despair.

Maybe you have been where Job is here. Maybe you're there right now. Beloved, that is why this book is so important and why God preserved it for us all these centuries. Anybody struggling with pain and sorrow wants answers. Well, stick with me through this book, because Job's experience will point us all in the right direction.

Job's opening speech can be summarized very simply: He sees death as preferable to his suffering. In fact, he says here in verse 3, “Let the day perish on which I was born.”

In verse 11 he says the same thing: “Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?” This is not exactly the kind of verse you are going to memorize and put on the dash of your car as you head to work. But maybe you have the same feelings as Job, who says here in verse 26, “I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, but trouble comes.”

Job's attitude is, “All I have in life is trouble. What's the use in living?”

Well, with that, chapter 4 opens, and we have the first counsel from Eliphaz the Temanite, probably the



oldest of Job's friends. Proverbs 16:24 says, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." Well honeycombed words are the last thing Job is going to hear from Eliphaz.

Eliphaz begins by noting that in the past Job had corrected and instructed and counseled many people who had stumbled in life. Then he says in verse 5, "But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed." In other words, "You are in a fix now, and you have to be willing to take your own medicine."

And what is the medicine? Well, as far as Eliphaz is concerned, Job is suffering because he has sinned. He is simply reaping the consequences of his wrongdoing. Eliphaz says to Job here in verse 7, "Who that was innocent ever perished ... where were the up-right cut off?"

By the way, this will be the central argument of all three friends of Job: "Job, you are suffering greatly because you evidently have sinned greatly."

And where is the evidence of his sin? Eliphaz claims that God gave it to him in a vision (verses 13-21). Let me tell you something, beloved, when anyone claims some kind of special revelation from God to try to manage your life, you need to lace up your shoes and run; don't even bother listening.

Eliphaz makes two mistakes here in his counseling. First, he assumes that sin always brings suffering. And yes, sin *can* bring suffering, but not always—at first anyway. In fact, the psalmist wrote in Psalm 73:3, "I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He was looking at people who were wicked, and life couldn't have been better for them. Wicked people actually can prosper in this brief life.

Sin and suffering do not always go hand in hand. But because he believes that false principle, Eliphaz makes his second mistake by way of application. He assumes Job has sinned and is now suffering because of it.

However, we know from chapter 1 that Job is *not* suffering because he was ungodly; he's suffering because he was godly. Satan has been allowed to attack this faithful man, not because he was sinning against God but because he was following God.

God already said of Job in chapter 2 and verse 3, "There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil."

Job then replies to Eliphaz in chapter 6. He sort of apologizes for his despair, saying in verse 3 that the weight of his suffering is "heavier than the sand of the sea." And he goes on in the next verse to say, "The terrors of God are arrayed against me." There is no escape from what God is doing in his life.

Now beginning at verse 14, Job appeals to his friends for compassion. He charges Eliphaz with being disloyal (verse 15), and he points out that his friends are now afraid to sympathize with him lest they bring God's judgment on themselves (verse 21). He then ends by pleading for them to be careful not to jump to conclusions (verse 29).

Imagine this scene, beloved; here Job sits in the ashes, covered in boils, racked with pain, bereft of his children. He is financially bankrupt, his skin is oozing with running sores, he's battling high fever, finding it difficult to breathe, and he's being told by his friends, "You deserve every bit of this—and more."

Job laments his misery in chapter 7, indicating that

*Those who offer the
ministry of presence
don't show up to
talk; they show up
first to watch, to
weep, to listen.*

his physical condition is actually worsening. He says in verses 5-6:

*"My flesh is clothed with worms
and dirt; my skin hardens, then
breaks out afresh. My days are
swifter than a weaver's shuttle*



and come to their end without hope.”

And with that, Job ignores his friends and effectively prays out loud, honestly and emotionally, here in verse 16, “I loathe my life ... Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.” In other words, “Since my life is short anyway, why let it linger on? God, why not let me die? The grave would be better than my painful life.”

There are no answers from God to this suffering, faithful believer, and Eliphaz has only added salt to his wounds with false accusations. The truth is, sometimes when we are at the lowest point in our lives, we don't have any answers, and we don't seem to have very many understanding friends.

What do we have today, beloved? We have the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). We have the promise that a faithful God can handle all our anxieties because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). We have the promise that God does hear our prayers (Psalm 69:33).

We may not have all the answers, but we have some promises that God is always at work on our behalf.

So based on the promises of God in His Word:

- When you think God doesn't care—He does.
- When you feel life is hopeless—it isn't.
- When you think you know better than God—you don't.
- When you believe God hasn't heard your cry—He has.
- When you conclude God isn't present—He is.
- When you think God doesn't love you—He always will.

Whether your suffering is fresh or long seared into your mind in what ways can you relate to Job's sentiment? They may not have spoken these words of Job, but who in your life could benefit from knowing that at least one person (Job) has lived through great suffering?

In what ways have you sounded like or thought like Eliphaz while attempting to minister to others? Why were you so oriented? What heart-attitudes help guard us from becoming discouragers to sufferers?

We may not have thoughtful friends, but we do have a compassionate God. How do the ending verses above help temper the effects of an Eliphaz during our suffering?

Think of a practical way you can display the six promises of God from above so that your heart has access to continual encouragement.

¹ Robert L. Alden, quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance* (Thomas Nelson, 2004), 61.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





THE HUSH OF HEAVEN

Job 8–10

When we insist on seeing everyone's physical well-being as a reflection of that person's spiritual condition, we limit our understanding of God and our ministry to those who are suffering. We see this lived out in Bildad, who acted more as Job's judge than his comforter.

The more I study the suffering of Job and the words of his so-called counselors, the more I am amazed at Job's endurance. Added to Job's suffering is that God is silent. I like to call these chapters, "The Hush of Heaven" for there is not a sound coming from above.

But there's plenty of noise down here where Job's friends are now taking turns delivering their wrong opinions about God, with a wrong approach to Job. Bildad now speaks here in chapter 8, and he echoes what Eliphaz had argued earlier—that Job is suffering because he has sinned. But Bildad is more brutal and uncaring in his counsel if you can call it that.

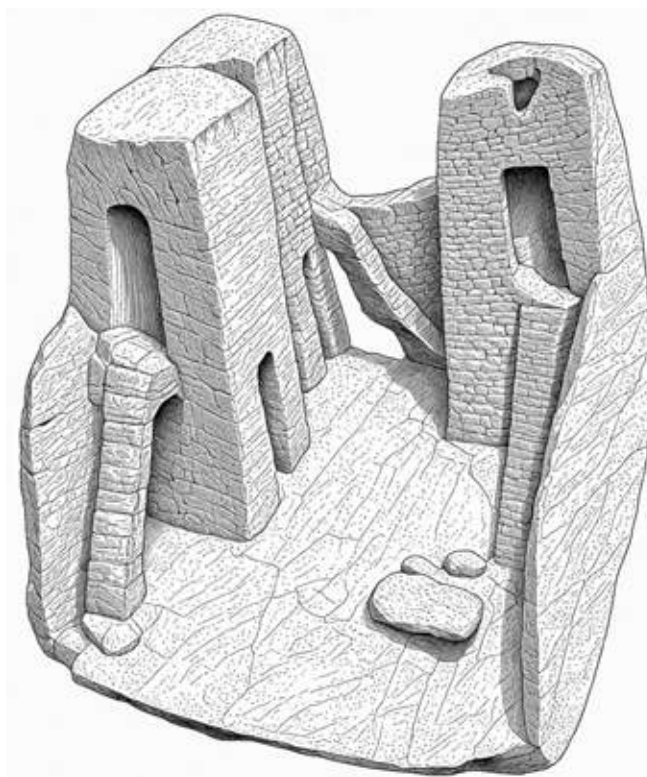
In verse 2 he says to Job:

"How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice?"

Bildad is calling Job a windbag. But let me tell you, Bildad is the one with all the hot air! He goes on to say to Job in verse 4—if you can believe this—"If your children have sinned against [God], he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression." In

other words, "Job, your ten children are dead because they probably deserved to die."

I like to call Bildad "the Bulldozer"—he has about as much compassion. And he tells Job here in verse 5 that his only hope is to confess his secret sins—to "seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy."



Clay houses were often placed on tombs



Bildad tries to support his argument that sinners *always* suffer by appealing to the ancestors who lived a long time before. He argues in verse 8 that ancient wisdom has come to the same conclusion. Besides, he says to Job in verse 9, “We are but of yesterday and know nothing, for our days on earth are a shadow.” He is saying, “We haven’t lived long enough to discover the truth.”

Now in one sense, Bildad is right. We cannot seem to learn fast enough what we need to know to handle the issues of life. About the time I figured out how to be a dad, my kids were out of college. That’s why I thank God for grandchildren—it’s a second chance to get it right.

Someone once said that experience is a comb you get after you have lost all your hair. Well, there is some truth to that too.

*Is there someone who
can speak for us?
Yes, there is—Jesus
Christ our Advocate,
our representative in
court.*

But Bildad was still wrong in that you do not have to be old to be wise. Listen to wisdom speaking in Proverbs 8, where it says, “By me kings reign [that’s older men] . . . by me princes rule [that’s younger men].” Wisdom then says, “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me” (verses 15–17).

James 1:5 promises, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all.” That promise is given not just to the old but to the young as well. Beloved, you don’t have to grow old in order to grow wise.

Now as we arrive at chapter 9, Job delivers his response to Bildad, and in verse 2 he presents a pro-

found question we all need to answer: “How can a man be in the right before God?” That’s a question for the ages. How can somebody be right with God? Job knows he is not hiding secret sin; but he also knows that God is just. So, Job wants to know what he’s missing here. How does someone get right with God?

