



A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL  
ON THE BOOK OF JOB

EASTBROOK CHURCH

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BY THE PEOPLE OF EASTBROOK CHURCH

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## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

1. Plan a 15-minute window each day when you can thoughtfully do the daily reading. Set a time, create a pattern, and stick to it for the Lenten season.
2. Decide whether you want to invite your friends, family, Life Group, or other small group you are a part of to join you.
3. Begin each day by reading the Scripture passage printed along the side of each page.
4. Read the devotional and reflect on it each day. Use the "Dig Deeper" questions to talk about it with someone else or to journal on your own. If you are a parent, use the "Family Time" piece each day to have a discussion with your kids.
5. Use the online version of the devotional readings to reach out to friends online and around the world. Invite them to follow along with you during Lent this year. Find the online version at **[eastbrook.org/findinggodinthedarkness](http://eastbrook.org/findinggodinthedarkness)**. Use Eastbrook's Facebook page ([facebook.com/eastbrookchurch](https://facebook.com/eastbrookchurch)) and other social media outlets such as Twitter and Instagram ([@eastbrookchurch](https://twitter.com/eastbrookchurch)) to share ideas.
6. Post your comments, thoughts, and questions in the online version. Read others' comments. You will benefit from the perspectives of others.

## INTRODUCTION

When Kelly and I were married with only one child, our apartment building and neighborhood were plunged into darkness through a power outage. It was at the end of the night, so, although we were awake, there was no light outside or inside, and the sense of confusion and helplessness gripped us. We stumbled around in the dark until we found some candles to light, and then we gathered around the light until we figured out what to do next.

Sometimes life is like that. It seems like the lights are thrown off and we are plunged into darkness, left to stumble around until we find our next steps. In times like that, we need light in our lives. A well-known passage from the Gospel of John says, *"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it"* (John 1:5).<sup>1</sup> John is not talking about some abstract concept here but about the very person of Jesus Christ. *He* is the light of the world. When we find ourselves in dark times, we need the light of Jesus. When a candle bursts forth in a dark place, everyone is drawn to its light. So, too, in our spiritual lives when darkness gathers we must draw near to Christ and gather around the light of His presence where hope, peace, and wisdom are found.

Today we begin a journey. It is a journey to the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a journey through dark lands as we fix our eyes on the light of Christ. The devotional booklet you hold in your hands is a guide to help us draw near to Christ in the light of His presence.

In this journey, we are preparing ourselves for the joys of Easter by having a deeper experience of Jesus in the midst of the darkness. This year, we will do that by journeying through the Old Testament book of Job. Job is a man who suffers much as he experiences dark times, but eventually encounters God in the darkness and finds restoration in his life. Job is a gritty book for gritty lives. Job is a hopeful book that does not turn away from dark places. The story of Job also reflects the power of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection where we celebrate how *"the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"* (John 1:14).

Traditionally, this journey is called Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday and carrying forward to Easter Sunday. Lent is more than a worn-out church tradition. Rather, it is intended to be a focused journey of reflection with God, leading us into a deeper place of repentance before God, serious reflection on the power of the Cross, and the fullness of joy in the resurrection we celebrate with Easter.

Each day in this devotional, you will find a Scripture reading, a short devotional, and a series of questions for reflection. These can be used individually, but are also intended for discussion in groups. Each day also includes a question or activity geared toward discussion for families who have children.

May God grow all of us as we embark on this journey together. May the light of God's presence in Jesus Christ fill our lives with life as we linger in the light of Christ this year.

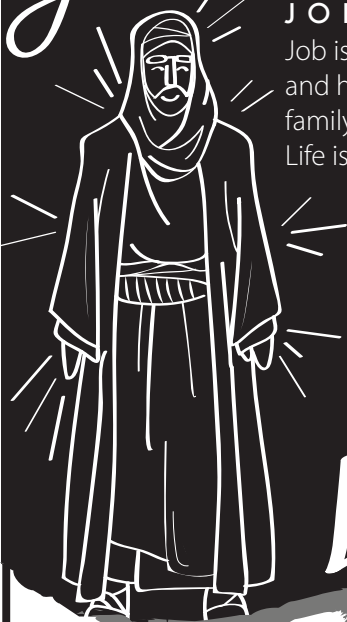
*Matt Erickson*  
*Senior Pastor, Eastbrook Church*

*Job*

## PROLOGUE

### JOB 1:1-3

Job is blameless, righteous, and honors God. He has a family, land and riches. Life is good!



## THE DEBATE

### JOB 3-37

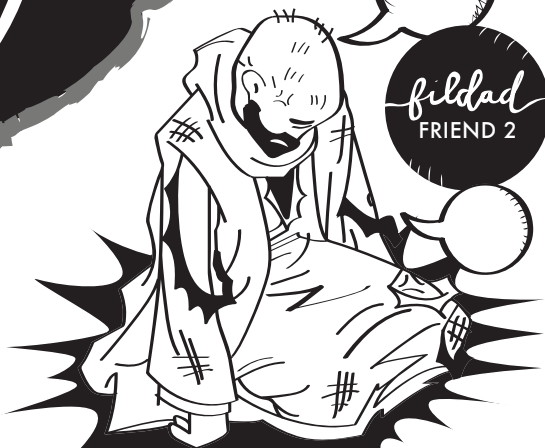
Job goes through four cycles of debate with his friends Eliphaz, Bildad & Zophar, and a younger man, Elihu.

*eliphaz*  
FRIEND 1

*bildad*  
FRIEND 2

*zophar*  
FRIEND 3

*elihu*  
THE OTHER GUY



## PROLOGUE

### JOB 1-2

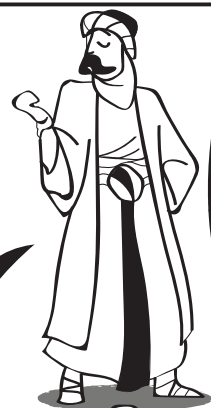
Satan, the accuser, the prosecutor, talks with God.

Satan ruins Job's life, taking away his riches, his family, and land.

*God*



*satan*



## GOD RESPONDS

JOB 38-42a

God speaks and Job listens. He reminds Job of His universal vantage point as the Creator of everything! He invites Job to trust His wisdom, and Job repents.

## THE PLEA

JOB 29-31

In Job's last statement, he asserts his innocence and demands an explanation from God.

(plus, the Leviathan shows up)



Job

## EPILOGUE

JOB 42

God honors Job's struggle, prayer, and honesty. His family, land & riches are restored.





## COSMIC NEGOTIATIONS

The events recorded in Job are very likely the oldest in Scripture other than those in the first ten or so chapters of Genesis. The book of Job is the Holy-Spirit-inspired account of a negotiation between the Living God and Satan and a debate among Job, a tag-team of three, and a young fellow who listens to the debate until he can no longer keep quiet.

It all starts with Satan coming from the earth to heaven to present himself before the Living God.

Satan had been cast down to the earth where he was “*roaming*” around, “*going back and forth on it*.” As part of the conversation between God and Satan, God suggests that Satan may want to consider Job as Satan “*prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). As Job later discovered (and as Peter knew firsthand), Satan must get permission to do what he does with God’s people; in Luke 22:31, Jesus tells Peter that Satan had asked for permission to mess with him!

We learn in chapter 1 that Satan’s idea about why man submits to God is that man is driven only by his own self-interest, his desire for physical comfort and his longing for material blessing. Satan told God that Job would curse God when he had lost everything he had, but in the end, Job stood this test.

These cosmic negotiations are not between equal parties. Satan is no equal to the Living God, and God, the only true sovereign in existence, is in full control. As we know from other parts of Scripture, God does not give permission to Satan to attack us in order to destroy us but to perfect us.

Remember! Satan is no match for the Living God; Satan has lost at the Cross!



**DIG DEEPER** — Consider Satan’s basic argument about Job: “*The only reason he lives for God is because God blesses him.*” Why do you live your life for God? How would others know this?

**FAMILY TIME** — Watch a video, read a book, or retell the story of Job. A written version to be read to children can be found at [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), or find a video of Job on today’s online version of this devotional, at [eastbrook.org/findinggodinthedarkness](http://eastbrook.org/findinggodinthedarkness).

## SEEDS OF FAITHFULNESS

*"He replied... 'shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said." (Job 2:10b)*

Job had every reason to feel that God had totally abandoned him. He didn't just lose some of his livestock. He lost all of it. This is the ancient equivalent of having someone gain access to all your personal and professional resources and destroy them. As if financial ruin wasn't enough, every single one of Job's children died tragically on the same day.

Once Job had already lost more in one day than most people lose in a lifetime, Satan made things even harder. Job ends up painfully ill with putrid sores covering his entire body. The pain of Job's personal ruin is so apparent that his friends simply stand back in shock when they first see him.

And yet... *"in all this, Job did not sin in what he said"* (2:10). This passage is a challenge. Do we truly believe that everything is a gift from God? If your house, your job, or the lives of your loved ones were taken away today would you be able to respond as Job does? We simply cannot effectively respond to suffering in a God-honoring way if our faith is not firmly rooted. Job practiced faithfulness throughout his life, and so in a time of trial he responded out of that faith. By sowing seeds of faithful obedience to God in our lives today we can prepare ourselves for times of difficulty ahead.



**DIG DEEPER** — How are you "sowing seeds of faithfulness" that will reveal a mature faith in times of trial? If you were to evaluate your speech over the course of the day, what kind of faith in God would it reflect?

**FAMILY TIME** — Everything good is a gift from God! As a family, make a list of the things that God has given you. What if you lost everything? How would you feel? What would you do? Can you praise God even when you lose everything?

## JUST HURT

*"What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have not rest but only turmoil." (Job 3:25-26)*

He told me, "I see you as just a friend." Ouch! Who would have thought friendship would cut like a knife. He didn't want me. The trip to show him my favorite fountain quickly became the place where I was dumped. After arriving back to my college dorm room, my wise friend embraced me and told me to "just hurt." Little did I know those two little words would impact my life in such a profound way.

We've arrived at Job 3. At this point, God has allowed Satan to test Job twice: first by taking away his possessions and children, and second by attacking his health. Job is hurting in every way possible. His life has become so painful that he wishes he had died at birth. Although we may wonder if Job is sinning in chapter 3 by cursing the day of his birth, Job is simply putting words to his pain.

I used to believe expressing pain and hurt meant I had less faith in God. I used to think that God would like me less if I did anything else but smile and say, "the joy of the Lord is my strength." But God doesn't need me to be strong for Him. He wants to be strong *in* me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Don't be afraid to be real and honest with God. He is well acquainted with our pain (Isaiah 53:3). He is not afraid of our pain, hurt, suffering, and doubts. The pain you're enduring now or in the past is awful. You may be asking God, "Why?" He may reveal the "why" to you or He may not. But this I know: God is not afraid of our pain and He wants to love us in it. It's okay to just hurt.



