

LEADERS GUIDE


WISDOM

for SUFFERING
THE BOOK OF JOB



JOHN D. MORRISON

A RESOURCE OF LAKEWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH

 Lakewoodlife.org
DR. TOM SMILEY, SENIOR PASTOR

Wisdom for Suffering

The Book of Job

John D. Morrison, PhD



Wisdom for Suffering: The Book of Job

Copyright © 2020 John D. Morrison

Published by Lakewood Press

Lakewood Baptist Church

2235 Thompson Bridge Road

Gainesville, Georgia 30501

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV© Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version©), copyright © 2001 by Crossway.

A Letter from the Senior Pastor

Greetings! Welcome to a new year. Over the course of 2020 we are going to be learning about biblical wisdom. We all want to live wisely and we all want to make wise decisions. We all look back on moments or events in our lives and wish we would have done things differently. At

times, we all wish “we knew then what we know now.” But the real question is, “How can I know the wise thing before I do it?”

James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” God teaches us in his word that we should go to him for true wisdom. The writer of Proverbs says, if you want “to know wisdom and instruction,” then start here: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” In order to live a truly wise life, you and I must look first to God. The wisdom of God is often different than the wisdom of the world. Think about Paul’s message in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” In other words, the message of the cross of Jesus Christ is foolishness in the world’s eyes, but to Christians the message of the cross is the perfect wisdom of God. Where the world sees the death of a man, the Christian sees the depth of the love of God. Where the world sees the end of life, the Christian sees the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you want to know what true wisdom is, you must ask God. And if you want to live a truly wise life, you have to live it by God’s standards and not the world’s standards.

To live wisely before God, you must prepare yourself for how the world will push back against you. Remember what God said in 1 Peter 2:15, “For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.” Therefore, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5–6). To be wise in God’s eyes means to worship and honor him first, and it means to look to Jesus Christ who is God’s true wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Over the course of this year we are going to immerse ourselves as a church with God’s wisdom. I’m excited that this year there will be a new “element” in our study. Each week you will have an activity to do or a devotional to read and write your own notes. I write in my journals all the time. I encourage you to write in yours and make this a memorable year. It will be great to look back on what the Lord taught you over the course of this year, or even to pass along to your grandchildren one day. Also, we will be memorizing Scripture together as a church. Check out the book for the verses and follow along.

Will you join me on this journey to live wisely and honor God first? The title of our study is Wisdom 2020. Of course, 2020 is the calendar year of our study, but it is also a reminder that like 20/20 vision, true wisdom means “Seeing Life Clearly through the Lens of Scripture.”

May God bless you as we journey this year through the biblical theme of wisdom.

Dr. Tom Smiley
Senior Pastor
Lakewood Baptist Church

Introduction

Purpose

Job confronts us with the reality of evil and the presence of suffering in this world. Job challenges any simplistic reading of wisdom literature that would draw a straight line from living a moral life to experiencing God's blessings. Life in our fallen world proves far too complex for over-simplified answers. The Book of Job brings into stark relief what is clear in the rest of the Old Testament: sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

Why? This is the question many want the book to answer. This is the question Job's friends sought to give him. But, this is not the question the Lord chooses to answer. As God himself responds at the end of the book, he does not offer an explanation of why Job suffered as he did. Rather, he answers Job's questions with an extended series of questions that point to the Lord's wisdom and power. The book of Job does not explain evil and suffering in this world. Instead, this book teaches us to respond in faith by trusting in God's wisdom and power. When faced with the sheer display of God's wisdom and power at the end of the book, we are challenged to confess that whatever the Lord does is good and right.

Job does not tell us *why* but the book sets forth *who*. The Lord is wise and in control. He is sovereign and good, and so he can be trusted. Even when we cannot understand our circumstances, we can still trust his character.

Setting

It remains unclear who wrote the book of Job or when it was written. Perhaps the book was written during the exile (587-538 BC) or after the exile (after 538), but it was clearly accepted as part of the Hebrew Scriptures shortly after these dates.

What is more certain is that the action of the book took place either before or during the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Job was from the land of Uz, which was probably somewhere between Edom and Babylon. While not an Israelite, Job is shown to be a faithful follower of Yahweh.

The bulk of biographical material about Job comes in 1:1-5:

¹ There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. ² There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³ He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. ⁴ His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Job feared God and was blameless before him. He possessed great wealth and numerous children. The sacrifices for his children reveal how fastidious he was in his religious devotion. Thus, Job is a non-Israelite who worships the Lord and has experienced tremendous material wealth and prosperity.

