

TRUST: JOB AND JAMES

WISDOM, HUMILITY & WORSHIP FOUND THROUGH SUFFERING.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	1
Literary Information.....	2
The Story of Job.....	4
Theology of Suffering.....	5
Helpful Tips.....	7
Lesson 1.....	8
Lesson 2.....	23
Lesson 3.....	37
Lesson 4.....	50
Lesson 5.....	63
Lesson 6.....	74
Lesson 7.....	86
Lesson 8.....	97
Instructions for Lament.....	112

Preface

Suffering is something that hurts our hearts, regardless of the magnitude of it. As humans, we all suffer and Scripture doesn't stay silent about suffering. In fact, the book of Job begs the questions: Does God cause or allow suffering? What is God's role? And, why do we suffer?

Yet (spoiler alert), we don't get a clear answer to the "why" in the book of Job. We need to look at the whole of Scripture to form a robust theology of suffering in order to help us understand. We, as a church, believe in God's power and God's healing, but we also know that one of the surest things promised in Scripture is that in this world we will have trouble (**John 16:33**). So where does that leave us? What does that say about God and His trustworthiness? How can we trust in God's sovereignty through all of life's trials?

While Job doesn't give us the answers to the big question of "why?" it begins to answer the "how": We can continue to trust God and walk through suffering with wisdom, humility, and worship.

One of the most compelling aspects of Scripture is how it weaves together in such an intentional way. While we look at what the book of Job in the Old Testament has to say, we will also get to see how the New Testament book of James tackles the theme of suffering and our response. All of God's inspired Word gives us a framework through which we learn how to trust God even, and especially, through suffering.

Literary Info on Job and James

We highly recommend watching the Bible Project overviews of both Job and James which can be found on youtube or the Bible Project website. These videos give good overviews and background information to each of these books.

Job

Author: Unknown

Date: The exact date of the events in Job is unknown, but they most likely occurred during the time of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2000–1800 bc).¹

Recipients: Job is part of the Wisdom Literature books of the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. These were written for God's people, the Israelites.

Setting: The Land of Uz, the exact location of which is not known.²

Literary Significance:

"The book of Job is one of the literary treasures of the world. The central issue is the struggle over the ways of God, especially his justice when the godly suffer not from human hands but from 'acts of God.' At the same time, the author raises the question, 'Where is wisdom found?' which in the end is powerfully answered in terms of God alone."³

¹ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2012. 783

² "Regardless of its location, this detail is significant because it indicates that Job is not an Israelite. His non-Israelite status explains the absence of many key theological elements in the book, including law, covenant, temple, and references to Yahweh. Intriguingly, however, the book frequently evidences an Israelite perspective, which suggests that the story of the non-Israelite Job has actually been given its literary shape by an Israelite author for an Israelite audience."

Walton, John. *NIV Application Commentary: Job*. Zondervan, 2012. Bible Gateway Plus
³ Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Zondervan, 2014. Bible Gateway Plus

James

Author: It is commonly thought to be James, a half-brother of Jesus.⁴

Date: Unknown; dated anywhere from AD 40–90.

Recipients: James was a letter written to the Jewish believers in Christ.

Literary Significance:

“James wastes no time getting to the point. After a one-verse greeting, he spends the rest of the letter describing what a working faith looks like. Our faith shows up in the way we deal with trials (**1:2-18; 5:7-11**). It betrays its presence in the way we humbly receive instruction (**1:19-20**). James insists that our faith is evidenced just as much by the way we dispense words (**1:26; 3:1-12; 5:12**) as by the way we dispense help to the needy (**1:27**). A life of faith shows no favoritism (**2:1-13**) and in humility demands none for itself (**3:13-17**). In faith, we are to rely on the Lord in prayer (**5:13-18**) and seek the spiritual welfare of our brothers and sisters (**5:19-20**).”⁵

⁴Galatians 1:19; 2:1-13; Acts 15

⁵Williams, Michael James. *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens: A Guide to Christ-Focused Reading of Scripture*. Zondervan, 2012. Bible Gateway Plus

The Story of Job

While the book of Job is presented mostly chronologically in this study guide, in order to get a good picture of the whole story, here is a brief summary outline.

Chapters 1-3:

- Job's story starts with an introduction. We meet Job, and the reader gets a glimpse "behind the curtain" into God's throne room.
- The Accuser and God discussed Job's life and integrity and God allowed Satan to test Job.
- The first test: Job lost all of his oxen, donkeys, farmhands, sheep, shepherds, camels, and servants, and all of his children died.
- The second test: Job lost his health.
- Job's response: Grief, lament, questions, and worship.

Chapters 4-31:

- Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) confronted Job with three rounds of earthly wisdom.
- These confrontations were presented in dense poetry that represented the wisdom of the day—the righteous will prosper while the wicked will suffer. They believed Job guilty of great sin.
- Job responded to each friend by defending his innocence and longing to hear from God.

Chapters 32-37:

- Another man, Elihu, entered the scene. He was younger than the friends but not much else is known about him. He, too, confronted Job about his sin and his view of God. Neither Job nor God responded to Elihu's words and accusations.

Chapters 38-41:

- God finally responded to Job's situation.

Chapter 42:

- Job responded with repentance and worship.
- God blessed Job with renewed health, family, and livelihood.

Theology of Suffering

You may have heard the term “theology of suffering,” but what does it mean? In it’s simplest form, it is what we believe about God in relation to the universal experience of suffering. The theology of suffering holds things together that seem contradictory. It is messy. It’s both hard and good.

The creation of the universe, including humanity, depicts God’s desire and intent in **Genesis 1-2**. There is no sickness, disease, or death. **Revelation 21:3-4** also shows God’s perfect intent—no more sorrow, death, crying, or pain. These biblical bookends reveal God’s heart and desire. As we read in **Genesis 3**, sin opened the door to sickness, pain, disease, and death. This necessitated a plan to redeem and restore humanity and the earth. Jesus’ death on the cross brings salvation for the penalty of sin and ultimately provides salvation from the effects of sin.

While God’s ultimate intent is to heal and restore, there are parts of the earthly journey that involve suffering. While we wait for His complete or full work of restoration, we can see purpose in the pain that we experience along the way. In Scripture we are told that even in our waiting, God is at work.

Sometimes we can find purpose in our suffering and sometimes we can’t—but God is always there.

We understand that suffering can sometimes serve a purpose:

- We share in the suffering of Jesus Christ (**1 Peter 4:12-13; Romans 8:17**).
- Suffering reveals the power of God (**John 9:3**).
- Sometimes God disciplines us through suffering (**Psalms 32:3-5**).
- Suffering refines us (**2 Corinthians 4:8-18; John 15:1-7**).

There is good news for those who are experiencing suffering:

- God is with you in your suffering (**Matthew 28:20**).
- The enemy does not have the last say (**1 Corinthians 15:54, 57**).
- God's power is made perfect in weakness (**2 Corinthians 12:7-10**).
- God can work through all things (**Romans 8:28**).
- We rejoice in the promise of complete healing when He will make everything new (**Revelation 21:4-5**).

These statements are both true and difficult. They are not platitudes to offer those of us who are suffering but rather a deep foundational truth that we can stand on. These are not trite bandaid sayings but rather radical and healing statements that we can build our lives on. God is good, just, in control. AND, yet, sometimes His goodness can be seen in how He meets us in our darkest moments. His justice is seen in His victory over evil, even as we continue to live in a broken world.

Important Note:

This study guide deals with hard and vulnerable topics and feelings. As you work through the material, we hope you will be willing to keep going—to continue on even if it is difficult or uncomfortable. There may be times you feel a question is difficult, painful, or wrong—keep going—there is something to be gained here. Listen to the voice of Jesus—He is kind, gentle, and without condemnation. You may want to move to the next question and come back later. Keep your heart, hands, and mind open to what God is showing you. Processing these hard things with other people you trust can be helpful as well.

Helpful Tips

Definitions

It can be helpful to find some common language for words that get used often and in multiple ways. We'll be using these words throughout the course of this study.¹

Trust: firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

Sovereignty: supreme power or authority.

Grief: deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone's death.

Lament: a passionate expression of grief or sorrow.

Humility: a modest or low view of one's own importance.

Worship: the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for God.

The Practice of Lament

Each week we will be interacting with the practice of Lament. There will be instructions to guide you. However, there are detailed instructions you can reference on page 112.

Pause to Notice

The pause to notice sections are opportunities to be more reflective. Use the space provided to jot down your thoughts, answers, and ponderings.

¹ Definitions taken from Oxford Languages Dictionary

Trusting God's Sovereignty in our Suffering

Lesson 1

Job 1:1-22; 2:1-10; 19:25-27

James: 1:2-4, 12-18; 5:10-12

Let's Begin.

1. As you read **Job 1:1-5 & 8**, what are you beginning to learn about Job?

“All of a sudden, we’re transported to God’s divine command center, the heavenly throne-room, where God’s executive staff reports for duty. This is a very familiar image in the Old Testament that describes God as the sovereign King over all creation (see **1 Kings 22:13-23**, and **Psalms 103:20-21**). He’s like a king who daily assembles his officers, surveys the land, and then sends them off for various missions (**Isaiah 6:1-8**). We’re told in **Job 1:6** that God’s subservient divine beings (called ‘sons of God’) report for duty as usual ...”¹

¹Mackie, Tim. “The Story of Job: Discover How the Introduction Sets the Stage.” *BibleProject*, 14 Dec. 2023, bibleproject.com/articles/book-job-whats-going/.

2. As you read **Job 1:6-12**, enter into the scene in the heavenly court. What stands out to you in the interaction between God and Satan,² the accuser?

