



# EXPLORE THE BIBLE.®

## Personal Study Guide

Summer 2021 | KJV



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 and he will curs  
 and unto Satan, Behold  
 n thy power; only upon  
 orth thine hand. So Satan  
 the presence of the LORD

**LECTIONS**  
 here was a day when his son  
 daughters were eating and drink  
 ne in their eldest brother's house;  
 and there came a messenger unto Job  
 and said, The oxen were plowing, and the  
 asses feeding beside them:  
 15 And the Sabeans fell upon them, and  
 took them away; yea, they have slain th  
 servants with the edge of the sword; and  
 only am escaped alone to tell thee.  
 16 While he was yet speaking, there cam  
 also another, and said, The fire of God i  
 fallen from heaven, and hath burned up  
 the sheep, and the servants, and consume  
 them; and I only am escaped alone to tel  
 thee.  
 17 While he was yet speaking, there cam  
 also another, and said, The Chaldeans mad  
 out three bands, and fell upon the camels  
 and have carried them away, yea, and slai  
 the servants with the edge of the sword  
 and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.  
 18 While he was yet speaking, there cam  
 also another, and said, Thy sons and th

Job's name  
 ent (LXX), the  
 1. The Hebrew  
 is common in the  
 "east" could designate "virtually any place  
 from Damascus to Arabia and as far east as  
 Persia" (R. Alden, Job, 50).  
 1:5 To ensure his family's spiritual purity

1:9-11 Satan challenged Job's motive  
 for fearing God. He suggested that Job's  
 devotion to God depended on his life ci  
 cumstances.

U N D E R S T A N D | E X P L O R E | A P P L Y

# Job; Ecclesiastes



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# THE MEANING OF LIFE

Many people try to build their lives on success, wealth, power, or intellectual accomplishments. Such a way of life, however, is ultimately futile and meaningless. Everything in this life is fleeting and fading away; anything that does not have eternal value really has no value.

Jesus taught that a house built on the sand will collapse when the storms hit. But the one who builds his house on the rock—his house will stand (Matt. 7:24-27). This “rock” that provides a solid foundation for life is Jesus Himself. Jesus is the foundation for a life that is secure, satisfying, and meaningful.

The Old Testament character of Job learned that the answer to life’s mysteries and meaning lies in proper reverence for God. It’s been said that you don’t know God is all you need until God is all you have. In losing everything he had, Job discovered that God was all he really needed.

Solomon learned the meaning of life by gaining and acquiring everything life had to offer. Despite having everything, he found it was all futile and meaningless if God is not the central focus of life.

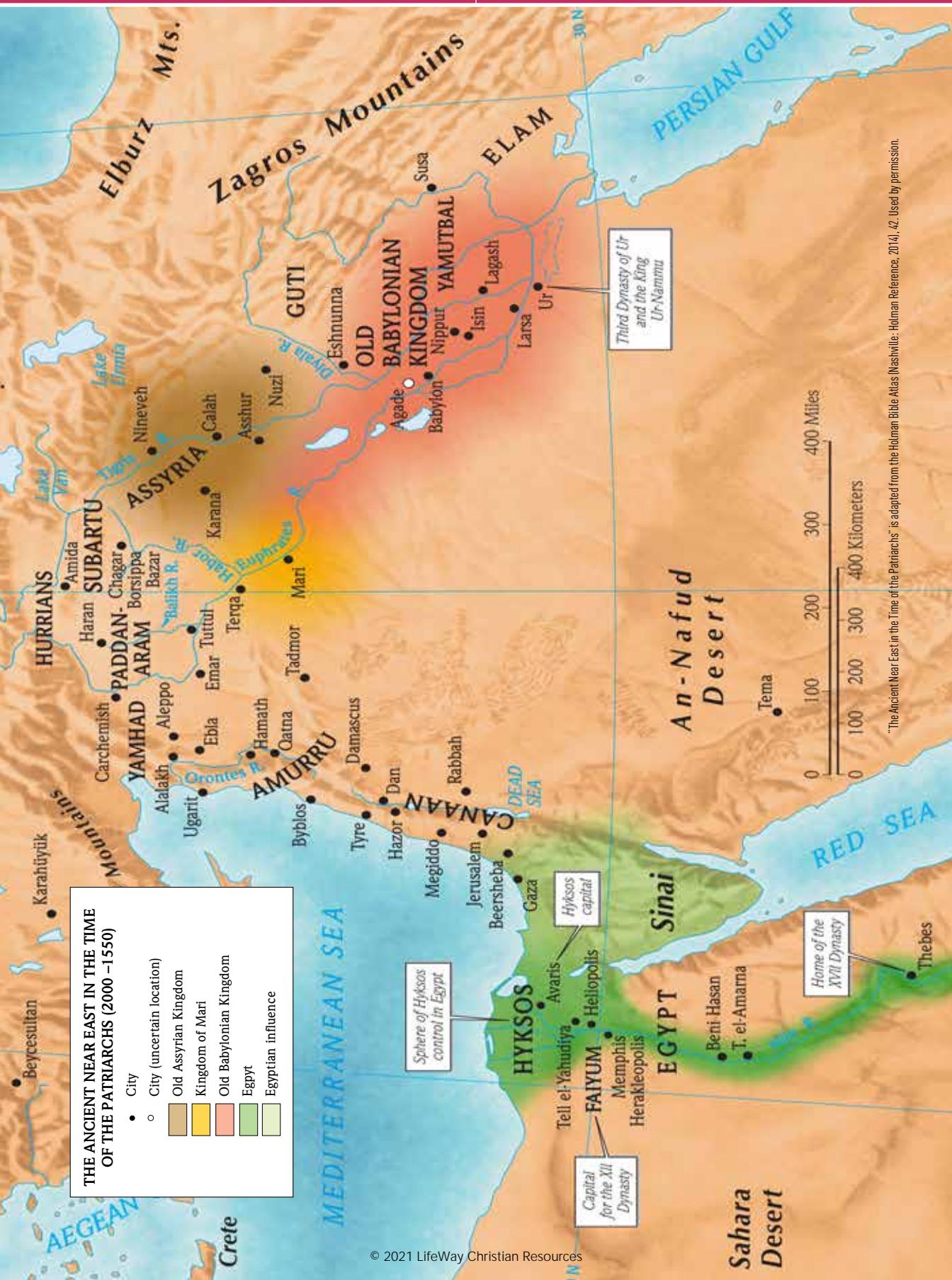
All of this points to our need of Jesus and the life He offers. He came so that we can have life that is abundant and eternal (John 3:16; 10:10). Right now, He is waiting for you.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

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After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

# Ancient Near East During the Patriarchs



"The Ancient Near East in the Time of the Patriarchs" is adapted from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 42. Used by permission.

# JOB; ECCLESIASTES

The Book of Job leads us to grapple with the question: Do we love God for who He is or for what we can get from Him? If we love Him only for what He gives us and not for who He is, then we're serving ourselves, not Him. It's been said we don't know that God is all we need until God is all we have. Job, who lost everything, reminds us that the Giver—not the gifts—is all we need. The Book of Ecclesiastes likewise grapples with a weighty question: What's the meaning of life? The writer of Ecclesiastes, who gained everything this life has to offer, shows us the futility and meaninglessness of life when it is lived apart from God as its central focus. Both Job and Ecclesiastes are complex books that ask deep questions and ultimately enable us to see afresh our need for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*[goExploreTheBible.com](https://goExploreTheBible.com)*

SUMMER 2021



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\*Evangelistic Emphasis

# MEET THE WRITER

**Terry J. Betts** wrote this study of Job and Ecclesiastes. Dr. Betts is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned degrees at Wright State University (B.S.Ed.) and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div., Ph.D.), and completed additional studies at Jerusalem University College.

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. Read LifeWay's full doctrinal guideline online at [lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline](http://lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline). The Key Doctrine statements in this study guide are adapted from these guidelines.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Mike Livingstone  
Content Editor

Ken Braddy  
Director of Sunday School

Brandon Hiltibidal  
Director, Adult Ministry

Send questions/comments to  
Content Editor by email:  
[Mike.Livingstone@lifeway.com](mailto:Mike.Livingstone@lifeway.com);  
or by mail to  
Content Editor, Explore the Bible:  
Adult Personal Study Guide,  
One LifeWay Plaza,  
Nashville, TN 37234-0175;  
or make comments on the Web at  
[lifeway.com](http://lifeway.com).

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# FROM THE TEAM LEADER

Job and Ecclesiastes? Really!

Most two-year blocks of time are filled with ups and downs. The past two years seem to have had more than their fair share. Members of the team that create these resources and our associates have seen deaths of loved ones and births, a retirement and an addition to our team, surgeries and recoveries, and sickness and health. We felt the economic impact of quarantines and learned new ways of relating, working, and teaching. Our experience was not unique, having heard from many of you as well.

The challenges of the last two years set the background for what you have in your hands. As we and our writers worked through Job and Ecclesiastes, we did so when facing many of the same questions addressed by Job and Solomon. We rediscovered the joy of trusting God for each day, the promise of a sunrise, and the satisfaction of a sunset. Job and Solomon came to the same conclusion as they looked at life: trust God in all things. They discovered a hope that was based on the One who does not change. That trust and hope brought balance and perspective to their lives.

Job and Solomon learned some important lessons that can help us today. As we study these two Bible books, we will focus on these timeless truths and the hope found through faith in God and in His redemptive work. May God help us remain faithful to Him in all things.

In His service,

**G. Dwayne McCrary**

Team Leader

[dwayne.mccrary@lifeway.com](mailto:dwayne.mccrary@lifeway.com)



# WORD WISE

**Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).**

**Abaddon** [uh BAD uhn]—Hebrew word that means “to perish,” parallel to death (Job 28:22) or Sheol (Job 26:6). It means the place of utter destruction. In the *King James Version*, Abaddon is translated “destruction.” Destruction and death are personified—they speak—in Job 28:22.

**Chaldeans** [kal DEE uhns]—In the Old Testament, the terms *Chaldeans* and *Babylonians* may be used interchangeably. The geographic region of Chaldea lies in modern Iraq, near its border to Iran.

**Cush**—A nation south of Egypt in Old Testament times; the Hebrew word *Cush* is sometimes translated “Ethiopia,” as in the *King James Version*. The borders of ancient Cush, however, were not identical with the borders of modern-day Ethiopia.

**Naamathite** [NAY uh muh thight]—A Naamathite was a resident of Na’ameh. Although the exact location is uncertain, this may have been Djebel-el-Na’ameh in north-west Arabia.

**Ophir** [OH fuhr]—A place famous in the ancient Near East for its trade, especially in its highly-valued gold. Solomon’s ships brought sixteen tons of gold and other goods from Ophir (1 Kings 9:28; 10:11). The exact geographical region is unknown.

**Sabeans** [suh BEE uhns]—Sabeans were descendants of Sheba, the rich queen who visited Solomon (1 Kings 10). They came from the southern part of Arabia and were known as traveling merchants (Job 6:19). *Sebean* may also have been a general term for nomadic merchants of any origin. Sabeans destroyed Job’s flocks, herds, and servants (Job 1:15).

**Sheol** [SHEE ohl]—In Old Testament understanding, Sheol was the abode of the dead. It is described as a place of doom and darkness (Job 10:21).

**Shuhite** [SHOO hight]—A person from Shuah; Shuah was the home of Job’s friend Bildad (Job 2:11). Shuhites were possibly descendants of Shuah, son of Abraham (Gen. 25:2).

**Temanite** [TEE muhn ight]—A person from Teman, a town located in Edom between the southern border of Israel and the Gulf of Aqaba. Temanites were renowned for their wisdom (Jer. 49:7). Job’s friend Eliphaz was a Temanite (Job 2:11).

# BIBLE READING PLAN

## JUNE

- 1. Job 1:1-12
- 2. Job 1:13-22
- 3. Job 2:1-13
- 4. Job 3:1-19
- 5. Job 3:20-26
- 6. Job 4:1-21
- 7. Job 5:1-15
- 8. Job 5:16-27
- 9. Job 6:1-13
- 10. Job 6:14-30
- 11. Job 7:1-10
- 12. Job 7:11-21
- 13. Job 8:1-22
- 14. Job 9:1-20
- 15. Job 9:21-35
- 16. Job 10:1-12
- 17. Job 10:13-22
- 18. Job 11:1-9
- 19. Job 11:10-20
- 20. Job 12:1-12
- 21. Job 12:13-25
- 22. Job 13:1-19
- 23. Job 13:20-28
- 24. Job 14:1-12
- 25. Job 14:13-22
- 26. Job 15:1-16
- 27. Job 15:17-35
- 28. Job 16:1-14
- 29. Job 16:15-22
- 30. Job 17:1-10

## JULY

- 1. Job 17:11-18:4
- 2. Job 18:5-21
- 3. Job 19:1-12
- 4. Job 19:13-29
- 5. Job 20:1-11
- 6. Job 20:12-29
- 7. Job 21:1-21
- 8. Job 21:22-34
- 9. Job 22:1-20
- 10. Job 22:21-30
- 11. Job 23:1-17
- 12. Job 24:1-12
- 13. Job 24:13-25
- 14. Job 25:1-26:14
- 15. Job 27:1-12
- 16. Job 27:13-23
- 17. Job 28:1-11
- 18. Job 28:12-28
- 19. Job 29:1-17
- 20. Job 29:18-25
- 21. Job 30:1-19
- 22. Job 30:20-31
- 23. Job 31:1-15
- 24. Job 31:16-28
- 25. Job 31:29-40
- 26. Job 32:1-14
- 27. Job 32:15-22
- 28. Job 33:1-11
- 29. Job 33:12-25
- 30. Job 33:26-33
- 31. Job 34:1-20

## AUGUST

- 1. Job 34:21-37
- 2. Job 35:1-16
- 3. Job 36:1-21
- 4. Job 36:22-33
- 5. Job 37:1-24
- 6. Job 38:1-24
- 7. Job 38:25-41
- 8. Job 39:1-18
- 9. Job 39:19-30
- 10. Job 40:1-24
- 11. Job 41:1-11
- 12. Job 41:12-34
- 13. Job 42:1-17
- 14. Ecclesiastes 1:1-18
- 15. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11
- 16. Ecclesiastes 2:12-26
- 17. Ecclesiastes 3:1-15
- 18. Ecclesiastes 3:16-22
- 19. Ecclesiastes 4:1-16
- 20. Ecclesiastes 5:1-7
- 21. Ecclesiastes 5:8-20
- 22. Ecclesiastes 6:1-12
- 23. Ecclesiastes 7:1-14
- 24. Ecclesiastes 7:15-29
- 25. Ecclesiastes 8:1-9
- 26. Ecclesiastes 8:10-17
- 27. Ecclesiastes 9:1-10
- 28. Ecclesiastes 9:11-18
- 29. Ecclesiastes 10:1-20
- 30. Ecclesiastes 11:1-10
- 31. Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

# INTRODUCTION TO JOB; ECCLESIASTES

## JOB

The writer of the Book of Job is unknown. Some scholars have proposed Job himself was the writer. Given the anonymity of the writer, the date when the book was written is also unknown. Proposals for the dating of the book range from the patriarchal period to the postexilic period. Since Job is a part of the wisdom literature, it touches on universal themes common to all of humanity. However, since it is part of the Old Testament, its original audience was God's covenant people, Israel, conceivably for the purpose of encouraging individuals or the nation as a whole during the times they suffered adversities.

The purpose of the book is to grapple with the question of why anyone should be devoted to God. Is God worthy of our worship apart from the material blessings He gives us? Satan posed this question by asking, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" (1:9). Job was an upright man, and even though he suffered incredible loss and was maligned by his friends, he remained faithful to God, silencing Satan's claim that the only reason Job worshiped God was because God had lavished Job with earthly blessings. While Job struggled to understand God's ways, he never stopped trusting in God's power, wisdom, and compassion.

## ECCLESIASTES

The Book of Ecclesiastes is part of the Old Testament's wisdom literature, and its name literally means "one who addresses an assembly of people" or a "teacher" or "preacher." Given the book's instruction in wisdom, it is best to think of the title referring to its writer as the Teacher. The writer reveals he was a son of David who ruled in Jerusalem over Israel. This points to Solomon, since he was the only descendant of David to rule in Jerusalem over all of Israel. The language as well as the content and literary evidence in the book all support Solomon's authorship. That being the case, Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes sometime between 971-931 BC, the time of his reign. Given his tone, he most likely wrote the book closer to the end of his life.

The purpose of the book is to show the futility and meaninglessness of life when it is lived apart from God as its central focus and object of devotion. Anything that does not have eternal value really has no value. Recognition of this truth should drive people to faith in God. Satisfaction in life comes when people gladly trust God and His sovereign will for their lives, rejoice in His blessings, fear Him, and obey His commandments. Life is short, so people need to seize the opportunities God gives them when He gives them and prepare themselves for death and then the judgment where they will give an account to God for how they lived their lives.

# OUTLINES OF JOB; ECCLESIASTES

## OUTLINE OF JOB

- I.** The Testing Begins (1:1–2:10)
- II.** First Round of Discourse (2:11–14:22)
- III.** Second Round of Discourse (15:1–21:34)
- IV.** Third Round of Discourse (22:1–31:40)
- V.** Elihu Speaks (32:1–37:24)
- VI.** God Speaks (38:1–42:6)
- VII.** Resolution (42:7-17)

## OUTLINE OF ECCLESIASTES

- I.** Introduction: The Search for Meaning (1:1-11)
- II.** The Search Described (1:12–6:12)
- III.** Wisdom Gained in the Search (7:1–10:20)
- IV.** Conclusion: Fear and Honor God (11:1–12:14)



### ON THE COVER

Stone olive press found at Tel Aviv, the ancient port city of Joppa. The beam through the round upright stone was pushed by an animal or human. The rolling stone crushed the olives, and the oil was collected in a vat. Olive oil was used for cooking, lamp fuel, medicinal ointments, and the anointing of kings. Oil also was a symbol of blessing and joy. (See session 12.)

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BRENT BRUCE/ERETZ ISRAEL MUSEUM/TEL AVIV, ISRAEL [60/9260]



# *Faith Tested*

Believers show the depth of their faith in adversity.

## **JOB 1:8-22**

Most of us hold to an idea that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. But how do we explain bad things happening to good people? Adversity can blindside us and leave us reeling in shock and dismay. We struggle to look for answers, yet answers are not always found, just more questions. Job experienced unexpected tragedies in his life and demonstrated the depth of his faith as he faced them.

**What is the most difficult challenge you have faced?**

**What did you learn about what you trusted during that challenge?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **JOB 1:1–2:10**

Job 1:1–2:10 lays the groundwork for the Book of Job. It begins by identifying Job as a real person who lived in the country of Uz. Jeremiah the prophet mentioned the land of Uz being in proximity to Edom, south of the land of Canaan (Jer. 25:20; Lam. 4:21). The text also clearly states Job was a man of integrity (Job 1:1). At the outset, the book establishes that none of the tragedies that are to beset him as the narrative unfolds happen as God’s punishment or discipline on account of Job’s sin. Everything about Job was sincere as he sought to live according to God’s will. In fact, he was not only meticulous about continuing in faithful obedience to God, he was deeply concerned about the spiritual condition of his children (1:4-5). Job’s uprightness is essential to the message of the book.