Structure

The book of Job proves to be a well-crafted piece of literature. The book can be subdivided into three main sections:

1. Introduction (1:1-3:1)
2. Conversations (3:2-42:6)
3. Conclusion (42:7-17).

The middle section makes up the bulk of the book and is written as poetry while the introduction and conclusion are written as prose. Each of these three sections is significant for understanding the book. The introduction sets the stage for how to read the conversations, the conversations reveal the depth of Job's suffering, and the conclusion helps us sort through all that has been discussed in the preceding chapters.

Introduction (1:1-3:1)

The book begins by introducing two key facts: (1) Job was righteous and (2) God is in control.

First, Job was righteous. Scripture describes him as "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). The narrator reiterates this truth as Job initially responds to his suffering in 1:22 and 2:10. Job's suffering was unearned. He did not suffer as a direct consequence of his sin. Job's uprightness and blamelessness form an important backdrop to his conversations with his friends as they accuse him of being the opposite of these qualities.

Second, God is in control. In 1:6, the scene shifts to heaven, where Satan came before the Lord to challenge him about Job. Following Satan's initial onslaught against Job's property and his children, Satan again appeared before the Lord for permission to attack Job again. These heavenly scenes give readers a peek behind the curtain of what is happening, but we need to keep in mind that Job never learns of these interactions. These scenes help form the introduction of the book and make clear a central teaching: God is in control. Satan does not possess free rein to do as he wills on the earth; he must come before the Lord and ask permission. In what initially strikes one as surprising, the Lord allows Job to be tested and tried by Satan. While Job and his friends lack this

knowledge, the reader knows what is behind his suffering, and we are to see that God is not surprised by Job's suffering but rather is sovereign over it.

The introduction ends with 3:1. After a seven day period of silent mourning, Job opened his mouth to curse the day he was born. He does not go so far as to curse God as his wife encouraged him (2:9), but, as two commentators explain, "It is, in effect, an explosion out of his silence that comes right up to the limit of cursing God." Job's suffering is so great that he cannot remain silent, and this verse transitions into a series of conversations between Job and his friends where Job's grief and anger are on full display.

Conversations (3:2-42:6)

The transition in formatting in most English Bibles indicate that these chapters are Hebrew poetry. One commentator suggests that the highly stylized poetry together with the intricate structure of the book demonstrate that while Job's life must have felt completely chaotic, God remained in control. The structure points to an order in the chaos, even if Job could not see it at the time.

This section can be further broken down as follows:

- A. Conversations with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (3:2-31:40)
- B. Elihu's Speech (32:1-37:24)
- C. The Lord Responds to Job (38:1-42:6)

3:2-31:40. After an initial complaint by Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar respond. Some commentators argue that these three friends represent the common wisdom from the nations surrounding ancient Israel. These three tell Job that God is good, and so if Job is suffering, then he must have done something wrong. Suffering, for these three, is a sure sign of wrongdoing. Throughout these chapters, Job maintains his innocence, which only infuriates these three more. Finally, they have no more to say, and Elihu takes up the case. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come into the book again when the Lord rebukes them in 42:7-9.

32:1-37:24. Elihu had waited patiently for his elders to answer Job, but when they fail to quiet Job, he begins because "he burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God" (32:3). While the Lord explicitly condemns the other three friends, no explicit rebuke of Elihu comes at the end of the book. Due to the lack of a specific mention of Elihu when the Lord censures the other three, Elihu's role in the book remains debated. In the end, Elihu's advice contains both good and bad components. Yes, Elihu is correct that Job's attitude in suffering was self-righteous, but he was wrong about Job's motivation. Job was not just following God to get benefits from God, as both Elihu and Satan allege. Additionally, Elihu has a better understanding of the nature and character of God than the three friends, but he does not rightly understand the way God acts in the world. That is, Elihu knows *who* God is, but he overestimates his ability to understand *how* and *why* God works.

38:1-42:6. Following the challenges from Job's friends, the Lord responds to Job. In these chapters, the Lord puts Job in his place. God does not answer the question of why Job suffered, but instead, the Lord highlights his own wisdom and power. The Lord undercuts Job's simplistic notions of what it would mean for the Lord to be just. Job's suffering is no sign of God's injustice. Rather, than question God, Job needs to look upon the Lord's wisdom and power and confess that all that God does is right. Job finally relents in his complaint against God and confesses his wrongdoing in questions God's justice. "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you" (42:5). Job has come face to face with the Lord and responds by humbling himself in submission to him.

