



NAC-USA
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Job is Noticed
and Tried

Job's Friends
Offer Their
Opinions

Job's
Honesty
with God

God
Responds to
and Restores
Job

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2016

August

Session 1—Job is Noticed and Tried

During the month of August, we will be taking an in-depth look into what is believed to be the oldest book in the Bible: Job. The story of Job is a story of suffering, destruction, and conflict wrapped inside the greater narrative of God's omnipotence, sovereignty, and wisdom. Within its 42 chapters, we see God challenged by evil; Job challenged by loss, his wife, and his friends; and finally, God challenged by Job. In the end, it's confirmed that our God is the great creator of all things, who has power over evil, and is our absolute protector and author of our faith. I would suggest that you take the time to read the complete story of Job.

To start our journey, let's learn about who Job was. In chapter 1, we learn firstly that he was "blameless and upright," and that he "feared God and shunned evil." This tells us that Job had a straight-forward, spotless character and that he was in a close relationship with God. Job and his wife had seven sons and three daughters, which from an Old Testament perspective, told those around him that Job had been blessed by God. He owned "seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants." He demonstrated how important it was to be in right standing with God by sacrificing a burnt offering on behalf of his children when he perceived that they had sinned. Job valued his relationship with his God and was living a blessed life. Pause for a moment and ask yourself, "Do I value my relationship with God? Is God's value to me dependent on how much He has blessed me?"

After telling us about Job, the story turns to a conversation between God and Satan. God asks Satan the following: "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" (Job 1:8). Satan then attacks Job's character by saying if Job lost all that he had, he would curse God to His face. Confident in Job, God agrees to this test as long as no physical harm is done to Job.

After Satan departs from God, Job's life is turned upside down through the remainder of chapter 1. First, a group of raiders from Sheba, the Sabaeans, attacked and killed several of Job's servants and made off with his oxen and donkeys. Next, his sheep and some servants were burned up by the "fire of God" that fell from the heavens. Third, the Chaldeans stole Job's camels and put to death more of his servants. Finally, a mighty wind swept through the desert and struck down the house where Job's sons and daughters were feasting and they were all killed. Just like that, all that Job had was gone. And what was his response? He fell to the ground and worshiped his God, uttering the well-known resolve: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (v.20-22). In all this, Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

That's something to consider now, isn't it? Let's put ourselves in Job's shoes for a moment and consider if we would be able to say the same thing. During the dark days of life, have you turned to God in worship? What made it possible for Job to do this? He had a pre-existing relationship with God in which he had come to truly know and trust Him. The same can be true for us. When we learn of the one true God and establish a relationship with Him, we come to understand His character and know that He "works [all things] to the good of those who love [H]im" (Romans 8:28 NIV). If we understand and embrace that truth, then we can come to a place of worship. Our God is a god of hope. In Jeremiah 29:11 KJV it says: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you," saith the Lord, "thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." We can worship God during dark times because, as believers, we are people of hope, knowing that God's plans for us include spiritual prosperity and good.

Job withstands the onslaught poured out on him and his relationship with God remains unchanged. As we turn to the 2nd chapter, we see Satan back in the presence of God and God once again holding up Job as a shining example of faithfulness. Then Satan seeks to test Job again, saying that if Job was stricken physically, he would then curse God. God agrees to this test and Job is afflicted with "sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head" (v. 7). In the midst of his pain, Job's wife encourages him to just curse God and die to end his suffering. But Job refuses to do so and accepts that God is the giver of all things and places his trust fully in Him. Job teaches us that a person of faith will trust in God through prosperity or adversity, even while unable to understand why bad things happen. In our lives, have we found it difficult to trust God in the midst of adversity or when we don't understand why things happen the way that they do?

After resisting the urging of his wife, Job is joined by three friends. Their back and forth conversations are the source for the next several chapters of the story and we will dive into them in the coming weeks. As we close this first session, let's take note of the themes that should be on our mind as we work through the book of Job:

- God is in control of the world and has the power to limit and allow the actions of Satan.
- Our God is sovereign and is not bound by our human rules or thought.
- Through all our trials and challenges, we want to continue to worship and trust in God.

Session 2 – Job's Friends Offer Their Opinions

Welcome back. At the conclusion of our last session, Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, have just arrived to support him. When these friends are introduced at the end of chapter 2, we can read that they wept for Job and "sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great" (Job 2:13).

By this time in the story, Job has already lost his children, his property, and his health was suffering due to the boils he was struck with earlier in chapter 2. It was good that Job's three friends had heard of his strife and wanted to come and mourn with him and comfort him. However, soon Job's friends start arguing with Job that suffering is punishment for sin and that prosperity is reward for righteousness (Job 4:7-8). They try to convince Job that his suffering must be punishment from God as the result of some great sin that he committed.