Pause to notice.

From the very beginning of this story, we encounter some very big questions about God and about suffering. Rather than try to quickly resolve our questions, or rather than push them away because they feel too big, let's actually stop and notice. Take some time to write some of the questions that may be brewing for you. There is no need to hide or be afraid of voicing these things. God welcomes our honest inquiry and is willing to walk with us through our biggest doubts and fears.

²"This word is not a proper name, like our modern translations that use the capital letter ("Satan") might lead us to conclude. The Hebrew word 'satan' is a descriptive noun, describing any person that stands 'opposed to' or as 'an adversary' to someone else. (See **1 Kings 11:14, 23; 1 Samuel 29:4; Psalm 109:6-7; Numbers 22:22, 32**). One conclusion from this short Hebrew word study is that a variety of people or heavenly beings can be described by the word 'satan.' This means that the satan who appears in **Job 1-2** is not necessarily identical with the full-orbed evil being called by that same title in the New Testament (see **Mark 1:13**)." Mackie, Tim. "The Story of Job: Discover How the Introduction Sets the Stage." BibleProject, 14 Dec. 2023, bibleproject.com/articles/book-job-whats-going/.

3. As you read **Job 1:13-19**, to the best of your ability, imagine the complete and agonizing suffering that Job experienced. How do you think you would have responded to such tragedies?


4. What is your typical response to suffering, either your own or the suffering of others? (You can choose more than one.)

- Fear
- Anger
- Isolation
- Ignoring
- Numbing/escape
- Busyness
- Counseling
- Prayer
- Other:

5. As you read the following quote, how does it speak to your understanding of suffering?

“The suffering and evil of the world are not due to weakness, oversight, or callousness on God’s part, but, rather, they are the inescapable cost of a creation allowed to be other than God.”³

³ Polkinghorne, John. *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion*, rev. ed. Crossroad, 2006. 61.



We shun difficulty, we shun pain, we shun trouble, we shun trials and tribulations at all costs and yet, God is in our suffering. He is still in control. Suffering can be where He does some of His best work. It can be part of our spiritual maturity. We often want to fix things, to get out of it fast, because it's painful. God's heart is for the suffering to end, but while it's happening, He longs for us to lean on Him. However, that is certainly not our cultural, or the comfortable, way.

6. How did Job respond to his suffering?⁴ **(1:20-21)**

7. What does Job's response say about his relationship with God?

⁴ "Job represents his grief by shaving his head and sitting in ashes, a common way of mourning in his world. In some ancient (and current) cultures, ashes symbolize death and mourning. Baldness symbolizes deprivation and a loss of strength." BibleProject. "Book of Job: Guide with Key Information and Resources." *BibleProject*, 16 Nov. 2023, bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-job/.]]

Pause to notice.

Is there a place of pain that comes to mind for you?
What might praise sound like for you in the midst of this situation?

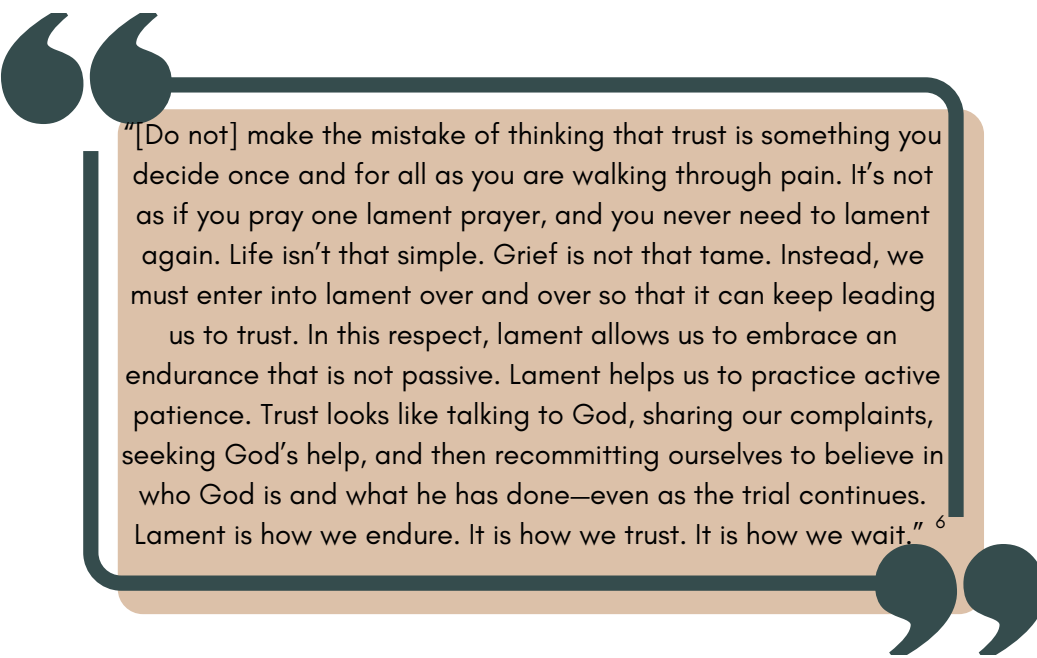
Praise may not come naturally or quickly. It can be declaring your trust, it can be committing to come to church even when you don't want to; it can be choosing to look at God instead of away from Him. You may want to borrow some of Job's words and posture. Take some time to practice praise in the midst of your suffering.

Further into Job, we see that praise was not his only worshipful response. In **chapter 3** (and others) we see that Job also lamented his complaints to God. He wasn't immune to crying out in anguish and pain. However, in all of his suffering and in his laments, *"Job did not sin by blaming God"* (**Job 1:22**). And the Lord commended Job saying, *"He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil. And he has maintained his integrity, even though you urged me to harm him without cause."* (**2:3**)

8. One author defines lament as "prayer in pain that leads to trust."⁵ In your own words, how would you describe lament?

⁵ Vroegop, Mark. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*. Crossway, 2019. 12
28

9. What are your thoughts on how lamenting can lead us to trust? Can it actually be an act of worship? Why or why not?



"[Do not] make the mistake of thinking that trust is something you decide once and for all as you are walking through pain. It's not as if you pray one lament prayer, and you never need to lament again. Life isn't that simple. Grief is not that tame. Instead, we must enter into lament over and over so that it can keep leading us to trust. In this respect, lament allows us to embrace an endurance that is not passive. Lament helps us to practice active patience. Trust looks like talking to God, sharing our complaints, seeking God's help, and then recommitting ourselves to believe in who God is and what he has done—even as the trial continues. Lament is how we endure. It is how we trust. It is how we wait."⁶

10. How does this quote help clarify the connection between lament and trust?

⁶ Vroegop, Mark. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*. Crossway, 2019. 74

What does James have to say?

Read over the following passages a few times, underlining what stands out to you.

James 1:2-4

2 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.

3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

James 1:12-18

12 God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. 14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. 16 So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. 18 He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.

James 5:10-12

10 For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

11 We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance.

You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

12 But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.

11. What kind of wisdom is emerging as you read these passages?

Pause to notice.

How does the wisdom of James help you as you engage with Job's story?

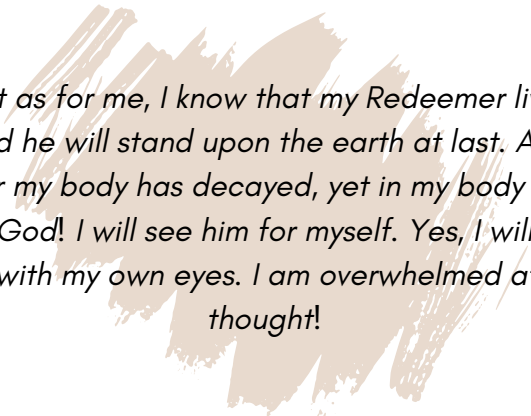
How does it help you as you engage with your own story?

Take some time to be still and pay attention to what God is drawing your attention to. Make some notes here.

Job's initial response was lament as an act of worship (**Job 1:21**). Job also continued to respond to God by asking questions and expressing doubts (for example: **Job 9:16; 31:1-40**). Ultimately, even though nothing about his situation had changed, Job acknowledged his position with humility. Job never stopped trusting God, but he didn't just say everything was okay or rationalize it away. He asked questions, he doubted, he cried out, and yet in that he didn't sin.

12. In Job's responses, we observe great humility. What are your observations and reactions to Job's humble responses? (**Job 1:21; 42:1-6**)

13. Even as his suffering continued and grew to include his own health and wellbeing (**Job 2:1-10**), Job responded in trust. In **Job 19:25-27** he says,



*“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
and he will stand upon the earth at last. And
after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will
see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see
him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the
thought!”*

Read these words multiple times and let them sink into your heart, mind, and spirit. You may even want to write them down somewhere where you can return to them throughout the day and week.

On Mission

“As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we’re different. Why we’re not bitter. Why the flames haven’t destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. There’s nothing unusual about Christians who are happy in prosperity. That’s natural. Even expected. But joy in suffering is supernatural. The world takes notice. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (**1 Peter 3:15**). A few of us may end up giving our lives for the gospel. Some of us may proclaim Christ through indescribable and extraordinary suffering. But all of us can show the surpassing worth of Christ to others through our mundane, often daily, trials. People want to see how we respond to our challenging children. Our chronic pain. Our difficult boss. Our financial struggles. Our ailing parents. Our unwanted singleness. The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have.”⁷

This week, as you notice your places of suffering and pain, what could it look like for these to be an opportunity to share with others about the hope that you have in Christ?