Job 1:6 introduces Satan into the narrative. Satan’s name means “accuser” or “adversary.” He belittles God (1:11; 2:4-5), demonstrates he is an enemy of those faithful to God by seeking to destroy them (1:13-19; see also Luke 22:31; 1 Pet. 5:8), and is the accuser of the people of God (1:9-11; see also Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10).

Satan raised the questions that are at the heart of the Book of Job: “Is God worthy of worship for who He is, or is He worth worshiping only for what one can get out of Him?” Is it possible for those who belong to God to remain faithful to Him in the midst of great suffering? God allowed Satan to take away Job’s wealth, health, and family while sparing Job’s life (1:13-19; 2:4-8), demonstrating that Satan was under God’s authority and but a pawn. God was the One who providentially directed all that would transpire. Furthermore, these actions laid the groundwork for God’s answer to Satan’s challenging questions. God used His servant Job to silence the Accuser through Job’s faithfulness (1:20-22; 2:9-10).

**As you read Job 1:8-22, what do you discover concerning what faith in God looks like in the face of adversity?**

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# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **PERMISSION GRANTED** (JOB 1:8-12)

**<sup>8</sup> And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? <sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? <sup>10</sup> Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. <sup>12</sup> And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.**

### **VERSE 8**

Verse 8 begins with the word *and*, referring back to the preceding verses. The scene is reminiscent of the prophet Micaiah's vision of seeing the Lord sitting on His throne and the whole heavenly army standing at both sides of Him (1 Kings 22:19). What is unexpected about this scene is that Satan also attended. Satan came with the "sons of God" (Job 1:6), but he certainly was not one of them.

The Lord asked Satan, "Whence comest thou?" (v. 7). Satan's cloaked reply revealed his reason for coming was for no good, saying, "From going to and fro in the earth" (v. 7). Peter later revealed what Satan's intentions were and continue to be, stating: "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

God knew Satan's intentions. Therefore, He got straight to the point, asking Satan: ***Hast thou considered my servant Job?*** In other words, "Is Job your next target?" God made some powerful statements about Job. Saying that Job feared the Lord meant Job had a deep-seated reverence and awe for God that caused him to want to please God at all costs. It involved wonder, submission, worship, love, and admiration inspired by God's authority over him and all of creation.

The fact that God initiated the conversation with Satan demonstrates that He was orchestrating what was going on and what

would transpire going forward in the Book of Job. Satan appears to have thought he had an opportunity to destroy one of God's saints while at the same time bringing disrepute to God. However, God was about to use both His servant, Job, and the adversary and accuser of the saints, Satan, to bring glory to Himself. As the narrative unfolds, God will silence Satan through the life of His servant Job, such that Satan will no longer be mentioned in the book after Job 2:7.

**Why is it important for believers to remember that while we may be surprised and shocked by sudden calamities, God is not and He is in complete control?**

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### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *The Kingdom*

The kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King (Rom. 5:17).

### **VERSES 9-11**

The question in verse 9 gets at the heart of the message of the Book of Job. Satan's question was dripping with cynicism, questioning Job's motives and suggesting that the only reason Job feared God was for the material blessings he could get from God. According to Satan, God was just a means to an end for Job. Satan was saying that Job did not really love God, honor God, or worship God because God is worthy. Rather, Job's piety toward God was a ruse, and the object of Job's affections and his true god was Job himself.

Stating that God had ***made an hedge about*** Job, his family, and possessions means that God had protected Job and everything that belonged to him from harm. Satan's claim was that God had secured Job's loyalty with bribery. Satan implied that Job's faith was untested because Job had not experienced any difficulties in life. Instead, God not only protected Job but also continued to bless and prosper Job in

his **work** and **substance**. The phrase **increased in the land** describes the vast swath of land that spread in every direction with which God had blessed Job. Job 1:2-3 attests to the validity of Satan's claims concerning what God had done for Job.

Satan suggested God test Job to see if Job's motives for worshiping Him were because of his love for God or his love of self. At the heart of the matter is the question: Can a person truly love God for who He is and not just for what he or she can get from God? The stretching out of one's arm or hand was a common ancient Near Eastern idiom meaning "to go and attack." Satan implored God to aggressively destroy everything that Job owned, and if He did, then Job would **curse** Him.

## ***Can a person truly love God for who He is and not just for what he or she can get from God?***

### **VERSE 12**

The Lord accepted Satan's challenge and gave him permission to do whatever he wanted to do with Job's family and possessions. However, God stipulated to Satan: upon Job **put not forth thine hand**. God's response to Satan highlights that while Satan is powerful, his power is limited and under God's sovereignty. God's ways are sometimes mysterious to us, but we can rest assured that whatever He does will be for our ultimate good and His ultimate glory.

**How should knowing that Satan seeks opportunities to attack those who are faithful followers of God affect how we think and live?**

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### **ATTACK EXECUTED (JOB 1:13-19)**

**<sup>13</sup> And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: <sup>14</sup> And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: <sup>15</sup> And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of**

the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.<sup>16</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

<sup>17</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.<sup>18</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:<sup>19</sup> And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

### VERSES 13-15

Job's *sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house*. This appears to be a harmless picture of a family enjoying time together. However, in the context there is a foreboding aspect to it that foreshadows the impending annihilation of the blessings Job and his family had experienced.

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### DID YOU KNOW?

The Sabeans were nomads from the southern part of Arabia and descendants of Sheba, the rich queen who visited Solomon (1 Kings 10). Later in Job they are called "traveling merchants" (Job 6:19; see also Joel 3:8).

The scene highlights the unexpectedness and suddenness of Satan's strike against Job and his family. In a matter of moments, Job's blessings would be replaced with sorrow and grief. One after another, Job's messengers came and reported the swift succession of ruin of Job's material wealth. The first to fall were Job's *oxen* and *asses*. Verse 3 indicates Job had five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred female donkeys. The text does not indicate how many *servants* were tending to the oxen and donkeys, but one can assume

there was quite a substantial number. Like a swift bird of prey, the **•Sabians fell upon them** to snatch all of the animals and kill all of the servants except for the one who was able to escape and inform Job of what had transpired.

### VERSES 16-19

While this servant was still reporting to Job what happened to his servants, oxen, and donkeys, a second servant arrived to report yet another disaster. This servant reported that **the fire of God is fallen from heaven** and consumed Job's **sheep** and the other **servants** with them. This could be describing lightning strikes, but whatever it was, it was the act of Satan. While this servant was **yet speaking**, a third servant arrived, exclaiming three bands of **•Chaldeans** from northern Mesopotamia raided Job's **camels** and seized them after killing all the rest of Job's **servants**. In a matter of moments, Job's assailants came from what must have seemed like every direction—the south, the north, and even the sky.

Job's most devastating report came from yet another servant who arrived while the third one was **yet speaking**. This fourth messenger pronounced the deaths of all of Job's children as they were at the oldest brother's banquet. **A great wind** struck the young man's home, causing it to collapse. All of these tragedies happened without Job's being aware of what had transpired between God and Satan. He was surely at a loss of understanding why these things happened as they did.

**What can believers learn about the timing, suddenness, and severity of Satan's attacks from these verses?**

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### TRUST MAINTAINED (JOB 1:20-22)

**<sup>20</sup> Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, <sup>21</sup> And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. <sup>22</sup> In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.**

## VERSES 20-22

In response to the surmounting tragedies in his life, Job continued praising God. He recognized God's sovereign rule over all things. All of this is demonstrated by the succession of deliberate actions he took after receiving his servants' jarring reports. Tearing one's clothing and shaving one's head and beard were customary ways of expressing grief in the ancient Near East. After expressing his grief before the Lord, Job ***fell down upon the ground, and worshipped*** Him.

What came out of Job's mouth revealed what was in his heart. He did not blame the culprits who had attacked or the servants who failed to defend Job's interests. In fact, he did not even blame God. Instead, trusting God, Job recognized God's sovereign control over all things. Job realized all that he had was from God's gracious hand. Just as it was God's prerogative to give, it was also God's prerogative to take it all away. Rather than sinning against God, Job voiced his confidence in the sovereignty of God even in the midst of extreme loss and sorrow.

**How does viewing God as sovereign over all His creation impact how a person responds to losses in this life?**

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### **BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary.*

Read an article on "suffering" in a Bible dictionary. Make a list of the faithful men and women of the Bible who suffered unimaginable circumstances. How do these examples help you properly frame your expectations of the Christian life? How does their faith teach you and shape your response to suffering?

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# *Hope Defined*

Believers find hope for life only in God.

## **JOB 14:1-14**

Many people enjoy an athletic competition between teams or individuals who are at the top of their sport. But when a subpar team or player is matched against a juggernaut, we may not tune in, especially if that subpar team is our favorite team. Even the subpar team's players may appear listless because they have lost hope in the contest. Losing hope in the future saps strength in the present. Job 14 highlights that believers will find strength in the present when they look to God and hope only in Him.

**Share about a time when your favorite team or player was outmatched going into the contest. What emotions did you observe as the contest unfolded?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## **JOB 2:11–14:22**

Job 2:11-13 sets the stage for the longest section of the book. After hearing about Job's adversity, three of his friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—came to visit him. Job 3:1–31:40 is the record of Job's dialogue with these men. The theme in these conversations is Job's friends arguing that his suffering was God's judgment on Job because of his sin. Job responded by claiming innocence, that he had done nothing to warrant such discipline.

The first cycle of dialogues between Job and his friends is in Job 3:1–14:22, beginning with Job's lament (3:1-26). In agony, Job expressed his wish that he had never been born. Given this was impossible, Job resigned himself to wanting to die. However, he never expressed thoughts of taking his own life.

In chapters 4–5, Eliphaz rebuked Job for his response to suffering. Eliphaz stated that he had never seen the innocent suffer; only those who committed injustice reaped calamity. Consequently, Eliphaz concluded that Job must have sinned against God. Job responded to Eliphaz by saying that his main reasons for wanting an early death was for relief from his suffering and his desire to stay faithful to God unto the end. What's more, Job said his suffering was multiplied by the disloyalty of his friends. Job was ready to admit his sin against God if they could point out what that sin was (6:1–7:21).

Bildad piled on to what Eliphaz said, saying Job's children deserved to die and that if Job was pure and upright, then he could experience restoration. Bildad argued that God blesses the righteous and causes bad things to happen to the wicked (8:1-22). Zophar called Job a hypocrite for claiming innocence (11:1-20).

In response to this first dialogue with his friends (12:1–14:22), Job stated he knew as much about wisdom as they did. Consequently, if they were unable to contribute to the situation positively, then they should at least keep their mouths shut as the matter was between Job and God. Job concluded with a prayer imploring God to stop persecuting him (13:20–14:22).

**As you read Job 14:1-14 identify words or phrases that point to a lack of hope. Why is it so important for believers to hope in God?**

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## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **QUESTIONS** (JOB 14:1-6)

<sup>1</sup> Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. <sup>2</sup> He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. <sup>3</sup> And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? <sup>4</sup> Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. <sup>5</sup> Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; <sup>6</sup> Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

### **VERSES 1-2**

Job 14:1-14 is a portion of a prayer Job prayed to God that spans 13:20–14:22. In 13:20-28, Job had two requests and several questions. His requests were for God to stop hurting him and to deliver him from the fright he was experiencing. Then Job asked how he had sinned against God. What was the cause of God’s wrath against him? Why would God punish him for the sins of his youth? Why did God consider Job an enemy? What possible purpose could God’s actions against Job serve?

Next, Job expanded his questioning to how God treats all of humanity. Job turned to the perplexing question of why human life is so brief and miserable. He observed that everyone struggles, suffers, and then dies. It all happens in a short amount of time. Job used two metaphors to make his point. The first was that human life is **like a flower**. The birth of a child is beautiful and accompanied with so much hope and potential. However, soon enough this precious, fragile flower will wither away because of the beating sun of suffering and the hot winds of adversity. The second metaphor bemoans that this child will quickly disappear from the face of the earth **as a shadow** that **does not last**. Life is short of days but full of trouble.

## How does reflecting on the relatively short duration of human life cause a person to consider some of the greater questions of life?

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### VERSES 3-4

These observations concerning the brevity of life and its being full of suffering led Job to ask three questions that puzzled him. It might appear that Job was asking whether or not God even notices what is happening to humanity. In other words, he may have been asking, “God, do you even take notice and care about people’s suffering?” However, this was not his question. His question was that since Job’s life was already brief and full of suffering, why did God add to his pain by treating Job the way He had been treating him? Knowing what he knew about God’s character, Job’s plight perplexed him. If a man is so fragile and oppressed with distress in life, why would God add to his agony?

### *Job’s only hope was for God to do for Job what Job could not do for himself.*

Even though Job insisted he had done nothing to warrant the agonies he was experiencing, he realized he was a sinner. How could Job survive standing before God in **judgment**? Every person is a descendant of Adam and Eve, so everyone has inherited their sin nature. Every person is a sinner by nature and by choice, and therefore born into this world as children already under the wrath of God. Job knew this truth. Everyone is **unclean** because of sin, so how could anyone turn one’s impurity into purity? Job recognized it was impossible for anyone to do this for oneself. He had already hinted he wished he had a mediator between him and God (9:33), and now he realized that without someone else to make him pure, he had no hope of standing and surviving before God in judgment. No man can purify himself. Job’s only hope was for God to do for Job what Job could not do for himself. Only God could cleanse Job of his sin and save him.

## VERSES 5-6

Job concluded this part of his prayer by emphatically acknowledging that God sovereignly controls a person's lifespan. A person's days are determined, the length of time an individual lives depends on God, and no human can change or circumvent these divine limits. This truth should give believers peace and hope, because the number of our days on this earth are in God's hands.

However, since God has determined that life is short, Job appealed to God to let people enjoy the brief number of days they have on this earth. He asked God to let him enjoy the time he had on earth as he longed for the end of his life *as an hireling* yearns for the end of a long, hard day of labor.

## DESPAIR (JOB 14:7-12)

**<sup>7</sup> For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. <sup>8</sup> Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; <sup>9</sup> Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. <sup>10</sup> But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? <sup>11</sup> As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: <sup>12</sup> So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.**

## VERSES 7-9

Verses 7-12 contain a contrast and a comparison from nature. Job contrasted the life of a **tree** with the life of a human being. Referring back to verse 5 and the limits God has placed on human lifespans, there is more hope for a tree than there is for a person. If a tree is cut down, it is possible for it to continue living. At times, **the tender branch** may be seen sprouting from a bare, dry stump. In fact, most deciduous trees like oaks, maples, and beeches possess this trait. Some more tenacious trees can sprout repeatedly after having been cut to the ground. This is what allows forests to return after a fire or destructive storm. In time, trees may regrow to the height they once were.

The key words in verse 7 are **hope** and **sprout**. Even after it is cut down, there is hope for the tree to sprout again. There is hope for renewal and new life for a tree even after it appears to be dead. In spite of the fact

that a tree is old, its roots are buried deep in the earth, and its stump is dying, the **scent of water** gives it hope. Just the smallest amount of water is able to make all the difference. Eventually, the life-giving water revitalizes the tree, and signs of life spring forth with new shoots that may grow into a luxuriant tree. There's the probability that the tree will appear as if it had never been cut down in the first place. Therefore, unlike a human being, the tree apparently has no limit on its lifespan.

## VERSE 10

**But man** marks the sharp contrast between Job's observations of a tree and a human being. The irony is in Job's word choice for *person* in Hebrew. Instead of using the typical words *ish* or *adam*, he used the word *geber*, which is associated with the idea of being "strong" or "might." The irony is that a strong person could lay low a tree with an axe, yet the tree will survive while the person who was able to cut it down will fade away. The strength of every person will be laid low. Job emphasized this truth with the question, **where is he?** Here Job used the Hebrew word *adam*, reminiscent of the first man, Adam, whom God created from dust (Gen. 2:7). When Adam sinned, God said to him: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). Thus, Job's question sounded as if he was asking God: Where is this one who has returned to dust? From a human perspective, the rhetorical question's answer is that he is no more.

**How does Job show us the importance of looking at life from God's perspective rather than our own?**

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## VERSES 11-12

Following the contrast in verses 7-10, Job made a comparison taken from nature. He compared people's deaths with a lake and riverbed that have become dry. An example of such a dry lake in the United States is in Death Valley National Park. There, Devil's Golf Course was once a lake that evaporated some 2,000 years ago leaving behind a lifeless 1,000 foot-layer of pointy salt spikes and minerals. The formation of dry lakes and riverbeds was a common phenomenon in the ancient

Near East. In that part of the world, some lakes and riverbeds were permanently dry. They were pictures of death and hopelessness.

From a purely human perspective, Job stated there is no visible evidence that people can hope for life after death. Thankfully, Job's perspective on matters of life and death included God. The fact that Job brought these matters to God in prayer demonstrates the faith he had in God, even if Job's own perspective was limited. Recognizing his helpless state, Job brought his concerns to the only One who could help him.

Having faith in God does not always mean having the answers to our questions, but it means taking our questions to God who has all the answers. It means trusting in God in spite of the fact that in His providential wisdom He has chosen not to reveal to us all that He is doing. One must remember that the whole premise of the Book of Job is based on Job having no knowledge of what happened between God and Satan that led up to the events that transpire in the book. Therefore, Job demonstrated that questioning what God is doing and why God does what He does may at times be part of a life of faith.

**How does keeping our eyes on Christ and His gift of eternal life help us overcome feelings of despair?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Compare related passages.*

Job's friends attempted to explain his suffering. Read Job 4:7-8 (Eliphaz); 8:4-6 (Bildad); and 11:13-20 (Zophar), and summarize their explanations of Job's suffering. How do their views of suffering compare to commonly accepted ways of understanding suffering today? Read Job 42:7. What was God's response to the explanations given by Job's friends, and what warning does this serve for us?

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## HOPE (JOB 14:13-14)

**<sup>13</sup> O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! <sup>14</sup> If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.**

### VERSES 13-14

In contrast to the despairing tone of the previous verses, Job recognized there is hope in God. He asked God to hide and protect him in ***the grave***. However, instead of the grave being a permanent place of death, Job saw it as a place to hide temporarily until all that was happening to him was over. Job was ready to die with the hope that God would remember him at that appointed time. (See verse 5.) He hoped that God would not leave him in the grave, but that at an appointed time He would bring Job back.

Job's pinnacle question is in verse 14. It appears Job did not know the answer to this question but asked it of the only One who did. By asking the question, Job attested that there is hope that the Giver of life would revive his life. Job asserted that if he could hope in a resurrection from the dead, then he would wait on God until his ***change*** would happen. It is a picture of patient expectation in spite of suffering; Job realized his brief life of suffering would pale in light of an eternity with God. The word *change* here is the same Hebrew word that is translated "sprout again" in verse 7. Its meaning is often associated with the idea of changing clothes, a concept Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 to describe the resurrection of the people of God.

**Why is putting one's hope in God the only reliable way to face feelings of despair?**

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### KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (1 John 2:28).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Suffering in the world leads the believer to consider the greater questions of life.
- Viewing death as the final state for humans can lead to despair.
- Believers can find hope in God’s promise of life in heaven.

