

Job

Knowing God in Pain



Lesson 6 ————— Job 22:1-27:23

What If Job's Friends Were Right?

*Far be it from me that I should declare you right.
—Job 27:5*

For just a moment, let's consider something Job never needed to: What if Job's friends were right and he had committed some unrighteous act? What then? Would that make all they said true? It's an important question for us to consider during our last week with Job's three "friends." (*Is that cheering I hear?*)

I have to believe that some of us have been reading through Job these past weeks with a hidden question churning in our souls. *What if I have done wrong things... made foolish choices...failed to put God first? Now suffering and trials have come into my life. Is this God's judgment? How can I ask him to help me if this is the punishment I deserve? What if He wants me to suffer?*

If you have placed your faith in Christ as Savior there is something you need to know with absolute certainty: *Your trials in this life are NEVER punishment for your sins.* How can I be so sure? Because the Bible assures us Christ's blood is enough to cover every wrong you have ever done or ever will do. You can never do anything so bad that it undoes the good Jesus Christ accomplished on cross. The book of Romans tells us:

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him...
Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
—Romans 5:1, 8-9; 8:1*

This is grace that is greater than all our sins! Will trouble and trials still come? Of course, but always filtered through His love and with a purpose that includes His glory and our good:

... We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, but the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

—Romans 5:3-5

The only question that remains is this: Are you certain of your relationship with Jesus Christ? If you have the slightest doubt, don't let this week go by without settling this issue. Nothing could be more important. We'd love to help in any way we can. We encourage you to talk to a Christian friend, your discipler, or any of us on the church staff.

DAY 1

- 1) Read the account of Eliphaz's third and final speech in Job 22.
- 2) Focus on 22:2-3. What is Eliphaz's view of God's relationship with humankind in general and Job in particular?

Review Job 2:1-6. With this in mind, write an answer to Eliphaz's questions in verse 3.

Read I Corinthians 6:19-20 and Ephesians 4:29-32 (focus on vs. 30). What do these verses tell us about how God is impacted by our obedience or disobedience?

- 3) Focus on 22:4-11. What does Eliphaz accuse Job of doing?

What do you think of Eliphaz's accusations? How do you think he is coming up with these charges?

- 4) Focus on 22:21-30. Eliphaz provides a detailed description of the steps of repentance. Make a list of the points he provides. (The first two are provide as examples.)

v 21 Yield to God

v 22 Listen to God's instruction

- 5) Eliphaz was speaking to the wrong person at the wrong time, even though his message had some good points. What mistakes can you identify in how Eliphaz interacted with Job that made him such an ineffective comforter and friend?

DAY 2

- 1) Read Job's response to Eliphaz in Job 23-24.
- 2) In chapter 23 Job shows us his heart for God. Summarize what you observe about Job's relationship with God in each of the following sections. Note specific comments that stand out in your mind.

23:3-7

23:8-12

23:13-17

- 3) Job is clearly standing in the whirlwind between faith and despair. It's a place God-followers throughout time have wrestled...a place you have probably been yourself.

Read Psalm 42. What portions of this passage can you most relate to?

Why does it comfort our hearts to know that others have experienced our same trials and struggles?

Spoken with compassion, how do you think Job might have responded to hearing words such as these from his friends?

- 4) Focus on 24:1-17. Summarize Job's message.

- 5) Focus on 24:18-25. Summarize Job's message.

Selah

What passages in Psalms have you found particularly comforting in times of distress? These are a wonderful source of encouraging words not only for yourself but for when you need to be a true friend to someone in need. Find a favorite Psalm and be ready to share it with your small group. You may want to keep a list of these passages or highlight them in your Bible.

DAY 3

- 1) Read Bildad's third and final speech in Job 25.
- 2) What is Bildad's central message? Why do you agree or disagree?
- 3) What is Bildad's view of God's relationship with humankind?
- 4) Read Job's response to Bildad in 26:1-4. Make of list of the things Job mentions that his friends did NOT do to help.
- 5) Read 26:5-14. Job uses nature to display God's greatness. Focus on verse 14, then rewrite these poetic lines of Job in plain language.
- 6) Why in times of suffering and confusion do we find comfort in focusing on God's power?

Selah

Job focused on things in nature he couldn't understand to vitalize his wonder of Almighty God. In today's scientific world, elementary-school children can explain the causes of thunder and many other "mysteries" expressed by biblical writers. But for every question science answers, thousands more appear—even more mind-boggling

than the first. The more we see beyond the reaches of the stars or peer into the very atoms that make up our bodies, the more awe-inspiring our God becomes.

What wonders in nature make you think of the majesty and authority of God? Keep your eyes open today and look to see His handiwork around you.

DAY 4

- 1) Read Job 27, the conclusion of Job's dialogue with his three counselors.
- 2) Focus on 27:1-6. What is Job's main message to the counselors?
- 3) Focus 27:5. What does Job refuse to do? Be as specific as possible.