⁷Rendall Risner, Vaneetha. “What Only Suffering Can Say: How Trials Feed the Flame of Witness.” *Desiring God*, 6 Oct. 2023, www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-only-suffering-can-say.



practice of lament

Over the next 4 weeks, we will be walking through the four movements of lament: ***turning to God, bringing your complaints, asking boldly and choosing to trust.***

For this first lesson we will focus on **Turning to God.**

To lament isn't simply to experience grief or cry out in our pain. It's the process of turning to God, of crying out to Him in our grief and pain.

As we look at the life of Job, he did exactly that. Rather than staying silent about his suffering or allowing his bitterness to turn into unbelief, he expressed it all to God (**Job 30:20**).

In the same way we are invited to address God in our pain as we come to Him.

In the space on the next page, start writing out your lament by turning to God. Think about a situation in your life or someone else's that is causing grief and pain and cry out to God about it. Don't be surprised if this feels slightly awkward. For many of us, it is exercising a new muscle as we learn to lament.

Sermon Notes

The Power of Words

Lesson 2

Job 2:9-13; 42:7-9; Narratives with friends

James 1:19, 26; 3:1-8, 17-18; 4:7-12

The Story

Job had lost everything—his health, his livelihood, his livestock, and even his children. He was devastated, in anguish, and experiencing deep grief. Yet, Job wasn't completely alone; he still had his wife. In addition, three of his friends came from their homes to comfort and be with him. Each of these people had influence in Job's life, and the words they spoke held power and had impact. However, not all of their words were helpful, truthful, or godly.

Let's Begin.

In **Job 2:9** we meet Job's wife. She had just experienced great loss as well. While it appears she still had her health, she had lost her security and most of the people she loved. She was hurting and broken. Then, her husband was afflicted with even more pain in the form of terrible boils from head to foot (**Job 2:7-8**). The first words we hear from her are dramatic and heavy: *"Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die."* (**Job 2:9**)

1. What is your first reaction to Job's wife's response?

Why do you think she spoke those words to Job?


2. In what way do you imagine you would have responded in her situation?

3. How did Job respond to his wife's words? (**2:10**)

Read **Job 2:11-13** and notice how Job's three friends comforted him.

11 When three of Job's friends heard of the tragedy he had suffered, they got together and traveled from their homes to comfort and console him. Their names were Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. 12 When they saw Job from a distance, they scarcely recognized him. Wailing loudly, they tore their robes and threw dust into the air over their heads to show their grief. 13 Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. No one said a word to Job, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words.

4. How did Job's friends enter into his suffering in these verses? What can we learn from their example?



After seven days together, Job broke the silence. He spends chapter three cursing the day of his birth (though not cursing God). “According to Jewish tradition, people who come to comfort someone in mourning should not speak until the mourner speaks.”¹ Therefore, since Job had broken the silence, we now get to hear words from his friends.²

Each friend talked to Job three times.³ “In the first set of speeches, the friends offer advice to Job. They use generalizations peppered with exhortations as they hold out the hope of restoration. In the second cycle, they turn their attention to the fate of the wicked. No hint of commiseration remains as they repeatedly insult and humiliate Job with insinuations [that he is to blame for his suffering]. In the third cycle, they turn to direct accusations of Job.”⁴

The chart on the next page summarizes Job’s friends’ responses, how they relate to today’s equivalent ideas/beliefs/ideologies, and then Job’s response to that “wisdom.”

¹ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2012. 788

² While each friend takes a slightly different approach to Job, they are unified in many ways. “The friends corporately represent the sages of the ancient world. They are the wisest men who can be found, and in that role they offer the cutting-edge philosophy of the day. ... The friends together play the role of representing, at least in part, the thinking of the ancient Near East ... the friends are all interested in helping Job appease a god who is angry (in their minds, undoubtedly and justifiably so) in order that he might be restored to favor and prosperity.” Walton, John H., and Tremper Longman. *How to Read Job*. InterVarsity Press, 2015. 67-69

³ “Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar play the crucial role of one form of ‘conventional wisdom’—the unbending, have-it-all-together theologians who believe their wisdom sufficient to understand the ways of God in the world: God is both almighty and just; suffering is the result of human sin; therefore, there is no such thing as undeserved suffering, and Job should own up and confess his (hidden) sins so that he will be restored.” Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. Zondervan, 2014. Bible Gateway Plus

⁴ Walton, John H., and Tremper Longman. *How to Read Job*. InterVarsity Press, 2015. 67

Friend	Conventional Wisdom of Job's Day	Key Verses	Modern Equivalent	Job's Response
Eliphaz	<p>Relies on and universalizes his experience (4:8-17)</p> <p>Heavily relies on his opinions (4:8)</p> <p>Claims to know that Job suffered because of sin</p> <p>Accuses Job of despising God's discipline (5:17)</p> <p>Claims that if Job submits to God he will have peace (22:1-25)</p>	<p>4:8-17 5:17 5:27 15:17</p>	<p>Moral one-upmanship</p> <p>Ruled by opinion</p> <p>My way is the right way</p> <p>Jumping to quick conclusions about the cause of suffering</p> <p>"Just give it to God"/"Just turn to God"</p>	<p>Stop assuming things about me (6:29 and 6:10-13)</p> <p>My friends scorn but I pour out my tears to God (16:20-21)</p> <p>God will find me pure (23:10)</p>
Bildad	<p>Over-reliance on tradition and law</p> <p>Save yourself—if you admit you are wrong, it will get better</p> <p>How long can you go on like this—do something (8:2)</p> <p>You are getting what you deserve—No one is innocent (25:4)</p>	<p>8:3-7 8:8-10 18:11-21</p>	<p>Self help</p> <p>Health and wealth</p> <p>Works not faith</p> <p>You have the power to do something to change your situation</p> <p>You can always pull yourself up by your bootstraps</p>	<p>This may be true in principle but who can challenge God (9:2-4)</p> <p>You don't have the right to judge me. I know my God; I will see Him (19:1-5, 25-29)</p> <p>Defends his integrity (27:3-5)</p>
Zophar	<p>Reliance on the common sense of the day: evil people suffer, good people succeed</p> <p>Get real, stop the dramatics</p> <p>Pull yourself together</p> <p>Trite religious answers</p>	<p>11:5-6 11:13-15 20:4-5, 29 21:34</p>	<p>You are just in it for the drama</p> <p>Use your head</p> <p>Get up—dust yourself off</p> <p>Churchy cliché</p>	<p>I am just and blameless (12:4)</p> <p>I will prove my innocence (13:15-19)</p> <p>The reality is the wicked prosper (21:28-30)</p> <p>You speak in empty cliché (21:34)</p>

Pause to notice.

It can be easy to identify the mistakes of Job's friends without taking the time to consider the ways that we may have similar reactions in our own current situations and conversations. Take some time to honestly reflect.

Which of the friends do you see yourself in?
(Refer back to the chart on page 26, if needed.)

What kinds of things do you hear yourself say when you are trying to understand suffering?

What kinds of things do you hear yourself say when you are trying to comfort your friends who are hurting?

5. What challenges you about Job's responses to his friends?

What inspires you?

“ “[Job] is willing to wait in the space of non-answer. That’s the space in which God creates faith. The [friends] are not willing to live in that space where there is no answer, no conclusions.”⁵ ”

At the end of Job’s interactions with his friends, an additional “friend” is introduced. “Elihu plays the role of the overconfidence of youth, who think they really are wiser than their elders. At the same time, ironically, he does in fact have an additional point to make that the other three do not—that beyond Job’s obviously deserved punishment there is a chastening value to such punishment that Job ought to be willing to accept.”⁶ He focuses on the sin of self-righteousness.

“More specifically, Elihu is angry because Job regards his own righteousness more highly than he regards God’s. This is the same accusation God will make in **Job 40:8**, so his anger on this point is justifiable.”⁷ “Elihu paves the way for God’s speech to Job. And in the end, God is angry with the first three friends, but not with Elihu.”⁸ Job doesn’t respond to Elihu like he did with the other three friends.

Optional: What do you find interesting or noteworthy about the character of Elihu? (You can answer this question based on the information above, or you can read more about him in **Job 32-37**.)

⁵Rohr, Richard. *Job and the Mystery of Suffering*. Crossroad, 1997. 74

⁶Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. Zondervan, 2014. Bible Gateway Plus

⁷Walton, John. *NIV Application Commentary: Job*. Zondervan, 2012. Bible Gateway Plus

⁸Halley, Henry H., and Ed M. Van der Maas. *Halley’s Bible Handbook*. Zondervan, 2014. Bible Gateway Plus

Pause to notice.

It seems that the difference between wise counsel and bad counsel isn't always as obvious as we may wish. And, there are times when we fall into the place of offering counsel to others that may not actually be godly wisdom.

What kind of discernment might God be inviting you into when it comes to ways you engage with the suffering of others?

God did not take the words Job's friends spoke to Job lightly. After God interacted with Job in **Job 38-41**, He addressed the friends in **42:7-9**:

42:7 After the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has. 8 So take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer on your behalf. I will not treat you as you deserve, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has." 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did as the LORD commanded them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

6. What does God's reaction say to you about the power of words?

What does God's reaction say to you about the power of grace?

What does James have to say?

James also holds a lot of wisdom and instruction about the power of words. Read the following verses and answer the questions below.

James 3:2-8

2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. 3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. 4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. 5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. 6 And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. 7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.

7. Here, James used three metaphors, some dramatic comparisons, and very strong words to make his point. In your own words, express what you are hearing in this passage.