**DIG DEEPER** — Take some time to reflect on past hurts or current hurts, and voice them to God through prayer, writing, drawing, etc. Spend time meditating on who God is with these scripture passages: 1 Chronicles 29:11; Isaiah 55:9; Lamentations 3:22; Ephesians 5:20; 1 John 3:1. Visit [eastbrook.org/findinggodinthedarkness](http://eastbrook.org/findinggodinthedarkness) for a song of lament based on Job 3 written by today's devotional writer.

**FAMILY TIME** — Make mad faces. Who can make the maddest face? When was a time you were so mad you didn't know what to do? What words could you have used to tell God how mad you were? Can you praise God even when you are mad?

## DATELINE: THE CASE OF UNDESERVED SUFFERING

*"Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees." (Job 4:3-4)*

Mary Ann and I enjoy watching shows like *Dateline*, those true crime shows that walk you through a dramatic murder case from the initial investigation, through the trial and eventual verdict. What I've learned from watching these shows is that often, the murderer is the spouse, and in the rare cases where they actually had nothing to do with the murder, everybody still assumes the spouse is guilty. It doesn't matter how much evidence there is to prove their innocence, the immediate assumption is: they did it.

What does *Dateline* have to do with Job? Eliphaz is the first of Job's three friends to respond to Job. His argument (his "*Dateline*" assumption) is this: the righteous are never punished, only the unrighteous suffer. *"When did you ever see an innocent man perish?"* he asks Job. He argues that Job's problem is caused by his own willful sin; something that Job is hiding. Despite the lack of evidence, Eliphaz' experience, logic and theology tell him Job must have done something wrong for God to allow all of this suffering in his life.

The basic truth Eliphaz latches onto is that God punishes the wicked and upholds the righteous. We know this is true, but Eliphaz attempts to apply this truth in an overly-simplified way. His assumption is that *all* suffering must be punishment for wickedness. Innocent suffering does not undo the truth that God punishes the wicked and upholds the righteous... God will uphold His justice, but in His time and His way. He works from an eternal perspective that we simply do not have.

When it comes to our pain and the pain of others, we have to avoid simple diagnoses and prescriptions. I cannot simply spout bumper-sticker theology when someone asks, "Why me?" I must be willing to walk alongside them through the questions and the tears, steadily encouraging their faith in the only One who holds the answers we may never know.



**DIG DEEPER** — What kind of "comfort" would you want to receive when you are going through a time of suffering? How can you be a comfort to someone around you that is suffering now?

**FAMILY TIME** — Have you ever been blamed for something you didn't do? How did it feel and what did you do about it? Can you believe God will make things right again?

# UNDIVIDED IN A DISTRACTED WORLD

"Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name." (Psalm 86:11)

Recent studies show that we are more distracted than ever before. A documentary entitled *Digital Nation* featured a study of multitasking MIT students who attempted to complete more work by simultaneously doing five or six tasks. The students assumed they were more efficient by multitasking, yet the study revealed that they were actually slower and distracted more easily as they switched from one thing to another.

In another arena, a study in 2008 revealed that 16% of all traffic fatalities in the United States involved distracted driving. In raw impact this means that over six-thousand people died in 2008 as a result of distractions.

Distraction is a powerful thing. Even as I write this devotional, I've switched tabs on my web browser multiple times, checked my email, adjusted the music I was listening to, and had a conversation with someone. Distractions are all around us.

Superficially, it might seem like distraction really has nothing to do with our spiritual lives. It doesn't seem like a spiritual issue. But the truth is that the more we make a pattern of distraction in our lives, the less we are able to be truly present with God and others.

The words of Psalm 86:11 speak of an *"undivided heart."* This is the opposite of distraction. Instead, we come with full attention to our life with God. Amidst all the things that call out for attention at work, school, or home, we must cultivate the ability to focus with God. One of the best-attested ways to do this is to set apart time each day to read Scripture, pray, and be still before God. Regardless of how we do this, in a distracted world we must take a different path in life that leads to an undivided heart with God.



**DIG DEEPER** — What distracts you most in your life? What would it look like to change the patterns of distraction? How could you be more attentive to God today in one specific way?

**FAMILY TIME** — Have each person draw an outline of a heart to fill a sheet of paper. Draw little pictures or write words in the heart that show what distracts you from God. Take a moment to talk about that together and then pray that God would give you undivided hearts for Him.

## GOD IS THE ULTIMATE MIRACLE WORKER!

*"He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted." (Job 5:9)*

In this chapter of Job, Eliphaz continues his speech attempting to make sense of Job's current state of affairs. Convinced that God only punishes the guilty, Eliphaz and his friends have concluded that Job must have some hidden guilt causing his suffering. What else could it be? Eliphaz and his associates were not aware that Job's suffering was not the result of God's actions. They did not realize that some of Satan's plans do succeed.

In the past whenever life wasn't going my way, I would assume I was being punished by God for my sins. My character is not quite the same as Job's so I believed that I deserved what I received. However, I didn't realize that most of my suffering was self-imposed. At times, Satan's spiritual attacks can result in poor decisions. However, when I finally turned the situation over to God, He provided answers that helped me grow in my Christian faith.

For me, one of the most compelling verses in this chapter is verse 9. Eliphaz offers wisdom, stating that God performs many wonders and miracles. In my own life God has provided miracle after miracle. The fact that I am alive provides confirmation. There have been miracles that were big and obvious, and many that seemed small, almost going unnoticed.

Whenever I look back on my past, I realize that God's grace was always present during my moments of adversity. I have learned that whenever I give my troubles to God, He lifts me up, performs miracles, and provides wisdom that makes any perceived suffering bearable.



**DIG DEEPER** — During your seasons of adversity or suffering can you feel God's grace? What miracle did God perform that improved your walk with Him?

**FAMILY TIME** — Split a treat in uneven sizes; maybe cut cake into different sizes, or scoop ice cream in different quantities. Draw numbers to decide who will get which portion. When everyone has their portion, talk about what it means to be grateful no matter what size portion you have.

## WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

The dialogue between the deeply distraught Job and his 'friends' is just getting warmed up in chapter 6 as Job offers his first reply. The conversation clearly does not help Job and he is so repulsed by his condition that he desires God to take his life (vs 8-9). He says his anguish exceeds the weight of the sands of the seas. A quick calculation of world beach sand comes up with over 300 trillion pounds—or comparatively—the weight of about 6 million Willis (Sears) Towers! Job's anguish is infinite.

Job, while being stripped of all that matters to him, tries valiantly to hold onto his dignity when all else has been stripped away. Though he has lost all his possessions, he hopes to find sympathy. But instead, his friends are as *"dependable as ephemeral streams."* With everything stripped away, he asks, *"do I have power to help myself, now that my success has been driven from me?"*

Interestingly, his cries closely parallel David's writings in Psalm 22: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* The Psalm goes on to describe someone crying out day and night to God, who does not seem to answer.

We all know that disaster can fall upon us at any time, yet we expect our plans and successes will carry us through. What will motivate you to remain faithful and true even if your friends, spouse, children, bank account and health have vanished? This can shake us to the core—but take heart, the Lord stands ready to increase the faith we do have. With all your heart ask for your faith to be so genuine, so true, so pure that it truly can withstand worldly losses. Remember Jesus' words in the garden of Gethsemane: *"The spirit is willing but the body is weak. Watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation"* (Mark 14:38). We are constantly tempted to rely on our own abilities proven through our successes. But God knows just how weak we are—we just need to humbly admit it.



**DIG DEEPER** — Spend some time talking to God about your need to lighten your grip on the things of this world and be prepared with greater faith to stand through anything this world can throw at you.

**FAMILY TIME** — What are you successful at? What are you able to do well? What if you couldn't do that as well anymore? Would God still value you? Could He still use you for His purpose?

# YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE

*"What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment?" (Job 7:17-18 ESV)*

Is life tough right now? Can you grasp God, our Father's, heart toward you and all that concerns you? When we read through the book of Job, we get a glimpse of the Father's desire for us to see His love and character, along with a desire to cultivate that understanding of His love and character in us. Often the "whys" behind the greatest struggles in our lives remain shrouded in the mystery of our great, loving God. But not completely.

We know from Romans 5:1-5, and many other scriptures, that God uses all circumstances for our sanctification and for opportunities to give Him glory as we walk by faith in confidence and trust. This bold witness always speaks to the unbelieving world that needs to find hope when all seems hopeless.

However, life can be brutal. Jesus knew this when He spoke the words, *"in this world you will have trouble,"* which universally applies to all. *"But take heart, I have overcome the world,"* Jesus continued (John 16:33). We are assured that victory rests in Christ, but sometimes the journey to victory can devastate. In the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, in addition to the raw emotions expressed by Job, we can experience His comforting presence, an emboldened faith, a renewed hope, a revealed strength, and fresh compassion.

It's not all about us when we suffer. Would Job's friends have known of their misunderstandings regarding God and hardships (theodicy) apart from Job's sufferings? When we fix our eyes on the Author and Perfecter of our faith, we can persevere in the midst of the suffering and allow our perspective to shift to the eternal weight of glory that far exceeds our momentary afflictions.



**DIG DEEPER** — Can you recall a difficult season in your life? How did God sustain and carry you through it? Were you able to honestly express how you felt to God? How were you changed through the whole experience?

**FAMILY TIME** — Share a time when you were feeling sad and someone cheered you up. What did they do to help you feel better? What can you do to help someone who is sad?



## LISTENING WITH COMPASSION

*"Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evil-doers." (Job 8:20)*

When you read the words of Job's friend Bildad above, they sound so true and right. It is logical, and may be supported by experience and even from the testimony in Scripture as well. But there are three things wrong with his approach.

First, Bildad answers Job without trying to find out what causes Job to say what he says, focusing on his words without understanding his agony. Though Job himself has admitted that he speaks rashly (6:3), he says it is because of the unceasing torment he is going through. Those of us who have gone through deep, unrelenting pain know how this can try our spirit to where we become short and impatient. Job says something that sounds extreme, but his friend only hears Job's words without recognizing his hurt.

Second, Bildad speaks with confidence as the final authority on the subject without understanding that perhaps there are aspects of God and dimensions to His Word that he has not yet seen. His narrow, limited vision says that difficulties in a person's life are always caused by sin. While many of life's problems are indeed caused by sin, he does not see that there may be other reasons God allows our suffering.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Bildad never asks God for help in understanding Job's problem so Bildad in turn can help his friend. He never prays with Job. While the book of Job is filled with prayers, the prayers are of Job crying out to God in the midst of his sufferings. Bildad does not appear to feel the need for further illumination on the subject. This is an example for us on how to speak cautiously when we deal with the deep hurts and problems of life.



**DIG DEEPER** — When have you experienced someone telling you something where it quickly became obvious you weren't hearing their heart? How can you make sure this doesn't happen again?

