

Job 1:1-5

Lessons from the Land of Uz

¹ There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. ² There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³ He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. ⁴ His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ 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." Thus Job did continually. – Job 1:1-5 ESV

This book contains the story of a man named Job; a rather obscure individual whose life would have passed on with little fanfare and no recollection in the collective human memory, except for the fateful events of his life recorded by an unnamed writer and eventually included in the canon of Scripture. In a sense, Job represents every man, with his life serving as a living lesson on the sometimes inexplicable and often unexpected ways of God.

While the book bears his name, Job is not intended to be the hero of the story it contains. All of the events recorded by the author revolve around the life of Job but the primary focus of the book's message is on God. He is the real point of the story. Verse 7 of the opening chapter introduces us to the LORD (*Y^hōvâ*), better known to us as Jehovah. He is the same God worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which has led many scholars to believe that this book was written sometime during the patriarchal period. There is no clear consensus regarding the dating of this book or its authorship, but its inclusion in the canon of Scripture provides ample evidence of its divine inspiration and the reliability of the message it contains. It is not a work of fiction or a cleverly crafted tale from the mind of a superstitious individual living in a less enlightened age.

"God inspired this book to reveal answers to questions that arise from God's nature and His ways with human beings. Specifically, what is the basis on which God deals with people?" – Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Job: 2023 Edition*

Job is described as an inhabitant of the land of Uz. While there is no consensus on the exact location of Uz, the Book of Lamentations associates it with the land of Edom.

*Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,
you who dwell in the land of Uz* – Lamentations 4:21 ESV



Most likely, Uz was located somewhere south of the Dead Sea. In this somewhat inhospitable region of the Middle East, Job had managed to establish for himself a very comfortable lifestyle. He was a successful man who had a large family, plenty of assets, and a glowing reputation among his neighbors and peers. He was well-off and well-liked.

Not only that, Job was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1 ESV).

This glowing assessment of Job is not intended as flattery or a ringing endorsement of his spotless spiritual qualifications. Like any other man, Job was born with a sin nature and a built-in propensity to pursue his own will and to act as his own god. But somewhere along the way, Job had been introduced to Jehovah, the one true God, and become an ardent follower and God-fearer. Job was neither sinless nor perfectly righteous, but he was faithful.

Job is described as “blameless,” a Hebrew word (*tām*) that means “sound, whole, or complete.” He was a man of integrity and spiritual maturity. The idea of “wholeness” is meant to convey a sense of completeness. Job didn’t live a compartmentalized life. There were no areas of his life that he had deemed off-limits to God. His entire life was an open book and every facet of his daily experience was lived out in full view of his all-knowing God. This is the same idea that God conveyed to Abraham when he was 90 years old.

“I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless (tām)...” – Genesis 17:1 ESV

Abraham was being ordered to “walk” or to conduct his life with the constant awareness that God was watching. He was to live with integrity or wholeness, never withholding or attempting to conceal any part of his life from God. And that was the way Job had lived his life.

It seems quite clear that the author wants his readers to understand that Job was well-off, both spiritually and materially. He had seven sons and three daughters, a sign of God’s blessings.

*Children are a gift from the Lord;
they are a reward from him.*

*Children born to a young man
are like arrows in a warrior’s hands.*

How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them! – Psalm 127:3-5 NLT

Not only did Job have a quiver full of arrows, but he also had fields full of flocks and herds. He was a wealthy man; “in fact, the richest person in that entire area” (Job 1:3 NLT). Job had a

reputation for godliness and, because of his extensive wealth, would have been viewed as a man who had been greatly blessed by God. In that day and age, wealth was considered to be practical proof that a man was living in a way that pleased God. His assets were viewed as rewards for a life well-lived.

*The blessing of the Lord makes rich,
and he adds no sorrow with it. – Proverbs 10:22 ESV*

Even Moses reminded the people of Israel that wealth and success were the purview of God Almighty.

“You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers...” – Deuteronomy 8:18 ESV

So, Job is portrayed as a poster boy of God’s pleasure, and his prosperity is provided as proof. This man was so well-off that his seven sons took turns hosting elaborate and expensive parties in their homes to which they invited all their siblings.

Job’s sons would take turns preparing feasts in their homes, and they would also invite their three sisters to celebrate with them. – Job 1:4 NLT

It seems that this recurring feast cycle was always ended by Job offering a sacrifice to “purify his children” (Job 1:5 NLT). Perhaps that was a father’s attempt to remedy any debauchery or immorality that may have taken place during the seven days of feasting and festivities. Job cared about the spiritual well-being of his children and acted as a priest for his family, ensuring that any sins they may have committed were properly atoned for.

“Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts.” – Job 1:5 NLT

This was a man who cared. He had a deep and abiding love for God and a desire to see that his children remained faithful to Jehovah all their lives. He was not willing to let his affluence negatively influence his children to live lives of excess and immorality.

Here is a man who had it all: Wealth, material possessions, a lovely family, and a vibrant relationship with his God. But these opening verses are meant to be the preface for all that comes next. The reader is given a glimpse into the life of a man who was living a storybook life. In a way, Job’s circumstances are meant to create a certain sense of jealousy or envy. It’s as if we’re reading a headline story about someone who just won the national lottery. It’s difficult to read these five verses and not want to picture yourself in Job’s sandals. What would it be like to have those kinds of resources at your disposal? How would it feel to be revered for your spiritual life and envied for your material success? There is little doubt that Job had plenty of friends and neighbors who outwardly conveyed their love and respect for him, while at the

same time harboring deep and resentful feelings of jealousy and anger. There were likely those who wished his trouble-free world would come crashing down around him.

That's where the rest of the story comes in. Unbelievable tragedy was about to rock Job's righteous and all's-right-with-the-world life. This faithful servant of God would suddenly find himself wrestling with an unexpected and seemingly unwarranted wave of tragic circumstances that would leave his head spinning and his world turned upside down. And worse yet, his long-held views of God would be tested like never before.

Everything he knew about his God was about to be challenged. How would he feel about Jehovah when the blessings were taken away? What would his response be when the seeming incongruities of life disrupted his once-perfect world? How would his faith hold up when it appears as if his faithful God failed to show up? The story of Job is the story of all those who choose to follow God in a fallen world.

"The book of Job deals essentially with man's relationship with God, centering on two questions. The first question is, Why does man worship God? . . .

"The second question is, How will man react to God when God seems unconcerned about his problems?" – Roy B. Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*

The stage is set. The protagonist has been introduced. But the rest of the players wait in the wings and the rest of the story waits to be revealed.

Job 1:6-12

When Times Get Tough...

⁶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. 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." ⁸ And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" ⁹ Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? ¹⁰ Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." ¹² And the Lord said to Satan, "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. – Job 1:6-12 ESV

Having established Job's spiritual credentials and material status, the author suddenly transfers the scene from Earth to heaven, where a divine council is taking place between the Lord (Jehovah) and the "sons of God." This abrupt change in locations provides the reader with a stark reminder of the spiritual and supernatural scope of this entire story. In every man's life, there is always far more going on behind the scenes than meets the eye. As Job lives out his seemingly blessed but rather pedestrian life on Earth, there are events taking place in the heavenly realm to which he is completely oblivious. As Job offers his morning offerings to the Lord on behalf of his children, he has no idea that he is the topic of a discussion taking place in heaven.

The text states that "the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord" (Job 1:6 ESV). The phrase "sons of God" has been much debated over the centuries, but is generally believed to be a reference to angels.

The "sons of God" in the OT is generally taken to refer to angels. They are not actually "sons" of *Elohim*; the idiom is a poetic way of describing their nature and relationship to God. The phrase indicates their supernatural nature, and their submission to God as the sovereign Lord. – NET Bible Study Notes

The fact that God has periodic meetings with His angels is not surprising, but what should catch our attention is the description of Satan being among them. His name in Hebrew is *śāṭān*, and it means "adversary" or "one who stands against." Our concept of Satan usually associates him with the fallen angels who were cast out of heaven for their rebellion against God. The Book of Ezekiel provides what is believed to be a reference to Satan's former beauty and vaunted position as one of God's divinely created beings.

*"You were the signet of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty."* – Ezekiel 28:12 ESV

Yet, this “anointed guardian cherub” (Ezekiel 28:14 ESV) grew discontented with his divinely ordained status as an angel and chose to lead a rebellion against God. Ezekiel goes on to describe what happened.

*You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created,
till unrighteousness was found in you.
In the abundance of your trade
you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned;
so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God... – Ezekiel 28:15-16 ESV*

The prophet Isaiah provides further insight into the downfall of this pride-filled “son of God.”

*“How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
You said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.’” – Isaiah 14:12-14 ESV*

As a result of his attempted coup, Satan and all those who joined him in his failed rebellion were cast out of heaven.

*“Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground...” – Ezekiel 28:17 ESV*

But this doesn’t mean that Satan no longer had access to God. This passage in Job would indicate that Satan continues to have the freedom to enter into God’s presence. The Book of Revelation reveals that Satan’s permanent fall will not take place until the end times. The “accuser of the brethren” will not face his full and final punishment for his earlier crime until Jesus Christ returns in His glory.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in

heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God." – Revelation 12:7-10 ESV

So, the arrival of Satan in the throne room of God should not surprise us. How else would the accuser of the brethren level his charges against God's people? And, as Job 1:6-12 reveals, Satan used his access to the Almighty to accuse the seemingly faithful Job of duplicity and disingenuousness. According to Satan, Job was only in it for what he could get out of it. As long as God blessed him, Job was a happy camper. So Satan proposed a test of Job's allegiance to God.

"Job has good reason to fear God. You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" – Job 1:9-11 NLT

Satan can't fathom any other reason to explain Job's faithfulness to God. As far as he can tell, Job is nothing more than an opportunist who will quickly turn his back on God as soon as things take a turn for the worse.

But God knows the truth about Job. He can see into His servant's heart and discern the true nature of Job's obedience. So, God agrees to allow Satan to test the faithfulness of Job but He places limits on how far Satan can go.

"Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically." – Job 1:12 NLT

This part of the story makes us uncomfortable. The idea that invisible, supernatural beings might be discussing our faithfulness and debating our allegiance is more than a bit disconcerting. While we go about our daily lives, could there be divine discussions taking place where our future well-being is at stake? But the real point of this story is not that God is having arbitrary conversations with angels regarding the faithfulness of His human followers, but that there is a spiritual battle taking place in the unseen realms. The apostle Paul reminds us, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12 ESV).

Satan is real, and his hatred for mankind is great. He especially loathes all those who worship God and remain faithful to Him regardless of the circumstances of life. He cannot imagine how anyone would serve God in the face of difficulty. He has no concept of allegiance or faithfulness. He sees men as nothing more than groveling servants hoping for a handout from the Almighty but always ready to turn their backs on their Provider as soon as the pipeline of blessings dries up.

“Cynicism is the essence of the satanic. The Satan believes nothing to be genuinely good – neither Job in his disinterested piety nor God in His disinterested generosity.” – Lloyd Anderson, *The Hidden Beauty of Hebrew Genealogies*

Job was about to be tested. His season of unbridled success and problem-free existence was about to come to a screeching halt. And like Job, we've all faced seasons of pain and unexpected suffering in our lives. We've all experienced a time when we have had to encounter extreme disappointment or devastating loss. And in those times of trouble, we are always tempted to question God regarding His love, power, faithfulness, or at times, even His existence. So the story of Job is one with which we can relate. Here is a man who had it all: Wealth, material possessions, a lovely family, and a vibrant relationship with his God. Then tragedy strikes. How would he fare? What would he do? They say that when times get tough, the tough get going. But will that be true of Job? Only time will tell.

Job 1:13-22

It Is Well with My Soul

¹³ Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, ¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "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." ¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ 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."

²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.

²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. – Job 1:13-22 ESV

We've all had seasons of pain in our lives. We've all experienced a time when we have had to face extreme disappointment, unexplained suffering, or devastating loss. And in those times of trouble, we're always tempted to question God regarding His love, power, faithfulness, or at times, even His existence.

So, the story of Job is one with which we can relate. Here is a man who had it all: Wealth, material possessions, a lovely family, and a vibrant relationship with his God. Then tragedy strikes. Not once, but four times. In a series of catastrophic events, Job loses everything. All of his livestock are stolen or destroyed. In a matter of hours, his net worth drops like a rock. He is financially ruined. On top of that, he receives news that every one of his children has been killed in a freak accident. All ten of them.

Job's world had been rocked, and his life would never be the same. Everything he knew about his God was about to be challenged. Understandably, Job sunk into a deep depression. In time, he would even curse the day he was born.

At last Job spoke, and he cursed the day of his birth. He said: "Cursed be the day of my birth, and cursed be the night when I was conceived. Let that day be turned to darkness. Let it be lost even to God on high, and let it be shrouded in darkness. Yes, let the

darkness and utter gloom claim it for its own. Let a black cloud overshadow it, and let the darkness terrify it." – Job 3:1-5 NLT

But what was Job's immediate response in the aftermath of his tragic losses? How did he react after hearing that his entire fortune had been decimated by foreign marauders and his children had been killed in a freak accident?

The text simply states that Job "arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped" (Job 1:20 ESV). He mourned and he worshiped. He grieved and he gave glory and honor to Jehovah.

The Hebrew word for "worshiped" is *שָׁחָה* (*šāḥâ*) and it can literally be translated as "bowed down" or "to prostrate oneself." Despite all that had happened, Job didn't shake his fist in the face of God, demanding answers and casting blame; he simply worshiped.

In the midst of all his pain and darkness, Job might be tempted to curse the day of his birth, but NOT HIS GOD. No, Job did not turn his back on God; instead, he bowed before Him in humble adoration. At the loss of all his possessions and his children, Job exclaimed, "I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be stripped of everything when I die. The LORD gave me everything I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!" (Job 1:21 NLT).

He was able to praise God, even though his world had been devastated. And, amazingly, Job didn't write off his loss to fate, bad luck, misfortune, karma, and some form of kismet. He admitted his belief that his sovereign God was behind it all. He wasn't blaming God; he was simply declaring his unwavering belief in God's ultimate control over all things. His wealth and his children had been gifts from God. He had not deserved or earned them. And Job understood that it was the height of hypocrisy to accept the good things that God gives but then curse Him when those things were taken away. In the very next chapter, after suffering an additional unexpected and inexplicable tragedy, he states, "Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" (Job 2:10 NLT).

Through it all, Job held on to his integrity and His God. He understood something about the character of Jehovah God. He knew that God was good. He knew that God must have a purpose behind all that had happened. It didn't make it any less painful or any easier to accept. In fact, Job would spend the next days wrestling with his concept of God. He would be challenged by his well-meaning friends. Job's suffering was going to reveal a lot about himself and a lot about his God.

This faithful saint would find himself wrestling with his concepts regarding God's sovereignty and His love. He would have to come to grips with whether God could be trusted. And in time, as his pain and suffering escalated, Job would go from resting in God to blaming Him. The day would come when he would even accuse God of wronging him (Job 19:6-7). But God never

blasts him for his doubt or punishes him for his hasty words. Instead, He comforts Job and, as we will see, eventually restores him.

All throughout this story, we see a picture of a faithful, loving God who is active behind the scenes. He is aware of our suffering and has a plan for them. He is not caught off guard or found asleep at His post. He is fully aware and He cares. Suffering is a part of life lived in a fallen world. Will we allow it to change our perception about God, or learn to see Him in the midst of it?

"We take the good days from God – why not also the bad days?" – Job 2:10 MSG

At this point in the story, as Job tries to come to grips with the immensity of his losses, he holds on to his belief in the sovereignty of God. He clings to his confidence in God's goodness and seeks to view his tragic circumstances through the lens of God's sovereignty and love. Job didn't like what had happened. He was not rejoicing in his losses or thanking God for the deaths of his children. He was simply expressing his trust in the goodness of God.

But for those of us reading this story, it is difficult to see the goodness of God when we know that this entire sequence of tragic events is little more than a test of Job's faithfulness. God had bragged about Job's integrity and spiritual vitality.

"Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil." – Job 1:8 NLT

But Satan had argued that Job's display of moral fortitude was nothing more than payment for services rendered. According to Satan, Job's faithfulness was tied to the degree of God's goodness. As long as God kept Job healthy, wealthy, and wise, Job would continue to worship. But Satan argued that if God suddenly turned off the top of His goodness, Job would turn his back on God.

"You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" – Job 1:9-10 NLT

And God agreed to put Satan's hypothesis to the test.

"All right, you may test him," the Lord said to Satan. "Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically." – Job 1:12 NLT

But why would God allow Satan to touch one of His servants? How could this be the will of a loving, gracious God? It seems out of character and incongruent with our understanding of God.

And yet, we know that there is a spiritual battle waging behind the scenes that pits the sovereign God of the universe against Satan, the prince of this world.

Ever since the fall, Satan has been attempting to thwart the redemptive will of God. He has been waging a relentless war against humanity, those made in God's image, in a vain attempt to steal their allegiance and displace God's authority over their lives. Even the apostle Peter warned his first-century readers that this battle was still going on in their day.

...humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are. – 1 Peter 5:6-9 NLT

Job was experiencing the very real presence of a spiritual battle that had been taking place since the beginning of time. The presence of Satan in the story of Job's life should not surprise or disappoint us. No human being is immune from the attacks of the enemy. His hatred for humanity is immeasurable and only surpassed by his hatred for God. He views Jehovah as a manipulative and oppressive overlord whose followers worship Him out of fear and only for the hope of reward. Satan can't imagine worship that isn't bought and paid for.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, one of his ploys was to offer payment for services rendered.

...the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." – Matthew 4:8-9 ESV

Hungry, tired, and seemingly alone in the wilderness, Jesus responded to Satan's offer of wealth for worship by stating, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (Matthew 4:10 ESV).

That was the last of Satan's temptations of Jesus. He went for broke and lost. He offered Jesus his kingdom and Jesus turned him down. And what we must realize is that this test of Jesus' faithfulness was the will of God. That very same chapter in Matthew opens with these words: "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1 ESV).

It was part of God's plan that His Son be tested, and it was part of God's plan that Job be tested. But these tests were not intended to reveal anything to God. He was well aware of the outcome in both cases. God did not doubt His Son's faithfulness and He did not doubt the faithfulness of Job. It was Satan who had doubts. It was the enemy who could not fathom faith even in the

face of suffering. Satan had a lot to turn about the goodness of God and the effect it can have on God's people. True worship is not a form of payment for services rendered. It is a willing response to the goodness of God that shows up in times of tragedy as well as blessing.

God's people are not fairweather friends, but faithful followers who strive to trust and obey even when God's presence seems unapparent and His power seems insufficient. When the trials and temptations of life come, may we sing the praises of our great and good God.

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul*

*It is well
With my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate
And hath shed His own blood for my soul*

*It is well
With my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul*

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Job 2:1-10

Trust in the Midst of Trials

¹Again 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. ²And 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." ³And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." ⁴Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. ⁵But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

⁷So 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. ⁸And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

⁹Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." ¹⁰But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. – Job 2:1-10 ESV

Satan was not satisfied. Despite Job's surprising response to the last round of devastating calamities, Satan refused to believe that Job would not eventually break. This man had lost everything but had maintained his hope and faith in Yahweh.

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." – Job 1:21 ESV

So, on the next occasion that Satan found himself in the presence of God Almighty, he once again questioned the sincerity of Job's professed allegiance and vehemently objected to God's glowing assessment of His suffering servant.

"Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil. And he has maintained his integrity, even though you urged me to harm him without cause." – Job 2:3 NLT

Satan simply wrote off Job's display of "integrity" as nothing more than a case of self-preservation. As far as Satan could see, Job was content because he had remained physically unscathed. He had lost his fortune and his family but he was still alive and well. From Satan's pride-filled perspective, it appeared as if Job was giving God praise because he was glad to be

alive. But if God would remove the protective clauses from His previous command, Satan knew he could get Job to cave.

“Skin for skin! A man will give up everything he has to save his life. But reach out and take away his health, and he will surely curse you to your face!” – Job 2:4-5 NLT

In the earlier test that Satan proposed, God had prohibited any direct assault on Job’s physical well-being.

“Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don’t harm him physically.” – Job 1:12 NLT

This led Satan to conjecture that the real key to destroying Job’s faithfulness to God would be a frontal assault on his personal comfort. The rather enigmatic phrase, “skin for skin” has been much debated over the centuries and we will have no way of knowing exactly what it means. But from the context, it would appear that Satan is demanding that God give him permission to get under Job’s skin – literally.

While Job had lost a lot in the first test, he still had his health. He and his wife could have more children and, in time, he could rebuild his lost fortune. But Satan believed that Job would crumple like a cheap suit if the gloves came off and the pain became physical rather than emotional in nature.

For Satan, the goal remained the same. He was out to get Job to curse God.

*“...stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and **he will curse you to your face.**” – Job 1:11 ESV*

*“...stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and **he will curse you to your face.**” – Job 2:5 ESV*

Satan was convinced that he knew the secret to Job’s faithfulness and would be able to expose the self-centered nature of Job’s apparent “blamelessness.” But God knew better. He knew Job well and was not afraid to see His servant face another test of his integrity. Yet, once again, God added a prohibition.

“Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.” – Job 2:6 ESV

Satan, though powerful, was prevented from doing outside the prescribed will of God. He could test Job but would be unable to kill Job. Whatever physical attack Satan conjured up in his mind could not lead to Job’s death. He could make Job wish for death but he was prohibited from taking Job’s life.

Satan wasted no time. The text states that he “struck Job with terrible boils from head to foot” (Job 2:7 NLT). No timeline is given but Job’s period of mourning after the loss of his ten children was followed by a sudden bout with a crippling skin disease. Job is described as sitting among the ashes, where he “scraped his skin with a piece of broken pottery” (Job 2:8 NLT). This once prominent patron of his community is pictured sitting in the midst of the town dump where the refuse was burned. His diseased condition has left him a social pariah with no friends or family members willing to provide him with comfort or care. In fact, even his wife encourages him to throw in the towel and end it all.

“Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die.” – Job 2:9 NLT

She was essentially telling Job to give up the charade. From her vantage point, she viewed Job’s stubborn attempt to keep a stiff upper lip as a waste of time. She believed Job to be under a curse from God and the sooner her husband admitted it, the sooner his suffering would stop.

Yet, even when he found himself covered with sores from head to foot, Job responded, "Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" (Job 2:10 NLT). Through it all, Job held on to his integrity and His God. He understood something about the character of Yahweh. He knew that God was good and that there was a purpose behind all that had happened. It didn't make it any less painful or any easier to accept, but it provided Job with a sense of peace and a semblance of sanity in the midst of all the suffering.

But that did not mean that Job was out of the woods. All the events that had taken place would provide him with ample opportunity to wrestle with his concept of God, and he would receive unsolicited help from his well-meaning friends. Job's suffering was going to reveal a lot about himself and a lot about his God. He would wrestle with concepts regarding God's sovereignty and His love. He would have to come to grips with whether God could be trusted.

As his suffering continues, Job will go from resting in God to blaming God. He will even accuse God of wronging him (Job 19:6-7). But God never blasts him for his doubt or punishes him for his hasty words. Instead, He comforts Job and eventually restores him.

All throughout this story, we see a picture of a faithful, loving God who is active behind the scenes. He is aware of our suffering and has a plan for them. He is not caught off guard or found asleep at His post. He is fully aware and He cares. Suffering is a part of life lived in a fallen world. Will we allow it to change our perception about God, or learn to see Him in the midst of it? "We take the good days from God--why not also the bad days?" (Job 2:10 MSG).

Shall I take from Your hand Your blessings
 Yet not welcome any pain
 Shall I thank You for days of sunshine
 Yet grumble in days of rain
 Shall I love You in times of plenty
 Then leave You in days of drought

Shall I trust when I reap a harvest
But when winter winds blow, then doubt

Oh let Your will be done in me
In Your love I will abide
Oh I long for nothing else as long
As You are glorified

Are You good only when I prosper
And true only when I'm filled
Are You King only when I'm carefree
And God only when I'm well
You are good when I'm poor and needy
You are true when I'm parched and dry
You still reign in the deepest valley
You're still God in the darkest night

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Job 2:11-13

Far From Fair Weather Friends

¹¹ Now 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 together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. ¹² And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. ¹³ And 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. – Job 2:11-13 ESV

Amid all his sorrow and suffering, Job gets a visit from three of his closest friends. Each of them had received news of Job's losses and made plans to leave their respective towns and rendezvous in Uz to provide moral support to their mutual friend. We know from chapter 32, that another friend named Elihu joined them at some point. At this point, we know nothing about these men, other than their names but in time their individual personalities will become increasingly more evident.

But for now, all we know is that they graciously agreed to gather in Uz to check on the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of their friend. It is important to note that what motivated their travel plans was "this evil that had come upon" Job (Job 2:11 ESV). The Hebrew word for "evil" is רָעָה (*ra'*) and it refers to that which is bad, wicked, malignant, or simply disagreeable. But it would appear that these men had all come to the same conclusion. Whatever had happened to their friend was the result of evil, and it will soon become clear that they assumed that Job had done something to deserve the distress and devastation he was experiencing. They believed there was a cause-and-effect rationale behind all that had happened to Job and they would soon deem it their responsibility to help Job confess whatever sin he had committed to merit God's judgment.

Yet, upon their arrival in Uz, the well-meaning and highly motivated friends of Job find their friend's condition far more distressing than they could have ever imagined. The skin disease from which Job suffered had left him virtually unrecognizable. Their shock and distress at Job's alarming physical state left them stunned. But soon, their silence soon gave way to mournful cries of pity as "they tore their robes and threw dust into the air over their heads to show their grief" (Job 2:12 NLT). This rather theatrical display of emotions was probably not what Job had expected and, most certainly, not what he needed at the moment. This dramatic demonstration was intended to convince Job that they felt his pain and could somehow relate to all that he had suffered. This is not to suggest that these friends were insincere or simply putting on a show of false sympathy. They were doing what was culturally customary in that day and age. The sincerity of their actions is evidenced by their willingness to sit in silence beside their grieving friend for a full seven days as he continued to mourn Job his staggering losses.

No one said a word to Job, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words. – Job 2:13
NLT

No doubt, this show of mutual support meant a great deal to Job. He had just lost all ten of his adult children and the only words of comfort and counsel he got from his wife was to curse God and die (Job 2:9). He had been left alone to wrestle with the import of his situation, so the arrival of his friends would have been a source of great encouragement. Their decision to join him in Uz was a sign of their love and affection for him, and their willingness to sit in silence while Job mourned demonstrates that they were there for the long haul. Their visit was not a spur-of-the-moment kind of thing, and they were in no rush to return home. They quietly waited, biding their time until Job was ready to hear what they had to say. And, as we will see, they were not at a loss for words; they were simply waiting for the right time to share their insights into Job's circumstances.

These men demonstrated the truth of the proverb: "A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need" (Proverbs 17:17 NLT). In Job's time of need, his friends were there for him. Their presence was palpable and tangible. Even as they sat alongside him in silence, their close proximity served as a balm for the pain Job was having to endure. His trials were no less difficult, but he no longer faced them alone.

Yet, the arrival of Job's friends would not be without its own set of difficulties. These compassionate companions would soon break their silence and begin to share their personal insights into Job's predicament. Once the seven days of mourning had passed, they would begin to offer up their well-reasoned assessment of Job's situation and outline a strategy for remedying the problem.

But Job will beat them to the punch. His patient endurance will run its course and he'll take the opportunity to take exception with God's providential plan for his life. Surprisingly, the blameless Job will end up cursing his ill-fated life and express his preference for an early death. His carefully constructed facade of faithfulness will begin to crumble under the weight of his burdens. It's not that Job no longer believes in God; it is that he no longer has the strength to endure the weight of his own sorrow and suffering. But God will show no surprise at Job's outburst. He will hear His servant out and then allow Job's friends to share their collective wisdom. But ultimately, God will step in and set the record straight. The entire ordeal surrounding Job's life will be given an explanation and the sovereign plan of Almighty God will be exposed for all to see.

Job 3:1-26**Beaten Down? Look Up**

¹ After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. ² And Job said:

³ *“Let the day perish on which I was born,
and the night that said,
‘A man is conceived.’*

⁴ *Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
nor light shine upon it.*

⁵ *Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds dwell upon it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.*

⁶ *That night—let thick darkness seize it!
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
let it not come into the number of the months.*

⁷ *Behold, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry enter it.*

⁸ *Let those curse it who curse the day,
who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.*

⁹ *Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
let it hope for light, but have none,
nor see the eyelids of the morning,*

¹⁰ *because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,
nor hide trouble from my eyes.*

¹¹ *“Why did I not die at birth,
come out from the womb and expire?*

¹² *Why did the knees receive me?
Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?*

¹³ *For then I would have lain down and been quiet;
I would have slept; then I would have been at rest,*

¹⁴ *with kings and counselors of the earth
who rebuilt ruins for themselves,*

¹⁵ *or with princes who had gold,
who filled their houses with silver.*

¹⁶ *Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child,
as infants who never see the light?*

¹⁷ *There the wicked cease from troubling,
and there the weary are at rest.*

¹⁸ *There the prisoners are at ease together;
they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.*

¹⁹ *The small and the great are there,
and the slave is free from his master.*

²⁰ *“Why is light given to him who is in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,
²¹ who long for death, but it comes not,
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,
²² who rejoice exceedingly
and are glad when they find the grave?
²³ Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?
²⁴ For my sighing comes instead of my bread,
and my groanings are poured out like water.
²⁵ For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me.
²⁶ I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest, but trouble comes.”* – Job 3:1-26 ESV

Suffering and sorrow don't come with expiration dates. The saying, “time heals all wounds” may be true but it doesn't explain how long the wait may be before the healing comes and the pain goes away. In Job's case, time passed but the grief that accompanied his losses failed to dissipate. He continued to struggle with residual physical as well as psychological pain. The arrival of his friends must have meant a lot to Job and he probably appreciated their willingness to sit with him in silence for seven days as he attempted to process all that had happened.

But the time came when Job couldn't hold back his frustration and anger any longer, and the blunt-force nature of his honesty leaves us feeling a bit uncomfortable. While we can probably relate to what he has to say, we find it strange to see them in writing and even more disconcerting to think about anyone saying them out loud.

And what we read in chapter 3 seems to contradict the Job we were introduced to in chapters 1 and 2. This blameless, upright, and God-fearing man (Job 1:8), had faced the unexpected and unprecedented losses of his family and fortune with unparalleled faith and resilience.

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” – Job 1:21 ESV

“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” – Job 2:10 ESV

But now we're given a starkly different look at this suffering servant of Yahweh. The cumulative effect of his losses had produced a burden that Job found too great to bear any longer. He was ready to give up and hand over his “faithful servant” badge. With the passing of time, some of his physical wounds had healed but his heart was raw, and he had come to a place where his suffering was no longer bearable or justifiable. He couldn't rationalize his way out of his own

growing sense of futility and frustration. None of it made any sense and, no matter how he analyzed the data, none of it left him with a particularly favorable view of God.

In a blatant display of anger, he cursed the day he was born. Job could see no meaning to his existence. With the devastating loss of his ten adult children and the complete dismantling of his means of livelihood, Job could see no purpose for his life.

*“Let the day of my birth be erased,
and the night I was conceived.
Let that day be turned to darkness.
Let it be lost even to God on high,
and let no light shine on it.” – Job 3:3-4 NLT*

In a sense, Job is declaring his birth to have been a cosmic mistake. After carefully considering all his losses, he can't conceive of a reason to keep on living. And his growing sense of futility is completely understandable. After burying all his children and picking up the pieces of his shattered life, Job is having a difficult time seeing the silver lining on the dark cloud that has become his life.

*“Let the darkness and utter gloom claim that day for its own.
Let a black cloud overshadow it,
and let the darkness terrify it.” – Job 3:5 NLT*

He simply wants the darkness to completely consume his life and put him out of his misery. And while reading his emotionally charged words leaves us feeling uncomfortable, it also makes Job highly relatable. He has fallen from his pedestal of faith and become one of us. Gone are the pithy and pious-sounding platitudes about God's goodness and his willingness to accept the good and the bad from God's gracious hands. And rather than bragging about leaving this life the same way he entered it – naked – Job is now declaring his desire to have been stillborn.

*“Why wasn't I born dead?
Why didn't I die as I came from the womb?
Why was I laid on my mother's lap?
Why did she nurse me at her breasts?” – Job 3:11-12 NLT*

*“Why wasn't I buried like a stillborn child,
like a baby who never lives to see the light?” – Job 3:16 NLT*

At this point in his life, Job could see no redeeming value in continuing to exist. He couldn't fathom a better tomorrow or a day when the pain would be replaced with joy and hope. The darkness was overwhelming. And sadly, that darkness was preventing him from glimpsing the goodness of his God. Job had reached a low point in his life, where despair morphed into doubt and heartache robbed him of all hope. His reasoning powers had been diminished by his

circumstances, and his faithfulness had been weakened by his own sense of powerlessness. He echoes the sentiments of Solomon, written in the book of Ecclesiastes.

*I also thought about the human condition—how God proves to people that they are like animals. For people and animals share the same fate—both breathe and both must die. So people have no real advantage over the animals. How meaningless! Both go to the same place—they came from dust and they return to dust. For who can prove that the human spirit goes up and the spirit of animals goes down into the earth? So I saw that there is nothing better for people than to be happy in their work. That is our lot in life. And no one can bring us back to see what happens after we die. – Ecclesiastes 3:18-22
NLT*

To say that Job was pessimistic would be a gross understatement. One might easily describe him as clinically depressed, even suicidal. This is such a contrast to the man God described as “blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil. And he has maintained his integrity” (Job 2:3 NLT).

The circumstances of life had left Job beaten down and unable to look up to God for help and hope. His statements are not in the form of a prayer. His poetic-sounding speech is not directed to God, but seemingly uttered into the vacuum of his pointless existence.

*“Why is life given to those with no future,
those God has surrounded with difficulties?” – Job 3:23 NLT*

He had come to the conclusion that his life no longer held any meaning or purpose. And he seems to blame God for all that had happened. It was God who had surrounded his life with difficulties. So, if all his problems were from the sovereign hand of God, how or why should he expect God to reverse course and bless him? Like so many of his contemporaries, Job was convinced that both blessings and curses came from God. Blessings were considered to be proof of God’s favor. Disease, pain, and financial loss were evidence that one had offended a holy God and was under His curse.

So, given the sheer scope of Job’s trials, it is no surprise that He had drawn the conclusion that he was under an irreversible and wholly unavoidable curse. His pessimism reaches an all-time low with his final statement:

*“What I always feared has happened to me.
What I dreaded has come true.
I have no peace, no quietness.
I have no rest; only trouble comes.” – Job 3:26 NLT*

He had feared the worst, and it had come true – in a big way. But what Job failed to realize was that God was not done yet. Job’s problems, while great, were not insurmountable. The darkened state of his future was not a foregone conclusion. There were things to which Job was

ignorant. There were details concerning his life story that were as yet unrevealed. He was completely unaware of the spiritual battle taking place in the unseen realm. The conversations taking place between God and Satan were out of sight and out of mind. He had no way of knowing that this entire sequence of events was being carefully orchestrated from heaven – not as curses to punish him for wickedness, but to reveal the power and providence of his God.

Job was being tested, to see if he truly believed in the sovereignty, goodness, and greatness of his God. And while his little diatribe doesn't portray a man of vibrant faith, it does reveal a man whose fallen humanity was all too real and whose need for a glimpse of God was all too necessary. And the good news is, God was not done yet.

Job 4:1-21**When Well-Intended Words Become Weapons**

¹ Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

² “If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?
Yet who can keep from speaking?”

³ Behold, you have instructed many,
and you have strengthened the weak hands.

⁴ Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,
and you have made firm the feeble knees.

⁵ But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;
it touches you, and you are dismayed.

⁶ Is not your fear of God your confidence,
and the integrity of your ways your hope?

⁷ “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?
Or where were the upright cut off?”

⁸ As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.

⁹ By the breath of God they perish,
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

¹⁰ The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion,
the teeth of the young lions are broken.

¹¹ The strong lion perishes for lack of prey,
and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.”

¹² “Now a word was brought to me stealthily;
my ear received the whisper of it.

¹³ Amid thoughts from visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men,

¹⁴ dread came upon me, and trembling,
which made all my bones shake.

¹⁵ A spirit glided past my face;
the hair of my flesh stood up.

¹⁶ It stood still,
but I could not discern its appearance.

A form was before my eyes;
there was silence, then I heard a voice:

¹⁷ ‘Can mortal man be in the right before God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?

¹⁸ Even in his servants he puts no trust,
and his angels he charges with error;

- ¹⁹ *how much more those who dwell in houses of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed like the moth.*
- ²⁰ *Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces;
they perish forever without anyone regarding it.*
- ²¹ *Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them,
do they not die, and that without wisdom?"* – Job 4:1-21 ESV

We all have them – well-meaning friends who step alongside us during times of difficulty and seasons of suffering spouting sanctimonious sermonettes on our condition. They're the Scripture police who tend to quote passages they don't fully understand and draw conclusions based on scant information and little or no experience. These people don't intend to hurt anyone, but in their zeal to "encourage," they do more harm than good.

Job's friend, Eliphaz, was one of these types of individuals. In the midst of all of Job's grief and suffering, he shows up on the scene lobbing all kinds of theological and psychological hand grenades into Job's pity party. He has taken one look at Job's circumstances and reached a conclusion: Job is guilty of something. He has to be.

But Eliphaz prefaces his verbal barrage on his suffering friend with what appears to be a kind and gracious request to share his thoughts. He and his companions have completed a seven-day-long wake, where they sat by Job's side as he mourned the deaths of his ten children and the loss of his entire economic empire. They sat in silence as their devastated friend attempted to heal from his deep emotional wounds while suffering from a debilitating and painful skin disease.

In time, Eliphaz grew impatient and decided it was time to speak. He had seen enough and was ready to help his friend come to grips with the real source of Job's problems. Knowing that Job is in no mood to hear what he has to say, Eliphaz begs his friend to show patience as he shares his enlightened insights. Then, in a somewhat heavy-handed attempt to gain Job's ear, Eliphaz flatters his suffering friend by recalling how Job had so often played the role of comforting counselor in the lives of others.

*"In the past you have encouraged many people;
you have strengthened those who were weak.
Your words have supported those who were falling;
you encouraged those with shaky knees."* – Job 4:3-4 NLT

In a sense, Eliphaz is saying, "I'm only doing what you would do if the shoe was on the other foot." Eliphaz is trying to prepare Job for the "truth bomb" he is about to drop. In the lengthy speech he has prepared, Eliphaz is going to share some things that Job is not going to want to hear. Eliphaz knows his words are going to be painful and difficult to accept but they need to be said, and he challenges Job to accept them like a man.

He levels an accusation of duplicity, suggesting that Job has always been quick to hand out advice to his suffering friends but now that he is the one doing the suffering, he crumples like a house of cards.

*“But now when trouble strikes, you lose heart.
You are terrified when it touches you.” – Job 4:5 NLT*

These words seem to echo the sentiments found in the Book of Proverbs.

*An open rebuke
is better than hidden love!*

*Wounds from a sincere friend
are better than many kisses from an enemy. – Proverbs 27:5-6 NLT*

*The heartfelt counsel of a friend
is as sweet as perfume and incense. – Proverbs 27:9 NLT*

*As iron sharpens iron,
so a friend sharpens a friend. – Proverbs 27:17 NLT*

But friendship isn't necessarily a guarantee of wise counsel. Well-intentioned friends can end up giving poor advice and questionable counsel. A close and intimate relationship doesn't automatically qualify someone to serve as an infallible source of wisdom. Eliphaz meant well, and much of what he had to say contained a semblance of truth, but there was a great deal about Job's situation to which he was ignorant.

From his limited vantage point, Eliphaz had come to certain conclusions regarding Job's circumstances. From the outside looking in, he assessed the scene and determined the cause of Job's suffering, and he validated his conclusions by spiritualizing them. He claims to have had a vision in the night.

*“This truth was given to me in secret,
as though whispered in my ear.
It came to me in a disturbing vision at night,
when people are in a deep sleep.
Fear gripped me,
and my bones trembled.
A spirit swept past my face,
and my hair stood on end.
The spirit stopped, but I couldn't see its shape.
There was a form before my eyes.
In the silence I heard a voice...” – Job 4:12-16 NLT*

Eliphaz doesn't attribute this vision to Yahweh. He never claims to have received a word from God Almighty. He simply saw "a form" that whispered a cryptic message in his ear.

"Can a mortal be innocent before God?

Can anyone be pure before the Creator?" – Job 4:17 NLT

Eliphaz heard a voice, but he could not name its source. He had a vision, but he had no way of knowing who this "spirit" was or whether the message was God-ordained. From his ethereal night encounter, Eliphaz built an entire case against Job. He wrongly concluded that Job must be guilty of something. Otherwise, why would he be suffering so much loss and pain?

In the second half of his speech, he draws the following conclusion:

"...evil does not spring from the soil, and trouble does not sprout from the earth. People are born for trouble as predictably as sparks fly upward from a fire." – Job 5:6-7 NLT

Bad things don't just happen. They're the result of bad choices made by individuals. In other words, you reap what you sow. And Job must have sown some *really* wild oats at some point in his past. Eliphaz admits that Job was a pretty good guy. He had been an encouragement to a lot of people over the years. He had been a source of comfort and strength to others when they needed him. He had always been there with a kind word and a listening ear. But he must have done something to deserve this bizarre turn of affairs. These things don't just happen.

The problem with Eliphaz's speech is that it contains a modicum of truth. He has a lot of good things to say but he suffers from bad timing and a lousy understanding of reality. He speaks of things he doesn't know. He makes assumptions about things he doesn't understand. He is judging based on the circumstances but can't see what God sees. He can't even see God working behind the scenes. And isn't that how we all approach the presence of trials and troubles in our lives?

We draw conclusions. We make assumptions. And we pass out words of wisdom like they were so much Valentine's candy. We mix a touch of biblical truth with a little bit of home-spun wisdom and then baste our friends with this toxic marinade of self-righteous piety. Eliphaz was dispensing truth like a doctor handing out prescriptions for a condition he had yet to diagnose; a process that will render perfectly safe drugs potentially deadly. We do that when we reach hasty conclusions about the spiritual condition of others based on circumstances alone. It reminds me of the story in the Gospel of John. Jesus is walking with His disciples, and they encounter a man blind from birth. His disciples reveal a lot about their theology when they ask Jesus, "Teacher, why was this man born blind? Was it a result of his own sins or those of his parents?" (John 9:2 NLT). To their surprise, Jesus responded, "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins, he was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him" (John 9:3 NLT).

The truth is, we don't know what God is doing behind the scenes. We don't know why certain situations are as they are, and if we're not careful, like Eliphaz we can hastily draw wrong

conclusions and hand out poor advice. When Job needed comfort, he got unnecessary conviction. When he needed a listening ear, he got a lecture. Was a lot of what was said true? You bet. But it was misapplied and mistakenly meted out. In his commentary on the book of Job, John Gill says this about Eliphaz's little speech:

"and he 'said' not anything by way of condolence or consolation, not pitying Job's case, nor comforting him in his afflicted circumstances, as they required both; but reproaching him as a wicked and hypocritical man, not acting like himself formerly, or according to his profession and principles, but just the reverse: this was a new trial to Job, and some think the sorest of all; it was as a sword in his bones, which was very cutting to him; as oil cast into a fiery furnace in which he now was, which increased the force and fury of it; and as to vinegar an opened and bleeding wound, which makes it smart the more." – John Gill, *Exposition on the Entire Bible, the Book of Job*

A big part of ministering to others is learning to listen well. Sometimes the greatest form of comfort is silence. But if you're going to say anything at all, maybe we could take notes from the words of Isaiah.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you. – Isaiah 35:4-5 NIV

Strengthen, steady, encourage, and point them to God. Lift them up, don't tear them down.

*Timely advice is lovely,
like golden apples in a silver basket.*

*To one who listens, valid criticism
is like a gold earring or other gold jewelry.*

*Trustworthy messengers refresh like snow in summer.
They revive the spirit of their employer. – Proverbs 25:11-13 NLT*

Job 5:1-16**When Good Friends Give Bad Advice**

¹ *“Call now; is there anyone who will answer you?
To which of the holy ones will you turn?*

² *Surely vexation kills the fool,
and jealousy slays the simple.*

³ *I have seen the fool taking root,
but suddenly I cursed his dwelling.*

⁴ *His children are far from safety;
they are crushed in the gate,
and there is no one to deliver them.*

⁵ *The hungry eat his harvest,
and he takes it even out of thorns,
and the thirsty pant after his wealth.*

⁶ *For affliction does not come from the dust,
nor does trouble sprout from the ground,
⁷ but man is born to trouble
as the sparks fly upward.*

⁸ *“As for me, I would seek God,
and to God would I commit my cause,
⁹ who does great things and unsearchable,
marvelous things without number:
¹⁰ he gives rain on the earth
and sends waters on the fields;
¹¹ he sets on high those who are lowly,
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.
¹² He frustrates the devices of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.
¹³ He catches the wise in their own craftiness,
and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.
¹⁴ They meet with darkness in the daytime
and grope at noonday as in the night.
¹⁵ But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth
and from the hand of the mighty.
¹⁶ So the poor have hope,
and injustice shuts her mouth.” – Job 5:1-16 ESV*

Assumptions can be dangerous things, especially when it comes to spiritual matters. And while Eliphaz thought he was doing his beleaguered friend a service, his lengthy and unsolicited counseling session was based solely on his own opinion about Job’s plight. From his theological vantage point, it appeared as if Job had done something to anger God. There could be no other

explanation. After all, Job had been blessed beyond belief, a sure sign of God's favor. He had a large family and his adult children had done well with their lives. Job had also built a prosperous agricultural operation that made him "the richest person in that entire area" (Job 1:3 NLT). And then suddenly, as if out of nowhere, Job had lost it all, including his health.

Like a forensic investigator, Eliphaz examined the evidence and came to the conclusion that his friend had committed some highly egregious sin that resulted in God's judgment. In his attempt to explain Job's horrific downfall, Eliphaz concluded that there must have been some heinous transgression hidden in his past. Job's sins had caught up with him.

Eliphaz is so convinced that his assumptions are correct that he challenges Job to call on the "holy ones" to come to his defense. In a casebook display of insensitivity, Eliphaz questions his friend's innocence and callously claims that even the angels would fail to listen to his cries or come to his aid. They would refuse to act as witnesses on his behalf or plead his case to God.

In one of the most blatant displays of over-confident self-righteousness, Eliphaz boldly asserts that Job is a fool.

*"Surely resentment destroys the fool,
and jealousy kills the simple.
I have seen that fools may be successful for the moment,
but then comes sudden disaster."* – Job 5:2-3 NLT

Eliphaz has the audacity to claim that the fate of Job's children was his own fault.

*"Their children are abandoned far from help;
they are crushed in court with no one to defend them."* – Job 5:4 NLT

Eliphaz's assertions are far from subtle and anything but encouraging. He lobbs his so-called truth bombs like hand grenades, showing no regard for Job's feelings and demonstrating no awareness that his assumptions might be wrong. He had reached his conclusions and there was no turning back. But Eliphaz's rush to judgment was both unwise and unwarranted. There were things he didn't know. There were details about Job's story of which he was ignorant and uninformed. Yet, he felt confident enough to declare his friend guilty and to label him a fool.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the issue of murder as it relates to the Mosaic Law.

"You have heard that it was said to an older generation, 'Do not murder,' and 'whoever murders will be subjected to judgment.' But I say to you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subjected to judgment. And whoever insults a brother will be brought before the council, and whoever says 'Fool' will be sent to fiery hell." – Matthew 5:21-22
NET

He rightly declared that the Law prescribed judgment for the act of murder. But then He added an interesting addendum, declaring that anger itself was tantamount to committing murder. Hatred was the breeding ground from which murder sprang forth.

Then He took His interpretation of the Law one step further by stating that to insult someone was also an act worthy of judgment. Jesus uses the word “raca,” a term that was derived from the Aramaic word *reqa*. It was an insult that is best translated as “empty-headed” and was used to refer to someone’s stupidity or mental inferiority. It was a highly derogatory expression and Jesus warns that its use to devalue another human being was deserving of the severest punishment of the Law. And then He adds one more eye-opening insight into the true meaning behind the command, “You shall not kill.”

“...whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” – Matthew 5:22b ESV

According to Jesus, Eliphaz was walking on thin ice. He had taken it upon himself to act as Job’s judge and render a guilty verdict – all without input or approval from God.

Eliphaz’s arrogance is truly mind-boggling. He’s so confident in his assertions that he talks to his friend like he’s a child, reminding him that evil doesn’t just happen; it has a source.

*“...evil does not spring from the soil,
and trouble does not sprout from the earth.
People are born for trouble
as readily as sparks fly up from a fire.” – Job 5:6-7 NLT*

Eliphaz not only has an explanation for Job’s sorry state but he also has a solution.

*“If I were you, I would go to God
and present my case to him.
He does great things too marvelous to understand.
He performs countless miracles.” – Job 5:8-9 NLT*

But this advice reeks of sarcasm. It is almost as if Eliphaz knows that Job is going to deny his guilt and declare his innocence. So, he challenges Job to present his case to Yahweh. What appears to be a sincere recommendation that Job turn to God for help is really a thinly veiled and sarcasm-laced statement of Job’s guilt. Eliphaz isn’t hiding his belief that Job has brought all of this on himself. He even warns Job that God “frustrates the plans of schemers so the work of their hands will not succeed. He traps the wise in their own cleverness so their cunning schemes are thwarted” (Job 5:12-13 NLT).

Eliphaz told Job that he was more than welcome to take bring his case before God, but he would find Yahweh to be anything but accommodating or forgiving. In Eliphaz’s mind, Job was nothing more than a clever schemer who had fooled everyone but God with his convincing holier-than-thou lifestyle.

Eliphaz seems to have reached the conclusion that Job had somehow used his wealth and power to take advantage of the poor, so he warned his friend that God “rescues the poor from the cutting words of the strong, and rescues them from the clutches of the powerful” (Job 5:15 NLT). This was a bold and highly condemning assertion on Eliphaz’s part; one that was based solely on conjecture and had no basis in reality.

When reading the words of Eliphaz, it’s important to consider how they stand in stark contrast to God’s assessment of Job.