James 1:19, 26

*19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.
26 If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.*

8. How is the wisdom in these two verses related to each other?

James 4:7-12

7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. 9 Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor. 11 Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. 12 God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

9. What role does humility play when it comes to our words and our counsel of others?

James 3:17-18

17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. 18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

10. How can we display God's wisdom through our words, counsel, and actions?

On Mission

"As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we're different. Why we're not bitter. Why the flames haven't destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (**1 Peter 3:15**). The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have."⁹

This week, as you notice your places of suffering and pain, what could it look like for these to be an opportunity to share with others about the hope you have in Christ?

⁹Rendall Risner, Vaneetha. "What Only Suffering Can Say: How Trials Feed the Flame of Witness." *Desiring God*, 6 Oct. 2023, www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-only-suffering-can-say.

Having engaged with the first movement of lament in the previous lesson (turning to God), we will now move on to the second movement: **Bringing your complaints to God**—our fears, worries, concerns, doubts, confusion, hardships, etc.

The practice of godly complaint can feel foreign to many Christians.¹⁰ We often associate complaining with a lack of faith or a sign of immaturity in our suffering. And yet the Bible is full of examples of people bringing their complaints to God. Job did this very well. Throughout this book, we see Job specifically naming the injustices he experienced in his life (**Job 6:29; 16:2; 17:2**). He brought his questions and frustrations to God, all with an unfiltered and unedited honesty. (**Job 3:11-12; 7:19; 9:22; 13:24; 17:6-9; 21:7-18**)

It seems that instead of our complaints being a lack of faith or maturity, it is the biblically appropriate and faith-filled response to bring the injustices, disappointments, and sorrows we and others experience in this broken world to God.

On the next page, continue writing out your lament by bringing your complaints to God. Try not to filter or edit your words as you do. It may be that some of what you write doesn't sound theologically accurate or "appropriate" for a Christian to say (**Job 3:3**). That's okay. That's part of embracing the messy and necessary process of lament.

¹⁰ Vroegop, Mark. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*. Crossway, 2019. 43

Sermon Notes

Seeking God's Wisdom and Counsel in Times of Suffering

Lesson 3

Job 12:13-25; 28:23-28; 38:1-18; 40:6-14; 42:1-6

James 1:5; 3:17

The Story

In the previous lesson we saw Job's friends offer supportive silence but then poor counsel. While having supportive people around you can be crucial in times of suffering, Job and James teach us that we should ultimately seek God's wisdom and counsel.

Let's Begin.

1. Read **Job 12:13-25**. How does Job describe God's mysterious ways?

"... Job believed the mystery was profound; and he was amazed that [his friends] would be so shallow. Job saw God as so wise and powerful that he cannot be put in a box. He has sovereign freedom. Job illustrated this by drawing a word picture of the mystery of God's acts in the history of the human race. God humbles great people and nations, showing himself to be the only truly sovereign being."¹

¹ Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway Plus


2. How do you tend to respond to the mystery of God and His wisdom?

What could it look like for you to lean into God's mysterious ways?

Pause to notice.

We often don't even know the ways we limit God and put Him into a box. Take a moment to simply ask God: How do I tend to put You in a box?

3. As you read **Job 28:23-28** and **James 3:17**, list the descriptions about God's wisdom.

“God alone knows where the wisdom is, for he is omniscient. Human beings must search for their treasure, but God sees everything without searching. When he brought order out of the primeval chaos, he used wisdom to do it. Wisdom is the summary of the genius God used to fashion the universe.”²

Throughout all of the friends' speeches seen in the last lesson (**chapters 4-37**), Job's responses showed that he longed to hear from God, to know what God wanted, and to understand God's wisdom. Take some time to read Job's words in **Job 7:6-21; 10:1-22; 13:1-3, 15-28; 23:3-7**.

4. What strikes you or surprises you about Job's posture and words to and about God in these passages?

²Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway Plus

5. How would you describe your own longing for God's wisdom in your life?

6. Looking back, how have you experienced God's wisdom in the midst of difficult or confusing circumstances?

7. How are you currently seeking God's wisdom?

Let's get a glimpse at the end of this story to see how God Himself describes His wisdom and sovereignty. As you read these excerpts from **chapters 38** and **40**, imagine what God's voice might have sounded like to Job.

Job 38:1-18

1 Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind:

2 "Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words?

*3 Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.*

4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell me, if you know so much.

5 Who determined its dimensions and stretched out the surveying line?

*6 What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone 7 as the
morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?*

*8 "Who kept the sea inside its boundaries as it burst from the womb,
9 and as I clothed it with clouds and wrapped it in thick darkness?*

10 For I locked it behind barred gates, limiting its shores.

*11 I said, 'This far and no farther will you come. Here your proud waves
must stop!'*

*12 "Have you ever commanded the morning to appear and caused the
dawn to rise in the east?*

*13 Have you made daylight spread to the ends of the earth, to bring an
end to the night's wickedness?*

*14 As the light approaches, the earth takes shape like clay pressed
beneath a seal; it is robed in brilliant colors.*

*15 The light disturbs the wicked and stops the arm that is raised in
violence.*

16 "Have you explored the springs from which the seas come?

Have you explored their depths?

17 Do you know where the gates of death are located?

Have you seen the gates of utter gloom?

18 Do you realize the extent of the earth?

Tell me about it if you know!

Job 40:6-14

6 Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind:

7 "Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.

8 "Will you discredit my justice and condemn me just to prove you are right?

9 Are you as strong as God? Can you thunder with a voice like his?

10 All right, put on your glory and splendor, your honor and majesty.

11 Give vent to your anger. Let it overflow against the proud.

12 Humiliate the proud with a glance; walk on the wicked where they stand.

13 Bury them in the dust. Imprison them in the world of the dead.

14 Then even I would praise you, for your own strength would save you.

8. What words, ideas, or imagery particularly captivated you from these passages?

Pause to notice.

We've been focusing on God's wisdom, God's sovereignty, and God's mystery. Make note of what is stirring in you. You may want to write out some prayers of worship and awe.

As we skip ahead to the very end of the story, look at Job's response to God:

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job replied to the LORD:

*2 "I know that you can do anything,
and no one can stop you.*

*3 You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?'
It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about,
things far too wonderful for me.*

*4 You said, 'Listen and I will speak!
I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.'*

*5 I had only heard about you before,
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.*

*6 I take back everything I said,
and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."*

9. What sticks out to you about Job's response?

What do you notice about both humility and repentance from his words?

Pause to notice.

As you read this **Job 42:1-6**, how are humility and repentance rising up in you?

What does James have to say?

James 1:5

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

How do we seek God's wisdom and counsel? There are multiple ways to seek it, here are a few of them:

- **Humility and reverence.** "The first step toward true wisdom is a reverent and respectful attitude toward God, which also involves a humble attitude toward oneself. Personal pride is the greatest barrier to spiritual wisdom."
- **Ask and listen.** "Ask God for wisdom (**James 1:5**). When we ask, we then get to watch and wait for the variety of ways that He will respond to our request."
- **Discern together.** "Discernment is always done best in community. We get to seek the counsel of those in our family of faith who are also asking and listening."
- **Eyes on Jesus.** "The important thing is that we focus on Christ, for He is our wisdom (see **1 Corinthians 1:24**), and in Him is hidden 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (**Colossians 2:3**). The better we know Christ and the more we become like Him, the more we will walk in wisdom and understand the will of God. We must allow the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our heart, so we can see God in His Word and understand more of the riches we have in Christ (**Ephesians 1:15-23**)."³

³All quotes from: Wiersbe, Warren W. *The WIERSBE Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2019. Bible Gateway Plus

10. As you read through the list on the previous page, which are particularly relevant for you? How might you engage with this further in the next few days and weeks?

On Mission

“As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we’re different. Why we’re not bitter. Why the flames haven’t destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (**1 Peter 3:15**). The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have.”⁴

This week, as you notice your places of suffering and pain, what could it look like for these to be an opportunity to share with others about the hope you have in Christ?

⁴Rendall Risner, Vaneetha. “What Only Suffering Can Say: How Trials Feed the Flame of Witness.” *Desiring God*, 6 Oct. 2023, www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-only-suffering-can-say.

The third movement of lament is to **Ask Boldly**.

It can be tempting to camp out in complaint and/or to let our complaints consume us. And yet the practice of lament now instructs us to ask boldly—“to fix our eyes on God and specifically call upon Him to act in a manner that fits His character.”⁴

In the Bible we see that there are many examples of what it looks like to ask boldly. The examples include calling on God to act justly (**Psalm 83:16-18**), to remember His covenant faithfulness (**Psalm 25:6**), to bring restoration (**Psalm 80:3**), and to provide mercy (**Psalm 51:1**). Job asked God boldly to vindicate him and to not be silent in his suffering (**Job 17:3; 13:20-22**).

On the next page, continue writing out your lament by presenting your “asks” boldly to God. Look back on your previous movements of lament and call upon God to act according to His character in light of these situations. And remember, we can ask boldly because we have a Savior who understands deeply, who sympathizes with our weakness, and who is a Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. (**Hebrews 4:15; Isaiah 53:3**)

Sermon Notes

Contentment that Is Not Tied to Circumstances

Lesson 4

Job 1:20-22; 21:22-26; 28:1-28

James 1:9-11; 2:5; 5:1-5

The Story

During the back-and-forth discussions Job had with his friends, he continually declared his innocence. Sprinkled throughout Job's rebuttals were glimpses of his trust in God's plan. In fact, regardless of what God gave or what He took, Job would continue to trust God's wisdom. Job declared that both the wealthy and the poor are buried in the same dust (**Job 21:26**); therefore, it's not gold or riches we should be searching for, but rather the wisdom of God (**Job 28**).

Let's Begin.