**FAMILY TIME** — Do you have a friend or a relative who is really hurting right now? Pray for that person. Ask God how, as a family, you can help those who are hurting.

## THE NEED FOR LAWYERS

*"For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both." (Job 9:32-33)*

Job has lost everything dear to him. His friends tell him that it must be due to a secret sin or fault in him, and he feels that God is at once too close and too far to be of any help. He is in the blackest pit imaginable. But in chapter 9, Job reaches a deeper understanding of one of the overarching issues here, which has little to do with his individual circumstances and sufferings.

Job's response to his friends begins with recognition of the hugeness of God—His unimaginable strength, might, and holiness. Along with that comes the dawning realization of humanity's smallness in comparison, and the separation that comes along with this huge gap. How can we possibly justify ourselves before God? How can we speak and expect Him to listen? How can we even stand before Him?

Job understands that there is too much of a difference between our humanness and God's holiness for us to ever hope to bridge it; there is an infinite space that we can never overcome on our own. God is huge, holy, and beyond us.

Then, suddenly, Job speaks to the heart of the gospel: our need for a Savior, our need for an arbiter to stand between us and God to act as mediator, councilor, lawyer. We need someone to bridge that gap, to cover our sin, to bring holiness into our hearts. As readers in the 21st century, we know how this one ends. Our smallness and sinfulness no longer forms an unbridgeable gap between us and God. We can find hope and joy in Jesus being our mediator, our arbiter, our defense attorney.



**DIG DEEPER** — What situations or places make you realize the smallness of your humanity in relation to God's hugeness? What emotions and thoughts does this realization provoke? Gratitude? Fear? Awe? Humility? Guilt?

**FAMILY TIME** — How big do you think God is? Look up and discuss how these three words describe God: omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (all-present), omniscient (all-knowing).

## TELL IT LIKE IT IS

*"I can't stand my life—I hate it! I'm putting it all out on the table, all the bitterness of my life—I'm holding back nothing." (10:1 The Message)*

We are made for intimacy with God, but what does that look like? How do we get it? How can we be intimate with God in seasons of unexplained suffering, when all seems senseless and dark? When it seems like God no longer cares?

As Job dialogues with his friends and allows them in on his passionate prayer to God, we get a glimpse of this mystery. Job isn't afraid to take his confusion, anger, and despair to God. He doesn't mince his words to make them more presentable or theologically correct. He isn't muzzled or silenced by what he should or shouldn't say to God. He lets it rip. His friends are offended by his open-heart/open-mouth stance with God. Perhaps we are too. When we suffer, and nobody understands, our world shatters. Things aren't the way that they should be. God does not act the way that we think He should act. Job teaches us how to talk directly to God about it all—even when we hurt so much that we wish we had never been born, or that we could die.

Like Job, our prayers may be a mess of praise, demand, insult, and self-pity. If we let others in on our painful spiritual journey, they may blunder like bulls "in a china shop." But as long as we stay honest and keep the lines of communication with God open, even the worst of our pain will draw us closer to Him. God invites us to straight talk with Him in Job 10.



**DIG DEEPER** — How has your relationship with God been boxed into "proper" types of communication? If you are longing for a deeper, more intimate relationship with God, try to imitate Job. Substitute your own words and feelings for Job's in 10:3-22.

**FAMILY TIME** — What is the hardest thing that has happened in your life? After everyone shares, ask each person to think about how they talked and listened to God in that time. What might they do differently next time?

## ACKNOWLEDGE OUR BROKENNESS

*"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)*

When I moved into a new house, there were some problems with the driveway. Because of ground settling, the slabs were angled toward one corner of the house. If we didn't remedy the situation in some way, water would likely seep into the house along that corner.

I had a decision before me. First of all, I could acknowledge that the driveway was broken, and then do something to fix it. Alternatively, I could ignore the driveway issue, leaving it for a later date when, more likely than not, the problem would become a much larger and more expensive issue.

The same is true of our lives. Because of sin in our world and our experience of it in our lives, we all have brokenness. Sometimes it is brokenness in the way we relate with others, as we continue to lash out at people because of how others lashed out at us. Other times we experience brokenness in patterns of action as we give in to painful addictions in order to feel better somehow.

As with my driveway, there is a decision before us. We can either ignore our brokenness, leaving the issue for a later date when, more likely than not, the problems will be much larger and more difficult to deal with, or we can choose to acknowledge our brokenness before God and others, thus beginning the move toward wholeness.

In Psalm 51, David confesses his sin before God, pouring his heart out in confession. He speaks to God: *"my sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart."* The sacrifice of the broken spirit and heart is something that pleases God, becoming the raw material for growth in His hands. The question is not whether you or I are broken. Rather, the question is what we will do with our brokenness.



**DIG DEEPER** — What is 'broken' in your life that, like David's sin of adultery, needs to be identified and given to God? How might you practically offer to God the brokenness of your life today?

**FAMILY TIME** — Take an old plate, cup, or something else and break it in a safe place. Gather around the pieces as a family and talk about the difficulty of putting something broken back together. Pray for God's grace in the broken places of your lives.

## ACCUSER OR REDEEMER?

Zophar can't contain himself. His righteous indignation has to strike back. How can Job speak so forcefully about God! It must be corrected. It seems wrong and Zophar thinks God needs to be protected. Zophar accuses Job of evil and sees Job's pain and agony as the result of his wrong. What Zophar failed to see and hear was Job's passion, his desire for God's touch and communication. He fails to recognize the deep depression of his friend, Job, misinterpreting his words of agony as obstinate, reckless insults of God.

Job expressed *"If only I had never come into being"* (Job 10:19). Zophar's response was to accuse Job and instruct him *"to put away the sin that is in your hand"* (Job 11:14).

Often we come across those who appear to mock God, or at the very least, do not understand His power and wisdom. How do we respond? Do we accuse others from our own sense of righteousness? Do we respond with epithets or with wise, pithy statements that are intended to put the mocker in their place? Do our actions cause further pain and separation from others and God? If we believe in a God who cares and shows us care by sharing in our lives, aren't we also called to react in a different way to those shouting about their mistreatment? The person is more than their current words and behavior. Our reaction needs to be aligned with the actions of the One who came to save, comfort and share grace, our healer and protector, Jesus.

Bad things can happen to good people. Healing is found in the presence of Christ. Since we aren't in His perfect presence yet, we need to be the redeeming presence when we encounter the fallen, broken world by bringing peace and reconciliation.



**DIG DEEPER** — How have you been the accuser or mocker? Has there been a time when your sense of righteousness exceeded your understanding? If so, how can you find the way of Jesus in relationships and go back to redeem them?

**FAMILY TIME** — How have you shown your friendship this week? What do true friends do for each other? How can you be a true friend this week?

## YET I WILL HOPE

*"Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him." (Job 13:15a)*

This bold and faith-filled statement challenges me time and time again to enter into deeper trust in the Lord in the face of trials and suffering. Job makes this statement amidst the loss of children, wealth, and health. His friends and wife are of no help—going as far as telling him to give up. He reaches the point of feeling as if his life was over, and understandably so. Yet, even if God did “slay” him, Job’s bold proclamation is that he will still trust in Him. Job realized that ultimately the suffering he faces is allowed by God. Job trusts that *“the LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up”* (1 Samuel 2:6). Nothing can shake the faith of someone so grounded in the goodness, faithfulness and glory of God.

*“Yet I will trust in Him.”* The word used here usually means the idea of waiting on one with an expectation of aid or help. It means to hope. The sense here is that his expectation or hope was in God; even in death, or after death, he would trust God. Job would follow Him.

Can you in sincerity lift your eyes toward God, and say to Him, “Though you slay me, though comfort after comfort is taken away, though the waves of trouble come against me, and though I go down into the valley of the shadow of death, I will trust in You; and when all is dark I will believe that You are right, and just, and true, and good, and will never doubt that You are worthy of my eternal affection and praise?”



**DIG DEEPER** — In what areas of your life do you need to put more hope in Him? Place these things in the following prayer and entrust them to the Lord: *Though you have allowed \_\_\_\_\_, teach me, oh Lord, to put complete hope in You.*

**FAMILY TIME** — Share a time you were hoping for something and it didn’t happen. How did this impact your life? How can putting our hope in God make a difference?

## REVEALING REDEMPTION

*"You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made." (Job 14:15)*

As difficult as it might be, it is important to try and put yourself in Job's shoes while reading this passage. At first pass, we might be tempted to say "I can't believe Job said that to God," or "how dare he say that?" But if we had suffered this mightily what would our posture towards God look like? How would we truly react?

The foundational truth that we need to keep coming back to, not only as we study Job but as we deal with the struggles in our lives today, is this: God is omniscient and we are not. He sees the whole drama unfolding from beginning to end. As v. 4 states in the text today, when we feel like insignificant *"withering flowers,"* we can be assured that God knows and loves us beyond our comprehension, is walking with us through our pain, and has it all completely in control—in the palm of His Sovereign Hand.

Job's dire tone continues in vv. 7-12 when, like in Ecclesiastes where life without God is depicted as *"a chasing after the wind,"* we see a hopeless outlook. However, this all changes drastically when we insert Jesus, the Light of the World, into the text. Without Christ, we would certainly *"breathe our last and be no more"* (Job 14:10). This is a good model. This grim picture doesn't result in apathy and a shrug of the shoulders but rather in questions and a genuine wrestling with God's promises—just look at the "will" statements again in vv. 14-17. Job may not specifically mention Jesus by name but it is crystal clear that his wrestling and questioning is opening the door for God to reveal truths that are yet unseen and to insert His Son—our only hope. Like David who ran to God covered in the filth of his sin (Psalm 51:4) and here in the midst of Job's frustration, we too should seek to draw near to God when we are struggling because it is when we are close that the glorious, redemptive power of the Son can take its full effect.



**DIG DEEPER** — Look at Job 14:7-10 again. Can you think of a family member, co-worker or neighbor that has this dark outlook on life? How can you speak the hope of Christ into their despair?

**FAMILY TIME** — Take some time as a family to look at flowers in a vase or in a photograph that you have around the house. List ways that a person is like a flower. What does this tell us about who God is in our lives?

## THE FULLNESS OF MY CRY

DAY 14: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25

According to Eliphaz, Job's notions are empty, his words are useless, his speech has no value, he undermines piety, he hinders devotion, his mouth is prompted by sin, and his tongue condemns him. All this because Job dares to voice his affliction.

