

speeches and false accusations, and distraught at finding no explanation for God's silent abandon, Job's focus fell from God's glory to his own misery and suffering. As a result, he came to wrong conclusions about the ways of God and accused Him of injustice.

Elihu is used by God to draw Job's attention upward once again. Unlike the first three friends, Elihu doesn't foolishly try to explain God's actions—he instead focuses on defending God's character and sovereignty. He ends his monologue by eloquently proclaiming the glory of God. Job falls silent. He is no longer on the defensive. He is listening. Pondering. Finally still, he will soon know God as he never has before.

DAY 1

- 1) Read Job 32-33 which contains the introduction and first speech of Elihu's monologue.
- 2) Focus on Job 32:1. Why did the three counselors stop answering Job?

- 3) Focus on Job 32:2-3. List the people Elihu is angry with and explain why.
 - a.
 - b.

What question do you think Elihu is referring to when he says the three friends have "found no answer" (vs. 3, 12)?

- 4) Focus on 32:6-22. Summarize Elihu's evaluation of the three counselors and his reason for finally speaking.
- 5) Focus on 33:8-12. Elihu quotes Job as a way of summarizing his complaint against God. What complaint does Elihu focus on in vs. 9-11?

Do you think Elihu is portraying Job's lament accurately?

Why does Elihu say Job is wrong (vs. 12)

- 6) Focus on 33:13-22. What complaint of Job's does Elihu address in this passage (vs. 13)?

What two examples does Elihu give as ways God speaks to people?

a. (vs. 15-18)

b. (vs. 19-22)

7) According to vs. 29-30, when God speaks to us, even in pain, what is his purpose?

Selah

"Behold, God does all these oftentimes with men, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of life" (33:29-30). Compare this with Hebrews 12:5-11. The word *discipline* in this passage means "instruction which aims at increasing righteousness." It may or may not involve reproof or punishment for sin.

Think back to a time when God brought affliction into your life. How did that experience draw your soul closer to God? How did it enlighten you... change the way you see life and live day to day? How did it produce righteousness in your character? Do you hear God speaking to you in your life today? Are you listening or doubting as Job often did?

DAY 2

- 1) Read Job 34-35 which contains the second and third speeches of Elihu's monologue.
- 2) Focus on 34:5-10. Elihu again quotes Job to draw attention to another of his complaints against God (vs. 5-6, 9). Summarize Job's complaint.

What impression do you get of Elihu's attitude towards Job from vs. 7-8?

How does Elihu answer Job's complaint in vs. 10?

- 3) Focus on 34:11-30. List at least four ways Elihu defends God in this passage.

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- 4) Focus on 34:35-37. Do you agree or disagree with Elihu's opinion of Job in these verses? Why or why not?

- 5) Focus on 35:2-3. Elihu again quotes Job to draw attention to another of his complaints against God. Summarize Job's complaint.

- 6) Focus on 35:5-16. List at least three points Elihu makes in response to Job's complaint.
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- 7) Compare 35:6-7 to Eliphaz's words in Job 22:2,3. What is wrong, incomplete, or misapplied about Elihu's thinking?

- 8) According to Elihu, why hasn't God listened to Job's cry (vs. 12)?

Do you agree or disagree that Job is marred by pride at this point? Why?

Selah

"What profit will I have, more than if I had sinned?" (35:3b). Job laments, *What is the benefit of living righteously? Look at the mess I'm in.* Read I Peter 2:19-20. Imagine having a friend who is suffering for doing the right thing, who is asking the same question as Job. How would you respond? What would you say to encourage them?

DAY 3

- 1) Focus on Job 36-37 which contains the fourth and final speech of Elihu's monologue.
- 2) In 36:2, Elihu states "that there is yet more to be said in God's behalf." List at least five ways Elihu defends God in 36:5-16, 24-33.
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- 3) Summarize Elihu's warning to Job in 36:17-23.

- 4) What does Elihu call on Job to do in 37:2 and 14?

- 5) List at least five examples Elihu gives of God's majesty in chapter 37.
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- 6) According to 37:13 what are three possible reasons for God to bring storm clouds?
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- 7) Elihu uses the forces of nature to illustrate the purposes of God. The reasons listed in verse 13 can be applied to all of His actions in our lives. The idea of God acting for our "correction" or to demonstrate His "lovingkindness" is easy to understand. But what about "for His world"? Read Psalm 147:7-9 and spend some time meditating on this phrase. Describe what purpose of God you think is illustrated by His care "for His world"?