“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” – Job 2:3 ESV

Eliphaz had already assumed Job’s guilt, solely based on circumstantial evidence. But there was so much he didn’t know and couldn’t see. He was blind to the spiritual battle taking place behind the scenes. He was incapable of seeing into the inner recesses of Job’s heart but had been more than willing to declare his friend a fool and a scheming con man who had enriched himself on the backs of the poor and needy. But he was wrong. Yet, he was far from finished. Eliphaz was neither lacking in confidence nor words, and he had a lot more to say to his involuntary counselee.

Job 5:17-27**When Saying Nothing Is Sound Advice**

- ¹⁷ *“Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves;
therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.*
- ¹⁸ *For he wounds, but he binds up;
he shatters, but his hands heal.*
- ¹⁹ *He will deliver you from six troubles;
in seven no evil shall touch you.*
- ²⁰ *In famine he will redeem you from death,
and in war from the power of the sword.*
- ²¹ *You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue,
and shall not fear destruction when it comes.*
- ²² *At destruction and famine you shall laugh,
and shall not fear the beasts of the earth.*
- ²³ *For you shall be in league with the stones of the field,
and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you.*
- ²⁴ *You shall know that your tent is at peace,
and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing.*
- ²⁵ *You shall know also that your offspring shall be many,
and your descendants as the grass of the earth.*
- ²⁶ *You shall come to your grave in ripe old age,
like a sheaf gathered up in its season.*
- ²⁷ *Behold, this we have searched out; it is true.
Hear, and know it for your good.” – Job 5:17-27 ESV*

Much of what Eliphaz has to say is true but he is approaching Job’s situation from a point of ignorance. He is speaking about matters that are outside his realm of understanding. And while there is a hint of truth in his words and his efforts appear to come from a good place, his well-intended rhetoric paints God in a poor light and portrays faithful service to God as a means to an end. In other words, if you do good things for God, He will reward you.

His message to Job is less a call to repentance from sins committed as it is a call for Job to change his ways. In essence, he is advising Job to replace his bad behavior with good behavior. According to Eliphaz, that little formula is the key to reversing Job’s fate and restoring his fortunes.

At first glance, Eliphaz’s advice seems biblical and sound. He recommends that Job readily accept what can only be explained as the discipline of the Lord. In saying this, Eliphaz has drawn the conclusion that Job is guilty of something and his suffering is nothing more than a sign of God’s loving discipline. And this statement seems to resonate with the words of the author of Hebrews.

...have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said,

*“My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline,
and don’t give up when he corrects you.
For the Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.” – Hebrews 12:5-6 NLT*

This passage is an almost verbatim quote from the Old Testament book of Proverbs, and when you see it in its immediate context, it appears to have been written with Job in mind.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart;
do not depend on your own understanding.
Seek his will in all you do,
and he will show you which path to take.*

*Don’t be impressed with your own wisdom.
Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.
Then you will have healing for your body
and strength for your bones.*

*Honor the Lord with your wealth
and with the best part of everything you produce.
Then he will fill your barns with grain,
and your vats will overflow with good wine.*

*My child, don’t reject the Lord’s discipline,
and don’t be upset when he corrects you.
For the Lord corrects those he loves,
just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights. – Proverbs 3:5-12 NLT*

But having read the opening chapters of the book of Job, we know that Job is not being punished by God. His suffering has come at the hands of Satan. Yes, God is the one who gave the enemy permission to test Job’s integrity and loyalty, but none of the attacks were a form of discipline or judgment.

*“Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.”
– Job 1:12 ESV*

And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.” – Job 2:6 ESV

It is true that God lovingly disciplines His children but we cannot automatically assume that all suffering in this life is evidence of this truth. We live in a fallen world in which evil exists and sinful people commit heinous crimes against one another. Disease and sickness are a constant threat. Natural disasters are commonplace. And, as the Scriptures remind us, there is an

ongoing spiritual taking place all around us, but invisible to our human eyes. The apostle Paul warns us about this in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 6:11-12 ESV

And this is exactly the kind of counsel Eliphaz should have given Job. Rather than automatically assume that Job was guilty of sin and undergoing the discipline of God, Eliphaz should have encouraged his beleaguered friend to recognize the reality of spiritual warfare. Perhaps Eliphaz lacked a well-developed doctrine of the supernatural and was not well-versed in the ways of Satan. It seems apparent that his concept of God was not fully developed because he has a rather one-dimensional view of the Almighty. Eliphaz's theology seems to portray God as either a rewarder or a punisher. If men do well, they get blessed by God. If they do poorly, they experience His judgment.

Once again, Eliphaz seems to be partially right. The author of Hebrews seems to corroborate Eliphaz's view of God.

...without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. – Hebrews 11:6 ESV

But one must take this verse in its context, where the author is unpacking the definition of faith and illustrating it through the lives of the Old Testament saints. Nowhere in the chapter does the author describe God's rewards as physical health or financial windfalls. In fact, he describes these people as having exhibited faith, but "all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised" (Hebrews 11:39 ESV). In other words, their faith and faithfulness did not produce health, wealth, or prosperity. In fact, their lot in life was anything but easy or rewarding.

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. – Hebrews 11:35-38 ESV

Eliphaz's entire premise is built on a faulty foundation. His reasoning is simplistic and based solely on a cause-and-effect model. Job had done something bad, therefore he was being punished by God. If Job would start doing good, he would be blessed by God.

To Eliphaz, the circumstances surrounding Job's life were clear. He had sinned and was reaping the just rewards of his folly. But if Job would simply alter his behavior, the nightmare would be over and God would put a hedge of protection around him.

*“He will save you from death in time of famine,
from the power of the sword in time of war.
You will be safe from slander
and have no fear when destruction comes.
You will laugh at destruction and famine;
wild animals will not terrify you.” – Job 5:20-22 NLT*

But again, this is a simplistic view of God and a less-than-helpful way to understand the nature of life in a fallen world. God does not promise His children a trouble-free existence. He does not exist to make our earthly life a walk in the park and even our best behavior cannot immunize us from suffering and pain.

Not long before His own death, Jesus warned His disciples:

“But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” – John 16:32-33 ESV

Not long after having been stoned and left for dead, Paul entered the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22 ESV). It is likely that as Paul spoke these words, his body bore the visible signs of his stoning. He was like a walking illustration of his very words. The walk of faith is not easy and the children of God are not immune to suffering, sickness, persecution, or distress. It is as Jesus promised, a time marked by many trials and sorrows.

Eliphaz was promising Job a return to normalcy and a trouble-free life.

*“You will know that your home is safe.
When you survey your possessions, nothing will be missing.
You will have many children;
your descendants will be as plentiful as grass!” – Job 5:24-25 NLT*

Eliphaz believed that if Job changed his ways, God would restore everything back to the way it was. But this Pollyanna outlook flies in the face of Job's own words.

“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” – Job 2:10 ESV

Job was not blaming God for his circumstances; he was simply acknowledging God's sovereignty over all things. He knew that God was in control, and he was willing to rest on the goodness of God. That is why he could say, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21 ESV).

Eliphaz would have done well to speak less and listen more. He could have learned a lot from Job but he was too busy giving out unsolicited and highly unhelpful advice

Job 6:1-13**Turning to God When Our World Turns Upside-Down**

¹ Then Job answered and said:

² “Oh that my vexation were weighed,
and all my calamity laid in the balances!

³ For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea;
therefore my words have been rash.

⁴ For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;
my spirit drinks their poison;
the terrors of God are arrayed against me.

⁵ Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass,
or the ox low over his fodder?

⁶ Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt,
or is there any taste in the juice of the mallow?

⁷ My appetite refuses to touch them;
they are as food that is loathsome to me.

⁸ “Oh that I might have my request,
and that God would fulfill my hope,

⁹ that it would please God to crush me,
that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!

¹⁰ This would be my comfort;
I would even exult in pain unsparing,
for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

¹¹ What is my strength, that I should wait?
And what is my end, that I should be patient?

¹² Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze?

¹³ Have I any help in me,
when resource is driven from me?” – Job 6:1-13 ESV

As might be expected, Eliphaz’s words provided little or no comfort to Job. His response to his friend’s lengthy lecture came in the form of a defense. Job was in deep pain, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. As he weighed out his unexpected losses, he found the burden of them too great to bear. Even all his long-held beliefs about God were coming under attack as he tried to make sense of all that had happened. Job admitted that his earlier words had been rash and impulsive, but he was having a difficult time understanding why God had suddenly turned His back on him.

*“For the Almighty has struck me down with his arrows.
Their poison infects my spirit.
God’s terrors are lined up against me.” – Job 6:4 NLT*

He reluctantly agreed with Eliphaz's assessment that God was behind his pain and suffering, but he refused to acknowledge any guilt or confess any sin. As far as Job could tell, his losses were arbitrary and undeserved. This led him to defend his right to complain. Like a donkey in need of food, Job was "braying" for relief. His words were nothing more than an expression of his pain and suffering. It was only natural for a man who had lost everything to cry out and demand that someone relieve his agony.

From Job's perspective, other people seem to have the right to complain about the smallest discomforts or disappointments, but he gets chastised for expressing his dissatisfaction with the deaths of his ten adult children, the loss of his entire fortune, and the failure of his own health. He was a beaten-down man and defended his right to vocalize his frustrations and questions. And Job wanted Eliphaz to see things from his perspective.

As far as Job could tell, he was under attack by God Almighty and he couldn't fathom why. He had been given ample time to assess his circumstances and search his brain to discover what sin he might have committed to deserve the wrath of God. But instead of a list of sins to confess, Job had derived comfort in his own integrity. Despite all that had happened, Job had not turned his back on God. He was confused but remained faithful.

*"At least I can take comfort in this:
Despite the pain,
I have not denied the words of the Holy One." – Job 6:10 NLT*

While Job had not lost His belief in God, he had lost his will to live. He was no longer able to see the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. There was no silver lining on the dark cloud that overshadowed his life. Job couldn't imagine a future without his children or a day when his joy might return. As far as he could tell, his financial losses were too great to overcome, and his health showed no signs of improvement.

In his depressed state, all that Job could think about was death, and he begged God to put him out of his misery.

*"Oh, that I might have my request,
that God would grant my desire.
I wish he would crush me.
I wish he would reach out his hand and kill me." – Job 6:8-9 NLT*

Even in this, Job revealed his belief in the goodness of God. He still believed that God, as the sovereign Lord over all things, was ultimately responsible for man's fate. Job instinctively knew that his life was in God's hands and so he appealed to God's mercy and begged that his unfortunate life be brought to a quick and painless end. And these do not appear to be empty words spoken in the heat of the moment. Job is serious and sincere. His words reflect his abject sense of despair and utter resignation.

*"I don't have the strength to endure.
I have nothing to live for.
Do I have the strength of a stone?
Is my body made of bronze?
No, I am utterly helpless,
without any chance of success." – Job 6:11-13 NLT*

It would be easy to assume that Job is expressing his words to Eliphaz. Through the use of hyperbole, he was exaggerating the extent of his pain and defending his innocence against the unjust accusations of his so-called friend. But Job's words come across more like a prayer to God than a defense of his own innocence. Even though he refers to God in the third person, he demonstrates a belief that God can hear every word he says. He doesn't shake his fist in the face of God and demand recompense or restoration. He simply expresses his desire for the pain to end and he calls on God to be gracious and grant his desire.

These are the words of a man in deep despair. Not only is he suffering from the pain of loss but he is also having to wrestle with his confused and conflicted understanding of God. He had spent his entire life walking with God, so much so that God deemed him to be "a blameless and upright man" (Job 1:8 ESV). He was a man of integrity and faithfulness. All throughout his life, Job displayed a healthy fear of God and a strong aversion to evil. And yet, here he was suffering unparalleled pain and having to grapple with its cause and meaning.

Even Job's wife had struggled to find any semblance of hope in his meteoric fall from grace, so she encouraged him to give up his ill-fated quest for godliness and end it all.

"Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." – Job 2:9 ESV

But Job refused to take his wife's ungodly counsel. He was not willing to give up on God or his desire to live in a way that was pleasing to God. Job wanted to die, but not enough that he would ever curse His God. Instead, he pleaded with God to take his life. He placed his faith in the faithfulness of God and pleaded for mercy in the form of relief from his pain and suffering. It was all the hope he had left. But even that small glimmer of hope in the midst of the overwhelming darkness of life revealed that Job still believed in God. He couldn't explain his suffering. He was at a loss as to why his life had taken such a dark turn, but he never stopped believing in the sovereignty of God. He knew his life was in God's hands and so he turned to the giver of life to request a reprieve from the pain of life.

But while Job waited for God to respond, he took the opportunity to address Eliphaz. He was unwilling to sit back and take his friend's verbal assault without defending himself. Assumptions had been made. Accusations had been leveled. Now, it was Job's turn to set the record straight. He was hurting but Job still had a lot of fight in him, and Eliphaz was about to get a much-needed lecture on bed-side manners and counseling etiquette.

Job 6:14-30**Good Advice, Well-Timed, Produces the Best Outcomes**

- ¹⁴ *“He who withholds kindness from a friend
forsakes the fear of the Almighty.*
- ¹⁵ *My brothers are treacherous as a torrent-bed,
as torrential streams that pass away,*
- ¹⁶ *which are dark with ice,
and where the snow hides itself.*
- ¹⁷ *When they melt, they disappear;
when it is hot, they vanish from their place.*
- ¹⁸ *The caravans turn aside from their course;
they go up into the waste and perish.*
- ¹⁹ *The caravans of Tema look,
the travelers of Sheba hope.*
- ²⁰ *They are ashamed because they were confident;
they come there and are disappointed.*
- ²¹ *For you have now become nothing;
you see my calamity and are afraid.*
- ²² *Have I said, ‘Make me a gift’?
Or, ‘From your wealth offer a bribe for me’?*
- ²³ *Or, ‘Deliver me from the adversary’s hand’?
Or, ‘Redeem me from the hand of the ruthless’?*
- ²⁴ *“Teach me, and I will be silent;
make me understand how I have gone astray.*
- ²⁵ *How forceful are upright words!
But what does reproof from you reprove?*
- ²⁶ *Do you think that you can reprove words,
when the speech of a despairing man is wind?*
- ²⁷ *You would even cast lots over the fatherless,
and bargain over your friend.*
- ²⁸ *“But now, be pleased to look at me,
for I will not lie to your face.*
- ²⁹ *Please turn; let no injustice be done.
Turn now; my vindication is at stake.*
- ³⁰ *Is there any injustice on my tongue?
Cannot my palate discern the cause of calamity?” – Job 6:14-30 ESV*

Job now turns his attention directly to Eliphaz and his as-yet silent companions. Their words have been anything but helpful or encouraging. At Job’s darkest moment in life, these men have shown up and made matters worse with their compassionless and self-righteous rhetoric.

Job even accuses them of “withholding kindness” and demonstrating a total lack of fear or reverence for God. They are so confident in their assertion of Job’s guilt that they don’t even consider what God might have to say if they’re wrong.

When Job needed loyalty and moral support from his friends he got what he deemed to be treachery. The Hebrew word is *בָּגָד* (*bāḡad*) and it conveys the idea of unfaithfulness or dealing with someone deceitfully. Job compares his friends to “a seasonal brook that overflows its banks in the spring when it is swollen with ice and melting snow. But when the hot weather arrives, the water disappears. The brook vanishes in the heat” (Job 6:15-17 NLT). In other words, they are unpredictable and unreliable. They show up at inopportune times, bringing destruction rather than comfort, and when they are needed for refreshment, they are dry as a bone.

His friends have been an utter disappointment, bringing no hope or healing with their presence or words. In fact, Job finds them to be more fearful than faithful. By casting all the blame on Job and writing off his suffering as the sovereign hand of God, they seem to be trying to excuse themselves from providing him with any kind of financial aid or assistance. If they can rationalize his losses as divine judgment, they can declare themselves to be free from having to help him. Job seems to see through their self-centered analysis of the situation when he asks, “Have I ever asked you for a gift? Have I begged for anything of yours for myself? Have I asked you to rescue me from my enemies, or to save me from ruthless people?” (Job 6:22-23 NLT).

These men knew that Job was in dire straits financially. He had lost all his flocks and herds, leaving him with no means of making a living. And the funeral expenses for his ten deceased children must have taken a hit on his resources as well. But Job has not asked them for assistance. At no point has he requested that they lend him money or come to his aid with anything other than moral support. Job had not requested their presence; they had shown up of their own accord. But their arrival on the scene had only made matters worse.

So, in frustration, Job invites them to state their case plainly. He wants facts and not just flimsy accusations of guilt. He demands that they prove whatever crime they think he has committed. If they are going to put him on trial, he wants them to bring clear and compelling evidence. He assures them that he is willing to listen to what they have to say and will accept their conclusions, even if their verdict is painful to hear.

But Job writes off their words as nothing more than criticism. They have no evidence of wrongdoing because there is none. And while their lengthy diatribes may inflate their own ego, they do nothing to aid Job in his moment of need. In their desperate attempt to explain Job’s desperate circumstances, they have completely overlooked his desperation. They have shown a stunning lack of compassion and empathy.

Job begs his friends to give him the benefit of the doubt. All he asks for is an opportunity to state his case and defend his integrity, and he fully expects those who claim to be his friends to consider him innocent until proven guilty – not the other way around. But Eliphaz has set the

precedent. His rush to judgment has unsettled Job and left him hurt and harboring anger and, sadly, it will encourage Job's other friends to follow suit. Soon, they will join in the dog pile and add to the burden that Job has to bear. Instead of comfort, they will continue to criticize and critique. In the place of much-needed encouragement, they will divvy out large doses of blame and shame. And, over time, Job's resentment will grow, and his feelings of isolation will increase to the point where he finds himself lashing out in anger, not only at his friends but at God.

What a timely reminder of the need for grace and mercy when dealing with those who are suffering. Eliphaz and his compatriots could have used the wisdom of Solomon.

*Timely advice is lovely,
like golden apples in a silver basket.*

*To one who listens, valid criticism
is like a gold earring or other gold jewelry. – Proverbs 25:11-12 NLT*

*Everyone enjoys a fitting reply; it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time! –
Proverbs 15:23 NLT*

Job's friends had shown up at just the right time but were sharing all the wrong advice. They failed to read the room and properly gauge the mental state of their audience. They may have meant well but their methods were far from helpful. And Job was far from done when it came to his response.

Job 7:1-21**With Friends Like These...**

¹ *“Has not man a hard service on earth,
and are not his days like the days of a hired hand?*

² *Like a slave who longs for the shadow,
and like a hired hand who looks for his wages,*

³ *so I am allotted months of emptiness,
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.*

⁴ *When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’
But the night is long,
and I am full of tossing till the dawn.*

⁵ *My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt;
my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh.*

⁶ *My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle
and come to their end without hope.*

⁷ *“Remember that my life is a breath;
my eye will never again see good.*

⁸ *The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more;
while your eyes are on me, I shall be gone.*

⁹ *As the cloud fades and vanishes,
so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up;*

¹⁰ *he returns no more to his house,
nor does his place know him anymore.*

¹¹ *“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.*

¹² *Am I the sea, or a sea monster,
that you set a guard over me?*

¹³ *When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me,
my couch will ease my complaint,’*

¹⁴ *then you scare me with dreams
and terrify me with visions,*

¹⁵ *so that I would choose strangling
and death rather than my bones.*

¹⁶ *I loathe my life; I would not live forever.
Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.*

¹⁷ *What is man, that you make so much of him,
and that you set your heart on him,*

¹⁸ *visit him every morning
and test him every moment?*

¹⁹ *How long will you not look away from me,
nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit?*
²⁰ *If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?
Why have you made me your mark?
Why have I become a burden to you?*
²¹ *Why do you not pardon my transgression
and take away my iniquity?*
*For now I shall lie in the earth;
you will seek me, but I shall not be.” – Job 7:1-21 ESV*

Job pulls out all the stops, unleashing a torrent of pain-induced questions mixed with a heavy dose of invectives against his so-called friend, Eliphaz. He has had enough of listening to pious-sounding advice that only intensifies his misery while raising more questions than answers.

Job’s statements recorded in this section contain direct attacks on Eliphaz as well as more veiled questions aimed at God. It is partly a self-defense and a soliloquy. Job seems to be letting his inner thoughts pour out with no attempt to manage their intensity or worry about the impact they may have on the hearer. He can no longer constrain his growing frustration and allows a barrage of pent-up anger to flow from his lips unabated.

But even considering his circumstances, Job’s words are shocking to the ears. As followers of God, we can’t help but question the propriety of his unfiltered and ungodly-sounding speech. Can he say the things he is saying? Is it okay for someone to talk like that, especially to God? It all sounds so *unfaithful*. The degree of his pessimism appears to be off the charts. Where’s his faith? Just listen to his words:

"I hate this life! Who needs any more of this? Let me alone! There's nothing to my life – it's nothing but smoke." – Job 7:16 MSG

A believer isn't supposed to *think* like this, let alone *talk* like this, is he? Just listen to the way he addresses God.

"Let up on me, will you? Can't you even let me spit in peace?" – Job 7:19 MSG

How can he get away with that? Shouldn't we say something? Shouldn't I quote a verse to him? Doesn't he need a good dose of Romans 8:28?

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Or how about 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18? That's a good one. "Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." This guy just needs someone to read him the proverbial riot act and tell him to shut up and shape up.

But wait a minute. Before we blow into another person's despair with our gems of wisdom and some ill-placed and taken-out-of-context Scriptures, let's try to understand where they're coming from. Let's enter into their situation and feel their pain. Let's share their grief. Let's get into their shoes and try to experience what they are going through.

Too often, we try to alleviate someone else's misery because we want it to go away for *our* sake, not theirs. We want the other person's pain to go away because it causes us to doubt. It tests our faith. Listen to what Job said about his friends: "They arrive so confident – but what a disappointment! They get there, and their faces fall! And you, my so-called friends, are no better – there's nothing to you! One look at a hard scene and you shrink in fear" (Job 6:20-21 MSG).

You see, pain is – well, painful. It is hard to watch someone suffer and even more difficult to walk into someone else's heartache and simply be there for them. We want to fix it. We want to pray them out of their situation. We want to counsel them back into wholeness. And while there's nothing wrong with prayer or biblically-based counsel, God may simply want us to go through this moment with them to provide love and concern. He may not want us to fix them; He may just want us to care about them.

There is something uncomfortable about Job's words in this chapter. He is being brutally honest and it assaults our Christian sensibilities. He is saying things that "good" Christians should not say. He is being TOO honest, and it makes us squirm. But in the midst of his pain, Job has lost all his pious inhibitions. He is beyond worrying about what others think about him because he is fighting for his life. Loss has a way of peeling away the layers of pretense and getting us down to the bare reality of life. It causes us to question, and those questions make others uncomfortable.

But why does the pain and suffering of others make us uncomfortable? It's usually because we don't have the answers. Of course, those of us who have grown up in the church have the standard Sunday School answers. We know a handful of verses we can apply to a given situation but most of us don't speak from experience. We have been programmed with the proper responses, but our words don't always reflect a personal point of reference.

Job's friends had not walked in his sandals. They had never been through what he was experiencing, so they couldn't relate, and it made them uncomfortable. But if any one of them had suffered the kind of losses Job had, they would probably have said less and hugged more. They would have allowed their friend to vent, understanding that it was part of the healing process.

Is there a time to speak up? Certainly. But sometimes it is enough just to show up; to give those who are going through tragedy a chance to express their grief, vent their anger, and ask their questions. God can handle it, so why can't we? I think it's because, in the back of our minds, we don't like to witness the suffering of others because it raises doubts in our own minds. Where is

God? Why does He allow good people to go through difficulties? If it can happen to them, what guarantee do I have that the same thing won't happen to me?

Suffering causes us to doubt. It tests our own belief system. But that's okay. Part of the reason God placed us within the body of Christ is that we might go through difficulty together. I can learn from the heartache and hurt of others. I can grow from their difficulty – alongside them. Job's friends could have learned a lot – if they would have only listened.

Job made it clear. He was in pain, and he was no longer willing to keep quiet.

*“I cannot keep from speaking.
I must express my anguish.
My bitter soul must complain.”* – Job 7:11 NLT

And while Job's skin was covered with sores, his mind was filled with questions. He couldn't understand what was happening to him. He desperately needed to know he was still loved because he felt completely abandoned and alone. And in a desperate attempt to seek solace and comfort from God, he cried out, “Why not just forgive my sin and take away my guilt? For soon I will lie down in the dust and die. When you look for me, I will be gone” (Job 7:21 NLT).

It was at that moment that Job needed his friends to show up and wrap their arms around him. He needed to know he was not alone. He needed to be reminded that his God still loved him. But as we will see, Job's friends failed to hear what he had to say. Rather than listen and love, they will take turns berating their beaten-down friend and attempting to set themselves up as his spiritual superiors and moral betters. With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Job 8:1-22**The Discomfiting Comfort of Well-Meaning Friends**

¹ Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

² “How long will you say these things,
and the words of your mouth be a great wind?

³ Does God pervert justice?

Or does the Almighty pervert the right?

⁴ If your children have sinned against him,
he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.

⁵ If you will seek God
and plead with the Almighty for mercy,

⁶ if you are pure and upright,
surely then he will rouse himself for you
and restore your rightful habitation.

⁷ And though your beginning was small,
your latter days will be very great.

⁸ “For inquire, please, of bygone ages,
and consider what the fathers have searched out.

⁹ For we are but of yesterday and know nothing,
for our days on earth are a shadow.

¹⁰ Will they not teach you and tell you
and utter words out of their understanding?

¹¹ “Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?

¹² While yet in flower and not cut down,
they wither before any other plant.

¹³ Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless shall perish.

¹⁴ His confidence is severed,
and his trust is a spider's web.

¹⁵ He leans against his house, but it does not stand;
he lays hold of it, but it does not endure.

¹⁶ He is a lush plant before the sun,
and his shoots spread over his garden.

¹⁷ His roots entwine the stone heap;
he looks upon a house of stones.

¹⁸ If he is destroyed from his place,
then it will deny him, saying, ‘I have never seen you.’

¹⁹ *Behold, this is the joy of his way,
and out of the soil others will spring.*

²⁰ *“Behold, God will not reject a blameless man,
nor take the hand of evildoers.*

²¹ *He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
and your lips with shouting.*

²² *Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more.” – Job 8:1-22 ESV*

Job’s impassioned plea to his friends fell on deaf ears. Like a contestant on a professional wrestling tag team, Eliphaz turned over the task of attacking Job to his partner, Bildad, who enters the ring with an abundance of energy and a lot to say.

He immediately picks up where Eliphaz left off, accusing Job of sinning against God. In his opinion, Job was an obstinate apostate who stubbornly refused to confess his sin and was suffering the consequences. From his perspective, Job was nothing more than a belligerent windbag whose persistent claims of innocence were a direct attack on God’s justice and integrity. Bildad even had the audacity to suggest that the deaths of Job’s adult children were the result of their own sins. They simply got what they deserved.

*“How long will you go on like this?
You sound like a blustering wind.
Does God twist justice?
Does the Almighty twist what is right?
Your children must have sinned against him,
so their punishment was well deserved.” – Job 8:2-4 NLT*

Imagine yourself in Job’s sandals. How would you have handled all that had happened to this man? He had lost everything, including his health, and now he was being “comforted” by his friends. They have looked at the circumstances of Job’s life and logically but, wrongfully, concluded that it was all a result of sin – the sins of his children as well as his own.

In the middle of a tremendous time of pain, loss, and suffering, Job finds himself having to defend himself against the attacks of his closest friends. They meant well and their conclusions seem logical and even biblical at times, but in their zeal to assess Job’s guilt, they seem to have overlooked a few of God’s character qualities. They stress His justice but leave out His mercy. They portray God as vindictive and wrathful but ignore his love and grace. Their view of God is rather one-dimensional and, as a result, inaccurate. Whether they realize it or not, they have placed God in a box of their own making. They have worked out their own theology of God and allowed it to determine their interpretation of the world.

Bildad begins his counseling session with Job with a rhetorical question, “Does God twist justice? Does the Almighty twist what is right?” (Job 8:3 MSG). Of course, the answer is no, so

this led Bildad to conclude that Job's circumstances were the result of a just and righteous God justly dealing with Job's unrighteousness. To Bildad, it seemed like the only logical conclusion.

Job's assumed guilt is what drives the messages of each of his friends. But this begs the question: Was Job sinless? Again, the answer is no. He was a man living in a fallen world. Yet God declared him to be blameless.

The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." – Job 1:8 NASB

God was not declaring Job to be without sin. He was commending Job's faithfulness. From God's perspective, Job was a man of integrity and moral excellence who strived to live in a way that demonstrated his fear and reverence for the Lord.

Yet something tragic had taken place in this man's life. He had suffered tremendous loss, and Job's friends could only conclude that it was all the result of sin. And they are partially right. Virtually everything that happens in this world is the result of sin. It is a direct consequence of what theologians like to call "the fall." When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they paved the way for sin to enter the world and infect the human race.

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. – Romans 12:12 NLT

As a result, we live in a fallen world where sin reigns and even the creation is impacted by the presence of sin. Disasters happen. Earthquakes take place. Wildfires consume thousands of acres and hundreds of lives. And every person living on the planet is exposed to the effects of the fall. Good men and evil men all suffer. Righteous men get cancer. Godly women lose children. Faithful Christ-followers lose their jobs. Innocent children are born into abusive homes. That is life in a fallen world. In his commentary on the Book of Job, John Gill states, "Job's view in saying this is to observe, that a man's state God-ward is not to be judged of by his outward circumstances, whether he is a good man or a bad man, since they may both be in the same afflictions and distress, and which he opposes to the sentiments and sayings of Eliphaz and Bildad."

We can't judge based on circumstances alone. Yet that is exactly what Bildad was doing. His advice to Job was predicated on Job's admission of guilt and his need for confession. If Job only humbled himself and asked for God's forgiveness, all would be restored.

*"But if you pray to God
and seek the favor of the Almighty,
and if you are pure and live with integrity,
he will surely rise up and restore your happy home." – Job 8:5-6 NLT*

God had already recognized and commended Job for his integrity and blamelessness, but Bildad seemed to know better. He had wrongly assumed that all tragedy and sorrow were the direct result of personal sin; not just the presence of sin in the world.

Bildad pulls no punches and dares to describe his friend as godless and of being guilty of forgetting God. As far as Bildad could tell, Job was a fairweather God-follower who remained faithful as long as God blessed him with wealth and health. He viewed Job as an opportunist who sought a relationship with God only for what he could get out of it.

*“The hopes of the godless evaporate.
Their confidence hangs by a thread.
They are leaning on a spider’s web.
They cling to their home for security, but it won’t last.
They try to hold it tight, but it will not endure.” – Job 8:13-15 NLT*

Now that Job had no home in which to live, no family to love, and no semblance of health on which to rely, Bildad believed he was exposed as a fraud and a fake. He had only appeared to be blessed by God. But his problem-free world had been rocked by God and he had been brought to his knees.

*“The godless seem like a lush plant growing in the sunshine,
its branches spreading across the garden.
Its roots grow down through a pile of stones;
it takes hold on a bed of rocks.
But when it is uprooted,
it’s as though it never existed!” – Job 8:16-18 NLT*

According to the “wisdom” of Bildad, all Job had to do was stop arguing and start confessing. He truly believed that Job had a serious pride problem and it was the source of all his problems. Once he confessed, everything would turn around.

*“But look, God will not reject a person of integrity,
nor will he lend a hand to the wicked.
He will once again fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.
Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
and the home of the wicked will be destroyed.” – Job 8:20-22 NLT*

For Bildad, it was a simple black-and-white matter; Job was wicked and needed to be righteous. His lack of integrity had left him devoid of joy and laughter. His shame was his own fault. His destruction had been well-deserved.

But Bildad’s confidence didn’t make him right. In fact, he was woefully wrong and completely off-base in his assessment of Job’s situation. Yet Job's greatest dilemma was that he couldn't

defend himself. He knew he was innocent. He was convinced that he had done nothing to deserve this kind of suffering. But how could he prove it? Who was he to argue with God? But he was more than willing to argue with Bildad. Unwilling to sit back and listen to the condemning rhetoric of his friend, Job prepared to give Bildad a piece of his mind and a primer on the sovereignty of God.

Job 9:1-2**The Folly of a Faulty View of God**

¹ Then Job answered and said:

² *“Truly I know that it is so:*

But how can a man be in the right before God?

³ *If one wished to contend with him,*

one could not answer him once in a thousand times.

⁴ *He is wise in heart and mighty in strength*

—who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?—

⁵ *he who removes mountains, and they know it not,*

when he overturns them in his anger,

⁶ *who shakes the earth out of its place,*

and its pillars tremble;

⁷ *who commands the sun, and it does not rise;*

who seals up the stars;

⁸ *who alone stretched out the heavens*

and trampled the waves of the sea;

⁹ *who made the Bear and Orion,*

the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;

¹⁰ *who does great things beyond searching out,*

and marvelous things beyond number.

¹¹ *Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not;*

he moves on, but I do not perceive him.

¹² *Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back?*

Who will say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” – Job 9:1-12 ESV

Job was convinced of his own innocence, but he wasn’t quite sure how to state his case before God Almighty. Bildad had brought up the topic of God’s justice and Job took no issue with his friend’s assessment. His only point of contention was with Bildad’s insistence that he “seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy” (Job 8:5 ESV). That all sounded well and good but how was a mere man to come before the God of the universe and hope to stand a chance of declaring his own innocence? Despite his strong belief in his innocence, Job asked, “...how can a person be declared innocent in God’s sight?” (Job 9:2 NLT).

Eliphaz had boldly proclaimed, “If I were you, I would go to God and present my case to him” (Job 5:8 NLT). But Job insists that Eliphaz’s confident assertion is easier said than done.

“Yes, I know all this is true in principle.

But how can a person be declared innocent in God’s sight?

If someone wanted to take God to court,

would it be possible to answer him even once in a thousand times?

For God is so wise and so mighty.

Who has ever challenged him successfully?" – Job 9:2-4 NLT

Job found it easy to confront and contradict his two friends, but to hope to stand before God and demand a fair trial was something he couldn't fathom. He was more than confident debating Eliphaz and Bildad; after all, they were only human and were hampered by their unenlightened, earth-bound perspectives. But God is all-wise and all-knowing. As the sovereign God of the universe, He "is wise in heart and mighty in strength" (Job 9:4 ESV). How was Job supposed to come before God and hope to stand any chance of arguing his case with any success? He pessimistically concedes, "Who has ever challenged him successfully?" (Job 9:4 NLT).

In this doleful response to the counsel of his friends, Job reveals the extent of his reverence and awe for God. He displays a strong understanding of God's sovereignty but it is tinged with a hint of resignation. For Job, God was a distant and disembodied deity who was to be feared. There is no sense of intimacy or personal friendship expressed in Job's description of God. In his mind, God was the "unmoved mover," a phrase coined by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle. He wrote, "...there must be an immortal, unchanging being, ultimately responsible for all wholeness and orderliness in the sensible world" (Sach, Job. "Aristotle: Metaphysics". Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.).

Job's concept of God was that of an invisible, all-powerful deity who created the universe and was fully capable of doing with it whatever He wanted to do.

*"Without warning, he moves the mountains,
overturning them in his anger.*

*He shakes the earth from its place,
and its foundations tremble.*

*If he commands it, the sun won't rise
and the stars won't shine." – Job 9:5-7 NLT*

Job was awed by God's power but not comforted by God's presence in his life. He could not conceive of this great God giving him the time of day or listening to his pleas of innocence. Job couldn't fathom why the One who hung the stars in the heavens and maintained the order of the entire universe would ever bother to care about someone as insignificant and unimportant as him.

Job's humility is to be admired but it reveals a woeful understanding of the nature of God. His concept of God, while accurate, is incomplete. He has no idea just how much God loves and cares for him. Like his two friends, Job is blind to what is going on in the unseen realms. He is oblivious to the conversation that God had with Satan, in which the Almighty declared His pleasure with him.

“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” – Job 1:8 ESV

“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason.” – Job 2:3 ESV

Job seems to believe that his all-powerful God has no time for or interest in him. This “unmoved mover” is too busy caring for the universe to take note of some insignificant human living in the land of Uz. Job admits that God “does great things too marvelous to understand” (Job 9:10 ESV), but he concludes that God is too busy to deal with his petty problems or listen to his pleas for assistance.

Job displays an all-too-familiar concept of God that is shared by far too many believers today. This idea of a great God in the sky who has no time or interest in the billions of helpless, hopeless earth-bound creatures scurrying across the planet is alive and well today – even among professing believers. We may pray to this God, but we don’t actually believe He hears or will answer. We give lip service to His grace and goodness but live as if He is too distant or disinterested in what is going on in our lives to do anything about it. He may help others but He probably won’t help us. He keeps the lights of the universe on but He’s too busy to do anything about the darkness enveloping our lives. This pessimistic perception of God is all too prevalent in today’s world and fully embraced by many who would declare themselves to be faithful God followers.

And these very same people would wholeheartedly agree with the gloomy perception of Job.

*“...when he comes near, I cannot see him.
When he moves by, I do not see him go.
If he snatches someone in death, who can stop him?
Who dares to ask, ‘What are you doing?’” – Job 9:11-12 NLT*

But this one-dimensional view of God is unbiblical, inaccurate, and unhelpful. It paints a distorted view of God that is unmerited and diminishes His glory. The Scriptures paint a starkly different image of God.

*The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help.
He rescues them from all their troubles.
The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;
he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.*

*The righteous person faces many troubles,
but the Lord comes to the rescue each time. – Psalm 34:17-19 NLT*

*The Lord is righteous in everything he does;
 he is filled with kindness.
 The Lord is close to all who call on him,
 yes, to all who call on him in truth.
 He grants the desires of those who fear him;
 he hears their cries for help and rescues them.
 The Lord protects all those who love him... – Psalm 145:17-20 NLT*

*God is our refuge and strength,
 always ready to help in times of trouble.
 So we will not fear when earthquakes come
 and the mountains crumble into the sea.
 Let the oceans roar and foam.
 Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! – Psalm 46:1-3 NLT*

Job didn't have access to these truths. He had no Bible to open up and read about the goodness of God, so his entire understanding of God was based on his own experience. He was confined to judging God based on circumstantial evidence. In looking at his life, Job could remember a day when he was blessed by God. He had enjoyed good health, financial success, and the joy of a happy home life. His God was good and so was his life. But then, in a moment's time, all that changed. He lost everything. The blessings were replaced with curses that were unbearable and inexplicable. He couldn't understand what was going on but was firm in his belief that he had done nothing to deserve such a fate.

In hopeless resignation and spurred on by the unhelpful counsel of his two friends, Job began to draw unhealthy conclusions about God that would do more harm than good. He could only conceive of God as a righteous and unapproachable judge who had no patience or time to hear the petty complaints of a mere human. Job wanted to defend himself and testify to his own innocence but didn't believe he would get a fair hearing. His faulty view of God left him in a state of resentment and frustration because he couldn't imagine the "unmoved mover" being moved by his plight or persuaded by his pleas of innocence. And his growing resignation will result in an ever-increasing sense of despair that, left unchecked, will turn into disdain and doubt.

Job 9:13-24**When Questioning God Becomes Playing God**

¹³ *“God will not turn back his anger;
beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab.*

¹⁴ *How then can I answer him,
choosing my words with him?*

¹⁵ *Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.*

¹⁶ *If I summoned him and he answered me,
I would not believe that he was listening to my voice.*

¹⁷ *For he crushes me with a tempest
and multiplies my wounds without cause;*

¹⁸ *he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.*

¹⁹ *If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty!
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?*

²⁰ *Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.*

²¹ *I am blameless; I regard not myself;
I loathe my life.*

²² *It is all one; therefore I say,
‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’*

²³ *When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.*

²⁴ *The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the faces of its judges—
if it is not he, who then is it?” – Job 9:13-24 ESV*

Job clings tenaciously to his claim of innocence but knows that he will have a difficult time proving it in the divine court of law. He is faced with the formidable task of having to present his case before the Judge of the universe and, as far as he can see, his prospects of success are small. Taking the advice of Bildad, Job inquired of bygone ages and considered what the fathers searched out (Job 8:8). He took a look at history and came to the conclusion that God doesn't always side with the righteous. His ways are not always predictable.

Job makes mention of Rahab, likely a reference to Leviathan, a mythic creature (Job 26:12) that the Jews associated with the sea. Rahab is most often used in Scripture as a reference to the sea and God's power over it. The God who can control the oceans of the earth cannot be defeated by the rhetoric of mortal men. Job mournfully concludes, "...who am I, that I should try to answer God or even reason with him?" (Job 9:14 NLT).

The oceans bend to the will of God. The creatures of the earth must do His bidding. Nothing and no one can stand before Almighty God, so what hope does Job have of successfully stating his case and receiving justice? Even if he is right, he will be powerless before God. His words of self-defense will prove meaningless, leaving him with no other option than to plead for God's mercy.

From Job's perspective, God was the cause of all his troubles, and this conclusion led him to see no hope in arguing his case. As far as Job could see, God had made up His mind and He would not be swayed by some mortal's pathetic pleas of innocence.

*“For he attacks me with a storm
and repeatedly wounds me without cause.
He will not let me catch my breath,
but fills me instead with bitter sorrows.
If it's a question of strength, he's the strong one.
If it's a matter of justice, who dares to summon him to court?” – Job 9:17-19 NLT*

At this point in his life, Job's conception of God had become marred by his circumstances. He saw God as the divine bully in the sky who was using His superior power to taunt a weaker and undeserving victim. Job's theology had become warped by the recent events of his life. He was viewing God through eyes clouded by tears and a mind heavy with grief. Nothing made sense. God appeared to be uncaring, even callous. Job had reached the conclusion that the justice of God had less to do with righteousness and rightness than it did with His overwhelming power. Job had divorced God's justice from His goodness. In his grief, Job had decided that the only difference between God and mortal men was His undiminished sovereignty and unaccountability. God answered to no one.

Because Job understood God to be just and right, it didn't matter what he said. He could claim his innocence, but it would do no good. Job could state his case but God would ultimately win any war of words and the divine verdict would be binding and non-negotiable. This pessimistic and defeatist mentality led Job to conclude, “Innocent or wicked, it is all the same to God. That's why I say, ‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked’” (Job 9:22 NLT).

But Job was wrong. His conclusions, though heartfelt and sincere, were inaccurate. His understanding of God was flawed, having been heavily influenced by his circumstances. The Scriptures paint a starkly different image of God.

This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. – Psalm 18:30 ESV

He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is! – Deuteronomy 32:4 NLT

*“God’s way is perfect.
 All the Lord’s promises prove true.
 He is a shield for all who look to him for protection.
 For who is God except the Lord?
 Who but our God is a solid rock?” – 2 Samuel 22:31-32 NLT*

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. – Psalm 84:11 NIV

This last verse is particularly pertinent because it reminds us of God’s previous assessment of Job. The Lord had declared His servant to be “a blameless and upright man” (Job 1:8 ESV). He viewed Job as faithful and a man of integrity. But God had allowed Satan to test Job’s allegiance. The Almighty permitted the enemy to take away all that was near and dear to Job, except his life. Satan had conjectured that Job would turn his back on God if all the blessings of life were removed. And, in a way, it almost seems as if Satan was right.

Job still acknowledges the presence and power of God. He has refrained from following his wife’s advice to curse God and die. But Job does not come across as a man who has a healthy relationship with His Creator. He doesn’t seem to view the ways of God as perfect and favorable. He doesn’t refer to God as his rock, sun, or shield. And while he readily admits that God is just, Job doesn’t describe Him as faithful or fair. In fact, Job’s assessment of God is anything but favorable or optimistic.

*“When a plague sweeps through,
 he laughs at the death of the innocent.
 The whole earth is in the hands of the wicked,
 and God blinds the eyes of the judges.
 If he’s not the one who does it, who is?” – Job 9:23-24 NLT*

What makes this statement so significant is that it comes from the same lips that earlier declared, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10 ESV). Job no longer appears willing to “receive evil” from the hand of God. He has had enough and demands that his innocence be acknowledged, and his suffering come to an end. In a way, Job reveals that he knows what is best and is determined to get his way, and the only thing standing in his way is God. Whether he realizes it or not, Job has decided to play god and, in doing so, he has declared war on Yahweh. He has decided that Yahweh is unfair and ultimately, unjust in His dealings with men. Without realizing it, Job has succumbed to the same tactic that Satan used to deceive Eve in the garden. He has bought into the enemy’s tempting offer of autonomy.

“...your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.” – Genesis 3:5 NLT

Job's eyes had been "opened" by the lies of Satan and he believed that he knew what was best for himself. He decided that he was right and God was wrong. Without actually saying it, Job declared that his way would be better than God's way. His brand of justice would be superior to that of God. His definition of right and wrong was the only one to consider and his preferred outcome was the only one he would accept. But Job had a lot to learn about the justice of God, and he would soon discover that his desperate desire to play god would not improve his circumstances. The solution to his problem was not the removal of all the problems from his life. What he needed most was a healthy understanding of the character of God.

Job 9:25-35**The Stark Contrast of Two Suffering Saints**

²⁵ *“My days are swifter than a runner;
they flee away; they see no good.*

²⁶ *They go by like skiffs of reed,
like an eagle swooping on the prey.*

²⁷ *If I say, ‘I will forget my complaint,
I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer,’*

²⁸ *I become afraid of all my suffering,
for I know you will not hold me innocent.*

²⁹ *I shall be condemned;
why then do I labor in vain?*

³⁰ *If I wash myself with snow
and cleanse my hands with lye,*

³¹ *yet you will plunge me into a pit,
and my own clothes will abhor me.*

³² *For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,
that we should come to trial together.*

³³ *There is no arbiter between us,
who might lay his hand on us both.*

³⁴ *Let him take his rod away from me,
and let not dread of him terrify me.*

³⁵ *Then I would speak without fear of him,
for I am not so in myself.” – Job 9:25-35 ESV*

Job has reached the end of his rope. His persistent pain and sorrow have left him in a hopeless state with no sign of relief in sight. He can't imagine a brighter tomorrow or any hope of a reversal of his misfortunes. The days come and go, “swifter than a runner” (Job 9:25 ESV), and leave Job in an increasingly more depressed and defeated state. To make matters worse, Job has determined that God is behind it all, and he believes there is nothing he can do about it.

*“If I decided to forget my complaints,
to put away my sad face and be cheerful,
I would still dread all the pain,
for I know you will not find me innocent, O God.
Whatever happens, I will be found guilty.” – Job 9:27-29 NLT*

Even if Job could force himself to put on a happy face, he doesn't believe his lot in life will change. A forced smile won't change anything unless God is willing to pronounce him innocent, and Job doesn't think that is going to happen. For whatever reason, Job has convinced himself that God is against him. His unresolved circumstances have forced him to conclude that the Creator of the universe has it in for him, and Job feels ill-equipped to defend himself before

such an august and powerful judge. The die has been cast, the verdict has been determined, and there is nothing Job can do to alter the pre-ordained outcome of an omnipotent God. But is he right, or is there a chance that Job has misjudged the Judge of the universe?

Job pessimistically states, “Whatever happens, I will be found guilty. So what’s the use of trying?” (Job 9:29 NLT). Even if he could find someone to mediate his case before God, Job doesn’t believe the outcome will be any different. He can try to clean up his act, improve his disposition, and put on a happy face, but he honestly believes that God will not relent or renounce His guilty verdict.

Job’s sorrowful state and gloomy outlook are not unique to him. There are countless others who have reached similar conclusions when faced with comparable circumstances. It was King David who wrote:

*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief. – Psalm 22:1-2 NLT*

In a similar fashion, Heman the Ezrahite declared his dissatisfaction with God.

*O Lord, God of my salvation,
I cry out to you by day.
I come to you at night.
Now hear my prayer;
listen to my cry.
For my life is full of troubles,
and death draws near.
I am as good as dead,
like a strong man with no strength left.
They have left me among the dead,
and I lie like a corpse in a grave.
I am forgotten,
cut off from your care.
You have thrown me into the lowest pit,
into the darkest depths.
Your anger weighs me down;
with wave after wave you have engulfed me. – Psalm 88:1-7 NLT*

Heman went on to accuse God of driving away all his friends, placing him in an inescapable trap, and repeatedly rejecting him. He found himself in a place of utter darkness and despair and could not understand why God would not respond to his cries for mercy and help. At no point in Heman’s psalm does he acknowledge the goodness and grace of God. But King David is different.

David's grief is just as palpable and his despair is unrelenting and virtually unresolvable. Yet, he manages to catch glimpses of the goodness of God amid all the sorrow and pain. He is able to look back on his life and remember the many times that God had poured out His undeserved blessings.

*Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb
and led me to trust you at my mother's breast.
I was thrust into your arms at my birth.
You have been my God from the moment I was born. – Psalm 22:9-10 NLT*

David understood his birth to be a gift from God. He had been raised by a godly mother who introduced him to Yahweh at an early age and, for that, David was grateful. His pain was real and his sense of despair and desperation was great, but David remained persistent in his belief that God would hear and deliver him.

*O Lord, do not stay far away!
You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!
Save me from the sword;
spare my precious life from these dogs.
Snatch me from the lion's jaws
and from the horns of these wild oxen. – Psalm 22:19-21 NLT*

David doesn't declare his innocence or accuse God of injustice. He simply appeals to God's mercy and grace, and he promises to praise God among the assembly when deliverance inevitably comes.

*I will praise you in the great assembly.
I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you. – Psalm 22:25 NLT*

Though David's suffering was no less intense than that of Job and Heman, his outlook on God was markedly different. His pain was just as real and his despair was just as intense, but he remained hopeful. He maintained His trust in the goodness of God. Even with all that was going on in his life, he was able to speak in optimistic and hopeful terms regarding God.

*Praise the Lord, all you who fear him!
Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!
Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!
For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.
He has not turned his back on them,
but has listened to their cries for help. – Psalm 22:23-24 NLT*

David was down but not defeated. He was suffering but was still willing to find solace in the goodness of God. He was able to maintain a hint of optimism in the midst of all the sorrow because he believed that God would ultimately deliver him. He maintained a strong belief in

the faithfulness of God, so he would continue to cry out and wait for God's deliverance. David had full assurance that God hears the cries of His children and responds, and it was that belief in God's goodness that prompted David to write: "His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born. They will hear about everything he has done" (Psalm 22:31 NLT).

Job will end up saying something that gives the impression of faith but it is actually a declaration of resignation.

God might kill me, but I have no other hope.

I am going to argue my case with him. – Job 13:15 NLT

For Job, God was a last resort. He firmly believed that God might strike him dead, but he was willing to take that risk in order to defend his innocence. There is a stark difference between the theology of Job and that of David. One viewed God as his only source of hope and his ultimate executioner. The other viewed God as honorable, worthy of worship, and the ultimate source of his deliverance. David was down but not out. He was in despair but had not lost his faith in God. He cried out to God for help and promised to shout His praises when deliverance came.