Here’s the dilemma: Job says in verse 19, “If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty [God is stronger than I am]! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?” Literally, he says, “Who can take God to court and win?”

Job is left confused. He now believes his days are numbered. In fact, he says throughout chapter 10 that his case is hopeless. You can almost hear him weeping as he asks God in verse 18, “Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me.”

Now, right in the middle of chapters 8, 9, and 10 are some profound truths I want to focus on for just a moment or two. They hint at deep gospel truths for you and me today.

Job says in chapter 9 and verses 32–33:

*For he [God] is not a man, as
I am, that I might answer him,
that we should come to trial to-
gether. There is no arbiter be-
tween us, who might lay his
hand on us both.*

Job is essentially crying out, “How can I be right with God when there is no one to help settle our differences in court? There is no arbiter.”

Job is referring to the custom of the ancient court, which used an official to act as an arbitrator between two parties to negotiate a settlement. It was the custom of this official to put his hands on the heads of the two disputing parties and settle the question.¹

So, Job essentially is asking the question that is at the heart of the gospel: “Is there anyone with official



capacity who can come between me and God and negotiate a settlement?”

And the answer is yes! Job was looking forward to Him, and we are looking back at Him. He is the one Person capable of settling this question forever.

With prophetic longing, and without even realizing the depth of his words, Job asks the question that the Bible answers in the coming of Jesus Christ, God's Son. The Bible says:

There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

(1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Is there someone who can speak for us? Yes, there is—Jesus Christ our Advocate, our representative in court.

Earlier in chapter 9 Job asked that timeless question: “How can someone be right with God?” My friend, that is really the most important question you will ever answer during your lifetime. And you need to get it right. The world will tell you that any answer will do, so long as you believe hard enough. If you are sincere, you will make it to heaven.

Well, that's as foolish as going to the airport counter today and saying, “I want to buy a ticket to Georgia to go see my family. Any flight will do. I just need to feel good about the pilot and the seat you assign me.” Oh, no; you're going to want the right flight, departing from the right gate, at the right time, in order to get to the right destination.

My friend, traveling from earth to eternity is no different. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

me” (John 14:6). Acts 4:12 says, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Job wanted a mediator. He wanted to be right with God. He wanted an answer that related to suffering. But his question opens the door to an answer related to salvation.

Do you know the answer? Have you come by faith to the Mediator, Jesus Christ, and claimed Him as your defender? Do that today. Jesus alone is capable of providing an everlasting settlement between you and God. My friend, don't try to take God to court. Invite Him into your heart.

- Want more information about the gospel? <https://www.wisdomonline.org/the-gospel>
- Let us know about your decision to trust Jesus: <https://www.wisdomonline.org/connect>

If you have struggled through a trial possibly for someone else's sin or for some other reason, describe how you dealt with the struggle. How does Proverbs 8:15-17 and James 1:5 help you overcome any ignorance or lack of wisdom you may have in ministering effectively to those suffering in your life?

Job's suffering coupled with God's momentary silence set an anticipation of a mediator in Job's heart. How does that outcome fit with God's loving and compassionate character?

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Patient* (Victor Books, 1991), 44.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





COUNSEL WITHOUT COMFORT

Job 11–14

Life is not always pleasant, and as Job learned, sometimes even those from whom we expect support and encouragement offer neither. The one constant, though, is our unchanging, compassionate God. And Like Job, even when we are confused by what He is doing, we can trust Him.

As we have visited Job, living down here at the town dump and trying to get comfortable on the ashes of burned-over trash, his three counselors have only made his life more uncomfortable.

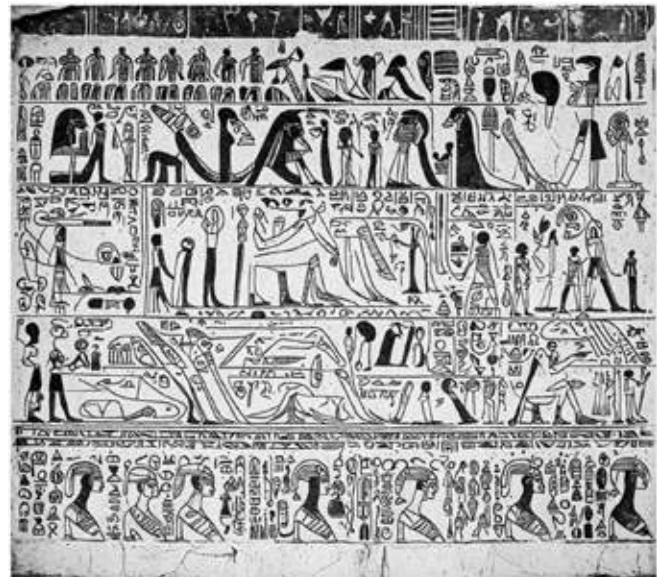
Frankly, we are a lot like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. No matter how wise and godly a person may have been in the past, when misfortune strikes that one, we tend to wonder whether the person deserved it. We wouldn't say it out loud, but:

- A child runs away, and we wonder if the parents were less committed or loving in the home, behind the scenes, than they appeared in public.
- A neighbor goes bankrupt, and we assume he had it coming through reckless financial misjudgments.¹

We naturally assume that some kind of error, failure, or even sin is the reason for reversals in life.

Well, that is the opinion of Job's friends. And now as Zophar speaks, he is going to express that very opinion with even less grace and kindness than Eliphaz and Bildad.

He immediately accuses Job of willful ignorance in verse 6 telling Job, "God exacts of you less than your



Painting from the wall of the sarcophagus hall of the tomb of Ramses VI

guilt deserves." Can you imagine that? He is saying, "Job, you're getting off easy!"

Zophar claims to know with *certainly* that Job is guilty of secret sin. He says in verse 11, "[God] knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?" In other words, "God knows you're a hypocrite, Job!" And in verse 12, he essentially calls Job an empty-headed idiot.



*We naturally assume
that some kind of
error, failure, or even
sin is the reason for
reversals in life.*

Warren Wiersbe writes on this conversation, “What Job needed was a helping hand, not a slap in the face. . . . How sad it is when people who should *share* your misery end up creating misery.”²

Zophar then delivers his solution for Job in verse 14:

*“If iniquity is in your hand, put
it far away, and let not injustice
dwell in your tents. Surely then
you will lift up your face without
blemish; you will be secure and
will not fear.”*

His message is, “Repent, Job, and God will put you back on your feet.”

So, here Job sits in despair, having lost everything. He has been unable to eat or sleep for months; his skin is itching uncontrollably; high fever and running sores have made him ache and suffer in agony. But he is still lucid and very much aware of his counselors’ accusations.

And now in chapter 12, Job responds; and he has some rather strong words for Zophar and these other counselors.

With biting sarcasm, he says in verse 2, “No doubt . . . wisdom will die with you.” He is mockingly saying, “I mean, you guys must be the only wise people left on the entire planet.”

He says in verse 3, “I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you.” In other words, “Go

ahead and mock me and call me an empty-headed idiot; but I know as much about God as you do!”

With that, Job launches into this incredible description of God’s character. He speaks of God as the creator and sustainer of life, saying, “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” (verse 10). And in verses 13–14, he says, “With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, none can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open.” He is declaring that what God does has divine reasoning and purpose, even though we may not understand Him.

Job turns to these men now in chapter 13 and gives his assessment of *them*. He says in verse 4, “Worthless physicians are you all.” The medicines they are prescribing for his soul are only making him worse.

Now starting at verse 13, Job turns his attention away from his friends and focuses on the case he wants to plead before God. He begins with a surprising declaration of faith here in verse 15: “Though he slay me, I will hope in him.”

Even here at this most painful moment in his life, Job refuses to curse God. He also proves to us that it’s possible to trust the Lord without having answers; it’s possible to have faith in the Lord without healing or prosperity; it’s possible to trust the Lord even in the most difficult trials of life.

Job is trusting the Lord in silence, but he still wants some answers. So here in verse 18 he says, “Behold, I have prepared my case; I know that I shall be in the right.”

Job asks the Lord, “How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin” (verse 23). His plea is this: “If I am suffering because of sin, lay out my sins in front of me. Let’s see them!”

But God remains silent. And with that, Job falls deeper into despair, which is what we often do, beloved, when we demand an answer from God and no answer comes.

In hopelessness, Job begins to dwell on the brevity and the trouble of life itself. As chapter 14 opens, he says:



“Man . . . is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not.” (verses 1-2)

One author writes:

Job has come to a pessimistic view of life. . . . Because of his pain, he’s unable to see [any of] the goodness of life and the blessings of God’s grace. Let’s not fall into the trap of Job’s thinking, [and let’s not be quick to] judge Job for feeling this way.³

Job prays in verse 13, “Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past.” He is actually voicing hope in a future resurrection, but in his present situation, he thinks God is just pouring out His wrath on him—all he can feel is pain and suffering. He thinks it would be better to hide out in the grave until God’s wrath runs out of steam.

Now we need to understand that Job cannot pull out his Bible and his commentaries—and certainly not any kind of Bible software. He can’t even turn to the New Testament to find out more about life beyond the grave.

The subject of life after death was more confusing for him. We have the New Testament and God’s full revelation of what lies beyond. The Hebrew word Job uses here is *sheol*, which is a general term for the place of the dead.

Job doesn’t understand that death offers immediate joy and peace in God’s presence. To him what lies beyond death is cloudy and murky. He has more questions than answers.

Frankly, I can’t imagine facing the trials of life without the entire Bible. What a blessing it is to turn to passage after passage that gives us insight and comfort. We have so much more to look forward to than old Job could have imagined. And that reminds me that we, of all people, ought to be hopeful about life and certain about life after death.

The Bible tells us that that we have peace with God now through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). We are not facing God’s wrath; we are under His care. The Bible says that suffering and pain have a purpose in the plan of God for our lives, conforming us into the character of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28-29); and we are told that when we die, we immediately go to be with our Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Death is the hand that opens the doorway into heaven—forever.