1. How do you view or describe contentment?

2. What is contentment reliant upon in your life? (You can choose more than one.)
 - Money
 - Status/reputation
 - Possessions
 - Comfort
 - People
 - Harmony in relationships
 - A sense of purpose
 - Other:

Let's jump back to the beginning of the story. Job was introduced as the richest person in the land of Uz in **Job 1:2**. He is the "ultimate example of a person who is beyond reproach and who has achieved success by the highest standards."¹ He had it all—wealth in terms of money (animals and servants), relationships with seven sons and three daughters, and status as a blameless and upright man. So when he lost everything, he lost a LOT. Therefore, it speaks volumes about Job when we see that his response was not to curse God but to respond with, *"I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!"* (**Job 1:21**)

3. Knowing how much Job lost, where would you say Job found his contentment?

Pause to notice.

We aren't told how quickly Job landed at contentment. Perhaps he had cultivated a lifetime of trust so it came more naturally. Perhaps it was a divine gift of peace. Maybe a combination of both. Think about your own experience or lack of experience with contentment.

Take some time to honestly note both places of contentment as well as your struggle to find it.

¹ Walton, John. *NIV Application Commentary: Job*. Zondervan, 2012. Bible Gateway Plus

Throughout Job's responses to his friends, he revealed what he knew about earthly circumstances. Read Job's words in **21:22-26** below.

*22 But who can teach a lesson to God,
since he judges even the most powerful?*

*23 One person dies in prosperity,
completely comfortable and secure,*

*24 the picture of good health,
vigorous and fit.*

*25 Another person dies in bitter poverty,
never having tasted the good life.*

*26 But both are buried in the same dust,
both eaten by the same maggots.*

4. How would you describe Job's view of earthly circumstances?

In a later response, Job went on to reveal his view that wealth is worthless. He seemed to understand that the truly valuable thing is God's wisdom. Take some time to read **Job 28** below, underlining what you notice about wealth and wisdom.

1 "People know where to mine silver and how to refine gold.

*2 They know where to dig iron from the earth and how to smelt copper
from rock.*

*3 They know how to shine light in the darkness and explore the farthest
regions of the earth as they search in the dark for ore.*

*4 They sink a mine shaft into the earth far from where anyone lives.
They descend on ropes, swinging back and forth.*

*5 Food is grown on the earth above, but down below, the earth is melted
as by fire.*

6 Here the rocks contain precious lapis lazuli, and the dust contains gold.

7 These are treasures no bird of prey can see, no falcon's eye observe.

8 No wild animal has walked upon these treasures; no lion has ever set his paw there.

9 People know how to tear apart flinty rocks and overturn the roots of mountains.

10 They cut tunnels in the rocks and uncover precious stones.

11 They dam up the trickling streams and bring to light the hidden treasures.

12 "But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding?"

13 No one knows where to find it, for it is not found among the living.

14 'It is not here,' says the ocean. 'Nor is it here,' says the sea.

15 It cannot be bought with gold. It cannot be purchased with silver.

16 It's worth more than all the gold of Ophir, greater than precious onyx or lapis lazuli.

17 Wisdom is more valuable than gold and crystal. It cannot be purchased with jewels mounted in fine gold.

18 Coral and jasper are worthless in trying to get it.
The price of wisdom is far above rubies.

19 Precious peridot from Ethiopia cannot be exchanged for it.
It's worth more than the purest gold.

20 "But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding?"

21 It is hidden from the eyes of all humanity.
Even the sharp-eyed birds in the sky cannot discover it.

22 Destruction and Death say, 'We've heard only rumors of where wisdom can be found.'

23 "God alone understands the way to wisdom; he knows where it can be found,

24 for he looks throughout the whole earth and sees everything under the heavens.

25 He decided how hard the winds should blow and how much rain should fall.

26 He made the laws for the rain and laid out a path for the lightning.

27 Then he saw wisdom and evaluated it. He set it in place and examined it thoroughly.

28 And this is what he says to all humanity The fear of the Lord is true wisdom; to forsake evil is real understanding."

“Job was tested. With a life filled with prestige, possessions, and people, he was suddenly assaulted on every side, devastated, stripped down to the foundation. But his life had been built on God, and he endured.”²

5. How do you create a firm foundation so you aren't rocked by circumstances?

6. How can seeking God's wisdom and trusting in Him bring contentment and peace in whatever life circumstances you find yourself?

7. What does seeking God's wisdom look like in your life?³

² *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2012. 783

³ "The fear of the Lord' is a key theme in the wisdom literature of the Bible. It means to have respect and reverence for God and to be in awe of his majesty and power. This is the starting point to finding real wisdom." *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2012. 820

“Through Job’s life we can see that faith in God is justified even when our situations look hopeless. Faith based on rewards or prosperity is hollow. To be unshakable, faith must be built on the confidence that God’s ultimate purpose will come to pass.”⁴

Pause to notice.

As we consider the notion of contentment and trust in spite of life struggles, you may be experiencing some tension. Maybe you’re thinking, “Sure. Great idea, but how?” Maybe some of the quotes and Scriptures sound more like a cheesy Hallmark card than reality.

Does skepticism or doubt rise up in you as you wonder if anyone can actually ever live and think this way? Noticing reactions like this can be really helpful as we wrestle with God through spiritual principles that are, by nature, quite counter-intuitive. Whatever they may be, take some time to simply notice your reactions and prayerfully process them. Just like when we lament, God is not offended or surprised by our reactions or doubts.

What does James have to say?

We live in a culture that highly values money. Those who are wealthy are esteemed, those who are poor are looked down upon, pitied, and often ignored. We often place worth on people and ourselves based on financial circumstances. Yet, as we learned from Job, in God's Kingdom, things are looked at quite differently.

8. Underline how the James passages below help clarify what is important in God's kingdom?

James 1:9-11⁵

9 Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them. 10 And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them.

They will fade away like a little flower in the field.

11 The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.

James 2:2-5

2 For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. 3 If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, 4 doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? 5 Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?

⁵ "The wealthy believer, then, is exhorted to glory 'in his low position.' Since the context deals with trials, the low position may describe the humbling experience of suffering persecution for Christ's sake. The very same treatment that exalts the poor and gives them a new sense of worth also humbles the rich. Suffering shows the rich that, instead of having a lasting lease on life on this earth, their lives are no more permanent than 'a wild flower' (**Isaiah 40:6-8**). Suffering and persecution reveal how tentative and short life really is." Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway plus

James 5:1-5⁶

1 Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. 2 Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. 4 For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. 5 You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter.

God's Kingdom values are upside down compared to our culture. A life filled with wisdom, peace, trust, and contentment comes from a very different source than many people seek. And this kind of life can be experienced regardless of our circumstances.

Pause to pray.

God, what do you want to show me today about Yourself that could take me deeper into trust and contentment?

God, I invite You to challenge my views about earthly finances, possessions, and comforts.

God, what is Your invitation to me today? How are You deepening my trust in You regardless of my circumstances?

⁶“Having condemned the wealthy landowners for their indifference, James next points out that riches are worthless when it comes to eternal salvation. ... James provides four reasons for the wealthy landowners to weep: Their wealth is temporal and subject to the ravages of time; they are guilty of a crime against their sisters and brothers; they will be judged and condemned for this selfish use of temporal goods; and they have been adding to their material treasure as if the world will go on forever.” Nystrom, David P. *James: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 1997. Bible Gateway Plus

On Mission

“As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we’re different. Why we’re not bitter. Why the flames haven’t destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (**1 Peter 3:15**). The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have.”⁷

This week, as you notice your places of suffering and pain, what could it look like for these to be an opportunity to share with others about the hope you have in Christ?

⁷Rendall Risner, Vaneetha. “What Only Suffering Can Say: How Trials Feed the Flame of Witness.” *Desiring God*, 6 Oct. 2023, www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-only-suffering-can-say.

The final movement of lament is **Choosing to Trust**.

“This is where all laments are designed to lead. ... If you don’t end in trust, you have not lamented. You’ve just been sad.”⁸

We see this progression throughout the book of Job—he turned to God, brought his complaints, asked boldly, and ultimately ended his lament with a declaration of trust.

*“I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted...
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” (Job 42:2-3)*

Job’s final response to God was one of worship. Despite all the pain and suffering he had and continued to experience, he chose to put his trust in the mystery and majesty of God.

We too are invited to do the same. This isn’t just a one-time act. “We must enter into lament over and over so that it can keep leading us to trust”⁹ It may be a monthly, weekly, or even a daily practice at times.

On the next page, end your lament by choosing to trust. For some, all that you may be able to muster is “Lord I trust You, help my lack of trusting.” For others, you may find yourself drawn to expressing your trust by rehearsing God’s steadfast love and faithfulness in your life.

⁸Vroegop, Mark, et al. “Discover the Grace of Lament.” *The Gospel Coalition*, 4 Oct. 2019, www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/tgc-podcast/discover-grace-lament/.

⁹Vroegop, Mark. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*. Crossway, 2019. 74

Sermon Notes

Remaining Faithful to God in Dark Seasons

Lesson 5

Job 6:10; 19:25-27; 23:3-12

James 1:2-4, 12-18

The Story

Job had been dealt a really rotten hand—he was hurting, he was grieving, he was walking through the fire. If ever anyone was having a dark season or the dark night of the soul, it was Job. Having lost everything, it would seem the likely response would be to give up or, as Job's wife so "kindly" put it: to "curse God and die." Yet, throughout the entire book of Job we see that wasn't Job's response. Sure, he was angry and he cried out, but he always responded with deep faithfulness to God, never taking his eyes off God, and never letting go of his trust in the Almighty.