DAY 4

Selah

Time to pull together all we've learned over the past six weeks! We have now heard from four friends of Job's. Take this day to think back over all we have seen these men say and do. Look back through the scriptures and our lessons to solidify the truths you have gleaned from their mistakes and successes. On the following page, record these so you will have a ready reference to turn to when God calls upon you to be a faithful encourager. Wherever possible, note references that demonstrate your observations.

ELIPHAZ, BILDAD & ZOPHAR

What did they do that was helpful(2:11-13)?

What did they do that was hurtful (chps. 4-25)?

ELIHU

What did Elihu do that was helpful? How was he an improvement over the others?

What did Elihu do that was hurtful? How did he make the same mistakes as the others?

YOU!

Based on what you have learned in Job, what positive things will you strive to do and say when encouraging the suffering?

Based on what you have learned in Job, what mistakes will you avoid making when encouraging the suffering?

DAY 5

Read through the EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION section that follows.

EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION

An Angry Young Man (32:1-5)

You will remember from chapter 2 that Job is sitting in an open public place. Most likely there have been bystanders listening in on his conversation with the three counselors. Among these bystanders was Elihu, a young man who has held his tongue for too long out of respect for the older counselors. When the accusations of the false friends finally cease, when Job exhausts his own defense, Elihu bursts forth with a torrent of words—a few of which prove to be worth the wait.

Three Friends' Condemnation (32:1)

The introduction to Elihu's monologue gives us insight into why the three friends have fallen silent. Job 32:1 says, "Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes." It is important to read this statement accurately: the three men stopped arguing with Job because *they* considered him prideful and self-righteous.

Be careful to consider the source of this observation against Job. The charge of self-righteousness is not coming from the author of the book, but specifically from the three friends themselves. These are the same guys who haven't gotten a thing right about Job in the past 25 chapters... the ones who accused him of stripping men naked, withholding bread from the hungry, sending widows away helpless, and crushing the arms of orphans (22:6-9)! There is little reason to assume they perceive Job accurately now.

If you read a variety of commentaries on Job you'll find widely differing views expressed on this very point: Does Job become marred by pride and self-righteousness during his affliction? It's an important question—one on which good people disagree. More on this next week when God weighs in on the issue.

Mad About You...and You and You and You (32:2-23)

As mentioned in the introduction to this lesson, Elihu's anger burns against Job "because he justified himself [more than] God." He accuses Job (and rightly so!) of spending his time defending himself rather than God's glory. While some see this as a demonstration of Job's pride, other commentators consider the problem to be more an issue of self-focus rather than self-righteousness.

Elihu also burns with anger toward Job's three friends because 1) they had found no answer, and 2) they had still condemned Job. The question they were unable to answer was: Why does an all-powerful, loving God allow bad things happen to good people? Their answer? He can't, therefore Job can't be a good person. Because they couldn't explain this age-old paradox, they insisted Job's own sinfulness and pride was the source of his suffering—even though they were unable to prove any charge of wrongdoing against him.

Elihu's First Speech (32:6-33:33)

"Listen to Me" (32:6-22)

Elihu apologizes to his elders for speaking out as a young man but also criticizes them for failing to answer Job. He points out that age isn't the source of wisdom—it is found in the Almighty.

Listen... "God Speaks" (33:1-28)

Throughout Elihu's monologue he quotes Job as a way of summarizing his complaints against God. Elihu then attempts to provide answers—something he accused the other three counselors of being unable to do. The first complaint is found in 32:9-11 in which Job basically says, "I am innocent and God is falsely accusing me."

Elihu answers: God doesn't have to answer to us, but He is not silent. Elihu goes on to list two ways God speaks to us and alludes to a third.

1) In Dreams and Visions—God speaks to us in the night.

The important warning we need to remember when coming upon passages such as this is that God's primary, authoritative way of communicating with us today is through His Word. Now that the Scriptures are complete, there is no need for special revelation as there was in ancient times. *We should never go looking for dreams and visions to find God's will.*

At the same time, we needn't close our ears to His gentle "voice" of direction and guidance, of peace and comfort in our personal daily struggles, a sense of His presence that may come in the night. There is no verse to tell us whether to take that job offer, no specific instructions on to get a hurting teen to open up, no step-by-step guide on how to rebuild intimacy in a wounded relationship. Yet our hearts long for His wisdom and guidance.

Who hasn't had the experience of going to bed in distress or despair and waking to find the answer crystal clear or one's spirit transformed with His hope? Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together* makes this observation:

When our eyes are closed in sleep God may nevertheless keep our hearts awake. It is the prayer (of the church) that God may dwell with us and in us even though we are unconscious of His presence, that He may keep our hearts pure and holy in spite of all the cares and temptations of the night, to make our hearts ever alert to hear His call and, like the boy Samuel, answer Him even in the night: "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:9).