Job defends himself against his friends' opinions and expresses that there is evidence all over the world that the wicked often prosper and that the righteous often suffer. He makes his case to his friends that he hadn't committed any horrendous sin that would set him up for suffering above others. As we progress through the book of Job, his friends' speeches start getting repetitive and shorter. By chapter 26, Job is the only one speaking. He has been able to argue that suffering cannot be explained by the simple principle of punishment and justice, where each person gets what he or she deserves (i.e. the bad people suffer and the good people prosper). However, he is still without an answer as to why he is suffering. By the end of chapter 31, Job has painted a picture of an unpredictable God. Job believes that God rules the affairs of men and does so wisely (Job 28:12-28), but all seems to be random and arbitrary, according to man's view. Job still doesn't have an answer for why the righteous suffer.

The very first verse of chapter 32 reads, "So these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes." However, not everyone is content to let Job remain in his own thinking. Among the group of men who are with Job is a young man named Elihu, who has remained quiet to this point out of respect to his elders. In verses 6-10, Elihu acknowledges his youth and implores Job and his friends to listen to him. Elihu brings an entirely new perspective to the situation, explaining that the suffering of the righteous is not a demonstration of God's hatred, but rather of His love. It is not a punishment of their sins, but rather a refinement of their righteousness.

Over the next six chapters, Elihu contradicts Job and his friends. First, Elihu says that Job's friends are wrong in saying that suffering is the proof of wickedness, which has been their only explanation for Job's suffering. Also in these 6 chapters, Elihu shows why Job is wrong in his understanding of the suffering, too. Job's understanding of God's justice was the same as his three friends; however, because Job insisted that he was righteous, he could not make his suffering fit with the justice of God. Elihu sees the pride and arrogance in some of what Job has said and points it out to him. In chapter 33, verses 8-12, Elihu addresses Job: "Surely you have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the sound of your words, saying 'I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me. Yet he finds occasions against me, he counts me as His enemy; He puts my feet in the stocks, He watches all my paths.' Look, in this you are not righteous. I will answer you, For God is greater than man."

Elihu explains that even though Job is a righteous man, he is not sinless and perfect. He points out that there are specks of pride that have begun to cloud the purity of Job's life once it was stirred up by his suffering. Elihu ultimately concludes

that affliction makes a righteous person sensitive to his remaining sinfulness, and that God uses suffering to further refine those He loves. In chapter 36, verse 10, Elihu states that God, “also opens their ear to instruction, and commands that they turn from iniquity.” This is reaffirmed by the psalmist in Psalm 119:71, “It was good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.” What this shows us is that there are some dimensions of God’s love that the righteous can only learn through affliction and suffering. For example, even though we have heard from a young age that God loves us, it may only be in our toughest moments of despair and rejection that we become aware of His loving arms around us and experience the way He tenderly carries us through.

It is fire that drives the impurities out of gold; it is the heat and pressure of the bowels of the earth that make diamonds; and often it is intense situations in our lives that bring to the surface impurities in our natures that need to be addressed. Can we find God’s love in a challenging neighbor or coworker who brings out in us our impatience? Or in a diagnosis that challenges us to trust in Him? The author of Hebrews encourages his readers in a similar way, reminding them in chapter 12 of the New International Version, starting in verse 6, that “the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” Continuing in verse 10, “God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness” (Hebrews 12: 6, 10 NIV). Elihu wants Job to see that permitting his suffering *does* fit with the nature of God because it is an act of love.

Job does not argue with Elihu. In fact, he doesn’t have the chance to say anything at all because it is at this point that God finally breaks His silence.

Join us in the final two sessions as we explore the importance of Job’s open communication with God and the final resolution that God provides.

Session 3 – Job’s Honesty with God

Welcome back! This week we are going to use the story of Job to focus on the importance of open communication with God and the intimacy it creates.

As Christians, we may think our prayers and conversations with God should always be full of thanksgiving and praise, even in the middle of our difficulties. God sent Jesus to sacrifice Himself for us and made our salvation possible. Our names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. How can any earthly trial or difficulty take away from the joy of those eternal gifts? Shouldn’t we, as Philippians 4:4 instructs, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”?

Before we answer this question, let us look to the Bible for some examples of how we could respond to trials and difficulty, beginning with our friend Job.

Job did not have the privilege of living on the earth after Jesus’ sacrifice was made and did not receive the offer of salvation in his lifetime. However, he did have an intimate relationship with God and lived as a man blessed and valued by Him. As we studied in our first session, God was so pleased with Job that He held him up before Satan as “the finest man in all the earth” (Job 1:8). After prolonged suffering, in the depths of despair, even Job struggled to continue rejoicing. He addresses God with frustration and bitterness in chapter 30, saying:

*I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer;
I stand up, but you merely look at me.
You turn on me ruthlessly;
with the might of your hand you attack me.
You snatch me up and drive me before the wind;*

*you toss me about in the storm.
I know you will bring me down to death... (v. 20-23)*

Job does not stand alone in the Bible as one who laments to God during trials. The 13th psalm of David also begins with questions of despair: “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:1-2). As David expressed his honest emotions and feelings, he began to see a different perspective and just a few verses later he says, “but I have trusted in your mercy, my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me” (v. 5-6).