Job 10:1-22**Light in the Darkness**

- ¹ *"I loathe my life;
I will give free utterance to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.*
- ² *I will say to God, Do not condemn me;
let me know why you contend against me.*
- ³ *Does it seem good to you to oppress,
to despise the work of your hands
and favor the designs of the wicked?*
- ⁴ *Have you eyes of flesh?
Do you see as man sees?*
- ⁵ *Are your days as the days of man,
or your years as a man's years,*
- ⁶ *that you seek out my iniquity
and search for my sin,*
- ⁷ *although you know that I am not guilty,
and there is none to deliver out of your hand?*
- ⁸ *Your hands fashioned and made me,
and now you have destroyed me altogether.*
- ⁹ *Remember that you have made me like clay;
and will you return me to the dust?*
- ¹⁰ *Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?*
- ¹¹ *You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.*
- ¹² *You have granted me life and steadfast love,
and your care has preserved my spirit.*
- ¹³ *Yet these things you hid in your heart;
I know that this was your purpose.*
- ¹⁴ *If I sin, you watch me
and do not acquit me of my iniquity.*
- ¹⁵ *If I am guilty, woe to me!
If I am in the right, I cannot lift up my head,
for I am filled with disgrace
and look on my affliction.*
- ¹⁶ *And were my head lifted up, you would hunt me like a lion
and again work wonders against me.*
- ¹⁷ *You renew your witnesses against me
and increase your vexation toward me;
you bring fresh troops against me.*

¹⁸ *“Why did you bring me out from the womb?
Would that I had died before any eye had seen me
¹⁹ and were as though I had not been,
carried from the womb to the grave.
²⁰ Are not my days few?
Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer
²¹ before I go—and I shall not return—
to the land of darkness and deep shadow,
²² the land of gloom like thick darkness,
like deep shadow without any order,
where light is as thick darkness.”* – Job 10:1-22 ESV

Job continues his diatribe against God, refusing to hold back his resentment for the way the Almighty has treated him. From his perspective, he has nothing to fear from being brutally honest with God. His life can't get much worse and if God has determined him to be guilty, there is little he can do about it. So, Job pulls out all the stops and levels a barrage of complaints against the One whom he has determined to be responsible for his unfortunate and undeserved circumstances.

Embittered by his unbearable suffering and loss, Job lashes out at God and demands that He explain Himself.

*“Don't simply condemn me—
tell me the charge you are bringing against me.
What do you gain by oppressing me?”* – Job 10:2-3 NLT

Job was convinced that God was responsible for his circumstances but wanted to know what he had done to deserve such treatment. He felt that God owed him an explanation for all that had transpired and was not going to shut up until God spoke up.

In his pain and confusion, Job couldn't resist the temptation to accuse God of injustice. As a child of God, he felt that he was being treated unfairly. After all, he could look around and see the ungodly getting away with all kinds of wickedness as if God had turned a blind eye. Yet, he seemed to believe that his status as a son of God was supposed to provide him with some kind of immunity from suffering and pain.

The recent events in Job's life had been totally unexpected. He had no way of understanding the severity of the losses he had endured. None of it fit into the paradigm he held of God and his understanding of human existence. As a follower of Yahweh, Job believed himself to be on the winning side. He understood himself to be the work of God's own hands and destined for blessings in this life – as long as he remained faithful. His theology led him to believe that God owed him the good life for having led a godly life, and his entire focus was fixated on the time between the womb and the tomb.

Job knew that he had a birth date and fully expected that he had a rapidly approaching death date. But he had a difficult time conceiving of anything beyond that point. In all his rantings and ravings, Job displays no concept of an afterlife. His words reveal a belief that everything that happens to a man must take place between the two bookends of birth and death. There is nothing before or after.

*“I have only a few days left, so leave me alone,
that I may have a moment of comfort
before I leave—never to return—
for the land of darkness and utter gloom.
It is a land as dark as midnight,
a land of gloom and confusion,
where even the light is dark as midnight.”* – Job 10:20-22 NLT

And that gloomy perspective led Job to regret that he was ever born. His ontology was based on a faulty understanding of how the world works. Because he lived in a temporal state, he couldn't fathom a concept like eternity. He saw nothing existing beyond the grave, simply describing it as a land of darkness, gloom, and doom. So, if the rest of his earthly life was going to be filled with nothing but trouble, he decided that death would be better than living. Non-existence would be preferable to the existential crisis in which he found himself.

Job couldn't help but state the obvious: God was responsible for his very existence, and it looked like God was intent on bringing his life to an untimely and ignominious end.

*“You formed me with your hands; you made me,
yet now you completely destroy me.
⁹Remember that you made me from dust—
will you turn me back to dust so soon?”* – Job 10:8-9 NLT

Once again, Job displays a dramatically different understanding of God than that of David. Both men understood the reality of suffering and wrestled with God's involvement in it. But David viewed his birth as a blessing and not a curse.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.* – Psalm 139:13-16 NLT

David saw the hand of God in every aspect of his life, including those less-than-pleasant moments when God's love seemed distant and difficult to comprehend. David was surrounded by wicked people who were out to take his life. He was suffering abuse and undergoing difficult circumstances, but he was able to say, "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!" (Psalm 139:18-19 NLT).

What a contrast to the woe-is-me mentality of Job. This man, when faced with difficult life circumstances, was willing to admit that God had given him life but was quick to accuse God of having it out for him.

*"You gave me life and showed me your unfailing love.
My life was preserved by your care.*

*"Yet your real motive—
your true intent—
was to watch me, and if I sinned,
you would not forgive my guilt." – Job 10:12-14 NLT*

Sadly, Job's view of God was anything but optimistic. Unlike David, he didn't perceive God as having precious thoughts about him. Rather than counting God's many blessings, Job was busy taking inventory of all his losses – and he was far from happy with the results.

*"...I am filled with shame and misery.
And if I hold my head high, you hunt me like a lion
and display your awesome power against me.
Again and again you witness against me.
You pour out your growing anger on me
and bring fresh armies against me." – Job 10:15-17 NLT*

Job had come to fear rather than revere God. He viewed God as his enemy, not his advocate. When Job looked at the future, he saw nothing but gloom. He felt completely abandoned by God and destined to a dark and dismal fate. But when faced with the inevitable difficulties of life, David reached a far different conclusion

*I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!
If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.
If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.
I could ask the darkness to hide me*

*and the light around me to become night—
but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.
To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you. – Psalm 139:7-12 NLT*

As the apostle John wrote, “God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all” (1 John 1:5 NLT). He is not the author of light, but the eliminator of it. His light shines in the darkness. David understood that darkness was an inevitable part of living in a fallen world. He was well aware of the fact that life would have its highs and lows. But he was fully confident in God’s presence and providential care. His God was with him in the good times and the bad times. David refused to allow his circumstances to determine his concept of God. But Job still had much to learn about life and the love of God.

Job 11:1-22**The Suffering Need God, Not Guilt**

¹ Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

² “Should a multitude of words go unanswered,
and a man full of talk be judged right?

³ Should your babble silence men,
and when you mock, shall no one shame you?

⁴ For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure,
and I am clean in God’s eyes.’

⁵ But oh, that God would speak
and open his lips to you,

⁶ and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!
For he is manifold in understanding.

Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

⁷ “Can you find out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?

⁸ It is higher than heaven—what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?

⁹ Its measure is longer than the earth
and broader than the sea.

¹⁰ If he passes through and imprisons
and summons the court, who can turn him back?

¹¹ For he knows worthless men;
when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?

¹² But a stupid man will get understanding
when a wild donkey’s colt is born a man!

¹³ “If you prepare your heart,
you will stretch out your hands toward him.

¹⁴ If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away,
and let not injustice dwell in your tents.

¹⁵ Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish;
you will be secure and will not fear.

¹⁶ You will forget your misery;
you will remember it as waters that have passed away.

¹⁷ And your life will be brighter than the noonday;
its darkness will be like the morning.

¹⁸ And you will feel secure, because there is hope;
you will look around and take your rest in security.

¹⁹ You will lie down, and none will make you afraid;

*many will court your favor.
²⁰ But the eyes of the wicked will fail;
 all way of escape will be lost to them,
 and their hope is to breathe their last.” – Job 11:1-22 ESV*

After Job finished his gloomy response to Bildad’s less-than-encouraging speech, he had to hear from the third friend who had been waiting in the wings and eagerly biding his time until he could put in his two cents. And Zophar wasted no time in delivering a stinging indictment against Job, filled with carefully worded one-liners that he hoped would shake his friend out of his self-righteous self-denial and force him to confess his obvious guilt.

Zophar, like his friends before him, had taken a look at Job's circumstances and concluded that Job had done something terribly wrong. He was being punished by God for his sins and all Job had to do was confess and change his behavior. According to Zophar, if Job follows his advice, God will forgive and restore him.

Sounds great, but there's only one problem. Job is innocent. He has done nothing wrong to deserve all that has happened to him. He has done nothing of which to repent. He is confused, hurt, alone, and suffering from unimaginable grief. And all he gets from his friends is accusations of his guilt.

Zophar takes the rhetoric to a whole new level, accusing Job of being deceitful, evil, and witless.

*"Surely he [God] recognizes deceitful men; and when he sees evil, does he not take note?
 But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can be born a
 man." – Job 11:11-12 NIV*

In Zophar's mind, Job is nothing more than a dimwitted, stubborn sinner who refuses to admit his guilt. In Zophar's world, all pain and suffering were tied to sin. Righteous men don't suffer. Good men don't lose all their worldly wealth. Sinless men don't have all their kids killed in a single freak accident. Therefore, Job was NOT a righteous man. Case closed.

But once again, Zophar didn't have all the facts. He was operating off of conjecture and faulty conclusions. The one thing he should have known or at least assumed is that God is in control. But the issue was not whether God had caused what had happened to Job; it was that God was aware and that He cared. Zophar would have been much more helpful if he had simply reminded Job that only God knew the real reason behind his suffering. He should have counseled Job to take his situation to God because only He could provide answers and assistance. The simple truth is that if Job had sinned, God would reveal it to him. If Job was innocent, God would ultimately disclose the reason behind his suffering. Bottom line? There was a purpose behind it all, and God was the key to discovering that purpose.

But instead, Zophar continued to berate and belittle his friend, accusing him of mocking God with his false claims of innocence. Zophar was completely convinced that Job was an

unabashed liar who refused to acknowledge his obvious guilt. And he is so self-assured in his assessment that he has the audacity to tell Job, “Listen! God is doubtless punishing you far less than you deserve!” (Job 11:6 NLT). His analysis of the situation has produced an iron-clad guilty verdict.

Zophar had reached what to him was a logical conclusion. God was all-wise and could see into the lives of all men. There was nothing hidden from His sight. While Job’s life had given the outward appearance of righteousness, it must have contained hidden secrets of which only God was aware. Now God was exposing Job’s sins by inflicting judgment.

*“If God comes and puts a person in prison
or calls the court to order, who can stop him?
For he knows those who are false,
and he takes note of all their sins.” – Job 11:10-11 NLT*

Convinced that his conclusion was the right one, all Zophar could recommend was repentance.

*“If only you would prepare your heart
and lift up your hands to him in prayer!
Get rid of your sins,
and leave all iniquity behind you.” – Job 11:13 NLT*

But Zophar couldn’t see into Job’s heart. He had no way of knowing what Job had done or said that might have led to his fall from grace. In fact, he had no proof whatsoever that Job had done anything worthy of God’s judgment. Yet, on nothing more than flimsy facts and faulty conclusions, he labeled his friend as a babbler and an empty-headed person. When Job needed love, Zophar delivered demeaning labels and callous calls to repent or suffer further judgment from the hand of God.

But despite all his pain, Job knew that God was there. He called out to Him. He appealed to Him. He acknowledged that God had created him (Job 10:8-9). But Job was confused. He clung to his innocence but was having a hard time understanding why he was having to endure all this pain. He was going through a terrible time of questioning and doubt. He needed comfort and all he got was caustic counseling from those who claimed to be his friends. He needed empathy but all he got was impatient demands that he confess his hidden sins.

Job's suffering was so intense that he longed for death. At this point in his life, he needed friends who would point him to the mercy, grace, and sovereign power of God. He needed guides to God, not the grand inquisition. He needed to be reminded that God loves him, not loathes him. The only remedy for anyone's pain and heartache is God. We need to point them to Him.

*When darkness falls
Temptations call*

*And all around me seems undone
 You hear my pleas
 Supply my needs
 And tell me of Your wondrous love*

*You are the joy in my morning
 You're my song of praise
 Just like the new day dawning
 Flooding my world with grace*

*Though trials come
 And every one
 Can take me further from Your truth
 You calm my fears
 Dry all my tears
 And draw me closer, Lord, to You*

*In You there's no shadow of turning
 Constant in all Your ways
 You're growing my faith
 And I'm learning to lean
 On You all of my days*

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Reading the words of Zophar reminds me that I need to be a friend who points others to God, instead of always trying to point out their faults or their sins. He alone knows their hearts, and only He can diagnose their condition and heal their hurts. I am simply a guide who can point them to God as they wander in the darkness of their circumstance.

The other lesson to be learned from this passage is to take my pain and suffering to God. In the midst of the pain that enters my own life, I should always turn to Him first. And when I find that difficult to do, I pray that God will bring friends into my life who will remind me of His love, grace, and mercy.

Job 12:1-25**Consider the Source**

¹ Then Job answered and said:

² “No doubt you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you.

³ But I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know such things as these?

⁴ I am a laughingstock to my friends;
I, who called to God and he answered me,
a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock.

⁵ In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune;
it is ready for those whose feet slip.

⁶ The tents of robbers are at peace,
and those who provoke God are secure,
who bring their god in their hand.

⁷ “But ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you;

⁸ or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

⁹ Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?

¹⁰ In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of all mankind.

¹¹ Does not the ear test words
as the palate tastes food?

¹² Wisdom is with the aged,
and understanding in length of days.

¹³ “With God are wisdom and might;
he has counsel and understanding.

¹⁴ If he tears down, none can rebuild;
if he shuts a man in, none can open.

¹⁵ If he withholds the waters, they dry up;
if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.

¹⁶ With him are strength and sound wisdom;
the deceived and the deceiver are his.

¹⁷ He leads counselors away stripped,
and judges he makes fools.

¹⁸ He looses the bonds of kings

- and binds a waistcloth on their hips.*
- ¹⁹ *He leads priests away stripped
and overthrows the mighty.*
- ²⁰ *He deprives of speech those who are trusted
and takes away the discernment of the elders.*
- ²¹ *He pours contempt on princes
and loosens the belt of the strong.*
- ²² *He uncovers the deeps out of darkness
and brings deep darkness to light.*
- ²³ *He makes nations great, and he destroys them;
he enlarges nations, and leads them away.*
- ²⁴ *He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth
and makes them wander in a trackless waste.*
- ²⁵ *They grope in the dark without light,
and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.” – Job 12:1-25 ESV*

Job has just had to listen to a third “friend” share his unsympathetic assessment of his circumstances, and he can’t keep from responding. He probably knew his friends meant well, but he was in no mood to listen to more of these arm-chair quarterbacks as they pontificated about his plight.

For Job, the idea that God was somehow responsible for his condition was a no-brainer. Whether or not God was behind his difficult circumstances was not the issue. He firmly believed that God was in control and so, ultimately, God was responsible. God could have prevented the disasters and the disease that had impacted Job’s life, but He had chosen not to. Job fully understood the power and might of God. He knew that God was providentially in control over the affairs of all men – rich and poor, strong and weak, righteous and unrighteous. Job’s belief in the sovereignty of God was unshakeable.

“True wisdom and real power belong to God; from him we learn how to live, and also what to live for. If he tears something down, it’s down for good; if he locks people up, they’re locked up for good. If he holds back the rain, there’s a drought; if he lets it loose, there’s a flood. Strength and success belong to God; both deceived and deceiver must answer to him.” – Job 12:13-15 MSG

So, Job knew that God alone could provide the answer as to why he was suffering, and he was fully convinced that it had nothing to do with his sin. Yet Job’s friends had reached a different conclusion. They kept blaming his condition on his sinfulness but couldn't tell him exactly what he had done to deserve such harsh judgment from God.

Job was convinced of his own innocence, and he was certain that God would have to agree. Which means there had to be another reason for his suffering. All he wanted was the chance to ask God face-to-face. So, he pushed back hard on Zophar’s counsel and sarcastically questioned his friends’ over-confident assertions regarding his guilt.

*“You people really know everything, don’t you?
And when you die, wisdom will die with you!
Well, I know a few things myself—
and you’re no better than I am.
Who doesn’t know these things you’ve been saying?” – Job 12:2-3 NLT*

He wasn’t going to argue with their thoughts concerning God’s omnipotence and omniscience. It was their cocky assurance regarding his guilt that drove him crazy. They were actually mocking him for attempting to demand an explanation from God. From their perspective, God owed him nothing and he was wasting his breath and his time pleading for God to come to his defense. That day was never going to come. But that didn’t keep Job from declaring his frustration with God’s apparent disinterest in his plight. He saw the wicked receiving better treatment from God, while he was kept in the dark and denied a response to his pleas for acquittal and restoration.

*“...robbers are left in peace,
and those who provoke God live in safety—
though God keeps them in his power.” – Job 12:6 NLT*

All he was asking for was a fair shake. Even the animals, birds, and fish enjoyed were the unwitting and undeserving beneficiaries of God’s grace, so why was he denied the right to a response and the hope of a fair trial?

*“...the life of every living thing is in his hand,
and the breath of every human being.” – Job 12:10 NLT*

As far as he could tell, the rest of nature seemed to get a fair shake from the Creator, while he was left to suffer in insufferable silence. Job was hoping for vindication, but was willing to settle for a little justification from God for his plight. Job didn’t think his friends were stupid, but he also didn’t think they had a monopoly on wisdom. That was the purview of God.

*“Wisdom belongs to the aged,
and understanding to the old.*

*“But true wisdom and power are found in God;
counsel and understanding are his.” – Job 12:12-13 NLT*

His friends could continue to regale him with all their earthly wit and wisdom but he wouldn’t be satisfied until he heard directly from the source of all wisdom: God Almighty. Compared to God, every other counselor is nothing but a hapless fool spouting man-made platitudes and helpless homilies.

*“Yes, strength and wisdom are his;
deceivers and deceived are both in his power.*

*He leads counselors away, stripped of good judgment;
wise judges become fools.” – Job 12:16-17 NLT*

From Job’s perspective, listening to his three friends was a royal waste of time because they were clueless as to what was really going on. They couldn’t provide any real insight into his circumstances because their point of view was hampered by their earth-bound perspectives. And Job warned them that God would ultimately expose them as frauds rather than faithful friends.

*“He silences the trusted adviser
and removes the insight of the elders.” – Job 12:20 NLT*

When exposed to the penetrating light of God’s wisdom, their wonderful words of advice would wither like weeds in the hot midday sun. Job truly believed that he would one day be vindicated by God and his friends would learn just how wrong they had been.

*“He strips kings of understanding
and leaves them wandering in a pathless wasteland.
They grope in the darkness without a light.
He makes them stagger like drunkards.” – Job 12:24-25 NLT*

But Job maintained his confidence in the goodness of God, and expressed his firm belief that God’s light would eventually shine on his life again and make sense of all the madness.

*“He uncovers mysteries hidden in darkness;
he brings light to the deepest gloom.” – Job 12:22 NLT*

But in the meantime, Job maintained his right to state his case before the Judge of the universe. All he was asking for was a fair trial. He was willing to accept whatever sentence God might mete out, but what he couldn’t take was God’s continued silence.

Job 13:1-28**The Unparalleled Patience of God**

- ¹ *“Behold, my eye has seen all this,
my ear has heard and understood it.*
- ² *What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.*
- ³ *But I would speak to the Almighty,
and I desire to argue my case with God.*
- ⁴ *As for you, you whitewash with lies;
worthless physicians are you all.*
- ⁵ *Oh that you would keep silent,
and it would be your wisdom!*
- ⁶ *Hear now my argument
and listen to the pleadings of my lips.*
- ⁷ *Will you speak falsely for God
and speak deceitfully for him?*
- ⁸ *Will you show partiality toward him?
Will you plead the case for God?*
- ⁹ *Will it be well with you when he searches you out?
Or can you deceive him, as one deceives a man?*
- ¹⁰ *He will surely rebuke you
if in secret you show partiality.*
- ¹¹ *Will not his majesty terrify you,
and the dread of him fall upon you?*
- ¹² *Your maxims are proverbs of ashes;
your defenses are defenses of clay.*
- ¹³ *“Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.*
- ¹⁴ *Why should I take my flesh in my teeth
and put my life in my hand?*
- ¹⁵ *Though he slay me, I will hope in him;
yet I will argue my ways to his face.*
- ¹⁶ *This will be my salvation,
that the godless shall not come before him.*
- ¹⁷ *Keep listening to my words,
and let my declaration be in your ears.*
- ¹⁸ *Behold, I have prepared my case;
I know that I shall be in the right.*
- ¹⁹ *Who is there who will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.*
- ²⁰ *Only grant me two things,*

then I will not hide myself from your face:
²¹ *withdraw your hand far from me,*
and let not dread of you terrify me.
²² *Then call, and I will answer;*
or let me speak, and you reply to me.
²³ *How many are my iniquities and my sins?*
Make me know my transgression and my sin.
²⁴ *Why do you hide your face*
and count me as your enemy?
²⁵ *Will you frighten a driven leaf*
and pursue dry chaff?
²⁶ *For you write bitter things against me*
and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth.
²⁷ *You put my feet in the stocks*
and watch all my paths;
you set a limit for the soles of my feet.
²⁸ *Man wastes away like a rotten thing,*
like a garment that is moth-eaten.” – Job 13:1-28 ESV

Job is just getting started. Warming to his topic, Job lets Zophar know that his impassioned speech provided no new information. His friend had produced no new details or insights into his circumstances that would persuade Job to change his mind. And he was more insistent than ever about demanding answers from God.

He tells his friends, "I'm taking my case straight to God Almighty; I've had it with you – I'm going directly to God" (Job 13:3 MSG). He is done listening to them and he tells them so.

"You graffiti my life with lies. You're a bunch of pompous quacks! I wish you'd shut your mouths – silence is your only claim to wisdom." – Job 13:4-5 MSG

Job wants to go directly to the source of his only hope and help – God Himself. His friends, with their poor bedside manners, have been more hurtful than helpful. Job knows they can't answer his questions or solve his problem. So he turns to God and asks, "O God, grant me these two things, and then I will be able to face you. Remove your heavy hand from me, and don't terrify me with your awesome presence." (Job 13:20-21 NLT).

I love Job's brutal honesty. He doesn't hide his request with fancy "thees" and "thous." He doesn't mask his frustration with flowery prose or pious-sounding prayer speech. He just tells God exactly what's on his heart. He asks for relief and answers.

What a reminder that we have a God who is big enough to handle our toughest questions. He can handle the honest and heartfelt expression of our frustration. In fact, I believe God would rather have us be honest with Him than watch us cover up our fears and frustrations with religious-sounding platitudes that we don't believe or understand.

In the middle of a trial in which things are going severely wrong and your frustration is mounting, I don't think God wants to hear you say, "Oh, Mighty God, maker of all things and ruler over all mankind, thank you for putting me through all this pain and suffering. Thank you for all the hurt and the heartache! You are a good God!"

God knows our hearts. He knows what we are thinking, and He wants us to share with Him what is on our hearts. He can handle our honesty, but He can't stand our poor attempts at false faithfulness. If we can give God a heartfelt, "I trust You!," so be it. But we often express words to God that we don't feel or believe. Job was telling God exactly what he was feeling. And tough times tend to make us more honest. During trials, it is harder to keep up the fake veneer of faithfulness. Job's faith was being tested and he was looking for answers, for proof. So, he turned to God.

Psalms 119 could have been written by Job. It is full of honest expressions of fear, frustration, doubt, and disenchantment. But the writer of Psalms 119 knew he could turn to God and openly express his feelings.

*I have chosen to be faithful;
I have determined to live by your regulations.
I cling to your laws.
Lord, don't let me be put to shame!
I will pursue your commands,
for you expand my understanding.*

*Teach me your decrees, O Lord;
I will keep them to the end. – Psalms 119:30-33 NLT*

Job's world had been rocked. His entire belief system was in shambles because everything he thought he knew about God had been turned upside down. And his friends were proving to be unreliable sources of comfort or wise counsel. They were painting blurry and indecipherable images of God that only intensified Job's confusion and pain. He had become so disenchanting with their input that he pleaded with them to cease and desist.

*"Be silent now and leave me alone.
Let me speak, and I will face the consequences.
Why should I put myself in mortal danger
and take my life in my own hands?
God might kill me, but I have no other hope.
I am going to argue my case with him." – Job 14:13-15 NLT*

To put it bluntly, Job wanted his friends to shut up and God to show up. He was more than willing to take his chances with God, and he would even risk having God expose whatever sin he had committed.

*“Tell me, what have I done wrong?
Show me my rebellion and my sin.” – Job 13:23 NLT*

In essence, Job is demanding a court date with God. He wanted the opportunity to defend himself before the only one who had the power to convict or acquit him. From Job’s point of view, God had no grounds for punishing him. He believed himself to be innocent and unworthy of all the judgments he had received. Something was wrong. A mistake had been made. And he couldn’t help but ask, “Why do you turn away from me? Why do you treat me as your enemy?” (Job 13:24 NLT).

As far as Job could tell, the only indictments God could level against him were from the past. He even seems to accuse God of cherry-picking from his past and dredging up old transgressions that had long ago been forgiven and forgotten.

*“You write bitter accusations against me
and bring up all the sins of my youth.” – Job 13:26 NLT*

In a way, Job was complaining that he had been declared guilty by God and was being forced to prove his own innocence. But he was frustrated about the lack of access to the courtroom of God. There had been plenty of witnesses called by the prosecution, but Job was still waiting for his opportunity to stand before the Judge of the universe and defend himself.

Job was calling on God, but his words were rife with bold accusations and unsubstantiated assumptions. He had come to the right source, but he was doing so in a less-than-righteous manner. But as time will reveal, God was more than willing to let Job vent his frustration and level his charges. The Almighty was not intimidated by Job’s harsh words or easily offended by his brutal honesty. God understood that Job’s caustic comments were flowing from the deep well of his grief and confusion. And, for the time being, God was willing to allow Job the freedom to speak bluntly and rather disrespectfully. Job’s words didn’t shock God and the accusatory manner of this down-and-out servant didn’t bring down the wrath of God. God knew Job needed to vent and He was willing to wait Job had said all he had to say.

In time, Job would learn the invaluable lesson found in the following psalm of David.

*The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
He will not constantly accuse us,
nor remain angry forever.
He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.
For his unfailing love toward those who fear him
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. – Psalm 103:8-11 NLT*

Job 14:1-22**The Hope of the Resurrection**

- ¹ *“Man who is born of a woman
is few of days and full of trouble.*
- ² *He comes out like a flower and withers;
he flees like a shadow and continues not.*
- ³ *And do you open your eyes on such a one
and bring me into judgment with you?*
- ⁴ *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?
There is not one.*
- ⁵ *Since his days are determined,
and the number of his months is with you,
and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass,*
- ⁶ *look away from him and leave him alone,
that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day.*
- ⁷ *“For there is hope for a tree,
if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that its shoots will not cease.*
- ⁸ *Though its root grow old in the earth,
and its stump die in the soil,*
- ⁹ *yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put out branches like a young plant.*
- ¹⁰ *But a man dies and is laid low;
man breathes his last, and where is he?*
- ¹¹ *As waters fail from a lake
and a river wastes away and dries up,*
- ¹² *so a man lies down and rises not again;
till the heavens are no more he will not awake
or be roused out of his sleep.*
- ¹³ *Oh that you would hide me in Sheol,
that you would conceal me until your wrath be past,
that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!*
- ¹⁴ *If a man dies, shall he live again?
All the days of my service I would wait,
till my renewal should come.*
- ¹⁵ *You would call, and I would answer you;
you would long for the work of your hands.*
- ¹⁶ *For then you would number my steps;
you would not keep watch over my sin;*
- ¹⁷ *my transgression would be sealed up in a bag,
and you would cover over my iniquity.*

- ¹⁸ *“But the mountain falls and crumbles away,
and the rock is removed from its place;
¹⁹ the waters wear away the stones;
the torrents wash away the soil of the earth;
so you destroy the hope of man.
²⁰ You prevail forever against him, and he passes;
you change his countenance, and send him away.
²¹ His sons come to honor, and he does not know it;
they are brought low, and he perceives it not.
²² He feels only the pain of his own body,
and he mourns only for himself.”* – Job 14:1-22 ESV

Job has reached the far-from-optimistic conclusion that life is short and then you die. Through the pain-clouded lens of his own life, he has determined that the time span from birth to death is a relatively short one and the period in between is filled with troubles of all kinds. But his dour assessment does not provide an accurate reflection of his own life. Up until recently, he had enjoyed a trouble-free existence, complete with wealth, good health, and a vibrant family life. He had been a respected member of the community and was considered “the greatest of all the people of the east” (Job 1:3 ESV). But then tragedy struck. In a series of bizarre disasters, Job endured the loss of his fortune, the deaths of his ten children, and the failure of his health. And the sheer emotional weight of these unexpected and unexplained losses led Job to reach his inaccurate but very heartfelt conclusion.

Because of all that had happened in his life, Job was having a difficult time remembering the “good old days.” His memory was clouded by his pain. His ability to recall the many years of blessing had been greatly diminished by the severity of his most recent losses. He was living in the moment and evaluating the success of his entire life through tear-stained eyes and a broken heart. We may judge his view as myopic and self-centered but his words were coming from a place of pain. That is what led him to be so brutally blunt with God.

*“You have decided the length of our lives.
You know how many months we will live,
and we are not given a minute longer.
So leave us alone and let us rest!
We are like hired hands, so let us finish our work in peace.”* – Job 14:5-6 NLT

His unabashed honesty with God makes us uncomfortable. We can’t imagine getting away with that kind of in-your-face approach to God. Yet, there have probably been times when we have thought what Job dared to say. On those occasions, we felt the desire to shake our fists in the face of God and declare our dissatisfaction with His handling of our lives. But lacking the boldness of Job, we just kept our thoughts to ourselves and weathered the storm.

But Job wasn’t willing to back down or shut up. He felt like he had been backed into a corner and was being falsely attacked by his friends. His integrity was under assault. Not only had he

lost everything near and dear to him, but he was being systematically robbed of his reputation. Still reeling from his most recent losses, Job was having to sit back and listen as his name was dragged through the mud by his supposed friends. And it was all too much for him to bear. That's what drove him to take his case to God. That's what emboldened him to say things that make us gasp in shock.

*"I wish you would hide me in the grave
and forget me there until your anger has passed.
But mark your calendar to think of me again!" – Job 14:13 NLT*

Job was asking God to kill him. He would rather die than continue to endure the sorrow and suffering that marked his earthly existence. He saw no light at the end of the tunnel. There was no silver lining to the dark cloud that had settled over his life. He had lost all hope and was desperately pleading with God to intervene; to do something, anything to relieve his pain. Even death would be preferable to more despair.

In his monologue, Job reveals a rather embryonic and as-yet-incomplete understanding of the afterlife. He seems to believe in a life after death but is not quite sure what it entails. His mention of Sheol is a reference to the grave. He knows his life will end in death but is not certain of what will happen next. He hints at a belief in some kind of resurrection or release from Sheol or the grave.

*"Can the dead live again?
If so, this would give me hope through all my years of struggle,
and I would eagerly await the release of death." – Job 14:14 NLT*

If he could be certain of life after death, he would have reason to hope. But for Job, death was like a door that opened into an unknown realm. He didn't know what was beyond the threshold of death, so all he could do was focus his attention on this life. And from his vantage point, the future was far from bright.

Job wanted to believe in a resurrection from the dead. The concept was comforting and encouraging.

*"You would call and I would answer,
and you would yearn for me, your handiwork.
For then you would guard my steps,
instead of watching for my sins.
My sins would be sealed in a pouch,
and you would cover my guilt." – Job 14:15-17 NLT*

He envisioned God calling him from the grave and restoring him to life. He imagined his past sins being forgiven and forgotten by God as he began his new resurrected life in the presence of

God. But then his pessimism kicks back in and he reverts to his old tried-and-true, dark-and-gloomy view of life.

*“But instead, as mountains fall and crumble
and as rocks fall from a cliff,
as water wears away the stones
and floods wash away the soil,
so you destroy people’s hope.” – Job 14:18-19 NLT*

Job couldn’t bring himself to see past the present. His world was relegated to the here and now, which kept him from believing in any kind of hereafter. With his myopic outlook on life, he couldn’t imagine a better tomorrow or the possibility of a blessed eternal state.

This poor man had reached rock bottom. He was depressed, distressed, disappointed, and totally devoid of all hope. His final statement in this morbid monologue reflects the depth of his despair.

*“You always overpower them, and they pass from the scene.
You disfigure them in death and send them away.
They never know if their children grow up in honor
or sink to insignificance.
They suffer painfully;
their life is full of trouble.” – Job 14:20-22 NLT*

As far as Job could tell, death was a dead end. He had no assurance of a future resurrection, so he assumed the worst. For Job, death was a black hole from which he would lose all touch with this world. From his gloomy perspective, Job assumes that the dead can’t look back and see what happens to their loved ones. From their vantage point in Sheol, the dead don’t have access to this world. They can’t watch their grandchildren grow up. They don’t have the hope of looking back and seeing their loved ones carry on after their deaths. This sullen outlook about the future led Job to view his current circumstances with even greater despair.

Job saw the grave as his only escape from the pain of this life but, at the same time, it filled him with fear because he didn’t know what lay beyond death’s door. Job didn’t know what the apostle Paul knew. He wasn’t privy to the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. He was living on the other side of the cross. But as New Testament believers, we can find hope, assurance, and peace in the words that Paul penned.

But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

*“Death is swallowed up in victory.
O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”*

For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 NLT

Job 15:1-16**A Time to Listen and Love**

¹ *Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:*

² *“Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge,
and fill his belly with the east wind?*

³ *Should he argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which he can do no good?*

⁴ *But you are doing away with the fear of God
and hindering meditation before God.*

⁵ *For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.*

⁶ *Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you.*

⁷ *“Are you the first man who was born?
Or were you brought forth before the hills?*

⁸ *Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?*

⁹ *What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear to us?*

¹⁰ *Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,
older than your father.*

¹¹ *Are the comforts of God too small for you,
or the word that deals gently with you?*

¹² *Why does your heart carry you away,
and why do your eyes flash,*

¹³ *that you turn your spirit against God
and bring such words out of your mouth?*

¹⁴ *What is man, that he can be pure?
Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?*

¹⁵ *Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not pure in his sight;*

¹⁶ *how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
a man who drinks injustice like water!” – Job 15:1-16 ESV*

Eliphaz has heard enough. Having listened to Job’s lengthy diatribe, Eliphaz decides to speak up again and delivers a second speech aimed at exposing his friend’s pride and arrogance. He can’t believe the cockiness and overconfidence that Job displays. How can any man declare himself to be innocent in the eyes of God?

While Eliphaz tries to come across as defending the integrity of God, he seems more concerned about his own reputation. He has taken Job's words personally and determined that his own integrity as a friend and a counselor has come under attack. How dare Job reject the advice of such learned men as Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar? He is so upset that he describes Job as a veritable blowhard who spews mindless rhetoric and rejects the wise counsel of his betters.

*"You are nothing but a windbag.
The wise don't engage in empty chatter.
What good are such words?" – Job 15:2-3 NLT*

Eliphaz is careful to keep God at the center of his argument, accusing Job of having no fear or reverence for the Lord. He wants to paint Job as an angry apostate whose very words condemn and convict him. The very fact that Job can so easily rail against the Almighty is ample proof that he is guilty as charged.

*"Your sins are telling your mouth what to say.
Your words are based on clever deception.
Your own mouth condemns you, not I.
Your own lips testify against you." – Job 15:5-6 NLT*

But it becomes readily apparent that Eliphaz's real point of contention is Job's refusal to take his advice. This has become a personal matter.

*"What do you know that we don't?
What do you understand that we do not?
On our side are aged, gray-haired men
much older than your father!" – Job 15:9-10 NLT*

Eliphaz pulls out the wisdom-is-the-purview-of-the-elderly card. Evidently, either he or one of his companions is older and, therefore, wiser. than Job. Or else he may be suggesting that he's shared the facts surrounding Job's case with other sages and received their endorsement of his conclusions. Either way, Eliphaz seems to believe that he has the upper hand in the debate over Job's guilt or innocence.

He doesn't believe that Job has some kind of special knowledge or direct access to God's divine will. So, Job has no right to reject the counsel of his more learned and experienced peers. Eliphaz can't understand the flippancy and callousness with which Job addresses God. How can this obvious sinner talk to God in the way that he does? As far as Eliphaz can tell, Job's words provide all the proof necessary to reach a verdict of guilt.

*"Is God's comfort too little for you?
Is his gentle word not enough?
What has taken away your reason?
What has weakened your vision,*

*that you turn against God
and say all these evil things?” – Job 15:11-13 NLT*

Eliphaz is totally convinced of Job’s guilt and refuses to consider any other option. He views his friend as “a corrupt and sinful person with a thirst for wickedness” (Job 15:16 NLT), and nothing is going to change his mind.

But where is the compassion? Why can’t Eliphaz manage to muster up any empathy or sympathy for his suffering friend? In Proverbs 15:4, the words of Solomon seem to have been written with Eliphaz and his friends in mind.

*Gentle words are a tree of life;
a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*

The Message puts it this way: *Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim.*

In one of his psalms, David described wicked people as those who “plot evil in their hearts and stir up trouble all day long. Their tongues sting like a snake; the venom of a viper drips from their lips” (Psalm 140:2-3 NLT). How is it that Job’s friends have become so caustic and condescending? Why have they chosen to dial up the rhetoric and intensify their attacks on Job’s integrity?

Eliphaz has transformed from a well-meaning friend to a full-fledged adversary. He is on the attack and seems frustrated at Job's continued claims of innocence.

Eliphaz and his companions are now on a mission to convince Job of his guilt and they will stop at nothing to accomplish that objective. Any concern they may have had for Job's feelings is long gone. This has gotten personal. They know they are right, which means Job is wrong. He just refuses to admit it. But they are not going to give up easily. They tell Job he is wicked, deceived, defiant, stubborn, and doomed if he doesn't confess his guilt. They will even go so far as to blame the deaths of Job's children on his sinfulness. They will attempt to soften their words by using farming metaphors (shriveled weeds, a vine whose grapes are harvested before they are ripe, an olive tree that sheds its blossoms so the fruit cannot form, etc.), but the pain hurts just as bad. Now Job not only has to mourn the loss of all his children, but he must also listen to accusations that he is the one responsible for their deaths.

What can we learn from this? What lessons are there in this passage for us? The simple one seems to be the destructive power of our tongues. We can use them to encourage and heal or to discourage and do lasting harm. Sometimes we may not mean to hurt others with our words, but when we fail to think before we speak, we can end up doing lasting damage. Job’s friends could have used the advice of James.

*My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. –
James 1:19 NASB*

They weren't willing to listen to Job and they didn't seem interested in what God might have to say about the situation. They had already reached their conclusion, and when Job refused to agree with their assessment, they became angry. And their anger led to even harsher words for their suffering friend.

These exchanges between Job and his friends remind me of the remarkable power contained in my own words. With them, I can bring about blessing or cursing. I can use them to build up or tear down. I can speak words of kindness and compassion, or I can speak words of criticism and accusation. Job needed true friends who cared more for his heart than for their need to be right. He needed compassion, not correction.

I am reminded of that famous passage from the pen of Solomon:

*For everything there is a season,
 a time for every activity under heaven.
 A time to be born and a time to die.
 A time to plant and a time to harvest.
 A time to kill and a time to heal.
 A time to tear down and a time to build up.
 A time to cry and a time to laugh.
 A time to grieve and a time to dance.
 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.
 A time to embrace and a time to turn away.
 A time to search and a time to quit searching.
 A time to keep and a time to throw away.
A time to tear and a time to mend.
A time to be quiet and a time to speak.
A time to love and a time to hate.
 A time for war and a time for peace. – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NLT*

There's a right time for everything, and the time was right for Job's friends to shut up, listen up, and lift up. May each of us learn to know the difference.

Job 15-17-35**Quick to Listen and Slow to Speak**

¹⁷ *"I will show you; hear me,
and what I have seen I will declare*
¹⁸ *(what wise men have told,
without hiding it from their fathers,
¹⁹ to whom alone the land was given,
and no stranger passed among them).*
²⁰ *The wicked man writhes in pain all his days,
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless.*
²¹ *Dreadful sounds are in his ears;
in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him.*
²² *He does not believe that he will return out of darkness,
and he is marked for the sword.*
²³ *He wanders abroad for bread, saying, 'Where is it?'*
He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand;
²⁴ *distress and anguish terrify him;
they prevail against him, like a king ready for battle.*
²⁵ *Because he has stretched out his hand against God
and defies the Almighty,*
²⁶ *running stubbornly against him
with a thickly bossed shield;*
²⁷ *because he has covered his face with his fat
and gathered fat upon his waist*
²⁸ *and has lived in desolate cities,
in houses that none should inhabit,
which were ready to become heaps of ruins;*
²⁹ *he will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure,
nor will his possessions spread over the earth;*
³⁰ *he will not depart from darkness;
the flame will dry up his shoots,
and by the breath of his mouth he will depart.*
³¹ *Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself,
for emptiness will be his payment.*
³² *It will be paid in full before his time,
and his branch will not be green.*
³³ *He will shake off his unripe grape like the vine,
and cast off his blossom like the olive tree.*
³⁴ *For the company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tents of bribery.*
³⁵ *They conceive trouble and give birth to evil,
and their womb prepares deceit."* – Job 15:17-35 ESV

Eliphaz has a way with words but it would be difficult to describe him as an encourager. He has a gift for crafting well-worded sentences that paint vivid images in the mind, yet do little to lift up the spirits of the one to whom they're directed. This guy is a veritable factory of one-liners and memorable word pictures. His vocabulary is impressive, as is his ability to string together powerfully worded indictments that masquerade as well-intended counsel to his afflicted friend.

His gift of persuasion is hard to argue with and one can almost find themselves nodding their head in agreement as he waxes eloquent about Job's guilt and his need for repentance. After all, he seems to know what he's talking about and even claims to have plenty of hard-earned personal experience that lends him credibility and authority in the matter.

*"If you will listen, I will show you.
I will answer you from my own experience.
And it is confirmed by the reports of wise men
who have heard the same thing from their fathers—
from those to whom the land was given
long before any foreigners arrived."* – Job 15:17-19 NLT

He claims to be backed by the wisdom of the ages, so his advice should be heeded and his words should go unchallenged. For Job to try and refute Eliphaz's counsel would be to reject generations of proven insight into the human experience. He would be standing opposed to centuries worth of collective knowledge and stubbornly rejecting the tried-and-true insights of the sages.

How is Job supposed to withstand that kind of withering assault on his innocence? If he continues to hold his ground and stubbornly cling to his blamelessness, he will only add fuel to the fire and validate Eliphaz's claims. After all, Eliphaz has carefully constructed his prosecution of Job, using any claims of innocence as proof of guilt. In his estimation, only the wicked would dare to lash out at God. A truly innocent man would show honor and respect by confessing his guilt and placing himself in the hands of the Almighty. And Eliphaz strengthens his case by comparing Job's actions with those of the wicked and godless.

*"The wicked writhe in pain throughout their lives.
Years of trouble are stored up for the ruthless.
The sound of terror rings in their ears,
and even on good days they fear the attack of the destroyer."* – Job 15:20-21 NLT

Eliphaz is anything but subtle. He claims that Job is only getting what he deserves for a life of hidden wickedness. Job may have fooled his family and friends but he couldn't pull the wool over God's eyes. Now, he was getting his just desserts. At least, that's how Eliphaz saw it.

He compares Job to a king who knows he is facing defeat at the hands of a more powerful foe but stubbornly clings to his false hope of victory. These kinds of fools "shake their fists at God,

defying the Almighty. Holding their strong shields, they defiantly charge against him” (Job 15:25-26 NLT).

Don't miss what Eliphaz is doing. He is setting Job up by turning every attempt at self-justification into proof of guilt. If Job even dares to question his circumstances, he is “shaking his fist at God” and “defying the Almighty.” This assertion virtually eliminates all options for Job. He's damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. His persistent pleas of innocence will only confirm his guilt but so will a vow of silence. Eliphaz has painted Job into a corner and left him with no way out.

Sensing that he has Job on the ropes, Eliphaz increases the intensity of his attacks, painting his hapless friend as being overweight from a life of over-indulgence. He is fat and bloated from decades of excess and extreme wickedness.

*“These wicked people are heavy and prosperous;
their waists bulge with fat.” – Job 15:27 NLT*

Subtlety is not Eliphaz's strong suit. He wields words like a sledgehammer, obliterating any semblance of hope that may remain in Job's already fractured heart. Eliphaz has gotten personal by attacking Job's physical appearance along with his integrity. Once again, Eliphaz is attempting to portray Job as a hypocrite and a fraud. He is not what he appears to be. Eliphaz has deduced that the pity-producing cries of his suffering friend are nothing but a cleverly orchestrated facade designed to distract and deceive. The more vociferously Job demands his guiltlessness, the more condemned he stands.

It's quite clear that Eliphaz has no doubts regarding Job's guilt. In his mind, Job is wicked and godless, and his losses are all the proof he needs to elicit a guilty verdict from the Judge of the universe. He believes he has God on his side and one can almost see the smirk on his face as he confidently asserts that the riches of the wicked “will not last, and their wealth will not endure” (Job 15:29 NLT). Job has seen his wealth evaporate before his eyes. He has nothing left. And, for Eliphaz, this is further proof of his friend's culpability. With Job's finances in shambles, he has no resources on which to rely, and Eliphaz knows it. In fact, he coldly states that Job's poverty has left him with nothing to look forward to than a life of emptiness. It will be Job's only reward.

This man is relentless and compassionless. He has become so determined to prove himself right that he has become blind to the wrongs he has inflicted on his helpless and hopeless friend. Eliphaz has lost all capacity to see Job's pain and provide solace. His words have become pain-inducing, not peace-producing.

The apostle James points out the danger of an unbridled tongue.

If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means

caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.
– James 1:26-27 NLT

Job was not a widow or an orphan, but he was a man in great distress, and Eliphaz and his friends, in their self-righteousness, were using their tongues to burden him with a heavy weight of unnecessary pain and suffering. James went on to describe the damaging influence of an unbridled tongue.

...the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. – James 3:6 NLT

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were all adept at wielding their tongues but the byproduct of their efforts was anything but uplifting. Job had not been comforted or cared for. Their religious speech had not produced righteousness. And James would have called them out for using the same tongue with which they praised God to curse one who had been made in the image of God (James 3:9). In doing so, these men had put themselves in the place of God. Each of them viewed himself as Job's judge, jury, and executioner.

I believe James would have counseled Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to back off and reconsider how they were using their tongues. He would have asked them to examine their motives. He would have questioned the health of their own hearts and encouraged them to do a bit of personal soul-searching to see if their wisdom was really from God or not.

If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. – James 3:13-16 NLT

Each of us could stand to learn from the not-so-flattering examples of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. We would do well to consider our own tendency to give out unsolicited advice and, in doing so, to do immeasurable damage to those who desperately need a word of encouragement in their time of need. Each of us would be wise to consider the words of James.

You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. – James 1:19-20 NLT

May we not forget the words Jesus spoke to the self-righteous and quick-to-judge Pharisees: "...let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" (John 8:7 NLT)

Job 16:1-22**Our Almighty Advocate**

¹ Then Job answered and said:

² "I have heard many such things;
miserable comforters are you all.

³ Shall windy words have an end?
Or what provokes you that you answer?

⁴ I also could speak as you do,
if you were in my place;
I could join words together against you
and shake my head at you.

⁵ I could strengthen you with my mouth,
and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.

⁶ "If I speak, my pain is not assuaged,
and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me?

⁷ Surely now God has worn me out;
he has made desolate all my company.

⁸ And he has shriveled me up,
which is a witness against me,
and my leanness has risen up against me;
it testifies to my face.

⁹ He has torn me in his wrath and hated me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me.

¹⁰ Men have gaped at me with their mouth;
they have struck me insolently on the cheek;
they mass themselves together against me.

¹¹ God gives me up to the ungodly
and casts me into the hands of the wicked.

¹² I was at ease, and he broke me apart;
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;
he set me up as his target;

¹³ his archers surround me.
He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare;
he pours out my gall on the ground.

¹⁴ He breaks me with breach upon breach;
he runs upon me like a warrior.

¹⁵ I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin
and have laid my strength in the dust.

¹⁶ My face is red with weeping,

*and on my eyelids is deep darkness,
¹⁷ although there is no violence in my hands,
 and my prayer is pure.*

¹⁸ *“O earth, cover not my blood,
 and let my cry find no resting place.*

¹⁹ *Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
 and he who testifies for me is on high.*

²⁰ *My friends scorn me;
 my eye pours out tears to God,*

²¹ *that he would argue the case of a man with God,
 as a son of man does with his neighbor.*

²² *For when a few years have come
 I shall go the way from which I shall not return.” – Job 16:1-22 ESV*

There was a lot that Job didn't know in the middle of all that was going on in his life. He didn't know why he was suffering. He didn't know why his friends were attacking him and accusing him of sins he had not committed. He didn't know why all of his children had to die. He didn't know what was going to happen to him. But he DID know one thing for sure: The answers to all of his questions and the solution to all of his problems were in heaven. He knew that he needed to direct his cries to God and not men. While men can and should provide comfort and support, they can't solve life's problems. Only God can do that.

This realization led Job to castigate his friends for their wordy and worthless diatribes.

*“What miserable comforters you are!
 Won't you ever stop blowing hot air?
 What makes you keep on talking?” – Job 16:2-3 NLT*

He was fed up with having to listen to their pompous pontifications and pious-sounding platitudes. Their words were unhelpful and uninspiring. In fact, Job states that if their roles were reversed, he could just as easily play the role of adversary rather than advocate.

*“I could say the same things if you were in my place.
 I could spout off criticism and shake my head at you.” – Job 16:4 NLT*

But he wouldn't.