Martin Luther wrote, "When our eyes with sleep are girt, be our hearts to Thee alert." Be sure to keep in mind: God will never lead you contrary to His written Word.

2) In Pain and Sickness—God speaks to us in suffering itself.

In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis points out, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Elihu points out that God speaks to us in our affliction, yet avoids making the mistake of the three counselors: daring to speak for God by claiming that Job's suffering was a message of judgment for his wickedness.

3) Through an Angel—God speaks to us through a heavenly intercessor.

Elihu considers the possibility of an angelic mediator who takes up the sufferer's case and works for the restoration of those who are afflicted. Elihu did not know the identity of this special angel—one *among a thousand*; however, as believers we know with certainty that Christ is continually interceding for us in heaven (Rom. 8:34) and the Holy Spirit is our ever-present Comforter and indwelling guide here on earth (John 14:26, Gal. 5:22).

Pain: It's Not Just for Punishment Anymore (33:29-30)

Unlike any of the three counselors, Elihu perceives that God has a purpose in allowing suffering besides punishment. He uses affliction to teach us, that we would be *enlightened with the light of life*. Job himself bears witness to this purpose at the end of the book: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You" (42:5). There are things we learn about God during the dark moments of life that we can never grasp at any other time.

Elihu's Second and Third Speeches (chps 34-35)

Elihu doesn't add much new to the conversation in the middle of his monologue. Here his rhetoric often mirrors that of the three friends.

Elihu's Fourth and Final Speech (chps 36-37)

Elihu's final speech is an eloquent defense of the greatness of God's power and the uniqueness of His ways. At points Elihu bursts forth in hymns of praise. He admonishes Job to contemplate God's power and wisdom rather than demand His justice.

Suffering separates us...from what matters most to us, something we want, need, desire. It has the power to cloud our deepest desire for Him. We feel separated from God, others (no one understands, cares, etc.), and our security. The best way to handle suffering is to discover and feed your desire *for God*. *Job was doing this by his many searching questions and by his seeking an audience with the Lord. His "friends" only served to widen the gulf that Job believed was between him and God. Our job in encouraging the one who is hurting is to build a bridge and hold the flashlight to light the way back into the safety of God.*

—Adapted by Betty Price from Larry Crab,
Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Path to Joy

This is what Elihu got right in his monologue. He quieted Job and prepared him to hear the voice of God.

Positive Lessons from Elihu (chps 32-37)

While at times arrogant, condescending, and judgmental, Elihu's words truly benefited Job—drawing his attention off of his circumstances and on to Almighty God. Below is a listing of observations about the differences between Elihu and the three friends. This list is by no means exhaustive—be sure to add your own insights. Most importantly, let's be sure to apply these lessons to become better encouragers ourselves.

- 32:21-22 **Speak for the sufferer's benefit alone.** Unlike the three friends who tended to "play to the crowd" in their speeches, Elihu asserts he out to impress no one.
- 33:1 **Call the person by name.** Elihu calls Job by name seven times during his monologue (33:1, 31; 34:5, 7, 35-36; 35:16). The three "friends" have carefully avoided speaking his name even once.
- 33:6-7 **Acknowledge your own frailty.** Elihu identifies with Job rather than taking a position of superiority or judgment.
- 33:8 **Step One: Listen in silence.** Elihu took the time to carefully listen to Job's words. Throughout the dialogue he demonstrates this by quoting Job, sometimes loosely but with general accuracy overall.
- 33:29-30 **"God is at work in you."** Elihu sees that God has a purpose in allowing suffering besides punishment: He uses affliction to teach us.
- 34:10,12; 36:2 **Speak up for God's character.** Elihu focuses on defending God's sovereignty and character, not on explaining His actions.
- 35:16 **Never accuse the sufferer.** Elihu attacks Job's words fiercely but never accuses him of unrighteousness, as the three friends did.
- 36:26 **Be willing to say, "I don't know."** Elihu acknowledges that man is incapable of understanding God, as opposed to claiming to have all the answers.
- 37:14 **Draw attention to God's glory.** The genuine comfort Elihu offers Job is to help him refocus his attention on the glory of God.
- 37:23 **"We can't always understand God... but we can always trust Him."** Elihu summarizes the only response the righteous can have to suffering: the ways of God are beyond our comprehension but He is always worthy of our confidence.