**List some of the questions you have that come about by observing suffering in this world. Spend time sharing your questions with God, asking Him to help you trust Him even in the midst of these questions.**

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**As a group, discuss how death can be a cause of despair. How can you help others deal with this despair based on the truths examined in today’s study?**

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**Memorize Job 13:15. Reflect on the impact a life lived for God even in the midst of great suffering has on others. With whom can you share this verse this week?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *Redemption Found*

Believers can trust God to be faithful to them.

## **JOB 19:19-29**

A person doesn't have to be alone to be lonely. We can be surrounded by people and yet not feel connected to them. That can happen even when sitting at a table with people we would count as friends. Such was the case with Job. He was surrounded by so-called friends and yet experienced the sting of abandonment and loneliness because they had turned against him. However, Job realized that even though his friends had abandoned him, the Lord never would.

**Think about a time when you felt alone even though you were surrounded by people. What factors make a person feel alone even when in a crowd?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## JOB 15:1–21:34

This section of the Book of Job contains the second cycle of dialogues between Job and his friends. In Job 15:2-3, Eliphaz accused Job of having abandoned his faithful devotion to God and thus hindering his prayers. Eliphaz accused Job of arrogance and hypocrisy (15:7-19). He surmised Job was suffering and would continue to suffer because Job “stretcheth out his hand against God” (15:25). Job responded by saying his friends were “miserable comforters” (16:2). While Job lamented his suffering, he revealed his hope in an Advocate and Mediator who would stand up for him before God (16:18-21).

In Job 18:1-21, Bildad’s response to Job was an angry verbal assault, restating the retribution principle that bad things happen to wicked people and good things happen to godly people. Bildad assumed Job was wicked and concluded that Job really did not know God (18:21). Even though Job bemoaned his condition and still did not understand why he was suffering, he hoped in his Redeemer who would resurrect him (19:1-29).

In Job 20:1-29, Zophar stated he was upset. What Job said was insulting to Zophar and his claim to wisdom (20:1-3). Then Zophar argued that no matter how wealthy and successful the wicked may be, their health and prosperity will be short-lived and eventually come crashing down just like what had happened to Job. Even though Job had declared that his Redeemer lives and he would one day see God (19:25-27), Zophar said that Job would lie dead in dust (20:11). Zophar contended that because Job was wicked, he would never again enjoy life (20:12-21). According to Zophar, the only things Job had to look forward to were agony, despair, and death (20:22-29). Job’s response dismantled his friends’ simple notions of the retribution principle, because the wicked do not always suffer and the righteous often do (21:1-34).

**As you read Job 19:19-29, note how Job highlighted humanity’s need for a Redeemer. How is the need for a Redeemer tied to the warning given to the friends?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## FAILING FRIENDS (JOB 19:19-22)

**19 All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me.<sup>20</sup> My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.<sup>21</sup> Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me.<sup>22</sup> Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?**

### VERSE 19

Most people are familiar with the phrase, “With friends like these who needs enemies?” This expression fittingly summarizes what Job expressed in Job 19:19-22 about his friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—who had come to console him in his time of agony and grief. Job’s friends despised him, meaning they were disgusted by him.

Moreover, what added to Job’s suffering was that these were men Job loved. In Job’s time of need, they **turned against** him. Job’s remaining and extended family already found him repulsive (19:17), and now when he looked to his closest confidants for help and encouragement, they scorned him too.

What Job endured reminds us of what Jesus experienced. When Jesus was suffering in the garden of Gethsemane, His disciples could not even support Him by staying awake to keep watch and pray. Furthermore, when the enemy came and arrested Jesus, all of Jesus’ closest friends abandoned Him. Peter went so far as to deny he even knew the Lord three times (Luke 22:39-62). These events and what followed in Jesus’ suffering on the cross should remind believers that even when those closest to us may not understand what we are experiencing and may even abandon us, our Lord Jesus Christ empathizes with us in our time of need and will never forsake or abandon us.

**What makes the failure of a friend to show compassion so disheartening to the person needing help?**

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## VERSE 20

As a result of Satan's onslaught, Job had become a shocking and horrific shell of himself. His body was emaciated down to skin and bones. His physical condition was so dire that he was as near to death as any living being could be, up to this point surviving and escaping the cold grip of death **with the skin of my teeth**, meaning just barely. This was Job's way of describing his body as having wasted away to the brink of death. Unending, excruciating pain tormented him.

## VERSES 21-22

Then Job cried out a double plea for **pity** from his friends. In the Old Testament, the repetition of a word or phrase is for the purpose of emphasis. Job emphatically implored his friends to show him compassion and mercy. The emphatic way he said it demonstrates how much Job desperately needed them to be compassionate and kind to him. Why? Because Job believed that God had **struck** him with a violent, devastating blow.

Yet it was their belief that God had struck Job down in retribution for his sin that caused Job's friends to refuse to show him mercy. In their eyes, Job was condemned to experience the full measure of what was the rightful judgment of God on a deserving sinner. The actions of Job's friends should be a reminder that there are those who think they are taking a stand for God when in reality they are against Him. (See 42:7.) Equally important, we must remember God was not the one who struck Job. Twice Satan told God to strike Job, but both times God told Satan that Job "is in your power" or literally "in your hand." What's more, God limited what Satan could do to Job (1:11-12; 2:5-6).

***How delighted Satan must be  
when people blame God for what  
Satan has done!***

Thus all the horrible things Job experienced were by Satan's hand. Nevertheless, Job was unaware of God and Satan's conversations and assumed it was God who had struck him. People must resist the temptation of always blaming God for their difficulties. How delighted Satan must be when people blame God for what Satan has done! In contrast, we are never more like God than when we show compassion

to those who are suffering, even to sinners who are suffering. If God withheld His mercy and compassion from sinners, then no one would have any hope of salvation. Everyone needs compassion.

### **Why should the people of God be quick to show compassion to those who suffer no matter the reason for their suffering?**

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Job's questions to his friends in verse 22 are revealing. He was basically saying, "Look at me! Hasn't God done enough to me already? What reason do you have to pile on to what God is already doing to me? And even if I had sinned against God, what is my sin against you? How is it your place to contribute to my sufferings? It appears as if you have some kind of morbid appetite that enjoys watching me suffer. You just cannot seem to get enough of it."

We must not have unrealistic expectations of even the most pious of our Christian brothers and sisters. They deal with the same sin nature within them we contend with ourselves. Consequently, it is just as inevitable that they will let us down as we will them. This truth will help us be understanding of our friends' lack of understanding. Jesus alone always understands what we are going through.

### **LIVING REDEEMER (JOB 19:23-27)**

**<sup>23</sup> Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! <sup>24</sup> That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! <sup>25</sup> For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: <sup>26</sup> And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: <sup>27</sup> Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.**

### **VERSES 23-24**

Job hoped for a permanent record of what he had said and was about to declare. He feared he would die before he was vindicated and cleared of all of the false accusations his friends had cast at him. He wanted a permanent statement that would put the record straight to the people of his day and future generations.

Job’s desire for his words to be **graven ... in the rock** suggests a monument, possibly like an inscription on a tombstone. Stone monuments with engravings are common from the ancient Near East. God answered Job’s request, and God’s Word contains a permanent record of Job’s vindication and declaration.

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary to better understand a word.*

Read articles about “redeemer” in a Bible dictionary. Review Bible passages identified in the articles. What was the significance of Job declaring that his redeemer was living? How does that image of a living redeemer impact how we understand Christ’s work in our redemption?

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**VERSES 25-27**

Verse 25 contains the beginning of Job’s emphatic declaration. He began by asserting ***I know that my redeemer liveth.*** This is an affirmation of extreme confidence. He did not say “I think” or “I suspect” or “I hope.” Job knew. Also, there is a personal aspect to Job’s assertion that he expressed with the word, *my*. He did not say “a Redeemer lives” but that *my redeemer lives*.

The Hebrew word for *redeemer* is *gō’el*. At its most basic meaning it refers to one who protects, saves, rescues, and restores. For instance, to protect a family’s inheritance, a near relative could purchase their land to prevent its sale to someone outside the family. This near relative was called a “kinsman-redeemer.” This idea also applied to a person who sold himself into slavery in order to pay off a debt. A close

relative played the role of a redeemer if he paid off the debt and thereby purchased his poor relative's freedom from bondage. Boaz in the Book of Ruth demonstrated the role of a kinsman-redeemer. Arguably, the greatest picture of redemption in the Old Testament is in the Book of Exodus when God promised to "redeem" Israel from slavery (Ex. 6:6). Then, God rescued His people who had been unjustly enslaved by the Egyptians.

On numerous occasions the prophets and psalmists referred to Yahweh as the Redeemer of His people. So who was the Redeemer to whom Job referred? Verses 25-27 are so tightly connected there is no doubt that the Redeemer to whom Job referred is God. The New Testament reveals Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. In the end, God will stand on Job's grave and be his eternal vindication. The phrase ***stand ... upon the earth*** can also be translated "stand against the dust." When Adam sinned in the garden of Eden, God told him, "you are dust, and you will return to dust," speaking of Adam's death (Gen. 3:19). Job knew that his God would not allow dust to be his end, as verses 26-27 indicate.

Even after Job's skin would become dust, he believed he would ***see God*** in his flesh. Instead of Job's skin being devoured and his being marched away to "the king of terrors," as Bildad declared (18:13-14), Job anticipated the day he would see God with his own eyes, and when he did, God would not be a stranger to him. In other words, God would be his friend. The hope of a bodily resurrection was at the center of Job's faith as it is at the center of all of those who place their faith in God and the person and work of Christ.

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *Glorification***

Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed (Titus 2:11-14).

In John 11:24-27, Martha expressed this faith when her brother Lazarus died. Jesus declared Himself to be the resurrection and the life and that those who believe in Him will live even if they physically die. Martha believed that the Lord would accomplish this, and so

did Job. Job may not have known how God would do it, but he knew he could trust God to do it. Consequently, Job longed for the day he would see his God face to face and worship Him.

**How does the promise of a future resurrection in Christ impact how a believer lives?**

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### **WARNING ISSUED** (JOB 19:28-29)

**<sup>28</sup> But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? <sup>29</sup> Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment.**

#### **VERSES 28-29**

Job concluded with a warning to his friends, saying that they too faced the *judgment* of God. ***Be ye afraid of the sword***, he warned them. The friends who had made accusations against Job would be judged by the same standard they had proposed God would use against Job. Eliphaz had told Job: “thine own mouth condemneth thee, ... thine own lips testify against thee” (15:6). Here, Job turned the tables on his friends and countered that this was in fact true for them. Job’s suffering happened because he was righteous, not because he was a sinner. Perhaps, if Job’s friends had been more righteous Satan might have targeted them.

**Why must humility always accompany a loving warning to others concerning God’s judgment?**

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- People enduring hardships need each other to show compassion to them.
- Believers can live with confidence in God’s redemption.
- Believers can lovingly warn others of God’s judgment to be faced by all.

**Who do you know who is facing a challenging time? What actions do you need to take this week to show them compassion?**

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**Reflect on what a person with total confidence in God looks and acts like. What do you need to change in your life so that you are closer to the person you imagined with total confidence in God?**

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**As a group, discuss the role the group plays in lovingly warning others about God’s judgment. What needs to be changed within the group to more lovingly warn others?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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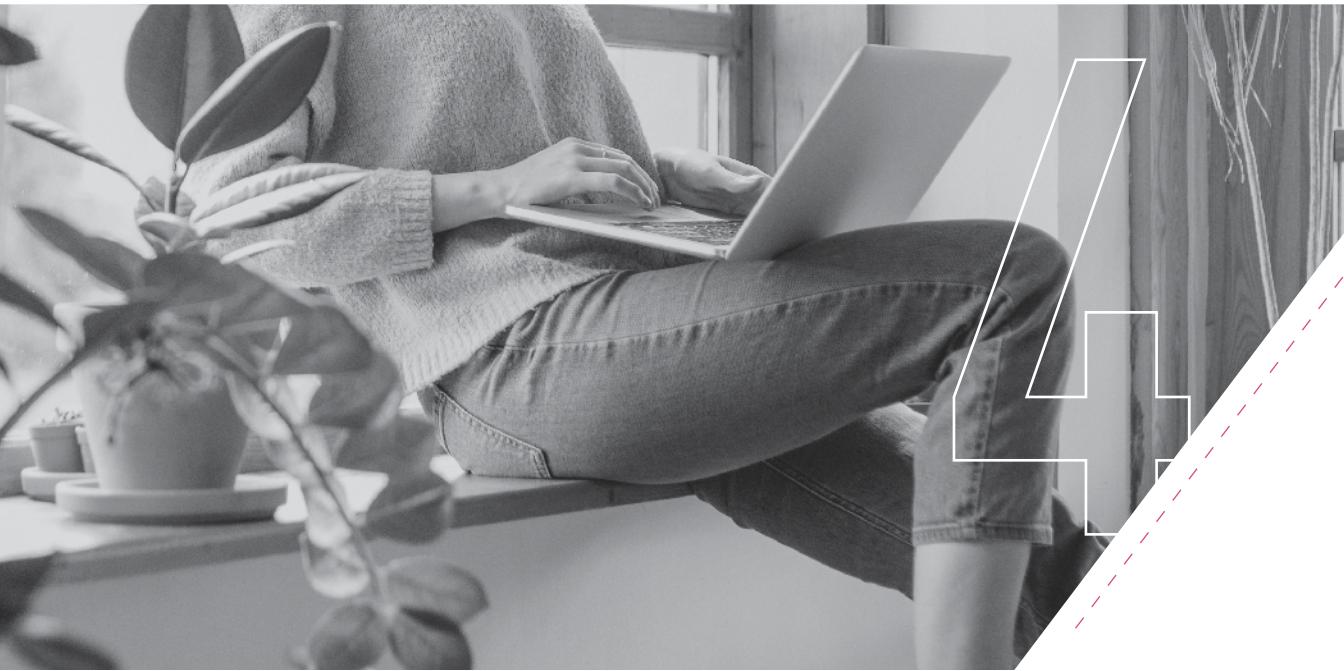
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# *Wisdom Gained*

God's wisdom is found in fearing and obeying Him.

## **JOB 28:12-28**

People today are seeking words of wisdom and dependable counsel concerning how to navigate life's challenges. We may search the Internet looking for the right piece of advice or help we need. We may fill our bookshelves or eReaders with self-help books. While it is true others may offer helpful advice in life, the Bible reveals that the source and goal of wisdom is God; true wisdom comes from Him and leads to Him. Job 28:12-28 emphasizes this truth.

**How might a person determine if the advice he or she is getting has merit? How do we know we can trust the source for wisdom?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **JOB 22:1–31:40**

This section of the Book of Job contains the third and final cycle of Job's conversations with his friends. Eliphaz concluded that abominable behavior could be the only explanation for Job's suffering. He contended that Job was paying for his sins and in danger of being completely destroyed (Job 22:1-20). However, Eliphaz believed there was still hope for Job. If Job would only come to terms with God, then God would restore him (22:21-30).

In Job's response to Eliphaz in chapters 23–24, he maintained his innocence and devotion to God, expressing his desire to plead his case face to face with God. Job was convinced God would pay attention to him and put an end to his suffering. On the other hand, Job resigned himself to recognizing God will do whatever He desires, a thought that terrified Job in his present condition. Job then questioned why the wicked appear to prosper while the weak suffer. Nonetheless, while Job's faith in God's justice may have momentarily wavered, it remained intact.

Bildad's final response to Job is in chapter 25. In these six verses, Bildad espoused God's power and majesty in contrast to the lowly estate of humanity. He contended that people are but maggots and worms before God, a view that contradicts God's Word. (See Ps. 8.) It seems Job cut Bildad off at this point, apparently having heard enough of his friends' counsel. Zophar didn't even get an opportunity to speak.

Chapters 26-31 contains Job's last retort to his friends. Job demonstrated he knew everything his friends knew. He acknowledged the transcendent power, majesty, and justice of God that they repeatedly declared. Be that as it may, it did not change the fact that Job was innocent of every accusation his friends made, and more importantly, he was innocent before God.

**As you read Job 28:12-28, look for how fearing God and obeying Him provides a firm foundation when facing life's challenges. How would you describe the value of finding true wisdom?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## VALUED (JOB 28:12-19)

<sup>12</sup> But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? <sup>13</sup> Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup> The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. <sup>15</sup> It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. <sup>16</sup> It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. <sup>17</sup> The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. <sup>18</sup> No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. <sup>19</sup> The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold.

### VERSES 12-19

Verse 12 introduces perhaps the central passage of the Book of Job. The answers to all of life's questions and the meaning of life are wrapped up in wisdom. True wisdom is characterized by the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7). It recognizes God as both the source and goal of wisdom. It recognizes God as the Creator and that He created everything and everyone to bring glory to Him. It is the realization that God is working all things according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Since God has a concern for all things, people should acknowledge Him and submit to Him in every aspect of their lives. Anyone can acquire wisdom with some effort and experience. However, in this verse Job raised the question, *where shall wisdom be found?*

**What are some sources a person may turn to when seeking wisdom?  
What makes the quest for wisdom daunting and frustrating for some?**

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In verses 1-11, Job recognized that with strenuous effort and perseverance, people were able to cut out channels in rocks and find the most valuable, precious metals and gemstones on earth. As impressive as that accomplishment may have been, there was

something more precious and valuable that humanity could not find on its own: **wisdom** and **understanding**, which should be understood as two ways of referring to a single concept. Job was not referring to having a skill, being shrewd, or having an impressive intellect or common sense. He was referring to a kind of wisdom that is unattainable by humanity's own efforts. No one could estimate its value because it is impossible to find on this earth. It does not derive from this earth. Even if a person could have plunged into the **depth**, he or she would not have found it there. People knew where to find **gold** and **silver** and precious stones, but they did not know where to find wisdom.

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### DID YOU KNOW?

The gold of Ophir (Job 28:16) was the rarest and most treasured gold in the ancient Near East (Isa. 13:12). It was the gold of Ophir with which queens adorned themselves (Ps. 45:9). Though believed to be somewhere in Arabia, the exact location of ancient Ophir is unclear.

Even the prized **onyx** that had a place in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel and was the treasure of kings along with **sapphire** was not enough. Not even the most finely adorned gold vessels or jewelry would work. **Coral** probably refers to a black, white, or pinkish limestone that artisans used along with **pearls** to make valuable adornments, and it did not measure up. Though probably rare and thus quite valuable in Job's day, the price of wisdom surpassed that of **rubies**. Finally, the value of **topaz**, a prized yellow gemstone found in **Ethiopia** did not compare to the worth of wisdom (v. 19).

**What is evidence that a believer values wisdom from God more than anything else?**

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## HIDDEN (JOB 28:20-22)

**<sup>20</sup> Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? <sup>21</sup> Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. <sup>22</sup> Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.**

### VERSES 20-22

Once again, Job reiterated the question similar to the one he raised in verse 12. The previous verses emphasized that wisdom is priceless and cannot be found on earth. This section underscores the truth that no one on earth knows the source of wisdom or the way to wisdom.