Explain how agreeing with his counselors would destroy Job's integrity.

- 4) Focus on 27:7-10. Who do you think Job's *enemy* and *opponent* are in verse 7?

What does Job want to happen to them?

- 5) Focus on 27:11. What does Job claim he will do?
- 6) Summarize 27:12-23.

Selah

"I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go. My heart does not reproach any of my days" (Job 27:6). What an amazing man Job was! It's a rare person who walks this closely and consistently with the Lord. I for one can't say that my heart doesn't criticize or condemn me for things I have done in the past.

What about today? Does your heart reproach any of your ways this very moment? Do you sense the Holy Spirit's conviction in your life? While as believers we will never be punished for our sins, we most certainly *will* receive God's correction and discipline, which may come in the form of troubles and hardships.

Read Hebrews 12:5-13. Let the Lord apply these words to your heart and life. May we each learn from God's discipline so we may share in His holiness.

DAY 5

Read through the EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION section that follows.

EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION

Eliphaz's Third Speech (chp 22}

In chapter 22, Eliphaz begins the third and final cycle of speeches. The three counselors have nearly exhausted every avenue in their attempt to convince Job that his sin is to blame for his troubles. The speeches are more brief, in fact Zophar doesn't speak at all. Convinced that Job's only hope is to return to God, Eliphaz makes one final last-ditch effort to call him to repentance.

Strike Three: Wrong Again (22:1-3)

Once again Eliphaz shows a lack of understanding about God as well as Job. "Can a man be of use to God?" he asks rhetorically. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains Eliphaz's error:

It is the now familiar unbalanced stress on divine transcendence: the concept that man is nothing in God's eyes, even his virtue is useless. God doesn't need man; it is man who needs God. Since everything has its origin in God, man's giving it back—even in service—does not enhance God in any way.

The amazing reality is, that while God does not need us, He deeply desires us. He went so far as to sacrifice His only Son to restore us to a right relationship with himself. And our lives of righteousness and service bring glory to him (1 Cor. 6:20).

Eliphaz's error is especially glaring when applied directly to Job. Verse 3 might be read, "Would it please the Almighty if you were vindicated? Would he gain anything if you did live a blameless life?" Answer: Yes! Eliphaz had no clue about the divine contest in heaven, in which the Almighty Himself had chosen Job to bring Him glory and humiliate the Accuser.

False Accusations (22:4-11)

Eliphaz hits a new low in his desperation to force Job to admit the "truth" and face up to his sins. "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?" (vs. 5). He goes on to accuse Job falsely of an array of wicked deeds.

In his characteristic, down-home style, Dr. J. Vernon McGee sets the stage:

Eliphaz is indulging in a very mean thing here. Unfortunately there are some Christians today who indulge in this same type of thing. You see, when this tragedy struck Job, it caused many people to say, 'I wonder what it is in his life?' Since they weren't able to pinpoint anything, the gossip began. Folk began to manufacture reasons. Before long they could spin quite a yarn out of a little piece of thread... Eliphaz implies that these are the things Job has done, and now the word is getting out. He goes on to warn Job that God is on high and takes note of these things.

—*Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*

God indeed was taking notes, but they weren't against Job.

A Final Call to Repentance (22:21-30)

Eliphaz is no doubt sincere as he pleads with Job to repent one last time. Filled with urgency and concern, this is a call to repentance any evangelist could be proud of:

- Yield to God and be at peace
- Receive His instruction
- Establish His words in your heart
- Return to the Almighty
- Remove unrighteousness from your life
- Delight in the Almighty
- Pray to Him
- He will hear you

One big problem: Job wasn't in need of repentance. He was in need of endurance and encouragement.

Where Did Eliphaz Go Wrong?

At this point, we're all thinking, "I never want to be like Eliphaz." But it would be a huge mistake to walk away from the book of Job thinking we should never challenge one another to get right with the Lord—provided sin is a reality and not a mere assumption or accusation. There are times when it is appropriate even necessary to call someone we know and love to repentance. For most of us, it's not an easy thing to do. Perhaps you have been in a position to help a friend who has fallen away from the Lord. Perhaps you've longed with all the love of a brother or sister in Christ to address a problem of sin with someone but didn't know what to say or how to go about it.

How can we avoid being an "Eliphaz"? The Bible gives specific guidelines for who should restore a straying believer to a right relationship with the Lord and how it should be done.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.
—Galatians 6:1-2

Questions	Answers
Who should be restored?	<i>Anyone caught (trapped) in any trespass</i> This is not a one-time error, and no one is exempt.
Who should do the restoring?	<i>The ones who are spiritual</i> — Those who are characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).
How should it be done?	<i>With gentleness and an awareness of one's own vulnerability to temptation</i>
Why should it be done?	<i>Because the law of Christ (love) calls us to share the burdens of life together</i>

Job's Response (chps 23-24)

A Softening Heart (23:1-17)

In chapter 23 Job repeats his central themes once again, but with a heart that reflects softening and renewed hope instead of his previous bitterness toward God.