Job uses God’s character in response to accusations towards himself.

How does a working knowledge of God’s characteristics and attributes contribute to any believer’s ability to handle accusations? What are you doing to “build up” your knowledge and convictions about God and His character?

Is it wise to ask the LORD to reveal any sins that may be contributing to your difficulties? Explain your answer.

¹ Mike Mason, *The Gospel According to Job* (Crossway, 1994), 141.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Patient* (David C. Cook, 1991), 59-60.

³ Ray C. Stedman, *Let God Be God* (Discovery House, 2007), 94.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





RESTING ON THE ROCK OF OUR REDEEMER

Job 15–21

Like Job, we long for relief and answers in times of suffering. But when friends have no answers and God’s Word offers no specific explanations, we can still cling to the wonderful assurance that our Redeemer lives, we will see God, and in Him we will find comfort and ultimate answers.

By the time we arrive here at chapter 15, Job’s spirit is completely crushed. These friends who showed up only made things worse.

Job chapters 15 through 21 record the second round of speeches between Job and his counselors. Job will answer each of his friends. Their arguments use different vocabulary this time, but they are saying the same thing: “Job, you’re a sinner, and God is judging you.”

Eliphaz speaks first again in this second round of speeches. He is actually angry that Job has refused to

confess his secret sins. So now in chapter 15, Eliphaz lashes out, saying:

“Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge? . . . Should he argue in unprofitable talk, or in words with which he can do no good?” (verses 2-3)

Again, Eliphaz accuses Job of being full of hot air. But we know who the windbag is here, and it’s not Job.

In verse 4 Eliphaz accuses Job of “hindering meditation before God.” Job evidently has messed up Eliphaz’s devotional life.

But let me tell you, here is why Eliphaz is so angry. He and his two friends are convinced that a righteous person is not going to suffer. If Job is suffering, and he is walking with God, they are terrified, because that means they have no special protection against personal suffering themselves. If obedience to God does not guarantee health and wealth, then what is happening to Job could happen to them.¹



Depiction of what was thought to be the pillars of earth



These counselors are the original prosperity preachers. If you walk with God, God will bless your socks off.

Well, Job doesn't fit their little, self-centered theology. So, these men are digging their heels in for their own sense of protection. Eliphaz says in verse 20, "The wicked man writhes in pain all his days." Why? "Because he has stretched out his hand against God and defies the Almighty" (verse 25). Eliphaz is convinced that Job is wicked because he is writhing in pain.

Job responds in chapters 16 and 17. His comments are basically summarized in verse 2 of chapter 16: "I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all." In this second round of speeches, these men have said nothing new. They are no closer to the truth than they were before.

But then Job straightens out their theology here. He dares to say that the source of his suffering is not his sin, but God. He says in verse 7, "God has worn me out," and in verse 12, "I was at ease, and [God] broke me apart."

Bildad the Bulldozer then speaks again in chapter 18, and he creates more devastation in Job's heart. He describes the horrifying future of a wicked person here in verse 5, saying, "Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out." Only darkness awaits a sinner like Job.

Job begins his reply in chapter 19 by asking Bildad, "How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words? . . . are you not ashamed to wrong me?" (verses 2-3).

Now in this chapter, we begin to hear something from Job that is important to highlight. Job agrees that God is punishing him, but he doesn't believe God is being fair. Job says, "[God] counts me as his adversary" (verse 11) and "[God] has put my brothers far from me . . . My relatives have failed me, my close friends have forgotten me" (verses 13-14).

Yet, in the middle of questioning God's actions, Job delivers this amazing statement of faith:

*"I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon
the earth. And after my skin has*

*been thus destroyed, yet in my
flesh I shall see God."* (verses 25-26).

This is a remarkable statement. Even with limited revelation, Job has assurance that his "Redeemer lives" and that he will "see God." And I love that Job didn't say, "I know that my Redeemer will live *someday*" or, "I know that my Redeemer *used* to be alive." Oh, no. This is the foundation of Job's persevering faith: "I don't see Him; I don't hear His voice, but I know that my Redeemer *is* alive."

*This is the
foundation of Job's
persevering faith:
"I don't see Him; I
don't hear His voice,
but I know that my
Redeemer is alive."*

Charles Spurgeon wrote on this text:

Spring up on this rock—if you are struggling in the sea just now, and waves of doubt beat over you, rest upon this rock—Jesus is alive.²

Zophar now speaks in chapter 20, repeating the same tired argument that wicked people are punished and godly people prosper. By the way, that will be true *finally*, in God's final judgment; but it is not true presently in our sinful world.

Job responds in chapter 21 by pointing out in verse 7 that here and now the "wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power." It should be obvious, Job says in verse 9, that often "their houses are safe from fear, and no rod [judgment] of God is upon them." In fact, Job declares, "They spend their days in prosperity" (verse 13).



All Zophar and his friends have to do is look around. They have built this comfortable little theology that ignores reality—a shallow theology that insists that godly people *always* prosper and ungodly people *always* suffer produces shallow Christians. How wrong they are. Job concludes in verse 34, “There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.”

Job’s counselors have only deepened his wounds. They are graceless men with shallow minds, offering no comfort at all to a grieving man. Beloved, let’s not be like them.

Let’s remember that life is complicated, and answers aren’t always obvious. And if God’s purposes for suffering are not clear, we had better think twice before telling someone what His purposes are.

Let’s be alert to opportunities to encourage others. The universal language of our fallen world is the language of suffering. We are surrounded by people who desperately need an encouraging word.

For several months before my godly mother-in-law passed away, she went through weekly dialysis treatments. It was a world of which I knew nothing. I picked her up from the clinic one afternoon, and she began telling me about all the people who came to be hooked up to those machines three days a week—several hours each day. The patients came in all sizes, ages, and ethnicities. There was an eighty-five-year-old who waved at everybody when she arrived. There was a middle-aged couple who had just begun taking treatments together. There was a sixteen-year-old with a pleasant attitude toward everyone around him. This young man especially impressed my mother-in-law. Hooked up to the dialysis machine, he patiently endured the treatment.

I couldn’t help but wonder who knew about his condition at school. Did the students know why he rarely stayed after school for activities? Did teachers know why his classes were arranged for early dismissal three days a week? Did anybody know he suffered? My sweet mother-in-law was always ready to provide a word of encouragement to him.

Beloved, we would be surprised by the number of suffering people we pass every day in the hallway, in the classroom, in the grocery store. Grace should always be on the alert. Comfort should always be on call. It might be a kind word, a handshake, a hello, or a few words of comfort and grace.

Have you ever thought about the fact that God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)? In fact, God’s comfort is never *given* to us—it is loaned. God wants us to turn around and distribute it to others.

Meditate on Eliphaz’s so-called theology above. Go before the LORD and ask Him to show you the degree to which you believe the lie that righteous believers don’t suffer.

How does Romans 8:28 help you answer this question: why is it important to trace all our suffering back to God and His wisdom no matter what the “source” is that He may be using?

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Patient* (David C. Cook, 1991), 71.

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Suffering of Man and the Sovereignty of God*, ed. Kerry James Allen (Fox River Press, 2001), 162.

³ Wiersbe, 84..

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





A SAINT IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY COUNSELOR

Job 22-24

Wise words of counsel and encouragement are blessings welcomed by any believer. But words are helpful only to the extent that they are true to reality and consistent with the Word of God. How Job could have used humble friends who offered such comforting words.

Job 22 begins the third and final cycle of speeches from Job's counselors. This time, only Eliphaz and Bildad will speak. And here in chapter 22, we are about to listen to Eliphaz deliver one more condemnation of Job.

Eliphaz is actually angry at this point. He is offended because his supposedly great wisdom has been ignored. You have heard of sinners in the hands of an angry God? Well, here we see a saint in the hands of an angry counselor.

Perhaps you are in the same position Job is in right now. Your actions have been misinterpreted, your motives have been questioned, and you are being condemned for no fault of your own. Well, if so, this chapter is especially for you. In fact, this chapter is for every believer who gives any kind of counsel to another person.

Eliphaz actually becomes an example here of how *not* to counsel. I want to point out four errors of Eliphaz. The first error he makes is to *condemn Job without understanding the context*. He says here in chapter 22:

"Can a man be profitable to God? . . . Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right,

or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?" (verses 2-3)

In other words, he is saying, "Job, do you think you benefit God in any way? Do you think God even cares about your claim to be godly? Why don't you look around? Where is any evidence that you even matter to God?"

What condemning, uncaring words to a suffering man. The truth is, Job is under the watchful care of God as he is being tested. Why, the angelic world is bending over the balcony, so to speak, watching this great battle take place.



Relief from Medinet Habu shows prisoners of Ramesses III



Eliphaz is the one who doesn't care about Job. Eliphaz cares only about being right.

Second, Eliphaz *counsels Job on the basis of outward appearances*. He asks Job in verse 5, “Is not your evil abundant?” He looks merely at Job's outward appearance and concludes that he is suffering abundantly because he has sinned abundantly.

Again, we know from chapter 1 that Job is suffering, not because he is in trouble with God but because he can be trusted by God to remain faithful, in the face of Satan's attacks.

A third error of Eliphaz is that *he invents sins that justify Job's punishment*. Here is where Eliphaz goes out on a limb. If Job is being punished for sins, where are they? Well, Eliphaz doesn't know, so he just makes some up.

He accuses Job with taking advantage of the poor, claiming in verse 6, “You have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing.” No, he hasn't. He accuses Job of turning away the needy (verse 7) and mistreating widows and orphans (verse 9). That's not true either. He even puts words in Job's mouth in verses 13-14: “But you say, ‘What does God know? . . . he does not see.’”