Conclusion (42:7-17).

The book concludes with the Lord's condemnation of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Then, Job prays for their forgiveness, and finally, God restores Job's wealth and brings him new children.

New Testament Connection

Job, the Bible tells us, was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Yet, Job endured some of the most profound suffering of anyone in Scripture. The clarity of these two facts — Job's righteousness and his suffering — teach us that we must put away simplistic answers about pain and suffering in this world. According to Scripture, we cannot draw a one-to-one correspondence between personal sin and suffering in this life. Conversely, the Bible also teaches us that physical well-being is not a sign of God's blessing.

Jesus makes this point clear in Luke 13:1-5. Notice how in this passage, Jesus points out not the innocence of those who suffered but their shared guilt with those who did not suffer. When it comes to God's purpose in suffering, simplistic answers will not do.

The life of Jesus forcefully drives this point home. If anyone did not deserve to suffer, it was he. Yet, he endured the pain and agony of the cross "for the joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2). He suffered and died in order to redeem a people for his own possession. He did not deserve his suffering, and yet, he endured it for us and for our salvation.

Job's life shatters any simplistic answers about prosperity and suffering. In his life, he also shows us how to respond to suffering in faith. Consider how he responds in faith to the death of his children and the loss of all his property: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). Similarly, he asks his wife, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10). As Job succinctly puts it, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (13:15). Job cries out to God. He questions him. Yet, through all his suffering, he moves from faith to a deeper faith.

We, too, are called to respond to suffering in faith. We have one great advantage over Job: in our suffering, we can look to the cross and see the one who did not deserve to suffer but who suffered willingly for us. We look beyond our pain to the righteous one,

Jesus Christ, who suffered for us. We may not understand exactly why we suffer, but at the cross, we are reassured of the loving kindness and goodness of our God who would die for us. Through the cross, we can look beyond suffering to our eternal hope. Through the cross, we can say with Paul, “This light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Respond in Faith

JOB 1-5 | WEEK 32 GROUP GUIDE



The first two chapters of Job are crucial for rightly interpreting the book. Job's uprightness in God's sight is established in these chapters, and we also overhear a heavenly conversation that clues readers in to what is behind Job's suffering. As Job 3 begins, Job begins his complaint, and then chapters 4 and 5 introduce us to Job's three friends who respond to his complaint.

Job 1

- Job 1:1-5 — How is Job described in these verses? What stands out to you about Job?
- Job 1:1 and 1:8 — How is Job described in both of these verses? Why would the author of the book repeat these facts so close together and so early in the book?
- Job 1:6-12 — Here is the heavenly court scene that helps set the stage for the suffering. What do we learn about the reason behind Job's suffering from this scene?
 - Who mentions Job first? Why does he mention him?
 - What is Satan's accusation against Job?
 - How would your life stand up to Satan's accusation? Do you follow the Lord merely for what he can provide? Certainly, we know that we do not follow the Lord to gain material possessions, but are there other ways that we are tempted to follow him for what he provides? Consider how Psalm 73:25-26 points to what, or rather who, we truly gain through our relationship with the Lord.
- Job 1:20-22 — How does Job respond to such devastating loss? How is he able to respond this way? How can we respond with such faith in the face of tremendous loss?

Job 2

- Job 2:1-3 — What does the Lord say about Job here?
- Job 2:4-6 — What is Satan's new accusation? How would we fare? Would we still follow the Lord even in the midst of our own physical suffering? What about in the face of mere discomfort or being taken out of our routine?
- Job 2:11-13 — How did Job's friends respond in these verses? Not considering their poor counsel that comes later, what is commendable about how they sought to comfort Job here? Have you ever been comforted by someone's silent presence with you in the midst of your pain or grief?

Job 3

- In this chapter, we begin to see that Job is not unfeeling. His faith expressed in 1:21 and 2:10 came about even in intense suffering and loss. Here in this chapter, we see that he has been dramatically affected by grief.
- Job 3:1-10 — Here Job curses the day of his birth. What did Job's wife encourage him to do in 2:9? How is Job's response here different than his wife's suggestion? Why is that difference so important?
- Do you see the faith of 1:21 and 2:10 still present in chapter 3? Why or why not? Can we have faith in God and still be in distress over our current circumstances?
- We could describe this section as a lament. What is a lament? How can one lament in faith? Consider the examples of one or more of the following: Psalm 22, 42-43, 90, and 130
- Are you currently experiencing a situation worthy of lament? What would it look like for you to lament in faith now? How could your group join you in praying both prayers of lament and intercession for you?