Typical of writing in the Old Testament, Job's answer moved from a general answer to one that was more specific. He began by asserting that the source of wisdom was ***hid from the eyes of all living***. Neither man nor beast could answer his question. Then he gave a more specific answer, referring to ***the fowls of the air***. Birds are generally known for excellent vision. Birds of prey stand out, especially eagles which are able to see small prey from a far distance. So Job declared that no living creature, not even those with exceptional eyesight, are able to see where wisdom comes from or its location. Consequently, even if people act as if they are the source of this wisdom, as Job accused his friends of doing, it is not true (12:2).

Job poetically personified two realities that have accompanied humanity from the very beginning in the garden of Eden, ***Destruction and death***. Destruction and death have accompanied humanity ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God. When Adam and Eve sinned, their fellowship with God was destroyed, signified by their hiding from Him in the garden as well as covering themselves before Him. Their immediate access to the tree of life was denied as they were banished from the garden. Moreover, they became spiritually dead and bodily mortal as they began dying physically. Death entered with sin.

Job was essentially saying that if these longtime associates of humanity could talk, they might have heard about wisdom, but even they do not know the answer to Job's question. It's like they were saying, "We've heard of wisdom somewhere along the way but just can't recollect what we heard." Wisdom is hidden from both the living and the dead.

## Why do people search for wisdom in the wrong places?

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### KEY DOCTRINE: *Scripture*

The Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction (Deut. 4:1-2).

### FOUND (JOB 28:23-27)

**<sup>23</sup> God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. <sup>24</sup> For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; <sup>25</sup> To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. <sup>26</sup> When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: <sup>27</sup> Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out.**

### VERSES 23-27

Job emphatically stated that God alone *understandeth the way* to wisdom and knows where it is because nothing is hidden from Him. From the beginning in creation God considered it, declared it, established it, and examined it. Everything in creation exists or does not exist and lives or dies according to God's wisdom. All true wisdom comes from Him.

One might conclude that given the hiddenness of wisdom as Job described it, God does not want us to find wisdom or wants to make it difficult to discover. This is untrue. The fact that God has revealed His wisdom in His Word indicates His desire for us to have it. In the New Testament, James indicates that those who in faith ask God for wisdom will receive it (Jas. 1:5-8). Moreover, the apostle Paul revealed that Jesus Himself is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24).

The wisdom of God is granted to those who seek Christ, to those whom He has redeemed (Eph. 1:7-10). In Christ, God has granted believers wisdom concerning God's plan and purpose. Believers must remember that in the present we are only able to see "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), meaning God has not revealed to us all the

reasons behind what happens to us and around us. Our understanding in all things is limited and imperfect. Job himself is an example of this truth. While the reader of the Book of Job is privy to the reason Job suffered as he did, Job was not. However, one day God will enable us to see everything clearly and to fully understand His purposes. In the meantime, by the help of the Holy Spirit, God gives believers the insight to understand the gospel, God’s Word, and His will for us in the present as well as a glimpse of the future.

**Why is submission to God and His sovereignty over all creation as the Creator essential to having true wisdom?**

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*One day God will enable us to see everything clearly and to fully understand His purposes.*

**OFFERED** (JOB 28:28)

**<sup>28</sup> And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.**

**VERSE 28**

So far, Job addressed the value of wisdom, the hiddenness of wisdom, and the source of wisdom, which is God Himself. However, it is not until he came to the conclusion of his thoughts concerning wisdom that he divulged what true wisdom actually is. Wisdom is ***the fear of the Lord***. To *fear* the Lord means having such awe of Him that it affects how one lives. It precipitates a desire to know God and leads to a reverence for God. It involves a trusting submission to God that seeks to know His Word and obey it, accepting God’s will and worshiping Him alone. The idea of submitting to God is highlighted by the word *Lord*. In Hebrew, it is the word, *Adonai*, meaning “lord” or “master.” While today we may find it difficult to comprehend the idea of having a master, in ancient times people understood that submitting to a master meant acknowledging the master had the

right to do whatever he wanted, while the servant existed for the purpose of submissively serving the will of the master in all things.

Practically speaking, wisdom is living all of life unto God, acknowledging Him in everything. As a result, wisdom is knowing the right thing, doing the right thing, doing it in the right way, at the right time, and to the right extent. Furthermore, the fear of the Lord—wisdom—not only involves knowing what is right but also having an understanding of what is wrong. The person who has wisdom and understanding clings to what is good and turns away from that which is evil. This includes avoiding sin but also repenting of sin when we have fallen into it.

**How does the “fear of the Lord” and “to turn from evil” define wisdom and understanding?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Review cross reference verses to gain insight.*

Review the following verses that support the same conclusion as Job: Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13; and Isaiah 8:11-13. Note similar words and phrases. How does each passage give us a different view of the fear of God? How would you summarize the teaching of these passages in one sentence?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- The wise person values and treasures godly wisdom.
- The wise person searches for godly wisdom.
- True wisdom belongs to God alone.
- True wisdom consists of fearing God and produces a godly life.

**Evaluate the role the Bible plays in your search for wisdom. What actions do you need to take to greater depend on the Bible for wisdom?**

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**Discuss with your group the value of God's wisdom. What can the group do to help others value God's wisdom as well?**

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**Memorize Job 28:28. Reflect on the relationship between fearing God and turning from evil. Record experiences through the week where you lived out the truth of this verse.**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *Justice Sought*

God is just in His treatment of all people.

## **JOB 36:8-23**

Most of us have been on the receiving end of something we thought to be unfair: the team running sprints because one person loafed or the class receiving extra work because one classmate misbehaved. One thing common to every person is we want to be treated justly by others. While people may struggle to always do what is right concerning others, Job 36:8-23 reveals God is just in His treatment of all people.

**What is the relationship between fairness and trust?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## **JOB 32:1–37:24**

Job 32:1–37:24 records Elihu’s lengthy speech to Job. Elihu was younger than Job’s other three friends. The first section of his speech is in Job 32:1–33:33. Elihu had been present as other Job’s friends spoke. After all he heard, it was impossible to remain silent. Both Job and his friends aggravated him. He was disturbed with Job because Job appeared to be more concerned with justifying himself than with justifying God. Elihu was also displeased with Job’s three friends because they were quick to condemn Job while lacking any insightful explanations for Job’s plight.

Elihu recognized that wisdom comes from God alone and He gives it to whomever He wills. Elihu concluded Job’s declarations of innocence were wrong. Nevertheless, God shows His kindness to people even when He disciplines them through suffering. God was using Job’s pain to teach him. God’s purpose was to restore Job.

Elihu rebuked Job for questioning God’s justice. How could anyone question the justness of God? What’s more, Elihu declared that God deals with people on His terms—not on their terms. In essence, Elihu stated that some of Job’s statements revealed Job’s ignorance.

In chapter 35, Elihu told Job that he needed to stop his complaining to God and turn to Him, for God alone could rectify his predicament. People are more concerned about God removing their suffering and self-justification than they are about worshiping Him. In the final section of Elihu’s speech in Job 36–37, Elihu reminded Job of God’s mercy, power, and desire to bring people to repentance. Every experience is an opportunity to learn more about God. However, many people like Job miss it. Finally, as the Creator, God transcends humanity. So how could Job have presumed to question God?

**As you read Job 36:8-23, reflect on how one’s submission or stubbornness toward God affects one’s relationship to God.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## PURPOSEFUL DISCIPLINE (JOB 36:8-11)

**<sup>8</sup> And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; <sup>9</sup> Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. <sup>10</sup> He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. <sup>11</sup> If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.**

### VERSES 8-10

Elihu's message was that God does not act randomly, especially when it comes to discipline or punishment. Here, Elihu argued that God has a specific purpose for allowing someone to suffer. Verse 8 describes people who are ***bound in fetters*** and ***holden in cords of affliction***. If God allows this, why does He do so? According to Elihu, the reason God allows this suffering is to reveal people's sin, warning them of the ultimate consequences of sin and instructing them of their need to repent before it is too late.

Certainly, God has shown Himself in His Word to do this. For instance, at times when the Israelites rebelled against God, He used other nations to attack, oppress, and even take them captive because of their rebellion against Him. God used their chains of affliction to break their stubbornness and turn them back to Him. (See Ps. 107:10-14.) Therefore, what Elihu said is true. At times, God uses the *cords of affliction* to communicate graciously to His children ***their transgressions that they have exceeded*** so they will repent of their sin and turn back to Him. For this reason, believers should consider the possibility that when they are experiencing difficulties it is God's way of getting their attention so they will confess the sin in their lives, reject it, and return to Him.

However, believers must likewise realize not all suffering is because of God's discipline for sin. Recall Joseph, when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He was separated from his family in a foreign land and falsely accused by his master's wife, resulting in his spending at least two years in jail. Years later, when Joseph's brothers feared his reprisals for all the suffering they had caused him, Joseph

told them that while they planned evil against him, “God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20). Joseph’s suffering was part of God’s purpose to save many lives, not God’s punishment of some sin Joseph committed.

Recall also John 9:2-3, when Jesus and His disciples saw a blind man, and the disciples asked Jesus: “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

Job 1–2 clearly reveals none of Job’s suffering was because he had sinned, even though Job’s friends were convinced to the contrary. Job suffered because there was no one else on earth like him, a man of perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:8; 2:3). In fact, Job’s friends might have suffered like he did if they had been as godly as he was!

**How does one know the difference between being disciplined for a sin and being shaped or tested by a challenge?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Memorize a Bible verse.*

Focus on Job 36:10. Review the verse in different translations including both older and contemporary translations. How did the comparison of translations impact how you understand the verse? Write your own paraphrase of the verse and memorize the verse and your paraphrase.

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## VERSE 11

In verse 11, Elihu made the first of two conditional statements concerning the consequences of either listening to or rejecting God's instruction through affliction. If people listen to God's instruction and repent of their sin, then they will be renewed and live out the remainder of their lives in *prosperity* and *pleasures*.

We must consider a number of things about this statement. First, we must remember when people experience prosperity and happiness, it does not necessarily mean they are living devoted lives to God. (See Job 21:7-15.)

Second, many have lived faithful lives to the Lord while having few worldly goods such as the widow Jesus pointed out who gave all she had to live on at the temple (Luke 21:1-4). Additionally, none of the apostles appeared to have accumulated material wealth on earth before all but John were martyred.

Third, Elihu could have been using a play on words. While the words translated *prosperity* and *pleasures* sometimes refer to material wealth even in the Book of Job, they often have meanings that advance beyond the material preoccupations of a materialistic prosperity mindset. The first word literally means "good." Given the context of this passage referring to learning lessons from suffering, Elihu could be using it like the psalmist did in Psalm 119:71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." Next, the word which is translated *pleasures* can also mean "pleasing." Proverbs 22:18 asserts it is "pleasant" to have the wisdom and knowledge that comes from God. People who have been teachable and have learned and embraced the lessons God has taught them will have the delight of knowing God because He opened "their ear to discipline" (Job 36:10). For the child of God, this is truly eternal prosperity and happiness.

## JUDGMENT COMING (JOB 36:12-16)

**<sup>12</sup> But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge. <sup>13</sup> But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he bindeth them. <sup>14</sup> They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean. <sup>15</sup> He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression. <sup>16</sup> Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait into a broad place, where**

**there is no straitness; and that which should be set on thy table should be full of fatness.**

## VERSE 12

In verse 12 is the second of the two conditional statements of Elihu concerning people's responses to suffering. This statement declares if people refuse to listen to God's instruction by refusing to repent of their sin, then they will **die without knowledge**. Those who refuse to listen to God, ignore His instruction, and continue to arrogantly sin against God will die without the knowledge that comes from God's instruction. So while the wicked may die while still grasping their material wealth, they will die without what matters most—the knowledge of God.

## VERSES 13-16

Verse 13 brings to light the stubbornness of those who do not trust God and refuse His corrective afflictions. **Hypocrites** refers to people who refuse to trust in God. They are angry because they are powerless to control their circumstances. They refuse to trust in God but hate the fact that they cannot really trust in themselves because they are powerless before Him. Instead of crying out to God for help, they embrace and nurture their anger against Him. They are too arrogant to cry out to God for help.

Verse 14 observes their lives are cut short, never to realize their potential. Their lives are like those of the **unclean** who engaged in lewd activities at the shrines of the fertility cults of that day. It is a picture of dissipation, waste, and shame.

**Why do people choose to ignore God, even when experiencing adversity? What are the consequences of ignoring God, and why are they so serious?**

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In verse 15, the subject changes from those who rebel against God to God Himself. This verse encapsulates Elihu's understanding of the reason or purpose of someone's adversities. Elihu said God uses people's afflictions to correct them and bring them to repent of their sin. Elihu asserted suffering is the tool God uses to rescue the sufferer.

In verse 16, **he** is God and **thee** is Job. Elihu urged Job to recognize God was using Job's adversities as a way to persuade him to repent. Like Job's other three friends, Elihu upheld the retribution principle that God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. Therefore, he believed Job's suffering was the result of his sin. He encouraged Job to repent of his sin so he would once again experience the blessing of the righteous—**out of the strait into a broad place**. Elihu was saying if Job had repented, then he could have already seen his table return to what it had been, **full of fatness**.

## **JUSTICE SEEN** (JOB 36:17-23)

**17 But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold on thee. 18 Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. 19 Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength. 20 Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place. 21 Take heed, regard not iniquity: for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction. 22 Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him? 23 Who hath enjoined him his way? or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity?**

### **VERSE 17**

Elihu continued his indictment of Job. According to Elihu, God always gives people what they deserve. Therefore, Job had no one to blame for his suffering but himself. Because Job was consumed with his vindication and self-justification, he was bearing the condemnation of God that is **of the wicked**.

Once again, we must be careful to remember that the beginning chapters of the Book of Job clearly indicate none of Job's suffering was on account of his sin, even if Elihu's interpretation of Job's afflictions heralded some ring of truth. As already observed, God's Word reveals the Lord sometimes uses suffering as a means of calling sinful people back to Himself. What's more, there is no doubt God uses our afflictions to teach us lessons concerning faith and His sustaining power and presence. However, Job's suffering was on account of his righteousness, not because of his sin. Job's suffering was for the sole purpose of silencing Satan and glorifying God.

## VERSES 18-21

Elihu warned Job to be wary of being tempted and deceived into believing material wealth could be the answer to his problems. Instead of allowing the lure of riches or a large bribe to pull him further away from God, Job needed to realize these worldly enticements would not be able to save him from God's judgment. Wealth and prosperity are worthless when one stands in judgment before Almighty God. No amount of **strength** would save Job either. In other words, there was nothing Job could do that would be able to help him now and deliver him from God's justice. God cannot be bought.

In verse 20, Elihu continued his theme of things that would not be able to save Job from God's judgment. Here, **the night** appears to be an allusion to death and Job's desire to die. Even death would not enable Job to escape God's judgment.

Elihu warned Job to beware of turning to **iniquity**. Perhaps Elihu was warning Job of the sin of blaming God and complaining against Him for all he was going through. (See 33:8-12.) Elihu had already rebuked Job for doing this (33:12) and asked him, "wilt thou condemn him that is most just?" (34:17). According to Elihu, it was illogical for Job to commit iniquity against God because of his afflictions when God allowed Job to suffer those afflictions in order to keep Job from sinning.

## VERSES 22-23

Once again, Elihu returned to the premise that God was teaching Job a lesson. God is the ultimate Master Teacher. God's lessons are perfect in their content and delivery. Therefore, there is no warrant for calling into question God's teaching methods or message. No one can instruct the Master Instructor.

**Why are people prone to question God and to instruct Him on what He should do and how He should do it?**

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### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *God the Father*

God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise (1 Pet. 1:17).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must examine their lives for sin of which they need to repent.
- People must be informed of the consequences of choosing to ignore God.
- Believers can trust God to be just in His dealings with humanity.

**Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal areas of disobedience in your life. What actions do you need to take that reflect repentance in that area?**

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**Discuss as a group actions that can be taken to help when a person ignores God. What can the group do to help those who are ignoring God or are abandoning Him?**

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**List situations you are facing that are challenging to your faith in God. How can you express trust in God with each challenge you listed?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *Power Displayed*

God's wisdom and power are unfathomable.

## **JOB 40:1-14**

Things would be different if we were in charge. We may have cried when a sibling got what we thought to be better treatment as we called into question the fairness of mom or dad. They may have let us know that we would be free to make that decision once we were parents, but that for right now, they were the parents and we were not. We may even accuse God of being unfair because of life's situations. Job raised this issue, and God responded by reminding Job of His credentials.

**What qualifies a person to be in charge? What credentials might a person need to be in charge of your family?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **JOB 38:1–41:34**

Finally, God responded to Job. He had the final word. God’s response served to correct the speculations and flawed statements Job and his friends had uttered because of their limited human perspectives. Job 38:1–41:34 contains God’s two speeches which are divided by Job’s first response in Job 40:3–5.

God’s first address to Job focused on God as the Creator and His sustaining power and dominion over all creation. His question in Job 38:2 summarizes His first response to Job: “Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?” Job had demonstrated his ignorance when he supposed he could question God’s justice or His ways. God focused on His work of creation, and with a battery of questions He pointed out that Job was not present when He created everything (38:4), that Job did not understand these things (38:21,33), and that Job had no power over any of these things (38:31–32,35). God emphasized His power over every creature and over all of nature. He not only set them in place, but He also ordered how they were to function in His creation. God provides for and sustains His creation. It all answers to Him. God knows everything about every intricate part of His creation. What did Job know about any of these things? What contribution had Job made to any of these things?

God’s second discourse focused on two powerful creatures, one on land called “behemoth” and the other in the sea called “leviathan.” Some scholars have suggested that Behemoth was a hippopotamus. God described Behemoth as an herbivore that inhabited areas around water, had powerful muscles, a firm rigid tail, legs like iron, and was unassailable (40:15–19). God described Leviathan as some kind of formidable reptile (41:1–34). God’s power over these extraordinary creatures served as examples of God’s omnipotence over all of His creation.

**As you read Job 40:1–14, identify the requirements for Job to instruct God. Why it is essential for us to realize only God has the wisdom and power to rule His creation?**

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# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **CORRECT ME?** (JOB 40:1-5)

<sup>1</sup> Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said, <sup>2</sup> Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it. <sup>3</sup> Then Job answered the LORD, and said, <sup>4</sup> Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. <sup>5</sup> Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.

### **VERSES 1-2**

The statement of verse 1 is very significant: *the LORD answered Job*. It is noteworthy because Job had claimed God ignored him and would not answer him (30:20). Job not only claimed God would not answer Him, but he also accused God of having wronged him and that when he cried out to God he could find no justice (19:6-7). The fact that God answered Job demonstrated Job was wrong about God in these matters. God's wisdom and power are beyond anything Job could have comprehended or imagined.

In his earlier dialogues with his friends, Job came very close to sounding like them by suggesting he had a deep knowledge of God and how God conducts Himself and His affairs. However, from the very beginning, the Book of Job clearly indicates Job did not know everything about God's affairs. Job was ignorant of the meetings and exchanges between God and Satan. Job had no clue about what precipitated the events that transpired as a result of those conversations. From the start, the narrative establishes that even the most righteous of men had a limited knowledge and understanding of God.