*“...if it were me, I would encourage you.
 I would try to take away your grief.” – Job 16:5 NLT*

Job has no desire for revenge. He simply asks that his friends back off and stop their incessant efforts to tear him down. He needs comfort, not criticism. He longs for encouragement, not more incrimination. But their verbal assault continues, no matter what he does. If he defends

himself against their accusations, it only adds fuel to the fire. They view his cries of innocence as proof of guilt. And if he chooses to say nothing, they still come to the same conclusion. His silence condemns him.

So, Job calls on God to be his witness. He may not understand why he is suffering, but he knows he is innocent and, in the end, only God can testify to that fact. Job can't prove he is blameless but God can, and Job is counting on it. In fact, he pleads that God would act as his mediator as well as his judge. He asks God to perform both roles because there is no one else he can count on.

*“Even now my witness is in heaven.
My advocate is there on high.
My friends scorn me,
but I pour out my tears to God.” – Job 16:19-20 NLT*

His friends think he is guilty. They would be lousy witnesses, let alone good mediators. So Job is left with God as his sole source of comfort and support. Which is right where Job needed to be.

His anger with God is visible and visceral. His world has been rocked and his belief in God's sovereignty left him with no other logical conclusion than that God was behind it all.

*“O God, you have ground me down
and devastated my family.
As if to prove I have sinned, you've reduced me to skin and bones.
My gaunt flesh testifies against me.” – Job 16:7-8 NLT*

*“I was living quietly until he shattered me.
He took me by the neck and broke me in pieces.” – Job 16:12 NLT*

*“Again and again he smashes against me,
charging at me like a warrior.” – Job 16:14 NLT*

Job graphically describes his abject physical state. His health has diminished, leaving him emaciated and gaunt. His emotional well-being has suffered greatly, leaving him in a constant state of mourning.

*“My eyes are red with weeping;
dark shadows circle my eyes.” – Job 16:16 NLT*

But despite all his pain and suffering, and his belief that God was behind it all, he still sees God as his only source of help and hope.

*“Even now my witness is in heaven.
My advocate is there on high.” – Job 16:19 NLT*

Job was blaming God for all his difficulties, but he was also counting on God for deliverance. And the second half of that equation is essential. God wants us to lean on Him and nothing else. He wants us to rely on Him and no one else. He can handle our criticism and our casting of blame. But, when all is said and done, He wants us to turn to Him for help.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart;
do not depend on your own understanding.
Seek his will in all you do,
and he will show you which path to take. – Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT*

Amid all his problems, Job was still reaching out to God. He hadn't given up or made the fateful decision to run away from God. And that is exactly what God would desire His children to do. As the old hymn so eloquently states:

*In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!*

Job was calling out to God. It's interesting to note that, in spite of Job's uncertainty, he describes a relationship with God that each of us as believers enjoy. Because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, He is able to stand before God the Father as the One who perfectly fulfilled all the requirements of the Law. Jesus lived a sinless life, so He was able to act as the sinless sacrifice in our place and pay the penalty that sin required. He died in our place, and the result is that we have eternal life. Now Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father acting as our advocate and mediator.

For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus. – 1 Timothy 2:5 NLT

We have exactly what Job was asking and longing for – an advocate and representative who stands before God, speaks on our behalf, and defends our righteousness. Because of what Jesus has done, when God looks at us He no longer sees our sins; He sees us covered with the blood of His Son. Therefore, we are righteous in His eyes. And even when we do sin, Jesus acts as our advocate, reminding God the Father that the price for that sin has already been paid. This is the great news that the apostle John shared with the believers in his day.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. – 1 John 2:1 NASB

Job inherently knew that God was the one to turn to in a time of need. He knew that God could be trusted to judge impartially and fairly. He understood that God was the only one who would be a reliable witness on his behalf. Yes, Job was struggling with doubt and despair. He was questioning everything. But he knew that, in the end, he could count on God.

How much more so should we? We have Jesus Christ as our advocate. He is our faithful representative, standing before God the Father and acting on our behalf, pleading our case before the throne of God. That is where we need to turn. That is who we need to trust.

For Christ has entered into heaven itself to appear now before God as our Advocate. – Hebrews 9:24 NLT

We can come right into God's throne room with confidence because we are well represented by Jesus our advocate. He has earned the right to represent us before God because He served as our sin substitute. And because of what Jesus has done, we are able to stand before God as sinless and holy.

When things take a turn for the worse in my life, I do not have to stand before God in fear, wondering if He is punishing me for some sin I have committed. My sins have all been paid for. The punishment for all my transgressions – past, present, and future – has already been meted out and His judgment has already been satisfied. We need to keep reminding ourselves that we can turn to God and trust Him to act favorably or propitiously on our behalf. He loves us because we are His children.

Job 17:1-16**A One-Dimensional View of God**

- ¹ *“My spirit is broken; my days are extinct;
the graveyard is ready for me.*
- ² *Surely there are mockers about me,
and my eye dwells on their provocation.*
- ³ *“Lay down a pledge for me with you;
who is there who will put up security for me?*
- ⁴ *Since you have closed their hearts to understanding,
therefore you will not let them triumph.*
- ⁵ *He who informs against his friends to get a share of their property—
the eyes of his children will fail.*
- ⁶ *“He has made me a byword of the peoples,
and I am one before whom men spit.*
- ⁷ *My eye has grown dim from vexation,
and all my members are like a shadow.*
- ⁸ *The upright are appalled at this,
and the innocent stirs himself up against the godless.*
- ⁹ *Yet the righteous holds to his way,
and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger.*
- ¹⁰ *But you, come on again, all of you,
and I shall not find a wise man among you.*
- ¹¹ *My days are past; my plans are broken off,
the desires of my heart.*
- ¹² *They make night into day:
‘The light,’ they say, ‘is near to the darkness.’*
- ¹³ *If I hope for Sheol as my house,
if I make my bed in darkness,*
- ¹⁴ *if I say to the pit, ‘You are my father,’
and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ or ‘My sister,’*
- ¹⁵ *where then is my hope?
Who will see my hope?*
- ¹⁶ *Will it go down to the bars of Sheol?
Shall we descend together into the dust?” – Job 17:1-16 ESV*

In this section of Job’s speech, he inadvertently shifts from talking to God directly to addressing Him in the third person. It is as if he is addressing two different audiences at once. One moment, he seems to be speaking directly to God:

*“You must defend my innocence, O God,
since no one else will stand up for me.” – Job 17:3 NLT*

In the next breath, he addresses an unseen audience to whom he vents his frustration about Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

*“God has made a mockery of me among the people;
they spit in my face.” – Job 17:6 NLT*

Then he suddenly directs his attention back to his three accusers.

*“As for all of you, come back with a better argument,
though I still won’t find a wise man among you.” – Job 17:10 NLT*

It’s almost as if Job sees himself on trial in a courtroom. He is standing before God, who serves as the judge, his three friends make up the prosecution, and his neighbors act as a jury of his peers. Job finds himself on the witness stand, responding to the accusations of his guilt, and attempting to sway the judge and jury of his innocence.

In his hopeless and impoverished state, Job pleads with God to put up the money for his bond.

*“Lay down a pledge for me with you;
who is there who will put up security for me?” – Job 17:3 ESV*

In the legal system of that day, each litigant was required to post a bond that would help cover the expense of the trial. At the end of the trial, the losing party would forfeit whatever collateral they had pledged. But Job was destitute and had lost all his worldly possessions, so he had no cash or collateral on hand. Job’s unusual request for a pledge from “the judge” was his way of letting God know that he felt like he was on trial. There was no literal courtroom with a jury and a judge sitting on a dais. But from Job’s perspective, his entire life had turned into a courtroom drama with himself as the defendant and God acting as his judge.

What complicated matters for Job was that the judge was also the cause of all his troubles. Since Job believed in the sovereignty of God, he could reach no other conclusion than that the Almighty was the moving force behind all that had happened in his life. At no time does Job blame Satan or anyone else for his problems. He inherently knows that God is the ruler over all the universe and nothing happens without His consent or causation.

So, in this “trial” of his life, Job finds himself in a rather awkward position, having to defend himself against his “assailant” who also serves as his judge. And, in a way, Job must also rely on God to act as his defense attorney because he has no one else to whom he can turn or trust. This rather unconventional trial causes Job to make statements that seem contradictory and confusing.

While he expresses anger with the unwarranted attacks of his friends, Job holds God responsible.

*“You have closed their minds to understanding,
but do not let them triumph.
They betray their friends for their own advantage...”* – Job 17:5 NLT

Yet, he wants the judge to punish his friends for their actions.

“... so let their children faint with hunger.” – Job 17:5 b NLT

Job couldn't help but hold God accountable. After all, he believed His all-powerful God to be in control of all things at all times. So, he reasoned that his difficulties could have no explanation other than God. And his undeserved and inexplicable troubles were having a negative impact on those around him.

*“God has made a mockery of me among the people;
they spit in my face.
My eyes are swollen with weeping,
and I am but a shadow of my former self.
The virtuous are horrified when they see me.
The innocent rise up against the ungodly.”* – Job 17:6-8 NLT

Those who once looked up to Job as an icon of integrity and virtue now cross to the other side of the street when they see him. They avoid him like the plague. Those who once revered Job for his righteousness are now horrified by his apparent wickedness and join the mob that assails him as ungodly. He has become a social pariah and an outcast in his own community. He has no family, home, or friends. He is alone and desperate for someone to come to his aid and defense, so he calls on his God.

*“My days are over.
My hopes have disappeared.
My heart's desires are broken.”* – Job 17:11 NLT

These are the cries of a broken man. He is not using hyperbole or overexaggerated rhetoric to intensify his suffering. He is not shedding crocodile tears or putting on a performance to gain the sympathy of the judge and jury. Job is at the end of his emotional tether, crying out for someone to step in and deliver him from the never-ending nightmare that has become his life.

What frustrates Job is how his friends use their words to twist reality. Their clever speeches paint a false picture of what is really going on.

*“These men say that night is day;
they claim that the darkness is light.”* – Job 17:12 NLT

Their statements contradict the truth. In a sense, Job accuses them of lying in order to state their case against him. Their words, cleverly spoken, are nothing but fabrications and half-truths that portray Job as a wicked man who fully deserves all that is happening. But Job knows that they are wrong. Yet, the only hope he has left is death. The only way he sees this nightmare ending is with the termination of his life.

*“If I hope for Sheol as my house,
if I make my bed in darkness,
if I say to the pit, ‘You are my father,’
and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ or ‘My sister,’
where then is my hope?” – Job 17:13-15 ESV*

But in his heart, he knows that death will not bring deliverance. The loss of his life will not restore his reputation, bring back his dead children, or renew the joy he once had. With no clear idea of what lay beyond the grave, Job could not imagine death as the preferred solution to his problem. That is what led him to take his case to God.

He is pleading with God to come up with another plan. He asks the judge to pronounce a verdict that will vindicate him and restore him – in this life. Job doesn’t want to die, but if the future holds more suffering, he sees it as his only way out. However, he believed that God had the power and authority to step in and change the course of his life. If God had caused it all, He could also bring it to an end.

But Job had a one-dimensional view of God. He had somehow reached the conclusion that a good God gives nothing but good gifts to his good children. If Job was convinced of his own righteousness, then he believed himself to be deserving of God’s goodness. In a sense, he had turned God into a cosmic slot machine, a kind of divine genie in the sky who doles out good things to His good children. But this seems to contradict what Job stated back in chapter two.

“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” Job 2:10 ESV

Yet, time has a way of altering our perspective. The longer Job had to dwell on and in his misery, the more uncertain he became about his earlier statement. He had been willing to accept the evil as long as it was immediately followed up by a proportionate amount of good. But when more trouble came his way and the floodgates of God’s goodness didn’t open up as expected, Job began to have second thoughts. He began to question the goodness of God. Things hadn’t turned out as he anticipated, and his one-dimensional view of God was leaving him conflicted and confused. Where were his rewards? When was God going to show up and pour out all His blessings again? But Job had much to learn about God and his own unworthiness.

Job 18:1-21**Bildad, the Insufferable Bully**

¹ Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

² *“How long will you hunt for words?
Consider, and then we will speak.*

³ *Why are we counted as cattle?
Why are we stupid in your sight?*

⁴ *You who tear yourself in your anger,
shall the earth be forsaken for you,
or the rock be removed out of its place?*

⁵ *“Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out,
and the flame of his fire does not shine.*

⁶ *The light is dark in his tent,
and his lamp above him is put out.*

⁷ *His strong steps are shortened,
and his own schemes throw him down.*

⁸ *For he is cast into a net by his own feet,
and he walks on its mesh.*

⁹ *A trap seizes him by the heel;
a snare lays hold of him.*

¹⁰ *A rope is hidden for him in the ground,
a trap for him in the path.*

¹¹ *Terrors frighten him on every side,
and chase him at his heels.*

¹² *His strength is famished,
and calamity is ready for his stumbling.*

¹³ *It consumes the parts of his skin;
the firstborn of death consumes his limbs.*

¹⁴ *He is torn from the tent in which he trusted
and is brought to the king of terrors.*

¹⁵ *In his tent dwells that which is none of his;
sulfur is scattered over his habitation.*

¹⁶ *His roots dry up beneath,
and his branches wither above.*

¹⁷ *His memory perishes from the earth,
and he has no name in the street.*

¹⁸ *He is thrust from light into darkness,
and driven out of the world.*

¹⁹ *He has no posterity or progeny among his people,
and no survivor where he used to live.*

²⁰ *They of the west are appalled at his day,
and horror seizes them of the east.*

²¹ *Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous,
such is the place of him who knows not God.” – Job 18:1-21 ESV*

In Bildad’s second speech to Job, one can sense his growing frustration and disdain for his “patient.” He is put out by Job’s persistent claims of innocence and more than a bit offended that his ungrateful friend refuses to recognize the wisdom of his words. So, Bildad resorts to name-calling and sarcasm. He turns into the neighborhood bully who picks on the one kid who can’t effectively defend himself.

First, he attacks Job’s verbosity, accusing him of being a pompous blowhard who seems to think that he can talk his way out of his dilemma.

*“How long before you stop talking?
Speak sense if you want us to answer!
Do you think we are mere animals?
Do you think we are stupid?” – Job 18:2-3 NLT*

Bildad finds Job’s little monologues to be nothing more than “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” He isn’t buying what Job is selling and is, frankly, fed up with having to listen to Job’s incessant claims of victimhood. In a highly unsympathetic tone, Bildad tells Job that his displays of self-righteous anger are a total waste of time.

*“You may tear out your hair in anger,
but will that destroy the earth?
Will it make the rocks tremble?” – Job 18:4 NLT*

Throwing a fit and putting on a show of mock mourning isn’t going to change anything. Job is wasting his time and his breath because Bildad and his companions remain stubbornly convinced that Job is guilty as charged. In fact, Bildad pulls no punches, clearly labeling Job as a wicked man who is getting exactly what he deserves.

*“Surely the light of the wicked will be snuffed out.
The sparks of their fire will not glow.
The light in their tent will grow dark.
The lamp hanging above them will be quenched.
The confident stride of the wicked will be shortened.
Their own schemes will be their downfall.” – Job 18:5-7 NLT*

Throughout this relatively short speech, Bildad repeatedly associates Job with the wicked. There is nothing subtle about his insinuation and his words must have cut deep into Job’s psyche. How could a man whom Job considered to be a close friend end up being so brutally cruel and heartless? Bildad provides Job with no hope but, instead, he presents his friend with a

bleak picture of further suffering that will end in Job's demise. Unwilling to declare Job's wickedness to his face, Bildad takes the more tactful but no less hurtful course. He simply infers Job's guilt by referring to "the wicked," and he makes it clear that "those people" always end up getting what they deserve.

*"All memory of their existence will fade from the earth;
no one will remember their names." – Job 18:17 NLT*

Job had lost everything but his mind. He could still understand what Bildad was saying and it must have cut like a knife. Bildad's words were as subtle as a brick to the forehead. He practically describes Job's personal plight word for word, in a less-than-compassionate attempt to prove just how wicked Job is.

*"Terrors surround the wicked
and trouble them at every step.
Hunger depletes their strength,
and calamity waits for them to stumble.
Disease eats their skin;
death devours their limbs.
They are torn from the security of their homes
and are brought down to the king of terrors.
The homes of the wicked will burn down;
burning sulfur rains on their houses." – Job 18:11-15 NLT*

Virtually every one of these things had happened to Job and Bildad was using them as evidence of the fate awaiting "the wicked." In Bildad's estimation, Job was living proof that the wicked always get what they deserve. Job's litany of losses gave ample testimony to his life of unrighteousness; they were the just judgments of a holy God on an unholy man.

And in an almost demonic display of insensitivity, Bildad claims that any lingering hope that Job may have of leaving a legacy is nothing more than wishful thinking.

*"They [the wicked] will be thrust from light into darkness,
driven from the world.
They will have neither children nor grandchildren,
nor any survivor in the place where they lived." – Job 18:18-19 NLT*

If anyone is wicked, it's Bildad. He displays an inordinate amount of disdain for his friend, using his words to wound rather than to heal. He shows no desire to lift up his brother with words of encouragement. His speech is destructive rather than instructive. His callous conclusions are meant to defend himself rather than Job, and the longer he talks, the more damage he does.

Bildad finally runs out of things to say, but he makes sure to end his speech with a knock-out punch. He tells Job that, one day, long after Job is gone, people will come by the ruins of his

former home and say, “This was the home of a wicked person, the place of one who rejected God” (Job 18:21 NLT).

According to Bildad, Job will leave a legacy, but it will not be the one he had hoped for. There will be no memories of Job’s blamelessness. There will be no heirs to carry on his good name. All that will be left to memorialize Job will be the remnants of his destroyed life. These are the words that Bildad leaves ringing in the ears of his suffering friend. And with friends like this, who needs enemies?

Job 19:1-29**My Redeemer Lives**

¹ Then Job answered and said:

² *“How long will you torment me
and break me in pieces with words?*

³ *These ten times you have cast reproach upon me;
are you not ashamed to wrong me?*

⁴ *And even if it be true that I have erred,
my error remains with myself.*

⁵ *If indeed you magnify yourselves against me
and make my disgrace an argument against me,*

⁶ *know then that God has put me in the wrong
and closed his net about me.*

⁷ *Behold, I cry out, ‘Violence!’ but I am not answered;
I call for help, but there is no justice.*

⁸ *He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass,
and he has set darkness upon my paths.*

⁹ *He has stripped from me my glory
and taken the crown from my head.*

¹⁰ *He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone,
and my hope has he pulled up like a tree.*

¹¹ *He has kindled his wrath against me
and counts me as his adversary.*

¹² *His troops come on together;
they have cast up their siege ramp against me
and encamp around my tent.*

¹³ *“He has put my brothers far from me,
and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me.*

¹⁴ *My relatives have failed me,
my close friends have forgotten me.*

¹⁵ *The guests in my house and my maidservants count me as a stranger;
I have become a foreigner in their eyes.*

¹⁶ *I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer;
I must plead with him with my mouth for mercy.*

¹⁷ *My breath is strange to my wife,
and I am a stench to the children of my own mother.*

¹⁸ *Even young children despise me;
when I rise they talk against me.*

¹⁹ *All my intimate friends abhor me,
and those whom I loved have turned against me.*

²⁰ *My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh,
and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.*
²¹ *Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!*
²² *Why do you, like God, pursue me?
Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?*
²³ *“Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
²⁴ Oh that with an iron pen and lead
they were engraved in the rock forever!
²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷ whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!
²⁸ If you say, ‘How we will pursue him!’
and, ‘The root of the matter is found in him,’
²⁹ be afraid of the sword,
for wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
that you may know there is a judgment.” – Job 19:1-29 ESV*

Job’s response to Bildad echoes his earlier speeches and continues to reflect his unwillingness to concede defeat or confess his innocence. He is worn out and begs his friends to show him some mercy to balance out their relentless attacks.

*“How long will you torture me?
How long will you try to crush me with your words?
You have already insulted me ten times.
You should be ashamed of treating me so badly.” – Job 19:2-3 NLT*

Their better-than-thou approach to counseling has left Job feeling beaten down rather than lifted up. Their constant displays of moral superiority and self-righteous certainty have done more damage than good.

*“Even if I have sinned,
that is my concern, not yours.
You think you’re better than I am,
using my humiliation as evidence of my sin.” – Job 19:4-5 NLT*

And Job reminds them once again that his real adversary is God. He is the one behind all his pain and misery.

*“God has blocked my way so I cannot move.
He has plunged my path into darkness.
He has stripped me of my honor
and removed the crown from my head.
He has demolished me on every side, and I am finished.” – Job 19:8-10 NLT*

In the midst of all his pain, abandoned by family and friends, Job begs Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz to show him a bit of compassion.

*“Have mercy on me, my friends, have mercy,
for the hand of God has struck me.
Must you also persecute me, like God does?
Haven’t you chewed me up enough?” – Job 19:21-22 NLT*

Then suddenly, as if a light switch was turned on in a darkened room, Job makes this incredibly optimistic statement.

*“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
and he will stand upon the earth at last.
And after my body has decayed,
yet in my body I will see God!” – Job 19:25-26 NLT*

Job is suffering inexplicably and unexpectedly. He is being relentlessly attacked and accused by his friends for his apparent wickedness. Yet, he is somehow able to cry out, "I know that my Redeemer lives!"

What is he saying? At the least, he is expressing belief in a God who will one day vindicate him and prove him to be innocent. He holds out hope that his sufferings are not the result of sin and are not some form of divine punishment for wrongs done. Job knows that he will be redeemed in the end. He may die, but he will stand before the Lord with a new body and be innocent of any wrongdoing.

The word Job uses for "Redeemer" is גֹּאֲלִי (*ga'al*, "to redeem, protect, vindicate"). Listen to what the Net Bible study notes have to say about this rich word:

"The word is well-known in the OT because of its identification as the kinsman-redeemer (see the Book of Ruth). This is the near kinsman who will pay off one's debts, defend the family, avenge a killing, marry the widow of the deceased. The word 'redeemer' evokes the wrong connotation for people familiar with the NT alone; a translation of 'Vindicator' would capture the idea more. The concept might include the description of the mediator already introduced in Job 16:19, but surely here Job is thinking of God as his vindicator. The interesting point to be stressed here is that Job has said clearly that he sees no vindication in this life, that he is going to die. But he knows he will be vindicated, and even though he will die, his vindicator lives. The

dilemma remains though: his distress lay in God's hiding his face from him, and his vindication lay only in beholding God in peace."

In the face of the unrelenting onslaught of his friends' accusations, Job is anxious for someone to vindicate him (to clear, as from an accusation, imputation, suspicion, or the like: to vindicate someone's honor). He longs to have someone stand up for him and he knows that the only one who can and will do so is God Himself.

His friends seem unwilling to show him mercy, so Job is left with God alone as his future source of hope and restoration. He has resigned himself with his pending death but he believes that he will stand before God one day with a new body and a clean record.

"I will see him for myself.

Yes, I will see him with my own eyes.

I am overwhelmed at the thought!" – Job 19:27 NLT

Job was able to face death because he placed his hope in the reality of eternity. In his desperate situation, his only recourse was to trust in a God who would one day redeem him and restore him. As bad as his life was, Job could face it only because of his belief in God and his hope in an eternal destiny.

So what about us? How do we face the trials and tests of life? Where do we focus our attention? Yes, Job was fully aware of his suffering. He was not living some Pollyanna dream where he refused to face reality. He was in pain. He was hurting. But he kept going back to the only thing he could trust – God.

There was a lot he didn't understand about God and his own circumstances, but he did know that God was just, righteous, and merciful. He also held on to his fragile belief that there was more to life than the here and now. He had to keep believing that there was a future life ahead of him and it was there that his vindication would be complete. His honor would be restored. Even his body would be renewed. It was that belief that kept Job going in the face of extreme difficulty. And we have the same hope.

We have a Redeemer who will one day vindicate us. He will welcome us into His presence as righteous and completely sinless. We will have restored bodies and hearts that are free from sin. And in the last part of Job's statement, I think we get a glimpse of the future reality of Christ's triumphant return to earth as the conquering Messiah. "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that **he will stand upon the earth at last**" (Job 19:25 NLT).

There is a day coming when Jesus Christ will return to earth, not to suffer and die, but to rule, restore, and reign. That is our hope. That is our future. That is why we can cry out along with Job, "I know my Redeemer lives!"

He will set all things right. He will vindicate and avenge His own. And we will be revealed to be what we have always claimed to be: God's children.

Job 20:1-19**The Worthless Wisdom of this World**

¹ Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

- ² “Therefore my thoughts answer me,
because of my haste within me.
- ³ I hear censure that insults me,
and out of my understanding a spirit answers me.
- ⁴ Do you not know this from of old,
since man was placed on earth,
⁵ that the exulting of the wicked is short,
and the joy of the godless but for a moment?
- ⁶ Though his height mount up to the heavens,
and his head reach to the clouds,
⁷ he will perish forever like his own dung;
those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’
- ⁸ He will fly away like a dream and not be found;
he will be chased away like a vision of the night.
- ⁹ The eye that saw him will see him no more,
nor will his place any more behold him.
- ¹⁰ His children will seek the favor of the poor,
and his hands will give back his wealth.
- ¹¹ His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
but it will lie down with him in the dust.
- ¹² “Though evil is sweet in his mouth,
though he hides it under his tongue,
¹³ though he is loath to let it go
and holds it in his mouth,
¹⁴ yet his food is turned in his stomach;
it is the venom of cobras within him.
- ¹⁵ He swallows down riches and vomits them up again;
God casts them out of his belly.
- ¹⁶ He will suck the poison of cobras;
the tongue of a viper will kill him.
- ¹⁷ He will not look upon the rivers,
the streams flowing with honey and curds.
- ¹⁸ He will give back the fruit of his toil
and will not swallow it down;
from the profit of his trading
he will get no enjoyment.

*19 For he has crushed and abandoned the poor;
he has seized a house that he did not build.” – Job 20:1-19 ESV*

Tag! You’re it.

Now, it’s Zophar’s turn to torment Job, and he takes up the challenge with a vengeance. Like his companions, Zophar has had his fill of Job’s declarations of innocence and accusations of abuse. He is deeply offended by Job’s assertions that their counsel was harmful in any way.

*“I must reply
because I am greatly disturbed.
I’ve had to endure your insults,
but now my spirit prompts me to reply.” – Job 20:2-3 NLT*

It’s amazing to witness how adept these men are at turning all the attention to themselves as they play the victim card and accuse Job of harming them. Somehow, they manage to make it all about themselves, portraying Job as the evil aggressor and themselves as his hapless and defenseless prey.

Zophar displays no compassion or empathy and is unwilling to allow his suffering friend to vent his frustration or express his confusion over his predicament. At no point do any of these men say, “I understand.” They have come to be heard, not to listen. They are determined to offer their opinions but have no desire to provide a listening ear or a word of consolation and comfort.

Rather than wrapping his arms around Job and loving him through his sorrow, Zophar chooses to beat down his brother with charges of wickedness and godlessness. But he isn’t brave enough to say, “Job, you are a wicked and evil man.” Instead, he veils his accusations in cleverly worded lessons about the well-deserved fate of such people. From the beginning of time, the wicked and godless have always gotten their just desserts. Oh, for a time they may enjoy a semblance of success and “the sweet taste of wickedness” (Job 20:12 NLT), but their joy is always temporary and their fate is permanent and inescapable.

*“...the triumph of the wicked has been short lived
and the joy of the godless has been only temporary...” – Job 20:5 NLT*

*“...they will vanish forever,
thrown away like their own dung.” – Job 20:7 NLT*

*“They will fade like a dream and not be found.
They will vanish like a vision in the night.” – Job 20:8 NLT*

In this grand-sounding soliloquy, Zophar never mentions Job by name but it is painfully clear who his words are meant for. He infers that Job was a prideful man who enjoyed a lifestyle of

wealth and comfort. He had all the trappings of success but they were ill-gotten gain, acquired by illegal or illegitimate means. Zophar has concluded that Job's former life of luxury and leisure was the result of "stolen riches" (Job 20:10), not the blessings of God. He rationalized that Job's fall from grace was nothing more than payback for a life of crime, graft, and corruption. If Job's heirs were going to live out their lives in abject poverty, it was his own fault.

*"Their children will beg from the poor,
for they must give back their stolen riches." – Job 20:10 NLT*

This callous statement is all the more hurtful because Zophar is fully aware that Job has no children. All ten of them had been killed when the roof of the house they were in collapsed and crushed them to death. So, Job had no inheritance or inheritors. He had nothing to leave and no one to leave it to. But that sad fact didn't stop Zophar from continuing his relentless attack.

Zophar seems to take great pleasure in reminding Job of all that he has lost. He can't stop alluding to Job's former wealth and riches, and it's impossible to know whether these attacks are driven by long-pent-up feelings of jealousy. But it is quite possible that Zophar had always been bothered by Job's success. It's as if he almost relishes the prospect of Job never rising from the ashes and regaining his former status as a wealthy and well-respected member of the community.

To justify his contempt for Job, Zophar must paint him in the least flattering light. So, he attributes Job's success to corruption.

*"Their wealth will bring them no joy.
For they oppressed the poor and left them destitute.
They foreclosed on their homes." – Job 20:18-19 NLT*

This conclusion gives Zophar the freedom to treat his former friend with disdain. One almost gets the impression that Zophar has developed a strong hatred for Job that is the culmination of years of jealousy and envy. While Job was in his prime and enjoying what appeared to be the blessings of God, Zophar could only sit back and watch as his friend basked in all the affluence and accolades. Now, the tables were turned. Zophar was on top and getting to watch his former friend's fall from grace.

For Zophar, Job's demise was proof of his depravity and wickedness. There was no other explanation. For Job to have lost all that he had, he must have gained it all through a life of wickedness.

*"They enjoyed the sweet taste of wickedness,
letting it melt under their tongue.
They savored it,
holding it long in their mouths.*

*But suddenly the food in their bellies turns sour,
a poisonous venom in their stomach.” – Job 20:12-14 NLT*

Zophar’s logic is simple but sensible. Job had gained his wealth through wickedness or God would not have taken it from him.

*“They will vomit the wealth they swallowed.
God won’t let them keep it down.” – Job 20:15 NLT*

While everyone had believed that Job’s wealth was the byproduct of his blameless life, Zophar was challenging that conclusion. He was proffering a different opinion that portrayed Job as a villain and not a victim. He proposed that the collapse of Job’s world was nothing more than the judgment of God for a life of undeserved prosperity gained through wickedness. That is why Zophar shows no sympathy to Job. He has determined his former friend to be a godless sinner whose fate is well-deserved and proof of God’s justice. Sadly, Zophar justifies his enjoyment of Job’s fall by demonizing him. This might explain why Zophar goes out of his way to portray Job as a corrupt profiteer who used his facade of righteousness for personal gain.

Like all men, Zophar is attempting to explain the complexities of life through the means of flawed and finite human reason. There is so much he doesn’t understand. There are so many things he cannot see from his limited earthly perspective. Zophar can’t peer into the heart of his friend. He has no way of determining Job’s righteousness or deciding Job’s warranting of God’s judgment. Zophar, because he is human, has no capacity for discerning the will or the ways of God. He has deemed himself to be a spokesman for God but he does not know the heart of God. And eventually, God will expose the flawed logic of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

After the Lord had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has.” – Job 42:7 NLT

These men had taken it upon themselves to speak on behalf of God. But nowhere in the Book of Job do we see them consulting God and attempting to discern His will concerning Job. There are no prayers directed to God. There are no requests for wisdom or insight. These men seem to believe that they reached the right conclusion without the help of God. Yet, the apostle James would have encouraged them to pray more and talk less.

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. – James 1:5 NLT

Life is complicated, and understanding the complexities of the human experience is impossible without insight from the One who rules and reigns over all. Zophar had no business acting as Job’s judge. He had no right to stand in judgment over his friend and flippantly determine his fault and fate without seeking insight from God first. He and his two friends were claiming to speak for God but had not heard from God.

They had set themselves up as arbiters of truth and dispensers of divine justice. But they were more like the false teachers that Jude describes in his short but impactful letter.

They are like shameless shepherds who care only for themselves. They are like clouds blowing over the land without giving any rain. They are like trees in autumn that are doubly dead, for they bear no fruit and have been pulled up by the roots. They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the foam of their shameful deeds. They are like wandering stars, doomed forever to blackest darkness. – Jude 1:12-13 NLT

In the end, Zophar, Eliphaz, and Bildad were providing wisdom that was ungodly, counsel that was unhelpful, and conclusions that were unreliable and inaccurate. All because they failed to consult God. Had Paul been around to consult them, they may have taken a decidedly different tact.

Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say,

*“He traps the wise
in the snare of their own cleverness.”*

And again,

*“The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise;
he knows they are worthless.” – 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 NLT*

Job 20:20-29**Applying Divine Doctrine Without Divine Authorization**

- ²⁰ *“Because he knew no contentment in his belly,
he will not let anything in which he delights escape him.*
- ²¹ *There was nothing left after he had eaten;
therefore his prosperity will not endure.*
- ²² *In the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in distress;
the hand of everyone in misery will come against him.*
- ²³ *To fill his belly to the full,
God will send his burning anger against him
and rain it upon him into his body.*
- ²⁴ *He will flee from an iron weapon;
a bronze arrow will strike him through.*
- ²⁵ *It is drawn forth and comes out of his body;
the glittering point comes out of his gallbladder;
terrors come upon him.*
- ²⁶ *Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures;
a fire not fanned will devour him;
what is left in his tent will be consumed.*
- ²⁷ *The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
and the earth will rise up against him.*
- ²⁸ *The possessions of his house will be carried away,
dragged off in the day of God's wrath.*
- ²⁹ *This is the wicked man's portion from God,
the heritage decreed for him by God.” – Job 20:20-29 ESV*

The longer Zophar talks, the darker his rhetoric becomes. He is on a roll and believes he has Job on the ropes. According to Zophar, not only is Job wicked and ungodly, but he is greedy and a glutton whose voracious appetite for evil will destroy him. It is somewhat shocking to remember that this man was supposed to be Job's friend and had shown up in Uz with the intent of providing comfort and support. But when Job refused to accept the dark and condemning assessment of his situation from his three “comforters,” they turned on him. His defiant resistance to their calls for confession and repentance was met with resentment and incredulity. Zophar and his companions couldn't believe their ears. How could this miserable wretch of a man dare to contradict their words of wisdom?

In his frustration with Job, Zophar resorts to blame and belittlement. He compares Job to a self-indulgent glutton who can't control his appetite and ends up eating himself out of house and home.

*“Nothing is left after they finish gorging themselves.
Therefore, their prosperity will not endure.” – Job 20:21 NLT*

To Zophar, Job is nothing more than a money-hungry, thrill-seeking, materialistic, and hedonistic fool who has reaped the results of his out-of-control lifestyle. His assessment of Job sounds similar to Paul's description of the "enemies of the cross" who had infiltrated the church in Philippi.

They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. – Philippians 3:19 NLT

But the problem with Zophar's less-than-flattering assessment of Job is that it directly contradicts what God had to say about His faithful servant.

"Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil." – Job 1:8 NLT

It seems obvious that Zophar had not sought or received insight from God on Job's situation. He was simply making judgments based on external circumstances and his personal opinion. He is right in stressing God's hatred for sin and the inevitable judgment that awaits those who refuse to repent. But his quick-to-judge mentality had placed him in a precarious position, where he found himself falsely accusing the Lord's anointed and spouting accusations and opinions that were anything but godly.

But in his over-confident zeal, Zophar charged full steam ahead, barraging his poor victim with further insults disguised as insights. He even resorts to praying for Job's eventual destruction by God.

*"May God give them a bellyful of trouble.
May God rain down his anger upon them."* – Job 20:23 NLT

Of course, he's kind enough not to address Job by name but his intentions are clear, and the not-so-subtle message didn't escape Job. It would have been difficult to miss what Zophar was inferring by his graphic depiction of an arrow piercing human flesh and dripping with blood.

*"When they try to escape an iron weapon,
a bronze-tipped arrow will pierce them.
The arrow is pulled from their back,
and the arrowhead glistens with blood."* – Job 20:24-25 NLT

According to Zophar, the archer is God and the victim is Job. God, the righteous warrior, has rained down his anger on the wicked and well-deserving Job. There was nowhere Job could run from God's wrath. He could continue to deny his guilt but God would eventually expose him for what he really was: a guilty and unrepentant sinner.

But again, Zophar is attempting to apply truth based on false assumptions. While much of what he says is accurate, he has mistakenly misapplied the doctrine concerning God's judgment. There is nothing wrong with his portrayal of God as a vengeful judge who metes out wrath on the wicked. The Scriptures fully support Zophar's understanding of divine judgment upon those who perpetrate evil.

*For the wicked will be destroyed,
but those who trust in the Lord will possess the land.*

*Soon the wicked will disappear.
Though you look for them, they will be gone. – Psalm 37:9-10 NLT*

*The wicked plot against the godly;
they snarl at them in defiance.
But the Lord just laughs,
for he sees their day of judgment coming. – Psalm 37:12-13 NLT*

*Though the wicked sprout like weeds
and evildoers flourish,
they will be destroyed forever. – Psalm 92:7 NLT*

The problem was how Zophar had assumed the worst when it came to Job's predicament. He wrongly assessed Job's fall as evidence of wickedness and proof of God's displeasure. From what he could gather, Job had screwed up and God had rained down His righteous anger in just retribution.

But he was wrong.

Zophar didn't have all the facts, so he ended up making wrong assumptions and drawing faulty conclusions. He spoke with self-assumed certainty and an over-confident assurance in his own assessment of the facts.

But he was wrong; categorically and catastrophically wrong.

Yet, he got one thing right. He boldly claimed, "The heavens will reveal their guilt, and the earth will testify against them" (Job 20:27 NLT). That one statement drips with truth and reflects the reality that only God knows the hearts of men and only He is authorized to stand in judgment as to their guilt or innocence.

The one thing Zophar, Bildad, and Eliphaz got consistently right was their call to repentance. All men are required to come to God, confessing their sins and repenting of their open rebellion against His righteous rule and reign. But where these three men got off the rails was in their assumption of Job's wickedness and their assertion that all of Job's pain and suffering was the handiwork of God.

“Was Zophar correct in his assessment of the wicked person’s fate? He was correct in saying that God judges sin, but he was wrong in claiming that God’s judgment always takes place during our earthly lifetime. He was also inaccurate in saying that Job was the type of person he described.” – Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Job*

Zophar was right when he stated, “This is the reward that God gives the wicked. It is the inheritance decreed by God” (Job 20:29 NLT), but he was wrong in applying it to Job. The doctrines of God are righteous, just, and true, but they must be wielded carefully and judiciously. They should never be used as hammers to beat down the defenseless or to win a war of words with an opponent.

Paul told his young protégé, Timothy, “Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth. Avoid worthless, foolish talk that only leads to more godless behavior” (2 Timothy 2:15-16 NLT). Knowing doctrine is not enough; you also have to know when and how to apply it. Paul also told Timothy that an overseer or leader in the church “must be able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2 NLT). That phrase carries the idea that a godly leader must be equipped “to teach God’s Word with skill.”

Verses quoted out of context, doctrines used as weapons, and godly truths misappropriated and misapplied are all to be avoided like the plague. Zophar was a veritable fountain of doctrine but he had used it to deluge Job and leave him drowning in despair. If only Zophar had understood that God’s Word, rightly divided, was fully capable of exposing and excising sin. It alone can reveal the condition of the heart and bring about either conviction or comfort. As the author of Hebrews so eloquently put it, “...the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires” (Hebrews 4:12 NLT).

But before you dare to speak on behalf of God, it pays to have heard from God. These men had chosen to address Job’s circumstances as self-appointed spokesmen for God. but they had failed to seek the will of God. Their arrogant appropriation of divine doctrine without divine authorization placed them in dangerous company. Without knowing it, they had become false prophets guilty of propagating false messages from God, and this is not something God takes lightly.

*“I have not sent these prophets,
yet they run around claiming to speak for me.
I have given them no message,
yet they go on prophesying.
If they had stood before me and listened to me,
they would have spoken my words,
and they would have turned my people
from their evil ways and deeds.” – Jeremiah 23:21-22 NLT*

Job 21:1-16**Life Doesn't Always Make Sense**

¹ Then Job answered and said:

- ² *"Keep listening to my words,
and let this be your comfort.*
- ³ *Bear with me, and I will speak,
and after I have spoken, mock on.*
- ⁴ *As for me, is my complaint against man?
Why should I not be impatient?*
- ⁵ *Look at me and be appalled,
and lay your hand over your mouth.*
- ⁶ *When I remember, I am dismayed,
and shuddering seizes my flesh.*
- ⁷ *Why do the wicked live,
reach old age, and grow mighty in power?*
- ⁸ *Their offspring are established in their presence,
and their descendants before their eyes.*
- ⁹ *Their houses are safe from fear,
and no rod of God is upon them.*
- ¹⁰ *Their bull breeds without fail;
their cow calves and does not miscarry.*
- ¹¹ *They send out their little boys like a flock,
and their children dance.*
- ¹² *They sing to the tambourine and the lyre
and rejoice to the sound of the pipe.*
- ¹³ *They spend their days in prosperity,
and in peace they go down to Sheol.*
- ¹⁴ *They say to God, 'Depart from us!
We do not desire the knowledge of your ways.*
- ¹⁵ *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?
And what profit do we get if we pray to him?'*
- ¹⁶ *Behold, is not their prosperity in their hand?
The counsel of the wicked is far from me."* – Job 21:1-16 ESV

Job's friends have a theology of consequences. Their arguments are based on their belief that Job's circumstances are the obvious result of his sinful behavior. He is suffering the consequences of pursuing wickedness. They take a look at the recent events of his life and conclude that God must be punishing him.

All of their speeches are based on this assumption and, the truth is, we can easily find ourselves doing the same thing. When we see someone suffering, we can easily jump to the conclusion

that they've done something wrong and are being punished by God in some way. Many of us have the same you-reap-what-you-sow mentality as Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad. It creeps into our thinking and influences our views on life. For instance, if something negative happens in our day, we can quickly find ourselves asking the question, "What did I do wrong?"

We can easily assume that we are suffering the consequences of some past action or thought. God must be punishing us for something we've done. And, if we're not careful, we can just as easily view the sufferings or trials of others in the same simplistic way.

But Job points out a very logical argument against this sin-has-consequences theology. He asks his accusers to take a look at the world around them and explain why it is that most wicked people don't ever suffer the way he has. In fact, they seem to thrive.

*"Why do the wicked prosper,
growing old and powerful?
They live to see their children grow up and settle down,
and they enjoy their grandchildren.
Their homes are safe from every fear,
and God does not punish them."* – Job 21:7-9 NLT

Great question, Job.

Life is not as black and white as it sometimes appears. Not everything fits into a neat and clean cause-and-effect paradigm.

Job points out that they tend to grow old and rich, and their kids grow up to enjoy the wealth they leave behind. From all appearances, there doesn't seem to be any punishment from God on their lives. These very same people openly dismiss God and deny any need for his help or his forgiveness. They mockingly portray God as useless and totally unnecessary because they view their success or failure as completely up to them alone. Job argues that these wicked individuals don't suffer, despite their dishonoring treatment of the Almighty.

"Go away. We want no part of you and your ways. Who is the Almighty, and why should we obey him? What good will it do us to pray?" – Job 21:14-15 NLT

Job points out that these people show no fear or respect for God, but they don't seem to suffer for it. The truth is that they actually prosper, and "they think their prosperity is of their own doing" (Job 21:16 NLT).

And Job is not alone in his outlook on the wicked. The prophet Jeremiah also voiced his confusion over the seeming success of those who dishonor God.

*Lord, you always give me justice
when I bring a case before you.*

*So let me bring you this complaint:
 Why are the wicked so prosperous?
 Why are evil people so happy?
 You have planted them,
 and they have taken root and prospered.
 Your name is on their lips,
 but you are far from their hearts. – Jeremiah 12:1-2 NLT*

The prophet Malachi had to address the growing consternation of the people of God who were questioning whether it was worth it to remain faithful. From their perspective, it seemed that the wicked were better off.

“You have said, ‘What’s the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the Lord of Heaven’s Armies that we are sorry for our sins? From now on we will call the arrogant blessed. For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them suffer no harm.’” – Malachi 3:14-15 NLT

An honest and objective look at the world would seem to indicate that the wicked don’t always suffer for their actions. Good doesn’t always win out over evil. The righteous don’t always come out on top. After all, Jesus Christ Himself died at the hands of wicked and unrighteous men. Most, if not all, of the disciples suffered martyrdom. History tends to validate Job’s conclusion.

This beleaguered man understood that life was not always easily explainable. We don't know why some suffer and others do not. We can't explain why a massive earthquake strikes one nation and not another. Sure, science can provide geological explanations, but no one can fully comprehend the moral implications of such devastating natural disasters.

We don't know why one person suffers from cancer while another doesn't. We don't know why one couple loses their child in a car accident while another couple is allowed to watch their child grow up and live a long life. The fact is, there are things we do not know. There are mysteries to life that we can't explain.

That is where faith comes in. That is where trust in a holy, mighty, all-knowing God comes in. Rather than turning to our conclusions, we must turn to Him. Even God Himself reminds us, "My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT).

When it comes to the egocentric ramblings of self-made men who claim that their prosperity is their own doing, Job simply states, “I will have nothing to do with that kind of thinking” (Job 21:16 NLT). He refuses to take credit for his success but he also refuses to take ownership for his seeming failure. Just because things have not turned out the way he had envisioned, that

doesn't mean he is wicked and reaping the righteous judgment of God. Job refused to draw that pessimistic conclusion.

What he needed and greatly desired was for his friends to comfort and console him in his time of need. He didn't need correction or caustic comments concerning his guilt. He could have used the heart-warming words of

*Don't worry about the wicked
or envy those who do wrong.
For like grass, they soon fade away.
Like spring flowers, they soon wither.*

*Trust in the Lord and do good.
Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you your heart's desires. – Psalm 37:1-4 NLT*

These words were written by a man who had experienced his fair share of suffering and sorrow. He had spent years running for his life, attempting to escape the bounty that King Saul had placed on his head. He had been anointed by the prophet of God to become the next king of Israel and yet he was forced to live like a fugitive and was treated like a convicted felon. Yet, he was able to pen the following words.

*Be still in the presence of the Lord,
and wait patiently for him to act.
Don't worry about evil people who prosper
or fret about their wicked schemes. – Psalm 37:7 NLT*

Life can be difficult to understand because things don't always turn out the way we expect. Even the psalmist, Asaph, expressed his confusion and frustration with the incongruities of living in a fallen and sin-damaged world.

*Truly God is good to Israel,
to those whose hearts are pure.
But as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.
For I envied the proud
when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.
They seem to live such painless lives;
their bodies are so healthy and strong.
They don't have troubles like other people;
they're not plagued with problems like everyone else. – Psalm 73:1-5 NLT*

But Asaph came to his senses and recognized the futility of his faulty thinking.

*Then I realized that my heart was bitter,
 and I was all torn up inside.
 I was so foolish and ignorant—
 I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.
 Yet I still belong to you;
 you hold my right hand.
 You guide me with your counsel,
 leading me to a glorious destiny.
 Whom have I in heaven but you?
 I desire you more than anything on earth.
 My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
 but God remains the strength of my heart;
 he is mine forever. – Psalm 73:21-26 NLT*

Job was not there yet. He had not reached the same conclusion as Asaph, but that time would come. He would eventually understand and appreciate the ways of God. But in the moment of his distress what he really needed was friends who would stand beside him and not gloat over him. He could have used a few encouraging words from a David or an Asaph. But he was stuck with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

The question we must ask ourselves is what kind of friends are we? Do we reach conclusions about the suffering of others based on conjecture and solely on our examination of the consequences? Are we too quick to question the wickedness of others or to doubt the goodness of God? May the following prayer reflect the desire of our hearts as we live our lives in this fallen and sometimes confusing world.

Father, forgive me for reaching conclusions about You that are based solely on conjecture and poor conclusions based on consequences and nothing more. You are inexplicable and Your ways are always unquestionably right and good. Help me to look for You in any and all circumstances of life. Help me to see the good You are bringing about in my life and the lives of others – despite what I may see. Your ways are not my ways. Your plans are beyond my knowledge and understanding, but they are always right and true. Thank You for that reminder and assurance. Amen.

Job 21:17-34**The Danger of Making God in Your Own Image**

- ¹⁷ *“How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out?
That their calamity comes upon them?
That God distributes pains in his anger?*
- ¹⁸ *That they are like straw before the wind,
and like chaff that the storm carries away?*
- ¹⁹ *You say, ‘God stores up their iniquity for their children.’
Let him pay it out to them, that they may know it.*
- ²⁰ *Let their own eyes see their destruction,
and let them drink of the wrath of the Almighty.*
- ²¹ *For what do they care for their houses after them,
when the number of their months is cut off?*
- ²² *Will any teach God knowledge,
seeing that he judges those who are on high?*
- ²³ *One dies in his full vigor,
being wholly at ease and secure,*
- ²⁴ *his pails full of milk
and the marrow of his bones moist.*
- ²⁵ *Another dies in bitterness of soul,
never having tasted of prosperity.*
- ²⁶ *They lie down alike in the dust,
and the worms cover them.*
- ²⁷ *“Behold, I know your thoughts
and your schemes to wrong me.*
- ²⁸ *For you say, ‘Where is the house of the prince?
Where is the tent in which the wicked lived?’*
- ²⁹ *Have you not asked those who travel the roads,
and do you not accept their testimony*
- ³⁰ *that the evil man is spared in the day of calamity,
that he is rescued in the day of wrath?*
- ³¹ *Who declares his way to his face,
and who repays him for what he has done?*
- ³² *When he is carried to the grave,
watch is kept over his tomb.*
- ³³ *The clods of the valley are sweet to him;
all mankind follows after him,
and those who go before him are innumerable.*
- ³⁴ *How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?
There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.” – Job 21:17-34 ESV*

Job continues to confront the overly simplistic and theologically stilted reasonings of his three friends. He argues that their assessment of his situation was based on faulty conclusions that fail to line up with reality. If God is punishing Job for his wickedness, why doesn't that kind of judgment seem to happen more often? Why don't more wicked people endure the same kind of debilitating losses that Job did? His argument is that the facts don't support their conclusion.

*"...the light of the wicked never seems to be extinguished.
Do they ever have trouble?
Does God distribute sorrows to them in anger?
Are they driven before the wind like straw?
Are they carried away by the storm like chaff?
Not at all!" – Job 21:17-18 NLT*

Job could provide case study after case study to disprove his friends' faulty thesis. The entire basis of their prosecution of him was based on a house of cards. It failed to stand up under cross-examination because it simply wasn't true.