No Simple Answers



Job's friends break their silence in chapter 4, and from then through chapter 31 is Job's conversation with the three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. As we read these conversations, we need to keep the Lord's assessment of these friends from the end of the book in mind:

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer (Job 42:7-9).

While the friends have much advice that sounds good, it is ultimately untrue. Their basic argument is that Job is suffering because he has sinned. The bookend chapters of Job (1-2 and 42) make it clear that this is not the case. One cannot draw simplistic conclusions about why suffering occurs. The complexities of this world do not always allow a straight line to be drawn between one's suffering and sin.

Job 6-7

In these two chapters, Job responds to Eliphaz's critique in chapters 4-5. Job 4:7-8 sums up how Eliphaz views Job: in short, Job is suffering because Job stands guilty God.

- Job 6:24-30 — How does Job respond to Eliphaz's claims against him?
 - In 6:24, Job asks Eliphaz to stop speaking generally and tell him what he has actually done wrong. If he has sinned to bring about this suffering, then he wants to know his sin.
 - In 6:29-30, Job again asserts his innocence, which we must remember is in line with what the Lord has said about him (1:21; 2:10).
- Job 7:7-21 — Job turns his complaint toward God in these verses. What is his message for the Lord? Can you think of other places in Scripture where people address God like this? How can we cry out to God in anguish and pain in a way that honors him?
- What do we learn about how to comfort others in their suffering from these chapters?

Job 8

In this chapter, Bildad responds to Job. Bildad affirms that God is just, but then he wrongly draws the implication that God's justice means that suffering only results from your personal sin. Bildad makes it clear that he doubts Job's claims for innocence (8:6, 13, 20). At the end of the book, the Lord denounces Bildad's inference that God's justice means that suffering only comes to the unrighteous.

- Reflect on where you are tempted to think like Bildad.
 - Do I believe that God will love me more if I do good things? Do I assume that when things are going well in my life that God is more pleased than at other times?
 - Do I think that God loves me less when I sin? Do I believe that bad things happening in my life are because God is displeased with me?
 - Do I ever think, "God you owe me"? Or, think, "God, after all I've done for you, how could you. . . .?"
- Discuss how the gospel of Jesus undercuts any Bildad-like thinking. Consider why God accepts us as his own, and why his love for us cannot change once we are united to Christ by faith.

Job 9-10

Job expresses his desire to plead his case before God, and yet, he also voices his hesitancy to do so. He wants a trial with God, but he considers that he would have little hope in such a case. After all, he's God—look at his power in creation.

- Job 9:32-35 — Compare with 1 Timothy 2:5. How does Christ's work fulfill Job's longing here? How should this encourage us as we pray?
- Job 10:3 — Here, Job asks, why do the wicked prosper? He looks at his affliction and at the comfort of others, and Job thinks that God is not being fair. In essence, Job is operating with the same understanding of God as his friends: since God is just, he punishes the wicked with suffering and blesses the faithful with physical well-being and material wealth. The difference with his friends is that Job maintains his innocence. Given that Job, who was an upright and honest man, shares in some of the misunderstanding of God's nature as his friends, what can we be doing to make sure we are growing in the depth of our understanding of who God is? How does Job's experience show us how important it is to know God truly and rightly? Would you share a time when knowing truth about God served as a great comfort to you?



The reading this week begins with Job summarizing his defense, and then a new character, Elihu is introduced. Elihu has waited to speak out of reverence for Job's three friends who were older. Once he starts, Elihu is angry and does not stop speaking for several chapters. His approach to Job's sufferings is different than the three friends and is closer to the truth. However, his counsel fails on several points and will be corrected by the Lord at the end of the book.

Job 31:1-4

These verses summarize much of Job's argument against God in the previous chapters. In 31:1, Job asserts his moral purity, and then in 31:2 and then 31:4, he rightly states that God is in control and knows all things. All of these prove true. Job is upright. God is omnipotent and omniscient. Job's implication with 31:3 raises the challenge against the Lord by questioning his justice. The unrighteous should earn calamity and iniquity should bring disaster. With these truths asserted, Job wants to know why he suffers. Job's case against God has been that the Lord is acting unjustly in his case.

- Has suffering ever led you to question God's goodness, his power, or his omniscience?
- How should we use biblical truth to combat the lies that arise in suffering?
- What lies have you been tempted to believe in the midst of suffering? What truths from Scripture helped you overcome those lies?