God asked if the one who had accused Him of wrongdoing was ready to make his argument against *the Almighty*. But first, God said, "Job, if you are going to criticize Me, then you must first answer My questions."

In chapters 38–39, God had commenced His response to Job by issuing a battery of questions to Job concerning his wisdom and power compared to God's wisdom and power over all of His creation. After giving Job the opportunity to regain a clearer perspective by reminding Job that God is God and Job is not, God said, "Job, if

you believe yourself to be qualified to correct Me, demonstrate you are qualified by answering the questions I have posed.” God asked Job if he could rule over creation better than God had been able to. The message was this: who was Job to challenge God’s wisdom and power?

### **What are some ways in which people might subtly question or underestimate God’s ability or character?**

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#### **VERSES 3-5**

Verses 3-5 provided Job’s initial response to God by making one recognition, one admission, and one declaration. Job recognized he was *vile* compared to God’s glory manifested in His rule over creation. Therefore, Job admitted that he, the creature, was unable to instruct or correct the Creator. Furthermore, in a gesture of respect and submission Job placed his hand over his mouth.

Job continued his response to God by using an ancient Near Eastern idiom that means, “I have spoken once too many times already” or “I have already said too much.” Thus, Job declared he had nothing more to say. It was the declaration of one whom God had humbled.

However, we should note that Job did not mention repentance. God had gotten Job’s attention and was graciously correcting Job’s perspective. Nevertheless, Job needed to hear more from God before he came to the full realization of his need to repent of the mistaken things he had said about God (42:6). So God had more to say in the following verses. It was God’s grace that humbled Job, and it would be God’s grace that would finally lead Job to repentance. A humble heart is the fertile soil where God plants the seeds of grace that produce an even greater grace of restoration and rejoicing.

### **Why are people prone to question God’s justice and fairness?**

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## KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures (Jer. 32:27).

## QUESTION MY JUSTICE? (JOB 40:6-9)

<sup>6</sup> Then answered the LORD unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, <sup>7</sup> Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. <sup>8</sup> Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? <sup>9</sup> Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?

### VERSE 6

In Scripture, God communicated to people in a variety of ways: through a burning bush to Moses (Ex. 3:1-4), through a fleece to Gideon (Judg. 6:37-40), in a still small voice to Elijah (1 Kings 19:12), and through a donkey to Balaam (Num. 22:22-30). In this instance, just as He initially did in Job 38:1, God replied to Job from the midst of a tornadic storm. Job needed to witness God's power firsthand.

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## DID YOU KNOW?

A physical manifestation or appearance of God is called a theophany. Theophanies in the Old Testament are often associated with the wind (Job 40:6; Ezek. 1:4). Other forms of theophanies included the burning bush (Ex. 3:2-4:17), a cloud (Ex. 16:10), visions (Isa. 6), and in human form (Gen. 32:30; Ex. 24:10).

In light of God's power, Job needed to fully accept his weakness and powerlessness, not only physically but intellectually and spiritually. Furthermore, Job needed to see God's power and His ability to act on Job's behalf. Only God could deliver him. Job needed more than an explanation from God; he needed a manifestation

of God. Consequently, God would reveal His wisdom not only through what He said but in how He would say it. It is reminiscent of how God has spoken to all of humanity in desperate need of a Savior. Hebrews 1:1-3 indicates God has spoken to us and revealed Himself through His Son through whom “He made the worlds,” who is “the brightness of his glory,” and is “upholding all things by the word of his power.” Our God has revealed to us that He is mighty to save through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

### VERSES 7-9

As God had already done when He initially responded to Job, He once again instructed Job to prepare himself to answer more questions. (See 38:3.) Again, God demanded that Job answer Him in response to His questions. Soon after Satan had struck Job, Job was demanding answers from God. God turned the tables and demanded answers from Job.

### **How does God confront people today who question Him? How does that compare to the way God confronted Job?**

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The Book of Job began with the matter between God and Satan. Satan questioned God’s worth and glory by saying that the only reason the most righteous of God’s children worship Him is because of what they can get from God. The material things and physical health God provides for them is their only motive for their loyalty to God. Take those things away, and they will curse God and turn away. God took up the challenge by using the life of His servant Job. God allowed Satan to strike Job, and in so doing God used Job to silence Satan and bring glory to Himself.

From these events another matter integral to the message of the Book of Job arises as a new challenge against God. In verse 8 this challenge was made clear as God accused Job of denying that God is just. In other words, Job declared that what God does is not right. Job 9:22-24 is one example of Job’s accusation against God (also see 6:29; 27:1-6).

Why did Job challenge God’s justice? It was so he could vindicate himself and prove his own innocence. It was true that Job was

innocent. Job's problem was in how he sought to vindicate himself. He suggested that somehow God was at fault for all of his adversities. Thus, God's rhetorical question: **wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?** It is odd that we, a corrupted people, are often so ready to question God's justice when in truth our only notion of what justice is comes from God.

In the ancient Near East, **arm** was an idiom people used to speak of strength. Kings would speak of stretching out their arms against their enemies. In verse 9, God asked Job if he had the strength to do what God could do. Job must learn that it is only God's strong arm that can rule, rescue, and restore. Could Job's voice **thunder** like God's and instill fear and dread on those who heard it? This is a vivid picture reminiscent of God before the Israelites on Mount Sinai just before giving the Ten Commandments (Ex. 19:16-19). The tone of God's questions to Job were cutting, but they were not of the brutish sort. Rather, they were the cuts of a surgeon intricately removing malignant growths for the purpose of healing and restoration.

**How is questioning God's justice the same as placing one's self as equal to or greater than God? Why is questioning God's omnipotence evidence of a limited or diminished perspective of God?**

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## **SAVE YOURSELF? (JOB 40:10-14)**

**<sup>10</sup> Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty. <sup>11</sup> Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. <sup>12</sup> Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. <sup>13</sup> Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in secret. <sup>14</sup> Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.**

### **VERSES 10-14**

These five verses contain ten commands God gave to Job. Altogether, they direct Job to assume his throne as the ruler of the universe and demonstrate that he can be as powerful as God and more just

than God. If Job was going to talk like he could rule better than God, then he should make sure to look the part.

Verses 11-13 convey one idea. Was Job equal to the task of executing justice in the universe? Job had been looking for proof of God's justice, so God challenged Job to show Him what justice looks like in the universe. While Job never claimed he could be a better ruler over creation than what God is, God's battery of commands served to remind Job that he needed to put his complete trust in God to do what is right. Instead of complaining, Job needed to be more trusting of God without demanding explanations from God. Our complaining to God implies we are capable of proposing better ways for God to run things in this universe. It is not unlike Satan, who believes he can usurp God.

In verse 14, God concluded by saying that if Job could do everything God supposedly had been neglecting to do in verses 10-13, then He would congratulate Job and concede that by his own strength Job could save himself with no need for God. God would see Job as an equal who was entitled to argue with God. However, if Job could not do these things, then he really did not know what he had been talking about. Furthermore, by implication, the God who ruled over Job in wisdom and power was Job's only hope of salvation.

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Compare similar passages.*

Compare the exchanges between God and Job with the exchanges between God and other people. Review Genesis 3:8-19; 1 Kings 19:9-18; and Jonah 4:9-11. How was each conversation God's response to a challenge to His justice or power? How does the response given to Adam, Eve, Elijah, and Jonah compare to the response given to Job? What can we learn about God from these conversations?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can be assured that God knows more about them and their circumstances.
- Believers must be careful to avoid viewing God as unfair and unjust.
- Only God has the wisdom and power to rule His creation.

**Share with the group ways God has demonstrated to you His faithfulness and wisdom in the past. How does knowing God has been trustworthy in the past assure you about your circumstances today?**

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**Examine your life for ways you view God as unfair or unjust. Confess your lack of trust in God to Him and ask Him to strengthen your trust in Him.**

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**How have the challenges you currently face revealed your need to trust God? Thank Him for being the all-wise God and commit to continue to trust Him.**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *Dependence Declared*

God honors those who humbly profess dependence on Him.

## **JOB 42:1-11**

Reading about something, hearing about it, or watching it on television can never compare to witnessing it in person. Seeing a professional sporting event live gives you a greater appreciation of the skill of the athletes. Visiting a historical location gives you a clearer view of the events that took place there. Observing a sunset over an ocean opens your eyes to the true beauty of God's creation. At the end of the Book of Job, Job said that he had heard about God but now he had seen Him. Job had gained a greater understanding of God.

**Think about the first time you saw a professional sporting event live or visited an important historical location. How did visiting or seeing that in person impact your understanding of that sport or place?**

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## **JOB 42:1-17**

The final chapter of Job should be understood in light of the entirety of the Book of Job. The story begins by introducing Job as “perfect and upright,” fully devoted to God (1:1). Right away, the narrative establishes that none of the adversities that were to beset Job were the result of divine judgment. Instead, it was because of his faithful obedience to God that Job would suffer.

Satan, the “accuser” and “adversary,” challenged God, claiming the only reason Job worshiped God was to get what he could from God. Satan contended that if God removed His hedge of protection around Job, then Job would curse God. Consequently, God allowed Satan to do whatever he wanted to do to Job except take Job’s life. So Satan wiped out Job’s possessions, killed his ten children, and struck Job with a terrible affliction. Nevertheless, Job clung to his faith in God, silencing Satan (1:6–2:10).

Then came Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, intending to “comfort” Job (2:11). However, these men compounded Job’s suffering, accusing Job of deserving it. They contended Job’s adversities were God’s divine judgment on Job for his sin. Job maintained his innocence, insisting he had committed no sin to warrant such divine judgment (4:1–31:40). Still, Job struggled with understanding God’s justice (6:29; 9:22-24; 19:6-7; 27:1-6).

Next came Job’s fourth friend, Elihu (32:1–37:24). Elihu recognized Job’s failure to fully trust in God’s wisdom as Job sought to vindicate himself. Elihu observed that God used suffering for instructive purposes.

Finally, God responded to Job. Pointing out Job’s mortality and limited perspective, God rebuked Job for questioning His just rule over all creation. God’s display of His power and majesty revealed to Job that God was more than equal to the task (38:1–41:34).

**Read Job 42:1-11, noting God’s directions to each person.  
How do the actions called for point to our dependence on God?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## ADMIT (JOB 42:1-6)

<sup>1</sup> Then Job answered the LORD, and said, <sup>2</sup> I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

<sup>3</sup> Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. <sup>4</sup> Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. <sup>5</sup> I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

<sup>6</sup> Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

## VERSES 1-4

Just as it was significant that “The LORD answered Job” in Job 40:1, it is equally important that Job responded to God. God’s word is never given just for the purpose of giving information. God’s revelation of Himself, whether in word or deed, demands a response. In this instance, God had just finished asking Job a series of questions. He asked Job a simple but profound question: “Who are you to question Me?” God demanded Job answer this question.

Job’s response began with what he had learned from God. He realized he had been saying things about God that he **understood not**, but now he was sure of two things. First, God has the power to **do every thing** He wants to do. Second, nothing God determines to do **can be withholden**. Whatever God wills to do will be done. Down to the most minuscule detail, the happenings in this world transpire according to God’s purposes by His power and wisdom. Job confessed that even though the reason for his suffering was incomprehensible to him, he knew God had a purpose in it and God could be trusted.

In verse 3, Job quoted a question and a statement God had spoken to him from the whirlwind (38:2-3). The question was, **Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?** The word *hideth* translates a Hebrew word meaning “obscures, doubts, or clouds.” The word *counsel* translates a word meaning “plan, purpose, or design.” Therefore, with the expression, *hideth counsel*, God accused Job of doubting the wisdom of God’s plan or purposes. Job’s response to this question reveals that he finally realized he truly was ignorant. Even though Job had

done nothing to deserve divine judgment when Satan struck him, Job had struggled to trust God's wise purpose for his suffering. Now he confessed his sin, saying, "I was the one who ignorantly questioned your wisdom and misrepresented your intentions."

The first step to experiencing God's mercy and being reconciled to God is the confession of sin. As Job confessed his sin to God he opened himself up to the mercy and grace of God to forgive and restore him.

In verse 4, Job quoted a statement God had made when He first responded to Job (38:3). Twice, Job had told God to "answer thou me" or "reveal to me," but now Job realized he was the one who needed to listen to what God wanted him to know (10:2; 13:23). It is presumptuous for anyone to question God for how He directs and rules His creation, yet it is a part of our sinful nature to do so. Without any true knowledge or understanding of the ramifications of the decisions God has made, we delude ourselves into thinking we could give Him a hand with our "wise" counsel.

The mindset of thinking God owes us anything, including explanations, is the essence of our prideful, sinful nature. Creatures have no right to instruct the Creator on how He should rule His creation. Job finally realized this in his reaction to his adversities and was sorry he had presumed to question or educate God. Job's omniscient, omnipotent sovereign God owed him no explanations nor word of vindication.

### **How does professing our shortcomings open the door for greater understanding of God?**

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#### **VERSES 5-6**

Through all that had transpired in Job's life, including God's speaking to him from the whirlwind, Job did not receive an explanation for the cause of his suffering. Instead, Job received something much more precious. Job's spiritual eyes were opened, and he was able to see a glimpse of God's wisdom and power. Before these events in his life, Job had only *heard of* God. He grew up hearing the teachings

his friends had also heard. He had heard of God’s wisdom and His omniscience. He had heard that God blessed the righteous and cursed the wicked, and so he had ideas of how God should conduct Himself as He ruled over human affairs.

### ***Job saw God with a clarity he did not have until now.***

Now God had revealed Himself to Job in a way that Job had never previously experienced. It was not the council of Job’s friends that opened his eyes; it was God and His word. Job saw God with a clarity he did not have until now. Just like the apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened,” the eyes of Job’s heart were opened (Eph. 1:18). Job now saw that God is incomprehensible to humans. Job saw the folly of thinking anyone could ever argue with God or assume one could competently advise God. Moreover, the eyes of Job’s heart were opened so that he could clearly see that he could trust God with his life without need of any explanation from God.

When the eyes of Job’s heart were enlightened and he was able to see God, his spiritual eyes were also able to see his own sin more clearly. In verse 3, Job had admitted that he did not know what he had been saying. In verse 6, he followed his confession with repentance. While Job was always devoted to God from the beginning, he regretted and rejected the words he said during his suffering. Job had fallen to the temptation of thinking perhaps God had not done everything right concerning him. But now Job shifted his focus from demanding answers to submitting to the Lord even though he did not have all the answers to his questions.

Putting **dust and ashes** on one’s head or sitting in them was a way of conveying grief and repentance. Therefore, sitting in the ash-heap where he had been since Satan had struck his body (Job 2:8), Job repented to God with contrition, submission, and self-humiliation.

### **REPENT (JOB 42:7-9)**

**<sup>7</sup> And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of**

me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. <sup>8</sup> Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. <sup>9</sup> So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job.

### VERSE 7

After God had finished speaking to Job, He addressed Job's friends, bringing charges against them. God told **Eliphaz** that He was angry with him and his **two friends** because they pretentiously thought they could instruct Job about the mind of God and His ways. They were emphatic in their accusations against Job with their simple-minded ideas of the retribution principle—that if good things happen to people then they must be right with God, and if bad things happen to people then they must be wicked.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar should serve as a warning to all to beware of thinking they can perfectly comprehend God's ways. God said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). Job's friends were sincere but misrepresented God. Ironically, those who were convinced of Job's guilt were themselves the objects of God's wrath.

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### **BIBLE SKILL:** *Review a Bible dictionary article for insight.*

Read a Bible dictionary article on the role of a priest. Review the passages identified in the article, paying close attention to how the role of priest was fulfilled by Jesus. How does what Job was called upon to do give us insight into what it means for today's believers to be called priests?

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## VERSES 8-9

God took the initiative to provide these men a way to be reconciled to Him. God allowed each of them to offer sacrifices to atone for his sin. What's more, God would only accept the sacrifices if Job assumed the priestly function of interceding on the men's behalf. God referred to Job as **my servant** three times, emphasizing Job's faithfulness to God in contrast to these men. Those who had believed Job's standing before God depended on what they had to say found their own standing before God depending on what Job would say.

God chose what sacrifice He would accept, and He also determined who the acceptable mediator for them would be. If they were to be reconciled to God, it had to be done God's way. God allowed the men no say in how it would be accomplished. In so doing, God extended mercy to them by not dealing with them as their senseless declarations about Him deserved.

**Why is it such a serious matter when apparently pious people misrepresent God? How should believers think about this in light of their calling to be ambassadors for Christ?**

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To their credit, Job's friends did as the Lord commanded them. To Job's credit, he graciously interceded to God for them even though they had spoken so wrongly and harshly to him. And to God's glory, He accepted their sacrifices and forgave them because His appointed mediator interceded on their behalf. Jesus serves as our Mediator. No other option exists for us except to follow God's provision, which is faith in Jesus alone.

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### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *God the Son*

Jesus ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

## RESTORED (JOB 42:10-11)

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. <sup>11</sup> Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.

### VERSES 10-11

Job's restoration of his prosperity came after his intercession for his friends, and it is important to note that **the LORD** did the restoring. One should beware of misunderstanding this verse to be a promise God will restore all one's losses or fully reward His people this side of heaven. Rather, it demonstrates God will not forsake His servants. What's more, in spite of Satan's intense barrage of attacks on Job, Job remained true to God and his fortunes were restored. However, there was one notable change in Job. He had a greater understanding of God and, therefore, a deeper faith in God. Even this most devout of men had room for spiritual growth.

Job opened up his home to his family and fair-weather friends even though they had abandoned him during his trials (19:13). It demonstrates the integrity of his continued devotion to God. Their gifts of **money** and a **gold** earring were probably expressions of atonement for having forsaken him. Graciously, Job received them.

**How does what was restored to Job compare to what God will provide His redeemed people in heaven?**

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can admit their dependence on God for all things.
- Believers can pray on behalf of others.
- What God has in store for His redeemed people will far outweigh any losses in this life.

**Reflect on Job 42:5. Reflect on times when you expressed the same thing as Job. How did those experiences impact your understanding about God? Memorize the verse and share at least one of your experiences with a friend.**

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**List people you know who need you to pray for them, especially for them to turn to God in repentance. Place a check by each person's name you listed as you pray for him or her daily this week.**

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**Share with the rest of the group times God used suffering to reveal Himself to you, resulting in your having a deeper knowledge of who He is. What did God reveal about Himself to you through the difficulty and how does that encourage you today?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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## *What's the Use?*

The wise person seeks to find meaning in life from God.

### **ECCLESIASTES 1:12-15; 2:18-26**

People throughout history have tried to take their wealth with them when they died. Items placed around mummies and in caskets point to that effort. The great equalizer in life is death, regardless of how much or how little one accumulates. The writer of Ecclesiastes observed that people who focus solely on work and amassing material possessions come to the end of life without any eternal gains to show for it.