And, perceiving the counterargument his friends will submit, Job immediately debunks the idea that God sometimes allows the wicked to prosper but pours out his judgment on their heirs.

*"'Well,' you say, 'at least God will punish their children!'
But I say he should punish the ones who sin,
so that they understand his judgment.
Let them see their destruction with their own eyes.
Let them drink deeply of the anger of the Almighty.
For they will not care what happens to their family
after they are dead.'" – Job 21:19-21 NLT*

Job knew his friends well and could easily guess the strategy they would use in their counterargument. They couldn't refute the evidence that Job raised, so they would be forced to make slight alterations to their position, in a stubborn attempt to save face and to keep from admitting they were wrong.

One of the concepts Job keeps returning to is the sovereignty of God. He believes that God is in control of all things and nothing escapes His divine will or authority. For Job, the day-to-day events that make up human life are the purview of God Almighty. He alone can determine the fate of humanity and manage the occurrence and outcome of every event. From our limited perspective, it all appears so haphazard and random.

*"One person dies in prosperity,
completely comfortable and secure,
the picture of good health,
vigorous and fit.
Another person dies in bitter poverty,*

*never having tasted the good life.
But both are buried in the same dust,
both eaten by the same maggots.” – Job 21:23-26 NLT*

Yet, Job would argue that God is behind it all, and we have no right to judge Him or to accuse Him of the mismanagement of our affairs. Without realizing it, Job was expressing the opinion of God as recorded by the prophet Isaiah.

“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, ‘Stop, you’re doing it wrong!’ Does the pot exclaim, ‘How clumsy can you be?’” – Isaiah 45:9 NLT

*“Do you question what I do for my children?
Do you give me orders about the work of my hands?
I am the one who made the earth
and created people to live on it.
With my hands I stretched out the heavens.
All the stars are at my command.” – Job 21:11-12 NLT*

The apostle Paul borrowed from the writings of Isaiah to drive home the concept of God’s sovereignty to the believers living in Rome.

Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, “Why have you made me like this?” When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction. – Romans 9:20-22 NLT

As finite human beings, it is impossible for us to fully grasp the ways of God. Because we can’t see the bigger picture, we view everything from our myopic perspective and end up drawing faulty conclusions that fail to take into account the power and providence of God. Job’s friends were making false assumptions based on a flawed understanding of God’s sovereignty. Without knowing it, they had diminished God’s glory by placing Him in a simplistic box of their own making. In their arrogance and eagerness to explain the inexplicable, they had recreated the Creator in their own image. In their effort to explain Job’s circumstances, they had unwittingly extinguished God’s glory.

The following quote from J.C. Ryle, the great 19th-century author and pastor, provides a timely warning against remaking God in our own image.

“Beware of manufacturing a God of your own: a God who is all mercy, but not just; a God who is all love, but not holy; a God who as a heaven for every body, but a hell for none; a God who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. Such a God is an idol of your own, as truly an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple. The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made him. He is not the God of the Bible, and beside the God of the Bible there is no God at all.” – Rev. J.C. Ryle. “For Those Who Are Not Christ’s”

Job somehow knew that his friends were misinterpreting the facts and drawing inaccurate conclusions because they misunderstood the ways of God. He wasn’t claiming to have all the answers or boasting about his superior understanding of God. He just knew better than to question how God works. He might not like how things turn out in this life but he was willing to accept the fact that God was in control. And from what he could tell, things weren’t always black and white or cut and dried.

*“Evil people are spared in times of calamity
and are allowed to escape disaster.
No one criticizes them openly
or pays them back for what they have done.” – Job 21:30-31 NLT*

So, what right did his friends have to bombard him with their “empty clichés” (Job 21:34 NLT) and pious-sounding platitudes about God’s judgment? They had no idea what they were talking about. Job had witnessed the funerals of countless individuals whose lives were marked by wickedness, but their memorials were still well-attended and filled with statements of praise and condolences. So, he was not willing to accept his friends’ over-simplistic explanation of his suffering because it oversimplified the glory and goodness of God.

Job 22:1-30**Playing God is a Dangerous Game**

¹ Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

² *“Can a man be profitable to God?*

Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself.

³ *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?*

⁴ *Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you
and enters into judgment with you?*

⁵ *Is not your evil abundant?*

There is no end to your iniquities.

⁶ *For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing
and stripped the naked of their clothing.*

⁷ *You have given no water to the weary to drink,
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.*

⁸ *The man with power possessed the land,
and the favored man lived in it.*

⁹ *You have sent widows away empty,
and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.*

¹⁰ *Therefore snares are all around you,
and sudden terror overwhelms you,*

¹¹ *or darkness, so that you cannot see,
and a flood of water covers you.*

¹² *“Is not God high in the heavens?*

See the highest stars, how lofty they are!

¹³ *But you say, ‘What does God know?*

Can he judge through the deep darkness?

¹⁴ *Thick clouds veil him, so that he does not see,
and he walks on the vault of heaven.’*

¹⁵ *Will you keep to the old way
that wicked men have trod?*

¹⁶ *They were snatched away before their time;
their foundation was washed away.*

¹⁷ *They said to God, ‘Depart from us,’
and ‘What can the Almighty do to us?’*

¹⁸ *Yet he filled their houses with good things—
but the counsel of the wicked is far from me.*

¹⁹ *The righteous see it and are glad;
the innocent one mocks at them,*

- ²⁰ saying, 'Surely our adversaries are cut off,
and what they left the fire has consumed.'
- ²¹ "Agree with God, and be at peace;
thereby good will come to you.
- ²² Receive instruction from his mouth,
and lay up his words in your heart.
- ²³ If you return to the Almighty you will be built up;
if you remove injustice far from your tents,
- ²⁴ if you lay gold in the dust,
and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed,
- ²⁵ then the Almighty will be your gold
and your precious silver.
- ²⁶ For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty
and lift up your face to God.
- ²⁷ You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you,
and you will pay your vows.
- ²⁸ You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you,
and light will shine on your ways.
- ²⁹ For when they are humbled you say, 'It is because of pride';
but he saves the lowly.
- ³⁰ He delivers even the one who is not innocent,
who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands." – Job 22:1-30 ESV

It doesn't take long for Eliphaz to jump back into the mix, responding to Job with his signature blend of sarcasm and sardonic wit. Openly disgusted with Job's incessant claims of righteousness and innocence, Eliphaz not only maintains his belief in Job's guilt but now insinuates that his entire life has been an elaborate cover-up. He accuses Job of trying to pull a fast one on God.

*"God is so great—higher than the heavens,
higher than the farthest stars.
But you reply, 'That's why God can't see what I am doing!
How can he judge through the thick darkness?
For thick clouds swirl about him, and he cannot see us.
He is way up there, walking on the vault of heaven.'" – Job 22:12-14 NLT*

He confidently asserts that Job has spent his entire life pretending to be something other than what he truly was. He had lived the life of a hypocrite, giving off the aura of a godly man while practicing wickedness behind closed doors. This is a serious accusation and one that Eliphaz fails to back up with any evidence. In Eliphaz's eyes, Job is guilty until proven innocent.

In the opening line of his speech, Eliphaz ridicules the very idea that Job was a righteous man, claiming that even if he was, God would not be beholden to him in any way. According to Eliphaz's theology, God doesn't need help from anyone, including the righteous.

*"Can a person do anything to help God?
Can even a wise person be helpful to him?
Is it any advantage to the Almighty if you are righteous?
Would it be any gain to him if you were perfect?" – Job 22:2-3 NLT*

Of course, the obvious answer to his question is, "No." God does need man's help. He does not require our input or assistance. Even the righteous provide no real benefit to God Almighty. But while this may be true, it does not accurately reflect God's view of the righteous and godly.

David paints a much more optimistic view of God's relationship with the righteous.

*...the Lord is in his holy Temple;
the Lord still rules from heaven.
He watches everyone closely,
examining every person on earth.
The Lord examines both the righteous and the wicked.
He hates those who love violence.
He will rain down blazing coals and burning sulfur on the wicked,
punishing them with scorching winds.
For the righteous Lord loves justice.
The virtuous will see his face. – Psalm 11:4-7 NLT*

*For the Lord loves justice,
and he will never abandon the godly.*

*He will keep them safe forever,
but the children of the wicked will die. – Psalm 37:28 NLT*

Yet Eliphaz won't even admit that Job is righteous. In his mind, it made no sense to view Job as godly and guiltless.

*"Is it because you're so pious that he accuses you
and brings judgment against you?
No, it's because of your wickedness!
There's no limit to your sins." – Job 22:4-5 NLT*

That was the only logical conclusion Eliphaz could come to, and nothing would sway him from that view. No amount of denial on Job's part would convince Eliphaz to reconsider his position or back down from his relentless attacks. He would not be satisfied until Job confessed or God completed His punishment by taking Job's life.

His entire argument is based on conjecture. He offers no concrete evidence of Job's guilt but doesn't seem to think any is necessary. He just assumes that Job's suffering is evidence enough.

*"For example, you must have lent money to your friend
and demanded clothing as security.
Yes, you stripped him to the bone.
You must have refused water for the thirsty
and food for the hungry." – Job 22:6-7 NLT*

Eliphaz's entire prosecution strategy is based on an if-then premise. If Job was suffering, then he must have done something to make God angry. His hypothesis that Job was guilty was built on a shaky foundation of conditional statements. The circumstances surrounding Job's life were proof that he had sinned against God. It didn't seem to matter to Eliphaz that he had no proof of Job's suppositional guilt.

*"You must have sent widows away empty-handed
and crushed the hopes of orphans.
That is why you are surrounded by traps
and tremble from sudden fears.
That is why you cannot see in the darkness,
and waves of water cover you." – Job 22:9-11 NLT*

It was all so black and white to Eliphaz. His conclusion was the only one that made any sense to him. And the longer Job defended himself, the more Eliphaz wished for his downfall. He was becoming increasingly more volatile in his attacks and anxious to see himself proven to be right. He even infers that Job's inevitable destruction will bring him great joy.

*"The righteous will be happy to see the wicked destroyed,
and the innocent will laugh in contempt." – Job 22:19 NLT*

But then he softens his stance, in an attempt to portray himself as a loving and compassionate friend. He pleads with Job to confess and repent. It's not too late. If Job will only drop his charade of righteous indignation and admit that he is all Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have claimed him to be, he can experience forgiveness and healing. In other words, Eliphaz tells Job to simply shut up, give up, and own up to his sins.

*"Submit to God, and you will have peace;
then things will go well for you.
Listen to his instructions,
and store them in your heart.
If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored—
so clean up your life." – Job 22:21-23 NLT*

Hidden in the somewhat empathetic-sounding rhetoric of this statement is Eliphaz's belief that he is speaking on behalf of God. He is the one whom God is using to "instruct" the wayward and stubbornly sinful Job. If Job will only listen to what Eliphaz and his friends have to say, he will be restored to a right relationship with God. They are the key to Job's restoration.

But there is one more thing that Job will have to do. He will have to clean up his act and give up all his wicked ways. According to Eliphaz, Job was a gluttonous materialist whose love of money had led him to commit all kinds of unjust and ungodly crimes. If he would only repent of his love affair with money and materialism, Job could see an end to his suffering and pain. At least, that was how Eliphaz saw it.

This led Eliphaz to make Job an attractive and difficult-to-resist offer. If Job would only admit his guilt, he could be on the pathway to righteousness and restoration.

*"Then you will take delight in the Almighty
and look up to God.
You will pray to him, and he will hear you,
and you will fulfill your vows to him.
You will succeed in whatever you choose to do,
and light will shine on the road ahead of you."* – Job 22:26-28 NLT

Once again, there is an element of truth in what Eliphaz has to say. His words align with those of the apostle John.

...if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. – 1 John 1:9 NLT

The Proverbs of Solomon also support Eliphaz's conclusion.

People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy. – Proverbs 28:13 NLT

But the problem was that Eliphaz was assuming guilt when he had no right or authority to do so. He and his two companions were playing God. Ever since their arrival in Uz, they had done nothing but condemn their friend for having sinned against God, with nothing to prove their assertion except circumstantial and unsubstantiated evidence of wrongdoing. Yet, they were right, God does forgive sinners. He can and will restore the repentant. But they had no proof that Job was a sinner in need of repentance. They had assumed the worst and pronounced Job as guilty based on nothing more than their opinions and observations. And in time, God will rebuke them for their insensitivity and insufferable arrogance.

Job 23:1-17**He Knows, He Sees, He Cares**

¹ Then Job answered and said:

² "Today also my complaint is bitter;
my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.

³ Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his seat!

⁴ I would lay my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.

⁵ I would know what he would answer me
and understand what he would say to me.

⁶ Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?
No; he would pay attention to me.

⁷ There an upright man could argue with him,
and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.

⁸ "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there,
and backward, but I do not perceive him;

⁹ on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him;
he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him.

¹⁰ But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.

¹¹ My foot has held fast to his steps;
I have kept his way and have not turned aside.

¹² I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.

¹³ But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back?
What he desires, that he does.

¹⁴ For he will complete what he appoints for me,
and many such things are in his mind.

¹⁵ Therefore I am terrified at his presence;
when I consider, I am in dread of him.

¹⁶ God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;

¹⁷ yet I am not silenced because of the darkness,
nor because thick darkness covers my face." – Job 23:1-17 ESV

Let's face it. We can't always understand what God is doing. His ways are sometimes mysterious and even frustrating. Like Job, we look for Him, but can't seem to find Him anywhere. It's as if He is hidden from our sight. But Job makes a profound statement that should bring us assurance and comfort: "But he knows the way that I take" (Job 23:10 ESV). In

other words, Job was confident that God knew exactly where he was and where he was going. That phrase could be translated, "He knows where to look for me."

Amid all his troubles, Job still believed that God was fully aware of all that was going on in his life. Despite the assumptions of his friends, Job was confident that had not lost sight of him, even for a moment. God had not gotten distracted or turned His back on His beleaguered servant. At no point in this sad story was God caught off guard or shocked by some unexpected change in Job's circumstances. No, God was right with Job every step of the way.

Of course, there were times when Job felt a growing distance between himself and God. It was only natural for him to question God's presence when everything was caving in around him. And yet, Job seemed to know that God was always near.

"I do not see him in the north, for he is hidden. I turn to the south, but I cannot find him. But he knows where I am going. And when he has tested me like gold in a fire, he will pronounce me innocent. For I have stayed in God's paths; I have followed his ways and not turned aside."— Job 23:9-11 NLT

Job found encouragement in the knowledge that God was faithful, if not always visible. He was watching and, for some inexplicable reason, waiting to step in and rescue Job. Despite the test in which he found himself, Job knew that God would eventually vindicate him and pronounce him innocent. While Job's three friends were convinced of his guilt, he knew that God would come to his defense and set the record straight. Job inherently knew that God had a plan for his life, and that plan included all that was happening at the moment. He didn't fully understand or like his circumstances, but Job knew there was a divine purpose behind it all.

So, Job continues to claim his innocence. He declares that he has remained faithful to God and has treasured His words. But then he states, "Nevertheless, his mind concerning me remains unchanged, and who can turn him from his purposes? Whatever he wants to do, he does. So he will do for me all he has planned. He controls my destiny" (Job 23:13-14 NLT).

Job seems to understand that this is not all about his guilt or innocence. It is about the sovereign will of God for his life. God controls his destiny. What He has set out to do, He will do. Nothing Job does will change that. You can detect a little frustration in Job's statement, and I don't blame him. I have been there more often than I would care to admit. I have found myself frustrated by God's plan for my life. Like Job, I know God is in control, and so I get frustrated that He can't come up with a better scenario for my life than the one He has chosen. Sure, I know I contribute to my own problems by bad decisions and outright sin, but sometimes it just seems like things take a turn for the worse and I didn't particularly do anything to "deserve" it. But that's when I have to remind myself that God's ways are perfect. And His love for me is flawless. He has the best in store for me. I am His child. He is my Father, And I can trust Him.

There are going to be days of darkness. Difficulties will come. Job knew that. In fact, he was in the middle of it.

"Darkness is all around me; thick, impenetrable darkness is everywhere." – Job 23:17 NLT).

Emotionally speaking, Job couldn't see his hand in front of his face. He couldn't see his God either but he knew that God was in control. That was his hope in the midst of his hopelessness. And it should be ours as well. Our God is both powerful and merciful. He sees us. Not only that, He loves us, and we are safely ensconced in the plan He has for us – no matter how the circumstances may appear.

When I find myself in a difficult situation with questions running through my mind and doubts racing through my heart, may the following prayer come to my lips:

Father, Your plan for me is perfect, but sometimes it is so hard to see, let alone understand. I feel like you are not there sometimes. I feel like I can't find you. But You remind me that You can always see me. You never take Your eyes off of me. You hold me in the palm of Your hand. You love me and are looking out for me. Help me see You in the midst of my trials. Help me trust You in the middle of my scariest moments. I know you don't have to explain Your ways to me, but help me to trust them. Amen.

Job 24:1-25**Life Isn't Fair, But God Is Just**

- ¹ *“Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty,
and why do those who know him never see his days?”*
- ² *Some move landmarks;
they seize flocks and pasture them.*
- ³ *They drive away the donkey of the fatherless;
they take the widow's ox for a pledge.*
- ⁴ *They thrust the poor off the road;
the poor of the earth all hide themselves.*
- ⁵ *Behold, like wild donkeys in the desert
the poor go out to their toil, seeking game;
the wasteland yields food for their children.*
- ⁶ *They gather their fodder in the field,
and they glean the vineyard of the wicked man.*
- ⁷ *They lie all night naked, without clothing,
and have no covering in the cold.*
- ⁸ *They are wet with the rain of the mountains
and cling to the rock for lack of shelter.*
- ⁹ *(There are those who snatch the fatherless child from the breast,
and they take a pledge against the poor.)*
- ¹⁰ *They go about naked, without clothing;
hungry, they carry the sheaves;*
- ¹¹ *among the olive rows of the wicked they make oil;
they tread the winepresses, but suffer thirst.*
- ¹² *From out of the city the dying groan,
and the soul of the wounded cries for help;
yet God charges no one with wrong.*
- ¹³ *“There are those who rebel against the light,
who are not acquainted with its ways,
and do not stay in its paths.*
- ¹⁴ *The murderer rises before it is light,
that he may kill the poor and needy,
and in the night he is like a thief.*
- ¹⁵ *The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight,
saying, ‘No eye will see me’;
and he veils his face.*
- ¹⁶ *In the dark they dig through houses;
by day they shut themselves up;
they do not know the light.*

- ¹⁷ *For deep darkness is morning to all of them;
for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.*
- ¹⁸ *"You say, 'Swift are they on the face of the waters;
their portion is cursed in the land;
no treacher turns toward their vineyards.*
- ¹⁹ *Drought and heat snatch away the snow waters;
so does Sheol those who have sinned.*
- ²⁰ *The womb forgets them;
the worm finds them sweet;
they are no longer remembered,
so wickedness is broken like a tree.'*
- ²¹ *"They wrong the barren, childless woman,
and do no good to the widow.*
- ²² *Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power;
they rise up when they despair of life.*
- ²³ *He gives them security, and they are supported,
and his eyes are upon their ways.*
- ²⁴ *They are exalted a little while, and then are gone;
they are brought low and gathered up like all others;
they are cut off like the heads of grain.*
- ²⁵ *If it is not so, who will prove me a liar
and show that there is nothing in what I say?" – Job 24:1-25 ESV*

The world we live in is anything but fair. Every day, people suffer injustices of all kinds. Children are born into families in which they find themselves unloved and abused. The powerful take advantage of the weak and defenseless. Corrupt governments deny the rights of their citizens. Individuals harm one another. People who have worked all their lives and saved to provide themselves a decent retirement income, lose it all at the hands of unethical corporate executives and greedy lenders. The same was true in Job's day.

Despite his friends' assertions that the wicked always face justice at the hand of God, Job argues that this isn't necessarily so. Plenty of people in Job's day seemed to walk away without a scratch in spite of their unethical and immoral behavior.

"There are people out there getting by with murder--stealing and lying and cheating. They rip off the poor and exploit the unfortunate, push the helpless into the ditch, bully the weak so that they fear for their lives. The poor, like stray dogs and cats, scavenge for food in back alleys. They sort through the garbage of the rich, eke out survival on handouts. Homeless, they shiver through cold nights on the street; they've no place to lay their heads." – Job 24:2-7 MSG

Job is simply stating the facts as he sees them. This is reality. It is the nature of life lived in a fallen world, and it was true in Job's day just as it is in ours. Job asks the obvious question:

"Why doesn't the Almighty open the court and bring judgment? Why must the godly wait for him in vain?" – Job 24:1 NLT

As we watch events taking place in our world, we tend to ask the same basic question. Why doesn't God step in and do something? When we read news stories of abuse, neglect, corruption, murder, hatred, and bigotry, we can't help but wonder where God is and why He isn't doing something about it all. The truth is that the wicked don't always suffer. Sometimes they actually get away with their actions and profit from their behavior. The innocent suffer while the wicked prosper. It happens all the time. We don't like it, and we can't explain it. And the fact is, God isn't obligated to provide us with an explanation.

But Job finds comfort in knowing that in the end, God will deal with all those who practice ungodliness.

"But God drags away the mighty by his power; though they become established, they have no assurance of life. He may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut off like ears of corn." – Job 24:22-24 NIV

God is always watching. His eyes are fixed on the ways of the wicked and He doesn't miss a thing. He is not asleep or indifferent. He is not apathetic or disinterested. Job knows that God will act – in His own good time. In the meantime, the righteous will continue to suffer while the wicked seem to prosper. Job isn't necessarily being pessimistic; he's simply being realistic. Life isn't a black-and-white affair. The good don't always win and the righteous aren't immune from suffering. Much to our chagrin, the bad guys don't always get what they deserve. Evil people sometimes prosper and too often than not, the weak and helpless come out on the short end of the stick.

It is a painful reality that Christians face persecution and even death at the hands of malicious governments. Innocent women and children are sold into slavery or used to feed the insatiable desires of the world's burgeoning sex trade. It's unfair. It's immoral. It's offensive and reprehensible. But it does not mean that God is out of control or disinterested. He is fully aware of what is going on and, one day, He will act. We can rest assured.

"But GOD hasn't moved to the mountains; his holy address hasn't changed. He's in charge, as always, his eyes taking everything in, his eyelids unblinking, examining Adam's unruly brood inside and out, not missing a thing. He tests the good and the bad alike; if anyone cheats, God's outraged. Fail the test and you're out, out in a hail of firestones, drinking from a canteen filled with hot desert wind. GOD's business is putting

things right; he loves getting the lines straight, setting us straight. Once we're standing tall, we can look him straight in the eye." – Psalm 11:4-7 MSG

Job's whole point is that things are not always what they seem. He is trying to get his three friends to understand that their assessment of his situation was inaccurate and unfair. They were judging him falsely because they didn't have all the facts. They were drawing their conclusions based on circumstantial evidence that gave a false impression of guilt. But God knew the facts of the case, and Job was convinced that He would rule favorably in the end.

*"God, in his power, drags away the rich.
They may rise high, but they have no assurance of life.
They may be allowed to live in security,
but God is always watching them.
And though they are great now,
in a moment they will be gone like all others,
cut off like heads of grain.
Can anyone claim otherwise?
Who can prove me wrong?"* – Job 24:22-25 NLT

Job was content to leave his judgment up to God. But he wasn't going to allow his friends to ruin his reputation by dragging his name through the mud and questioning his integrity. He was not guilty as charged. Job was perplexed and confused but he was willing to wait on God to make things right. For the moment, things seemed out of sorts and difficult to comprehend. But even in the upside-down world in which Job found himself, he knew he could count on God.

God sees all. He is just. And one day He will make all things right. May He give us patience to wait for His perfect timing. And as we wait, we must pray for strength so that we might be salt and light in the dark world in which we live. May we bring refreshment and hope to the suffering and the lost. Life is not far, but our God is just and righteous. And one day, He will balance the scales and set all things in order.

Job 25:1-26:4**God's Greatness and Goodness**

¹ *Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:*

² *"Dominion and fear are with God;
he makes peace in his high heaven.*

³ *Is there any number to his armies?
Upon whom does his light not arise?*

⁴ *How then can man be in the right before God?
How can he who is born of woman be pure?*

⁵ *Behold, even the moon is not bright,
and the stars are not pure in his eyes;*

⁶ *how much less man, who is a maggot,
and the son of man, who is a worm!"*

¹ *Then Job answered and said:*

² *"How you have helped him who has no power!
How you have saved the arm that has no strength!*

³ *How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
and plentifully declared sound knowledge!*

⁴ *With whose help have you uttered words,
and whose breath has come out from you?" – Job 25:1-26:4 ESV*

It almost appears as if Bildad is growing weary. In what will be the last of his three speeches, he seems to run out of energy and words in his ongoing attempt to convince Job of his guilt. Since Job has continued to express his belief that God will ultimately vindicate him, Bildad reminds his friend that God is not to be trifled with. He describes God as a "powerful and dreadful" (Job 25:1 NLT) ruler who reigns over the armies of heaven. His power is so vast that He controls the sun and "is more glorious than the moon" and "shines brighter than the stars" (Job25:5 NLT).

This all-powerful deity is a force to be reckoned with and not to be taken lightly. Bildad is appalled by Job's arrogant display of faux intimacy with God. From his perspective, Bildad sees Job as far too flippant in his attitude toward the God of the universe. His beleaguered friend displays a shockingly and unwise disregard for God's holiness and transcendence. Job speaks of God as if they were best friends and Bildad goes out of his way to paint God as anything but Job's bosom buddy in the sky. This great and glorious God is so vast and holy that no mere mortal can dare to stand in His presence, let alone hope to be called His friend. Bildad drives home this point like a dagger.

*"How can a mortal be innocent before God?
Can anyone born of a woman be pure?" – Job 25:4 NLT*

And in an apparent attempt to build a bridge of reconciliation to Job, Bildad includes himself in the category of all those who fail to measure up to God's glorious standard.

*"In comparison, people are maggots;
we mortals are mere worms." – Job 25:6 NLT*

While there is truth in what Bildad has to say, he is applying that truth like a sledgehammer while neglecting to factor in such things as God's love, mercy, compassion, and desire to have a relationship with mankind. God is indeed transcendent, but He makes a habit of reaching out making Himself available and approachable to humanity. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the greatest example of God's desire to make Himself known to man.

No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us. – John 1:18 NLT

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. – Colossians 1:15 NLT

God made Himself known to Adam and Eve in the garden. Before the fall, they had daily fellowship with their Creator-God. Noah and Enoch are said to have walked with God. They both enjoyed an intimate relationship with the Almighty that He initiated. Abraham was called "the friend of God" (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:24) and that relationship was marked by regular interactions with his divine counterpart. They talked repeatedly and Abraham knew what it was like to be discipled and disciplined by his Heavenly Father and friend.

Bildad mistakenly portrays God as a one-dimensional being who is so dissimilar and distant from humanity that the gulf between the two cannot be bridged. What right does the lowly worm have to expect the God who created the universe to take notice of it. And, according to Bildad's logic, a sinful human being has not hope of standing before the wholly righteous and sinless God of the universe. Job was out of his league and out of his mind to think that God would give him the time of day. Bildad believed Job was living in a fantasy land of illusion and false hope, and the sooner he woke up to the reality of his sinfulness and God's holiness, the better.

But Job isn't swayed by Bildad's pessimistic logic. Rather than bow the knee to Bildad's demand for abject submission to God's transcendence, Job levels a series of stinging and sarcastic one-liners against his friend.

*"How you have helped the powerless!
How you have saved the weak!
How you have enlightened my stupidity!
What wise advice you have offered!
Where have you gotten all these wise sayings?
Whose spirit speaks through you?" – Job 26:2-4 NLT*

These literally statements drip with sarcasm. Job wants Bildad and his two companions to know that their lengthy monologues have been utterly useless and of no benefit whatsoever. He is not impressed with their wisdom. He has received no life-altering insights from all their pontificating and posturing. He has not been swayed by their rhetorical skills or pithy-sounding platitudes masquerading as truth. There is nothing they have said that he didn't already know. They have brought nothing new to the table but have simply regurgitated the same old worn-out arguments about God's greatness and man's lowliness. But that doesn't help to explain Job's predicament. Job fully understood that God is God and he is not. He knew that God was holy and righteous. In fact, he was counting on it. He was so convinced of God's "otherness" that He was willing to take his questions and concerns straight to the sole source of wisdom, truth, and justice.

Job knew God was holy, and he wasn't taking Him lightly or treating Him with contempt. Despite the picture his friends painted, Job wasn't stupid. But he was desperate. He needed answers. He longed for relief. And so he called out to that powerful and dreadful God who rules over the host of heaven and controls the sun, moon, and stars. He went straight to the top, not out of some misguided sense of self-worthiness or equality with God, but based on his understanding of God's greatness and goodness.

God invites His children to call upon Him. He desires even lowly worms to reach out to Him in faith and hope.

"...call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." – Psalm 50:15 ESV

"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." – Jeremiah 33:3 ESV

...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. – Romans 10:13 ESV

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. – Acts 2:21 ESV

Job had not called his friends, but they had shown up anyway, and their arrival had brought him nothing but grief. Their answers and advice had proven unhelpful and nothing but hurtful. They were even advising Job to curtail his pitiful and pointless cries to God. It would do him no good, they reasoned. He was wasting his time. But Job knew better. Despite all that had happened, Job knew that God was his only hope. Yes, his hope was wavering and his faith was being severely tested, but he kept returning to the one piece of solid ground in the landscape of his shattered life: The greatness and goodness of God.

If Job had only had access to the Psalms, he might have shared the following insights with his friend, Bildad. These amazing words from the pen of Ethan the Ezrahite provide a powerful counterpoint to the short-sighted logic of Bildad.

*O Lord God of Heaven's Armies!
Where is there anyone as mighty as you, O Lord?
You are entirely faithful.*

*You rule the oceans.
You subdue their storm-tossed waves.
You crushed the great sea monster.
You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.
The heavens are yours, and the earth is yours;
everything in the world is yours—you created it all.
You created north and south.
Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon praise your name.
Powerful is your arm!
Strong is your hand!
Your right hand is lifted high in glorious strength.
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.
Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants.
Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship,
for they will walk in the light of your presence, Lord.
They rejoice all day long in your wonderful reputation.
They exult in your righteousness. – Psalm 89:8-16 NLT*

It is God's greatness that makes possible His goodness. Only He is all-powerful and fully capable of using His righteousness and justice to right the wrongs and bring about vindication and restoration to the hurting and hopeless of this world.

Job 26:5-14**You Don't Have to Understand God to Trust Him**

- ⁵ *The dead tremble
under the waters and their inhabitants.*
- ⁶ *Sheol is naked before God,
and Abaddon has no covering.*
- ⁷ *He stretches out the north over the void
and hangs the earth on nothing.*
- ⁸ *He binds up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not split open under them.*
- ⁹ *He covers the face of the full moon
and spreads over it his cloud.*
- ¹⁰ *He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters
at the boundary between light and darkness.*
- ¹¹ *The pillars of heaven tremble
and are astounded at his rebuke.*
- ¹² *By his power he stilled the sea;
by his understanding he shattered Rahab.*
- ¹³ *By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.*
- ¹⁴ *Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways,
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?"* – Job 26:5-14 ESV

Job is convinced of God's greatness and that is what motivates his cries for the Almighty's help. He is calling on the only one who is able to assist him during his time of need. His God was majestic and mighty in power and that is exactly why Job was willing to place himself at God's mercy.

Job understood that God was all-knowing and all-powerful. This great God knows things that no human being could ever hope to know. His knowledge is far beyond anything the human mind can comprehend. Just take a look at some of the Hubble Telescope images of the universe and the scope and size of God's knowledge starts to become clear. Job seemed to have a solid grasp of the greatness of God and could see it reflected in the world around him.

"By his hand the north is stretched out in space, and the earth is hanging on nothing. By him the waters are shut up in his thick clouds, and the cloud does not give way under them. By him the face of his high seat is veiled, and his cloud stretched out over it. By him a circle is marked out on the face of the waters, to the limits of the light and the dark." – Job 26:7-10 BBE

Job tells his friends that while they seem to be speaking for God, they have no clue what what they are talking about. They are ignorant of the ways of God, and are presumptuous to think that they have figured out the mysteries of life. These men have repeatedly made assumptions about Job's guilt as if they know for sure what has taken place, but they don't know. Only God does.

We can't understand the ways of God; our understanding is limited. We can't fully comprehend or explain what God does or why He does it, and He doesn't explain Himself to us. For Job, all he could rest on was his own integrity and his hope in God's rescue. He stood firm on his claim of innocence and, as he states in the very next chapter, he would go to his grave knowing he had done nothing wrong.

"Let it be far from me! I will certainly not say that you are right! I will come to death before I give up my righteousness. I will keep it safe, and will not let it go: my heart has nothing to say against any part of my life." – Job 27:5-6 BBE

Job didn't understand why he was suffering. He couldn't explain the reasons for all his losses. All he knew was that he had done nothing wrong to deserve any of it. And when it came to his understanding of God, Job was relegated to examining the world around him. He could not see God but he could gather insights about God from nature.

The apostle Paul provides insight into God's divine display of His glory through His creation. The universe bears the mark of its Maker, giving ample proof of His existence and providing visible illustrations of His power, immensity, creativity, and sovereignty.

They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. – Romans 1:19-20 NLT

At the end of the day, all any man can know about God is what He chooses to reveal about Himself. Job could see aspects of God's power and creativity in nature and within the world around him, but he couldn't fully comprehend how it all worked.

As modern human beings, we can look into the design of the human cell and appreciate its intricacy and complexity, but we can't explain how God made it. There is so much about God that we don't understand but we do know that He is powerful. His creation provides a daily demonstration of His power. From the sun, moon, and stars hung in the night sky to the storms that rage on this singular planet floating in the vastness of space, we have been given ample evidence of God's existence and essence.

King David recognized this cosmic display of God's glory and immortalized it in words.

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
 The skies display his craftsmanship.
 Day after day they continue to speak;
 night after night they make him known.
 They speak without a sound or word;
 their voice is never heard.
 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
 and their words to all the world. – Psalm 9:1-4 NLT*

Yet, fallen man has a way of looking past the signs of God’s glory that surround him. In his pride and arrogance, he tries to write God out of the script by providing his own explanations for the existence of the universe. Yet, humanity would have a difficult time answering the probing questions that God directed at His servant Job.

*“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
 Tell me, if you know so much.
 Who determined its dimensions
 and stretched out the surveying line?
 What supports its foundations,
 and who laid its cornerstone
 as the morning stars sang together
 and all the angels shouted for joy?” –Job 38:4-7 NLT*

No man was there when God created the universe. Yet the creature still tries to explain away the Creator. Man, in his hubris, attempts to play god by providing answers to all the mysteries of life. But God exposes the absurdity of it all.

*“Where does light come from,
 and where does darkness go?
 Can you take each to its home?
 Do you know how to get there?
 But of course you know all this!
 For you were born before it was all created,
 and you are so very experienced!” – Job 38:19-21 NLT*

When all is said and done, all we can really know about God is what He chooses to reveal about Himself. He is the unknowable, unsearchable God. He is beyond finding out and impossible to comprehend and yet He has made Himself known through His creation. And Job knew this God. He knew of the power and majesty of God. But He also knew of God’s love, sovereignty, righteousness, and justice. He knew that God was always watching.

Job knew these things and he rested in them. While knowing these things did not stop his pain or eliminate his suffering, it did give him a sense of hope in the midst of it all. Job's approach to his situation is similar to that of King David reflected in another one of his psalms.

*I said to myself, "I will watch what I do
 and not sin in what I say.
 I will hold my tongue
 when the ungodly are around me."
 But as I stood there in silence—
 not even speaking of good things—
 the turmoil within me grew worse.
 The more I thought about it,
 the hotter I got,
 igniting a fire of words:
 "Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.
 Remind me that my days are numbered—
 how fleeting my life is.
 You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand.
 My entire lifetime is just a moment to you;
 at best, each of us is but a breath."*

*We are merely moving shadows,
 and all our busy rushing ends in nothing.
 We heap up wealth,
 not knowing who will spend it.
 And so, Lord, where do I put my hope?
 My only hope is in you. – Psalms 39:1-7 NLT*

My only hope is in You. Is God where you put your hope? Is He the first place you turn to in times of trouble? There is much about life we will never understand, but we can know that God is faithful, just, righteous, merciful, powerful, and completely in control of any and all circumstances. We can trust Him.

Father, I want to trust You, but I struggle so often with wanting to understand first. I want to have everything explained to me, THEN I'll trust You. But You aren't obligated to explain Yourself to me. You don't have to justify Your actions to me. Part of trusting You is learning to rely on You even when I don't understand You. You've never proven Yourself untrustworthy, Lord, so I'm not sure why I struggle so much with trust. But thank You for your patience. Thank You for Your love. Thank You for Your faithfulness. Amen.

Job 27:1-23**The Truth About False Words**

¹ *And Job again took up his discourse, and said:*

² *“As God lives, who has taken away my right,*

and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter,

³ *as long as my breath is in me,*

and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,

⁴ *my lips will not speak falsehood,*

and my tongue will not utter deceit.

⁵ *Far be it from me to say that you are right;*

till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.

⁶ *I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go;*

my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

⁷ *“Let my enemy be as the wicked,*

and let him who rises up against me be as the unrighteous.

⁸ *For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off,*

when God takes away his life?

⁹ *Will God hear his cry*

when distress comes upon him?

¹⁰ *Will he take delight in the Almighty?*

Will he call upon God at all times?

¹¹ *I will teach you concerning the hand of God;*

what is with the Almighty I will not conceal.

¹² *Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves;*

why then have you become altogether vain?

¹³ *“This is the portion of a wicked man with God,*

and the heritage that oppressors receive from the Almighty:

¹⁴ *If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword,*

and his descendants have not enough bread.

¹⁵ *Those who survive him the pestilence buries,*

and his widows do not weep.

¹⁶ *Though he heap up silver like dust,*

and pile up clothing like clay,

¹⁷ *he may pile it up, but the righteous will wear it,*

and the innocent will divide the silver.

¹⁸ *He builds his house like a moth's,*

like a booth that a watchman makes.

¹⁹ *He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more;*

he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone.
²⁰ *Terrors overtake him like a flood;*
in the night a whirlwind carries him off.
²¹ *The east wind lifts him up and he is gone;*
it sweeps him out of his place.
²² *It hurls at him without pity;*
he flees from its power in headlong flight.
²³ *It claps its hands at him*
and hisses at him from its place.” – Job 27:1-23 ESV

In this follow-up to his previous response to Bildad, Job takes all three of his friends to task. In Hebrew, his use of the word “you” is in the plural form and he repeats it several times.

*“I will never concede that **you** are right;*
I will defend my integrity until I die.” – Job 27:5 NLT

*“I will teach **you** about God’s power.*
I will not conceal anything concerning the Almighty.
*But **you** have seen all this,*
*yet **you** say all these useless things to me.” – Job 27:11-12 NLT*

Job has reached the end of his patience and wants Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar to know that he will never give in to their demands that he confess his sin. In fact, the first six verses of this speech are his unequivocal claim of innocence, and he backs it up by a vow or oath that is based on the very existence of God.

“As surely as God lives,” Job begins. The existence of God is undeniable and irrefutable, and on that basis, Job declares that his innocence is just as sure and steadfast. His steadfast belief in his innocence was as firm as his belief in the existence of God. Even the life-altering nature of his fall had not shaken his belief in God. Yes, he had plenty of questions he wanted to direct to God, but he had never questioned God’s existence. And he was willing to take unwavering belief in his own righteousness to the grave. No amount of pressure from his three friends was going to change his mind or shatter his faith in his own integrity.

“I will never say that you are right; I will maintain my integrity until I die. I will cling to my righteousness and never let go. As long as I live, my conscience will not accuse me.” – Job 27:5-6 BSB

Job was so insistent because he refused to place himself within the company of the wicked. For him, that was unthinkable because it would be a virtual death sentence. His view of the fate of the wicked was dark and hopeless. He flatly states, “what hope do the godless have when God cuts them off and takes away their life?” (Job 27:8 NLT). Their fate is sealed because they will fall into the hands of the righteous Judge of the universe. No amount of regret or remorse will change their future because God will not listen to their cries or defer His judgment.

*“Will God listen to their cry
when trouble comes upon them?
Can they take delight in the Almighty?
Can they call to God at any time?” – Job 27:9-10 NLT*

Job’s questions are rhetorical and have only one answer.: “No!” One day, as they face their inevitable judgment, the wicked of this world will see the error of their ways and attempt to make things right with God, but it will be too little, too late. Job is not describing true repentance or what we might call “saving faith.” He is talking about those who live their entire lives in opposition to the will of God and then, at death, when facing their just and righteous judgment, try to escape their fate by a sudden death-bed display of godliness. It won’t work, asserts Job.

The most surprising aspect of Job’s assessment of the fate of the wicked is that he hopes his three friends will experience it.

“May my enemy be like the wicked and my opponent like the unjust.” – Job 27:7 BSB

This statement appears harsh and unjustified to the modern reader but it was a common rhetorical device in Job’s day. This over-the-top denunciation of his three friends was meant to accentuate the unjust nature of their false accusations of him.

King David uses a similar style of imprecation when dealing with his own false accusers.

*O God, whom I praise,
don’t stand silent and aloof
while the wicked slander me
and tell lies about me.
They surround me with hateful words
and fight against me for no reason.
I love them, but they try to destroy me with accusations
even as I am praying for them! – Psalm 109:1-4 NLT*

These “friends” of David were not only guilty of slandering him but were going out of their way to ruin his reputation and life.

*They say, “Get an evil person to turn against him.
Send an accuser to bring him to trial.
When his case comes up for judgment,
let him be pronounced guilty.
Count his prayers as sins.” – Psalm 109:6-7 NLT*

David provides a shocking list of their prayers for his downfall and they are unsparing in their desire to see him completely humiliated and ruined, not only for life, but for eternity.

*“May all his offspring die.
 May his family name be blotted out in the next generation.
 May the Lord never forget the sins of his fathers;
 may his mother’s sins never be erased from the record.” – Psalm 109:13-14 NLT*

So, David responds with a prayer of his own.

*May those curses become the Lord’s punishment
 for my accusers who speak evil of me. – Psalm 109:20 NLT*

Again, those kinds of words seem out of place and unacceptable for a child of God to pray. But they are a common form of rhetorical argument among all the semitic people groups. In those days, a man’s name was considered sacred and an extension of his very nature. That is why false accusations were taken so seriously and dealt with so harshly. One of the commands in the Decalogue dealt with this very issue.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” – Exodus 20:18 ESV

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses outlines a further extension of this law, providing legal judgment concerning anyone who made a libelous accusation against another.

“If the accuser has brought false charges against his fellow Israelite, you must impose on the accuser the sentence he intended for the other person. In this way, you will purge such evil from among you.” – Deuteronomy 19:18-19 NLT

In a sense, this is what Job was calling for. He wanted the slanderous accusations of his three friends to have consequences. In his mind, they were attempting to ruin his name and tarnish his reputation amongst his neighbors. In Job’s case, the integrity of his name was all he had left and the malicious words of his three accusers were robbing him of even that.

Job’s anger is understandable. He has been through a lot and the attacks of his three friends have been relentless. It’s likely that these discussions did not take place in private but were conducted in front of an audience of Job’s peers. Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar had put their friend on trial. They probably sought evidence against Job by interviewing his neighbors. To bolster their case, they would have conducted pre-trial research and found individuals willing to testify against Job. The meteoric fall of Job would have been known to all in Uz, but the presence of the three friends would have fired up the rumor mill and stirred up all kinds of speculation concerning Job’s fate.

So, weighed down by his pain and suffering and angered by the destruction of his reputation among his neighbors and friends, Job lashed out. He couldn’t help but wish that his three friends would have their own words turned against them. It was only just and right in his mind that his false accusers suffer some kind of consequences for their actions, and his assessment was right in line with the will of God.

“Be sure never to charge anyone falsely with evil. Never sentence an innocent or blameless person to death, for I never declare a guilty person to be innocent.” – Exodus 23:7 NLT

Job was convinced of his own innocence, so his friends must be guilty of slander. It was a simple as that. His friends had been adamant that God punishes the wicked, and Job fully agreed. But in Job’s mind, the roles were reversed. They were the guilty ones and fully liable to the wrath of God. Their righteous-sounding rhetoric would not save them. Their claims of godly wisdom wouldn’t protect them. They had ruined Job’s name and they would pay dearly for their crime.

*“Terror overwhelms them like a flood,
and they are blown away in the storms of the night.
The east wind carries them away, and they are gone.
It sweeps them away.” – Job 27:20-21 NLT*

These verses are difficult to read and reconcile. But Job was desperately trying to protect and preserve the only thing of value that remained: His name. Without a good name, he had nothing. His future was ruined, and his legacy was utterly destroyed. But the only way he could restore his soiled reputation was by having God step in and declare him innocent. He knew that only God could provide a just and righteous verdict in this case, and he longed for that day to come.

Job 28:1-28**Wisdom is a Rare Commodity These Days**

¹ *“Surely there is a mine for silver,*

and a place for gold that they refine.

² *Iron is taken out of the earth,
and copper is smelted from the ore.*

³ *Man puts an end to darkness
and searches out to the farthest limit
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.*

⁴ *He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives;
they are forgotten by travelers;
they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro.*

⁵ *As for the earth, out of it comes bread,
but underneath it is turned up as by fire.*

⁶ *Its stones are the place of sapphires,
and it has dust of gold.*

⁷ *“That path no bird of prey knows,
and the falcon's eye has not seen it.*

⁸ *The proud beasts have not trodden it;
the lion has not passed over it.*

⁹ *“Man puts his hand to the flinty rock
and overturns mountains by the roots.*

¹⁰ *He cuts out channels in the rocks,
and his eye sees every precious thing.*

¹¹ *He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle,
and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light.*

¹² *“But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?*

¹³ *Man does not know its worth,
and it is not found in the land of the living.*

¹⁴ *The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’
and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’*

¹⁵ *It cannot be bought for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed as its price.*

¹⁶ *It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.*

¹⁷ *Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.*

¹⁸ *No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.*

¹⁹ *The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.*

²⁰ *"From where, then, does wisdom come?
And where is the place of understanding?"*

²¹ *It is hidden from the eyes of all living
and concealed from the birds of the air.*

²² *Abaddon and Death say,
'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.'*

²³ *"God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.*

²⁴ *For he looks to the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.*

²⁵ *When he gave to the wind its weight
and apportioned the waters by measure,*

²⁶ *when he made a decree for the rain
and a way for the lightning of the thunder,*

²⁷ *then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.*

²⁸ *And he said to man,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.'"* – Job 28:1-28 ESV

This chapter contains what appears to be Job's inner musings concerning man's endless and often futile search for wisdom. According to Job, humanity has an insatiable desire for wisdom and diligently seeks to find it like a miner prospecting for precious gems.

But despite man's most ardent efforts, wisdom remain illusive and difficult to find. While there are mines that contain rare metals and tunnels where sapphires and onyx are found, the source of wisdom remains a mystery. It's value is incalculable which makes its allure so irresistible.

In this chapter, Job asks and answers the question, "Do people know where to find wisdom?" And, at first glance, it appears as if Job is fairly pessimistic about the prospect of discovering wisdom. He asserts that we may be able to mine precious metals from the depths of the earth, but we don't have the foggiest idea where to find wisdom. It eludes us and remains a mystery to us no matter how hard we search for it. And yet, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, had a markedly different outlook.

*Wisdom shouts in the streets.
She cries out in the public square.
She calls to the crowds along the main street,*

*to those gathered in front of the city gate:
 "How long, you simpletons,
 will you insist on being simpleminded?
 How long will you mockers relish your mocking?
 How long will you fools hate knowledge?
 Come and listen to my counsel.
 I'll share my heart with you
 and make you wise." – Proverbs 1:20:23 NLT*

Solomon personified wisdom as a woman wandering the streets offering her valuable product to anyone who would accept it. There was no effort required; simply a desire to become wise. But wisdom discovered few takers. No one was interested in what she had to "sell."

Yet, men continue to seek it, traveling vast distances, consulting with sages, reading volumes of books, and offering their fortunes in exchange for it. They recognize its value but it eludes their grasp.

This entire soliloquy is a direct assault on the so-called wisdom of Job's three friends. They waltzed into Uz with a cocky assurance that they knew exactly what was behind Job's suffering and they have dispensed their wise words with abandon and a total lack of compassion. Their prideful assertions of Job's guilt and God's judgment have been relentless and have left Job demoralized and more than a bit defensive. He has had enough of their attacks and is now making a few assertions of his own.

When it comes to wisdom, "No one knows where to find it, for it is not found among the living" (Job 28:13 NLT), and that includes his three friends. Despite its great value, "It cannot be bought with gold. It cannot be purchased with silver" (Job 28:15 NLT). Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar may think they've garnered the market on wisdom, but Job asserts that they are sorely mistaken.

*"It is hidden from the eyes of all humanity.
 Even the sharp-eyed birds in the sky cannot discover it." – Job 28:21 NLT*

Again, Job's words seem to contradict those of Solomon. So, who is right? Which man offers the correct perspective? The answer is that Job and Solomon are both right. Each man is describing an invaluable resource that is impossible to find unless you know the source. And both Solomon and Job describe wisdom as coming from God.

*"God alone understands the way to wisdom;
 he knows where it can be found." – Job 28:23 NLT*

*Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge,
 but fools despise wisdom and discipline. – Proverbs 1:7 NLT*

Job knew that God was the sole source of wisdom, and He alone could solve the mystery of his suffering. Only God could explain why Job has lost everything and only God could resolve the debate about Job's guilt or innocence. The reason he kept demanding an audience with God was because of his fear and reverence for his Maker. Job didn't have all the answers, but he knew that God did.

Without realizing it, Job was taking the advice of Solomon.

*Tune your ears to wisdom,
and concentrate on understanding.
Cry out for insight,
and ask for understanding.
Search for them as you would for silver;
seek them like hidden treasures.
Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord,
and you will gain knowledge of God.
For the Lord grants wisdom!
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. – Proverbs 2:2-6 NLT*

Job wasn't searching for wisdom so he could impress his friends. He was seeking to know the will and the ways of God. He was trying to make sense of all the madness that had enveloped his life and left him destitute, disease-ridden, and alone. And he knew that the only one who could answer all his questions and bring relief to his suffering was God.