Now the fourth error here is that Eliphaz *misrepresents God by making shallow promises*. Eliphaz promises Job that if he confesses his sin, God will remove every problem from his life. He says in verse 28: “You will decide on a matter . . . and light will shine on your ways.” That's his solution: “Confess, Job, and your life is going to be filled with sunshine and roses.”

Frankly, many counselors and preachers make this same claim today. They present Christianity as a quick cure for everything. This is a false gospel. The Bible actually promises that a godly person is going to experience suffering and even persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Becoming a Christian just might make your life more difficult, not less difficult.

Well, Job responds in chapter 23. He knows he is suffering, and he knows God is behind it all. He says in verses 3-4:

*Oh, that I knew where I might
find him . . . I would lay my case
before him and fill my mouth
with arguments.*

He is convinced that if he can just get a fair trial, he will be “acquitted forever” (verse 7).

Job then makes this astounding statement of faith in verse 10: “When he [has] tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”¹

*The Bible actually
promises that a god-
ly person is going to
experience suffering
and even persecution
(2 Timothy 3:12).*

Job still believes that God has a reason for his suffering—that God is purifying him like refined gold for His own purposes. He does not know what they are, but Job amazingly—faithfully—trusts the hand of God.

I am reminded of that great hymn of the faith, “How Firm a Foundation” by John Rippon, who wrote:

*When through fiery trials thy pathway
shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*

Now in chapter 24 Job catalogues some sins that are all around him—sins like greed and theft (verse 2),



oppression (verse 3), murder and adultery (verses 14 and 15), and more.

This is a clever answer to Eliphaz by the way. Job implies that if God always punishes people because of their sin, why are so many sinners going unpunished?

That probably only makes Eliphaz angrier than ever. Frankly, Eliphaz is working on Satan's behalf, not God's. Satan is the accuser of the brethren. He wants the believer to live under a cloud of guilt and a sense of displeasure from God.

How different is the counsel that finds its source in Satan from that which comes from God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of specific sin and when we confess it, He doesn't bring it up again. Satan, on the other hand, constantly throws our sin back in our face. He loves to remind us of sins that have already been confessed and forgiven and no longer need our attention.

I've heard it said that the devil is like a dishonest mechanic. Even if he can't find something that needs to be fixed, he will tell us he did. As a result, we end up paying for things to be fixed that aren't even broken.

The truth is, we can all play the role of Eliphaz. As spouses, we can refuse to forgive; as parents, we can remind our children of their failures; as teachers and colleagues, business partners, and classmates, we can withhold words of approval and thanks and commendation.

Like Eliphaz, we can become an angry counselor, more interested in being right than in bringing hope. Eliphaz, the angry counselor, brings no hope to the heart of Job.

To this day, the believer who is on the verge of losing heart often believes God has forgotten him. But He

hasn't. Job says here in verse 23, at this low moment in his life, that God's eyes are on the ways of His people. He knows where they are and what they are going through.

John Rippon wrote further in that great hymn these words:

*Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee
to stand,
Upheld by my gracious, omnipotent hand.*

Beloved, when you are in the dark, when you don't know which way to turn, even when you're in the hands of an angry counselor, you are still, ultimately, in the hands of your all-wise, ever-loving, gracious heavenly Father.

What are some practical ways you can display or utilize verse 10 above (like a postcard of it on the bathroom mirror) so that you're constantly reminded that your suffering must first filter through God's good purposes for you? Consider how this truth is related in Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4.

Why is it important to have already "treasured God and His word in your heart" when you encounter discouraging counsel in your personal suffering?

¹ King James Version

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





THE LAST STAND OF A DESPERATE MAN

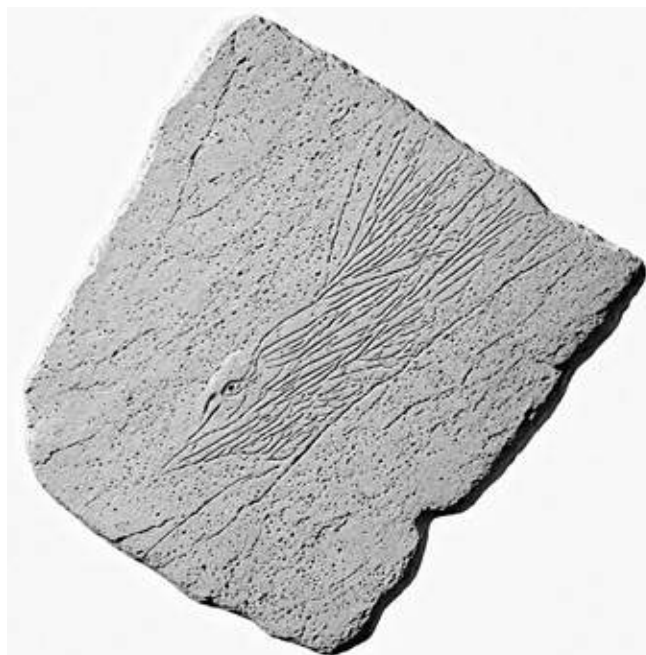
Job 25–31

To his credit Job did not allow suffering to rob him of his faith in God or his understanding of God's nature. He did not grasp why God was allowing him to suffer, but he acknowledged God's greatness. It is not our experiences but God's Word that infallibly reveals God to us.

Job chapters 25–31 bring us to the end of the dialogue between Job and his companions. Eliphaz has spoken in chapter 22. Zophar will not speak again, and Bildad will speak only very briefly here in chapter 25. Their attacks have been worn out by this point—they're convinced that Job is suffering because Job is a sinner.

Now some of what Bildad has to say here in chapter 25 is correct, but his conclusion is wrong. He declares that God is all-powerful, saying in verse 2, "Dominion and fear are with God"—that is, nobody can successfully fight against God. But Bildad applies this to Job, implying that Job has been fighting against God rather than confessing to God. Well, Job certainly has been questioning God, but he is not fighting against Him.

Bildad's comments are followed by a rather long response from Job that takes us from chapter 26 all the way through chapter 31. His comments here in chapter 26 focus on the *greatness of God*. He says in verse 7 that God "stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing." He says in verse 14 that we observe only the "outskirts of his ways." In other words, we are nowhere near seeing the fullness of God's glory. We can see only the outer fringes; we hear only the whispers of His greatness.



Ostrakon referring to the gold of Ophir

Remember, this great theology is coming from a man sitting out at the town dump, trying to get comfortable on the ashes of burned-over trash, suffering with running sores, high fever, and twenty-five other ailments.

Job is effectively saying, "I don't understand what's happening to me, but I have a Creator God who does. I'm the clay, and He's the Potter; I'm the stu-



dent, and He's the Teacher; I'm the sheep, and He is my Shepherd."¹

Now in chapter 27 the *judgment of God* is in view. In light of God's greatness, why would anybody want to ignore God's coming judgment? Job even describes the future of those who defy God. He says here in verses 8-9:

"For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off, when God takes away his life? Will God hear his cry when distress comes upon him?"

How tragic for people to ignore their guilty consciences and run from God, thinking they can actually run away.

How tragic for people to ignore their guilty consciences and run from God, thinking they can actually run away.

Next, in chapter 28, Job focuses on the *wisdom of God*. This is the wisdom that is needed to handle life and the suffering it brings.

Wisdom cannot be dug up out of the earth, Job says here in verse 13. And you can't buy wisdom at the grocery store: "It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price" (verse 15).

So how do you get wisdom? Listen to what Job says in verse 28: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding."

Wisdom isn't purchased; it's practiced. We gain wisdom when we practice two things in life.

First, we acquire wisdom when we worship God with *reverence*. That's what Job means when he refers here to "the fear of the Lord." It means we take God seriously. Somebody who takes God seriously is going to develop a life of wisdom.

Second, we get wisdom when we respond to God's Word with *obedience*. We not only take God seriously, but we also take His Word seriously. We understand that we have only one life, and we want that one life to be lived for God's pleasure.

So, wisdom comes to those who practice reverence for God and obedience to the Word of God. Beloved, when you live like that today, you won't be worrying about tomorrow.

Now in chapter 29, Job shifts his focus from God's glory to his own personal story. He just sort of stares out into space and begins reminiscing on his past life of so many blessings. He says, "The friendship of God was upon my tent . . . my children were all around me" (verses 4-5).

He even says in verse 6, "My steps were washed in butter." This is his way of saying, "I had all the delicacies you could imagine—I had all the butter I wanted."

A church member brought me a dozen doughnuts covered with chocolate icing—homemade from a well-known bakery—probably a stick of butter in that box. I don't know if that member wanted me to die early or what, but were those doughnuts ever good. My footsteps were bathed in butter.

Job goes on to say, "When I went out to the gate of the city . . . the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose and stood" (verses 7-8). He had been a man of influence and respect. He even recounts in verse 21, "Men listened to me and waited and kept silence for my counsel."

But what a difference there is now, as Job begins to describe his current situation in chapter 30. He says, "Now they laugh at me" (verse 1), "They do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me" (verse 10), and "My



prosperity has passed away like a cloud” (verse 15). No more days of butter—life is now just bitter.

Job cannot understand why God doesn’t answer him. He says in verse 20, “I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me.”

But even after all this, we see in chapter 31 that Job continues to make a commitment to walking wisely in reverence and obedience.

He cites a long list of sins in chapter 31: lust, lying, deceit, adultery, unjust treatment of people, and lack of compassion for the poor. He says that if he has been guilty of any of these things, God should judge him. And starting in verse 24, he even calls on the Lord to judge him if he has trusted in his wealth, or acted in pride, or rejoiced in the ruin of people who hated him.