**In what activities do people engage in their pursuit to find meaning in life?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **ECCLESIASTES 1:1–2:26**

The Book of Ecclesiastes consists of “the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1). The only king who was a descendant of David and ruled in Jerusalem over all of Israel was Solomon. Verses 2-3 indicate the theme of the book. In Hebrew, the word translated “vanity” means “vapor” or “breath.” From this the word came to mean “temporary,” “fleeting,” “futile,” “inconsequential,” or even “absurd.” The phrase, “under the sun,” was Solomon’s way of referring to life on earth. It is here the Teacher asked the often repeated key question of the book: “What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?” The answer is futility.

The generations of humanity come and go, but they, along with their achievements, are forgotten. While there are human inventions, reconstructions, and novel ideas, nothing is able to add any lasting meaning or value to what God already has created. Humanity can add nothing intrinsically new to what He has done. Therefore, the search for meaning in life will not come through something as transitory as human achievement (1:3-11).

With this in mind, the Teacher delved into numerous pursuits he undertook in the search for life’s meaning. He tried education and intellectual endeavors but discovered that trying to understand the meaning of life is too perplexing for even the most educated and greatest of human intellects. In the end, it is a bewildering puzzle (1:12-18). Solomon found that even the wisdom one may gain in life is of no real ultimate value. In the end, both the wise and foolish share the same fate—death (2:12-17).

Next, he turned his attention to pleasure and the accumulation of possessions. He discovered the “delights of the sons of men” were in the end a disappointment (2:8). Moreover, when one dies, it is likely that those who inherit these possessions will squander them, so all the work was for nothing. It is best to go through life being content with what one has (2:18-26). All of this indicates the answer to life’s meaning is outside of human achievement. It should lead humanity to look to God who provides the answer to the question, “What is the meaning of life?” The answer is in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-15 and 2:18-26, highlighting words or phrases that express frustration. How does the futility of human achievements reveal one's need for God?

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## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### LIMITED PERSPECTIVE (ECCL. 1:12-15)

<sup>12</sup> I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. <sup>14</sup> I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. <sup>15</sup> That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

### VERSES 12-15

As already noted, the writer indicated he was a “son of David” and had been *king over Israel in Jerusalem* (1:1,12). This points to Solomon. As king, Solomon was known for his great wealth and building projects, which included the temple and his palace in Jerusalem. Solomon was also renowned for his wisdom. He had both the means and the mind to provide a unique, insightful perspective on life. It is best to think of Ecclesiastes as Solomon’s musings and reflections on what he had learned in life now that he was approaching its end.

The phrase *I gave my heart* is literally “I set my heart.” This idiom represents one’s thinking, will, and devotion. The Teacher indicated he determined to devote his whole self—mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—to this task. To *seek* means to get to the root of the matter, and *search out* means to thoroughly investigate the matter from a variety of approaches. The Teacher was analytical, meticulous, and thorough in his pursuit of understanding the meaning and significance of life.

The Teacher discovered that his endeavor was a *sore travail*. Why? Because he discovered that, in contrast to the widely held belief that

knowledge leads to satisfaction in life, the pursuit of knowledge fails to give lasting fulfillment. It is a never-ending quest and a hopeless task. It will always be fruitless until one realizes God is the Source of wisdom as well as the Goal of wisdom. True wisdom comes from God and always leads to God. Therefore, the wisdom of man will never satisfy. Because we were created in the image of God, we sense there is something beyond us, and so we search. However, it is a miserable task when we look to ourselves and fail to look to God for the solution.

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary to gain insight into a word.*

Read the entry about “vain,” “vanity,” or “futility” in a Bible dictionary. Examine some of the Bible passages included. How does the way vain or vanity is used outside of Ecclesiastes give you deeper insight into the emotions expressed by Solomon? What modern words might you use to convey what Solomon meant when he used the word translated as vanity or futility?

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The Teacher indicated he saw the various things people busy themselves with and concluded that, apart from God, humanity is doomed to a life of frustration. The pursuits of accomplishment, satisfaction, and progress end in futility. In the context, this conclusion is especially true concerning intellectual pursuits. It is like chasing the wind. One can never catch it, but even if one could, it would amount to nothing. Since the fall, when Adam and Eve sinned, all of humanity has been subjected to these futile pursuits, and our only hope is in God’s salvation. (See Rom. 8:20-21.)

Solomon concluded this section with a proverb: ***That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.*** The first part means that problems—what is *crooked*—cannot be solved. The second part means that there is no end to a lack of information. In other words, there is not enough data to solve the problem. Intellectuals and the most educated should recognize this

truth. There are anomalies in life that one cannot comprehend, and this is especially true when it comes to the most important issues in life. No matter how impressed humanity may be with its own intellectual prowess, it fades away before the inscrutableness of God.

**What motivates a person to find meaning and purpose?  
How does that motivation work for and against a person?**

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## **INHERITANCE BLOWN? (ECCL. 2:18-21)**

**<sup>18</sup> Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.**

**<sup>19</sup> And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. <sup>20</sup> Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. <sup>21</sup> For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.**

### **VERSES 18-21**

The Teacher has deliberated on the failures of physical pleasures and luxuries to bring meaningful satisfaction in life. He revisited the futility of attempting to achieve immortality by accumulating human wisdom or accomplishing great feats (2:1-17). Now he turned his attention to the question, “What will happen to all my wealth and accomplishments when I die?” In the preceding verses he acknowledged that everyone will die. Now, he considered what happens after that. He was appalled when he recognized the truth that someday he would die and lose everything he had worked to attain. He realized everything he had accomplished by his hard work would go to someone else.

This is what happens when one views work as a means of self-gratification. For such individuals, their work literally ends up at a dead end. One of Solomon’s proverbs, Proverbs 16:3, states: “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.”

The Hebrew word translated *activities* refers to all the various things people set out to accomplish in life, including their work. The Hebrew word translated *established* means “to be made stable, durable, and lasting.” The promise of this proverb stands in stark contrast to what happens to those who live and work for themselves instead of for the Lord. Their accomplishments are temporary and ultimately meaningless. When people commit their activities to the Lord, not only do they honor Him but they store up for themselves eternal “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20).

To make matters worse, the Teacher considered who might inherit everything he had accumulated. It occurred to him that all his hard work and all he had attained would come to nothing. His children may squander it. Though Solomon made no direct reference to his son, Rehoboam became an apt illustration of Solomon’s point (1 Kings 11:41–12:24). With time, legacies will be forgotten and others will spend what they have inherited in whatever ways they choose. Concerning one’s labor, it is best to heed Paul’s instruction to the believers in Colossae concerning work: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23-24).

### **Why are people prone to focus solely on work and the amassing of material possessions in their lives without any regard for God?**

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After all his investigation into the human pursuit for meaning and satisfaction in life, the Teacher became disillusioned with it all. He experienced human wisdom and pleasure and discovered they had nothing meaningful and lasting to offer. Every human attainment will be forgotten, lost, and passed on to someone else. The person who lives by the philosophy, “He who dies with the most toys wins,” will ultimately have lived for nothing. Therefore, the Teacher no longer would be deluded by the notion that hard work and the accumulation of wealth validates one’s life. There is more to life than that.

The Teacher then determined that not only is working hard and accumulating possessions a futile task, but it is also an injustice. One can spend a lifetime working to think properly concerning

an endeavor, learn all the pertinent information, develop the expert skills needed to be successful, then lose everything to someone else who did nothing to earn it. The Teacher found this all quite disturbing.

## **ENJOY WORK** (ECCL. 2:22-26)

**<sup>22</sup> For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? <sup>23</sup> For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. <sup>24</sup> There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. <sup>25</sup> For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? <sup>26</sup> For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.**

### **VERSES 22-23**

The Teacher returned to the key question of the book first raised in the introduction (1:3). This fundamental question appears several times in the book (1:3; 2:22; 3:9; 5:16; 6:8,11). All the content in the book is connected to this question. For this reason, the reader should keep this question in mind while reading the entire Book of Ecclesiastes. The question asks, “When people die, is there any lasting value or eternal significance to all the mental stress and strenuous work that consumed their lives, and how will these pursuits help people beyond the grave?” This lays the groundwork for the counsel the Teacher would dispense in verse 24 and following.

Not only does all this work and worry offer no eternal value in the afterlife, but it is also a life filled with grief, sorrow, and anxious unrest every hour of every day and night. It describes a life of misery, adversity, and worry—consisting of stressful days and sleepless nights. Such is the plight of the workaholic whose life is consumed with work, thinking this is what life is all about. It is physically and emotionally draining and devoid of any eternal significance.

## What are the dangers of basing our worth solely on the job or type of work we do?

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### VERSES 24-26

Verses 24-26 mark the climax of the first section of the Book of Ecclesiastes. The Teacher concluded that work and the fruit of one's labor should be enjoyed as one recognizes they are gifts from God. Work originates with God, as He is a God who works. The creation account indicates God was pleased with His work of creation and blessed the man by placing him in the garden to work (Gen. 1:31–2:3,15). God established a pattern of working six days and resting on the seventh (Ex. 20:8-11). The ability to work and enjoy its fruit are gifts from God. However they are neither a means to nor the attainment of lasting value. It is not the gifts but the Giver who gives them significance. Speaking of God, the Teacher asked, "Who can enjoy life apart from Him?" The answer is no one.

The wise person lives a life devoted to God and thus experiences the joy of knowing God and living life as God intends it to be lived. In contrast, the foolish who live for themselves forfeit everything. All their striving in life is for nothing. Thus, it is the people of God who ultimately inherit all things. The Teacher recognized God's sovereignty to be both gracious and just at the same time. As the great King over the whole earth, God has sovereign authority to choose an eternal inheritance for those who belong to Him.

## Why should those who belong to God enjoy life more than anyone else?

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### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *Stewardship*

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him (2 Cor. 9:8).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- We need God’s gift of wisdom to find life’s true purpose.
- Focusing solely on work and amassing material possessions leads to no eternal gains.
- Believers should enjoy their work, thanking God for His provisions.

**On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your dependence on God for your life’s purpose? What adjustments need to be made to increase your dependence on Him?**

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**Review your schedule, noting the amount of time spent on work versus other activities. What does your schedule reveal about your attitude toward work and the value of work? How does your attitude coincide with what Solomon taught?**

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**As a group, memorize Ecclesiastes 2:26. In your discussion, consider how work and being blessed with the ability to work are gifts from God. How can you use your work to honor God?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *What Time Is It?*

The wise person stewards time, realizing God controls all things.

## **ECCLESIASTES 3:1-15**

Time is one of the most valuable commodities we have. Once it is gone, we can never get it back. It seems like something is always vying for our time. Additionally, constantly being busy has become a status symbol, and we may fear being looked down upon for failing to keep ourselves busy. Consequently, many view time as a taskmaster. However, Ecclesiastes 3 reveals that time is a gift from God. Instead of being slaves to time, time is meant to give us the freedom to enjoy God and glorify Him in the opportunities He gives us as we move from one season of life to the next.

**Would you rather have a greater quality of time or quantity of time? Explain.**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **ECCLESIASTES 3:1–4:6**

At the beginning of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher raised the question, “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” (1:3). It is the central question to the book. The word profit means “lasting benefit”—that which remains of a person’s life after death.

The Teacher’s obsession was to discover if there is any lasting benefit to what a person does with his or her life. He observed that everything people strive to be and accomplish in life will eventually be forgotten. Believing that intellectualism and the world of academia can solve the mysteries to life’s most profound questions is a dead end. The promise that a life of luxury and self-gratification will result in lasting satisfaction is bogus. The fruit of one’s labors will eventually rot, and the supposed insights of human wisdom and philosophy are fraudulent (1:12–2:22). “All is vanity” (1:2).

Life makes sense only when one recognizes it as a gift from God and lives to please God. This person will receive the wisdom, knowledge, and joy that comes from God (2:26). This truth lays the foundation for Ecclesiastes 3:1-15. If all of life’s activities and labors have meaning when lived and understood in relationship to God, then one needs to accept and embrace the seasons of life as God has ordained them. Each season of life—with all of its challenges, sorrows, and joys—is a gift from God. The seasons of life remind us we are mortal and subjugated to time. What we do is temporary, but what God does will last forever. Yet God has put a thirst for eternity in the human heart. It is impossible for one to quench this thirst through self-effort. One’s thirst for eternity can only be quenched by the grace of God through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

**As you read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, consider how embracing the seasons of life honors God. What makes each season identified significant?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## TIME AND PLACE (ECCL. 3:1-8)

<sup>1</sup> To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: <sup>2</sup> A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; <sup>3</sup> A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup> A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup> A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup> A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; <sup>7</sup> A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup> A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

### VERSE 1

In poetic form, Solomon listed a series of opposites, pointing out that each has been appointed by God and has an appropriate time and place in life. The point is that everything that happens in this time-bound universe is under God's sovereign authority. Consequently, the message for believers is they should not only accept the seasons of life but embrace every season God has appointed in their lives as His gift to them—as opportunities to glorify Him by doing what is right at the right time (3:11). Recognizing this truth is implicit to wisdom.

Wisdom in the Scriptures is the fear of the Lord—knowing the right thing, doing the right thing, doing the right thing at the right time, in the right way, to the right extent for the glory of God. The seasons of our lives are gifts from God, blessing us with opportunities to enjoy and employ the gift of wisdom that He has given us (2:26). The message is not fatalistic nor is God arbitrary. Rather, it points to the truth that God's timing is perfect.

**What challenges must a person overcome if he or she is to embrace all of life's seasons and situations?**

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## VERSES 2-8

The first pair of opposites in verse 2 is birth and death. God has appointed both as well as everything that happens in between. Death is as much a part of the human experience as is birth. In contrast to the eternal God, mortal man has a beginning and an end. The sooner we come to grips with mortality, the more we are able to recognize the preciousness of life.

A **time to kill** likely refers to war between peoples. The Bible recognizes the reality of war and even the necessity of it at times. It also recognizes capital punishment. Solomon was not concerned with what constitutes just war or when and if capital punishment should be implemented. Rather, he was merely stating there is a time to kill. He also acknowledged that there are times when a situation calls for healing. Similarly, there are times we must **break down** things and other times when we need to **build**.

***The sooner we come to grips with mortality, the more we are able to recognize the preciousness of life.***

In verse 4, Solomon used two extreme expressions of human emotions—sorrow and joy—to indicate there are occasions that produce a whole range of human emotions. Whether it is in the spontaneous instances when we cry or laugh or the more formal occasions when we mourn the loss of a loved one or celebrate at another’s wedding, all of these experiences appropriately are part of the human experience.

Biblical scholars debate the meaning of the first pair in verse 5. If taken literally, it is probably a reference to clearing a field and removing **stones** for plowing and planting. The idea of gathering stones would be for the purpose of building walls around the field or the walls of a house. However, other scholars understand these expressions euphemistically from an ancient Jewish interpretation, interpreting “to throw stones” as sexual union and “to gather stones” as sexual abstinence (Lev. 18:19). This interpretation fits well with the second part of this verse, indicating that there was a time for a married couple **to embrace** and a time for them **to refrain from embracing**, since anyone who touched a woman during her

menstrual cycle was deemed unclean according to Old Testament law (Lev. 15:19-33).

The Lord Himself demonstrated the first point of verse 6 in the parables, where a man searches for his lost sheep and a woman searches for her lost coin (Luke 15:1-10). These are pictures of Jesus who came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Relatedly, the second pair of opposites—**keep** and **cast away**—is a reminder that nothing of this world is ours forever or lasts forever.

The two phrases, **a time to rend** and **a time to keep silence**, probably allude to mourning or times of repentance. In ancient Israel, people tore their garments and were silent as expressions of grief or repentance for sin. However, it was understandable people were able to mend what they had torn and speak to one another at other times since no one was expected to continue their expressions of grief permanently. Additionally, once one repented of sin to God, one was to carry on in the joy of His forgiveness.

**To love** refers to choosing to care for and cherish, but **to hate** means to reject and repudiate. Both loving and hating are wise if the objects of our love and our hate are what God loves and hates. Also, the Bible shows that while a kingdom should seek to be at peace with other kingdoms, there are times when war may be the only path to peace. The Scriptures depict this truth in the realm of spiritual warfare as we are to don the “whole armour of God” and “fight the good fight of faith” (Eph. 6:13; 1 Tim. 6:12).

**How should recognizing that there are complementary seasons of opportunity that open and close in life impact how one lives?**

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## **ENJOY LIFE** (ECCL. 3:9-13)

<sup>9</sup> **What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?**

<sup>10</sup> **I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. <sup>11</sup> He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.**

<sup>12</sup> **I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice,**

**and to do good in his life.<sup>13</sup> And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.**

### VERSES 9-11

The *sons of men* refers to all of humanity. Before Adam sinned, work was a gift God gave him in the garden (Gen. 2:15). With sin, this gift became cursed with difficulty. Yet the ability to work was a gift all the same; just as childbearing became painful for women, it does not negate the wonderful gift of a child (Gen. 3:16-19).

The problem for human beings is that, while God has given us the ability to work and to acknowledge that everything happens according to His perfect timing, we are unable to understand God's timing. While we may have a sense there is a time and place for everything under God's rule, we are incapable of grasping the true measure of *the world*. It is this limitation that makes life a struggle. We have a desire to know the future, but its grasp is beyond us. Our consciousness of God and eternity speaks of God's having created us in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Nevertheless, because of the fall recorded in Genesis 3, sin has severely affected our consciousness of all things eternal. It is for this reason the gospel is truly good news. John 3:16 says, "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." What humans cannot grasp or accomplish, God has done for us in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**How does having a healthy sense of one's mortality help one be a faithful steward of one's time?**

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### VERSES 12-13

Knowing that God has appointed the occasions and seasons of life, we should gladly accept and embrace them, trusting the sovereign God who has given us all things. We should enjoy the good blessings that God gives us, and during difficult seasons we need to remember that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). In Hebrew, the last phrase in verse 12 is literally, "there is nothing better for them to

do than to rejoice and to do good in one's life." Thus, God's gift to us is to live joyfully and holy in Christ. God has given believers the gift of the Holy Spirit for this purpose (Gal. 5:22-23).

**What are some practical ways of seeing good in the work and investments of time we make in this life?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible or theological dictionary.*

Review articles about eternity in a Bible or theological dictionary. Examine Bible passages included in the articles. Note the contrasts between God being identified as eternal and humanity as being created but looking toward eternity. How does this contrast impact your understanding of Ecclesiastes 3:11?

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**GOD WORKS** (ECCL. 3:14-15)

**<sup>14</sup> I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. <sup>15</sup> That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.**

**VERSES 14-15**

In contrast to the futile accomplishments of humans, everything God does endures. What God has done may not be improved upon

or diminished. So what is God’s ultimate purpose for the occasions and seasons in our lives? It is so that we ***should fear before him***. It is to have what the Bible often calls the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is a deep-seated reverence and awe for God that causes men to want to please Him at all costs. It involves wonder, submission, worship, love, and admiration inspired by His authority.

God is personally involved in the everyday affairs of His creation—in sustaining all things and working all things toward His perfect goals. In that security, we can enjoy life as a gift as we eat, drink, and labor (v. 13). This is a call to actively pursue good things in life. In a sense, these verses are about perspective. Though life sometimes can feel dark and gloomy, God has given us good things that break through the clouds like the morning sun. There are still rainbows in our fallen world. They are often the simple things, the things we take for granted. Our view of time—what we do with our time—affects how we live our lives.

