

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.