Job asserts that God alone "looks throughout the whole earth and sees everything under the heavens" (Job 28:24 NLT). This is a direct slam on his three arrogant friends. They spoke as if they had a monopoly on wisdom and insight, but they were nothing more than blind men seeking to find treasure in a darkened pit. Rather than heeding the cries of wisdom, they were filling the air with the sound of their own self-righteous ramblings and false assumptions.

But Job saw things differently. He viewed God as the source of all wisdom, it was God alone who "saw wisdom and evaluated it. He set it in place and examined it thoroughly" (Job 28:27 NLT). And if Job's three friends would shut up long enough to listen, they might hear the words of God.

"...this is what he says to all humanity: 'The fear of the Lord is true wisdom; to forsake evil is real understanding.'" – Job 28:28 NLT

Job was willing to put his trust in God. He continued to reject the words of his three friends because he knew they were wrong. They were not speaking for God and so their wisdom was not from God. Job was convinced that wisdom was available and accessible, but you had to go to seek it at the source. Godly wisdom could only be found in God's presence.

*“He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.
He guards the paths of the just
and protects those who are faithful to him.” – Proverbs 2:7-8 NLT*

Wisdom is a rare commodity these days, but that doesn't mean it's illusive or unavailable. We just need to go to the source.

Father, I want and need wisdom. But I tend to seek it in all the wrong places. I look to myself and I look to others. Instead I need to seek it in You. I need to fear You. Not in a timid, cowering way, but out of awe, reverence and respect for Your power, majesty, and holiness. Rather than question You, I need to learn to trust You. Rather than whine and moan at You, I need to learn to thank You for the fact that You are in control of my life and my future. Help me get my focus off of me and put it on You. Because You alone grant wisdom. Amen.

Job 29:1-25**The Time to Shut Up and Look Up**

¹ *And Job again took up his discourse, and said:*

² *“Oh, that I were as in the months of old,
as in the days when God watched over me,
³ when his lamp shone upon my head,
and by his light I walked through darkness,
⁴ as I was in my prime,
when the friendship of God was upon my tent,
⁵ when the Almighty was yet with me,
when my children were all around me,
⁶ when my steps were washed with butter,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!
⁷ When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I prepared my seat in the square,
⁸ the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose and stood;
⁹ the princes refrained from talking
and laid their hand on their mouth;
¹⁰ the voice of the nobles was hushed,
and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth.
¹¹ When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
and when the eye saw, it approved,
¹² because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to help him.
¹³ The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me,
and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
¹⁴ I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
my justice was like a robe and a turban.
¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.
¹⁶ I was a father to the needy,
and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.
¹⁷ I broke the fangs of the unrighteous
and made him drop his prey from his teeth.
¹⁸ Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my nest,
and I shall multiply my days as the sand,
¹⁹ my roots spread out to the waters,
with the dew all night on my branches,
²⁰ my glory fresh with me,
and my bow ever new in my hand.’*

- ²¹ *“Men listened to me and waited
and kept silence for my counsel.*
- ²² *After I spoke they did not speak again,
and my word dropped upon them.*
- ²³ *They waited for me as for the rain,
and they opened their mouths as for the spring rain.*
- ²⁴ *I smiled on them when they had no confidence,
and the light of my face they did not cast down.*
- ²⁵ *I chose their way and sat as chief,
and I lived like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners.” – Job 29:1-25 ESV*

Chapters 28 and 29 provide an interesting contrast. Both are the words of Job, but they reflect two extremely different views or outlooks. In chapter 28, Job asks and answers the question, "Do people know where to find wisdom?"

According to Job, wisdom is found with God.

*“God alone understands the way to wisdom;
he knows where it can be found...
...he saw wisdom and evaluated it.
He set it in place and examined it thoroughly.
And this is what he says to all humanity:
‘The fear of the Lord is true wisdom;
to forsake evil is real understanding.’” – Job 28:23 27-28 NLT*

In chapter 28, Job asserts that only God knows where wisdom can be found, because He is its source. The problem that Job’s friends faced was a lack of wisdom, understanding, and a knowledge of the ways of God. None of them truly understood what was going on, including Job. They could only guess as to what was the cause of his distress. Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz blamed it on some hidden sin in his life. Job blamed it on God's abandonment of him. But they each lacked wisdom. Job seemed to know that, which is what is reflected in his speech in chapter 28. He seemed to understand that the fear of God is where he would find the answer to all his questions.

But then there's chapter 29. In this speech Job suddenly reflects a perspective that is common to all men. He took his eyes off of God and focused on himself. Depending on the translation you are reading, there are upwards of 40 uses of the personal pronouns "I," "me," or "my" in the speech. Job uses the word "I" 20 times, the word "me" 12 times, and the word "my" 16 times.

You might put it this way: Job suffers from a serious "I" problem. He can't keep his eyes off of himself and the problems that plague his current situation. This leads to another dangerous disability. Job begins to exhibit the tell-tale symptoms of the-good-old-days syndrom. Weighed

down by the burdens of his present life, he chooses to find solace in the past. He begins to dwell on how things used to be when his life was good.

Without realizing it, Job begins to brag about all his accomplishments. He envisions himself as a kind of super saint who rescued all the helpless, always fought for the underdog, and was revered and respected by his community.

*“The young stepped aside when they saw me,
and even the aged rose in respect at my coming.
The princes stood in silence
and put their hands over their mouths.
The highest officials of the city stood quietly,
holding their tongues in respect.” – Job 29:8-10 NLT*

While there is probably a semblance of truth in Job’s words, his memory has painted an idealized vision of his past. Of course, compared to his current situation, everything in the rear view mirror looks bigger and better, and he longs to return to those halcyon days.

Now, I don't particularly blame Job, but in all his myopic obsession with his idealized past, he seems to lose his fear of the Lord. Like his friends, he starts to draw some unwise conclusions. His speech wrongly infers that God is no longer watching over him. He seems to believe that God is no longer his friend and has somehow abandoned him. Yet, these conclusions are all based on his circumstances. He still maintains his innocence, but he blames his condition on God.

Job wanted his honor back. After being constantly berated by his three friends, Job longed to be respected again. He wanted to remind everyone about all the good he used to do. He missed the respect he used to garner for all his good deeds and acts of kindness.

*“All who heard me praised me.
All who saw me spoke well of me.
For I assisted the poor in their need
and the orphans who required help.
I helped those without hope, and they blessed me.
And I caused the widows’ hearts to sing for joy.” – Job 29:11-13 NLT*

There's no doubt that Job had lost a lot, and I don't blame him for wanting to see his circumstances reversed. But when he turned his attention to himself, he took his eyes off of God. Reminiscing was not going to change anything, and it was not going to provide him with any answers to his questions or comfort for his pain. That would only come when he turned his attention to God. It’s as if Job needed to go back and read his words recorded in chapter 28. In his heart, Job knew that God had all the answers he was looking for. He alone could provide the comfort Job was seeking.

Yet, whenever we become myopic and focus on ourselves, we lose sight of God. It is at those moments that we must turn to Him, fear Him, and seek Him. Job could have used a dose of Solomon's insight.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones. – Proverbs 3:5-8 NLT*

In chapter 29, Job leaves God completely out of the picture. He makes it all about himself, reminiscing about all his accomplishments, attributes, and well-deserved accolades. It's almost as if Job is giving testimony in a trial and acting as his own character witness. No one else seems to be stepping up in his defense, so Job decides to do it himself.

But Job would have been better off listening to the words of God that he quoted in the previous chapter.

*"...this is what he says to all humanity:
'The fear of the Lord is true wisdom;
to forsake evil is real understanding.'"* – Job 28:28 NLT

Job needed to shut up and look up. He needed to end his futile phase of belly button gazing and turn His eyes to the Lord. It's too bad that Job didn't have a friend like David, a fellow sufferer who could have given him just the right time-tested advice.

*Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will not be shaken.
My victory and honor come from God alone.
He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.
O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him,
for God is our refuge. – Psalm 62:5-8 NLT*

Job 30:1-31**Gratitude is Good Medicine**

- ¹ *“But now they laugh at me,
men who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock.*
- ² *What could I gain from the strength of their hands,
men whose vigor is gone?*
- ³ *Through want and hard hunger
they gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation;*
- ⁴ *they pick saltwort and the leaves of bushes,
and the roots of the broom tree for their food.*
- ⁵ *They are driven out from human company;
they shout after them as after a thief.*
- ⁶ *In the gullies of the torrents they must dwell,
in holes of the earth and of the rocks.*
- ⁷ *Among the bushes they bray;
under the nettles they huddle together.*
- ⁸ *A senseless, a nameless brood,
they have been whipped out of the land.*
- ⁹ *“And now I have become their song;
I am a byword to them.*
- ¹⁰ *They abhor me; they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.*
- ¹¹ *Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me,
they have cast off restraint in my presence.*
- ¹² *On my right hand the rabble rise;
they push away my feet;
they cast up against me their ways of destruction.*
- ¹³ *They break up my path;
they promote my calamity;
they need no one to help them.*
- ¹⁴ *As through a wide breach they come;
amid the crash they roll on.*
- ¹⁵ *Terrors are turned upon me;
my honor is pursued as by the wind,
and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.*
- ¹⁶ *“And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.*
- ¹⁷ *The night racks my bones,*

and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
¹⁸ *With great force my garment is disfigured;*
it binds me about like the collar of my tunic.
¹⁹ *God has cast me into the mire,*
and I have become like dust and ashes.
²⁰ *I cry to you for help and you do not answer me;*
I stand, and you only look at me.
²¹ *You have turned cruel to me;*
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
²² *You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it,*
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
²³ *For I know that you will bring me to death*
and to the house appointed for all living.

²⁴ *“Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand,*
and in his disaster cry for help?
²⁵ *Did not I weep for him whose day was hard?*
Was not my soul grieved for the needy?
²⁶ *But when I hoped for good, evil came,*
and when I waited for light, darkness came.
²⁷ *My inward parts are in turmoil and never still;*
days of affliction come to meet me.
²⁸ *I go about darkened, but not by the sun;*
I stand up in the assembly and cry for help.
²⁹ *I am a brother of jackals*
and a companion of ostriches.
³⁰ *My skin turns black and falls from me,*
and my bones burn with heat.
³¹ *My lyre is turned to mourning,*
and my pipe to the voice of those who weep.” – Job 30:1-31 ESV

Job’s moment of reminiscence is followed by a painful realization that there’s no going back. All that he has lost is gone forever and, from what he can ascertain, it is all the handiwork of God. To make matters worse, Job feels as if God has emasculated him, leaving him defenseless against all those who would do him harm or further damage his reputation. He describes himself as being surrounded by a host of individuals, both young and old, who seem determined to grind his life and name into the mud.

“I am mocked by people younger than I,
by young men whose fathers are not worthy to run with my sheepdogs.” – Job 30:1
 NLT

“...they mock me with vulgar songs!
They taunt me!

*They despise me and won't come near me,
except to spit in my face.” – Job 30:9-10 NLT*

And Job holds God responsible for the relentless attacks of these despicable people.

*“God has cut my bowstring.
He has humbled me,
so they have thrown off all restraint.” – Job 30:11 NLT*

Part of the frustration he feels is his inability to be able to defend himself. It is as if God has sent him into battle without a reliable weapon or ammunition. He is easy prey to all those who mean to do him harm, and the number of his enemies increases daily. Job describes himself as being surrounded and overwhelmed with no one to come to his aid or defense. He is convinced that God has abandoned him.

*“They block my road
and do everything they can to destroy me.
They know I have no one to help me.” – Job 30:13 NLT*

According to Job’s estimation, he has suffered a litany of indignities at the hands of his oppressors. They mock and taunt him. They treat him with disrespect, avoiding him like the plague and only coming close in order to spit in his face. His enemies lay traps for him and attack him when he is weak and defenseless. The effects of all this mistreatment is a deep depression and a growing sense of despondency and defeat. Job has nowhere to turn and no one he can count on to come to his aid.

He even describes God as joining in the abuse, having grabbed him by the collar and cast him into the mud. His enemies kick him while he’s down but it is God who put him in that vulnerable position. The middle portion of this speech reveals the depth of Job’s despair as he levels his charges against God.

*“I cry to you, O God, but you don’t answer.
I stand before you, but you don’t even look.
You have become cruel toward me.
You use your power to persecute me.
You throw me into the whirlwind
and destroy me in the storm.
And I know you are sending me to my death—
the destination of all who live.” – Job 30:20-23 NLT*

He accuses God of neglect. No matter how often or hard Job has cried to God, his pleas have been met with indifference. It is now to the point where he feels as if God gone from being disinterested in his plight to being an active participant in his pain and suffering. He accuses God of being אֶכְזָר (*‘akzār*), a Hebrew word that means “to act harshly” and implies cruel

treatment to the point of death. In other words, he is convinced that God is out to kill him. He even suggests that God is sending him to his death.

At this point, Job can't comprehend why all of this is happening to him. He recalls the many times when he was the friend of the helpless and hopeless. In his former life, when he was healthy, happy, and whole, he would "weep for those in trouble" and he "grieved for the needy" (Job 30:25 NLT). Isn't that the right thing to do, he asks. Wouldn't a righteous God expect His people to treat one another with love and care, not cruelty and harshness?

But when Job looks for good, all he finds is evil. When he could use a bit of help and hope, all he gets is a steady diet of mockery, cruelty, and false accusations – even from the hand of God. And this state of affairs has left him in a deep pit of despair.

*"My heart is troubled and restless.
Days of suffering torment me.
I walk in gloom, without sunlight.
I stand in the public square and cry for help."* – Job 30:27-28 NLT

It's interesting to note that in chapter 29, Job spent a great deal of time recalling and lamenting his former glory days. His memory took him back to the good old days when things were so much better. But while he look back longingly and remembers those trouble-free days, at no point does he thank God for making it all possible. This oversight on Job's part is glaring when you consider the words he spoke after the first news of disaster struck his life in the opening chapter.

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." – Job 1:21 ESV

Job had just received the devastating news that he had lost all his flocks and herds as well as all ten of his adult children. Yet, he was able to bless God. But now, we find him throwing himself a pity party and bemoaning his lonely and ill-fated life. He doesn't thank God for all the amazing benefits he enjoyed during the vast majority of his life. Instead, he wallows in the memory of his former state and complains about the less-than-enjoyable nature of his current circumstances. It was an unknown psalmist called Asaph who recorded the following words from God:

*"Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God,
and keep the vows you made to the Most High.
Then call on me when you are in trouble,
and I will rescue you,
and you will give me glory."* – Psalm 50:14-15 NLT

God went on to say, "...giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me. If you keep to my path, I will reveal to you the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23 NLT). Job was so busy deluging God with

his complaints and declarations of mistreatment, that he forgot to thank God for all the wonderful blessings he had enjoyed. God had blessed him with life, health, financial prosperity, a large family, and a good reputation. Job had not earned or deserved any of those things. Now that they were gone, he longed to have them back but he failed to thank the One who had made them possible in the first place.

While Job had a rock-solid memory regarding his former life, he couldn't seem to remember the words he spoke when his health first failed.

“Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?” – Job 2:10 NLT

Job suffered from selective memory loss. As time passed, he became less and less willing to accept anything bad from the hand of God. He didn't like the cards he had been dealt and was anxious to see God remedy the situation as soon as possible. Job was running out of patience and hope, and it seemed that his well of gratitude had run dry as well.

For all his reminiscing, Job struggled with forgetfulness that produced in him an unhealthy ungratefulness. God would have Job repent and remember just how blessed his life had been.

*“Repent, all of you who forget me,
or I will tear you apart,
and no one will help you.
But giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me.
If you keep to my path,
I will reveal to you the salvation of God.” – Psalm 50:22-23 NLT*

Job didn't need any more lectures from his friends, but God didn't need any advice or criticism from Job either. They say gratitude is good medicine and the apostle Paul would have wholeheartedly agreed.

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NLT

Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. – Colossians 3:16-17 NLT

Gratitude has a way of changing one's attitude. If Job could learn to give thanks as readily as he complained, his outlook on life would undergo a dramatic change. But his near-sighted focus on his circumstances left him with a distorted view of God and a disgruntled outlook on life and eternity.

Job 31:1-23**A Demand for Justice or Judgment**

¹ *"I have made a covenant with my eyes;
how then could I gaze at a virgin?"*

² *What would be my portion from God above
and my heritage from the Almighty on high?*

³ *Is not calamity for the unrighteous,
and disaster for the workers of iniquity?*

⁴ *Does not he see my ways
and number all my steps?*

⁵ *"If I have walked with falsehood
and my foot has hastened to deceit;*

⁶ *(Let me be weighed in a just balance,
and let God know my integrity!)*

⁷ *if my step has turned aside from the way
and my heart has gone after my eyes,
and if any spot has stuck to my hands,*

⁸ *then let me sow, and another eat,
and let what grows for me be rooted out.*

⁹ *"If my heart has been enticed toward a woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door,*

¹⁰ *then let my wife grind for another,
and let others bow down on her.*

¹¹ *For that would be a heinous crime;
that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges;*

¹² *for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon,
and it would burn to the root all my increase.*

¹³ *"If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant,
when they brought a complaint against me,*

¹⁴ *what then shall I do when God rises up?
When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?*

¹⁵ *Did not he who made me in the womb make him?
And did not one fashion us in the womb?*

¹⁶ *"If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,
or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,*

¹⁷ *or have eaten my morsel alone,
and the fatherless has not eaten of it*

¹⁸ *(for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father,*

and from my mother's womb I guided the widow),
¹⁹ *if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,*
or the needy without covering,
²⁰ *if his body has not blessed me,*
and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep,
²¹ *if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,*
because I saw my help in the gate,
²² *then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,*
and let my arm be broken from its socket.
²³ *For I was in terror of calamity from God,*
and I could not have faced his majesty.” – Job 31:1-23 ESV

In what appears to be Job’s closing argument, he provides a long list of accusations that have been leveled against him. Since the first moment his three friends arrived in Uz, Job has endured a steady barrage of finger-pointing and fault-finding as they attempted to determine the cause of his suffering. In their minds, Job’s circumstances could only be explained by one thing: Sin.

To have suffered such inexplicable loss and pain, Job must have done something to offend God. That was the only reasonable explanation Job’s self-appointed prosecutors could come up with. So, in this rather lengthy speech, Job addresses each and every one of their accusations head-on but he does it in the form of a call for divine justice or judgment.

Repeatedly, Job uses the conditional statement formula, “If...then. In this rather strange declaration of innocence, Job uses their very accusations to say, “If I have done these things, then let me suffer the consequences.” But inferred by his statement is the counter-argument: “If I have not committed these crimes, then may God vindicate me.”

Job is not confessing guilt; he is demanding justice. He remains resolutely committed to his innocence and firmly confident that justice will be done. For Job, the one point of consistency in his topsy-turvy life was the sovereignty of God. While everything else crumbled around him, Job clung to his belief in God’s providential care and commitment to justice.

“Let God weigh me on the scales of justice,
for he knows my integrity.” – Job 31:6 NLT

Job’s theological underpinnings were quite simple and straightforward. His view of God was fairly one-dimensional and based on a righteousness-reward model. If you do what is right and good, you will be rewarded by God. If you don’t, you will suffer the consequences. Job provides the following synopsis of his thoughts about God.

“Isn’t it calamity for the wicked
and misfortune for those who do evil?

*Doesn't he see everything I do
and every step I take?" – Job 31:3-4 NLT*

It would appear that Job's view of God was somewhat unsophisticated. His entire theology was based on a belief that God's omniscience allows Him to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. In Job's simplistic worldview, good deeds guarantee a good life.

"As a consequence of his suffering, Job viewed man's relationship to God as being based on God's sovereign caprice; therefore man could hope for happiness only by adhering to an ethical rightness superior to God's whereby he could demand vindication." – Gregory W. Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job." *Bibliotheca Sacra*

It's easy to see how this view of God required Job to defend his innocence so rigorously. There had to be another reason for his suffering, otherwise, his friends would be proven right and he would be forced to acknowledge his own wickedness.

What if I were in Job's shoes? What if I found myself in a similar situation? Could I respond the way Job did? Would I be able to claim my innocence with unwavering confidence? No, I would probably be able to come up with more than a handful of reasons for why I was going through what I was going through. I could find plenty of things for which I was guilty and deserving of some kind of punishment. But not Job. Just take a look at his speech in chapter 31. Job continues to claim his innocence, and he does it by giving a list of possible options for sins that might result in the kind of suffering he is enduring.

If I have stolen...

If I have coveted...

If I have lusted...

If I have taken advantage of...

If I have been selfish and unmerciful...

If I have not been generous...

If I have shown no compassion...

If I have abused the defenseless...

If I have been greedy...

If I have made prosperity my god...

If I have enjoyed watching others fail...

If I have not shared with those in need...

If I have tried to hide my sins...

If Job had done any of these things, he would have understood why he was suffering. But, in his mind, he stood before God and men as innocent.

Could I say the same thing? No, I'm afraid not. I would be guilty. In fact, I would never have played the "What if game" that Job played. Too dangerous. Too risky. Too condemning. I have done all of those things and more. I know it and so does God. Because, just as Job stated in his rhetorical question at the beginning of his little speech, "Isn't God looking, observing how I live? Doesn't he mark every step I take?" (Job 31:4 MSG).

God knew every detail of Job's life and the same thing is true of me. But what is amazing for us as believers is that we get to stand before God as righteous – justified and pure – all because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. God looks at me through the blood of His Son and sees me as righteousness. I have had Christ's righteousness imputed to my account. He sees me as guiltless and, therefore, He does not condemn me. I am *positionally* righteous.

But I still sin. That is why I am called to become *progressively* more righteous. Paul commands us to "lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God" (Ephesians 4:1 NLT). In Colossians he tells us, "So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, [act] like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ--that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your [real] life--even though invisible to spectators--is with Christ in God. [He] is your life" (Colossians 3:1-3 MSG).

Yes, God is watching us. But He is also indwelling us and empowering us. He is providing us with all we need to live the life of righteousness to which He has called us. Peter reminds us, "Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received!" (2 Peter 31:3 MSG).

We have all we need to live a life of righteousness. And even when we fail and fall, we have the right to bring our sins before the throne of God and confess them. And "if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:9 NLT).

So, in actuality, we can stand before God just as Job did and say, "If I..." The key is confession and repentance. Our sins have been paid for in full on the cross. There is no more punishment for sin. We confess our sins not so we can incur God's wrath and judgment, but so that He can

cleanse us and make us more into the likeness of His Son. He *progressively* makes us more righteous. In 1 Peter 1:16, we are told by God to "Be holy, because I am holy." God is not telling us to become something new. He is not telling us to change who we are. He is telling us to become what we already are – holy, set apart, and uniquely His. Peter tells us, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:10 NIV).

We have the power within us to change everything about us. So that we can actually stand before God and say, "If I..."

Job 31:24-40**Learning to Trust God**

²⁴ *"If I have made gold my trust
 or called fine gold my confidence,
²⁵ if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant
 or because my hand had found much,
²⁶ if I have looked at the sun when it shone,
 or the moon moving in splendor,
²⁷ and my heart has been secretly enticed,
 and my mouth has kissed my hand,
²⁸ this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges,
 for I would have been false to God above.*

²⁹ *"If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me,
 or exulted when evil overtook him
³⁰ (I have not let my mouth sin
 by asking for his life with a curse),
³¹ if the men of my tent have not said,
 'Who is there that has not been filled with his meat?'
³² (the sojourner has not lodged in the street;
 I have opened my doors to the traveler),
³³ if I have concealed my transgressions as others do
 by hiding my iniquity in my heart,
³⁴ because I stood in great fear of the multitude,
 and the contempt of families terrified me,
 so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors—
³⁵ Oh, that I had one to hear me!
 (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)
 Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!
³⁶ Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;
 I would bind it on me as a crown;
³⁷ I would give him an account of all my steps;
 like a prince I would approach him.*

³⁸ *"If my land has cried out against me
 and its furrows have wept together,
³⁹ if I have eaten its yield without payment
 and made its owners breathe their last,
⁴⁰ let thorns grow instead of wheat,
 and foul weeds instead of barley." – Job 31:24-40 ESV*

Job continues his list of hypothetical if-then scenarios in an attempt to strengthen his claim of innocence. He produces a lengthy and wide-ranging catalogue of potential infractions that would warrant some kind of judgment from God. He is basically challenging his friends to come up with one solid piece of evidence that might provide proof of their charges of guilt. “If I am guilty,” Job says, “then God can punish me accordingly.”

But the obvious inference behind Job’s little speech is that he has done nothing wrong. He goes out of his way to list petty “crimes” that everyone commits everyday without suffering the kinds of loss he has faced. He is not trying to minimize the gravity of these “lesser” sins; he is simply pointing out their ubiquitous nature. Whether it’s the sin of lusting after another man’s wife or the mistreatment of household servants, Job claims that his hands are clean. He also demands that he is innocent of neglecting the poor and needy.

*“No, from childhood I have cared for orphans like a father,
and all my life I have cared for widows.” – Job 31:18 NLT*

He asserts that these kinds of selfish actions are commonplace and yet no one seems to incur the level of judgment that he has had to face. What makes matters worse is that he has refrained from doing these kinds of things and has still lost everything.

Job is demanding proportional justice. He is asking that his punishment match his crime. If he has committed a sin worthy of God’s wrath, then it seems only fair that his judgment be balanced and equitable. He is willing to accept God’s verdict but only asks that it be in keeping with whatever wrong he has committed.

*“If I raised my hand against an orphan,
knowing the judges would take my side,
then let my shoulder be wrenched out of place!
Let my arm be torn from its socket!
That would be better than facing God’s judgment.
For if the majesty of God opposes me, what hope is there?” – Job 31:21-23 NLT*

From Job’s perspective, his punishment has been disproportional to any sin he may have committed. This once wealthy man was now impoverished and destitute. Yet he declares that he never put his trust in money or gloated over his superior financial status. So, what would have caused God to take away all his material possessions?

Had Job been guilty of idolatry, worshiping the sun, moon, or stars in place of God Almighty, the judges of his community would have dealt with him severely. There were already laws and punishments in place for just such infractions. But what he suffered was far worse than any punitive measures an earthly judge would have meted out.

When Job looked back on all the disasters he had endured, he could more readily accept their occurrence if he had been guilty of wishing that same fate on one of his enemies.

*“Have I ever rejoiced when disaster struck my enemies,
or become excited when harm came their way?” – Job 31:29 NLT*

The answer was, “No!” Job claims to have never wished ill-will on anyone. Yet, he was forced to endure a litany of devastating disasters that had left him nothing. That is the part he was wrestling to understand. He was willing to accept any and all punishment as long as it was deserved. But he could think of nothing he had done that was worthy of the kind of pain and suffering he had endured.

He had not lived a secret life, clandestinely committing his sins behind closed doors and hiding his indiscretions from the eyes of others.

*“Have I tried to hide my sins like other people do,
concealing my guilt in my heart?
Have I feared the crowd
or the contempt of the masses,
so that I kept quiet and stayed indoors?” – Job 31:33-34 NLT*

Job wasn’t a hypocrite or a pretender. He couldn’t be accused of being a fraud or an impostor. His former life as an outstanding pillar of the Uz community had been anything but a sham. His righteousness had not been a cleverly crafted veneer designed to hide a secret life of sin and shame. He was exactly what he appeared to be. And yet, he had lost everything.

All Job is asking for is a fair trial. The vigilante justice of his three friends was wearing thin and he longed for an opportunity to stand before God and defend himself from all their false accusations.

*“If only someone would listen to me!
Look, I will sign my name to my defense.
Let the Almighty answer me.
Let my accuser write out the charges against me.” – Job 31:35 NLT*

As far as Job could tell, no one had come up with a single piece of evidence that proved his guilt or adequately explained his losses. If they could produce the crime, Job would “wear it like a crown” (Job 31:36 NLT). In other words, he was so confident in his own innocence that he would take their indictment into the throne room of God and boldly give a defense of all his actions. But their accusations were all speculative and unspecific. They were forced to guess because they didn’t know the facts. But Job did and he was confident that God would decide in his favor.

Job was willing to accept punishment – *if* he was guilty. But that was the rub. He did not believe he had done anything to deserve what he had suffered. His judgment was way out of proportion to any sin he could have committed, and he firmly and consistently denied having done anything wrong at all.

There is little doubt that Job longed for relief from his pain and suffering. But his greatest desire was to have the integrity of his name restored. His reputation had been ruined, and it didn't help that his three friends continued to drag his name through the mud as they hurled unsubstantiated rumors and allegations against him. None of this was done in a vacuum. This was a public trial that placed Job in the awkward position of being the "celebrity" defendant whose entire life was put on display for all to see. Rumors ran rampant. Gossip made its way through the streets of Uz as everyone debated the guilt or innocence of this former icon of the community.

This entire scene brings to mind another man who suffered unjust treatment at the hands of his fellow citizens. In this case, it was King David, as he fled from Jerusalem because his son, Absalom, had staged a coup and taken over the throne. As David and his royal retinue made their way out of the city in shame, he was met with a less-than-favorable reaction from one of his own citizens.

As King David came to Bahurim, a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, from the same clan as Saul's family. He threw stones at the king and the king's officers and all the mighty warriors who surrounded him. "Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!" he shouted at David. "The Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul's clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer!" – 2 Samuel 16:5-8 NLT

David's companions offered to kill Shimei for his mistreatment of the former king, but David restrained them. Instead, he took a more reasoned reaction to the reproach of Shimei.

"Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it. And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today." – 2 Samuel 16:11-12 NLT

David was willing to leave the matter in God's hands. He was able to see the entire affair through the lens of God's sovereignty. David had a firm belief that God was behind all that happened in his life. That doesn't mean the pain wasn't real or that Shimei's words didn't hurt. In fact, David would later record the state of his feelings at that very moment.

*O Lord, I have so many enemies;
so many are against me.
So many are saying,
"God will never rescue him!" Interlude*

*But you, O Lord, are a shield around me;
you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.
I cried out to the Lord,
and he answered me from his holy mountain. – Psalm 3:1-4 NLT*

David went on to say that, despite the negative nature of his circumstances, he was able to sleep at night because he knew he was under the watchful gaze of God.

*...the Lord was watching over me.
I am not afraid of ten thousand enemies
who surround me on every side. – Psalm 3:5-6 NLT*

Job demanded resolution and restoration. He would not be happy until his lot in life had been remedied and his former lifestyle had been reinstated. But David was content to accept his situation and rest in the sovereign will of his all-knowing and ever-watchful God. This doesn't mean that David didn't desire rescue or vindication. He makes that point perfectly clear.

*Arise, O Lord!
Rescue me, my God!
Slap all my enemies in the face!
Shatter the teeth of the wicked!
Victory comes from you, O Lord.
May you bless your people. – Psalm 3:7-8 NLT*

David didn't waste time arguing his innocence or allowing the false attacks of his "ten thousand enemies" to get him down. He kept trusting in the Lord and patiently waiting on Him to set things right. He had full assurance that God would ultimately avenge him and all his enemies would get what they deserved. But in the meantime, he was able to sleep peacefully and wait patiently for God's will to be done.

Job was having a difficult time resting in the will of God. He was far from content with his circumstances and less than willing to trust God to determine the outcome. It's doubtful that Job was getting a lot of restful sleep, and it seems obvious that he didn't share David's view of God's watchful and protective care. He felt abandoned by God. He believed he had received unfair treatment at the hands of God. And it's hard to imagine Job saying, "you, O Lord, are a shield around me; you are my glory, the one who holds my head high" (Psalm 3:3 NLT). But in time, he will come to see things from David's perspective and learn to see God as a friend and not a foe.

Job 32:1-22**Falling in Love with the Sound of Your Own Voice**

¹ So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. ² Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. ³ 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. ⁴ Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he. ⁵ And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he burned with anger.

⁶ And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said:

*"I am young in years,
and you are aged;
therefore I was timid and afraid
to declare my opinion to you.*

⁷ I said, 'Let days speak,
and many years teach wisdom.'

⁸ But it is the spirit in man,
the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand.

⁹ It is not the old who are wise,
nor the aged who understand what is right.

¹⁰ Therefore I say, 'Listen to me;
let me also declare my opinion.'

¹¹ "Behold, I waited for your words,
I listened for your wise sayings,
while you searched out what to say.

¹² I gave you my attention,
and, behold, there was none among you who refuted Job
or who answered his words.

¹³ Beware lest you say, 'We have found wisdom;
God may vanquish him, not a man.'

¹⁴ He has not directed his words against me,
and I will not answer him with your speeches.

¹⁵ "They are dismayed; they answer no more;
they have not a word to say.

¹⁶ And shall I wait, because they do not speak,
because they stand there, and answer no more?

¹⁷ I also will answer with my share;
I also will declare my opinion.

¹⁸ For I am full of words;

the spirit within me constrains me.
¹⁹ *Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent;
 like new wineskins ready to burst.*
²⁰ *I must speak, that I may find relief;
 I must open my lips and answer.*
²¹ *I will not show partiality to any man
 or use flattery toward any person.*
²² *For I do not know how to flatter,
 else my Maker would soon take me away.” – Job 32:1-22 ESV*

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have given up. After a lengthy series of heated debates with Job, these three men have decided to abandon their quest to convict him of sin. He has stubbornly maintained his innocence and refuses to admit to any wrongdoing. His problem, as they see it, was that “he was righteous in his own eyes” (Job 32:1 ESV). They didn’t agree with Job’s assessment, but they were done trying to convince him otherwise. He had proven to be too tough a nut to crack and they were exhausted from the effort.

But just as Job was about to get some much-needed relief, the cavalry shows up in the form of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite. This young man had been waiting in the wings, biding his time, and biting his tongue as he let his three older companions handle the interrogation of Job. After all, they were his seniors and should have had the years of experience and wisdom that comes with age. But their performance had left Elihu more than disappointed; he was furious. Not only was he angry with Job for his refusal to confess his sins but he was livid with his three older companions because they had given up so easily.

He was also angry with Job’s three friends, for they made God appear to be wrong by their inability to answer Job’s arguments. – Job 32:3 NLT

His frustration loosened his tongue and emboldened him to speak his mind, and his first words were addressed to his older and supposedly wiser companions.

“It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right. Therefore I say: Listen to me; I too will tell you what I know.” – Job 32:9-10 NIV

Elihu has patiently waited for his older and wiser friends to speak up and force Job to shut up. But, from his estimation, they have failed miserably. According to him, all they had managed to do was make God look bad. So, when he finally decided to speak up, he aimed his first volley of invective at the three unsuccessful sages.

First, he questions their intellect, insinuating that old age is no guarantee of wisdom.

*“...there is a spirit within people,
 the breath of the Almighty within them,
 that makes them intelligent.” – Job 32:8 NLT*

And just to make sure they didn't miss what he was saying, Elihu puts it in black and white.

*"Sometimes the elders are not wise.
Sometimes the aged do not understand justice."* – Job 32:9 NLT

To say that Elihu suffers from overconfidence would be an understatement. This young man, full of vitality and energy, has been waiting for a chance to speak his mind, and once he opens his mouth what comes out is not exactly flattering.

Like Job's three other friends, Elihu is well-intended but poorly informed. He is so ready to share his vast reservoir of wisdom that he is about to explode.

"I am like a wine cask without a vent. My words are ready to burst out! I must speak to find relief, so let me give my answers." – Job 32:19-20 NLT

Elihu was like a volcano that has lain dormant for a long time and has now awakened and ready to erupt. He should have recognized that as the first sign that he should take a deep breath and consider his words carefully. His unbridled enthusiasm coupled with his seething rage was going to produce some unpleasant statements that he would eventually regret. Elihu was mistaking passion for wisdom. He was confusing opinion with understanding. His own words reveal his prideful arrogance.

*"...listen to me,
and let me tell you **what I think.**"* – Job 32:10 NLT

*"If Job had been arguing with me,
I would not answer with your kind of logic!"* – Job 32:14 NLT

*"I will say my piece.
I will speak my mind.
For I am full of pent-up words,
and the spirit within me urges me on."* – Job 32:17-18 NLT

Elihu would have used the wise words of James.

*My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, **slow to speak**, and slow to get angry.* – James 1:19 NLT

The Proverbs have a lot to say about choosing our words carefully and using them sparingly.

When words are many, sin is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. – Proverbs 10:19 BSB

A man of knowledge restrains his words, and a man of understanding maintains a calm spirit. – Proverbs 17:27 BSB

Elihu wrestles with restraint and exhibits an oversized ego. It is amazing how often he speaks of himself. His more than 40 uses of personal pronouns must have set a world record. Elihu comes across as an arrogant and prideful young man who appears woefully lacking in discernment. He exhibits many of the characteristics of the fool as described in the Book of Proverbs:

*The wise are glad to be instructed,
but babbling fools fall flat on their faces. – Proverbs 10:8 NLT*

*Wise people treasure knowledge,
but the babbling of a fool invites disaster. – Proverbs 10:14 NLT*

*The words of the godly encourage many,
but fools are destroyed by their lack of common sense. – Proverbs 10:21 NLT*

Elihu seems to believe that because he was made *by* God, he was qualified to speak *for* God. In chapter 33, which chronicles the second half of his lengthy diatribe, Elihu confidently boasts, “I speak with all sincerity; I speak the truth. For the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:3-4 NLT).

That is a dangerous assumption for anyone to make. Sincerity is not a guarantee of accuracy or spiritual insight. One can speak sincerely and be sincerely wrong. Saying what you believe to be the truth can be a dangerous and deadly exercise because words carry weight and produce consequences. Thinking you are right is not enough. Believing you have all the answers is not a sign of wisdom; it is evidence of pride.

As Elihu sat back and listened to the conversations between his three friends and Job, he became increasingly agitated and anxious to set the record straight. He knew he had the answer and couldn’t wait to inform his less-enlightened colleagues. It was his time to shine and he couldn’t contain himself.

*“I must speak to find relief,
so let me give my answers.” – Job 32:20 NLT*

Elihu could have used the old adage, “Silence is golden.” But he was driven by the desire to hear the sound of his own voice. He wanted everyone to listen to what he had to say because he was convinced that he was right and they were wrong. Yet his motivation was purely selfish and self-centered. It was all about Elihu, not Job. He was less interested in Job’s repentance and restoration than he was in elevating his own reputation as being wise beyond his years.

But in his zeal to be right and respected, Elihu violated the very wisdom of God.

*The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing,
but the mouth of a fool belches out foolishness. – Proverbs 15:2 NLT*

*Patience can persuade a prince,
and soft speech can break bones. – Proverbs 25:15 NLT*

Elihu will reveal the extent of his pride in the closing verses of chapter 33, which contains the second half of his ego-driven speech.

"Pay attention, O Job, listen to me; Keep silent, and let me speak. Then if you have anything to say, answer me; Speak, for I desire to justify you. If not, listen to me; Keep silent, and I will teach you wisdom." – Job 33:31-33 NASB

The arrogance of Elihu is amazing. One can't help but feel a sense of embarrassment just reading his words. They come across as so pompous and arrogant that it's difficult to believe that Elihu managed to get them out of his mouth.

But Elihu is not alone in his penchant for claiming the moral high ground. We all have a bit of Elihu inside us and it tends to reveal itself at the most inopportune moments. The temptation to speak our minds is strong and difficult to control. As Yoda said of Luke Skywalker, "The force is strong in this one." So, we have to be careful how we use our words. We must be mindful that our passion to be heard and to be right can sometimes be so incredibly wrong.

Elihu was right in one respect, wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age; it comes from God, and it begins with a fear of God.

Fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline. – Proverbs 1:7 NLT

As we grow in our knowledge of God, we increase in wisdom and discernment. Our limited human understanding gets imbued with His divine knowledge and discretion. We will become wise, but not just in our own eyes. We will find joy in being righteous, not just right. We will learn what it means to speak words of comfort, not just correction. And we will find joy in displaying the heart of God, not just parroting the words of God.

Job 33:1-22**Learning to Listen Before Speaking**

- ¹ *“But now, hear my speech, O Job,
and listen to all my words.*
- ² *Behold, I open my mouth;
the tongue in my mouth speaks.*
- ³ *My words declare the uprightness of my heart,
and what my lips know they speak sincerely.*
- ⁴ *The Spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*
- ⁵ *Answer me, if you can;
set your words in order before me; take your stand.*
- ⁶ *Behold, I am toward God as you are;
I too was pinched off from a piece of clay.*
- ⁷ *Behold, no fear of me need terrify you;
my pressure will not be heavy upon you.*
- ⁸ *“Surely you have spoken in my ears,
and I have heard the sound of your words.*
- ⁹ *You say, ‘I am pure, without transgression;
I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me.*
- ¹⁰ *Behold, he finds occasions against me,
he counts me as his enemy,*
- ¹¹ *he puts my feet in the stocks
and watches all my paths.’*
- ¹² *“Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you,
for God is greater than man.*
- ¹³ *Why do you contend against him,
saying, ‘He will answer none of man's words’?*
- ¹⁴ *For God speaks in one way,
and in two, though man does not perceive it.*
- ¹⁵ *In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men,
while they slumber on their beds,*
- ¹⁶ *then he opens the ears of men
and terrifies them with warnings,*
- ¹⁷ *that he may turn man aside from his deed
and conceal pride from a man;*
- ¹⁸ *he keeps back his soul from the pit,
his life from perishing by the sword.*

¹⁹ *“Or God disciplines people with pain on their sickbeds,
with ceaseless aching in their bones.
²⁰ They lose their appetite
for even the most delicious food.
²¹ Their flesh wastes away,
and their bones stick out.
²² They are at death’s door;
the angels of death wait for them.”* – Job 33:1-22 ESV

Whatever credibility Elihu may lack due to his young age, he more than makes up for in swagger. He is an extremely confident individual who believes he has a divine calling to shed light on Job’s situation.

*“I speak with all sincerity;
I speak the truth.
For the Spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”* – Job 33:4 NLT

Yet, Elihu tries to win Job over by emphasizing their commonality. Both of them, he points out, are products of God’s creation, having been “formed from clay” (Job 33:6 NLT). Since they are mere men who have been created by and belong to God, there is no reason that Job should refuse to listen to what Elihu has to say. He insists that he is no threat to Job.

*“So you don’t need to be afraid of me.
I won’t come down hard on you.”* – Job 33:7 NLT

Having tried to placate Job by stressing their similarities, Elihu shifts gears and begins to address where he and Job disagree. He starts by condensing all of Job’s complaints down to one simple sentence.

*“You said, ‘I am pure; I am without sin;
I am innocent; I have no guilt.
God is picking a quarrel with me,
and he considers me his enemy.
He puts my feet in the stocks
and watches my every move.’”* – Job 33:9-11 NLT

This is an unfair and over-simplistic assessment of Job’s lengthy responses to Bildad, Eliphaz, and Bildad. In his desire to point out the flaws in Job’s arguments, Elihu resorts to reductionism, “the practice of simplifying a complex idea, issue, condition, or the like, esp. to the point of minimizing, obscuring, or distorting it” (collinsdictionary.com).

A quick review of Job’s earlier speeches confirms that he believed himself to be innocent of all charges leveled against him by his three friends, but at no time did Job ever declare himself to

be sin-free. His only point was that he was not guilty of anything worthy of the kind of suffering he had endured. He had done nothing to deserve the collapse of his entire fortune, the deaths of his children, or the loss of his health. And because Job believed God to be sovereign over all things, the only conclusion he could reach was that God was behind it all. In Job's mind, either God caused his suffering or, for some reason, refused to prevent it.

But Elihu takes issue with Job's conclusion and rebukes him for his arrogant and disrespectful view of God.

*“you are wrong, and I will show you why.
For God is greater than any human being.
So why are you bringing a charge against him?”* – Job 33:12-13 NLT

Elihu had not been listening. He heard the words that came out of Job's mouth but he was oblivious to the state of Job's heart. Rather than probe behind all the impassioned rhetoric of his suffering friend, Elihu placed himself in the position of being the thought police. He was so busy monitoring Job's use of words that he was unable to hear what Job was trying to say. Job wasn't attacking God; he was simply trying to make sense of his ongoing pain and suffering. Job wasn't blaming God either. All he was asking for was an explanation and the hope of vindication.

But Elihu heard what he wanted to hear, and in his mind, Job was nothing less than a blasphemer. As he had sat listening to Job's responses to the other three interrogators, Elihu had deduced that Job was disparaging the Almighty. This made Job an enemy of God. Elihu heard Job repeatedly declare that all he wanted was a response from God. Job was demanding that God give him an audience and provide him with answers. But Elihu suggests that God had already spoken but Job was not listening.

*“God speaks again and again,
though people do not recognize it.
He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night...”* – Job 33:14-15 NLT

Elihu asserts that Job had probably received word from God in the form of a dream but he refused to listen to what God to say. Without any evidence to back up his assertion, Elihu claims that Job had been warned by God but didn't take the warning seriously. According to Elihu's assessment, God had already revealed to Job the cause of his suffering. He had visited Job in a dream and warned him to repent or suffer the consequences.

*“He whispers in their ears
and terrifies them with warnings.
He makes them turn from doing wrong;
he keeps them from pride.”* – Job 33:16-17 NLT

Elihu's conclusion was that Job could have escaped all his pain and suffering if he had only listened to God. Therefore, he was responsible for his own undoing. And, to make matters worse, Elihu suggests that God was still trying to speak to Job through his pain.

*“God disciplines people with pain on their sickbeds,
with ceaseless aching in their bones.” – Job 33:19 NLT*

It was all so clear to the overconfident Elihu. Job had lost everything because he refused to heed the warnings of God, and his continued suffering was a sign of God's ongoing discipline. It was as simple as that.

Elihu shows little or no compassion. He exhibits no empathy for his older friend because he has no personal experience with such matters. It is unlikely that Elihu has ever lost all that he holds dear. He has no concept of what Job has suffered. He has no basis for understanding the pain behind Job's words. So, he resorts to simplistic deductions that paint Job as a stubborn and unrepentant sinner who is getting exactly what he deserves.

Like his three companions, Elihu meant well. He is not an evil man who is guilty of kicking his brother while he is down. He sincerely believes that he is in the right and has the solution to Job's problem. But in his haste to be the bearer of “good news,” Elihu ends up being the harbinger of doom and gloom. His words bring little comfort to Job. Instead, they are condemning and rather condescending, treating Job like he is nothing more than a stubborn child in need of a spanking or a time-out.

Elihu will attempt to shine a dim glimmer of hope on Job's darkened world, but it will be well outside of Job's control. God will not listen to Job, Elihu asserts, but He may be open to “a special messenger to intercede for a person and declare that he is upright” (Job 33:23 NLT). So, in effect, all Job can do is sit in silence and hope for the best.

Both men agree that God is in control, but Elihu suggests that Job has no right to demand an audience with the Almighty. He totally rejects Job's suggestion that God owes Him an answer and just might acquit him of any wrongdoing. For Elihu, that kind of thinking was ungodly and out of bounds for any faithful God-follower. But the young and inexperienced Elihu had a lot to learn. In time, he would discover the truth behind God's words.

*“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord.
“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.
For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” – Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT*

Job 33:23-33**Too Wise for His Own Good**

²³ *"If there be for him an angel,
a mediator, one of the thousand,
to declare to man what is right for him,
²⁴ and he is merciful to him, and says,
'Deliver him from going down into the pit;
I have found a ransom;
²⁵ let his flesh become fresh with youth;
let him return to the days of his youthful vigor';
²⁶ then man prays to God, and he accepts him;
he sees his face with a shout of joy,
and he restores to man his righteousness.
²⁷ He sings before men and says:
'I sinned and perverted what was right,
and it was not repaid to me.
²⁸ He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit,
and my life shall look upon the light.'*

²⁹ *"Behold, God does all these things,
twice, three times, with a man,
³⁰ to bring back his soul from the pit,
that he may be lighted with the light of life.
³¹ Pay attention, O Job, listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.
³² If you have any words, answer me;
speak, for I desire to justify you.
³³ If not, listen to me;
be silent, and I will teach you wisdom."*— Job 33:23-33 ESV

According to Elihu, Job has only one chance for redemption and restoration, and that involves the intercession of an angel or mediator sent from God. It is difficult to tell whether this divine agent is mediating on behalf of the guilty party before God, or whether their goal is to show the sinner the error of his ways. The *English Standard Version* Bible translates verse 23 as "to declare to man what is right for him." The *New English Translation* takes a similar approach: "to tell a person what constitutes his uprightness." These translations seem to indicate that the angel has been sent to reveal the path to righteousness to the wayward sinner.

But the *New Living Translation* translates the same line a slightly different way: "to intercede for a person and declare that he is upright." This would indicate that the angel or agent is mediating on behalf of the falsely accused victim and declaring his innocence before God.

Based on Elihu's earlier declarations of his own uprightness, it would appear that the NET Bible and the ESV Bible have rendered the text accurately. Elihu seems to be alluding to himself as the angel or mediator sent from God. Look back at how he described himself to Job when he began his address.

*"I speak with all sincerity;
I speak the truth.
For the Spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."* – Job 33:3-4 NLT

Elihu believes he has been sent to Job by God in order to call him to repentance. That is why he is so adamant and repetitive in his calls for Job to listen to what he has to say.

*"Listen to my words, Job;
pay attention to what I have to say."* – Job 33:1 NLT

"...you are wrong, and I will show you why." – Job 33:12 NLT

*"...listen to me.
Keep silent and I will teach you wisdom!"* – Job 33:33 NLT

Elihu's entire speech is a not-so-subtle master's class in self-promotion. He is out to toot his own horn and establish himself up as Job's divinely-ordained rescuer. He even alludes to the fact that he is the "dream" sent from God to serve as the wake-up call that will deliver Job from his living nightmare of a life.

*"For God speaks again and again,
though people do not recognize it.
He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on people
as they lie in their beds.
He whispers in their ears
and terrifies them with warnings.
He makes them turn from doing wrong;
he keeps them from pride."* – Job 33:14-17 NLT

Elihu is convinced that he is Job's deliverer. While his three companions have failed in their attempts to persuade Job of his guilt, Elihu is convinced of his success because he believes he speaks for God. As a further sign of his self-inflated worth, Elihu claims to have direct access to the Almighty and enough influence to intercede on Job's behalf. Look closely at what he promises Job.