Let's Begin.

Scattered amongst Job's responses to his friends were glimpses of his ongoing trust in God throughout his dark season.

1. Read through the following passages and underline what you notice about Job's faithfulness.

Job 6:10

*At least I can take comfort in this:
Despite the pain,
I have not denied the words of the Holy One.*

Job 19:25-27

*25 "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
and he will stand upon the earth at last.
26 And after my body has decayed,
yet in my body I will see God!
27 I will see him for myself.
Yes, I will see him with my own eyes.
I am overwhelmed at the thought!*

Job 23:3-12

*3 If only I knew where to find God,
I would go to his court.*

*4 I would lay out my case
and present my arguments.*

*5 Then I would listen to his reply
and understand what he says to me.*

*6 Would he use his great power to argue with me?
No, he would give me a fair hearing.*

*7 Honest people can reason with him,
so I would be forever acquitted by my judge.*

*8 I go east, but he is not there.
I go west, but I cannot find him.*

*9 I do not see him in the north, for he is hidden.
I look to the south, but he is concealed.*

*10 "But he knows where I am going.
And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold.*

*11 For I have stayed on God's paths;
I have followed his ways and not turned aside.*

*12 I have not departed from his commands,
but have treasured his words more than daily food.*

2. What is your first reaction to Job's ongoing faithfulness?

3. What are some of the reasons Job gave for remaining faithful?

Pause to notice.

Think back over some of the difficult and dark seasons you have experienced in your life as well as some of your current difficulties. Likely, your emotional and spiritual reactions were varied. Make note of both the times when you were able to trust God and times when you doubted that He even cared.

4. How can we stay faithful even when circumstances seem impossible?

5. What does staying faithful look like in your life?

6. How does faithfulness show our love for God?

How is faithfulness an act of worship?

7. What can we do when we feel like we are staying faithful but God seems silent or hard to find?

What does James have to say?

Read the James passages and then answer the questions on the following page.

James 1:2-4

2 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. 3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

James 1:12-18

12 God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. 14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. 16 So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. 18 He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.

8. How is endurance connected to faith?

9. As you read through the James passages, what did you find to be encouraging or inspiring?

What did you find frustrating, confusing, or challenging?

10. How can we grow in endurance?

How would you, personally, like to grow in endurance?

Pause to notice.

Take some time to worship God. As you do, you may want to think about things like His faithful love, His perfect wisdom, His eternal presence, His absolute power, His peace, and so much more.

This worship time may look like journaling, praying out loud, sharing with a friend, singing worship songs, making something creative, going for a walk, reading a book about God's faithfulness, or reciting a liturgy.

You may want to read and ponder the following liturgy as part of your worship time:

"Oh Jesus, who meets me in the shadow and the sorrow,
Oh Jesus, who leads me into light and bright delight,
As I walk through the valley of thickening twilight,
or of death's dark night, let this be the sum and substance
of my hope, my peace, and my rest:
You are always with me. I am not alone.
You will never leave me. I will never be alone."¹

¹McKelvey, Douglas Kaine, et al. *Every Moment Holy: Death, Grief, and Hope*. Vol. 2, Rabbit Room Press, 2021. 313

On Mission

"As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we're different. Why we're not bitter. Why the flames haven't destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (**1 Peter 3:15**). The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have."²

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- It might be difficult to be present with someone and feel as if we're offering them nothing in their pain. Our attentive and loving presence is the gift we offer to the one sharing their lament, trusting that God is present in our presence.

Opening prayers

- Start with a time of prayer. We suggest using the prayers on pages 113-114.

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "Let's now spend time in silence, to be still and become aware of God's presence together."*

Read lament and share any additional thoughts (5-7 mins)

- Share the lament.
- *Time Keeper: "Thank you [name] for your vulnerability and courage in sharing your lament with us. Is there anything else you would like to share before we enter a time of silence?"*

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- Questions for facilitators to ask in response:
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 - *How would you describe your thoughts/feelings toward yourself or God because of this?*
 - *Where have you sensed God's presence (or absence) in this situation?*
 - *How do you think God feels/thinks about you as you experience this situation?*
 - *How would you like Jesus to help you in this?*
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Sermon Notes

Cultivating Patience through Suffering

Lesson 6

James 5:7-11; 1:2-18

The Story

We don't know how long Job suffered. It could have been days, weeks, months, or even years. Yet, James reveals that Job was a man of great endurance, which means that his suffering had to have been some period of time. Suffering can be acute or chronic, but no matter the length, we can learn to persevere through suffering with patience.

Let's Begin.

The author of James says this in **James 5:10-11**:

10 For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.



Oxford Languages defines patience as “the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset.”



1. Take some time to review and think through Job's story. Make note of ways that Job experienced and demonstrated patience in the midst of great suffering. (It may be helpful to watch the Bible Project overview video on Job, which can be found on youtube or the Bible Project website.)



2. What benefits does patience have in our lives?

3. Another word for patience is long-suffering. How does this synonym help make sense of what patience actually is?

Pause to notice.

Think about moments of suffering in your life. Were there moments when you were able to experience patient endurance? What did this look like for you?

It also can be helpful to reflect on moments when we didn't experience patient endurance. What were some of those moments like for you?

What does James have to say?

As you read the passage of James on the following page, be looking for ways we can cultivate endurance and patience in the face of suffering.

James 1:2-18

2 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. 3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. 6 But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.

7 Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

9 Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them. 10 And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. 11 The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.

12 God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. 14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

16 So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. 18 He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.

4. As you consider how God might be cultivating patience in your life, what do you learn from James' words?

5. What does James say about God's character in this passage? Look specifically at **verses 5, 13, 17, 18**.

6. Suffering can cause confusion and doubt. How do **verses 5-6** speak to this?

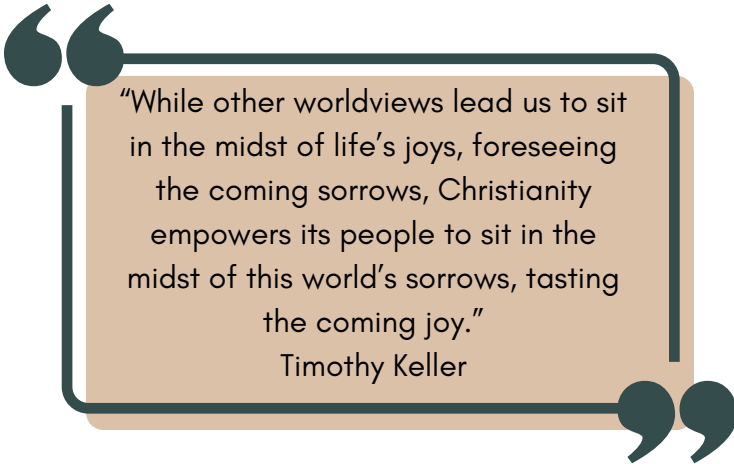
Pause to notice.

Galatians 5:22 says that patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit, which means that it is Holy Spirit who produces it and makes it grow, not our own striving. Take some time to invite God to grow this fruit in you, by the work of His Spirit.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

(The Message Paraphrase)

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.



7. As you read both the passage and the quote above, what is your response? How do these truths help cultivate patience in you?

James 5:7-11

7 Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. 8 You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door! 10 For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

8. How have you experienced God's tenderness and mercy?

9. How does God's tenderness and mercy encourage you as you think about having endurance and patience through suffering?

On Mission

“As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we’re different. Why we’re not bitter. Why the flames haven’t destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (**1 Peter 3:15**). The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have.”¹

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Sermon Notes

The Power of Prayer

Lesson 7

Job 42:7-9

James 5:13-18

The Story

Job had endured through so much suffering and he waited patiently to hear from God even while protesting his innocence and wondering why it was all happening to him. God finally responded to all of Job's doubts, questions, and accusations (**Job 38-41**). And Job repented of how he reacted and what he said about God. (This occurs in **Job 42:1-6**, which will be discussed in the lesson for week 8). God then turned His attention to Job's three friends.

Let's Begin

Job 42:7-9

7 After the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has. 8 So take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer on your behalf. I will not treat you as you deserve, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has." 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did as the LORD commanded them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

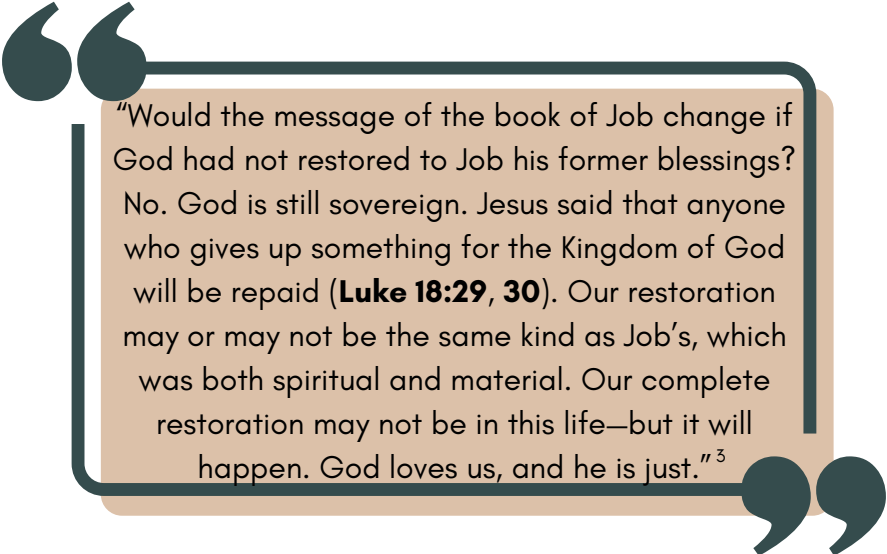
1. What do you notice about prayer in **Job 42:7-9**?