God is the primary Actor in the natural world, and we are dependent on Him. The clock of time is powered by the providence of our sovereign God. We make real, responsible decisions every day, but in reality we know that the seasons of life are mostly out of our hands. In this, we learn to accept that we have very limited access to the big picture. Perhaps God intends us to be like children who trust their Father to know what’s best because we cannot see what He sees and we cannot know what He knows.

**How does recognizing that God is at work in the time granted and situations faced give a person hope and comfort?**

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### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *Stewardship*

Believers are under obligation to serve God with their time, talents, and material possessions and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others (John 9:4).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must use time as God made it to be used, doing the right things at the right time.
- Time is a gift, and believers should make the most of the time granted to them by God.
- Believers can take comfort in knowing that God actively works in human history to fulfill His plans.

**List activities and actions you have been putting off or avoiding. How can you embrace the items listed, looking for God’s work in each?**

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**Review your schedule for the next week. What adjustments do you need to make to be a better steward of the time you have?**

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**As a group, memorize Ecclesiastes 3:11. Discuss each phrase in the verse and review the verse in different translations. Prepare to share with each other during the week ways this passage impacts you this week.**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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## *Why Listen?*

The wise person heeds the warnings gained from past mistakes and godly counselors.

### **ECCLESIASTES 4:13–5:7**

One of the difficulties of parenting is trying to warn children not to make poor decisions. Parents are able to give these warnings because they learned the hard way through the many mistakes they made along the way—many mistakes that could have been avoided if they had listened to their own parents. Much pain and many heartaches can be avoided when one has a teachable spirit. In Ecclesiastes 4:13–5:7, the Teacher instructs the reader that it is wise to heed the warnings of past mistakes and the wise advice of godly counselors.

**What lessons from history do people rely on when living today?  
Why might a person ignore history and the lessons to be learned?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **ECCLESIASTES 4:13–5:7**

The Teacher wrote this book as a record of his search for meaning in life. He began with a record of his own personal failed attempts to discover the meaning of life. His conclusions were the verdicts of one who had personally investigated every angle before declaring his judgments on the matter. He pursued several paths, nevertheless each of them were dead ends.

In his search for meaning in life, Solomon discovered life only makes sense when one acknowledges God. Otherwise, it is all nonsense. For example, while it is impossible for fallen humans living in a fallen world to understand the various seasons of life and all the activities that accompany these seasons, people should recognize that God in His sovereignty has appointed all of them and that they are appropriate to His purpose. What is God’s purpose? It is to teach people that He should be at the center of their lives. The ability to be active and enjoy the fruits of one’s endeavors is a gift from God. Therefore, one should enjoy God’s blessings and do good (3:1-15).

Additionally, human beings need to live life with an appropriate understanding of the present fallen world in which they live. Living in a fallen world means living in a world where sin thrives. In its present state, it is chaotic and will never satisfy one’s deepest longings. Living in a fallen world means living in a dying world. Therefore, people should live with a proper perspective of their own mortality (3:16–4:6). Finally, Solomon surmised what God said in the beginning: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). A life lived in fellowship with others is better than a life lived in isolation (4:7-12).

**As you read Ecclesiastes 4:13–5:7, identify words and phrases that emphasize listening. What are the dangers of failing to listen?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## WHEN LEADING (ECCL. 4:13-16)

**<sup>13</sup> Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. <sup>14</sup> For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor. <sup>15</sup> I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. <sup>16</sup> There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.**

### VERSE 13

The Teacher recognized that having a teachable spirit was necessary for living a meaningful life, and this means receiving instruction in community with those who are wise. Valuing and receiving instruction from wise counselors is central to the Bible's concept of wise living. (See Prov. 4:13; 19:20.) In contrast, fools arrogantly despise instruction and wisdom. (See Prov. 1:7; 5:12-13; 15:5.)

In ancient Israel, the general consensus was that young people were foolish and old people wise. What's more, kings were supposed to be guided by wisdom (Prov. 8:15). Here, Solomon used irony to teach the wisdom of being teachable by stating that ***a poor and a wise child*** is better than an experienced ***king*** who has sat on the throne many years but is no longer willing to listen to wise counsel. In contrast to the much older king, this young male, possibly a teenager, was teachable and willing to pay attention to the insightful advice of others. The older king's refusal to listen to wise counsel was ***foolish*** and shameful.

### VERSES 14-16

The young man was the most unlikely person to become a king or be recognized as wise, ***for out of prison he cometh***. As a prisoner, he would have been deprived of the ability to make any decisions for himself. He would have been at the mercy of others and either disdained or forgotten by society. Slaves in the ancient Near East lived in better conditions than did prisoners. Also, describing him as ***poor*** means he came from

humble beginnings. Nevertheless, Solomon's bottom line was that wisdom does not depend on one's birth, social class, wealth, or age. This teaching is both a warning and an encouragement at the same time. The best of conditions for learning wisdom do not guarantee it, and the worst of conditions cannot in and of themselves keep one from attaining it and the opportunities it affords, such as becoming king in the case of this young man. Solomon's story is reminiscent of Joseph, who was released from prison in order to rule over Egypt as Pharaoh's second in command.

### **What are the characteristics of teachable people, and how does one develop a teachable spirit?**

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The Teacher witnessed a ***second child*** who succeeded the first young man who had replaced the old foolish king. The people who once adored the first young man who became king now followed his successor. As wise as the young man who replaced the old but foolish king was, his reign came to an end just as the foolish king's reign did before him. So regardless of whether one is foolish or wise, one's time on this earth is short-lived.

The third king's popularity appears to have surpassed that of his two predecessors. Regardless, his idolization and influence were also fleeting. No matter how great a king he was and how much the people loved him, those of the next generation would fail to appreciate all that he had accomplished and would soon forget him. This too is similar to what happened to Joseph. After he died, the next king who came to power "did not know about Joseph" and initiated a program of heavy oppression on Joseph's people (Ex. 1:8). The Teacher knew that the whims of the masses change directions as quickly as the wind, and the human aspiration for eternal glory is ***vanity***. Jesus' question was indicative of the Teacher's observation when He asked, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

### **How is the cycle described by Solomon in this passage seen today?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary to gain insight.*

Read articles about vows in a Bible dictionary. Review Bible passages identified, looking for common themes. How are the themes connected to each other? How are these common themes you identified seen in Ecclesiastes 4:13–5:7?

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## WHEN WORSHIPING (ECCL. 5:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> **Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.** <sup>2</sup> **Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.** <sup>3</sup> **For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.**

### VERSE 1

Verse 1 contains the first of two admonitions concerning worship. The phrase *keep thy foot* is a warning that means “to be cautious” or “to be careful to do something.” It is the same word Moses used when he exhorted the Israelites to “keep the law” and “keep the Sabbath” (Deut. 4:40; 5:12). Here, ***keep thy foot*** means to think carefully before taking action ***when thou goest to the house of God*** to worship.

Instead of approaching worship nonchalantly, one must approach worship reverently and circumspectly, recognizing there are consequences to how one worships God. The worship God accepts is

that which comes from a heart devoted to obeying Him. In contrast, **fools** think that as long as they make some religious gesture toward God, then their worship is acceptable to Him. They are ignorant of what it means to worship God because they believe expressions of worship are distinct from a life of obedience. However, the Scriptures are very clear that God will not accept the worship of the disobedient. (See Ps. 66:18.) Moreover, the prophet Samuel said obeying the Lord is more important than offering sacrifices to Him (1 Sam. 15:22). Our expressions of worship are an offense to God if they do not come from hearts submitted to Him. The fool does not know how dangerous it is to enter into worship with such disregard for God.

### VERSES 2-3

The second admonition regarding worship is that people should be careful to abstain from saying something they really do not mean or that they would not say if they gave it more thought. This can happen when people sing songs with lyrics they do not mean or pray prayers that are just empty words or clichés. It means recognizing there is nothing one can say that will impress God or inform Him of something He does not already know. It means abstaining from making empty promises to God.

As the saying goes, “Think before you speak.” Why? Because just as those with a lot on their minds have trouble resting, so those who talk excessively cannot do so without sinning and getting themselves into trouble. Solomon’s instruction is similar to Jesus’ words to His disciples before He taught them the model prayer: “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matt. 6:7-8). It does not mean we should not pray. It just means we should be more focused on God and more mindful of who He is when we pray.

**Why are worshipers prone to approach God with meaningless rituals instead of hearts for obedience?**

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## WHEN PROMISING (ECCL. 5:4-7)

**<sup>4</sup> When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. <sup>5</sup> Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? <sup>7</sup> For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.**

### VERSES 4-7

Verses 4-6 have as their background Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy 23:21-23 concerning making **a vow unto God**. A vow involved an oath to God promising to offer something to Him if He would act on behalf of the individual making the vow. Sometimes people make vows in the midst of great danger or need, but sometimes it is out of great desire. For instance, Hannah was unable to have children. So she went to the tabernacle and vowed to God that if He gave her a son, she would "give him unto the LORD all the days of his life." In grateful response to the Lord's granting her request, her husband offered a vow offering on their behalf in gratitude for what God had done (1 Sam. 1:9-28).

***It is foolish to take what is a delight to the Lord and turn it into self-centered grandstanding.***

God never required anyone to make a vow to Him. Therefore, failing to keep a voluntary vow to the Lord in His house was a serious offense and equated to breaking the third commandment, which forbids the misuse of the Lord's name (Ex. 20:7; see also Lev. 19:12). God's final words in Leviticus warn of the costliness of breaking a vow (Lev. 27). The voluntary act of making a vow to God was the highest worship one could offer God. Voluntary expressions of worship are more a blessing to God than doing only what is required. For this reason, it is foolish to take what is a delight to the Lord and turn it into self-centered grandstanding before Him, acting as if one delights in God when in truth that person just seeks to advance himself or herself with grand promises.

**What does the expectation of keeping a vow made to God reveal about the true nature of worship? How does this expectation relate to the character of God?**

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God expects His people to keep their commitments. People often look for ways to back out of their commitments to God and others. It dishonors God when we refuse or fail to keep our word. Therefore, it would be better never to make a vow than to make one ***and not pay***.

The Teacher's admonition is "Do not sin with your mouth or complain about your commitments to God to His minister" (*angel* probably refers to a temple servant). Failure to keep one's promises to God robs God of the honor and worship He deserves and robs the individual of the blessings and honor that come from God to those who keep their vows. Lying to God has serious consequences, and just in case one thinks this is only an Old Testament teaching, one should recall Ananias and Sapphira who lost their lives because they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). We must be like the psalmist in Psalm 66:13-15 who determined to keep his vows to the Lord.

Having ***dreams*** of what one might do for God and expressing elaborate plans to serve Him mean nothing to Him apart from faithful obedience. What matters to God and should therefore matter to every individual is that we live our lives in complete devotion to Him. This is what it means to ***fear thou God***.

**Why is it better to refrain from making a vow to God than making a vow and not keeping it?**

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**KEY DOCTRINE: *Scripture***

Scripture reveals the principles by which God judges us (Rom. 2:1-5).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Christian leaders must willingly listen to wise counsel when leading.
- Believers are to worship God in reverent obedience.
- Wise believers carefully weigh the promises they make to God and others, knowing God will expect them to keep any promises made.

**Discuss as a group ways of encouraging each other to listen to wise counsel. What role does your Bible study group and church play in helping others find and listen to wise counsel?**

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**List reasons why believers in times of corporate worship should prioritize listening to God and how they may do so. How can you give greater priority to listening to God through worship?**

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**What promises to God have you made that you have yet to fulfill? What keeps you from fulfilling that promise? What steps do you need to take to move closer to fulfilling your promise?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *Where Is the Balance?*

The wise person realizes God offers wisdom to the imperfect.

## **ECCLESIASTES 7:11-22**

We live on a fine line. If we think too lowly of ourselves, we see ourselves as being so broken we are not salvageable. If we think too highly of ourselves, we see no need for God or His forgiveness. We need to find balance to being broken by sin and yet still created in the image of God. Fortunately, God has not left us on our own to navigate our time “under the sun.” The wise person realizes God offers wisdom to the imperfect which gives us balance in this life and hope for the future.

**Why is acknowledging our sinfulness important for having a proper understanding of ourselves and our limits in this life?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **ECCLESIASTES 7:1-8:17**

In Ecclesiastes 6:12, the Teacher asked: “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?” He set out to answer this question in 7:1-8:17. He began in chapter 7 using proverbs. The person who is wise is able to evaluate what the better things in life are. For example, Solomon observed that the death of a person with a good reputation is far more valuable than the expensive perfumes used in burial preparations, and the death of one who lived for God is better than fleeting moments of merriment.

When faced with mortality, one may take stock in how life should be lived, whereas amusements serve as temporary diversions at best. The person who is wise will contemplate how to live in light of his or her mortality. Hence, the birth of a child is wonderful, but a life lived for God is even better (7:1-4).

The wisdom that comes from God is the key to living a balanced life. It is wise to recognize one’s utter helplessness and look to God. Having the wisdom of God provides strength and a way of escape from sin. It is recognizing that only God can make one upright (7:11-29). God’s wisdom enables people to conduct themselves properly before governmental authority, realizing while one may be powerless before a king, every king is powerless before God (8:1-8). Additionally, it is God’s wisdom that gives people patience to wait on God’s judgment of the wicked and vindication of those who fear Him (8:9-13). In contrast, trusting in one’s own wisdom leads to futility, because the Lord has deliberately made life incomprehensible apart from Him (8:16-17).

**As you read Ecclesiastes 7:11-22, consider the contrast presented. How does God’s wisdom produce the balance called for by Solomon?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## ACCEPT IT (ECCL. 7:11-14)

**<sup>11</sup> Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. <sup>12</sup> For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it. <sup>13</sup> Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? <sup>14</sup> In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.**

### VERSES 11-12

Verses 11-12 consist of an observation followed by an explanation. The first clause of verse 12 explains the first clause of verse 11, and the second clause of verse 12 expounds upon the second clause of verse 11. The main purpose of both verses is to espouse the high value and desirability of wisdom. The first part of verse 11 states that gaining **wisdom is good with an inheritance**. They are similar in that both wisdom and an inheritance are passed on from one generation to another. Additionally, both have value. That which one inherits may have sentimental value or monetary value. In either case, an inheritance is meant to be a blessing to the one who receives it. Likewise, the one who receives wisdom is greatly blessed.

The first clause of verse 12 provides the Teacher's reasoning for saying wisdom is as good as an inheritance. It is because both wisdom and financial wealth provide **a defence**. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Solomon had a significant monetary inheritance in mind in verse 11. The phrase **wisdom is a defence** literally is "the shade of wisdom" in Hebrew. The idea of protection derives from the picture of one's being protected from the intensity of the sun's rays in the heat of the day. We understand how financial wealth provides protection in a financial crisis, but how does wisdom offer protection? The wisdom that others pass down provides a tried and true way of maneuvering through life. The Book of Proverbs is an example of this. Moreover, when thinking about the wisdom that those who fear the Lord inherit from Him, the security of this

wisdom is even greater because it not only provides security in this life but also in the life to come.

The second clause in verse 11 states that wisdom is an advantage to **them that see the sun**. Most scholars understand this phrase to be synonymous with those “under the sun,” meaning every living person. In this case, it means wisdom is good for everyone, which is true. However, when understanding the phrase *that see the sun* in light of the following clause in verse 12, “wisdom is a defence,” it may be addressing extremely difficult times, when, metaphorically speaking, the sun blinds one’s eyes and its intense heat is unbearable. This is supported by the last part of verse 12 that states the lasting benefit of wisdom is that it **giveth life to them that have it**. The idea is that it not only preserves life but is also the source of life. Therefore, no matter how uncomfortably and intensely hot life can get, the one who possesses wisdom is secure. The wisdom that comes from God also leads to God, and the New Testament reveals that Jesus Christ is “the wisdom of God” unto salvation (1 Cor. 1:24). Those who trust in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ are given the gift of eternal life and are eternally secure (1 John 5:10-13).

### VERSE 13

In verse 13, the Teacher asked a rhetorical question expecting the emphatic answer: “Nobody can.” Having wisdom involves recognizing God created everything and does all things according to His own purposes. What is more, He is in control of everything. Therefore, it is wise to submit to God as He works out His will because nobody can change what God has done, is doing, or will do. God always knows what is right and does what is right at the right time, in the right way, and to the right extent. In light of this truth, why should anyone want to change what God does? Nobody can, and nobody who is truly wise would want to.

### VERSE 14

Expounding on verse 13, the Teacher anticipated and answered the question his readers must have been asking: “If we are powerless to change the way God has made things and what He does, then what can we do?” Solomon’s answer contains two imperatives given in two circumstances. In the first instance, when you are

experiencing good times, rejoice and enjoy God’s blessings. However, when you experience seasons of **adversity**, then you must **consider**. This echoes the beginning of verse 13, “Consider the work of God.” What work of God should one consider in times of adversity? We must remember that like the good times, the difficult times are also from the hand of God. (See Lam. 3:38.) As limited creatures we can never fully comprehend God or His ways. God deliberately demonstrates this truth to remind us we are incapable of ruling our own lives and thus need to trust Him (3:14; 7:14).

**Why might people find it so difficult at times to trust that God’s ways are always best?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible concordance to compare how a word is used.*

In Ecclesiastes 7:14,24,26-29, Solomon repeatedly used the words “find” and “discover.” Look up the Hebrew word *matsa’* in a Bible concordance that includes Hebrew words and examine Old Testament passages that use the word. How does the use of this word in other passages help you gain a clearer understanding of why Solomon would have used the word in this passage?

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## **FIND BALANCE** (ECCL. 7:15-18)

**<sup>15</sup> All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness. <sup>16</sup> Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou**

**destroy thyself? <sup>17</sup> Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? <sup>18</sup> It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.**

### VERSE 15

The Teacher observed how the pervasiveness of sin and its effects in a fallen world have sullied every aspect of human virtue. In this verse, he pointed out a phenomenon that totally confounded the teaching of traditional wisdom: a righteous person can die young while a wicked person may live a long life. In Solomon's day, **a just man** was a person who by faith in God lived in accordance to God's law. It was understood that keeping the law would prolong one's life. (See Deut. 4:40; 5:33; 8:1; 30:20; Prov. 3:1-3.)

However, when Moses spoke of life that springs from obedience to God's law, it was set in contrast to the death that would come as a result of God's judgment for disobedience. The emphasis was on avoiding their lives from being cut short because of God's judgment. It was never meant to be a guarantee of an individual living a long life. As for the Book of Proverbs, one must remember it is a message of how the world works in general. It is like saying if people work hard they will have a job, but we have all witnessed hard-working people lose their jobs because of extenuating circumstances and no fault of their own. This reality does not keep parents from teaching their children that they will be rewarded for their hard work. Furthermore, there are numerous godly people in the Bible whose lives were cut off before old age, almost all of them on account of their righteousness. (See Heb. 11:36-40.) Remember Jesus was thirty-three years old when He was crucified. Life in a fallen world that is marred by sin is chaotic and unpredictable.