Undeterred, Job continues his lament. For his example, I am thankful. He reminds me that God is at work even in the inscrutable darkness, and that when I cry, I can expect Him to hear me though nobody else may care or approve.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke describes his own experience with suffering that seems not unlike Job's:

*It feels as though I make my own way  
through massive rock  
like a vein of ore  
alone, encased.*

*I am so deep inside it  
I can't see the path or any distance:  
everything is close  
and everything closing in on me  
has turned to stone.*

*Since I still don't know enough about pain,  
this terrible darkness makes me small,  
If it's you, though—*

*press down hard on me, break in  
that I may know the weight of your hand  
and you, the fullness of my cry.<sup>2</sup>*

The poet, like the prophet, fully expresses his suffering, his confusion about the source of it, and his confidence that God can nevertheless be found in the midst. What's more, both poet and prophet give us permission to honestly articulate the anguish we feel living in a fallen world even as men and women like Eliphaz continue to urge silence and spout inadequate notions about God. We know God is familiar with pain.



**DIG DEEPER** — In v. 9, Eliphaz taunts Job, asking, “What do you know that we do not know?” Are there lessons we can learn only through suffering?

**FAMILY TIME** — Together, list as many negative emotions as you can think of. What can you do when you feel like any of these words? How can talking about them help? How can telling God help?

JOB 15



## MISERABLE COMFORTERS

*"I have heard many things like these; you are miserable comforters, all of you!"*  
(Job 16:2)

It is interesting to note this is the second time I have been given the opportunity to write a devotional from a specific chapter of the Bible, and both times the word "comfort(er)" has appeared in the very first verse. I am immediately struck with the question, "What are you trying to tell me, Lord?"

The first chapter I was given was Isaiah 40. The very familiar words ring out of the first verse where the command is to "*Comfort, comfort my people.*" But in Job chapter 16, we hear Job lashing out at his friends saying, "*you are miserable comforters.*" So, what happens between hearing the command to bring comfort to God's people and actually being obedient in carrying out the command? Where do we cross the line from being compassionate to being judgmental?

Matthew Henry said, "When under convictions of sin, terrors of conscience, or the arrests of death, only the blessed Spirit can comfort effectually; all others, without him, do it miserably, and to no purpose."<sup>3</sup>

Bringing comfort and being compassionate cannot be effectively done when we interject our own sin-natured solution into the situation. Our biggest mistake in taking on the role of a "comforter" is to think we have to have all the answers when, in fact, as Matthew Henry states "only the blessed Spirit can comfort effectually." The assignment of a comforter is not always to give counsel, but to listen and pray. Pray for the Holy Spirit to intervene. He will let you know how He wants to use you to bring comfort. More often than not it will be as simple as being present with your friend.

The Apostle Paul gives us guidelines for being a good comforter in Philip-  
pians 2:1-4. We are to use Christ's humility as our model.



**DIG DEEPER** — When have you ever experienced the need for comfort from a friend and been disappointed? If so, what lesson did you learn on the value of being a good comforter?

**FAMILY TIME** — Parents, share a time when you were young and needed comfort. Did you have a teddy bear or blanket? Who comforted you? What comforts you now?

## REDEMPTION THROUGH SUFFERING

*"Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger." (Job 17: 9)*

Job, chapter 17, focuses on the responses of others to Job's suffering. He describes the public shame and humiliation he suffers daily. Job also explains how easy it would be to succumb to evil and abandon the hope of God's faithfulness, especially since his personal plans have been shattered. As Job is suffering, God seems far off. From our vantage point, God might even seem to be manipulative and cold toward His faithful servant Job. As we reflect on Job's suffering, we might even be tempted to ask: Do we follow a God who can empathize with human suffering?

Absolutely! We need only to look at Jesus for a clear answer to this question. There are numerous parallels between the way that Job was treated by his friends and acquaintances, as described in chapter 17, and the way that Christ was treated by others in the time leading up to His crucifixion. As Isaiah 53:3 describes, *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."* Christ was scorned by the upright, denounced by His friends and publicly shamed in His suffering, just like Job. And like Job, Christ was faithful to God's ultimate plan of redemption, which was far greater than what the humans around Him could comprehend in the moment.

God displayed His ultimate and unconditional love through physical and emotional suffering endured on the Cross. As it says later in Isaiah 53:5, *"The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."* So while God may seem far off in this portion of Job, we know that God is intimately acquainted with human suffering, as demonstrated through Christ.



**DIG DEEPER** — How have your close friends and acquaintances responded to suffering in your life? What does it look like to truly empathize with the suffering of others?

**FAMILY TIME** — Think of someone who is going through a hard time. How can your family be a blessing to this person during this difficult time?

## FROM DISTRESS TO PEACE

I still remember the time I encountered a mother who could not find her preschool-age daughter at a hotel. She urgently searched for her child, gripped by fears until, returning to where her search began, the mother thankfully found her daughter wander innocently into sight.

Do you ever feel distressed? The writer of Psalm 4 experienced that:

*Answer me when I call to you,  
my righteous God.*

*Give me relief from my distress;  
have mercy on me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4:1)*

Where do you turn in your distress? Sometimes we turn to friends or family who offer helpful support during challenging times. At other times we may turn to benign distractions like our smart phones or reading a book. At still other times we gravitate toward activities or substances that numb the feelings of distress.

Perhaps the better question is *to whom* do you turn in your distress? Of course, the obvious answer is that we should turn to God, but there is more to it than that. In Psalm 4:1, God invites us to turn to Him with two strongly descriptive words. The psalmist says: *"I call to you, my righteous God."* Through these words, we remember that God is both personal in His nature and good in His character. He is both the type of being to whom we long to turn and also the type of being who wants to relate with us. Unlike any other person, activity, or substance, God will do what He promises to the highest degree. We turn to our righteous God.

So today may we turn to God in the midst of our distress, finding safety and peace in the presence of our righteous God.



**DIG DEEPER** — What does it mean to you that God is *"my righteous God"*? What activities, people, or substances are you tempted to turn to in the midst of your distress? How might you turn to God instead of these people or things today?

**FAMILY TIME** — On a piece of paper write down as many words or phrases as you can think of that describe God's character. Once you're done, take some time to thank God in prayer for who He is.

## YOUR DWELLING PLACE

*"Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man; such is the place of one who does not know God." (Job 18:21)*

When suffering and trials come, where do we dwell? Job's friend gives a detailed description of a dwelling place that is characterized by darkness, weakness, lack of direction, fear, feelings of being trapped and of ultimate death and destruction. Bildad says this is the place of the one who does not know God.

This is a stark contrast to the dwelling of one who does know God as described in Scripture. The Bible is full of verses that describe this place as one that is characterized by light, understanding, strength, freedom from terror, fruitfulness, hope, and joy.

So, when we face trials and suffering will we run to the house of darkness or the house of light? Will we believe that the Word is a lamp unto our feet or will we dwell in our own understanding? Will we gain our strength from the Lord or will rely on ourselves? There are many verses that show the contrast between the house of the wicked and the house of the believer. We must make a conscious decision, just as Job did, to trust the Lord and His Word.

It is instructive that when Job was informed of all the calamities that had visited him and his family, his first response was to fall down and worship the Lord (Job 1:20-21). Would we do the same? His friends gave him seven days of peaceful presence before they open their mouths to speak. Bildad made the mistake of equating Job's suffering with wickedness on Job's part. Regrettably, we make similar judgments. Our challenge is to instead be humble, non-judgmental, and always listen and let God be the arbiter of right and wrong. But we must run to the house of light and understanding when trials assail us.



**DIG DEEPER** — Choose and memorize one promise from Scripture having to do with suffering that you can claim for yourself or family this Lenten season (Philippians 1:29; Luke 6:20-23; 1 Peter 3:17; Psalm 126:5-6).

**FAMILY TIME** — Draw two houses. Inside one house, write or draw what a "dark" or "wicked" dwelling looks like. In the other house, draw or write what a dwelling full of light or goodness would look like. What can you do so that your house is a house of light?

## VINDICATED

Job is taken aback at Bildad's attacks in the previous chapter. He feels abandoned, forsaken, and afflicted. As we well know, Job is having a bad day. Nothing seems to be going his way. Here in chapter nineteen Job is beginning to tear apart at the seams. Job says there is no justice (v. 7), his hope is uprooted (v. 10), and that even God considers him an enemy (v. 11). There is no one to help him; his family and friends have left him; his servants do not respond. Even his wife finds him repulsive. Job has reached his end, and he feels he has no where to turn.

Does any of this sound familiar? Have you even found yourself abandoned, forsaken, and afflicted? Even to the point that God seems to have turned his back on you? Obviously, Job's situation was extra-ordinary, very few people have had their entire world actually destroyed in the space of a few hours. That doesn't negate the fact that life can be hard, and life can beat us down. It doesn't stop us from feeling that even God himself has abandoned us.

Thankfully, Job doesn't get stuck in that place. Verse twenty-five gives Job and us the hope of vindication and redemption. The word "*redeemer*" (ga'al in the Hebrew) is better translated here as either kinsman-redeemer (which is well known from the book of Ruth) or vindicator (a person who defends from attack, or avenges what is right and true). An intermingling of both ideas should be read here. Job recognizes that even in this desperate time, his God can vindicate and redeem his circumstances. Though Job feels there is no vindication in this life, he recognizes that vindication will be achieved when he sees God. In this he finds comfort and hope.



**DIG DEEPER** — What do you think vindication has to do with Job's situation? What situations in your life need to be redeemed and vindicated?

**FAMILY TIME** — Who are your best friends? What do you like about them? How do you feel when your friends are not kind to you? Parents, share a time when you were young and either your friends were unkind (or moved away). What did you do? What do you wish you would have done?

## PROVIDING COMFORT IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

DAY 19: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2

We live in a fallen world where horrible things happen to human beings. These difficulties can cause horrific physical and emotional pain. Christians are not exempt from the pain and heartaches of this fallen world. When we go through difficult situations, we try to determine the reason for our pain. This is a natural reaction. When we hurt, we want to know why.

When someone is suffering, we often try to comfort them. But we must be careful not to express conclusions about the causes of their suffering that are based on simplistic or non-biblical assumptions.

For example, telling a person who is suffering from an illness that the reason that God has not provided healing is because that person lacks sufficient faith; or that they must not be a faithful Christian, because every true Christian will have good health and wealth during their physical lifetime.

Although it is true that suffering is sometimes a direct result of sin, this principle cannot be applied to all human suffering. During His earthly ministry, Jesus addressed this issue. He and His disciples encountered a man who had been born blind. The disciples asked Jesus what the cause of the man's blindness was, his sin or his parent's sin. Jesus answered: *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him"* (John 9:1-3).

Let us encourage each other in the fact that God has a purpose for our suffering and that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us when we see our God face to face (Romans 8:18). When we suffer, let us comfort each other with the grace and mercy that Jesus provided for us on the Cross (Ephesians 2:4-8).



**DIG DEEPER** — How do you think you would react to the words of Zophar here in Job, chapter 20, if you were in Job's place? Would his words comfort you, or anger you, or something else?

**FAMILY TIME** — Have each person tell 3 things that make them sad. Talk about why these things make you sad. Why do sad things happen? Pray about the sad things.