Listen beloved, Job wasn’t perfect, but he was an example of integrity—socially, financially, ethically, and spiritually—in the home and in the community. And remember, this is why Job is such a compelling example as a sufferer. He was not suffering because he was *ungodly*; he had been identified by Satan as the perfect target to suffer because he *was* godly. He was being put to the test because he *had* faith, not because he *lacked* faith.

Some Christians have the idea that God guarantees our protection from suffering. No, God guarantees His presence in the midst of our suffering. And you may very well be suffering right now.

John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement in the 1700s once wrote out a prayer, and it reminds me of Job. Let me encourage you to make the same kind of fresh commitment and resolve today.

Wesley wrote:

*I am no longer my own, but Thine. . . .
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.*

*Let me be employed by Thee or laid
aside for Thee.*

Exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to

Thy pleasure and disposal. . . .

Thou art mine, and I am Thine.

Maybe you need to say this to your Lord, all over again, today. “I freely yield all things to You; You are mine, and I am Yours.”

In what ways are you investing in growing in your understanding of God’s greatness, justice, and wisdom? Would you recommend your methods to a new believer? Who in your life is watching you grow - or not - in these areas of life?

What roles do reverence (taking God seriously) and obedience (taking God’s word seriously) play in equipping you to view your sufferings as gifts for growth?

Why is it important to be honest with God about your feelings? What heart attitudes does this maintain? How does such “maintenance” fuel your worship and concern for others?

¹ See Charles R. Swindoll, *Job: Man of Heroic Endurance* (Thomas Nelson, 2004), 213.





THE LEARNING CURVE OF LIFE

Job 32–37

Job's friend Elihu did not have all the answers, but he knew when we are suffering and see no end to it or purpose for it, we need to recall the basic, comforting truth that God is sovereign and uses suffering to teach us. Our responsibility is to “listen and serve him.”

A learning curve is an expression that relates to certain times in life when changes and challenges happen so quickly that you need to learn or adapt in a very short amount of time.

My roommate in college encouraged me to take golf lessons. He explained how difficult it is to hit a golf ball. I said, “It can't be that hard.” He said, “Let me show you.”

I should've walked away. Instead, we went to the front yard of our dormitory with a golf club, and after giving me a few instructions, he placed a large ripe orange on the ground and said, “Okay, hit it.” I

smiled and swung—and missed. He said, “Keep your head down,” which didn't make any sense to me, but I did and swung even harder. That orange just sat there mocking me. After several more tries, I finally hit it – but only because in frustration I finally swung down like an ax.

That orange never left the ground. Golf, I learned, has a learning curve.

How about the learning curve for driving a car? I learned on a Volkswagen Bug—baby blue, with a stick shift on the floor. When I was fifteen, my parents let me practice in front of our house. With a stick shift, you have to remember several things at the same time—how to let the clutch out slowly until it engages, being careful not to pop the clutch too quickly and stall, all while accelerating with the gas pedal. It wasn't long before I was zipping back and forth in front of our house. Nobody got hurt—the neighbors stayed indoors.

How about the learning curve for marriage? After two sessions of premarital counseling and a finished notebook, you probably wondered, *How hard can this be?* You had no idea the learning curve for marriage didn't actually start until after the ceremony.



Stone basin for crushing the olives



Someone said that marriage is like getting on a plane heading for the Bahamas and landing instead at the North Pole. Instead of a breeze, it's a blizzard, and you find out then that you needed a fur coat, not a swimsuit. Let the learning curve begin!

The truth is, you never know when the learning curve is coming, and you're never fully prepared when it does.

The psalmist David wrote, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes" (Psalm 119:71). In other words, suffering put him on a steep learning curve that ultimately taught him wise and godly principles for living. And it can do the same thing for you and me. Job has been living on that learning curve for as long as a year or more.

With their speeches and dialogue completed, Job and his three friends fall silent at the end of chapter 31. Then a young man steps forward here in chapter 32. He is going to speak for the next six chapters, and he is going to deliver better counsel to Job.

His name is Elihu, and he has been struggling for some time to remain quiet. We are told why, here in verses 2 and 3:

He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong.

He has grown angry with what he considers Job's self-righteous attitude, and he has also grown angry at the empty and false accusations of Job's three friends.

So, Elihu launches into his own speech. He begins in chapter 33 to bring out some new insights that are, for the most part, right on target.

First, he says to Job that *even when life is confusing, God is still communicating*. Recalling Job's earlier words, Elihu asks him here in verse 13, "Why do you contend against [God], saying, 'He will answer none of man's words?'"

Elihu says God *is* speaking. At this time, before the Bible was available, God spoke to Abraham, Joseph, and Jacob—and Job—through dreams. More important, though, God is speaking to Job through his suffering. Elihu says in verse 19, "Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed." The word here for "rebuked" can be translated "instructed." Sickbeds have a unique way of instructing us—we're tuned in, as it were, to the Spirit of God when we suffer.

In chapter 34, Elihu gives this second insight: *Even when life seems unfair, God is never unjust*. Job had complained earlier that delighting in God evidently did not bring any benefit. Elihu says in verse 10, "Far be it from God . . . that he should do wrong."

Elihu then goes on to defend the nature and character of God, emphasizing that God is the Rewarder (verse 11), the sovereign authority (verse 13), the Sustainer of life (verses 14-15), and the impartial Ruler (verses 17-20).¹

When you think life seems unfair, a good counselor will remind you that God always does what is right, even if He does not give us an explanation.

Elihu's third point is expressed in chapter 35: *Even when life seems hard, God is not heartless*. Elihu encourages Job by reminding him that God, his Maker, can even give him "songs in the night" (verse 10).

Fourth, Elihu delivers this insight: *Even when life becomes unsettled, God has not been unseated*. In chapter 36 and on into chapter 37, he defends God's character. He begins in verse 2 of chapter 36, saying, "Bear with me a little, and I will show you, for I have yet something to say on God's behalf."

Elihu is warning Job not to charge God with wrongdoing. God is powerful, Elihu says, and nobody can fully understand His ways.

And Elihu presents as evidence the way God manages nature. Beginning in verse 27 and continuing



through chapter 37, Elihu points to the majesty of God in nature. Elihu mentions the rain, the clouds, thunder and lightning, snow and ice. And he says to Job in chapter 37, verse 14, “Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God.” God is in control of that lightning storm, Job, and the storm that swept into your life.

*Elihu recognizes
that God uses
suffering to keep us
from sin. It keeps
us close to Him.*

Job’s other friends were convinced Job was suffering because of sin. Elihu recognizes that God uses suffering to keep us from sin. It keeps us close to Him.

So, Elihu is much closer to the truth than the other three men, but he is only partially correct. And that is because we know what Elihu does not know, and we know what Job and his three friends do not know. We know that Job is suffering uniquely at the hands of Satan, who wants to prove that God will not be worshiped by someone who suffers so greatly. There was something bigger going on than any of these men could have imagined.

But listen, beloved, these insights from Elihu are actually true for us all, and the rest of the Bible confirms them.

First, God may appear to be silent, but He is always speaking—through His Word, through our circum-

stances, and through His evident power in nature around us. The problem is we are hard of hearing.

Second, life might seem unfair, but God is never unjust. He will eventually make everything right.

Third, life might be difficult, but God has not abandoned us. He will never leave us or forsake us.

And, finally, when life becomes chaotic, God is actually in control of the chaos. Life might become unsettled, but God will never be unseated. He is already King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let’s trust Him today.

Elihu’s four responses above reveal he has pondered God and His ways deeply. In what ways is a *casual* approach to a growing relationship with God a detriment to being equipped to suffer with strength and faith and to minister to those who are suffering?

In what ways has your understanding and practice of caring for those who suffer been changed or confirmed from Job’s story? Who in your life might you now feel better equipped to serve as they suffer? How might you invest in serving or starting a “care ministry” in your church?

¹ Steven Lawson, *When All Hell Breaks Loose: Job* (Navpress, 1993), 206.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





A WORD FROM GOD AT LAST

Job 38:1-3

Our hope, our assurance, our peace, and our comfort in trying times are all tied to the truth that God is the Creator. Like Job, we can be sure that this omnipotent God who spoke the universe into existence is fully in control of all the circumstances of our lives.

We have come now to chapter 38 of the book of Job, and everything is about to change. Verse 1 says, “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind.”

Now just stop here for a moment. Aren’t those wonderful words? “Then the Lord answered Job!” We’ve been waiting for this moment for thirty-seven chapters. And Job has been waiting for what must have seemed like a lifetime.

Finally, God speaks. And what follows is the longest speech from the Lord recorded in Scripture. God is going to comfort Job, but He is not going to do so as we might have expected. God says to Job in verse 3, “Dress for action like a man.” That is, “Get ready for a tough assignment.”

And that tough assignment is going to be an exam. God says, “I will question you, and you make it known to me” (verse 3). God is about to ask Job question after question in these next few chapters—seventy-seven questions in all.

He will ask Job questions related to topography, oceanography, meteorology, astronomy, and zoology. God is going to ask Job about his knowledge of the depth of the ocean, the measurement of the earth, and the design and movements of constellations.

So is God trying to humiliate Job? No. God is going to develop in him greater trust and faith by showing Job His power and sovereignty as displayed in His creative majesty and amazing design of nature.

But think about it. Here sits Job, devastated and diseased. And God finally speaks, but instead of pat answers, God wants him to think about the rain clouds and the stars. What kind of comfort is that going to bring?

Well, this tour of creation, in fact, will bring incredible comfort to Job—just as it will bring you comfort today.



Egyptian metal production



God's creative power is not some unimportant sentence in a religious creed. Creation is the vital part of Christianity. And if that sounds like an exaggeration, it is only because our world has bowed to the theory of evolution and rejected the biblical account of creation. Even many churches today will agree that the Bible is full of folktales and myths strung together.

The reason the average person today cannot find comfort through God's creation is because the average person does not believe God created anything.