“In [**Job 42:8**] the [friends], no longer with Job, are ordered by God to go back to Job with sacrificial animals sufficient to atone for their transgressions. The sacrifice performed by Job was an integral part of the worship in which Job prayed for them. Praying for your enemy was already taught and practiced in the Old Testament (**Psalm 35:12-14; 109:4-5**). And showing mercy to one’s enemies was a faith principle clearly required in **Exodus 23:4-5**. ... Job did not fail to love those who had spitefully abused him when he was most helpless.”¹

2. Why do you think God wanted Job to pray for his friends?

3. How can we pray for our “enemies”? What kind of power does that type of prayer hold?

¹ Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway plus



“Would the message of the book of Job change if God had not restored to Job his former blessings? No. God is still sovereign. Jesus said that anyone who gives up something for the Kingdom of God will be repaid (**Luke 18:29, 30**). Our restoration may or may not be the same kind as Job’s, which was both spiritual and material. Our complete restoration may not be in this life—but it will happen. God loves us, and he is just.”³

5. What is your reaction to this quote?

6. In what ways is God’s justice different than everyone getting what they deserve?

What does James have to say?

Prayer is powerful. It's how we stay connected to God in both good times and bad. "Suffering can refine us rather than destroy us because God himself walks with us in the fire."⁴ It's in prayer that we walk with God.

Pause to notice.

As you read through the passage below, simply pause to respond in prayer. Bring your unfiltered thoughts to God about both your hardships and your joys.

James 5:13-18⁵

13 Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. 14 Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. 16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. 17 Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! 18 Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

⁴ Keller, Timothy. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Penguin Books, 2016. 16

⁵ "The Greek word for 'trouble' [hardships, in **verse 13**] is *kakopatheo*, which means 'to suffer misfortune'; this word is normally not used of illness. [One author] offers the opinion that the word indicates not a specific misfortune, but rather the 'inner experience of having to endure misfortune.' As in **chapter 1**, James is not advocating a prayer for the removal of the cause of trouble so much as for the strength to endure the present troublesome situation." Nystrom, David P. *James: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 1997. Bible Gateway Plus

“The first issue raised [in **James 5:13-18**] is that of suffering (v. 13). ... James is well aware that life, and perhaps especially the Christian life, is one in which we experience trouble—and in such a way that we may feel tempted to call the goodness of God and of our fellow human beings into question. In such times James advocates neither anger nor stoic resignation, for the former poisons the spirit and the latter dulls the mind. Instead, he advocates prayer. It is a response that allows us to be active and positive and keeps us in communication with God.”⁶

7. In what ways have you turned to prayer as a response to troubles?

8. Have you found prayer to be something that helps you solidify the trustworthiness of God? Why or why not?

9. What might your everyday practice of prayer look like moving forward, in both difficult and pleasant times?

⁶ Nystrom, David P. *James: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 1997. Bible Gateway Plus

10. As you have worked through the practice of lament, how do these concepts land differently for you today?

On Mission

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Sermon Notes

A Cry for a Mediator and a Call for Repentance

Lesson 8

Job 9:32-35; 16:18-22; 38:1-41; 42:1-6

James 4:6-10

The Story

Throughout the story of Job, we see him cry out for a mediator—someone who intercedes between two parties. As Job protested his innocence, he begged for someone to mediate between God and himself—for someone to advocate for him. Job knew that in dealing with the Most High God, he could not do it in his own strength. In the end, God Himself responded to Job. Then, Job’s response was to humbly repent both in words and actions. Job’s restoration came from God as a free gift.

Let’s Begin.

Job cried out for a mediator in **Job 9:32-35** and **Job 16:18-22**.

1. From those two passages, how would you describe a mediator?

2. Why did Job need one?

3. What does his desire for a mediator tell you about Job and his situation?

What does that tell you about his character?

Though Job was begging for someone to speak to God on his behalf, ultimately it was God, Himself, who showed up and responded to Job (**Job 38–41**). God’s challenge to Job was both convicting and awe-inspiring. As the reader, we learn a lot about who God is and how He interacts with His creation through His response to Job.

“Here you come to the climax of the book. God speaks out of the storm, breaking silence in fulfillment of Job’s deep yearnings. But rather than vindicate Job (as Job had hoped) or reprove him (as his friends expected), God simply calls human wisdom into account, powerfully demonstrating over and over again from creation—both its origins and his care for it—that wisdom lies with him alone.”¹

4. Read **Job 38** below, and as you do, underline the questions God asks that stand out to you.

1 Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind:

*2 “Who is this that questions my wisdom
with such ignorant words?*

*3 Brace yourself like a man,
because I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.*

*4 “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell me, if you know so much.*

*5 Who determined its dimensions
and stretched out the surveying line?*

*6 What supports its foundations,
and who laid its cornerstone*

*7 as the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?*

*8 “Who kept the sea inside its boundaries
as it burst from the womb,*

¹ Fee, Gordon D., and Stuart K. Douglas. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. Zondervan, 2014. Bible Gateway Plus

- 9 and as I clothed it with clouds
and wrapped it in thick darkness?
10 For I locked it behind barred gates,
limiting its shores.
11 I said, 'This far and no farther will you come.
Here your proud waves must stop!'
12 "Have you ever commanded the morning to appear
and caused the dawn to rise in the east?
13 Have you made daylight spread to the ends of the earth,
to bring an end to the night's wickedness?
14 As the light approaches,
the earth takes shape like clay pressed beneath a seal;
it is robed in brilliant colors.
15 The light disturbs the wicked
and stops the arm that is raised in violence.
16 "Have you explored the springs from which the seas come?
Have you explored their depths?
17 Do you know where the gates of death are located?
Have you seen the gates of utter gloom?
18 Do you realize the extent of the earth?
Tell me about it if you know!
19 "Where does light come from,
and where does darkness go?
20 Can you take each to its home?
Do you know how to get there?
21 But of course you know all this!
For you were born before it was all created,
and you are so very experienced!
22 "Have you visited the storehouses of the snow
or seen the storehouses of hail?
23 (I have reserved them as weapons for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war.)
24 Where is the path to the source of light?
Where is the home of the east wind?
25 "Who created a channel for the torrents of rain?
Who laid out the path for the lightning?

26 Who makes the rain fall on barren land,
in a desert where no one lives?

27 Who sends rain to satisfy the parched ground
and make the tender grass spring up?

28 "Does the rain have a father?
Who gives birth to the dew?

29 Who is the mother of the ice?
Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens?

30 For the water turns to ice as hard as rock,
and the surface of the water freezes.

31 "Can you direct the movement of the stars—
binding the cluster of the Pleiades
or loosening the cords of Orion?

32 Can you direct the constellations through the seasons
or guide the Bear with her cubs across the heavens?

33 Do you know the laws of the universe?
Can you use them to regulate the earth?

34 "Can you shout to the clouds
and make it rain?

35 Can you make lightning appear
and cause it to strike as you direct?

36 Who gives intuition to the heart
and instinct to the mind?

37 Who is wise enough to count all the clouds?
Who can tilt the water jars of heaven

38 when the parched ground is dry
and the soil has hardened into clods?

39 "Can you stalk prey for a lioness
and satisfy the young lions' appetites

40 as they lie in their dens
or crouch in the thicket?

41 Who provides food for the ravens
when their young cry out to God
and wander about in hunger?

“God offers Job no theological explanation of the mystery of his suffering. The book, however, is teaching us through the divine [manifestation of God] that there is something more fundamental than an intellectual solution to the mystery of innocent suffering. Job’s greatest anguish was over the thought that he was separated from God. But Job learned through [God’s appearance] that God had not abandoned him. And it gradually dawned on Job that without knowing why he was suffering he could face it, so long as he was assured that God was his friend. Job’s past experience with God was nothing compared with the experience that he found through [this interaction]. Job had the high privilege here of sitting at the feet of the Lord. Job would be made wonderfully aware of who God is in a universe full of paradoxes for humankind and yet filled with joy and wonder. **In this way Job learned to take God at his word without understanding hardly any of the mysteries of his universe, much less the reason why he was suffering.**”²

Pause to notice.

Read that last sentence again. How does this idea inspire you? How does it challenge you?

² Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway Plus. Emphasis added.

God's words to Job led him to repentance.

Job 42:1-6

Then Job replied to the LORD:

*2 "I know that you can do anything,
and no one can stop you.*

*3 You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?'
It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about,
things far too wonderful for me.*

*4 You said, 'Listen and I will speak!
I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.'*

*5 I had only heard about you before,
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.*

*6 I take back everything I said,
and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."*

6. What strikes you as you read about Job's repentance?

Repentance, which is an act of worship, leads to restoration. It may not be the end of our suffering, but it does bring restoration with God.

7. What does repentance mean to you? What does it look like in your life?

8. What more do you learn about repentance from **James 4:6-10**?

6 And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. 9 Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

9. How has repentance led to restoration between you and God?

Pause to notice.

Prayerfully consider: is there an area of your life where there is a need for restoration with God? Take some time to process in prayer and invite God to lead you into repentance (which includes both changing your actions and/or turning to God and realigning our thinking with what is true) and restoration.

“The book of Job has an important place in the biblical story, not only by calling us to total trust in God even in the most trying of situations but also by preparing the way for Jesus Christ, who as the incarnate God gives the ultimate answer to Job’s question by assuming the role of innocent sufferer—only in his case to bear the sins of the entire world.”³

Hebrews 12:1-4 says, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.*

2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne. 3 Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up. 4 After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.”