JOB 20

## RIGHTEOUS IMPATIENCE

*"As for me, is my complaint addressed to mortals? Why should I not be impatient?" (Job 21:4)*

This query cuts to the core of Job's lament: the wicked go unpunished while the righteous suffer. Job knows this truth intimately, and it dismays him. However, Job's friends remain obstinate: he must have sinned exorbitantly to earn such punishment. Angry with his friends, Job fires back: *"Why should I not be impatient?"*

We, like Job, have the right to lament injustice, and to voice our heartfelt distress to God. Furthermore, I would argue that lamentation is not merely our right, but our obligation. Through lamentation, we remain faithful to the truth—the truth that, as Job voices, *"the wicked are spared in the day of calamity,"* and the righteous, often, are not.

I admit that this truth depresses me, and hardly seems fit for a devotional reading, until I recall a nomadic Nazarene, who, while living in perfect submission to God's will, experienced rejection, scorn, humiliation, and death. Jesus Christ, the perfectly righteous human, experienced real suffering and death, and in doing so, He gave us life.

Does this mean that we should stand idly as others suffer, because Christ suffered also? Absolutely not. Injustice broods heavily over creation, and we must fight it where we can, and lament it where we cannot. But given that our perfect Messiah suffered, we should never understand suffering as a deserved punishment from God.

Job, in the middle of a fervent lament, asks this rhetorical question: *"Will any teach God knowledge, seeing that he judges those that are on high?"* (Job 21:22) Directed at his heedless friends, Job's question is a convicting reminder: it has never been our place to instruct God on judgment.

Therefore, we can, and must, lament. Not only for the world's injustices, but also for the pride that keeps us ambivalent, and the despair that convinces us that we are powerless to resist the darkness. Why should we not be impatient?



**DIG DEEPER** — How does the reality of injustice affect your faith? What form of suffering weighs upon you most heavily? Why?

**FAMILY TIME** — Have everyone share when they had a hard time waiting for something. What did you do to make the waiting easier? How do you think you can get better at being patient while you wait?

## I SURRENDER ... ALL?

*"Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you." (Job 22:21)*

In American culture, and even in the church, subtle lies of the enemy seem so sweet, so appealing. That is, until they are tested in real life. Upon first read, the bad theology of Job's friends may sound very familiar. In fact, if you don't read carefully, you might think, "Wow, why was Job so harsh with his friends?"

As humans, we cling to every semblance of control. The Christian walk seems to be about giving up control—just when you think "I surrender all," another area crops up that proves extremely painful to surrender. And, the kicker is that surrendering requires one to believe in God's goodness, *no matter what* the circumstances. This is true faith.

An international visitor shared that the way he made it through the intense persecution he faced as a Christian was by believing that God is both absolutely loving and absolutely sovereign. This is faith based *not* on feelings, but faith that rests on Truth alone—on the Word of God alone. Praise God that He is both the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Theology similar to that of Job's friends has permeated the American Christian church. Unfortunately, this is not a solid foundation when trials come. As a result, many people lose faith when *prosperity* does not come their way. So, here is the challenge: do we believe that God is both loving and sovereign? Do we trust that His will is what we would want if we could see the big picture? Is the fact that He is with us enough for us? Are we basing our beliefs on truth or on feelings? And, do we have core people in our lives who will speak this truth to us?



**DIG DEEPER** — What does the truth that God is both loving and sovereign mean for your daily life and decision-making?

**FAMILY TIME** — Did you ever wonder why bad things happen to good people? Tell about a time when a bad thing happened to you. Who or what did you blame? Even when bad things happen, God is always good. Memorize Psalm 23 together so you can remember it when bad things happen.



## GOD'S WORD: VITAL AND NECESSARY

*"I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread." (Job 23:12b)*

When life buffets you, do you look for God? Job did. He wanted to complain about his circumstances, to ask for answers, to state his innocence. Even though he knew everything he suffered could not occur unless God allowed it, he was still searching for God.

How do we find God? One way is to imitate Him as verse 11 says. We can walk in His footsteps and not deviate from His path. Similarly, we can read His word and obey it as we see in verse 12. Job talks about treasuring God's Word more than his daily food. Psalm 119 offers a compelling illustration of this.

God's Word is powerful and alive. In times of trouble, we can cling to God's promises and gain comfort by remembering God's deliverance for scores of people in the past. We can acquire strength by meditating on God's character and be challenged by Christ's example. Saturating our minds with God's Word will prevent us from magnifying our problems so that they become bigger than the God we serve.

Christ, our supreme and sinless example, declared that man cannot live on bread alone. We need the very words God speaks. During times of temptation and trial (and indeed every day), don't neglect the Word of God. Memorize it. Recite it. Read it. Study it. Consider it to be as necessary as the food you eat. Just as our physical bodies cannot survive without food, so our spiritual lives are dependant on God's Word.



**DIG DEEPER** — How often do you read your Bible? How often do you study it and memorize verses? Start today by memorizing Job 23:12.

**FAMILY TIME** — What would happen if you didn't eat today? Besides being hungry, how would you feel? How is God's Word like food? Consider having this discussion before a meal. Call everyone to the table but don't have any food out. Ask what would happen if you did not eat but skipped this meal.

## WHAT CONCERNS GOD?

GRACE DAY: SUNDAY, MARCH 6

There are many things that concern me in life: my family, meaningful relationships, finances, the state of the world, and more. I am sure you have your own similar list. It may sound surprising, but there are also specific things that concern God. Look at these words from Exodus 2:

*God heard their [the enslaved Israelites] groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.* (Exodus 2:24-25)

God is concerned about people, and that concern plays out in two different ways.

First, God is concerned with being faithful to His promises. The Scripture quoted above says God *"remembered"* His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; promises He made over many generations. Those promises go all the way back to His covenant with Abraham: *"I will make you into a great nation..."* (Genesis 12:2). God is concerned with being faithful to that promise. As it says in Psalm 33:4, *"He is faithful in all he does."*

Second, God is concerned with the suffering of His people. After hearing the groans of the Israelites, God calls Moses to be a deliverer for His people with these words:

*The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.'* (Exodus 3:7-8)

Many people view God as an impassive, removed deity who has no sense of the suffering we endure in our lives. Yet, the God of the Bible is quite different. He is concerned about the suffering of His people. In the life of Christ, we come face to face with God's concern over human suffering. On the one hand, Jesus reaches out to heal and care for people in their earthly suffering. On the other hand, Jesus goes to the Cross for our spiritual suffering, bringing healing to a broken world: *"Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering"* (Isaiah 53:4). God is concerned with the suffering of His people, not only in this Exodus story, but also in our daily lives. He hears and He is concerned about us.



**DIG DEEPER** — How has God shown up in your life with His divine concern and love?

**FAMILY TIME** — Have everyone share something that concerns them. How do you think God feels about these concerns? Pray about your concerns.

EXODUS 2:1-25

## DIVINE PROVIDENCE

*"Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for such days?" (Job 24:1)*

The Lord's guidance for and care over us is just, coming from a place of highest wisdom. But in times of suffering and trial, it is often difficult to remember this providence, and we may begin to ask if the suffering is somehow a punishment for our actions. Additionally, there are many forms of injustice and suffering we see in the world that make us wonder why bad things happen to good people. But while God is just, our good or evil actions don't determine whether we are rewarded or punished because we cannot control the outcomes and unexpected turns in our lives and in our fallen world.

While we don't always know the reason why we suffer, we do have a God who has a higher and universal perspective. It is in the dark places that we have the opportunity to press more deeply into His strong, loving and sovereign character. When we look to who God is and remember that He is in control, we are led to a place of humility and trust. This change in our attitudes and hearts isn't easy, especially when the natural reaction to hard times is often to focus on the negative side of things. Yet through the trials, the storms and the tears, He remains constant. He is the just, wise, faithful and strong Father who cares for us more than we could ever know.

Brothers and sisters, the trials and injustice we face in this life can seem strong enough to overtake us, but we have the opportunity to choose humility and to trust in the One who is in control. May we turn to God in times of trouble and rest in His divine providence.



**DIG DEEPER** — Has there been a difficult time in your life that made you question God's providence? How can you respond in times of suffering in ways that will increase your faith?

**FAMILY TIME** — Sing "Jesus Loves Me" or another song about God's love together. Talk about how God's love is stronger than anything and can give us strength when we are weak.

## WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

*"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18 :24 NKJV)*

Bildad does not share concern, compassion, or love within Job 25. While it appears his words affirm God's sovereignty and man's sin, his approach to Job is impersonal and his words seem to say "I told you so," rather than "I care deeply about you." Job already knows he is a sinner, but he also knows he walks with God and cannot fathom this calamity upon him. However, Bildad pours on words about man's unrighteousness (vv. 3-4), and concludes that man is but a maggot; a lowly worm (v. 6).

*Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged—  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful,  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.<sup>4</sup>*

Bildad could have connected better through praising God, reaffirming God's creation and His wonderful plan for man. Job is like a battered ram, with his "friends" not countering Satan's attack placed upon him. We long for friends who will weep with us, and even forgive us if they have been wronged, rather than walk away into the silence of broken relationships.



**DIG DEEPER** — When you are in the midst of suffering, who is a friend you can turn to who brings you to Christ? Think of ways you can reach out to two people and encourage them with the words of Jesus. How do you feel after you have done this?

**FAMILY TIME** — Bildad thinks he knows everything. He tells his friend Job about how horrible people are, even calling them maggots. Draw a picture of what you think Bildad might look like. Make a speech bubble and put some of his words from Job 25 in the bubble. What would you say to Bildad if he were your friend?

## HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD?

In chapter 26 Job basically says there is no use talking to his friends anymore. The cynical remarks that start this chapter point out that in spite of Bildad's supposedly great theology, he had not encouraged Job at all.

Hurting people are not comforted by theological explanations alone but by people who will sit with them and feel their pain. Rick Warren writes on suffering, "When life doesn't make sense, an explanation doesn't ease your pain; the presence of God does."<sup>5</sup>

But Job doesn't stop with simply critiquing his friends. He goes on to point out the utter fruitlessness of their trying to solve his problem by explaining how they think God works.

He goes on to demonstrate the majesty of God and he closes with this: *"And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?"* (Job 26:14)

What he means is that just when you think you have God all figured out, something happens that doesn't fit in your box. Once again, we're reminded of the great mystery that is our God.

I, for one, am glad that our God, even in my times of suffering, cannot be completely understood by my friends, by theologians, or by me. If He could be fully understood by mere humans, well, then what kind of God is that and what kind of hope could He bring? I need God to be a God who can stretch the heavens, a God who can shake the earth, a God who can calm the sea, and a God who can defeat my monsters.



**DIG DEEPER** — Which aspect of who God is brings you the most hope in your life today and why? (ex: His justice? Grace? Power? Eternal nature? Personal presence?, etc.)