*"If there be for him an angel,
a mediator, one of the thousand,*

*to declare to man what is right for him,
and he is merciful to him, and says,
'Deliver him from going down into the pit;
I have found a ransom;
let his flesh become fresh with youth;
let him return to the days of his youthful vigor'" – Job 33:23-25 ESV*

This arrogant young man states that he has the power to offer Job mercy and to provide him with a ransom that will atone for all his sins. According to Elihu, his “gracious” and undeserved mercy will restore Job to health and happiness. But Elihu is not only overly confident in his assertion; he is sorely mistaken. Elihu seems to suffer from a bad case of savior complex. He is fully convinced that he is the remedy to Job’s problem and can restore him to health and happiness. He even believes he can provide a ransom that will satisfy the just demands of a holy and righteous God. But compare his words with those of the psalmist.

*Truly no man can ransom another,
or give to God the price of his life,
for the ransom of their life is costly
and can never suffice,
that he should live on forever
and never see the pit.*

*But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol,
for he will receive me. – Psalm 49:7-9, 15 ESV*

Elihu provides no details concerning the ransom he intends to offer on Job’s behalf. But the psalmist would argue that there is nothing Elihu can offer that would ever cover the cost for a man’s sin. Even the sinner himself cannot ransom his own life.

Elihu is so over-confident that he places God in a subsidiary role, with nothing more to do than to rubber stamp the transaction that Elihu has arranged. Once Job has seen the error of his ways and Elihu has offered whatever ransom he has in mind, then all Job has to do is pray and “he will be accepted. And God will receive him with joy” (Job 33:26 NLT). Because of Elihu’s efforts, God will restore Job to righteousness. Done deal. Case closed.

Elihu attempts to manipulate his suffering friend by describing a future scene that pictures Job as confessing his sins and rejoicing in his redemption.

*“I sinned and perverted what was right,
and it was not repaid to me.
He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit,
and my life shall look upon the light.” – Job 33:27-28 ESV*

All Job has to do is admit his guilt and all will be well. That is the deal Elihu is offering and it is nothing more than a form of plea bargaining. In his desperation to get a full confession out of Job, Elihu guarantees absolution and complete restoration. But those things are not his to give. He has no power or authority to promise Job anything. Elihu does not speak for God, and he is not an angel sent from God.

He is right about one thing; God can and does rescue and restore those who are suffering.

*“God does these things
again and again for people.
He rescues them from the grave
so they may enjoy the light of life.” – Job 33:29-30 NLT*

But Elihu has no business guaranteeing such an outcome to Job or anyone else. And he is way out of bounds when he places himself in the role of Job’s savior and ransom provider. Yet, he is so self-deceived and over-confident that he demands Job’s undivided attention to his words.

*“Pay attention, O Job, listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.” – Job 33:31 ESV*

After all, he is the “angel” of God, the divine mediator who has the power to redeem Job from the grave. He is Job’s self-appointed Messiah, and he has a direct line to the throne of God in heaven. So, if Job wants to see his fortunes restored and his life spared, he will need to listen to what Elihu has to say.

And sadly, Elihu was far from finished. He has another entire speech to deliver, in which he will lecture Job on the justice of God. His primary purpose will be to refute Job’s claim on innocence and establish God’s right to judge justly. But in all of this, Elihu will mirror the mistakes of his predecessors. He will make assumptions and draw conclusions based on incomplete data. He will say right things about God but make false accusations against Job – all because he is ignorant of all the facts. This “angel of God” will prove to be a lousy spokesperson for God because he doesn’t know the mind of God.

If only Elihu could have accessed the wisdom of the apostle Paul, he could have avoided the pitfalls of the savior complex and spared Job a lot of grief.

*Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us
to understand his decisions and his ways!*

*For who can know the Lord’s thoughts?
Who knows enough to give him advice?
And who has given him so much
that he needs to pay it back?*

For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! – Romans 11:33-36 NLT

Job 34:1-15**Show up, Shut Up, and Build Up**

¹ Then Elihu answered and said:

² “Hear my words, you wise men,
and give ear to me, you who know;

³ for the ear tests words
as the palate tastes food.

⁴ Let us choose what is right;
let us know among ourselves what is good.

⁵ For Job has said, ‘I am in the right,
and God has taken away my right;

⁶ in spite of my right I am counted a liar;
my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.’

⁷ What man is like Job,
who drinks up scoffing like water,

⁸ who travels in company with evildoers
and walks with wicked men?

⁹ For he has said, ‘It profits a man nothing
that he should take delight in God.’

¹⁰ “Therefore, hear me, you men of understanding:
far be it from God that he should do wickedness,
and from the Almighty that he should do wrong.

¹¹ For according to the work of a man he will repay him,
and according to his ways he will make it befall him.

¹² Of a truth, God will not do wickedly,
and the Almighty will not pervert justice.

¹³ Who gave him charge over the earth,
and who laid on him the whole world?

¹⁴ If he should set his heart to it
and gather to himself his spirit and his breath,

¹⁵ all flesh would perish together,
and man would return to dust.”— Job 34:1-15 ESV

You reap what you sow. That’s the basic idea behind Elihu’s entire argument, and from his “learned” perspective, Job was living proof of that proverbial adage. But Elihu could not claim credit for having coined that phrase; it was Eliphaz who first broached the topic.

*“As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.” – Job 4:8 ESV*

The prophet Hosea records Yahweh using the same idea to condemn the rebellious people of Israel.

*“I said, ‘Plant the good seeds of righteousness,
and you will harvest a crop of love.
Plow up the hard ground of your hearts,
for now is the time to seek the Lord,
that he may come
and shower righteousness upon you.’*

*“But you have cultivated wickedness
and harvested a thriving crop of sins.” – Hosea 10:12-13 NLT*

And the apostle Paul picked up on this theme when writing to the believers living in Galatia.

*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.
For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one
who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. – Galatians 6:7-8 ESV*

Of course, Elihu attempts to give his personal touch to the topic by paraphrasing it in a slightly different way.

*“The Almighty can do no wrong.
He repays people according to their deeds.
He treats people as they deserve.” – Job 34:10-11 ESV*

His places the emphasis on God because he is trying to show that Job is guilty of falsely accusing Yahweh of injustice. Not only has Job committed sins worthy of God’s wrath and judgment, but he has also blasphemed the name and character of God – at least according to Elihu’s estimation.

But Elihu is guilty of twisting Job’s words. Yes, Job is frustrated and has spoken rashly and, sometimes, unwisely, but at no point has Job disparaged God. He has actually championed Yahweh’s sovereignty, declaring his belief that, ultimately, God is in control of all things. That’s the reason he longs to have God provide him with an explanation for his suffering. Job isn’t discrediting the character of God; he is simply having a difficult time justifying his own pain and suffering. He refuses to accept the idea that his losses are the result of personal sin and that is what is driving Elihu crazy.

Elihu resorts to quoting Job but takes liberties in doing so.

*“For Job also said, ‘I am innocent,
but God has taken away my rights.’*

*I am innocent, but they call me a liar.
My suffering is incurable, though I have not sinned.”* – Job 34:5-6 NLT

A look back at chapter 27 reveals that Elihu conveniently disregarded a few pertinent points from Job’s comments.

*“I vow by the living God, who has taken away my rights,
by the Almighty who has embittered my soul—
As long as I live,
while I have breath from God,
my lips will speak no evil,
and my tongue will speak no lies.
I will never concede that you are right;
I will defend my integrity until I die.
I will maintain my innocence without wavering.
My conscience is clear for as long as I live.”* – Job 27:2-6 NLT

Job did not disparage God but simply acknowledged that his fate was in God’s hands. His whole point was that there was nothing Elihu, Bildad, Eliphaz, or Zophar could say that would make him deny his innocence. Job’s belief in the sovereignty of God was so great that he was forced to conclude his trials were the handiwork of God.

Elihu was disingenuous and deceptive in using Job’s words against him. But he was desperate to portray Job as a wicked and ungodly man who was getting exactly what he deserved. In fact, he goes out of his way to paint Job in the least favorable light.

*“Tell me, has there ever been a man like Job,
with his thirst for irreverent talk?
He chooses evil people as companions.
He spends his time with wicked men.
He has even said, ‘Why waste time
trying to please God?’”* – Job 34:7-9 NLT

For all his self-proclaimed wisdom, Elihu displays rather unsophisticated reasoning skills. For him, it boiled down to one simple equation: God is right and men are wrong.

*“Everyone knows that God doesn’t sin!
The Almighty can do no wrong.”* – Job 34:10 NLT

No one in his right mind would argue with that conclusion, including Job. But Elihu wants to make it appear as if Job was accusing God of sin. At best, all Job was guilty of was questioning the fairness of his situation. He couldn’t understand why he had been forced to endure such devastating losses. But at no time had Job accused God of wickedness. He knew there was a reason behind his suffering and all he was asking for was an explanation.

But Elihu is engaging a bit of sleight of hand. He is attempting to make this a battle between Job and the Almighty, with Job playing the part of the evil antagonist. In Elihu's heavily fabricated version of events, God is wearing the white hat while Job is relegated to the role of the dastardly desperado.

*“Truly, God will not do wrong.
The Almighty will not twist justice.” – Job 34:12 NLT*

This overly simplistic view of Job's situation was designed to make it a black and white matter. God was good and Job was bad. As far as Elihu could see it, Job was lucky to be alive.

*“If God were to take back his spirit
and withdraw his breath,
all life would cease,
and humanity would turn again to dust.” – Job 34:14-15 NLT*

But Elihu is a windbag who lives to hear himself talk. He is in love with the sound of his own voice. He goes on and on, spouting his words of wisdom, but never really saying anything of substance. Amazingly, he accuses Job of talking utter nonsense. He claims that Job speaks without knowledge or insight, and he opens his mouth in empty talk. But in reality, Elihu is the one who is saying a lot without saying anything at all. He is so convinced he is right that he even gets vindictive and hateful toward Job, wishing him harm and not good.

We all could learn a lot from Elihu; not so much from what he says, but how he says it. In his pride and arrogance, this young man cares more about being right than being showing love to someone who is hurting. He takes it upon himself to defend God, when God needs no defense. He speaks for God when he has no clue what God is doing or thinking.

But we can do the same thing. It is too easy to jump to conclusions regarding situations and circumstances, and make determinations that are neither correct nor corrective. We judge too quickly and condemn too easily. Sometimes our declarations of guilt have less to do with the facts than wishful thinking. There is little doubt that there were those who took a perverse sort of pleasure in Job's demise. They had watched him prosper and succeed, all the while harboring jealous feelings toward him. Now that he had taken a tumble, it was easy to dog-pile and relish in his apparent sinfulness.

They say if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. That's probably what Job's friends were thinking about him. And sometimes we can harbor the same feelings towards those in our sphere of influence whom we have watched suffer a sudden fall from grace. Sure, we tell them we're praying for them, but we actually find their demise somewhat enjoyable. We find pleasure in trying to ascertain the sin that led to their fall. If we're kind, we try to remind them that they're far from perfect. And we do all this because if we can find fault in others, it usually makes us feel better about ourselves.

But what Job needed was encouragement, reassurance, and comfort. He needed to know that God loved him and had not abandoned him. This suffering saint was in need of the calming presence of compassionate companions, not the harsh criticism of fair-weather friends. So when we encounter friends who are going through difficult times, will we offer them a tale ... full of sound and fury, signifying nothing? Or will we offer them our unconditional love and unwavering support?

While it is easy to condemn Elihu, we must be careful to keep from becoming just like him. That requires God to open our eyes so that we can see any similarities we may share with Elihu. It means that we must ask the Holy Spirit to control our tongues and create in us hearts of compassion. They say that silence is golden. There are times when saying nothing can speak volumes. So, may we ask God for the wisdom and discernment to know when to speak up and when to shut up, so that whenever we encounter anyone going through difficulty, we can be the ones who lift them up.

Job 34:16-37**Where Was Paul When Job Needed Him?**

- ¹⁶ *"If you have understanding, hear this;
listen to what I say.*
- ¹⁷ *Shall one who hates justice govern?
Will you condemn him who is righteous and mighty,*
- ¹⁸ *who says to a king, 'Worthless one,'
and to nobles, 'Wicked man,'*
- ¹⁹ *who shows no partiality to princes,
nor regards the rich more than the poor,
for they are all the work of his hands?*
- ²⁰ *In a moment they die;
at midnight the people are shaken and pass away,
and the mighty are taken away by no human hand.*
- ²¹ *"For his eyes are on the ways of a man,
and he sees all his steps.*
- ²² *There is no gloom or deep darkness
where evildoers may hide themselves.*
- ²³ *For God has no need to consider a man further,
that he should go before God in judgment.*
- ²⁴ *He shatters the mighty without investigation
and sets others in their place.*
- ²⁵ *Thus, knowing their works,
he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed.*
- ²⁶ *He strikes them for their wickedness
in a place for all to see,*
- ²⁷ *because they turned aside from following him
and had no regard for any of his ways,*
- ²⁸ *so that they caused the cry of the poor to come to him,
and he heard the cry of the afflicted—*
- ²⁹ *When he is quiet, who can condemn?
When he hides his face, who can behold him,
whether it be a nation or a man?—*
- ³⁰ *that a godless man should not reign,
that he should not ensnare the people.*
- ³¹ *"For has anyone said to God,
'I have borne punishment; I will not offend any more;
³² teach me what I do not see;
if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more'?*
- ³³ *Will he then make repayment to suit you,*

*because you reject it?
 For you must choose, and not I;
 therefore declare what you know.*
³⁴ *Men of understanding will say to me,
 and the wise man who hears me will say:*
³⁵ *'Job speaks without knowledge;
 his words are without insight.'*
³⁶ *Would that Job were tried to the end,
 because he answers like wicked men.*
³⁷ *For he adds rebellion to his sin;
 he claps his hands among us
 and multiplies his words against God."* – Job 34:16-37 ESV

Elihu is unmerciful in his brutal assessment of Job's condition, removing all doubt as to his guilt and any hope of getting a hearing before God. In Elihu's far-from-humble opinion, Job is getting exactly what he deserves and has no right to blame God for his problems or to expect the Almighty to relent in the deliverance of justice. From Elihu's perspective, God is only doing what comes naturally to Him.

*"Could God govern if he hated justice?
 Are you going to condemn the almighty judge?"* – Job 34:17 NLT

God is a just and righteous deity who must punish all sin regardless of who commits it. He shows no partiality, treating all guilty individuals the same, whether they are rich or poor, well-connected or disadvantaged. Even the wealthy and well-to-do receive unbiased justice from the hand of God.

*"He doesn't care how great a person may be,
 and he pays no more attention to the rich than to the poor.
 He made them all.
 In a moment they die.
 In the middle of the night they pass away;
 the mighty are removed without human hand."* – Job 34:19-20 NLT

While all of these statements offer an accurate assessment of God, they lack nuance and the benefit of contextual application. Elihu is speaking in theological generalities and drawing sweeping conclusions regarding Job's life. He has no way of knowing what Job has done and has means of assessing the true condition of Job's heart. Elihu has evaluated Job's circumstances through the lens of his own theological rubric and confidently ascertained his friend's guilt. But there was much that Elihu failed to understand about God and even more information he lacked about Job.

He was correct in saying that "God watches how people live; he sees everything they do" (Job 34:21 NLT), but Elihu didn't possess that same 20-20 vision. He couldn't see all, so Elihu was left

to assume, conjecture, and speculate. He was far from all-knowing, but he had no problem coming across as a know-it-all. That's why he could haughtily insist, "...listen to me if you are wise. Pay attention to what I say" (Job 34:16 NLT).

Elihu's logic was simple.

1. God hates sin.
2. God punishes sinners.
3. Job was suffering, therefore,
4. Job was a sinner.

Once again, there is a degree of truth to Elihu's logic. In fact, the apostle Paul would conquer that Job, like all human beings, is a sinner.

"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." – Romans 3:23 ESV

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, shared Paul's conclusion.

Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins. – Ecclesiastes 7:20 NLT

But just because all people sin, it's not fair to conclude that Job was suffering as a result of a sin or sins he had committed. His suffering could have been nothing more than the unfortunate outcome of living in a fallen world where disease, difficulties, and even death are common and unavoidable occurrences. Even Jesus warned His disciples about the inevitable reality of suffering.

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows." – John 16:33 NLT

Jesus didn't add the caveat: "When you sin." He wasn't warning about the judgment of God poured out as a result of willful disobedience. His words were merely a statement of fact that were followed up by a promise of hope.

"But take heart, because I have overcome the world." – John 16:33 NLT

The presence of trials and sorrows is not a litmus test for the presence of sin. If that was the case, the apostle Paul should have been the poster boy for the judgment of God. But in defending his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul virtually boasted about the many trials and tribulations he had suffered as a minister of the gospel.

"But whatever they dare to boast about—I'm talking like a fool again—I dare to boast about it, too. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five

different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.” – 2 Corinthians 11:21-25 NLT

Paul goes on to describe himself as having endured sleepless nights, going without proper food and shelter, and not having enough clothing to keep himself warm. Yet, none of this was an admission of guilt or proof of God’s punishment for some sin he had committed. It was actually meant to be evidence of his apostleship and calling by God. He saw God’s hands on his suffering but recognized it as divine enablement and part of his ongoing sanctification.

“I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am.” – 2 Corinthians 11:30 NLT

In the very next chapter, Paul talks about a very specific trial he had been called to endure. He referred to it as “a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7 NLT). We are not told the nature of this trial, but Paul repeatedly prayed for God to remove it from his life.

“Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.” – 2 Corinthians 12:8 NLT

But he came to recognize that it was actually a gift from God, to keep him from becoming proud and self-sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:7). And the presence of this thorn in the flesh actually produced a positive outcome in Paul’s life. Each time Paul asked God to remove it, God responded by saying, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT). And this seemingly irresolvable trial became a means of spiritual transformation for Paul.

“So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” – 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NLT

Job was not there yet. He was not ready to embrace his difficulties with open arms or to boast about his many weaknesses. He wanted them removed. He desperately desired that his pain go away and his damaged reputation be restored. On top of that, he was ready for Elihu, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to catch the next bus out of Uz and leave him alone.

But Elihu was not going anywhere, and he had no interest in viewing Job’s plight as anything but hard evidence of unrepentant sin. Unwilling to buy Job’s excuses, Elihu declared, “Job speaks out of ignorance; his words lack insight” (Job 34:35 NLT). Then he followed up that compassionless assessment with an even harsher prediction of Job’s inevitable fall.

*“Job, you deserve the maximum penalty
for the wicked way you have talked.
For you have added rebellion to your sin;*

*you show no respect,
and you speak many angry words against God.” – Job 34:36-37 NLT*

Too bad Job didn't have a friend like Paul; someone who could have brought a much more balanced and optimistic perspective to the conversation. Paul would have built Job up, calling him to run the race to win (1 Corinthians 1:24), to press on (Philippians 3:12), and to endure suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3).

But sadly, Elihu was too busy pouring salt in Job's wounds to see that his words were doing more harm than good. Sometimes the best thing anyone can say is nothing at all. Sometimes, silence is the best policy or, if you have to speak, the only words that come out of your mouth are, "I don't know." But Elihu was too proud to plead ignorance and too in love with his own voice to stay silent. Much to Job's detriment and dismay.

Job 35:1-16**The Need for Trust in the Midst of Trials**

¹ *And Elihu answered and said:*

² *“Do you think this to be just?*

Do you say, ‘It is my right before God,’

³ *that you ask, ‘What advantage have I?*

How am I better off than if I had sinned?’

⁴ *I will answer you*

and your friends with you.

⁵ *Look at the heavens, and see;*

and behold the clouds, which are higher than you.

⁶ *If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him?*

And if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to him?

⁷ *If you are righteous, what do you give to him?*

Or what does he receive from your hand?

⁸ *Your wickedness concerns a man like yourself,*

and your righteousness a son of man.

⁹ *“Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out;*
they call for help because of the arm of the mighty.

¹⁰ *But none says, ‘Where is God my Maker,*
who gives songs in the night,

¹¹ *who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth*
and makes us wiser than the birds of the heavens?’

¹² *There they cry out, but he does not answer,*
because of the pride of evil men.

¹³ *Surely God does not hear an empty cry,*
nor does the Almighty regard it.

¹⁴ *How much less when you say that you do not see him,*
that the case is before him, and you are waiting for him!

¹⁵ *And now, because his anger does not punish,*
and he does not take much note of transgression,

¹⁶ *Job opens his mouth in empty talk;*
he multiplies words without knowledge.” – Job 35:1-16 ESV

Once again, the overly verbose Elihu starts off the latest section of his speech by lifting the statements of Job out of their context and using them as a launching pad for his latest diatribe. He addresses Job’s persistent demand to get a hearing before God so that He might prove himself innocent. Elihu describes that demand as nothing more than a display of boastful pride. As far as Elihu is concerned, Job has no rights before God.

This led him to pick up on another statement made by Job but he does so with a fair amount of paraphrasing. He accuses Job of claiming that living a righteous life is of no advantage if the righteous suffer along with the wicked.

But what Job actually said was quite different. He simply asked, “For what hope do the godless have when God cuts them off and takes away their life? Will God listen to their cry when trouble comes upon them?” (Job 27:8-9 NLT). All he was trying to say was that the only hope the righteous have is if their God hears their cries and releases them from their pain and suffering. If He were to refuse to do so, they would be no better off than the wicked.

Yet Elihu wants to paint Job as a prideful, self-proclaimed Puritan who claims to have lived a perfect and sin-free life. Elihu isn't buying Job's innocent-victim act but he plays along with the idea. For Elihu, it didn't really matter whether Job was righteous or wicked because God was not affected by either.

*“If you sin, how does that affect God?
Even if you sin again and again,
what effect will it have on him?
If you are good, is this some great gift to him?
What could you possibly give him?” – Job 35:6-7 NLT*

Elihu's concept of God was that of a distant and disengaged deity who was far removed from the daily actions of mere humans. His argument seems to be that even if Job was fully righteous, God owed him nothing. All of Job's supposed good deeds were nothing more than filthy rags in the eyes of God (Isaiah 64:6). From Elihu's vantage point, sin had no influence on God; it only affected the sinner and all those around him. In the same way, the righteous deeds of men were only of value to other men. They were the sole beneficiaries. In Elihu's theology, God remained unaffected by human sin or righteousness.

“There is no place in Elihu's theology for doing God's will out of love for him. Man affects only his fellow man by being good or bad (v.9). And though God may punish or reward man as Judge, there is no place for him in the role of a Father who can be hurt or pleased by man.” – Elmer B. Smick, "Job," in *1 Kings-Job, vol. 4 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Elihu seems to concede that Job had done a few righteous things in his lifetime, but Elihu didn't believe those “good deeds” had earned Job any credit with God. It seems obvious that these two men had two diametrically distinct views of God. For Elihu, God was aloof and disinterested in man's earthly activities. But Job believed that God was intimately involved in the lives of mankind, and the Scriptures support his conclusion.

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
and whoever captures souls is wise.
If the righteous is repaid on earth,
how much more the wicked and the sinner! Proverbs 30:30-31 ESV*

*Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,
but the companion of fools will suffer harm.
Disaster pursues sinners,
but the righteous are rewarded with good. – Proverbs 13:20-21 ESV*

*Say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, and do not fear,
for your God is coming to destroy your enemies.
He is coming to save you.” – Isaiah 35:4 NLT*

It was David who said of God, “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness” (1 Samuel 26:23 ESV). He spoke these words to King Saul, after having rejected the opportunity to take Saul’s life. David had spent years running from the king, who had placed a bounty on David’s head. On one occasion, after a long day of pursuing David, Saul and 3,000 of his men set up camp in the wilderness of Ziph. In the middle of the night, David and a companion snuck into camp and found Saul fast asleep. Abishai, who had volunteered to join David on his clandestine mission, saw this as a God-ordained opportunity to take care of the Saul problem once and for all.

*“God has surely handed your enemy over to you this time!” Abishai whispered to David.
“Let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won’t need to strike twice!”
– 1 Samuel 26:8 NLT*

But David rejected Abishai’s advice, refusing to take matters into his own hands.

“Don’t kill him. For who can remain innocent after attacking the Lord’s anointed one? Surely the Lord will strike Saul down someday, or he will die of old age or in battle. The Lord forbid that I should kill the one he has anointed! But take his spear and that jug of water beside his head, and then let’s get out of here!” – 1 Samuel 26:9-11 NLT

With Saul’s spear and water jug in his hands, David stealthily exited the camp and climbed to the top of a nearby hill, where he called out to Saul and revealed just how close the king had come to death at his hands. David informed Saul that the only reason he was still alive was because David was willing to let God reward and repay according to His own will.

“The Lord gives his own reward for doing good and for being loyal, and I refused to kill you even when the Lord placed you in my power, for you are the Lord’s anointed one. Now may the Lord value my life, even as I have valued yours today. May he rescue me from all my troubles.” – 1 Samuel 26:23-24 NLT

This perspective stands in direct opposition to that of Elihu. He asserts that when the oppressed “cry out, God does not answer because of their pride” (Job 35:12 NLT). The reason they get no answer from God is because they are sinful. According to Elihu’s theology, their oppression is their own fault.

But in the very next breath, Elihu seems to contradict himself. He states, "...it is wrong to say God doesn't listen, to say the Almighty isn't concerned" (Job 35:13 NLT). He actually accuses Job of denying God's presence. But that is not what Job has been saying. He has only expressed his view that God didn't seem to be listening or intervening in his situation. He has repeatedly called out to God, asking for an audience before His Creator and Judge so that he might state his case. But from Job's perspective, it felt like God was not listening or was nowhere to be found.

Job was simply stating things as he saw them. He was describing the way he viewed his life from his limited earth-bound perspective. He knew God was there, but his circumstances painted a very different picture. Elihu views Job's honesty as the words of a fool because he doesn't understand the depths of Job's pain. Elihu can't get past Job's words long enough to see what going on in his heart. This leads him to say, "...you are talking nonsense, Job. You have spoken like a fool" (Job 35:16 NLT)

But in reality, Job was speaking like a suffering saint. He was expressing his pain and confusion just as David did. The David who was confident that God rewards the righteous is the same David who wrote the following gut-wrenching words:

*O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever?
How long will you look the other way?
How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,
with sorrow in my heart every day?
How long will my enemy have the upper hand? – Psalm 13:1-2 NLT*

And he was the same David that followed up these words of anxiety and anguish with the following statement of faith and hope:

*But I trust in your unfailing love.
I will rejoice because you have rescued me.
I will sing to the Lord
because he is good to me. – Psalm 13:5-6 NLT*

Both David and Job were venting their frustration. The only difference is that Job had not yet reached the point of expressing his hope in the faithfulness of God. He was not yet ready to rejoice in the midst of his trials. At this point in his life, there was no song on his lips or unwavering confidence in his heart that God was going to make things right. He had hopes but they were weak and wavering. He was desperate for deliverance but was not quite convinced of its imminence.

But Job could have used a little help from his friends. Instead, all he got was a heavy dose of condemnation and correction. In Elihu's attempt to defend God, he was destroying Job's faith in God. His truncated theology had produced a diminished view of God that was actually diminishing Job's faith in God.

Job 36:1-21**Stop Pointing Your Finger and Point Them to God**

¹ *And Elihu continued, and said:*

² *“Bear with me a little, and I will show you,
for I have yet something to say on God's behalf.*

³ *I will get my knowledge from afar
and ascribe righteousness to my Maker.*

⁴ *For truly my words are not false;
one who is perfect in knowledge is with you.*

⁵ *“Behold, God is mighty, and does not despise any;
he is mighty in strength of understanding.*

⁶ *He does not keep the wicked alive,
but gives the afflicted their right.*

⁷ *He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous,
but with kings on the throne
he sets them forever, and they are exalted.*

⁸ *And if they are bound in chains
and caught in the cords of affliction,*

⁹ *then he declares to them their work
and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly.*

¹⁰ *He opens their ears to instruction
and commands that they return from iniquity.*

¹¹ *If they listen and serve him,
they complete their days in prosperity,
and their years in pleasantness.*

¹² *But if they do not listen, they perish by the sword
and die without knowledge.*

¹³ *“The godless in heart cherish anger;
they do not cry for help when he binds them.*

¹⁴ *They die in youth,
and their life ends among the cult prostitutes.*

¹⁵ *He delivers the afflicted by their affliction
and opens their ear by adversity.*

¹⁶ *He also allured you out of distress
into a broad place where there was no cramping,
and what was set on your table was full of fatness.*

¹⁷ *“But you are full of the judgment on the wicked;
judgment and justice seize you.*

- ¹⁸ *Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing,
and let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.*
- ¹⁹ *Will your cry for help avail to keep you from distress,
or all the force of your strength?*
- ²⁰ *Do not long for the night,
when peoples vanish in their place.*
- ²¹ *Take care; do not turn to iniquity,
for this you have chosen rather than affliction.” – Job 36:1-21 ESV*

Okay, I've officially had enough of Elihu. He is a highly eloquent, but loquacious young man who just doesn't know when to shut up. While he has said a lot of wonderful things about God, he has ended up painting a very conflicted and confusing image of the Almighty. He boastfully claims that all he is doing is defending the integrity and name of God.

*“Let me go on, and I will show you the truth.
For I have not finished defending God!
I will present profound arguments
for the righteousness of my Creator.” – Job 36:2-3 NLT*

But his lofty words concerning God seem to be a thinly veiled excuse for condemning Job and trying to coerce a confession out of him. This young man has had more to say than Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar combined. He is on a roll and shows no signs of letting up. His attacks on Job have been relentless and severe, but he continues to wrap them in a thin veneer of pious-sounding rhetoric meant to sanctify his words and justify his anger with Job.

Much of what he says about God is true but he is using these powerful truths as weapons in his attacks on Job. They are not intended to provide Job with comfort, but are meant to convict him of sin. Look closely at what he says.

*“God is mighty, but he does not despise anyone!
He is mighty in both power and understanding.
He does not let the wicked live
but gives justice to the afflicted.
He never takes his eyes off the innocent,
but he sets them on thrones with kings
and exalts them forever.” – Job 36:5-7 NLT*

There is no way for Job to argue with those statements because they are true. But Job knows that Elihu is using these lofty statements about God as a way to condemn him of guilt. It was perfectly clear to Job that he was one of the “wicked” whom God will not allow to live. And just in case Job missed the point and placed himself in the role of the innocent, Elihu makes sure that he understands that they too will suffer at the hands of God.

*“If they are bound in chains
and caught up in a web of trouble,
he shows them the reason.
He shows them their sins of pride.
He gets their attention
and commands that they turn from evil.” – Job 36:8-10 NLT*

According to Elihu, even the innocent can enjoy great blessings or terrible tragedies. If they suddenly find themselves cast from the throne room and into chains, it is because of sin – case closed. God is simply trying to get their attention by breaking their pride and turning from their wicked ways. Basically, Elihu is stating that bad things don’t happen to good people; they are reserved for the wicked. So, Job must be a wicked person.

Elihu never mentions Job by name and does not address him directly, but it’s clear that his entire speech is directed at his suffering friend. He has designated Job as a wicked and stubborn sinner who will continue to suffer the wrath of God until he repents. Job doesn’t need an audience with God, he needs to confess his sins.

*“If they [the wicked] listen and obey God,
they will be blessed with prosperity throughout their lives.
All their years will be pleasant.” – Job 36:11 NLT*

Elihu is brutal and unwavering in his assessment of Job, and he warns his “friend” that the future will end in death and not deliverance unless Job repents.

*“But if they refuse to listen to him,
they will cross over the river of death,
dying from lack of understanding.
For the godless are full of resentment.
Even when he punishes them,
they refuse to cry out to him for help.” – Job 36:12-13 NLT*

When Elihu looked at Job, he saw a man who was obviously a sinner who refused to admit his guilt, Job’s relentless defense of his innocence was the proof. Elihu firmly believed that Job remained blind to his sins because he was too busy trying to prove his innocence. What Job failed to understand was that all the pain and suffering he had endured had been a divine wake-up call designed to show him his sins and lead him to repentance.

*“God is leading you away from danger, Job,
to a place free from distress.
He is setting your table with the best food.
But you are obsessed with whether the godless will be judged.” – Job 36:16-17 NLT*

Again, there is an element of truth in what Elihu says but is applying it like a sledge hammer. He accuses Job of wickedness and assures him that he is suffering at the hand of God for his sinful actions. He tells Job to repent of his sins and all will go well with him. Elihu's is a simple and simplistic view of God. He keeps talking about the majesty and incomprehensibility of God, yet he seems to have God boxed in and figured out. He alone knows the ways of God. He even brags that he speaks on behalf of God.

"Be patient with me a little longer and I will instruct you, for I still have words to speak on God's behalf." – Job 36:2 NET

He even brags that his wisdom is perfect and complete.

"For in truth, my words are not false; it is one complete in knowledge who is with you." – Job 36:4 NET

Here is a young man who is wise in his own conceit. Not only does he have Job figured out, he has a handle on God as well. For all his spouting about God's majesty and power, his God is really a small, petty, vengeful, and reactionary God. But his God is not the God of the Bible. He doesn't know or understand the ways of God. None of us do. Just about the time we think we have Him figured out, He surprises us. We will never fully know or understand His ways. We can never predict His actions. But we can rest assured in His character. He is a loving, holy, and righteous God. He is a God of judgment, but He is also a God of mercy.

Where we get into trouble is when we start trying to determine what He is doing in the world or in the lives of those we know. We can jump to wrong conclusions and assume that natural disasters like earthquakes are meant to punish nations for their sins. We can't make that claim because we don't know the mind of God. We can't make those kind of sweeping assumptions because we do NOT know. Rather than trying to figure out the why, we need to ask God what and how. What does He want us to do about it? How does He want us to react to it? We know God has a purpose. We know He has a plan. Our job is not to determine the cause of what has happened, but to reach out in love and compassion to those who are caught in the midst of it.

I have no problem with Job's friends pointing out that Job *might* have sinned and that his suffering could be a result of that sin. But once Job denied it, they needed to move on and help Job seek God in the midst of it all. They needed to point Job back to God and keep him focused on the mercy and love of God. We need to do the same. And this ministry of pointing people to God needs to be self-applied. When we find ourselves going through difficult times, we need to look to God. Rather than seeking the cause of our suffering, we need to pursue the hope of our restoration. We need to look for the God who is ultimately in charge of all that goes on in the world. We need to ask Him to examine our hearts and expose anything that needs to be revealed. But more importantly, we need to ask Him to open our eyes so that we might see Him more clearly.

Elihu had reached his conclusion, and he was not willing to consider any other option. Job was guilty and there was no need for discussion or debate. That is what led him to matter-of-factly state:

*“Be on guard! Turn back from evil,
for God sent this suffering
to keep you from a life of evil.” – Job 36:21 NLT*

But what if he was wrong?

Job 36:22-37:5**Diminishing God's Glory by Disregarding His Love**

²² *"Behold, God is exalted in his power;*

who is a teacher like him?

²³ *Who has prescribed for him his way,*

or who can say, 'You have done wrong'?

²⁴ *"Remember to extol his work,*

of which men have sung.

²⁵ *All mankind has looked on it;*

man beholds it from afar.

²⁶ *Behold, God is great, and we know him not;*

the number of his years is unsearchable.

²⁷ *For he draws up the drops of water;*

they distill his mist in rain,

²⁸ *which the skies pour down*

and drop on mankind abundantly.

²⁹ *Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds,*

the thunderings of his pavilion?

³⁰ *Behold, he scatters his lightning about him*

and covers the roots of the sea.

³¹ *For by these he judges peoples;*

he gives food in abundance.

³² *He covers his hands with the lightning*

and commands it to strike the mark.

³³ *Its crashing declares his presence;*

the cattle also declare that he rises.

¹ *"At this also my heart trembles*

and leaps out of its place.

² *Keep listening to the thunder of his voice*

and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.

³ *Under the whole heaven he lets it go,*

and his lightning to the corners of the earth.

⁴ *After it his voice roars;*

he thunders with his majestic voice,

and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard.

⁵ *God thunders wondrously with his voice;*

he does great things that we cannot comprehend." – Job 36:22-37:5 ESV

Elihu now shifts the focus of his argument away from Job and onto God. He has not given up on leveling his indictment against Job, but has simply taken a new tactic. By emphasizing the

transcendence of God, Elihu hopes to shame Job into submission. What right does this groveling and grumbling man have to expect an audience before the God of the universe? Elihu wants Job to understand that his incessant demands for justice from God are a waste of time and breath.

*“Look, God is all-powerful.
Who is a teacher like him?
No one can tell him what to do,
or say to him, ‘You have done wrong.’” – Job 36:22-23 NLT*

Elihu’s theology promoted a God who was above reproach and beyond man’s capacity to understand. How dare a mere mortal like Job shake his fist in the face of the Almighty and demand restitution and restoration. God owed Job nothing, and all of Job’s petty and self-pitying pleas were having no impact on the One who had bigger fish to fry. Instead of bombarding God with a barrage of questions and calls for an inquest, Job would be better off praising His glory and greatness.

*“Instead, glorify his mighty works,
singing songs of praise.
Everyone has seen these things,
though only from a distance.” – Job 36:24-25 NLT*

Not bad advice but, once again, it lacks nuance and is being used to shame Job into silence. In essence, Elihu is telling Job to stop complaining and start praising. The truth is, there may be a time when that kind of counsel is called for, but in Job’s case it seems a bit out of place and insensitive. It wasn’t wrong for Elihu to remind Job of God’s glory and to encourage an attitude of praise, but his motivation seems a bit off. Was Elihu interested in the glory of God or in using that topic to shame Job into a confession of guilt?

Everything he says is correct and in line with the Scripture’s description of God’s nature and character. He manages to paint an accurate likeness of God but everyone of his brush strokes seems to emphasize God’s majesty and transcendence. His portrait of God displays a distant and incomprehensible deity who remains aloof and detached from man. Look closely at Elihu’s use of language.

*“Look, God is greater than we can understand.
His years cannot be counted.
He draws up the water vapor
and then distills it into rain.
The rain pours down from the clouds,
and everyone benefits.” – Job 36:26-28 NLT*

Yes, God is mysterious and far beyond man's capacity to understand. His ways are unfathomable and incomprehensible. This great God of the universe is busy managing the details of His vast kingdom and orchestrating everything from the weather to the annual harvests that meet the needs of all men. Elihu's God is patterned after the pagan deities who were believed to rule over various aspects of nature and who used their domains to exact blessing and judgment on the human race. Notice how Elihu describes God as using nature to either benefit or punish mankind.

*"Who can understand the spreading of the clouds
and the thunder that rolls forth from heaven?
See how he spreads the lightning around him
and how it lights up the depths of the sea.
By these mighty acts he nourishes the people,
giving them food in abundance.
He fills his hands with lightning bolts
and hurls each at its target." – Job 36:29-32 NLT*

Elihu then draws the conclusion: "The thunder announces his presence; the storm announces his indignant anger" (Job 36:33 NLT). It is no coincidence that Job some of the losses that Job had suffered were due to "acts of nature."

Job would have remembered that fateful day when one of his servants arrived with the following news:

*"The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds.
I am the only one who escaped to tell you." – Job 1:16 NLT*

And before Job could process this devastating information, another servant showed up with even worse news.

"Your sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother's home. Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the wilderness and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you." – Job 1:18-19 NLT

The "fire of God" and "a powerful wind" were responsible for Job's losses and now Elihu declares, "the storm announces his indignant anger" (Job 36:33 NLT). What was Job supposed to deduce from this message? What point was Elihu attempting to make?

Elihu answers those questions when he counsels Job to "Listen carefully to the thunder of God's voice as it rolls from his mouth" (Job 37:2 NLT). Elihu is letting Job know that God is not yet done pouring out His judgment. According to Elihu the ongoing presence of pain and suffering in Job's life was proof of his guilt and evidence of God's judgment.

Elihu even manages to portray himself as the godly saint who recognizes God's greatness and responds accordingly.

*"My heart pounds as I think of this.
It trembles within me." – Job 37:1 NLT*

He trembles in awe at the power of God but he is not afraid of judgment because, unlike Job, he had done nothing wrong. It is Job who needs to worry. That is why Elihu counsels him to offer praise and glory the all-powerful God so that the storm of His wrath might subside.

*"God's voice is glorious in the thunder.
We can't even imagine the greatness of his power." – Job 37:5 NLT*

This seems to be a subtle suggestion that, unless Job confesses his guilt, things are going to increase in intensity. The judgment of God will not relent until Job repents. Elihu is attempting scare Job straight. He is using the inescapable and unfathomable power of God to threaten Job into submission and force a confession.

But nowhere do we hear Elihu speak of God's mercy and grace. He never mentions the love of God and he never encourages Job to seek hope in the patience and forgiveness of God. Yet, God described Himself in those terms when speaking to Moses in the wilderness.

*"Yahweh! The Lord!
The God of compassion and mercy!
I am slow to anger
and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.
I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations.
I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin." – Exodus 34:6-7 NLT*

It was King David who said of God, "O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help" (Psalm 86:5 NLT). He went on to describe God in terms that provide a much-needed balance to Elihu's one-dimensional view. His words echo the self-disclosure of God Himself.

*But you, O Lord,
are a God of compassion and mercy,
slow to get angry
and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. – Psalm 86:15 NLT*

The prophet, Jonah, who had been commanded by God to "go to the great city of Nineveh" (Jonah 1:2 NLT), was reluctant to take up his commission because he didn't want to see the Ninevites spared from God's judgment. God had made Jonah's commission quite clear: "Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are" (Jonah 1:2 NLT).

When Jonah finally obeyed God's command and made his way to Nineveh, his worst fears were realized when the citizens of that wicked city repented. Disappointed that the enemies of God's people had been spared and not destroyed, Jonah declared his dissatisfaction.

“Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. – Jonah 4:2 NLT

The whole reason Jonah tried to avoid his God-ordained mission was because he knew that Yahweh was merciful and compassionate. He understood that God was loving and quick to forgive. It was his knowledge of God that prompted him to try and disobey God because he didn't want to see the Ninevites spared.

In a way, Elihu seems to be doing the very same thing. He avoids any mention of God's love, mercy, and grace. He refuses to portray God as patient and compassionate. In his determination to convict and condemn Job, Elihu ends up diminishing the glory of God. He invites Job to praise a version of God that is incomplete and, therefore, inaccurate.

Elihu could have used a few pointers from the prophet, Joel. Rather than trying to scare Job into submission by emphasizing the judgment of God, Elihu should have pointed his suffering friend to the love, mercy, and grace of God.

*That is why the Lord says,
 “Turn to me now, while there is time.
 Give me your hearts.
 Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.
 Don't tear your clothing in your grief,
 but tear your hearts instead.”
 Return to the Lord your God,
 for he is merciful and compassionate,
 slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
 He is eager to relent and not punish. – Joel 2:12-13 NLT*

Job 37:6-24**The Instability of Bad Theology**

- ⁶ *“For to the snow he says, ‘Fall on the earth,’
likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour.*
- ⁷ *He seals up the hand of every man,
that all men whom he made may know it.*
- ⁸ *Then the beasts go into their lairs,
and remain in their dens.*
- ⁹ *From its chamber comes the whirlwind,
and cold from the scattering winds.*
- ¹⁰ *By the breath of God ice is given,
and the broad waters are frozen fast.*
- ¹¹ *He loads the thick cloud with moisture;
the clouds scatter his lightning.*
- ¹² *They turn around and around by his guidance,
to accomplish all that he commands them
on the face of the habitable world.*
- ¹³ *Whether for correction or for his land
or for love, he causes it to happen.*
- ¹⁴ *“Hear this, O Job;
stop and consider the wondrous works of God.*
- ¹⁵ *Do you know how God lays his command upon them
and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine?*
- ¹⁶ *Do you know the balancings of the clouds,
the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge,*
- ¹⁷ *you whose garments are hot
when the earth is still because of the south wind?*
- ¹⁸ *Can you, like him, spread out the skies,
hard as a cast metal mirror?*
- ¹⁹ *Teach us what we shall say to him;
we cannot draw up our case because of darkness.*
- ²⁰ *Shall it be told him that I would speak?
Did a man ever wish that he would be swallowed up?*
- ²¹ *“And now no one looks on the light
when it is bright in the skies,
when the wind has passed and cleared them.*
- ²² *Out of the north comes golden splendor;
God is clothed with awesome majesty.*
- ²³ *The Almighty—we cannot find him;
he is great in power;*

justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate.
²⁴ *Therefore men fear him;*
he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.” – Job 37:6-24 ESV

Elihu continues his impassioned defense of God by emphasizing His sovereignty over creation. This God of whom Job has taken issue is the same God who controls the weather and, by extension, all created life. God is behind every storm and every drop of rain. He produces thunder, lightning, ice, wind, heat, and cold from His throne room in heaven, controlling the fates of all living creatures. Their habitats are directly impacted by His sovereign will and their well-being is under His providential control.

*“He directs the snow to fall on the earth
 and tells the rain to pour down.
 Then everyone stops working
 so they can watch his power.
 The wild animals take cover
 and stay inside their dens.” – Job 37:6-8 NLT*

It’s not difficult to discern the point behind Elihu’s lofty rhetoric. This young man has not gotten distracted or forgotten about Job. This entire speech is intended to drive home his disdain for Job’s continued demand for an audience with God. Elihu finds Job’s personalized approach to God to be offensive. In his estimation, Job has gotten too comfortable with his relationship with the Almighty and has lost sight of His glory and splendor. Job is too demanding and has become far too casual in his conversations with Yahweh. He treats God like a peer when he should be cowering in fear and begging for mercy.

But Job and Elihu have strikingly different understandings of God. For Job, God is all-powerful, but also intimate and personal. He cares about the plight of His children and hears them when they call to Him. This is what has Job so perplexed and confused. He has suffered greatly and call out repeatedly, but God has not responded. His caring and compassionate God is acting in a way that is contrary to his nature.

Job is not demanding anything from God. He is simply asking for clarity on his circumstances. He wants to know why he is suffering and when he might expect to find relief. Job’s cries to God are not meant to be disrespectful; they are simply the impassioned pleas of a desperate man who longs to find relief and restoration. A quick review of Job’s comments provides insight into his thinking and the motivation behind his heartfelt cries to God.

*“What I always feared has happened to me.
 What I dreaded has come true.
 I have no peace, no quietness.
 I have no rest; only trouble comes.” – Job 3:25-26 NLT*

*“At least I can take comfort in this:
Despite the pain,
I have not denied the words of the Holy One.
But I don’t have the strength to endure.
I have nothing to live for.” – Job 6:10-11 NLT*

*“My days fly faster than a weaver’s shuttle.
They end without hope.
O God, remember that my life is but a breath,
and I will never again feel happiness.” – Job 7:6-7 NLT*

*“If I have sinned, what have I done to you,
O watcher of all humanity?
Why make me your target?
Am I a burden to you?
Why not just forgive my sin
and take away my guilt?
For soon I will lie down in the dust and die.
When you look for me, I will be gone.” – Job 7:20-21 NLT*

Job was not being disrespectful; he was being brutally honest. The unbearable nature of his pain and loss had left him in dire need of expiation or an explanation. He wanted to know the why behind his suffering. Why had he lost his entire fortune? Why had all ten of his adult children died in a freak accident? Why had his reputation been dragged through the mud and his integrity been destroyed by the unjust comments of former friends? Why had God not intervened or simply destroyed him? If Job had done something worthy of all this devastation, why had God not left him alive? If he was innocent, why would God not come to his defense and acquit him of all the false charges against him?

But Job wasn’t stupid. He knew God was holy, righteous, and transcendent. The Almighty was not a man whom Job could order to appear in court and answer for His actions.

*“...how can a person be declared innocent in God’s sight?
If someone wanted to take God to court,
would it be possible to answer him even once in a thousand times?
For God is so wise and so mighty.
Who has ever challenged him successfully?” – Job 9:2-3 NLT*

Since God is the righteous Judge of the universe, Job knew he stood no chance of successfully arguing his case or achieving an acquittal.

*“God is not a mortal like me,
so I cannot argue with him or take him to trial.*

*If only there were a mediator between us,
someone who could bring us together.” – Job 9:32-33 NLT*

These statements reveal that Job had a deep respect for God but they also display the depth of his despair. He knew God was his only hope but he felt as if he had no access to the only One who could justify or judge him. Among his friends, Job’s guilt was a foregone conclusion. It was an open-and-shut case that left no room for denial or debate. Yet, Job kept reaching out to God for a second and more vital opinion on the matter.

Then there was Elihu. His view of God was admirable and, for the most part, accurate. He saw God as a powerful and unparalleled in glory. He was the transcendent God who ruled over all creation and reigned in mighty and majesty. He was without equal and worthy of honor and obedience. Elihu’s God was completely righteous and always right. He was free to do as He pleased and whatever He did was just and fair. No one should dare to question His ways or doubt the efficacy of his actions. That’s why Elihu took exception with Job’s constant complaints aimed at the Almighty. As far as Elihu was concerned, Job was out of bounds and way over his head.

And Elihu kept trying to remind Job that his circumstances were the result of God’s divine judgment. He was in this predicament because he had failed to show God proper respect.

*“The clouds churn about at his direction.
They do whatever he commands throughout the earth.
He makes these things happen either to punish people
or to show his unfailing love.” – Job 37:12-13 NLT*

From everything else Elihu has said, it’s doubtful that he believed Job was the recipient of God’s unfailing love. All the evidence was stacked in the favor of God’s judgment. It was obvious to Elihu, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar that Job was guilty and deserving of everything that had happened. These four men had no idea what Job had done to merit such a harsh punishment from God but they were convinced that he had done something.

As Elihu begins to wrap up his lengthy and meandering speech, he devolves into the use of sarcasm, attempting to humiliate and belittle Job.

*“So teach the rest of us what to say to God.
We are too ignorant to make our own arguments.
Should God be notified that I want to speak?
Can people even speak when they are confused?” – Job 37:19-20 NLT*

He mocks Job for his incessant demands for an audience with God. In Elihu’s estimation, Job is a fool at best and a blasphemer at worst. He views Job as an ignorant sinner who has no respect for the God of the universe and is destined to suffer the consequences for his impiety and immorality.

In a false display of compassion, Elihu encourages Job to change his ways and show God the respect and honor he deserves.

*“We cannot imagine the power of the Almighty;
but even though he is just and righteous,
he does not destroy us.*

No wonder people everywhere fear him.

All who are wise show him reverence.” – Job 37:23-24 NLT

But this will prove to be the last words that Elihu or his companions will speak. Their time to pontificate and postulate is over. Now they will hear from the One for whom they claimed to be speaking. The very God whom they thought they knew was about to expose the ignorance of their ways. And much to their shock, God would begin His speech by addressing Job directly. Their friend would get his wish. The transcendent, all-powerful God of the universe had heard Job’s cries and was ready to speak.