Job 32-37

Elihu has been quiet out of respect for his elders, but when he finally speaks, he is angry and long-winded. There is no back and forth with Job as the other friends had. Rather, for six straight chapters, he lambastes Job for his self-righteousness. Four times in the first five verses of chapter 32, Elihu is described as angry. He's angry at Job's friends lack of a sufficient response. He's angry at Job for his self-righteousness (notably, the Lord confirms this point in 40:8). Elihu's speech is mixed with truth and error. On the one hand, he is right that Job is self-righteous, but he is wrong about Job's motivation. Job has not just been following God for the benefits, but Job has been self-righteous in his suffering.

Often, Elihu is right about God but wrong about Job. In the end, Elihu reminds us that our suffering does not give us the right to raise a challenge against God. In many cases, Elihu is right that God uses suffering to refine and to grow his people. However, Elihu's counsel demonstrates that while God is just and may use suffering, it is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to explain rightly what God is doing with suffering in one's life. As with the whole book of Job, Elihu's speech reminds us that we may not know the *why* of suffering but we can know *who* governs all things. "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Ps 115:3). Through the cross we are reminded that God by his grace is intimately tied up his glory and his good pleasure with the good of his people.

- What is commendable about Elihu's approach to being with someone in suffering? What is worth emulating?
- Where does Elihu's approach to counseling Job leave something to be desired? What can we learn not to do from him?
- Who is someone you know who is suffering now? What is a step you could take this week to provide biblical, hope-filled comfort to that person?
- As the book of Job makes clear, suffering and pain often do make sense, and in many cases we will never have the answers we want in this life. How can we respond to suffering in a faithful, God-honoring way? What would such a response look like? Is there somewhere in your life right now that you need to stop questioning God and start trusting him? What grace does God give to allow us to do that?

Trust in the Lord

JOB 38-42 | WEEK 34 GROUP GUIDE



Job has been clamoring throughout this book for an audience before the Lord. He has wanted to plead his case before the Lord and declare his innocence. Now, the Lord appears to Job, and rather than explaining why Job has suffered, the Lord asserts his own power and wisdom. In short, God declares that he is God who is the sovereign creator and ruler of all things. It is not for Job to know why he suffers. It is enough for Job to know that God sits on his throne and rules over all things.

Job 38:1-40:2

- What stood out to you about the Lord from these verses? What impression did these chapters make on you?
- Job 38:1-3 — What is God's assessment of Job in these verses? Notice the turn in verse 3: Job wanted to question God, but instead God questions Job. What does this remind us about the Lord's prerogative?
- The remainder of the Lord's speech is spent with questions. What type of questions does God ask Job? Do these questions deal with Job's suffering? What is God trying to teach Job in this section? What does God's response teach us about how we should respond to suffering?

Job 40:3-5

Job gets his audience before the Lord, but he is unable to even voice his complaint any more.

- How does hearing God's voice to us in Scripture silence our complaints and criticisms?
- Read Psalm 119:65-72 and discuss how God's Word and affliction work together to grow us closer to the Lord.
- What truths are important to see about God through his Word to humble us in the midst of our self-righteous assertions against him?
- How have you experienced the humbling of God's Word before in your life?

Job 40:6-41:34

- Job 40:8 — The Lord asserts that he cannot be wrong. He will always do what is right. Have you ever been tempted to think that God is in the wrong? Have you ever thought, "If I were God, I would have done it another way"? Why is such an attitude wrong and sinful?
- Job 40:15-24 — What point does the Lord make with his discussion of Behemoth?
- Job 41:1-34 — What point does the Lord make with his discussion of Leviathan?

Job 42

- Job 42:1-6 — How would you describe Job's response in these verses?
- Job 42:1-6 — What can we learn about repentance from Job? Has this book revealed a wrong way of thinking about God from which you need to repent?
- Job 42:7-17 — What key things do these last few verses remind us about Job and about God?

Applying Job

- Where has Job challenged your beliefs about God and how he works in the world?
- How does the book of Job challenge us to respond to suffering in our lives and the lives of others? What does it look like to respond to suffering faithfully and in a God-honoring manner?
- How does the book of Job challenge us to respond when we cannot make sense of God or how he works in the world? Consider what Paul teaches us in Romans 9:14-24.
- Consider Acts 2:22-24. How does the cross remind us at once both of God's goodness and his control over all things?
- Why is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus such good news for those who suffer?



Dr. Tom Smiley, Senior Pastor • 2235 Thompson Bridge Road, Gainesville, GA 30501
LakewoodLife.org • (770) 532-6307