**FAMILY TIME** — When have you seen someone get hurt? What did you do to help them? Which is better: hugging someone who hurts, or telling them what they did was wrong?; listening to them, or leaving them to deal with the mess they are in?

## T R U S T

*"As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made my life bitter, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not say anything wicked ..."* (Job 27:2-4)

Here's the Book of Job so far in a nutshell: Satan bets with God that Job will curse God if He makes Job suffer enough. Job's wife and his so-called friends take turns egging him on to do exactly that, but Job refuses again and again. Chapter 27 is Job's final speech to his "friends." He once again steadfastly refuses to blame God. Here's a question I keep asking myself: If I had been Job, would I have continued to trust and praise God? Or would I have distrusted and cursed Him?

I've never had 1/100th of what happened to Job happen to me. I'd like to think I'd trust God no matter what, but if I'm honest I sometimes find myself questioning His goodness when I see all the suffering and evil in the world. In fact, I can even have trust issues when God does something as innocuous as refusing to make my favorite sports team win every game.

For those, like me, who may need some help in the trust department, here are some great verses to store deeeeep in your soul. We'll start with Job and end with Jesus:

*"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. May the name of the LORD be praised."* (Job 1:21b)

*"The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him and I am helped."* (Psalm 28:7)

*"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."* (Proverbs 3:5)

*"The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him."* (Nahum 1:7)

*"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me."* (John 14:1 NLT)



**DIG DEEPER** — In what circumstances do you find it difficult to trust God 100%? Pray right now that the next time those circumstances present themselves, God will *"fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 15:13).

**FAMILY TIME** — One awesome way to build up your trust in God is to count your blessings. Take turns naming things for which you're thankful. Close with a prayer thanking God for all He has given you and for His trustworthiness.

## THE HUMBLE PATH OF SUFFERING

*"The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding."*  
(Job 28:28)

I don't know about you, but this verse comforts me. The God we serve and love truly gets us! He understands that we will find ourselves in a place, like Job, where our understanding isn't enough. We do the right things (we shun evil) and yet we sometimes suffer! Why?

Many times this year, I have felt myself frantically searching for meaning and understanding in the midst of suffering and grief. If only I knew why I was going through this trial then I might not struggle to have faith in the midst of it. If only I understood what God's plan was then I might be able to bear this burden more easily. Have you felt this way, where you've wracked your brain, but come to the end of your understanding? You long for the peace that surpasses understanding because you are mentally exhausted from trying to figure out how God is at work in the midst of your suffering?

In this place of weary brokenness, God wants us to recognize, like Job does in v. 28, and the author of Ecclesiastes does in 12:13-14, that He is sovereign...that He is everything...He is wise...that He must increase, and we must decrease.

This path of suffering that Job is on, that I have tasted, and that some of you are walking in today is painful. In spite of the pain we experience, you and I are walking the road of discipleship with God; we are not alone. Fearing God (v. 28) means that we lower our view of ourselves, and we recognize in humility that we may never see the entirety of His plan. The path to wisdom is one of breaking down pride and wrestling through the tough issues of life, while still holding onto the fact that God is the author of wisdom and He knows better than we do. Our understanding may fail, but God's wisdom prevails. Trust Him.



**DIG DEEPER** — Spend some time in quiet meditation with this prayer: *O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*<sup>5</sup>

**FAMILY TIME** — Memorize Job 28:28 today. Put each of the words on a separate paper and hide them. Have your children find them or challenge your kids to make up a cheer or rap using the words.

## LONGING FOR BETTER DAYS ...

*"The light of his lamp shone on me. I walked through darkness by his light." (Job 29:3 NIRV)*

Job, an honest man who respected God, was in the dark about God's conversation with Satan. Unaware, God allowed him to be tested. Consequently, he suffered greatly. Condemned by friends, Job's faith was challenged. In an effort to defend himself, he stumbled in the darkness, as he presented his case. What did he long for? It was those former, better days.

Jesus' disciples, those who walked closely with Him, were once at sea when a sudden, dark squall came down on the water. Underestimating His divine power, their faith decreased as the waves increased. With eyes fixed on the storm, they were overcome by fear. What did Jesus' disciples long for? A life preserver.

Years ago, a dark cloud overshadowed my life. Heavy-laden, I felt oppressed. Judged and injured, I was heartbroken. What did I long for? Peace. I turned to God but instead of providing a way out of my sorrow, He led me to the Way through it. The light of His lamp shone on me, as I walked through the darkness by His light. Engulfed in a twister of emotions, His light pointed to the eye of the storm, to the anchor for my soul...to Jesus! He is our sanctuary of peace, who continues to whisper, *"Be still."*

Jesus, the Son of Man, fully understands our dark times. Like Job, like the disciples, like you and me, He was fully human, well acquainted with suffering. He, too, prayed in anguish, *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me..."* Yes, when darkness loomed, even the Light of the World cried out to God! What did the Son of Man long for? A way out. Yet, as the Son of God, He longed for the Way of Salvation. His final answer? *"...not my will but yours be done"* (Luke 22:42).



**DIG DEEPER** — What are you longing for: former days, self-preservation, or comfortable circumstances? Scripture tells us that faith needs to be tested in order to grow. If your faith is being tested, what can you do to fix your eyes on Jesus in order to find peace, so that you, too, will be able to lay down your longings and say, *"not my will but Yours be done"*?

**FAMILY TIME** — Blindfold a child and let only a still, small voice guide him/her through the darkness to a treat. After they find the treat, ask them how this is like listening to God. How did they feel being blindfolded? How did it feel to find the treat?



## UNBUSY SOULS

*My heart is not proud, Lord,  
 my eyes are not haughty;  
 I do not concern myself with great matters  
 or things too wonderful for me.  
 But I have calmed and quieted myself,  
 I am like a weaned child with its mother;  
 like a weaned child I am content.  
 Israel, put your hope in the Lord  
 both now and forevermore. (Psalm 131)*

What was your life like this past week? Did you rush around from one thing to another? Did you feel like there wasn't enough time for everything and everyone? What does the schedule for the coming week look like?

In the 1950s, American legislators expected that technological advances would decrease the amount of time we spend at work and give us more leisure time than ever. Instead, the incredible technological advances we experience have exponentially increased both our pace of life and expectations of productivity.

In the midst of the rush of activity, it is important for us to turn away from busyness, even if only for a season. Whether it is taking a weekly Sabbath or scheduling seasons like this Lenten journey, we must do the hard work of whittling down our activity to enter into the healthy, sustainable rhythms of life with God.

Psalm 131 reflects this attitude of rest and quiet in a busy world. Here is a soul purged of pride and pretentiousness (v. 1). Here we find someone who has intentionally forced themselves into the quiet that leads to contentment (v. 2). Out of this place of quiet, a hope and trust in the Lord rises up that is both for now and eternity (v. 3). What a contrast to the busyness of our frenzied world! Today, may we be the sort of people who are quiet and calm enough to hear the still, small voice of God.



**DIG DEEPER** — Where do you struggle most with busyness? How can you release some of that today? What would it look like for you to cultivate more stillness before God today or this week?

**FAMILY TIME** — If you had a whole day to do anything you wanted, what would you do? After everyone answers, ask how God could be a part of that sort of day?

## DESPISED AND REJECTED

In this chapter, we see a man who is despised and rejected, heartbroken and depressed, as his suffering goes on and on. He feels abandoned by God and by men and is at a loss to understand why. His heart-cry to God in verse 20 reminds me of Another, who in His agony cried out *"My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?"* quoting Psalm 22:1.

That One, our Lord Jesus Christ, was forsaken! He took upon Himself the wrath of God as He bore our sins, and God did turn His face away. But Jesus did this so that we would never be abandoned.

Sometimes, in our suffering, we cling to God and experience His presence in profound ways. At other times, when our pain goes on and on without relief, it seems that God is absent. We don't know how to pray, or whether God cares. This is where Job finds himself in chapter 30.

Still, God is with us in the midst of our trials, whether we see His hand in them or not. He promises: *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Deuteronomy 31:6). And when we feel abandoned we can choose to trust His promises. Paul tells us that even when we don't know how to pray, *"The Spirit helps us in our weakness..."* and *"intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express"* (Romans 8:26).

Psalm 22:24 tells us: *"He [God] has not ignored the suffering of the needy. He has not turned and walked away. He has listened to their cries for help."* He hears; He sees; He cares, and He will have the last word. The LORD who loves you is King (Psalm 22:28)! Let's choose to trust Him now!



**DIG DEEPER** — Read all of Psalm 22 in a modern translation. This psalm would have been familiar to many of those who heard Jesus quote verse 1. What does the rest of the psalm tell you about the outcome of Jesus' suffering?

**FAMILY TIME** — Has anyone ever teased or mocked you in a mean way? Job's friends teased him. What can you do when others tease you?

## BLAMELESS BEFORE GOD

*"Let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless." (Job 31:6)*

Job continues to defend himself by outlining several sins that would rightly deserve the harsh punishment he is receiving, but they are all sins that he has never committed. In fact, he has acted righteously in each situation, so why would a just God punish him?

Isn't that the same question we ask today? Where is the justice of Almighty God in the face of human suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent? Why does an all-powerful God allow good people to suffer? Where is God in the midst of my suffering? The mistake Job's friends made and the mistake we continue to make today is trying to wrap our finite minds around the wisdom and activity of the Infinite. God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).

Paul helps us to understand this wisdom when he encourages us in Philippians 3:10 to come to know Jesus Christ at a deeper level through the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings. When we stand with Christ in the suffering, we draw ever closer to Him. Jesus knows suffering more than any of us ever will. In dying for the sins of the whole world, as the Son of God and the Son of Man, He suffered beyond what any human can bear. He suffered separation from the Father, a pain even greater than the unbearable physical pain He endured for our sake. Unlike Job, He did not question the Father or complain about the call on His life (Isaiah 53:7). In His humanity and in His divinity, our sinless Savior knew the love of God as well as the wrath of God and was willing to obey the Father, and in His obedience present us blameless before God.



**DIG DEEPER** — Today we see Christian martyrs all over the world giving up their lives rather than renounce their faith. What thoughts does this bring up in your faith life?

**FAMILY TIME** — Use the internet to read about some of the Christian martyrs of the faith (we recommend [opendoorsusa.org](http://opendoorsusa.org)). What qualities did they have that you want to develop in your own life?

## GOD IS NOT DONE WITH YOUR STORY

*"God does all these things to a person—twice, even three times—to turn them back from the pit, that the light of life may shine on them." (Job 33:29-30)*

Job 32-33 ushers in a new voice into the ongoing discussion of the life of Job. Elihu is a younger man who has been a witness to the debate between Job and the three friends. In Job 32 we discover that Elihu is angry with all the people involved. He is angry with Job attempting to justify himself and he is angry with the friends for bringing a message of condemnation on Job.

