

DISCUSS

Now that Job's lament is finished, his friends began to speak to him about his situation. First, Eliphaz responded.

Read Job 4:4–9 and 5:6–8.

In attempting to encourage his friend, Eliphaz reminded Job of what a good guy he'd been. "Should not your piety be your confidence...?" He encouraged Job to explain to God why he didn't deserve all that he endured. **Have you ever approached God in an effort to prove him wrong? Do you think that is the right approach to God's choices? Why, or why not?**

***Note:** Our goodness does not dictate how God relates to us. To learn more about God's grace, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Job then replied to Eliphaz. Read Job 7:20.

In his response to Eliphaz, Job spoke bitterly to God, accusing him of toying with him, making him a target. He assumed that bad things are supposed to happen to bad people, not a faithful man like himself. **In what ways can you relate to Job? Do you think he was right? Why, or why not?**

Next was Bildad's turn. Read Job 8:20–22.

Bildad countered Job's assumption that his suffering came from God's hand. He focused on God's character, declaring that God would not reject a blameless person. **Given that the readers know God indeed allowed Job's trials, what are we to think of Bildad's conclusion?**

Too often we, like Bildad, assume God's morality mimics ours. Good behavior warrants a reward, and bad behavior earns punishment. **What do you base your ideas of God's morality on? How do you know your beliefs are accurate?**

Job's response in chapter nine declared that God is too great to be truly known. His works are beyond our understanding. Read 9:4–10.

metaphors? If Job's description was the only information you had of God, to what degree would you be drawn to him or frightened by him?

Job went on, feeling torn between faith and despair. Read Job 10:8–12.

Here, Job acknowledged God as his caring creator, but one who seemed to be destroying him. **In what ways can you identify with Job's back-and-forth outburst? Where have you experienced God's apparent anger yet also remember his love?**

Later, Job's third friend, Zophar, joined the conversation. Read Job 11:13–18.

Zophar's advice may seem true, but it is terrible advice. He sees the world as karmic—you earn both pain and joy. *Job suffered greatly so, surely, he thought, he must have sinned greatly.* This line of thinking may appear to be reasonable, but it places the blame of suffering on the sufferer, compounding their sorrow, negating God's sovereignty, and stealing their hope. **In what ways can this line of thinking isolate a person, pushing them away from God and their church community?**

On the other hand, Zophar's advice might seem harsh, but our society is full of similar “wisdom”: try harder and life will get better; move on—life will be good again if you just let it. **What alternative answer to suffering can the church offer those who only hear our society's harsh response to their pain?**

Job replied to Zophar, trying to rebuke his view of the world and maintain his innocence (Job 21), but Eliphaz wouldn't have it. Read Job 22:4–11.

Eliphaz adds to Zophar's claim that Job earned his suffering. Instead of comforting his friend, he begins to invent sins that Job might have committed: wickedness that would justify his level of suffering. **In what ways can we, like Eliphaz, blame people for their pain? What might be a better way to help them?**

Note: To learn more about how we can minister to others because of our sorrows, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

light through our gifts, personalities, and actions. By our good works, we confirm the presence of his Spirit in us and live out our purpose as ambassadors for Christ. **In what ways have you acted upon your faith? What gifts do you have to share? What about God’s grace inspires you to show his love to others?**

Spend time reflecting on the grace you’ve been given and thank God that your salvation isn’t based on what you do. Then pray for opportunities to do good works—motivated by the grace of God—and act.

2. Our pain can help us minister to others.

Job’s friends arrived after hearing of his suffering and sat with him for a solid week, mourning with him in silence. When Job finally decided to speak, they responded. Though much of what they said about God was true, the ultimate message each of them gave Job was wrong. Their “comfort” proved unhelpful and misleading.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–6.

Paul opens his letter to the Corinthian church with words of comfort. In verse 6, Paul refers to the benefit of his suffering: “it is for your comfort and salvation.” **In what ways does suffering give us the ability to understand or empathize with others?**

In what ways have you been able to draw on past hurt or hardship to encourage someone else?

Paul knew that the persecution he endured would benefit newer believers. By enduring his suffering while remaining committed to Christ, Paul served as an example to those coming behind him. He kept his perspective centered on God rather than himself because he knew God was using his unwanted experiences to draw others to Jesus. **How could you keep perspective during your struggles, remembering that God has purposes and plans beyond your personal experience?**

It took a long time for Job to realize that his suffering was not about him. We can struggle with that reality as well. As you walk through your valleys, remember Paul’s encouragement to the young church. He praised his

Father in heaven, the one who comforted him in all his trouble because he knew that his suffering would be transformed into a blessing for others. Spend a few moments praising your Father in heaven for his intentional care and affection for you.

3. Why think about pain and suffering when life is going well?

In Job 29:1, Job opens with memories of the good old days: “If only I could be as in months gone by, in the days when God watched over me.” It’s natural, amid suffering, to long for better, easier, happier times.

But what if those happier times could prepare us for the hard times? Painful events can come at any moment, from any direction—how might contemplating an inevitable hardship now help us when it comes?

Proverbs offers us an unlikely illustration. Read Proverbs 6:6–11.

Here we are directed to observe the activity of the lowly ant. What does the ant teach us about wisdom?

The ant understands what’s coming. He’s a realist.

- He doesn’t wait for others to motivate him. He takes initiative.
- He prepares himself for the future that he knows is coming.
- He’s not lazy. When the harvest comes, he’s out gathering food.

Like the ant, what could it look like for you to prepare yourself to suffer well when you are currently at ease?

A few ideas to get you started:

- Minimize the potential for regrets. Keep short accounts and be free with your words of affirmation and love.
- Maximize your time in God’s Word and prayer.
- Learn from your past. What lessons did you learn from difficult times? How are you applying those lessons in your life now?
- Fortify your faith. Deepen your knowledge of God and your dependence upon him.
- Cultivate healthy relationships now. When dark times come, they will lift you up and often carry you until you are strong enough to walk again.

What would you add to the list?

What steps can you take to fortify your faith now?

What doubts and questions can you seek answers to now?

Which relationships can you strengthen now?

We will all suffer in some way. It is wise, not morbid, to acknowledge that reality. Better to consider what we believe about God during times of ease and comfort so we will be ready when tragedy or hardship comes. Celebrate the good times, but also use them to solidify your foundation in Jesus, your friendships, and in your church.

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 15:1–35

Day 2: Job 16:1–17:16

Day 3: Job 18:1–19:29

Day 4: Job 20:1–29

Day 5: Job 21:1–34