Vs. 3-7	I am innocent and want to present my case before God... He will listen and I will be delivered	vs	God will never hear me.
Vs. 8-12	I can't find God...but He knows my ways.	vs	God has abandoned me.
Vs. 13-17	God is sovereign and has done this to Me...His ways are above me and I am dismayed.	vs	God is my enemy.

A Chapter of Controversy (24;1-25)

Chapter 24 records Job's final response to his counselors. It's a passage that causes scholar some difficulties—so if you have trouble following the seemingly disconnected train of thoughts, you are in good company. Some actually attribute portions of this text to Zophar or Bildad, but this is unnecessary when the passage is understood correctly.

Swindoll provides some clarity by summing up chapters 23-24 in this way:

In chapter 23 Job says, "I'm unable to find God...but I trust Him."
"I'm unable to explain His ways...but I trust Him."

Now in 24 he declares, "I'm unable to justify what God allows...but I trust Him."

We can all think of events in our lifetime that the Lord could have stopped-maybe even should have stopped from our perspective-but He didn't. This isn't just about the World Trade Center or Hurricane Katrina. This isn't simply about countless thousands of children orphaned by the AIDS virus. This is also about heartaches close and personal. It's about cancer and car accidents, molestations and abuse, lost jobs and failed marriages. This is about all kinds of things that we could name. God could have stopped each one-but He didn't. *It's a mystery!* That's the point. "I can't justify what God allows, but I trust Him." (Adapted from *Job* by Charles R. Swindoll)

Bildad's Final Speech (chp 25)

Bildad references God's power to demonstrate how He establishes order in the heavens and extends His dominion over all creation. Nothing can be pure in His sight; "much less man, that maggot, and the son of man, that worm!" (25:6). Such fittingly miserable final words from Job's worthless friends.

It's interesting to note that in Romans 1-3, Paul uses man's sinful, helpless state to point the way to grace. Bildad's condemnations left no room or reason for forgiveness and mercy.

Job's Reply & Closing Remarks (chps 26-27)

A Not-So-Fond Farewell (26:1-4)

Job had resigned himself to the fact that his three counselors considered him a sinner worthy of God's punishment, but Bildad's comments hit a sensitive nerve. Bildad argued there was no hope of being pure in God's sight. Translation: Job, your quest for vindication with God is hopeless.

Job's sarcastic and scathing reply provides a summary of his entire experience with these three counselors: you offer no help, no strength, no wise counsel, and no helpful insight.

The Greatness of God (26:5-14)

This second section of the chapter consists of a hymn of praise to God's omnipotence. Job begins by acclaiming God's power over death in verses 5-6. *The departed spirits, the waters, Sheol* and *Abaddon* are all Hebrew expressions referring to the dead or the place of the dead. (Note: Whereas Sheol is a neutral term referring to the grave, Abaddon refers to a place of destruction or torment more closely resembling our images of hell.)

Even the hidden depths of Sheol are naked before God. There is no place hidden from God, in this life or the next.

Job goes on to exalt God as Creator and Ruler of all nature: stretching out the heavens, hanging earth in the void of space, controlling the rain on earth and celestial bodies above. He has authority over light and dark, over earthquakes and volcanoes. His understanding shatters Rahab, a well-known mythical sea monster that personified chaos, disorder, and destruction in the world. God rules supreme over every evil force that comes against humankind.

Verse 14 brings this hymn of praise to its conclusion. All these mighty deeds of God are only the fringes of His ways, a faint whisper of all God really is.

Holding On To His Integrity (27:1-6)

Job rejects the advice of his friends one last time in the most forceful means possible. "An oath based on the existence of God was the most extreme measure available (the last resort) in Job's society for a condemned person to plead innocent. Either he was innocent, or he suffered the divine sanctions; for if Job was a liar, he blasphemed God" (*The Expositors Bible Commentary*). Job would rather die than lose his integrity by repenting as his friends compelled him to do. Job was confident he was righteous (not sinless).

"Same To You!" (27:7-12)

Job's oath is followed by a prayer for the destruction of his enemies, referring to the three counselors. Since they had falsely accused Job of being wicked, he now calls for them to receive the punishment of the wicked. As horrible as Job's friends had been, such a plea hardly seems righteous to our Western minds. But in the culture and time of Job, an imprecation (calling down of judgment often stated in exaggerated terms) had a legal function. Remember the law of the day: an eye for an eye. From Job's perspective the only way he could be completely vindicated would be for his counselors to receive the judgment they so freely claimed he deserved. In the end, it will be Job's prayer on their behalf that leads to God's mercy instead.

This concludes The Dialogue portion of the book of Job. Next up: The Monologues. Good news, we won't be hearing from Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar anymore!