It would be easy for Job to become even more discouraged as Elihu begins to speak; knowing that Elihu is pointing out an incorrect purpose for why Job is defending himself. We might do exactly the same thing that Job does! When we are wronged by another, our initial instinct is to defend our actions. When we do that, our goal seems to be more self-serving than God-honoring.

Elihu is bringing a new message, a message that may still be a difficult one to hear. The message is that God has a purpose in what Job has gone through and that God can use difficult circumstances in a person's life to bring both salvation and purpose. Oh, how we so often wish that difficulty in our life was not present. Who wants pain, hurts, and frustration?

Maybe we need to hear the message that Elihu has begun to deliver in his speech. God is not done with your story. God can bring good things out of what seems so horrible. He is able to bring salvation and purpose. Is your hope in life being good and comfortable, or is your hope in God continuing to walk with you in your life? God has never left Job and He will not leave us either.



**DIG DEEPER** — Think back on your life and consider a painful experience. How might God have worked through that experience to make a positive impact, whether it is in your life or in the life of another?

**FAMILY TIME** — Parents, share a personal example of something difficult you went through and how God did something positive through that time. Talk about your experience together as a family.

## JUSTICE AND MERCY

In Job 34, Elihu continues his speech by vigorously defending God's righteousness. He says, *"Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice"* (v. 12). The evidence Elihu gives for this is the downfall of all wicked people without respect to their social status (v. 19). There is no escape from God's justice, *"no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves"* (v. 22).

We know that these things are true. God is the measure of perfection and, failing to meet His standard, we are all deserving of divine punishment for our sins. When we read other passages in Scripture and when we look within ourselves, Elihu's words are confirmed. Readers of Job know, however, that Elihu is wrong in two ways. First, Job's suffering is not the result of his sin. God's conversations with Satan in chapters 1 and 2 confirm this.

Elihu is wrong in another way: his theology is fragmentary, articulating the justice of God without expounding on the mercy of God. From our vantage point in history, we know that there is One who is both the measure of perfection and the recipient of divine punishment. If we read Job 34 without Jesus in mind, God seems like a cold, calculating observer of man's missteps, ready to condemn instantly. When we remember that Jesus suffered as a righteous man, enduring pains He had not earned, we see that we are not alone in our suffering. When we remember that Jesus willingly suffered on our behalf, precluding our condemnation, God's mercy comes into full view. When we remember Jesus' resurrection, we can say with Elihu, *"far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong"* because He vindicated His sinless Son (34:10). Because of Jesus, we can read Elihu's words in verse 11—*"For according to the work of a man he will repay him, and according to his ways he will make it befall him"*—and begin to appreciate the magnitude of God's love. Though He would have been just to do so, God did not repay us according to our work! Instead, He shows us mercy through Jesus.



**DIG DEEPER** — Which attributes of God do you tend to emphasize over others? For example, His justice at the expense of His mercy?

**FAMILY TIME** — What is mercy? Talk about the many ways God has shown you mercy. Talk about the many Bible stories that highlight God's mercy. How can you show mercy to your family members? To others?

## HOPE IN THE SHADOWS

*"But it is wrong to say God doesn't listen, to say the Almighty isn't concerned. You say you can't see him, but he will bring justice if you only wait."* (Job 35:13-14 NLT)

Have you ever been trapped by circumstances beyond your control, or locked in a situation that seemed unfair and unjust? This is exactly how Job felt, as he and his friends struggled with deep questions about how his blessed life had unraveled so suddenly. Like Job, our common cry in these moments is, "Where are you, God? Do you care?"

One person who faced this type of pain in recent years was a young man named James Bain.

In 1974, the 18-year-old Bain strolled home at night from a friend's house in Bartow, Florida. Around midnight, the police came to his home and took him down to the station for questioning. Despite his desperate pleas of innocence, Bain was accused and later convicted of a terrible crime of violence. He was sentenced to life in prison, and spent the next 35 years in six different Florida prisons. Until his conviction, he'd never had more than a few parking tickets.

In 2009, DNA testing proved Bain's innocence. The state vacated his sentence after Bain had spent 35 years behind bars—the longest time served by an innocent man eventually freed using DNA evidence. Remarkably, after being released, Bain told an interviewer that he isn't angry. "How can I be?" he said. "You can't go back." Today, Bain tells his story at middle schools, high schools and colleges across the country. "I have to thank God," he says.

During our brief time here on earth, God never promises us pain-free lives. In fact, we know there will be times of shadow and fog, when we can't see far ahead at all. Thankfully, God is faithful and remains by our side at the darkest moments. *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe"* (Proverbs 18:10 NKJV). As Job's friend Elihu reminds him, God eventually will *"...bring justice if you only wait."*



**DIG DEEPER** — When have you felt imprisoned by difficult circumstances beyond your control? What lessons did God teach you?

**FAMILY TIME** — Have you ever been treated unfairly by your friends or at school? What did you do in that situation? What do you think you should do if you are in this situation again?

## GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAY

*"He delivers the afflicted by their afflictions, he reveals himself to them by their suffering." (Job 36:15 NET)*

Eddy spoke softly to us with a slight smile in a room filled with 30 homeless men, "2015 was the lowest point in my life. Alcohol got me homeless but my addiction to alcohol got me to this place (homeless shelter) and being here got me to the highest point in my life—I found Jesus in my homelessness."

Working in a shelter for homeless men, I am reminded of Elihu's words from Job 36:15. As a man comes out of the cold into the warmth of our building, he finds a welcome, a warm meal, a clean bed and a hot shower. For Eddy the affliction and suffering resulting from alcohol and drugs led him to a place of forgiveness and hope. God seems to do that in our lives, doesn't He? Elihu says that God *"reveals himself to them by their suffering."*

In the midst of his addiction and homelessness, God made His presence known to Eddy. In the midst of alienation, dark alleys, and debilitating losses, God's character of goodness, justice, and mercy manifests itself in a Christ follower's life (vv. 6-15). Elihu goes on to remind us today that God, the compassionate One, is also the all-powerful One (vv. 22-33). God is present to Job through His character of goodness and mercy and God is present to Job as his all-powerful Deliverer.

Two realities seem clear from this remarkable verse. First, our God mysteriously uses our suffering to *"deliver"* us in our affliction. Secondly, our God in His own sovereign way shows Himself by a believer's suffering. For Eddy, the suffering of homelessness brought him face to face with God's goodness and God's pursuing power—and everything changed.



**DIG DEEPER** — When has God shown you or revealed to you a new aspect of His love in affliction? What was that aspect of His love? What is normally your first response to affliction and suffering? How might you more readily respond with thankfulness for suffering situations?

**FAMILY TIME** — Think about the things a homeless person might need. Together, gather items and put them in a bag. Keep the bag in your car and give it to the next homeless person you see.

# IS GOD THERE?

GRACE DAY: SUNDAY, MARCH 20

All of us have times when we feel like God isn't speaking even though we are trying to listen. We're not alone in this. We can see it in the life of David, who wrote these words of prayer:

*"Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love;  
in your great mercy turn to me.  
Do not hide your face from your servant;  
answer me quickly, for I am in trouble."* (Psalm 69:16-17)

Even Jesus experienced God's apparent silence on the Cross, crying out to the Father: *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46). What do we do when it seems like God is not speaking?

Sometimes, our problem is that we are listening for only one thing. We ask God for direction about what our major for studies should be, or who we should ask out on a date. We want to hear that He wants us to study Biology. We want to hear that He wants us to ask Jack or Jill out, and so we're not listening for some other name . . . or something else entirely. Paul experienced this. He asked God to remove a thorn in his flesh three times, but God wanted Paul to live with that thorn (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). We need to come with open hands to our Father in prayer, willing to hear His voice and not just our own desires spoken back.

Other times, our problem is that we are unwilling to be silent with God. Paul Tournier said: "Modern people lack silence. They no longer lead their own lives; they are dragged along by events." God often needs to interrupt us with silence and stillness. He wants to wean us away from the flurry of sound and activity, to a place of abundant life. But to get there, we have to go in His way, not our own. He needs to un-train us. Sometimes this means that He needs to knock our legs out from under us so that we can sit down for a bit.

So, what do we do when it seems like God isn't speaking? Perhaps the best thing we can do is to enter the silence with Him. We can *"be still and know that He is God"* (Psalm 46:10). We can ask Him if we're asking the wrong sort of questions. We can shut our mouths and get untrained so that we can enter His way for abundant life.



**DIG DEEPER** — Take 5-10 minutes alone with God to read Psalm 46, asking God to speak to you.

**FAMILY TIME** — As a family, read Psalm 46 aloud and then write, draw, or make something in response to what God is speaking.

PSALM 69



## HOPE BEYOND CIRCUMSTANCE

*"He brings the clouds to punish people, or to water his earth and show his love."*  
(Job 37:13)

Are these dark clouds meant to punish me, or to instead lovingly refine me? When will this pain finally end? Why is this happening to me?

Like Job, when life takes a turn for the worse, we want answers. "If I must suffer, at least tell me why," we think. What should we do, then, when God seems silent to our pleas? Should we doubt His goodness? Unlike our circumstances, God is unchanging. We can trust His plan; it's been in place since the beginning. God is never taken by surprise. He is immovable.

Although God is not moved by any circumstance (in that He has known all things since the beginning), neither is He removed from our circumstances. On the contrary! Having lived and died on this sin-soaked planet, Jesus is intimately acquainted with suffering. In fact, before Jesus' ascension into Heaven, he took time to warn His disciples (some of whom would soon after become martyrs), to detail their own dark days ahead. But Jesus didn't end on this note of despair. Instead He explained that comfort is possible in the face of terrible difficulty. In triumphant conclusion He says, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33, emphasis mine). In saying this, Jesus did not sugar-coat suffering. He guaranteed troubles would come to the believer, but He also guarantees that "in Him" peace can be found. In Him—the God who conquered every evil on our behalf. In Him—where we find new and eternal life.

So be encouraged, downcast soul. He is working through all of history for our benefit. Soon, after the pains and joys of this life are over, we will receive our greatest reward: Jesus Christ Himself for eternity.



**DIG DEEPER** — Hard times often make us feel further from God. How can we best cope with this feeling of separation? What expectations of God are separate from what scripture says is true of God? (For example: If God loved me, He would do X). How can you maintain realistic and honest expectations concerning God?

**FAMILY TIME** — As a family, make a list of things that are very important to each member. Discuss how each member would feel if their chosen item was suddenly taken away. Discuss why it is important that our hope is found in Christ alone.

## LOOK UP

*"Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm." (Job 38:1)*

Simply and profoundly, we round a new corner in Job's journey. We have listened to three cycles of dialogue between Job and his friends, and a four-part speech from the young bystander, Elihu. It's as though all human wisdom is finally exhausted and now God Himself—the Word—speaks.

