

DISCUSS

Francis guessed that most Christians turn to the book of Job when difficult situations come along. We tend to see Job’s trials as worse than our own, so we usually think, “If Job was able to glorify God during those trials, I can do the same thing.” **In what situations have you tended to open up the book of Job? To what extent have you compared your circumstances with his?**

Job can be a helpful resource when we are suffering, but it is about more than suffering well. As we will learn in this series, Job’s core message relates to the meaning of life and why God created us. **What do you think the meaning of life is? What questions do you have about why we exist or the meaning of life?**

Read Job 1:1–5.

The opening section of chapter one describes Job’s character: he is a holy man, dedicated to God, having “complete integrity.” He was also a loving father of ten, a wealthy landowner, and “the greatest man among all the people of the east.” He is a richly blessed, reputable, and righteous man. **How would you expect God to treat Job?**

Read Job 1:6–12.

The scene switches from Job to a courtroom-like scene in heaven, where God is meeting with his angels. Satan, shockingly, enters the throne room and is asked about “blameless and upright” Job. Francis described the conversation between God and Satan as “a little bit offensive,” because it can appear like God used Job as a pawn in a game. **What is your first impression of God’s decision to let Satan test Job?**

Note: *To learn more about who Satan is, go to Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of this study.*

After God praised Job as an outstanding example of faithfulness, God allowed Satan to test him. **Do you think Job’s testing is fair? Do you feel like all hardship in life is deserved? Why or why not?**

Note: *To learn more about the genre of the book of Job, go to Go Deeper, Section 2 at the end of this study.*

Horizontal lines for writing answers.

Satan insinuated that Job only worshiped God because he was wealthy. If his tangible assets and relationships were taken away, Satan accused, Job would abandon God. **To what degree do you associate the quality of someone’s life with the quality of their faith? In what ways can losing something or someone make us question God?**

Note: To learn more about the connection between righteousness and prosperity, go to Go Deeper Section 3 at the end of this study.

Francis acknowledged that when trials come, we often wonder, “Is God punishing me?” Not all hardships are punishments. Sometimes, we experience hardships as a direct result of our sins—think of how lying can damage a relationship. Other times, we struggle for unknown reasons, simply because our world is fallen and broken. **Is it easier for you to think of hardships as an inevitable part of living in a sinful world or as judgment sent from God? Why?**

Read Job 1:13–19.

As part of Job’s testing, all of his livestock, servants, and source of wealth were stolen or destroyed. Then, almost immediately, he heard that his children, the joy of his life and hope for his future, were all killed in a freak weather event. **After the worst happened, how did Job react? How would you react if you were in Job’s shoes?**

God sometimes allows hardship so that he will receive glory—praise, recognition, and honor from us and others—but that idea can be hard to understand or even believe, especially in the midst of difficulty. **In what ways can suffering can bring glory to God? How do you feel about him allowing hardship for you as a way to refocus attention on himself?**

It is normal to focus on ourselves in suffering because we feel like our world is falling apart. In many ways, our worlds are changing or being reoriented when we hurt. We also change during suffering. The question is, what we will be changed into? **In what ways can suffering change us? How have you seen suffering strengthen a person’s character or Christlikeness?**

Sometimes what we go through develops the growth or faith of someone on our periphery. We might never

know what good came of our struggle, but God can use our pain in miraculous ways. **How willing are you to suffer well even if you were never to see the purpose of it?**

Read Job 1:20–22.

Job responded to the tragic news with the customary traditions of his culture: tearing his clothes, shaving his head, and sitting in ashes—all signs of mourning. He publicly proclaimed how well he loved his children and how deeply distraught he was. In doing so, he honored them. In our society, we often put up a strong front, hiding our pain instead of publicly displaying it. We can try to run from grief, but we cannot avoid it. The only way out of grief is to travel through it. **To what extent have you permitted yourself to grieve a loss thoroughly? What does it look like to mourn in a healthy way?**

In his grief, Job acknowledged God’s sovereignty. His world was collapsing, but Job rested on the solid rock of God’s faithfulness. **What sorts of things do we turn to for stability when our lives are in chaos? Why is God a more reliable source of stability than the created things we run to?**

Francis closed by encouraging us to live as part of a community where others see how we work out our faith in hard times. We may never understand the why behind our circumstances but we do get to decide if we will still trust God as we walk through the valleys of life. And we can take courage in knowing that our story is one part of a whole kaleidoscope of stories that God has used—and will use—to bring him glory. **Whom in your community have you watched faithfully endure suffering? What have you learned from watching them?**

What steps can you take to draw your community around you when times get tough?

same Satan we encounter in the New Testament.

Literature written during the four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments identified the leader of evil spirits by several names, including Beelzebub and Satan. These names were used by New Testament authors to identify the leader of evil spirits. Read Matthew 4:8–10; Mark 3:22–29; Luke 22:3.