The reason the average person today cannot find comfort through God's creation is because the average person does not believe God created anything.

We are all accidents of time and molecules. Beloved, there is little wonder why Satan has launched such fierce attacks on the truth of creation.

By the nineteenth century, there were no less than eighty different theories of origins. Nearly every major world religion has accommodated some form of evolution, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, and animism. It has crept into Islam, Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and even evangelical Christianity today.¹

Let me tell you something, if the Genesis account of creation can be written off as a folktale because it's just too fantastic to believe, how can we believe anything in the Bible? If the creation account is untrue, Jesus was mistaken when He said in chapter 10 of Mark's Gospel, "From the beginning of creation, 'God made

them male and female'" (Mark 10:6). And the apostle Paul was wrong when he wrote to Timothy, "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13).

By the way, every passage throughout the Bible that refers to creation—and there are scores of them—refers to it as a finished, completed event, not some ongoing, still-evolving process.

So, if the Bible isn't telling us the truth about God creating the universe, what other parts of the Bible can you really trust to be true? And let me add to that: Without the truth of creation, not only is the Bible unreliable, but also the gospel is incomplete.

Did you know that when the apostles preached in the first century, Buddhism, with its evolutionary pantheism, had already reached the Mediterranean world? And Stoics and Gnostics, who didn't believe in a personal God creating the world, were the scholars of their day. They were the university professors.

So, here is the apostle Paul in Acts 14 preaching to these scholars of his day. Listen to what he says to them:

"We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things [idols] to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." (Acts 14:15)

How did God make them? The Bible says in Psalm 33:9, "He spoke, and it came to be." God simply spoke the universe into existence. John Wesley put it this way: "God created the universe and didn't even half try."² To me, the wonder is not that God miraculously created the universe in six days but that He took six days to do it!

It is no surprise that Satan would attack the Word of God with regard to creation, because without creation, the reliability of Scripture is shattered and our gospel is rendered powerless.

And let me add this: without the truth of God's power and control over all of creation, the believer is without comfort.



Here is a man who has lost everything. And what will God do for him? He is going to come to him and say, “Job, let me show you what I’ve created. Let me take you on a tour of the created order, from the heavens to the earth to the oceans and to the animals.” God knows that a show-and-tell of creation’s magnificence will help settle the heart of a grieving man.

Do you want to know why a tour of creation is still one of the most comforting things God can give you when you are suffering? Let me put the answer into three final principles for today.

First, *if God is powerful enough to create the universe, He is powerful enough to control the universe.* Job would have wondered about that fire that fell from heaven and killed his sheep and the shepherds who watched them and about that unexpected whirlwind that toppled a house and took the lives of all his children. What God creates, God can control.

Second, *if God is powerful enough to create us, He is powerful enough to direct us.* The things that happen in our lives are not accidents; they are appointments designed by God. So, even when God does not explain Himself, we know He is too powerful to slip up and too wise to make a mistake.

Listen to how the psalmist David connects creation to comfort in Psalm 8:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him? (verses 3-4).

Wow! Our powerful Creator God cares about us.

Third, *if God is powerful enough to create our home on earth, He is powerful enough to create our future home in heaven.*

And in the meantime, as God begins to speak comfort to Job, we discover the solution to suffering on earth is not a quick answer, an explanation, or a proposition; it is a Person—our powerful God.

Listen as the apostle Peter writes, “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19). Our hope in suffering is bound up in the truth that we can trust God’s Word and we can trust God. Why? Because He is our Creator God.

To what degree does your current view of creation impact your view of God’s ability or concern to redeem your suffering? Explain your answer.

How much time do you regularly devote to contemplating God as your Creator? What have you learned is the relationship between your suffering and your Creator? In what ways might quietly sitting in the warm sun with someone or delivering a vase of flowers become a God-infused opportunity to serve anyone who’s suffering?

¹ See Henry Morris, *The Remarkable Record of Job* (Master Books, 1988), 94.

² Quoted in J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Vol. III* (Thomas Nelson, 1982), 462.

³ See Derek Thomas, *The Storm Breaks: Job Simply Explained* (Evangelical Press, 1995), 286.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





WATER, EARTH, AND SKY

Job 38:4-38

The great value of studying creation is that it gives us greater understanding of and appreciation for our Creator. It reveals His power, providence, and goodness; it humbles us as we grasp our place in His creation; and it rebukes elevated views of ourselves.

God has finally arrived on the scene to speak to Job. And you can imagine that there are a lot of things Job wants to say to God. But what we find instead is that God has a lot to say to Job. In fact, beginning in chapter 38 we find the longest speech delivered by God in all the Bible.

And while Job thinks he is going to pepper God with questions, God begins to ask Job questions—seventy-seven questions in all.

So, instead of *answering* questions about why bad things happen to good people or why good things happen to bad people, God *asks* questions—questions that are designed to reveal His power over everything.

Now let's begin with questions God asks Job about Planet Earth here in chapter 38, verses 4-5:

“[Job,] where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?”



Assyrian hunting scene

God is using the language of an architect and builder. A building site is surveyed; it is measured for the exact placement of the foundation. God is effectively asking, “Job, did I need you to check my blueprints when I designed the earth?”

Down in verse 18, God asks, “Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?” In other words, “Do you know how big this planet is?”

Now Job didn't know what we know today about the earth:

- It has 57 million square miles of land surface.



- It has 139 million square miles of water surface.
- And it has a circumference of 24,902 miles.

Now I had to look all that up, so hold your applause. I have to admit, I was never really interested in physics as a kid in school. I was interested in phys-*ed*, not phys-ics.

God also has a question for Job about the oceans of the world. This lengthy question begins here in verse 8:

*“Who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,
when I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling
band, and prescribed limits for it
. . . and said, “Thus far shall you
come, and no farther?”* (verses 8-11)

God says, “Job, who instituted all the necessary systems to create predictable and profitable high tides and low tides?”

We know today that ocean tides are caused by the moon’s gravitational pull. As the moon orbits the earth, it causes the earth to bulge out on the side facing the moon. And this causes the tides to lower and to rise.

Without the moon, life would not flourish on this planet. Without the moon, the earth’s axis would begin to wobble, the stability of the earth’s climate would be lost, and our ocean tides would reduce dramatically and water would stagnate. The scientific world knows that and has spent billions of dollars trying to figure out how the moon evolved to this point. Well, the record of Genesis chapter 1 tells us that the moon didn’t evolve. God created it on the fourth day.

Beloved, Isaiah the prophet tells us God formed the earth “to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18). We’re living on a designer-made planet—perfectly created for life on earth.

God now moves on to ask Job in verse 12, “Have you commanded the morning, since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?” In other words,

“Job, are you in charge of creating a brand-new day? Do you control the movement of the sun in the sky?”

Today we understand how God designed the rotation of the earth to create nighttime and daytime—in just the right amounts. Just imagine how different life would be if the earth rotated at one-third its current speed. One day would be three times longer. How many moms of two-year-olds would be able to survive that?

God isn’t trying to stump Job. He is revealing to Job that He not only created water, earth, and sky but that He also controls water, earth, and sky.

He asks Job:

“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble?” (verses 22-23)

God could be referring here to one of the ten plagues, when He would send hailstones on the land of Egypt (Exodus 9:18-35). Or He could be referring to the judgment during the end-times tribulation, when, as the apostle John writes, “Great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail” (Revelation 16:21).

God is saying, “Job, do you know my plans for the future? Do you know what I have reserved in nature for the future?”

God moves on to talk about rainfall. He says in verse 25 that He created the “thunderbolt [lightning], to bring rain on the land.”

Now understand that God is delivering information to Job that people will not understand for centuries.

One scientist writes:

[We now know that] complex forces generate an electrical field that produces lightning discharges. These violent electrical currents . . . cause the small water droplets to bind together with others to form larger drops. Finally, this



remarkable series of events delivers the rain to the thirsty ground.¹

But God just told Job here in verse 25 that He created the lightning bolt to send the rain.

By the way, it is no coincidence that God is describing for Job His creation and control of storms and lightning. Again, let me remind you, it was lightning—fire from heaven—that killed Job's sheep and a windstorm that caused the deaths of his children. God is indicating that these tragedies were not acci-

*“Job, do you know
my plans for the
future? Do you
know what I have
reserved in nature
for the future?”*

dents of nature; they were guided by the nature of God—for His mysterious purposes.

There's one more stop along this creation tour. God points Job to the stars and asks him more questions:

*Can you bind the chains of the
Pleiades or loose the cords of
Orion? Can you lead forth the
Mazzaroth [constellations] in
their season, or can you guide
the Bear [the Big Dipper] with
its children?”* (verses 31-32)

Some point out that Pleiades is the constellation that belongs to the spring, and Orion to the winter. “Look up Job—look at those constellations. Can you manage them? Can you bring springtime or wintertime?” Obviously, Job must answer, “No.”

God has not lost control of nature—He is the creator of nature. And this, beloved, points to something deeper. It points to God's nature, creative power, and control over water, earth, and sky.

Those today who believe we are accidents and the earth is an accident and that we just got lucky enough to live at this place in this solar system, well, they cannot begin to answer the deeper questions like, Where did we come from? Where are we going? And, do we even matter?

Oh, let me tell you, the creator God who spoke the stars and planets into being by the word of His mouth (Psalm 33:6)—our creator God—designed you and planned for you to be alive today. And because of His gift of salvation, you can belong to Him today. You can have your sins forgiven; you can talk to Him and serve Him. And the Bible says one day beyond this life, you can go and live with Him, where you will enjoy a newly created universe.

That is how much you matter to God. And Job is getting the deeper answer here—this is how much he matters to God as well.