And, so He kicks up a storm. Why a storm? Job's suffering itself has been a storm, but this kind of storm causes Job not to look at himself and his suffering, but instead to look up. Storms command attention. Storms can be brilliant and beautiful and scary. Storms can make us feel small.

That's exactly what God has in mind. The storm causes Job to experience—with all his senses—the message that God will speak. Instead of answering Job's questions, God poses a long litany of questions; questions that force Job to consider the incomprehensible vastness of creation and, at the same time, its meticulous detail. In beautiful poetry, God personifies the sea, the morning, the lightning, and more. He has created them, set their boundaries, orders their way. God has created all and He is aware of all.

But, back to Job. What effect does this storm—and God's voice heard above the storm—have on him? Though we won't really see for another couple of chapters, one thing is already clear. Job is silent. He has no answer to God's questions, nor would we.

When we consider God's creation, our perspective shifts. We see how small we are in the universe and we are left to acknowledge God's vastness. Maybe this shift in perspective is the first step toward the healing that Job needs. Maybe the answer is found not by striving to figure it all out, but in quietly surrendering to the One who already knows.



**DIG DEEPER** — What kinds of experiences cause you to shift your perspective from yourself to God? How has this changed your circumstances? How has it changed you? How do you know when you need to focus on God more than your circumstances?

**FAMILY TIME** — Spend some time outdoors together. Take a walk through the park, or a walk on the lake front. Or, before bed, take a few minutes to go outside and look up at the stars. Why do you think God made the stars? What do you suppose He was thinking when He made so many fish? How do all of these creatures survive? If God takes care of the squirrels and the robins, how will He take care of us?

## A HUMBLING GOD

*"Does the hawk take flight by your understanding and spread its wings to the south?" (Job 39:26)*

Have you ever been so confident that you were right about something that you invested every part of yourself to prove you were right? Everything seems to be going so well, and you feel as if you have proved your point convincingly, and the other party is so wrong...in your opinion. But then when the truth comes out, you come to terms with yourself as you realize that you were very wrong the whole time. Now you are embarrassed for employing all that effort to prove to everyone that you were...well...wrong.

This is how we see Job in this section of the book. In chapters 38 and 39, God humbles Job. God reminds Job that He is the creator of all things, and He reminds Job that He has everything in His hands, including Job's hard life. As God responds in this chapter and as you see Him talk about the world He created, you feel God's power. You can imagine Job sinking down in his seat as he realizes how wrong he was about God and His power. But friends, that is the great thing about God, even though we are so wrong about Him many times, He still chooses to keep us. Not only that, but He chooses to bless us.

Do not be afraid of God's power. Be thankful that He humbles us so we can fully experience His power.



**DIG DEEPER** — In the context of our worship and prayer life, what does coming to God with humility mean? When God mentions creation and His power over it, how does that make you feel about your current circumstances?

**FAMILY TIME** — Have you ever believed you were right about something only to find out later you were wrong? Read Proverbs 18. Why is it important to be careful about what we say? Can you find verses in Proverbs 18 to help you remember to seek the truth?

## WHY I LOVE CONFESSION

*"Then Job answered the Lord: 'I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.'" (Job 40:3-4)*

In my Senior High School English Class, I was the token Christian. In that class we read the book of Job as a fantastic piece of literature. On one quiz I missed the question, "With what emotion did God respond to Job?" The correct answer was anger. However, I had such an intimate relationship with God as my Father that I had a hard time imagining Him as angry.

Since then I have come to understand that God's anger is one side of His character that we must understand, exactly because He is altogether good. God becomes angry when there are misperceptions about His holy character, or when the people He created are treated unjustly. This anger is right, true, and just.

When God speaks, He is altogether right. His judgments are true. His voice is pure. He knows what He is talking about. His voice, like a sword, cuts through the lies, the misperceptions, the misunderstandings, the complaining, and the lack of clarity that is inside each one of us. His voice is the Truth; and it is the exact Truth each of us longs for and needs.

Silence is the best response to this voice. We might need to learn to sit in this uncomfortable silence longer than we expect. The next words out of our mouths should be something like, "I am sorry. I do not see clearly. Set my heart, my perceptions, and my understanding in line with the Truth; in line with your voice." Then the surprise comes because, unlike humans, God is both angry and merciful. He receives us back into His loving arms as we confess our sin before Him. He himself has taken care of our sin. This restoration is so beautiful and completely undeserved. It is costly to God, yet sweet to us, His loved ones. Oh the joy, the purity of His goodness! I do truly rejoice in His anger, the gift of His voice of truth, and confession, as a means to set my heart right with my incredibly good Father.



**DIG DEEPER** — How do you respond when God speaks into an area of your life that needs to be corrected? How can you take time right now to ask God to realign your thoughts, attitudes and perceptions with His?

**FAMILY TIME** — Talk about confession as a family. God is perfect. When we sin, we can confess our sins to Him and He removes our sin from us. Fill a glass container with bleach. On a piece of paper, using a water soluble red marker, write "sin." Explain that when we confess, our sin is removed. Watch what happens as you dunk the paper. The "sin" goes away.

## FACING MONSTERS

*"Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down its tongue with a rope?"*  
(Job 41:1)

God reaches the pinnacle of His response to Job with one of the most unique portions of the book. Here, God confronts Job with the fierce form of a great sea monster known as Leviathan. With a series of striking questions, God reminds Job of his utter powerlessness before a creature of this sort: Job cannot catch it, he cannot tame it, he cannot keep it, and he cannot subdue it (41:1-11).

There are many suggestions for what this sea beast might be: a crocodile, a dinosaur, or some other extinct sea creature. Leviathan appears other times in the Bible (Psalm 74:12-17; 104:26), showing up most pointedly in Isaiah 27:1 as a representation of the evil which God will defeat.

God continues to describe Leviathan with poetic detailing of its powerful form and the terror it causes throughout the sea and earth (41:12-32). The final lines of the chapter give us the clue to why Leviathan occupies the final portion of God's words to Job:

*"Nothing on earth is its equal—  
a creature without fear.*

*It looks down on all that are haughty;  
it is king over all that are proud."* (Job 41:33-34)

Job was thrown in the depths of the darkness of suffering, struggling with his friends to make sense of it all. Now, God confronts Job—and his friends, too—with the powerful truth that the fiercest monsters of the earth—and other 'monsters' that plague us—overwhelm us, but they cannot equal God.

Contemplating Leviathan reminds us of two things. First, we must recognize our own limits in the face of monsters like that. Second, we must remember that God is more powerful than any monster we face...and also more powerful than us. The response God is looking for from Job, and from us, is true humility.



**DIG DEEPER** — What 'monsters' are you facing in your life right now? What would it look like to see those 'monsters' in light of God and His power?

**FAMILY TIME** — Look up some of the most powerful animals on the face of our earth. Based on Job 41:33-34, draw what you think a Leviathan might look like.

## HUMBLE RESTORATION

*"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." (Job 42:5)*

Everyone wants a story to have a happy ending. Deep down our longing for everything to be put right in the end is woven into the fabric of our being. The problem is that most of us don't feel like we live in a fairy tale.

After being plunged into suffering, a good portion of Job's story rotates around the big questions of life like 'why does suffering happen?' and 'what is God doing when we suffer?' At the end of the book, Job comes face to face with God and understands a basic truth of life we all must realize: there are some things we can know and other things we simply cannot know.

Yet Job is not merely left with his struggles and some vague sense of unknowing. He actually enters through his suffering into a transforming encounter with the Living God. This is one of the great differences between Christianity and many other religions or philosophies. We believe humility before life is the pathway toward a transforming encounter with the personal God.

From the very beginning we understand that the story of Job occurs within God's bigger story. And so, as the story of Job draws to a close, we return to the bigger story that God is working out. Job is humbled before life and God, and God begins to work within Job's life in powerful ways: *"the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before"* (42:10). We catch a glimpse of God's joyful restoration in the life of Job.

It's a restoration that we see more fully in Jesus Christ. The great hope of faith in Christ is that when suffering gathers around us, God is still at work in us. In fact, the grace we see in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is that God has turned back the overpowering weight of sin, evil and death in Jesus. Things have been put right and there is a happy ending for our story because of Jesus. Finding God in the darkness humbles us, but it leads us into an encounter with the Living God who is both beyond us and also there with us.



**DIG DEEPER** — What are you asking God to restore in your life? How has the book of Job challenged you and encouraged you in this area? Read Job 42:1-6. Write it down in your own words as a prayer back to God.

**FAMILY TIME** — Compare the number of animals and children that Job has before and after his disaster (Job 1:1-3; 42:10-16). Why did God double Job's possessions? How might Job's story change if he knew God was going to do this? How can we live knowing our reward in heaven is better than life now?

## RESTORATION IN THE RESURRECTED JESUS

*"They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." (John 20:9)*

After Jesus was crucified most people believed that death was the end of Him. In that belief, the disciples come upon a scene that startles them: the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid after the crucifixion is broken open and empty.

Mary Magdalene assumes someone took Jesus' body. Peter examines the scene thoroughly as he steps inside the tomb. He sees the strips of linen used as grave clothes. He is confused, forgetting the words Jesus had spoken: *"The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day"* (Luke 24:46). We read in John 20:9 that *"they still did not understand from the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead."*

When we are in the midst of the darkness of grief and confusion, we search for God. At times it even seems like God is hiding from us. Sometimes we are not that different than the disciples. When we wander in the dark times we, too, still do not understand much of what is happening. Jesus' resurrection, however, points us to the hope of restoration in the midst of the darkness.

The claim of the early followers of Jesus—and Christians today—is that Jesus, as the divine being in human flesh, brought the greatest miracle of all time. He turned the key on the door of death that we cannot open ourselves.

For those with faith in Jesus as the death-defier, there is a hope that we, too, will defy death. The darkness of suffering does not need to be the end. We can find God in the darkness. As Jesus Himself says:

*"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)*

Because of His resurrection, Jesus Christ pushes back the emptiness of death, making it the doorway to full life for all who reach out to Him with faith.



**DIG DEEPER** — What difference has the resurrection of Jesus made in how you respond to your own suffering or the death of a loved one?

**FAMILY TALK** — Have each person write or draw a picture of what Easter means. Share it with your friends and family today.





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## WORKS CITED

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After being plunged into deep suffering, a good portion of Job's story rotates around the big questions of life. Why does suffering happen? What is God doing when we suffer? Job's suffering eventually leads him to come face to face with God in order to understand a basic truth of life we all must realize: there are some things we can know and other things we simply cannot know.

Finding God in the darkness humbles us, but it leads us into an encounter with the Living God who is both beyond us and also there with us. Journey with Eastbrook Church this Lent as we explore themes of suffering, faith, humility, and grief in light of God's goodness, love, and grace in our lives.



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