But what comes next will prove to be a surprise to all the parties involved. Everyone, including Job, is about to get a lecture from God that will leave them at a loss for words and in need of an overhaul of their theology.

Job 38:1-18**When God Speaks, It Pays to Listen**

¹ Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

² “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³ Dress for action like a man;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.

⁴ “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶ On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone,

⁷ when the morning stars sang together

and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

⁸ “Or who shut in the sea with doors

when it burst out from the womb,

⁹ when I made clouds its garment

and thick darkness its swaddling band,

¹⁰ and prescribed limits for it

and set bars and doors,

¹¹ and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,

and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?

¹² “Have you commanded the morning since your days began,

and caused the dawn to know its place,

¹³ that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,

and the wicked be shaken out of it?

¹⁴ It is changed like clay under the seal,

and its features stand out like a garment.

¹⁵ From the wicked their light is withheld,

and their uplifted arm is broken.

¹⁶ “Have you entered into the springs of the sea,

or walked in the recesses of the deep?

¹⁷ Have the gates of death been revealed to you,

or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

¹⁸ Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?

Declare, if you know all this.” – Job 38:1-18 ESV

Job has expressed his desire to stand before God. He has repeatedly begged the Almighty for an audience so that he can receive answers to all his questions, relief from his pain, and the chance to be vindicated.

*“O God, grant me these two things,
and then I will be able to face you.
Remove your heavy hand from me,
and don’t terrify me with your awesome presence.
Now summon me, and I will answer!
Or let me speak to you, and you reply.
Tell me, what have I done wrong?
Show me my rebellion and my sin.” – Job 13:20-23 NLT*

*“If only someone would listen to me!
Look, I will sign my name to my defense.
Let the Almighty answer me.
Let my accuser write out the charges against me.” – Job 31:35 NLT*

Well, Job gets his wish. After a long and indeterminate delay, God breaks His silence. But if Job was expecting to get a chance to defend himself before God, he was in for a surprise. If he was expecting God to provide answers to all of his questions and absolve him of all guilt, he was going to be sorely disappointed.

The reader has been given an explanation for Job’s losses in the opening chapters of the book, but Job was left in the dark as to the cause of his pain and suffering. He had no idea about the conversations that took place between God and Satan. Job was completely unaware that this entire ordeal had been a test of his own faithfulness. God knew Job was “a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8 ESV).

Even after Satan had destroyed all of Job’s flocks and herds and caused the deaths of his ten adult children, “Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22 ESV). Instead, Job had declared his faith in God.

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” – Job 1:21 ESV

And when Satan appeared before God a second time, God had declared Job to be “a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 2:3 ESV). God proudly boasted of Job’s faithfulness in the face of trials, telling Satan, “He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason” (Job 2:3 ESV).

Yet, when God appears before Job, He doesn’t divulge any of this information. Instead, He gives Job a much-needed lesson on His own sovereignty and authority. God has had to listen to all

the arrogant claims and theological ramblings of Job and his four friends, now He is going to set the record straight, and He directs His words to Job.

God appears to Job in the form of a whirlwind. The Hebrew word is סַעַר (*sa'ar*) and it can be translated as “tempest, storm, or hurricane.” This visible manifestation of God’s divine presence is called a theophany, and it is meant to allow human beings to see the invisible God. To Job, God appeared in the form of a storm. Moses and the people of Israel had received a similar glimpse of God when He appeared to them on Mount Sinai.

On the morning of the third day, thunder roared and lightning flashed, and a dense cloud came down on the mountain. There was a long, loud blast from a ram’s horn, and all the people trembled. Moses led them out from the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. All of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the LORD had descended on it in the form of fire. The smoke billowed into the sky like smoke from a brick kiln, and the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the ram’s horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God thundered his reply. – Exodus 19:16-19 NLT

This description of God’s presence is meant to illustrate His power and glory. From the midst of the storm, “God thundered His reply.” He didn’t speak with a still, small voice, but He boomed out His words with power and authority. The same was probably true in Job’s encounter with the Lord. And the first words out of God’s mouth were in the form of a question.

*“Who is this that questions my wisdom
with such ignorant words?
Brace yourself like a man,
because I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.” – Job 38:2-3 NLT*

God had heard enough. Everyone had been quick to share their opinions about Him but no one knew what they were talking about. Even Job had made some fairly condemning statements about God, declaring Him to be distant and even unjust. The longer Job had been forced to endure his pain without any sign of a resolution, the more accusatory he had become. He felt abandoned by God and wasn’t afraid to say so.

*“The whole earth is in the hands of the wicked,
and God blinds the eyes of the judges.
If he’s not the one who does it, who is?” – Job 9:24 NLT*

Job’s despondency had grown so deep that he lost all hope. He was convinced that God had already predetermined his guilt and punishment. Nothing was going to change.

*"I know you will not find me innocent, O God.
Whatever happens, I will be found guilty.
So what's the use of trying?" – Job 38:28-29 NLT*

But God had heard enough of Job's whining and was ready to pose a few questions of His own. This entire situation had begun as a test of Job's integrity and faithfulness but it had somehow evolved into a test of God's character. God was on trial and He begins a well-reasoned defense of His greatness and goodness. He does so by asking a series of rhetorical questions that are meant to disqualify anyone from setting themselves up as His judge, including Job.

God goes back to the literal beginning, asking, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much" (Job 38:4 NLT). The answer is obvious. Job was nowhere to be found when God created the heavens and the earth. Neither was Elihu, Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar. None of these men were around at the beginning of all things, and yet they were quick to give their opinions about the One who brought all things into existence.

They could debate and speculate but they had no idea how God formed the earth or how He separated the seas from the dry land. These references to the creation account are meant to emphasize God's power and authority. He rules over everything, from the wind and waves to the stars and galaxies. He caused the earth to rotate and revolve around the sun so that men might experience day and night as well as the changing of the seasons.

But God isn't satisfied with stating His divine attributes of power; He wants to know if Job or his friends can replicate any of them.

*"Have you ever commanded the morning to appear
and caused the dawn to rise in the east?
Have you made daylight spread to the ends of the earth,
to bring an end to the night's wickedness?" – Job 38:12-13 NLT*

*"Have you explored the springs from which the seas come?
Have you explored their depths?
Do you know where the gates of death are located?
Have you seen the gates of utter gloom?
Do you realize the extent of the earth?" – Job 38:16-18 NLT*

These questions are meant to expose mankind's desire for self-deification. Ever since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the garden, man has been on a relentless quest to be his own God. Unwilling to worship and obey the one true God, humanity has sought to "be as God." That was the promise Satan made to Adam and Eve in the garden when he offered them the fruit that God had declared off limits.

*"God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God,
knowing both good and evil." – Genesis 3:5 NLT*

Satan offered them the power to be their own gods. By disobeying God, they would be free to set their own rules and live according to their own standards. By rejecting God's sovereignty they would establish their own autonomy or self-rule. But while autonomy offers the allure of god-like authority, it comes with none of God's attributes. Men can create but they can't replicate the power of God. Men are endowed with wisdom, but it pales in comparison to the omniscience of God Almighty.

The apostle Paul provided insight into man's delusion about self-deification and the self-glorification of human wisdom.

Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say,

*"He traps the wise
in the snare of their own cleverness."*

And again,

*"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise;
he knows they are worthless." – 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 NLT*

God wanted Job to comprehend the vast gulf that existed between God and humanity. Men are not His equals or peers. Their understanding of Him is limited and Job's right to question His will or ways was not only unjustified but unwise. God ends His opening salvo with the command: "Tell me about it if you know!" (Job 38:18 NLT). He isn't expecting Job to speak up; He's expecting Job to shut up and listen to what He has to say. God is God and Job is not. The Almighty has had to listen to the ramblings of men, not it was time for them to hear the truth about God from the source of all truth.

Job 38:19-41**Give God Glory Rather Than Advice**

- ¹⁹ *“Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
²⁰ that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?
²¹ You know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!*
- ²² *“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
²³ which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?
²⁴ What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?*
- ²⁵ *“Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderbolt,
²⁶ to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man,
²⁷ to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground sprout with grass?*
- ²⁸ *“Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
²⁹ From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the frost of heaven?
³⁰ The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.*
- ³¹ *“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades
or loose the cords of Orion?
³² Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
or can you guide the Bear with its children?
³³ Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you establish their rule on the earth?*
- ³⁴ *“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you?
³⁵ Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go
and say to you, ‘Here we are’?
³⁶ Who has put wisdom in the inward parts*

or given understanding to the mind?
³⁷ *Who can number the clouds by wisdom?*
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
³⁸ *when the dust runs into a mass*
and the clods stick fast together?
³⁹ *"Can you hunt the prey for the lion,*
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
⁴⁰ *when they crouch in their dens*
or lie in wait in their thicket?
⁴¹ *Who provides for the raven its prey,*
when its young ones cry to God for help,
and wander about for lack of food?" – Job 38:19-41 ESV

God finally speaks. Job has heard from his three friends and Elihu, the young, arrogant upstart. But now he hears from the only one who matters; God Himself. And God's response is full of not-so-subtle sarcasm as He peppers Job with rhetorical questions designed to accentuate His divine nature. He starts out His response to Job by saying, "Brace yourself, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them" (Job 38:3 NLT). God tells Job to brace himself like a man because He has a few questions for him. "Who are you...?" "Where were you when..." "Have you ever...?" "Can you...?" "Do you know...?"

At one point, God's sarcasm becomes painfully clear and pointed. He sardonically states, "But of course you know all this! For you were born before it was all created, and you are so very experienced!" (Job 38:21 NLT).

God is questioning Job's right to question Him. Who is Job, a mere man, to question the intentions and integrity of the holy, righteous, all-powerful, God of the universe? Every one of His questions is a statement of His sovereignty and superiority. He is providing Job and his four friends with a much-needed reminder of His surpassing greatness. God's emphasis on nature is intended to get Job's focus off of himself. His myopic and rather morbid perspective has tainted his view of God, and produced faulty reasoning and a fragile faith.

“The function of the questions needs to be properly understood. As a rhetorical device, a question can be another way of making a pronouncement, much favoured by orators. For Job, the questions in the Lord’s speeches are not such roundabout statements of fact; they are invitations, suggestions about discoveries he will make as he tries to find his own answers. They are not catechetical, as if Job’s knowledge is being tested. They are educative, in the true and original meaning of that term. Job is led out into the world. The questions are rhetorical only in the sense that none of them has any answer ventured by Job. But this is not because the questions have no answers. Their initial effect of driving home to Job his ignorance is not intended to humiliate him. On the contrary the highest nobility of every person is to be thus enrolled by God Himself in His school of Wisdom. And the schoolroom is the world! For Job the exciting discoveries to which God leads him bring a giant advance in knowledge, knowledge of himself and of God, for the two always go together in the Bible.” – Francis I. Andersen, *Job*

By drawing Job’s attention to the wonders of creation, God is showcasing His power and providential care. There are wonders surrounding Job that reveal just how great and good God really is. The presence of light and dark are the handiwork of God. From the human perspective, these elements simply appear in the sky and little thought is given as to their source. But God demands that Job explain where light comes from and where the darkness goes in the morning. Then He sarcastically adds, “But of course you know all this! For you were born before it was all created, and you are so very experienced!” (Job 38:21 NLT).

God is not being mean; He is simply driving home the extents of the vast gulf between His own reality and man’s infallibility. He wants Job to contemplate the inconceivable greatness of the One who controls the entire universe and all it contains, including Job.

Job wants answer from God. He demands to know the source of his own pain and suffering, but God asks him, “Where is the path to the source of light? Where is the home of the east wind?” (Job 38:24 NLT). God is letting Job know that there are greater questions to consider other than the ones he keeps asking. If Job wants to understand the nature of his circumstances, he needs to know his God, and a quick look at the creative order would provide Job a masters-level course in theology.

King David had graduated with honors from God’s divine school of wisdom, having learned the lessons of God’s greatness found in the world around him.

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.
Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world. – Psalm 19:1 NLT*

And it was Jesus who used nature to teach His disciples the wonder of God's providential care so that they might understand His unwavering faithfulness and their need for enduring faith.

“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?”

“And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?” – Matthew 6:25-30 NLT

God turns Job's attention to the clouds that produce rain, ice, hail, thunder, and lightning. These everyday, commonplace meteorological events are not the result of chance but are the handiwork of God. The very presence of rain is a reminder of God's faithfulness. Without it, nothing on earth would survive. Yet, God can turn life-giving rain into crop-destroying hail. He can transform a gentle rain into a torrential, flood-producing downpour that takes away life and livelihood. These kinds of occurrences are an inexplicable yet inescapable part of life on this planet, and so is human suffering.

God's point seems to be that there are some things men will never fully comprehend. Despite our modern scientific capabilities and our incessant obsession with solving the riddle of the universe's creation, there are certain aspects of God's creative order that will remain a mystery to us. Job was earth-bound and suffered from a limited understanding of the heavens. He could see the stars and even know some of them by name, but he could not explain their existence or comprehend the magnitude of their number.

In a sense, Job had been trying to give God directions concerning the future of his own life. He wanted to provide the God of the universe with some helpful guidance regarding his future state. But God asks Job if he has any insight into the “the movement of the stars” (Job 38:31 NLT). If Job knows that is best for himself, can he also “direct the constellations through the seasons?” (Job 38:32 NLT). And the answer is clearly, “No!”

Job has no business giving God advice. He is in no place to tell God what to do. And to ensure that Job understands that point, God asks, “Do you know the laws of the universe? Can you use them to regulate the earth?” (Job 38:33 NLT). If the answer is no, then why does Job seem to believe he knows the laws concerning his own universe and how they should be used to regulate the affairs of his life?

Sometimes, a simple upward glance will help take our eyes off of the worries and concerns we face in this world. The prophet Isaiah echoes the words of God and provides a much-needed reminder to reminder to acknowledge the greatness of God rather than attempt to advise Him.

*Who else has held the oceans in his hand?
 Who has measured off the heavens with his fingers?
 Who else knows the weight of the earth
 or has weighed the mountains and hills on a scale?
 Who is able to advise the Spirit of the Lord?
 Who knows enough to give him advice or teach him?
 Has the Lord ever needed anyone's advice?
 Does he need instruction about what is good?
 Did someone teach him what is right
 or show him the path of justice? – Isaiah 40:12-14 NLT*

And Isaiah recommends that we consider a bit of stargazing before we resort to advice-giving. God doesn't need our recommendations, but He is worthy of our veneration.

*Look up into the heavens.
 Who created all the stars?
 He brings them out like an army, one after another,
 calling each by its name.
 Because of his great power and incomparable strength,
 not a single one is missing. – Isaiah 40:33 NLT*

Job 39:1-30**God Can't Always Be Understood, But He Can Always Be Trusted**

¹ *"Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?*

Do you observe the calving of the does?

² *Can you number the months that they fulfill,
and do you know the time when they give birth,*

³ *when they crouch, bring forth their offspring,
and are delivered of their young?*

⁴ *Their young ones become strong; they grow up in the open;
they go out and do not return to them.*

⁵ *"Who has let the wild donkey go free?*

Who has loosed the bonds of the swift donkey,

⁶ *to whom I have given the arid plain for his home
and the salt land for his dwelling place?*

⁷ *He scorns the tumult of the city;
he hears not the shouts of the driver.*

⁸ *He ranges the mountains as his pasture,
and he searches after every green thing.*

⁹ *"Is the wild ox willing to serve you?*

Will he spend the night at your manger?

¹⁰ *Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes,
or will he harrow the valleys after you?*

¹¹ *Will you depend on him because his strength is great,
and will you leave to him your labor?*

¹² *Do you have faith in him that he will return your grain
and gather it to your threshing floor?*

¹³ *"The wings of the ostrich wave proudly,
but are they the pinions and plumage of love?*

¹⁴ *For she leaves her eggs to the earth
and lets them be warmed on the ground,*

¹⁵ *forgetting that a foot may crush them
and that the wild beast may trample them.*

¹⁶ *She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers;
though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear,*

¹⁷ *because God has made her forget wisdom
and given her no share in understanding.*

¹⁸ *When she rouses herself to flee,
she laughs at the horse and his rider.*

- ¹⁹ *“Do you give the horse his might?
Do you clothe his neck with a mane?*
- ²⁰ *Do you make him leap like the locust?
His majestic snorting is terrifying.*
- ²¹ *He paws in the valley and exults in his strength;
he goes out to meet the weapons.*
- ²² *He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;
he does not turn back from the sword.*
- ²³ *Upon him rattle the quiver,
the flashing spear, and the javelin.*
- ²⁴ *With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground;
he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.*
- ²⁵ *When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’
He smells the battle from afar,
the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.*
- ²⁶ *“Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars
and spreads his wings toward the south?*
- ²⁷ *Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
and makes his nest on high?*
- ²⁸ *On the rock he dwells and makes his home,
on the rocky crag and stronghold.*
- ²⁹ *From there he spies out the prey;
his eyes behold it from far away.*
- ³⁰ *His young ones suck up blood,
and where the slain are, there is he.” – Job 39:1-30 ESV*

In His continuing lecture of Job, God points out that there are things that take place in nature of which humanity is totally oblivious and ignorant. These everyday occurrences escape man’s notice and happen without his knowledge or consent. For instance, the beasts of the field give birth to their young at prescribed times and in places hidden from Job’s view. But God observes and even oversees it all. The point seems to be that there are many things in life of which Job is uninformed and, frankly, disinterested. Job doesn’t have questions about those kinds of things because he doesn’t consider them pertinent or important.

God points out the “freedom” of the wild donkey. These free-range undomesticated animals roamed the wilderness with no need of supervision or sustenance provided by humans. How were they able to survive? How did they manage to eke out an existence far from civilization and without the aid and control of a master? The obvious answer is that God manages their affairs and sees to their daily needs.

*He gives food to the wild animals
and feeds the young ravens when they cry. – Psalm 147:9 NLT*

God wants Job to understand that nothing escapes His notice. God doesn't share Job's lack of vision or understanding. The Almighty knows all things and controls all things, so Job has no need to worry about the affairs of his own life. As the psalmist states, "How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension!" (Psalm 147:5 NLT).

Next, God asks Job to consider the wild ox. Does Job have the ability to domesticate such a powerful beast and bring it under submission to his will? Just because Job desires something doesn't mean he will get his way. The message here seems simple enough. Job is guilty of trying to force his will on God. In a sense, he has been trying to tame God and force Him to "plow his field." But if Job can't control a wild beast of the field, how does he expect to get the all-powerful God to do his bidding?

God asks a pair of probing question designed to expose the absurdity of Job's demands of Him.

*"Given its strength, can you trust it?
Can you leave and trust the ox to do your work?"* – Job 39:11 NLT

Does Job really think God can be domesticated and coerced to serve the needs of mere men? Is the Creator-God able to be controlled by His own creation? The answer is a resounding, "No!" And yet Job has unwittingly tried to force his will on the Almighty.

With the next animal, God points out that not all things in life make sense. He asks Job to consider the ostrich. This strange-looking, oversized bird with the long neck and equally long legs appears to be the byproduct of a committee. It's bizarre amalgam of seemingly disparate traits make it a walking contradiction. It is a bird with large wings and yet is incapable of flight. It makes no nest but, instead, lays its eggs on the ground where they can be warmed by the sun and exposed to vulnerable to predators. And those young who manage to survive, the ostrich mistreats.

*"She is harsh toward her young,
as if they were not her own.
She doesn't care if they die."* – Job 39:16 NLT

According to God, this was all part of His design for the ostrich. None of these character traits are flaws or mistakes. In fact, God indicates that the odd behavior of the ostrich is due to a lack of wisdom, which He factored into its design.

*"For God has deprived her of wisdom.
He has given her no understanding."* – Job 39:17 NLT

And yet, this gangly and ungainly animal is equipped with a built-in survival skill that allows it to outrun "the swiftest horse with its rider" (Job 39:18 NLT). The ostrich makes no sense but it is a byproduct of God's creative imagination. And there are things about Job's life that seem nonsensical and inexplicable but they are all part of God's sovereign plan for his life. At this

point, it's as if Job has noticed that he has large flightless wings and he expresses his frustration with God's design. But he fails to recognize that he has also been given powerful legs that provide him with a capacity to escape danger. Like the ostrich, Job lacks wisdom, but he hasn't been left defenseless. If God can care for the seemingly hapless ostrich, He can handle the needs of the seemingly hopeless Job.

Now God turns Job's attention to the horse. First, he sarcastically asks whether Job is responsible for the creation of this magnificent animal.

*"Have you given the horse its strength
or clothed its neck with a flowing mane?" – Job 39:19 NLT*

Job can admire the horse but he can't take credit for it. This majestic animal is powerful, bold, and fearless. It has been divinely equipped with great strength that produces both speed and agility, a perfect combination for use in battle. It is as if God designed the horse for warfare. Unlike the ostrich, the horse uses its speed to run into danger, not away from it.

*"It paws the earth and rejoices in its strength
when it charges out to battle.
It laughs at fear and is unafraid.
It does not run from the sword." – Job 39:21-22 NLT*

The same God who made the ostrich also made the horse. Each is equipped with different physical and mental characteristics that reflect the wisdom of God. There are no mistakes. There is nothing about either animal that lies outside God's sovereign will and intended purpose for them. And the same is true of Job. Nothing about his life is a mistake. There is a divine purpose behind every detail. In a way, God is letting Job know that he has been wonderfully made and designed with a purpose in mind. King David understood the remarkable nature of his own design and expressed his awe for God's gracious gift of life.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed. – Psalm 139:13-16 NLT*

Finally, God directs Job's eyes to the sky, where he can view the ways of the eagle and the hawk. Unlike the ostrich, these two birds of prey are designed for flight. Their wings enable them to soar among the clouds and make their nests in hidden places far from the threat of

predators. These majestic birds are the hunters not the hunted. God has designed them for flight but there is far more to their aerial capabilities than meets the eye. It is this unique capacity that allows them to protect and provide for their young. Their powerful wings and keen sight are divine design features that set them apart from all the other birds of the air.

God wants Job to take notice of His attention to detail. There is nothing that God has left to chance and there are no mistakes or anomalies in His design. And as much as Job would like to debate that fact, God is conceding no ground and accepting no blame. There is so much Job does not know or understand. He and his four friends had been quick to spout their opinions and expose their ignorance. They thought they knew and understood God but they had a lot to learn. The God who made the beasts of the field and the birds of the air had also made them. His ways are not always understandable but His divine plan is flawless. While things may not always make sense, God can always be trusted.

*No human wisdom or understanding or plan
can stand against the Lord.*

*The horse is prepared for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the Lord. – Proverbs 21:30-31 NLT*

Job 40:1-24**Safe in the Hands of God**

¹ *And the Lord said to Job:*

² *“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
He who argues with God, let him answer it.”*

³ *Then Job answered the Lord and said:*

⁴ *“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.*

⁵ *I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further.”*

⁶ *Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:*

⁷ *“Dress for action like a man;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.*

⁸ *Will you even put me in the wrong?
Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?*

⁹ *Have you an arm like God,
and can you thunder with a voice like his?*

¹⁰ *“Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity;
clothe yourself with glory and splendor.*

¹¹ *Pour out the overflowings of your anger,
and look on everyone who is proud and abase him.*

¹² *Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low
and tread down the wicked where they stand.*

¹³ *Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.*

¹⁴ *Then will I also acknowledge to you
that your own right hand can save you.*

¹⁵ *“Behold, Behemoth,
which I made as I made you;
he eats grass like an ox.*

¹⁶ *Behold, his strength in his loins,
and his power in the muscles of his belly.*

¹⁷ *He makes his tail stiff like a cedar;
the sinews of his thighs are knit together.*

- ¹⁸ *His bones are tubes of bronze,
his limbs like bars of iron.*
- ¹⁹ *“He is the first of the works of God;
let him who made him bring near his sword!*
- ²⁰ *For the mountains yield food for him
where all the wild beasts play.*
- ²¹ *Under the lotus plants he lies,
in the shelter of the reeds and in the marsh.*
- ²² *For his shade the lotus trees cover him;
the willows of the brook surround him.*
- ²³ *Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened;
he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth.*
- ²⁴ *Can one take him by his eyes,
or pierce his nose with a snare?” – Job 40:1-24 ESV*

God takes a brief pause in His rhetorical interrogation to give Job a chance to respond. God demands that this “contender” or “complainer” explain himself. Since Job seems to enjoy arguing with God and questioning His ways, then he must have a lot to say. This is the moment for which Job has been waiting. He has an audience with the Almighty and the opportunity to defend himself but Job finds himself at a loss for words. Suddenly, when faced with the overwhelming sense of God’s presence and power, Job is speechless.

*“I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers?
I will cover my mouth with my hand.
I have said too much already.
I have nothing more to say.” – Job 40:4-5 NLT*

Wiser words have never been spoken. Job didn’t say much and yet, he spoke volumes. He acknowledges his own ignorance and inadequacy when standing before the God of the universe. He recognizes that he has spoken too freely and flippantly. In his pain and despair, Job allowed himself to vent his frustration to God but in doing so, he had spoken out of turn and failed to show God the reverence and honor He deserved.

But while Job’s reticence to speak was a wise decision, it did not defuse God’s anger or absolve Job from a further tongue-lashing. In fact, God informs Job that silence is not an option. The one who was so quick to criticize the ways of God must answer the questions of God.

*“Brace yourself like a man,
because I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.” – Job 40:7 NLT*

God seems to be accusing Job of doing the same thing his friends had done to him. In his effort to defend his innocence, Job had overextended his understanding of what his suffering was all

about. He was convinced that it wasn't the result of some sin he had committed, so that led him to make false assumptions about the justice of God. He questioned God's goodness and righteousness. Job's perception was limited, and his understanding was incomplete. He was unaware of all that was going on behind the scenes so that left him with no other option than to base his conclusions on circumstantial evidence, just as his friends had done.

In his zeal to defend himself and prove his own innocence, Job had falsely accused God. He was so determined to prove himself right that he was willing to accuse God of doing wrong, and God was not happy.

*“Will you discredit my justice
and condemn me just to prove you are right?” – Job 40:8 NLT*

This led God to sarcastically suggest that Job reveal his own glory. After all, if he was righteous and morally blameless, then he must be nothing less than a god.

*“All right, put on your glory and splendor,
your honor and majesty.
Give vent to your anger.
Let it overflow against the proud.
Humiliate the proud with a glance;
walk on the wicked where they stand.
Bury them in the dust.
Imprison them in the world of the dead.
Then even I would praise you,
for your own strength would save you.” – Job 40:10-14 NLT*

God demands that Job display his glory and power by pouring out his judgment on the wicked and prideful. He challenges Job to demonstrate his wisdom and righteousness by judging justly and rightly. In a sense, God is demanding that Job prove that he knows what is best and can effectively determine the fate of all those who live on this planet.

But Job is not a god; he is just a man, and that seems to be God's main point. In all of God's verbal reprimands of Job, He never specifies a single sin that Job has committed. God never questions Job's assertion of innocence. The Lord's primary complaint with Job is his suggestion that God was somehow unfair or unjust. Job didn't like the state of affairs surrounding his life and he had demanded that God explain Himself. Job knew that God was sovereign over all things so God was somehow responsible for his losses. And since Job had done nothing wrong, God must be the one who was at fault. Job never said those words directly but he inferred them, and God found them offensive and worthy of a stern response.

At the heart of Job's complaint was his suggestion that God was somehow failing to do His job properly. Job had certain expectations of God that he felt had not been met. In his estimation, the most recent history of his life was out of step with his understanding of God's character. So,

God must course correct and fix the problem. But God found Job's assertion that He was somehow in the wrong or guilty of mismanagement offensive. There was no basis for that conclusion. That's why God launched into yet another illustration from nature that proved His impeccable credentials as the overseer of all creation.

God draws Job's attention to the "Behemoth," a creature of almost mythical proportions that is the byproduct of God's imagination and creative power.

*"Take a look at Behemoth,
which I made, just as I made you.
It eats grass like an ox.
See its powerful loins
and the muscles of its belly.
Its tail is as strong as a cedar.
The sinews of its thighs are knit tightly together.
Its bones are tubes of bronze.
Its limbs are bars of iron." – Job 40:15-18 NLT*

We have no idea what animal God is talking about. Some believe this to be a reference to a mythical creature that never existed, but God seems to contradict that conclusion when He states, "It is a prime example of God's handiwork, and only its Creator can threaten it" (Job 40:19 NLT). No, this is no make-believe creature formulated in the minds of men; it is an actual flesh-and-blood animal that God brought to life and over which He holds complete control. This beast was so large that it had no equal and faced no threat from predators. Its only adversary was God Himself.

God asserts that "No one can catch it off guard or put a ring in its nose and lead it away" (Job 40:24 NLT). The point? This animal was completely cared for by God. It owed its existence and ongoing sustenance to God. Only God could protect it or threaten it. Its life was in the hands of the Almighty and so was Job's. No one could harm Job unless God allowed it. No one could threaten his life without God's permission. Which brings us back to the opening chapters of this book.

They describe an interaction between God and Satan, man's primary and powerful adversary. In response to God's declaration of Job's righteousness, Satan replied:

"Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" – Job 1:9-11 NLT

Satan admits that God cared for and protected Job but he argues that Job would respond differently to God if that protection was removed. God had a different opinion of Job and provided Satan with limited access to test his theory.

“All right, you may test him,” the Lord said to Satan. “Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don’t harm him physically.” – Job 1:12 NLT

God gave Satan permission, but he didn’t give him carte blanche. Satan was not free to do whatever he wanted to do. His actions were limited. God was still in control.

When Satan’s plan failed and Job refused to curse God, he came up with a second challenge. He asked God for permission to attack Job’s physical well-being. He believed that was the source of Job’s faithfulness and so he sought to take away Job’s health and cause him to curse God. And, once again, God permitted Satan to take his best shot.

“All right, do with him as you please,” the Lord said to Satan. “But spare his life.” – Job 2:6 NLT

God never relinquished control. At no point was He impotent or incapable of protecting Job’s life. And at no time, was God’s assessment of Job’s righteousness threatened or in question. He knew how Job would respond. He knew that Job would survive. God stated that Behemoth is “not disturbed by the raging river, not concerned when the swelling Jordan rushes around it” (Job 40:23 NLT), and that was what he expected from Job. The great beast that God created was capable of enjoying the peaceful respite provided by the shade of the Lotus plant, but it also accepted the storms that occasionally accompanied life. How much more so should Job trust in the goodness and graciousness of God? He had enjoyed great blessings for the vast majority of his life and now, when trials had come, he had lost his faith in God. But now was the time when he needed to know and understand that he too was “a prime example of God’s handiwork, and only its Creator can threaten it” (Job 40:19 NLT).

Job 41:1-34**Fear That Produces Faith**

- ¹ *“Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook
or press down his tongue with a cord?*
- ² *Can you put a rope in his nose
or pierce his jaw with a hook?*
- ³ *Will he make many pleas to you?
Will he speak to you soft words?*
- ⁴ *Will he make a covenant with you
to take him for your servant forever?*
- ⁵ *Will you play with him as with a bird,
or will you put him on a leash for your girls?*
- ⁶ *Will traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him up among the merchants?*
- ⁷ *Can you fill his skin with harpoons
or his head with fishing spears?*
- ⁸ *Lay your hands on him;
remember the battle—you will not do it again!*
- ⁹ *Behold, the hope of a man is false;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.*
- ¹⁰ *No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.
Who then is he who can stand before me?*
- ¹¹ *Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.*
- ¹² *“I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame.*
- ¹³ *Who can strip off his outer garment?
Who would come near him with a bridle?*
- ¹⁴ *Who can open the doors of his face?
Around his teeth is terror.*
- ¹⁵ *His back is made of rows of shields,
shut up closely as with a seal.*
- ¹⁶ *One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.*
- ¹⁷ *They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.*
- ¹⁸ *His sneezings flash forth light,
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.*
- ¹⁹ *Out of his mouth go flaming torches;
sparks of fire leap forth.*
- ²⁰ *Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,*

- as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.*
- ²¹ *His breath kindles coals,
and a flame comes forth from his mouth.*
- ²² *In his neck abides strength,
and terror dances before him.*
- ²³ *The folds of his flesh stick together,
firmly cast on him and immovable.*
- ²⁴ *His heart is hard as a stone,
hard as the lower millstone.*
- ²⁵ *When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid;
at the crashing they are beside themselves.*
- ²⁶ *Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail,
nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.*
- ²⁷ *He counts iron as straw,
and bronze as rotten wood.*
- ²⁸ *The arrow cannot make him flee;
for him, sling stones are turned to stubble.*
- ²⁹ *Clubs are counted as stubble;
he laughs at the rattle of javelins.*
- ³⁰ *His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
he spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire.*
- ³¹ *He makes the deep boil like a pot;
he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.*
- ³² *Behind him he leaves a shining wake;
one would think the deep to be white-haired.*
- ³³ *On earth there is not his like,
a creature without fear.*
- ³⁴ *He sees everything that is high;
he is king over all the sons of pride.” – Job 41:1-34 ESV*

In His concluding statement to Job, God brings up yet another “beast.” This time, He mentions Leviathan, a large and ferocious sea creature that was well-known to Job and his companions. The exact identification of this large sea-dwelling animal has been hotly debated over the centuries, but remains a mystery. Because of its unique and almost mythic-like characteristics, some have concluded that it was not an actual flesh-and-blood creature at all, but a figment of man’s imagination. Rumors of a great, fire-breathing dragon had been passed down from one generation to another and the very thought of its actual existence struck fear into mankind. So, those who believe God that was referencing a creature of legend and myth argue that He did so to play off the irrational fears of enlightened men. Even if such a creature did exist, it would have to be the handiwork of God and, therefore, just another example of His omnipotence.

There is another camp that suggests God is describing some species of long-extinct dinosaur. Since the book of Job is considered to chronicle one of the earliest times in human history,

possibly before the flood, the argument is that this fantastical creature might have actually been real.

This is not the only mention of Leviathan in the Scriptures. The Psalms also contain a reference to this creature and clearly describe it as having been made by God.

*O Lord, what a variety of things you have made!
In wisdom you have made them all.
The earth is full of your creatures.
Here is the ocean, vast and wide,
teeming with life of every kind,
both large and small.
See the ships sailing along,
and Leviathan, which you made to play in the sea. – Psalm 104:24-26 NLT*

The point the psalmist is making is that God has created a wide array of sea and land animals that all depend upon Him for their existence and sustenance.

*They all depend on you
to give them food as they need it.
When you supply it, they gather it.
You open your hand to feed them,
and they are richly satisfied.
But if you turn away from them, they panic.
When you take away their breath,
they die and turn again to dust.
When you give them your breath, life is created,
and you renew the face of the earth. – Psalm 104:27-30 NLT*

Whatever Leviathan was, it was a created being that existed because God had deemed it so. He alone gave this powerful beast life and breath. It's power and fierceness were legendary and, over time, had almost reached epic, out-of-the-ordinary proportions. God seems to use these mythological rumors to accentuate the fear-inducing nature of this creature. He describes it as having scale-like skin that was virtually impenetrable. Its teeth were large and numerous. And as if to play off the irrational fears of superstitious men, God uses their own rumors to accentuate Leviathan's legendary and mythological characteristics.

*“When it sneezes, it flashes light!
Its eyes are like the red of dawn.
Lightning leaps from its mouth;
flames of fire flash out.
Smoke streams from its nostrils
like steam from a pot heated over burning rushes.*

*Its breath would kindle coals,
for flames shoot from its mouth.” – Job 41:18-21 NLT*

This sounds like a fire-breathing dragon. In fact, the Hebrew word for Leviathan is לִיְוִיָּתָן (*livyātān*) and it means “sea monster” or “dragon.” The Blue Letter Bible’s Outline of Biblical Usage contains this interesting note:

“Some think this to be a crocodile but from the description in Job 41:1-34 this is patently absurd. It appears to be a large fire breathing animal of some sort. Just as the bombardier beetle has an explosion producing mechanism, so the great sea dragon may have an explosive producing mechanism to enable it to be a real fire breathing dragon.”

But is God really describing a fire-breathing dragon that inhabited the seas and oceans of Job’s day, or is this a case of God using man’s superstitious and hyperbolic descriptions of an ordinary sea creature to drive home a point? While God is fully capable of creating an animal of epic proportions and equipping it with the capacity to kindle coals with its breath, it makes more sense to see His description of this creature as an exaggerated and over-the-top conclusion to His ongoing argument.

Even this wake-producing, fire-breathing, smoke-belching, fear-inducing animal would be the byproduct of God’s power and imagination. And just as Job would have no chance before a creature of such ferocity, he was powerless before the God who created all things.

If Job were dumb enough to take on Leviathan, he would find himself ill-equipped for the challenge.

*“No sword can stop it,
no spear, dart, or javelin.
Iron is nothing but straw to that creature,
and bronze is like rotten wood.
Arrows cannot make it flee.
Stones shot from a sling are like bits of grass.
Clubs are like a blade of grass,
and it laughs at the swish of javelins.” – Job 41:26-29 NLT*

And yet, Job had shown no qualms about going to the mat with God. He exhibited no fear in taking on the Almighty. Job had more fear of a semi-mythological sea beast than he did of the God who gave life to every living creature. He had a greater respect and awe for this monster of the sea he had never seen with his own two eyes than He did for the God who gave him sight.

In describing Leviathan, God seems to echo the common views of the day.

*“Nothing on earth is its equal,
no other creature so fearless.*

*Of all the creatures, it is the proudest.
It is the king of beasts.” – Job 41:33-34 NLT*

But this creature was nothing when compared with God. It was the Almighty who was without equal. He alone was King and the ruler over all the universe. And yet, Job had dared to question God’s integrity and justice. He had more fear of a fire-breathing dragon that was more fiction than fact than he did of God. If Job lived near the sea, he probably avoided it like the plague just in case Leviathan happened to live there. He would have never have stood on the sea shore demanding that Leviathan give him an opportunity to do battle. And yet, Job had repeatedly demanded a chance to defend himself before the God who was fully capable of raining down judgment in the form of fire.

It’s important to remember that God was addressing Job “out of the whirlwind” (Job 40:6). The Hebrew word for whirlwind is סַעַר (*sa’ar*) and it can refer to “a tempest” or “storm.” We are not told how this meteorological manifestation of God appeared, but it got Job’s attention. It most likely consisted of powerful winds and, possibly, thunder and lightning. It was a theophany, a physical representation of God’s glory and power. This attention-getting display was intended to make the invisible God visible and drive home His supernatural and all-powerful nature to the all-too-human and far-too-confident Job.

It wasn’t Leviathan that Job needed to fear; it was God. And Job’s God was not some mythological byproduct of man’s fertile imagination. He was real and very powerful. He was just and righteous. He possessed power beyond man’s capacity to comprehend and yet, as Jesus so aptly pointed out, He cared for all His creation.

“Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” – Matthew 10:28-30 NLT

Job had nothing to fear but God. But God wanted that fear to produce faith. Job’s great God had great plans for him. He was not yet done. But unless Job learned to fear God, he would never know what it means to have faith in God. The author of Hebrews would remind Job that all his claims of righteousness were nothing without faith. When all is said and one, only faith brings God pleasure and it’s only faith that God rewards.

...it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. – Hebrews 11:6 NLT

Job 42:1-9**The Greatest Gift of All**

¹ Then Job answered the Lord and said:

² "I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³ 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

⁴ 'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.'

⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;

⁶ therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

⁷ After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, 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. ⁸ Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer. – Job 42:1-9 ESV

Job had been in search of answers from God but, instead, he had ended up discovering God himself. His quest for justice, vindication, and explanations for his suffering had forced him to seek God and, in the end, what he found eclipsed his any of his expectations. Job's unexpected and unwanted sufferings actually brought him closer to God. Ever since his trials had begun, Job had been in a constant search for relief and redemption, and while he received those things in full, they were nothing when compared to his restored relationship with God.

Job has suffered much at the hands of Satan, but also as a result of the critical words of his friends. But as the book comes to an end, God has stepped into the scene and administered a profound theological lesson that has left Job virtually speechless. The only words that come out of his mouth are statements of praise and contrition.

*"I know that you can do anything,
and no one can stop you."* – Job 42:2 NLT

*"I was talking about things I knew nothing about,
things far too wonderful for me."* – Job 42:3 NLT

*"I take back everything I said,
and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."* – Job 42:6 NLT

Job's encounter with God left him a changed man, and while the restoration of his health and wealth would have an impact on his life, it was the change within his heart that produced the greatest transformation. Job confessed that his relationship with God had been dramatically altered because his understanding of the Almighty had been greatly expanded. His suffering and subsequent face-off with God had opened his eyes to things he had never considered before. His knowledge of God had moved from the head to the heart. Rather than having to rely on purely theoretical concepts, Job had moved to an experiential understanding of God.

*"I had only heard about you before,
but now I have seen you with my own eyes."* – Job 42:5 NLT

God had become real and relatable. He was no longer distant and disconnected from Job's daily life but was an up-close and personal God who had chosen to meet with Job face to face.

He has spoken and condemned Eliphaz and his friends as having spoken out of turn. In fact, God tells them, "you have not been right in what you said about me" (Job 42:7 NLT). He commands them to offer burnt offerings for their sin and to have Job pray for them. If they don't, God would be forced to deal with them according to their folly.

After 42 chapters of dialogue, the most important part of the story of Job seems to be the lessons he learns about his God. Up until this point, Job's understanding of God was based on what he had heard about God. His was an academic, intellectual understanding of God, and it showed up in his diatribes against God. But now he realized that he was wrong. He had spoken out of turn and out of ignorance. But now, Job's view of God had changed because he had experienced and heard from Him.

And isn't that what God is always trying to do – reveal Himself to men? He wants us to know Him, not just know about Him. He wants us to experience Him – in all His power, mercy, grace, and love. That is why He sent His Son – as a living revelation of God on earth in the form of a man. In Jesus, we see the character of God come alive. He gave us an up-close and personal glimpse of God.

For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body. – Colossians 2:9 NLT

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ. – Colossians 1:19 NLT

It was the apostle Peter who encouraged followers of Christ to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18 NLT). Yet, for too many of us, our knowledge of God is what we have heard, read, or assumed. Our understanding of God is limited to what we have been taught or told. It lacks the personal, experiential touch.

Our God ends up being distant and, at times, a little difficult to know. But God wants us to know Him. He wants us to see and experience Him in our everyday lives. He challenges us get to know Him better.

*"Stop your striving and **recognize** that I am God!" – Psalm 46:10 NET*

In Hebrew, that word "recognize" means "to know, realize, see, find out, discern, or to know by experience." God wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He truly is who He says He is. He wants us to know **by experience** that He is God.

It is in the daily experiences of life that God wants to reveal Himself, including our trials and difficulties. He wants to display His glory and goodness in those impossible situations that come our way, in our relationships, finances, health, homes, workplaces, and those moments of doubt and fear.

Job didn't come to know God because God blessed him. The restoration of Job's health and wealth were not the impetus for his improved understanding of God; it was he because actually *heard* from God. God spoke to Job and the truth about Himself. He gave Job a glimpse of His power and majesty by comparing Himself to His own creation.

The interesting thing is, He never gave Job an explanation for what had happened. He never defended Himself to Job because He didn't have to. He was God. He simply reminded Job who it was he was complaining to. He reminded Job of His power and sovereign will. God didn't owe Job an explanation. He also didn't owe Job reparations or compensation of any kind. But Job learned that he owed God reverence and respect.

With Job on his knees in repentance, God turns attention to Eliphaz and his friends, and He shows them no mercy.

"I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has." – Job 42:7 NLT

What happens next appears to be a test of the validity of Job's heart transformation. God commands Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to offer an atoning sacrifice for having misrepresented themselves as His spokesmen and for having misspoken about His character. They had neither heard from God nor fully understood the nature of God, but they had not let that stop them from speaking on behalf of God. So, God required them to make atonement for their sins, and then he commanded Job to pray for them.

"My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer on your behalf. I will not treat you as you deserve, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has." – Job 42:8 NLT

One can only imagine how difficult this assignment would have been for Job. These three men had caused him untold amounts of grief and suffering. They had berated and belittled him. They had falsely accused him. And now, God was asking Job to act as their intercessor. If Job would pray for them, God would withhold His judgment of them. That means that Job held their lives in his hands. He could have refused to petition the Lord on their behalf. In his anger and resentment, He could have chosen to get even and give them over the God's judgment. But he didn't. His heart had been changed and his desire to please God was greater than his need for vengeance or vindictiveness.

We know Job prayed because the text tells us "the Lord accepted Job's prayer" (Job 42:9 NLT). The sacrifices were made, Job's supplication was offered up to God, and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were forgiven.

Four separate times in these verses, God refers to Job as his servant. He wants Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to understand that their estimation and subsequent condemnation of Job had been totally wrong. They had declared Job to be wicked and immoral. They had accused him of committing acts of injustice and unrighteousness. And yet, God repeatedly refers to him as "my servant Job" (Job 42:7, 8). Job's sufferings had not been a sign of sin. His losses had not been evidence of wrongdoing. Throughout it all, Job had remained a servant of God. He was a suffering saint who endured tremendous pain and loss in this life but whose relationship with God had remained unchanged.

In the 11th chapter of Hebrews, the author chronicles the lives of Old Testament saints who, like Job, exhibited faith in the midst of sorrow and loss. These men and women were willing to endure great pain while still holding onto to their belief in the goodness and greatness of God.

...others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us. – Hebrews 11:35-40 NLT

Job's reputation was restored. His integrity and good name were vindicated. But God was not done. In a demonstration of divine mercy and grace, God will prove Job's innocence by putting everything back to the way it was before Satan entered the scene. God will graciously and abundantly bless His servant Job and allow him to once again experience the joys of his former life. But the greatest gift Job received was his restored relationship with God.

Job 42:10-17**The Light-Giving, Life-Restoring Love of God**

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. 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 for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

¹² And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. ¹³ He had also seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵ And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. ¹⁶ And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, an old man, and full of days. – Job 42:10-17 ESV

Rather than seeking vengeance against his accusers, Job graciously interceded for them and God forgave them. He did for these men what they should have done for him. Yet, in 42 chapters of recorded history, not once did Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, or Elihu lift up a single prayer on Job's behalf. Their words were directed *at* him, but never *for* him in intercession to God. Whatever sin they believed Job to have committed, they could have called on God to provide forgiveness and restoration, but they refused to do so. And now, when given the opportunity to get even, Job revealed his true character and prayed for his tormentors.

Without knowing it, Job was keeping the command that Jesus would give centuries later.

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” – Matthew 5:44-46 ESV

Luke records a slightly different version of this same command.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” – Luke 6:27-30 ESV

And Jesus went on to provide a strong source of incentive for demonstrating this gracious and unexpected kind of love.

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” – Luke 6:35-36 ESV

Because of his willingness to love his enemies, Job ended up experiencing the truth behind Jesus’ words. He became the recipient of God’s mercy and magnitude. The text states, “the Lord restored his fortunes. In fact, the Lord gave him twice as much as before!” (Job 42:10 NLT), and it was all because Job demonstrated undeserved love and grace to those who had caused him much pain and suffering. Job did so, not because he was expecting a great reward but because he had survived his encounter with God and had lived to tell about it.

Job knew that he had experienced the mercy and kindness of God. His demand for an audience with God had been out of line and his assertions that God was somehow unjust had been undeserved and worthy of God’s wrath. But instead of judgment, Job had received nothing more than a stern reprimand. Now, much to his surprise, he would receive a double blessing from God.

So the Lord blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning. For now he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. He also gave Job seven more sons and three more daughters. – Job 42:12-13 NLT

This list is meant to take the reader back to the opening chapter of Job’s story.

He had seven sons and three daughters. He owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He also had many servants. He was, in fact, the richest person in that entire area. – Job 1:2-3 NLT

God effectively doubled Job’s material wealth and graciously replaced the ten children he had lost. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, states that Job was 70 when his suffering began and that he lived another 140 years after his fortunes were restored by God. This doubling of his life span would have been another sign of God’s gracious reward.

This man who had lost everything, including his reputation and former status as a well-respected leader in the community of Uz, was welcomed back with open arms by all those who had abandoned him in his darkest hour.

...all his brothers, sisters, and former friends came and feasted with him in his home. And they consoled him and comforted him because of all the trials the Lord had brought against him. And each of them brought him a gift of money and a gold ring. – Job 42:11 NLT

Notice that his friends “consoled him and comforted him” after his fortunes were restored and he graciously hosted them in his own home. Job was the one who took the initiative. There is

no indication that they reached out to Job or offered to provide him a costly feast in their own homes. But Job held no grudges and refused to be bitter about their former treatment of him. He opened up his heart and home and showered them with undeserved love, and this gracious act prompted them to respond with money and gifts intended to forestall any act of revenge and assuage their own guilt. They knew Job had every right to be angry and the resources to seek retribution.

But Job was content to live out his life with an attitude of gratitude to God. He lived an additional 140 years, enjoying the pleasure of watching four generations of his offspring grow up right before his eyes. He would have attended weddings and celebrated births. He would have reveled in the daily blessings of God and vividly recalled those dark days when his life had been turned upside down by unexpected and inexplicable events. And there is no indication that Job ever received an explanation for what had happened.

It's interesting to note that the text seems to place the responsibility for Job's losses on God. It clearly describes Job's sufferings as "the trials the Lord had brought against him" (Job 42:11 NLT). But this phrase is in the context of Job's friends offering him consolation and comfort. It may be that they still held the mistaken view that Job's suffering had been the judgment of God for sins he had committed. Yet, the opening chapters reveal that it was Satan who was behind the disasters that devastated Job's life. Yes, God was aware and provided Satan with permission to implement his diabolical plan to test Job's faithfulness, but God was not the author of Job's misery and pain. In fact, God is displayed as the restrainer and restorer throughout the story. He is the one who put a limit on Satan's aspirations. The enemy could test Job's allegiance to God but he was prevented from taking Job's life. Everything that Satan took from Job was eventually restored – twofold. God plays the part of redeemer and restorer. He came to Job's defense, not because he deserved it but because God is gracious and loving and cares for His own.

King David provides a timely reminder for all those who express belief in God and place their faith in His unwavering love and mercy.

*The Lord is like a father to his children,
tender and compassionate to those who fear him.
For he knows how weak we are;
he remembers we are only dust.
Our days on earth are like grass;
like wildflowers, we bloom and die.
The wind blows, and we are gone—
as though we had never been here.
But the love of the Lord remains forever
with those who fear him.
His salvation extends to the children's children
of those who are faithful to his covenant,
of those who obey his commandments!*