10. As we enter into this Holy Week, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the one who innocently suffered on our behalf. As you consider Christ’s suffering, how does it shape your response to the realities of your present day suffering?

³ Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. Zondervan, 2014. Bible Gateway Plus

“[Job] prompts us to learn how to think about God more accurately, just as Job learns alongside us. ... In light of the book of Job, the only acceptable elaboration [about God is]: ‘I am God, I care deeply, and I want you to trust me even when you don’t understand.’ By affirming such a view of God, we do not dismiss suffering as meaningless but try to understand it in the larger context of God’s wisdom and the world in which we live.”⁴

11. How is God drawing you into deeper trust in Him?

⁴ Walton, John. *NIV Application Commentary: Job*. Zondervan, 2012. Bible Gateway Plus

On Mission

“As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we’re different. Why we’re not bitter. Why the flames haven’t destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (**1 Peter 3:15**). The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have.”⁵

This week, as you notice your places of suffering and pain, what could it look like for these to be an opportunity to share with others about the hope you have in Christ?

⁵Rendall Risner, Vaneetha. “What Only Suffering Can Say: How Trials Feed the Flame of Witness.” *Desiring God*, 6 Oct. 2023, www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-only-suffering-can-say.

Let's conclude by continuing to
practice listening and lamenting together.

Below are instructions to help you practice this as a Life Group.

For more detailed instructions, see page 112.

Prepare

- Decide who will share their lament and who will facilitate (2-3 people including time keeper).
- Silence cell phones.
- Read through the reminders below before you begin.

Reminders

- We share our laments with others as an act of faith (**Romans 12:15**).
- The purpose of this time isn't to fix, problem solve, or give advice but to listen well and be lovingly present for the person sharing their lament.
- It might be difficult to be present with someone and feel as if we're offering them nothing in their pain. Our attentive and loving presence is the gift we offer to the one sharing their lament, trusting that God is present in our presence.

Opening prayers

- Start with a time of prayer. We suggest using the prayers on pages 113-114.

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "Let's now spend time in silence, to be still and become aware of God's presence together."*

Read lament and share any additional thoughts (5-7 mins)

- Share the lament.
- *Time Keeper: "Thank you [name] for your vulnerability and courage in sharing your lament with us. Is there anything else you would like to share before we enter a time of silence?"*

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "Let's be silent together and allow ourselves time to sit with and feel the lament that was just shared."*

Facilitators respond with questions (5-7 mins)

- Questions for facilitators to ask in response:
 - *As you think about the issue you're processing, what feelings are you noticing?*
 - *How would you describe your thoughts/feelings toward yourself or God because of this?*
 - *Where have you sensed God's presence (or absence) in this situation?*
 - *How do you think God feels/thinks about you as you experience this situation?*
 - *How would you like Jesus to help you in this?*
- Additional helpful questions to ask may be:
 - *How do you sense we could be helpful to you now?*
 - *Are there any questions you wish we would ask you?*
 - *Would you mind if we just sat in silence for a few minutes?*

Time of silent prayer for person who shared lament (1-2 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "As we end this time of lament with silence, come to God with whatever is on your heart or mind for the person who shared their lament."*

Debrief (3-4 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "We're going to take time now to debrief this experience together. Each of us will get a chance to describe what it felt like to share their lament or what it felt like to listen. Additionally we can share how it felt to engage with the questions and times of silence. Who would like to share first?"*
- *Reminder - This isn't a time to advise or problem solve.*

Sermon Notes

Practice: Listening & Lamenting Together

When we look at the story of Job, we see three friends who attempted to provide comfort and counsel to their friend in pain. Unfortunately for Job, their efforts provided further reasons to lament. Instead of continuing to mourn with Job in the silence, they provided endless monologues that added to Job's misery.

We can fall into the same trap. We can be quick to offer advice or explain away and minimize people's suffering through our misguided responses.

In **Job 21:2**, Job described to his friends what he really needed in the midst of his suffering, *"Listen carefully to my words; let this be the consolation you give me."*

It's as we are present with one another in our pain, and as we lovingly listen to each other lament, that we embody what it means to *"weep with those who weep"* (**Romans 12:15**).

God invites us to listen to and lament with each other.

Throughout this study guide, we are going to practice listening and lamenting together.

The goal of this time is not to fix all of our problems and answer all of life's questions. The goal is to draw closer to God in the midst of them as we listen and lament together.

The following instructions are to help you practice this as a Life Group.

We suggest that you save 20-25 minutes for this practice at the end of your time together. This could replace your regular practice of prayer requests and praying together as listening and lamenting is another way that we intercede with and for each other.

Detailed Instructions and Script for Listening & Lamenting Together Practice:

Prepare

Start by deciding ahead of time who will volunteer to share their lament with the group this week. Also, decide on 2-3 people who will facilitate the practice, including someone who will be the time keeper during this process. (We recommend using a timer on your phone to help you transition from each section. If you follow the time guidelines, this process will take about 20-25 minutes per person. The time keeper will also be the one to move the conversation forward using the prompts provided in each section.) Before you begin, remind everyone to silence their phones so they are not a distraction and then read through the reminders below.

Reminders

- We share our laments with others as an act of faith (**Romans 12:15**).
- The purpose of this time isn't to fix, problem solve or give advice but to listen well and be lovingly present for the person sharing their lament.
- It might be difficult to be present with someone and feel as if we're offering them nothing in their pain. Our attentive and loving presence is the gift we offer to the one sharing their lament, trusting that God is present in our presence.

Opening prayers (optional wording)

Prayer to be read aloud by person sharing their lament:

- *“O God who inhabits our sorrows, it is no easy thing to admit another person into my grief. For grief, even if it is a grief common to many, is ever an intimate, personal thing. It can feel such a risk to allow anyone else to access these, my most wounded places. And yet you, O Lord, have clearly called your children to bear one another’s burdens. You have instructed us to mourn with those who mourn, even naming such service as an act of worship. But this command can only be fulfilled when each of us, in the midst of our own sufferings, are also willing to allow others who know and love us well to walk alongside us, granting them access to the places where we are most hurting and vulnerable. In light of this truth, give me the grace Jesus, to take this courageous step of letting others listen to my lament. Amen.”¹*

¹ McKelvey, Douglas. *Every Moment Holy: Death, Grief, & Hope*. Vol. 2, Rabbit Room, 2021. 243-245

Prayer to be read aloud by a person who is helping to facilitate the practice:

- *“Give us wisdom, grace and empathy, O Lord, to simply walk beside, to let our friend lead as they learn to navigate this grief, and not to ever in arrogance believe that we can somehow set them straight, or make it right, or give advice they do not need from us. Teach us how to set aside our own discomfort, so that we might compassionately perceive, in the context of their specific loss and their specific need, what true encouragement and helpfulness would mean. Above all, let us learn to remain present in their life, being ever ready to listen, however much they choose to entrust to us, and so let us serve our friend well by a close and constant willingness to bear some small part of their long burden. Amen.”²*

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

Take this time of silence to be still and become aware of God’s presence together. Relax your body and breathe deeply. If distracting thoughts come to mind, you may find it helpful to have a word or phrase that brings your attention back to God, for example: “Father” or “I love You, Jesus.”

Read lament and share any additional thoughts (5-7 mins)

The person who has decided to share their lament will start by reading what they have written for each section of their own lament (Lessons 1-4): turning to God, bringing your complaints, asking boldly and choosing to trust. (Don’t feel obligated to read every word if something doesn’t feel appropriate to share in a group setting.)

For the lamenter: don’t feel like you have to fill the whole time if you run out of things to say.

Also, if the timer goes off while someone is sharing, allow the person to wrap up their final thought and move on to the next section.

² McKelvey, Douglas. *Every Moment Holy: Death, Grief, & Hope*. Vol. 2, Rabbit Room, 2021. 243-245

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

Use this time of silence to sit with the lament the person has just shared. Allow yourself to feel and enter into the emotion of the experience that has been presented.

Facilitators respond with questions (5-7 mins)

The purpose of this time is to ask questions in order to help the person sharing explore their thoughts and feelings, as well as notice God's presence in the midst of their lament.

Questions for facilitators to ask in response:

- *As you think about the issue you're processing, what feelings are you noticing?*
- *How would you describe your thoughts/feelings toward yourself or God because of this?*
- *Where have you sensed God's presence (or absence) in this situation?*
- *How do you think God feels/thinks about you as you experience this situation?*
- *How would you like Jesus to help you in this?*

Additional helpful questions to ask may be:

- *How do you sense we could be helpful to you now?*
- *Are there any questions you wish we would ask you?*
- *Would you mind if we just sat in silence for a few minutes?*

Unhelpful responses or questions might sound like:

- *"Don't worry—it will get better"*
- *"Trust God. God always know best"*
- *"At least it's not as bad as so and so"*
- *"I know just how you feel"*
- *"Why do you think you are in this situation?"*

In a group setting it may be tempting to ask too many questions and interrupt the work God is doing. Go slowly, allow for silence, and be sensitive to Holy Spirit.

Time of silent prayer for person who shared lament (1-2 mins)

Come to God in silent prayer with whatever is on your heart or mind for the person who shared their lament.

Debrief (3-4 mins)

End by debriefing your time together. Give each person a chance to share about their experience. Encourage reflection on what it was like to share their lament or listen to it, as well as what it felt like to engage with the questions and times of silence.

Don't be surprised if you feel at the end of this time that the person who shared still has questions or unresolved issues. That's okay. The goal of this time is not to fix all of our problems and answer all of life's questions. The goal is to draw closer to God in the midst of them as we listen and lament together.