What do these examples teach us? First of all, we can see that suffering and tragedy are part of the human experience, even of one who fears and loves God. No person is exempt from them. Secondly, we learn that it is not necessary to hide our emotions when going through these difficult times.

God knows all things, including what is in our hearts, and even if it’s not pretty, we can express it to Him. Through this expression we can feel that the strength and hope of God come into our circumstance. We can see this very clearly in Lamentations 3. For 21 verses, the writer very explicitly describes his anguish, but then in verse 21 something happens: “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I hope in Him!’”

And finally, Job also began to see a new perspective through his conversation with God. Job 42 states: “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You...I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” And here the Lord responds in the 7th verse saying to Eliphaz, “My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me **what is right**, as My servant Job has.”

Our willingness to express ourselves to God brings us closer to Him. Our communication and openness are very important for us to have intimacy with God and to feel His strength and hope. In times of pain, grief, and anger, we cannot give up on God and become silent, but rather should pour out ourselves to Him, just as the example of Job. He emerged from tragedy not only with his faith intact, but also with it strengthened.

Session 4 – God Responds to and Restores Job

Welcome to the last small group session for August. In this session, we will conclude our study of the book of Job with its last five chapters: God’s response to Job.

At this point in the story, Job has suffered great personal strife, defended his innocence against his friends, and has been asking for the chance to vindicate himself before God and to find out why he has been made to suffer. Considering what Job’s relationship with God was like, this request seems pretty reasonable. But when God breaks His silence in chapter 38 after Elihu’s speech, He does not answer Job’s questions. Instead, God takes a different approach and proceeds to ask a series of questions that show how little Job really knows.

In chapters 38, 39, and part of 40, God speaks about His creation and all of the details that went into this creation that people cannot even fathom. Through these details, many comparisons can be drawn about God and humans. God is everlasting and our earthly time is limited; He has knowledge of all things, whereas we are ignorant in so many things; God is perfect in His power, while we are weak and imperfect in our sin. God organized and sustains all of creation, and

we can find no fault in His work. If there is nothing wrong with God's creation, then do we have reason to fear it and question it? Job has been questioning God about the trials he has suffered through the course of the book, not fully understanding that God is in complete control and has a plan for all things and experiences in life. Beyond what we can even be aware of, He does and allows things to happen to us every day that are for our good, just as Job's suffering was for a greater purpose and good. God's first speech to Job has its intended effect: Job realizes his smallness compared to God's infinite greatness and quickly recants: "I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers? I will cover my mouth with my hand. I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say" (Job 40:4-5 NLT).

Job recognizes his error in wanting to reason with God and yields himself to the One who knows all. Job's humility is expressed through his choice to say nothing more. The voices of his friends couldn't keep Job from defending himself, but the voice of God makes him realize that there is nothing he can say to justify himself. God knows all, and we can neither comprehend nor compel Him. Job realizes this and accepts and surrenders to God's plans for his life, without knowing what his future will hold.

When we continue with the story in chapters 40 and 41, we see that while Job has now recognized his error and repents for it, God still wants to show him that there is even more to understand about His creation. No one can ever fully know everything about God, so there is always more we can learn. God speaks about the creatures He has made, specifically the Behemoth and the Leviathan. God set forth His power through the creation of these animals, which are fearful, yet majestic; untamable, yet wonderful. If no living thing has a chance against these creatures except God, then we do not want to ever try to stand against Him. Job again realizes God's mightiness and humbles himself before God to repent: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You...Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:2-3, 5-6). Job recognizes that while he had a relationship with God before, he wasn't seeing Him fully. Now, after getting a glimpse of the omnipotence of God, Job has come to understand that while God is too great for human comprehension, all Job really needs to understand is that God will always be in his life as a Comforter and Provider of strength.

To conclude the story of Job, God instructs him to intercede for his friends who have made claims about God that were untrue. When Job prays for his friends, not only does God give them mercy, He also blesses Job with twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10): new livestock, 10 more children, and a long life that allowed him to see his children and grandchildren grow for four generations.

From this ending, we can understand that while our suffering won't necessarily be rewarded monetarily or with earthly things, we know that God can work good through suffering. If we want His plans to guide our lives, they will always lead us to a great ending: an ending where we can be with Him eternally.

As we finish studying about Job this month, let's look back and extract the teachings that we can apply to our own lives:

- We want to always trust that God has a purpose for our lives in times of abundance and times of struggle.
- We cannot impose our human perceptions of things like justice and sin on God.
- God's love can be felt through His comfort during trials, but also through the redirection and refinement of our lives that we experience after living through such trials.
- We want to experience an intimate relationship with God and that can happen through open communication and honesty with Him.
- God is omniscient and all-powerful, and we want to be humble before Him.

You can now turn to your guides and answer the discussion questions.