Colossians 1:16 reveals Jesus as the Creator. Therefore, Job's Savior, (that he knew existed, 19:25-27), was reassuring him that He was more than able to redeem Job's suffering. Write down and display Colossians 1:16 to assure yourself (and loved ones) that your suffering is always in good Hands.

¹ Henry M. Morris, *The Remarkable Record of Job* (Master Books, 1988), 39.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





A TRIP TO THE ZOO

Job 38:39–40:14

Dwelling on God and His wonderful creation puts our lives into perspective. Seeing the limitations of our knowledge and strength in light of God’s wisdom and omnipotence, silences our complaints and energizes our worship. This was the lesson for Job, and it is a lesson for us.

One of the most devastating blows to the theory of evolution was the discovery of that little spiral codebook of genetic information called DNA.

Charles Darwin accepted the prevailing theory of the 1800s that variations caused by the environment could be genetically inherited by the offspring. He used this theory to explain the origin of a giraffe’s long neck, which he said was “the inherited effects of the increased use of parts.” In other words, Darwin reasoned, giraffes would stretch their necks for the high leaves, which then resulted in longer necks being passed on to their offspring.¹

And by the way, that is the theory we are still hearing presented over and over again in the secular world. But the truth—and it’s a truth that is being suppressed today—is that modern genetics has disproved this theory. We now know that the length of a giraffe’s neck is determined by its genetic code—by

its God-created DNA—not by stretching to reach tall limbs over millions of years.²

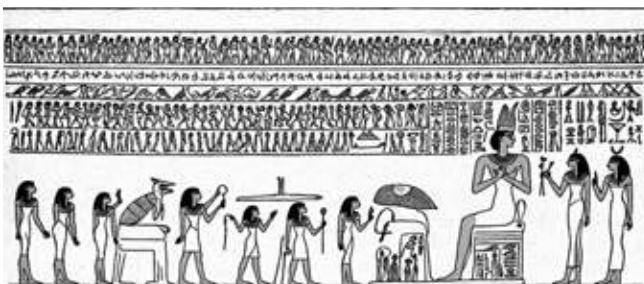
Beloved, when you believe the biblical creation account, you understand that God created every animal species to function according to His design. And here is the bigger point God is going to make to Job: God has created us as well, and we are living on a designer-made planet under the direction of our creator God.

When God finally showed up to talk with Job, the Lord began asking him questions about the constellations, the stars, the earth, and water. Now He shifts His focus and essentially takes Job on a field trip to the zoo.

The Lord is going to show Job His care over creation, from the smallest animals to the biggest. And the message He is sending Job becomes obvious and comforting: If God can design and care for His animal creation, how much more will He care for mankind.

First, God asks Job about the lion, here in chapter 38:

“Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket?” (verses 39-40)



Weighing scene from a Book of the Dead



The truth is, Job probably doesn't care if lions ever eat again!

*If God can design
and care for His
animal creation,
how much more
will He care for
mankind.*

I was within a foot or two of lions while tucked inside a jeep on an African reserve a few years ago. These lions were massive! One of them walked by the jeep, and his back reached the bottom of my window ledge. Even though my window was rolled up tight, I could hear him purring—it sounded like an engine idling.

God is reminding Job that He has designed these lions with their hunting instincts. God is the original lion tamer.

In verse 41, God asks Job about another animal: “Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help?” God wants Job to know that He cares about the ravens and their young. And if a raven is cared for by God's providence, how much more will God care for Job.

That's the same message Jesus preached to anxious people in Matthew 6:26, when He said, “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” Clearly, God cares about them. Then the Lord says to His audience, “Are you not of more value than they?”

You are worth far more than birds. That's a message our world needs to hear today. You see, when the creator God is rejected, animal life is elevated and human life is devalued. So, today it is illegal to crush the egg of an unborn eagle, but you can take the life of an unborn baby without any legal penalty. This is a tragic reversal of God's created order.

I want to point out now how God describes a rather strange bird in chapter 39:

The wings of an ostrich wave proudly, but are they the pinions and plumage of love? For she leaves her eggs to the earth and lets them be warmed on the ground, forgetting that a foot may crush them and that the wild beast may trample them . . . God has made her forget wisdom, and given her no share in understanding. (verses 13-15, 17)

In other words, this is not the brightest bird on the planet!

The ostrich is a rather interesting bird. In fact, it is the largest living bird today, the adult weighing more than 300 pounds and standing nine feet tall. It has wings but cannot fly.

Pliny, the first-century Roman naturalist, was among the first to write of an ostrich ignorantly hiding its head in some bushes, thinking it was safe because it could not see anything. Today we talk about people burying their head in the sand, ignoring reality.

But notice that for all its strange ways and ignorance, the ostrich is amazing to watch as it runs. God says here in verse 18, “When she rouses herself to flee, she laughs at the horse and his rider.” The ostrich lifts its head, extends its small wings for balance, and takes off running at some forty miles an hour.

God takes Job to the zoo, as it were, to look at an ostrich. This is God's way of saying, “Job, I create things that don't seem to make much sense.”

You look at an ostrich and wonder what in the world God was thinking. And that is the point. There are times in your life when you wonder, *Lord, what are You thinking? This doesn't make much sense.*

Well, there are chapters in your life that might go under the heading of “strange – this doesn't add up.” And



you have to agree that God's ways are not your ways, and His thoughts are not your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). Now God moves on to describe another bird in verses 27-29:

Is it at your command [Job] that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high? On the rock he dwells and makes his home, on the rocky crag . . . From there he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it from far away.

An eagle, flying 600 feet above your home, beloved, can watch a spider crawl across your driveway. An eagle was created with eyesight capable of seeing a fish jumping in a lake five miles away. I have trouble seeing my computer screen five feet away.

Now evolutionists would say the eagle *developed* that eyesight because it made its nests so high up. But they are denying that genetic information—DNA. God *designed* the eagle with such amazing eyesight *because* it would soar up so high.

The diversity of creation shows the diversity of God's creative ability. But it also points to accountability. If God created us, we belong to Him and we answer to Him.

And that's how God ends this part of the field trip to the zoo. He says to Job here in chapter 40 and verse 2, "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it." Job responds in verse 4, "What shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth."

Even though the Lord continues to challenge Job all the way down to verse 14, Job realizes he no longer has any desire to demand answers from God. In the

presence of an awesome Creator, Job has found the best answer of all. The creative design and care and control of God over His animal creations points us to His amazing design and care and control over our lives this very day.

"Are you not of more value than they?" What circumstances or attitudes in your life are getting in the way of you believing and acting on the truth of this question? What promises or character traits of God reinforce the truth that God cares for His people?

What must you assume about God and His thoughts towards you to genuinely ask a question like, *Lord, what are You thinking?* In what ways does such a question contribute to a growing relationship with God?

"Almighty" (verse 2 above) can be understood as "all sufficient." So, God was in effect asking, "Am I not all sufficient on your worst day?" Ponder this question and then ask yourself if your actions and attitudes on your worst day align with God's all-sufficiency. Explain your answer.

¹ John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning* (Thomas Nelson, 2001), 134.

² Ibid.





DRAGONS AND DINOSAURS

Job 40:15-42:6

Creation is a wonderful teacher. It is a powerful witness to the might and wisdom of the Creator. Observing what He *has* done comforts us with the assurance that what He *is* doing in our lives is fully within His control and according to His wise purposes.

God has finally spoken to Job. And His speech has surprised us all. Instead of showing up to provide answers, God began asking questions—seventy-seven in all.

These questions effectively took Job on a tour of the universe, from the constellations down to the smallest raindrop. Then God took Job to the zoo, where He revealed that He had created the animals' habitats and instincts; and if a bird—from an eagle to a raven—never escaped the notice of God, Job could be sure he had not slipped off the divine radar either.

God might have been asking questions, but His questions provided deep answers and wonderful assurances. The apostle Peter tells those who suffer to remember God's power in creation. He writes in 1 Peter 4:19, "Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator."¹

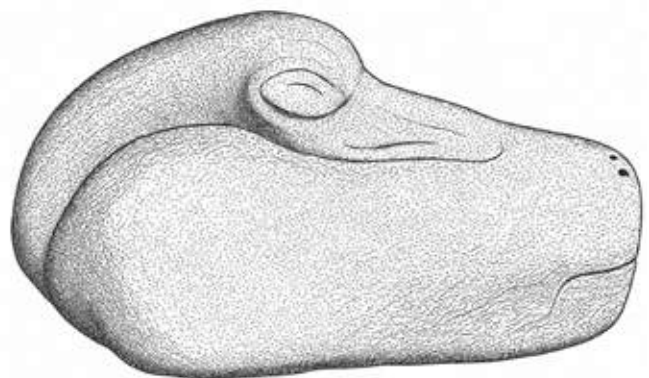
So why don't you take some time to walk around the block or take a hike in the woods. Sit out on your back porch or visit a nearby lake. And don't just walk around but look around. Observe, listen, and marvel at the creative detail and design in God's creation. One author wrote; "Sometimes it is by enjoying the Creator's handiwork that we often begin to feel again the touch of the Creator's hand."

Well, God is about to point out to Job two final animals, and they happen to be the largest land and sea animals in all of creation.

In Job 40:15, God says to Job, "Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox." This Hebrew word *behemoth* simply means "great beast."

Now I have been surprised by all the scholars who have suggested that the behemoth was a hippopotamus or an elephant. Those animals do not come close to fitting the description we are given here in verses 16-17: "Behold, his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. He makes his tail stiff like a cedar." Hippos and elephants don't have tails that resemble cedar trees.

The description continues:



5 mina weight in shape of a duck



“The sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron. He is the first of the works of God.” (verses 17-19)

In other words, he is first in strength and size.²

God says that if the Jordan River flooded, it would not bother the behemoth at all (verse 23). No one is big or strong enough to catch him (verse 24).