What power does Satan have over spiritual elements and people? How does Jesus’s power compare to Satan’s?

In the book of Revelation, the great dragon is identified as “that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”

Read Revelation 12:9; 20:2, 10. **What’s Satan’s destiny?**

The *satan*, as it relates to Job, could either be a neutral angelic character or Satan. No matter which interpretation we favor, we can recognize that wherever he shows up, the *satan* accuses God’s faithful people. Consider the courtroom scenes in Job 1 and 2. **After learning the different views of the *satan*, do you think this character is a neutral angel whose task was to observe the earth? Or is he the same Satan condemned elsewhere as God’s archenemy? What reasons can you give for your choice? How does your view affect your reading of Job?**

2. The Genre of Job

Knowing the genre, or type of literature, we are reading helps us understand its meaning more accurately. A poem may describe a situation in evocative terms that aren’t true. For example, a singer might say a former love “stole” their heart, but no one takes that to mean there is a fugitive organ thief on the loose. In the same way, a history textbook and a novel discussing the same event will do so in very different ways.

Think of books with different genres, like Psalms, Acts, and Revelation. How might the genres of these books lead you to read them differently from one another?

whether we should read it as a historical account. Was Job a real person? Or is the book an allegory or illustration? Learning about the genre will give us a framework for how we should read, interpret, and apply the events of Job.

A few contextual clues tell us that Job is wisdom literature. The opening verse reads, “In the land of Uz there lived a man . . .” The author is telling his readers that the man was not an Israelite, since “Uz” did not fall within the boundaries of Israel. But where is Uz? No one knows. By using an unknown place, the author is, in effect, saying, “In a land far, far away,” which serves to universalize his message. The wisdom in Job applies to all who read it, not just a specific Jewish audience.

Another clue: Job is structured like a poetic saga. The poem asks a variety of deep philosophical questions: Who is wise? Is God just? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does God bless us?

Job could have been a historical person whose saga reached Israel and was eventually incorporated into the collection of holy books. But the book doesn’t seem concerned with Job’s historical setting as much as it does a person like Moses or Abraham. But the meaning of the book does not hinge on Job’s historicity—the story teaches the same lesson even if he is an archetype of a righteous sufferer.

How does knowing Job is wisdom literature clarify some of the questions you’ve had about the book?

3. Is there a connection between behavior and blessing?

Job was described as a righteous man. He was also a very wealthy man with all the cultural markers of success—cattle, children, and servants. It can be tempting to correlate his wealth with his morality. But does the Bible do that?

Do blessings beget good behavior?
Read Job 1:9–11.

When Satan observed Job’s faithfulness and assumed that his material wealth motivated his righteousness. *He’s living the good life, Satan tells God, so, of course,*

he thinks you're great. He will turn on you if you remove your favor from him. **When have you heard others say something similar, or thought like this yourself?**

Read Job 1:20–22; 2:10. Despite losing everything, Job proved the sincerity of his faith. Without his blessings, he still trusted and praised the goodness of God.

One of the questions we will wrestle with as we study Job is whether we truly love God for who he is or for what he does for us. Is our faithfulness to God contingent upon his generosity toward us? If we think of his generosity as material goods, we will look to our things as a sign of God's favor. But when Job lost everything, his faith did not waiver. **What, if you lost it, might make you question your faith? If that thing is something you can lose, how sure is your hope?**

Job's foundation was built on the blessing of God's faithfulness. And where can we see God's faithfulness most clearly? On the cross. We don't worship God because of *what* he gives us but *who* he has given us. **Is your "good behavior" dependent upon God blessing you? What exactly prompts your worship?**

Does good behavior beget blessings?

On the flip side, sometimes we believe that God blesses us because we behave correctly. We think we somehow earn the good things we have. If this were true, then we could lose our blessings as soon as we sinned. Thankfully, God doesn't work that way.

Read Romans 3:23 and Ephesians 2:8–9.

Despite our utter lack of holiness, God chose to send Christ as savior out of the abundance of his grace—unearned, undeserved favor. Our salvation is a gift—no amount of good works can make us right with God. **How has God shown unearned favor to you? In what ways are you experiencing his grace right now?**

Read James 1:17.

Everything good comes from our heavenly Father. Our blessings are gifts, not rewards. We may not know why bad things happen to "good" people, but we can know God is not exacting revenge on them. We are not always told why things happen but his Word assures us that his goodness to us is grace. **What can you do to**

remind yourself regularly of God’s good and holy character?

4. Weekly Reading Plan

Job is a long book, and we won’t be able to study every verse of it during our group sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of Job so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to you and your group.

Day 1: Job 1:1–5

Day 2: Job 1:6–19

Day 3: Job 1:20–22

Day 4: Job 2:1–10

Day 5: Job 2:11–13