God is describing the largest land animal He ever created—the dinosaur. It has a tail like a cedar tree but eats grass like an ox.

Now maybe you’re saying, “Well, I’ve never seen the word *dinosaur* in the Bible.” And that’s true. It was not until 1841 that the word was coined by Sir Richard Owen, Director of the British Museum of Natural History. After viewing the bones of Iguanodon and Magalosaurus, he realized these were the remains of a unique group of reptiles that had never been classified before. He called them *dinosaurs*, meaning “terrible lizards.”

Now we don’t know which dinosaur God was pointing out to Job. It could have been a Brachiosaurus, which could weigh 90,000 pounds and reach 75 feet in length.

The average person today has been taught that dinosaurs existed at least ten million years before humans. But according to Genesis 1, the land animals were created mature and fully functioning on the sixth day—the same day Adam and Eve were created.

And here God implies that Job is already aware of the dinosaur. He tells him in verse 15 to “behold” the behemoth—to look at him. So evidently this massive land animal, extinct in our generation, was roaming the earth in Job’s day.

I found it interesting that stone carvings and cave drawings of people several thousand years ago show them hunting mammoths and antelope, and those famous drawings ended up in textbooks. Well, on those same cave walls were drawings of huge animals that look like dinosaurs, and those drawings were conveniently left out. Beloved, we do not interpret

Scripture through the lens of the universe; we interpret the universe through the lens of Scripture.

*We do not interpret
Scripture through
the lens of the
universe; we
interpret the
universe through the
lens of Scripture.*

But let me tell you, if you have trouble believing God could create a huge dinosaur to roam around at the same time as humans, then you are going to have a lot of trouble with this final animal God now speaks of here in chapter 41. God is about to describe the largest water creature, and it happens to be a fire-breathing dragon! And we are given here the most detailed description of any animal in all of Scripture, so hold on to your hat.

God’s description of leviathan is highlighted by questions for Job:

“Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?” (verses 1-2)

He continues in verses 7-8:

“Can you fill his skin with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again!”



Then in verse 10 the Lord says of this creature, “No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me?” God is saying, “Job, I am the creator of the terrifying leviathan, and I alone can control him.”

Now note this amazing description:

“His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn [that is, his eyes are blood-red]. Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. ... His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth.” (verses 18-19, 21)

This is the description of a fire-breathing dragon!

People might say, “There is no way for an animal to breath fire.” Well, what about the bombardier beetle, which fires at its enemies explosive bombs made of powerful chemicals stored and mixed inside its body?

And what about the firefly, which has an internal chemical reaction, converting chemical energy into light energy without burning a hole in its abdomen?

Here is a creature that once brought terror to the world of Job but is now extinct. Isaiah calls the leviathan “the dragon that is in the sea” (Isaiah 27:1).

Now why would God end his words of comfort to Job by pointing out these two massive creatures? Could it be because they were fierce and cruel and untamable—like the events that had occurred in Job’s life? Beloved, this was God’s way of reminding Job that everything God created He can control, in order to bring about His ultimate plans for our lives.

And that’s exactly the lesson Job understands. He responds to God, “I know that you can do all things, and

that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). Here is Job, bowing before God and with a repentant heart expressing awe and reverence and a submissive spirit to his glorious, all-powerful creator God.

And that is our solution today. In the face of unexplainable suffering, in the presence of difficult situations, let us join Job in saying what the hymn writer expressed so well:

*Have Thine own way Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the potter,
I am the clay.
Mold me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.*³

“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” Reflect on Job’s conclusion about God’s character. Make a list of those characteristics and then a list of the sufferings you’re enduring. Which list do you ponder the most? Why?

Who in your life might benefit from learning to view their suffering with a correct understanding of God’s character and His intentions? How can you help this person gain that insight and perhaps the hope to persevere?

¹ David Atkinson, *The Message of Job* (InterVarsity, 1991), 147.

² Roy B. Zuck, *Job* (Moody, 1978), 179.

³ Adelaide A. Pollard, “Have Thine Own Way, Lord!”

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





ALMOST HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Job 42:7-17

In the end, the tragedy that marked Job's life is replaced with God's abundant blessings. We may not find relief from our suffering in this life, as Job did, but he points to the wonderful truth that the suffering of the righteous is temporary and God's blessing awaits them.

We come now to the last few verses in the book of Job. And I'm afraid that the average person is saying, "You know, Job had a rough go of it, but he ended up living happily ever after. Everything turned out perfectly in the end."

Well, let me tell you, that conclusion is for shallow thinkers. Ask someone who has lost a child if having another child eliminated that hollow place in their heart. Ask someone who was abandoned by friends and family or someone who was the victim of a crime if they look at life exactly the same way they used to.

Let's not come to the last chapter and say, "Hey, Job had ten more children, his diseases cleared up, and he got rich again"—as if this were some fairy-tale ending. No, believe me, Job will never forget what he lived through.

Job is going to have a deeper appreciation for his health than he ever had before; he is going to look at business and wealth with a different perspective; he is going to hold his children and grandchildren a little closer than he did in the past. And he will never forget those thirty-nine seconds back in chapter 1 when four messengers delivered the news that he had lost everything.

Now there are some wonderful things taking place here in this closing chapter. First of all, God is going to speak on Job's behalf. Verse 7 says:



Statuette of a kneeling worshipper of Larsa

The LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

Eliphaz represents Bildad and Zophar, and God publicly condemns their false counsel—and that must have done a world of good in the heart of Job. The fourth man, Elihu, isn't mentioned. He seems to have disappeared as quickly as he appeared.



But these three counselors, so-called, are now called out for their uncaring, proud, pseudo-spiritual counsel continuously condemning Job as a rebellious man worthy of God's judgment. Even though the Lord has rebuked Job for questioning His justice, Job had not experienced the judgment of God for secret sins.

Remember, Job was not suffering because he lacked faith; he was suffering because he was a man of faith. Indeed, God had made Job a lasting testimony that even when a believer is confused, God is still in control; and that even when a believer suffers, God still has His sovereign purposes for it.

So, God vindicates Job here—publicly. The Lord refers to Job as “my servant” four times here in verses 7 and 8.

God then tells Eliphaz and his two friends to prepare sacrifices for their own sinful pride. I love what God tells these three arrogant men here in verse 8:

“My servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly.”

And with that, God begins to restore the blessings of health and life to Job. We read in verse 10:

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

God also restores Job's family circle, as noted in verse 11:

Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him ... And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

Back in chapter 19, Job had mentioned in verses 13-14 that his family had basically deserted him.

So, picture the scene here, as the family is essentially showing up to apologize. And I have to think that it took a lot of grace for Job and his wife to forgive them—but they did. The idea of eating bread together signifies restored family fellowship.

We are told here in Job 42:10, “The LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.” Verse 12 gives us the precise number of livestock and cattle he now has, which is double what he had previously (see 1:3).

Then verse 13 tells us that Job and his wife have seven more sons and three more daughters. Now you will notice that these ten children born after his suffering matches the number he had before (see Job 1:2); it isn't double that number. But think about it: Unlike his cattle and flocks, his first ten children are not considered lost because they are alive with the Lord and he is going to see them again one day. So, Job and his wife effectively have twenty children now.

Finally, we read that Job lived another 140 years after all this suffering; and the last verse of the book, verse 17, says, “Job died, an old man, and full of days.” This is the Hebrew expression for being satisfied with a full life. And what a life he had!

There are many lessons to be learned from the suffering of Job. I personally think the greatest lesson of all is that Job had not been alone; although God was invisible, God had been present and involved all along.

As an undergraduate at the University of Colorado, William Frey spent a couple of hours a week reading to a fellow student named John. John was blind, but he was an eager student.

The young man told William how he lost his sight in an accident when he was a teenager and how, at that point, he had given up on life. He was bitter and angry with God for letting this happen, and he took his anger out on everyone around him. He wouldn't lift a finger on his own behalf and demanded that others wait on him.

When William Frey asked what had changed his attitude, John said, “One day, my father came into my



*The greatest lesson
of all is that Job
had not been alone;
although God was
invisible, God had
been present and
involved all along.*

room and started giving me a lecture. He said he was tired of my feeling sorry for myself. He said that winter was coming, and it was always my job to put up the storm windows, and that I was to get those windows up by suppertime tonight, or else! He shut the door and went downstairs.”

“Well,” John said, “that made me so angry that I resolved to do it. Muttering to myself, I groped my way out to the garage, found the windows, a stepladder, all the necessary tools, and I went to work. They’ll be sorry when I fall off the ladder and break my neck, I thought; but little by little, groping my way around the house, I got the job done.”

Then he stopped, and his sightless eyes misted up as he said, “I later discovered that at no time during that afternoon had my father ever been more than five feet from my side. I didn’t know it until later, but all the while I was climbing up and down that ladder, muttering to myself . . . fumbling with the tools and sweating my way through that horrendous project—in the dark—my father had been beside me all the way.”¹

There is the lesson.

- Even when the heavens are silent, you can trust the heart of God.
- Even when the world is filled with evil, you can trust the hand of God.
- Even when you don’t know which way to turn, you can trust the will of God.

You are always in the presence of your ever-near, all-wise, forever-caring, gracious God.

Reflect on your own attempts to care for those who have or are suffering. To what degree might you have had thoughts, or worse, given counsel like Job’s friends? What has God’s response to Job taught you about how to biblically think about and care for those who suffer?

Why would it be a mistake to assume that material and social blessings automatically follow suffering that has ended? What *spiritual* blessings can you assume will follow suffering through which you trusted the LORD?

Complete these sentences: The next time I am suffering I will _____. The next time I am able to counsel someone who is suffering I will _____.

¹ Adapted from Charles Swindoll, *Getting Through the Tough Stuff* (W Publishing, 2004), 224-25.