### VERSES 16-18

The Teacher addressed a false philosophy that seeks the good life through strict religious commitments. Obviously, there is a difference between being **righteous over much** and righteous, and being **over wise** and wise. The *righteous over much* and *over wise* have given themselves to legalism (seeking righteousness by keeping the law or doing good works) and asceticism (self-denial in order to attain a spiritual ideal). The basic notion is that if you obey all the rules (and perhaps even make up some

new ones), then you will be righteous and have a wonderful life. Job's friends held to this philosophy and were proven wrong. It is a philosophy that is self-focused (what can I do?), arrogant (this is what I can do), and miserable (enjoying the simple pleasures of life is something I cannot do). Trusting in your own righteousness and wisdom is self-destructive.

Solomon was not saying in verse 17 that sinning in moderation is acceptable. Instead, while recognizing everyone sins (see 7:20), he was stating that the person who embraces wickedness as a way of life is heading for destruction. In addition to verse 16 that teaches not to think of oneself as being overly wise, here he instructed that one should not be foolish by ignoring God's wisdom.

People should avoid the path of self-righteousness and an inflated perception of how wise they are, while at the same time rejecting wickedness as a way of life. Religious legalism, asceticism, and licentiousness are each paths to destruction. True righteousness and wisdom coupled with the ability to enjoy life's blessings comes to **he that feareth God** in loving awe and devotion.

**What is the difference between being a religious fanatic and being completely devoted to God?**

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *Man***

By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race (Rom. 1:21-23).

### **ACKNOWLEDGE SIN (ECCL. 7:19-22)**

**<sup>19</sup> Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. <sup>20</sup> For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. <sup>21</sup> Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: <sup>22</sup> For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.**

## VERSE 19

Following the thought of verse 18, the Teacher surmised that wisdom found in the fear of God makes one stronger than the collective wise counsel of **ten mighty men**. This is significant given the great value the biblical sages gave to having many counselors (Prov. 11:14). Our fear of God and our faith in Him and what He has done in the person and work of His Son saves us. Rulers attempt to curb sin, but only the wisdom of God through Christ can cleanse us of our sin.

**How does being honest about our own sin open the door for us to gain perspective when dealing with other people?**

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## VERSES 20-22

Recognizing we are all sinners (v. 20) should impact how we understand ourselves and others. We must learn to deal with people as they are—as sinners like us. In verses 21-22, the Teacher provided an example of what this looks like. He advised that we should not take too seriously everything people say because we are probably going to hear someone say something insulting about us. We ourselves have said unkind things about others too. Taking issue with those who speak wrongly of us serves to justly accuse us of our own culpability in relationship to others.

It is interesting that this example is of a **servant** doing the insulting. A person is much more likely to rebuke a subordinate than a superior. Nevertheless, it is wise to let it go. Just as we are sinners who have spoken unfair criticisms of others and are in need of God's grace, so is everyone else. Since the perfect, holy, sinless God who is our Superior has shown mercy and grace to us who have willfully rebelled against Him and offended Him, then how can we refuse to show mercy and grace to others?

**How does recognizing the tremendous mercy, grace, and forgiveness God has shown us empower us to be merciful, gracious, and forgiving to others?**

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can be sure that God’s plans for them are the best.
- Believers are to live reasonable and balanced lives.
- All people are sinners and therefore are in need of God’s grace and wisdom.

**List areas in which you struggle to accept God’s plans. What steps can you take to more fully trust Him in each area listed?**

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**Ask God to reveal things in your life that are out of balance. What actions do you need to take to get these things aligned with God’s purposes and plans? What does it mean to live a reasonable and balanced Christian life?**

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**Discuss as a group why it is wise and good to always remember that all people, including ourselves, are sinners. How does doing so bring honesty and perspective to the group as a whole? As a group, hold one another accountable for memorizing Ecclesiastes 7:20 this week.**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *Facing Death?*

The wise person gratefully lives all the days he or she is granted.

## **ECCLESIASTES 9:1-10**

We do not know the number of days we have on this earth. But we are responsible for how we live those days and steward the resources we have been given. There are times when we may suffer. There are times when we will experience great blessings. These times are part of the ebb and flow of life. No matter how long a person lives, he or she is going to die unless the Lord returns first. Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 addresses this reality and how people live in light of their mortality.

**What is on your bucket list? How does the potential of death add urgency to doing the things on your list?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **ECCLESIASTES 9:1–10:20**

No matter how much people want to know the future and control it, they are unable to know what God is going to do in the future, because nobody can control God. This is part of being human, and once again the Teacher confronted his audience with the limits of human power and knowledge (Eccl. 9:1-2).

Nonetheless, death is certain and is the great equalizer. It puts everyone on an equal playing field. Believers must beware of thinking that if all people share the same kinds of burdens in life and then die, then fearing the Lord makes no difference. Instead, this should encourage believers to trust in God's purposes, knowing that their devotion to Him will be vindicated because He will one day make everything right. In the meantime, it is this knowledge that not only makes life bearable but also enjoyable. Furthermore, it does no good trying to figure out all of the circumstances pertaining to one's death (9:3-12).

These conundrums of life are at least more bearable when people apply themselves to wisdom. Wisdom will help people deal with the challenges of life, but it does not mean they will be appreciated for their wisdom (9:13-16). Also, the multitude of benefits that come from wisdom can be easily destroyed by foolishness (9:17–10:1).

The Teacher concluded these observations using government as an example. Usually the folly of a fool is self-evident, but it does not prevent a leader from promoting the fool to a position of authority. Unlike the fool who does not fear God, the wise person who does must always be cool headed and careful with what he or she says, especially to those in authority and about those in authority. It is wise to be humble and patient. Moreover, when leaders neglect their duties, everything suffers. But the appropriate actions of mature leadership give the people reasons to rejoice (10:5-20).

**As you read Ecclesiastes 9:1-10, consider the significance of the Teacher's observations about life and death. How does a person find balance between enjoying life and being conscious of the brevity of it?**

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# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **SOBER TRUTH** (ECCL. 9:1-3)

<sup>1</sup> For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. <sup>2</sup> All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. <sup>3</sup> This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

### **VERSE 1**

The Teacher began with an important statement and it is essential that everything he is about to communicate be understood in light of this truth. He stated ***that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God.*** To say they are *in the hand of God* means they are in His control. The *righteous* describes the person who keeps God's law, and the *wise* live by the instruction of God's Word. These terms are interrelated, and it is best to think of these subjects as the same people. Those who are righteous and wise acknowledge God in everything they do.

With this in mind, the Teacher revealed his first thoughts in this passage concerning the human condition: people in general do not know how God is going to deal with them. God is sovereign and will deal with people as He sees fit. The core of the problem is human depravity caused by sin (7:20; 9:3). God is a just God who must punish sin and at the same time a gracious God who forgives sin (Ex. 34:6-7). So is God going to be against us or for us? It is impossible to answer this question by just looking at what goes on around us. People cannot determine if they are in God's favor or disfavor based merely on their present experiences in life.

## VERSE 2

It is impossible to understand these issues from a human perspective, because the righteous appear to be no more favored by God than the wicked appear to be rejected by God. There was no visible difference from the Teacher's vantage point. So from a human point of view it may raise the question, "What advantage is there to being righteous if the righteous and the wicked experience the same things in life and in the end share the same 'fate'—death?" The Teacher recognized that, in the final judgment, things will go well for the righteous and poorly for wicked (8:12-13). But what about in the meantime? Solomon already indicated that prosperity is not necessarily a good thing (6:1-6), and that God uses adversity for His good purposes (7:1-15; see also Rom. 8:28).

**Why are people, unbelievers and believers alike, reluctant to think about their mortality and what they should do to properly prepare for death?**

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## VERSE 3

Recalling the fall in Genesis 3, everyone is under the curse of sin and cannot escape the ***evil among all things that are done under the sun***, which is death. Calling death *evil* means it is distressing, calamitous, and grievous. No one can escape this curse. Instead of facing this truth, sin-marred people are driven by the ***madness ... in their heart***. They follow a variety of futile paths in the short time they live (1:12–2:26), failing to make the best use of their time and to reckon with the dilemma of their sin and the inevitableness of their death.

The Teacher gave more details concerning the effects of the fall. The phrase ***the heart of the sons of men is full of evil*** means sin dominates everyone's lives, and ***while they live*** means human sin begins with conception and remains until one breathes one's last breath. Moreover, sin's effect is *madness*, and for this reason, people's sinful actions in this fallen, chaotic world are an enigma to human reason or logic. What's more, it is for this reason we desperately need the grace of God to save us from sin, to transform us, and to renew our minds (Rom. 12:2). The only way to prepare for death is to trust in God and His provision for us through His Son.

## SEEK LIFE (ECCL. 9:4-6)

**<sup>4</sup> For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. <sup>5</sup> For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. <sup>6</sup> Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.**

### VERSE 4

The Teacher concluded that, in spite of the overwhelming perplexities and difficulties intrinsic to the human condition, it is still better to be alive than dead. He illustrated this by comparing the most admired and mightiest of beasts in the ancient Near East, a **lion**, with perhaps the most despised animal in the ancient Near East, a **dog**. Lions were icons of royalty. For example, Jacob used the metaphor of a lion to describe the coming Messiah (Gen. 49:9). In contrast, the dog was associated with contempt. Goliath expressed this connotation when he asked David: “Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?” (1 Sam. 17:43). Solomon concluded that a despised, contemptible dog that is alive is better off than a dead lion, even if the lion was the mightiest and most majestic of the entire animal kingdom. Why? Because hope is lost when one dies. In contrast, regardless of their status or situation, there is still hope for the living.

### VERSES 5-6

What is this hope for the living? Ironically, it is that they know their death is inevitable and that sooner or later they are going to die. Consequently, the living still have an opportunity to be prepared for their death (12:14). But as for the dead, their opportunity to resolve the problem is gone. Solomon was not saying there is no life after death; his point was that the opportunities God gives people while alive on this earth will be forever lost to them when they die. Life is meant to be more than just an exercise in endurance. It is the same idea Jesus propounded when He said: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

This teaching hearkens back to the Teacher's words in Ecclesiastes 3:1-14. There is a time for one's birth, one's death, and everything that happens in between. Every season and event in life comes from God and is according to His purposes for His glory. God does what He does so that we will worship and serve Him. Nevertheless, all of these opportunities to glorify the Lord will evaporate when we die. For this reason, we need to take advantage of this short window of opportunity while we have it. It is good for believers to be ever mindful of Jesus' resurrection and the hope of eternal life we have in Him. But it dishonors our Lord if we allow our looking to this blessed hope to keep us from glorifying Him with our lives in the present.

**How does the resurrection of Jesus change a believer's attitude toward life and death?**

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## **ENJOY** (ECCL. 9:7-10)

**<sup>7</sup> Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. <sup>8</sup> Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. <sup>9</sup> Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. <sup>10</sup> Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.**

### **VERSES 7-8**

Several times already the Teacher has exhorted his readers to enjoy life. (See 2:24-26; 3:12-13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15.) In verses 7-10, he elaborated again on why and how one should enjoy life. (And he will do it one more time in 11:7-10.) Repetition was the common way ancient Near Eastern writers emphasized a point, and Solomon's repeated message to enjoy life demands our attention. In verse 7, Solomon asserted we can enjoy life because ***God now accepteth thy works***. This is not saying God approves of everything a person wants

to do. Rather, it means God intends us to enjoy the blessings of life He has given us in acknowledgment of Him.

Using several imperatives and other Hebrew grammatical forms denoting desire, Solomon emphasized what is commendable to God. **Go** is a call to take action. Bread and wine were the staples of every meal. So the call to ***eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart*** was a call to enjoy God's daily provisions.

In ancient Israel, people associated wearing **white** clothing with joy and celebrations. Likewise, oil symbolized joy. The Teacher was saying be clothed or covered in joy at all times and let your joy be apparent to others.

**How does the reality of death motivate a person to take action? How can a person live with a healthy understanding of death without being fearful of death?**

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### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Oil, an indispensable commodity in the ancient Near East, had many uses: the preparation of food, fuel, treatment of wounds, and in religious ceremonies. Oil also was a symbol of blessing and joy (Ps. 45:7). Being anointed with oil represented God's blessing and the joy it brings.

### **VERSES 9-10**

In his patriarchal culture, Solomon instructed men to ***live joyfully*** with their wives, but the principal is for both married men and women to enjoy their spouses until they die. Marriage is a blessing from God for the mutual enjoyment of both partners, and couples can only enjoy it in this vain life because there will be no institution of marriage in heaven as we know it on earth. (See Matt. 22:30.) When a married couple loves and enjoys each other as God intended, they will experience a wonderful blessing.

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## **KEY DOCTRINE: *Marriage***

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime (Heb. 13:4).

Enjoying life also involves ***whatsoever thy hand findeth to do***. This certainly pertains to one's occupation but also more generally speaks to whatever one is able to do. The Hebrew word translated *whatsoever* literally means "all" or "everything." The phrase ***do it with thy might*** means to give it everything you have. We should give our very best effort to everything God allows us to do. Why? Because when a person dies and goes to ***the grave***, there will be no more opportunities this life on earth affords.

### **How does enjoying the blessings of life honor God?**

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## **BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary.***

Read articles in a Bible dictionary about Sheol. Note verses included in the articles, reviewing selected passages. How does Sheol differ from how most people understand "hell." How does the use of the word in the passages you examined give you a deeper understanding of the meaning of the word?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- All people must prepare for death.
- Believers can live with hope and purpose, knowing that Christ defeated death through His resurrection.
- Believers should treat life as a precious gift, making the most of their lives for Christ's glory.

**Discuss the role the group should play in helping others prepare for death in a healthy way. What changes might the group need to make in light of this discussion?**

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**Who do you know in need of hope and purpose? What can you share with them from Ecclesiastes 9 that will help them?**

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**List the blessings of life for which you are most grateful. How can you celebrate these blessings, being sure to honor God in the process?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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## 13

# *What Is Life About?*

The wise person fears and obeys God.

## **ECCLESIASTES 12:1-14**

Reading biographies and autobiographies gives us a glimpse into the thoughts and events that shaped a person. We discover why they did some of the things they did and how their experiences impacted the decisions they made in life. We also see ourselves in some of the stories. In many cases, we discover wisdom that helps us deal with life and gives us perspective. In Ecclesiastes 12, the Teacher looked back at life and emphasized the importance of finishing well, giving us wisdom that will help us live our lives well.

**What biography or autobiography have you recently read? What insights did you gain about life in general from reading that book?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **ECCLESIASTES 12:1-14**

The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches at least ten essential truths for living life “under the sun”:

1. Anything that does not have eternal value has really no significant value. Everything humans achieve appears and disappears like a breath on a cold morning. Only what God does is lasting (Eccl. 1:1-11).

2. The wise person will find meaning in life through faith in God. All other pursuits to discover meaning in life—such as education, wealth, recreation, work, and power—are dead ends (1:12–2:26; 5:10–7:6).

3. Time is a gift from God. Wise people use time as God made it to be used—doing the right things, at the right times, in the right ways (3:1-15).

4. Obedience to God is more important than religious expressions of devotion. What’s more, God expects His people to have integrity and keep their promises to Him as well as to others (4:13–5:7).

5. Wise people trust God and His sovereign will for their lives (7:11-14).

6. God is not impressed with human efforts to achieve righteousness; He is pleased with humble devotion to Him (7:15-18).

7. Wisdom involves recognizing one’s own sin and leads to having compassion on others who also are sinners (7:19-22).

8. Wise people live their lives with a proper perspective of their mortality. They realize life is precious and that their window of opportunity is short-lived (11:7–12:8).

9. Wise people enjoy the life and blessings God has given them (2:24-26; 3:12-13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:1-10; 11:7-9).

10. Wise people fear God and obey His Word, realizing they will give an account to Him for how they lived their lives (12:9-14).

**As you read Ecclesiastes 12:1-14, consider what God’s wisdom looks like through the lens of maturity. How does the end of life serve as proof for all the Teacher was saying?**

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# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **THE TWILIGHT** (ECCL. 12:1-8)

<sup>1</sup> Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; <sup>2</sup> While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: <sup>3</sup> In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, <sup>4</sup> And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; <sup>5</sup> Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: <sup>6</sup> Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. <sup>7</sup> Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. <sup>8</sup> Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

### **VERSE 1**

Verse 1 is part of a larger unit of thought beginning in Ecclesiastes 11:7 that serves as the Teacher's conclusion to the book. This conclusion contains two major themes. First, remember God, walk His path of wisdom, and enjoy the blessings such a life contains (11:7–12:8). Second, fear God and keep His commandments because God will hold everyone accountable for what they have done in life at the judgment (12:9-14).

Verse 1 is connected to the previous verses, especially Ecclesiastes 11:10. To enjoy life to the fullest, you should begin living for God *in the days of thy youth*. The phrase *remember now thy Creator* means to take God into consideration. In the context, there are three considerations concerning God that young people should take into account. First, to recognize that everything they have comes from

God, their *Creator*. Everything they are and possess depends on Him. Second, to enjoy the blessings God has given while they can, the window of opportunity to do so is small. Third, to keep in mind that the day is coming when God will hold them accountable for how they lived their lives. Failing to remember God in one's youth invites sorrowful regrets both later in this life and at the final judgment. The life of faith is a life of enjoyment now and hope for the future, but the life that shuns God is a life of loss both now and in the future.

The ***evil days*** refers to the inevitable physical and mental deterioration that comes with aging. It is a difficult season of life as one loses the capacity to enjoy the many blessings of youth. These days of adversity are difficult for one to accept. Hence, speaking of the final years of life the Teacher despairingly confessed, ***I have no pleasure in them.***

**How would you communicate the importance of considering God when younger? Does a person's failure to consider God when younger disqualify them in the future? Explain.**

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### VERSES 2-5

In verses 2-5, the Teacher used several metaphors to describe the deterioration of the body as old age approaches. It was all for the purpose of imploring young people to act on their opportunities to live for God and enjoy His blessings before it is too late.

Given the context, verse 2 may have been figuratively referring to one of two things. First, it may refer to death, since darkness can often mean death in the Scriptures. Second, it may refer to the dimming of one's vision that most often comes with aging. The ***clouds*** returning after the rain may be indicating that the vision never gets better, unlike the sun breaking through the clouds after the rain has passed. The teacher may also have been referring to the fading capacity to enjoy life. This seems to fit the context better given its proximity to the last line in verse 1.

In verse 3, the ***house*** seems to represent the body. The ***keepers*** of the house are the hands, and their trembling describes tremors that

become more common with aging. The **strong men** who **bow** are the major muscle groups of the legs and back along with the bones. The **grinders** are the teeth. Chewing food becomes more difficult as gums deteriorate and teeth are lost. **those that look out of the windows** are the eyes that fail to see as well as they once did.

Given the three references to sound in verse 4, the **doors** that are **shut** seem to refer to the ears. Rising to the **voice of the bird** is an accurate description of what many aged people experience—waking up earlier in the morning.

A fear of **that which is high, and ... in the way** points to a recognition of one's frailty and being at more risk of an accident. The blossoming of **the almond tree** refers to the whitening of the hair, like the almond tree's flowers turn white just before falling from the branches. The expression **the grasshopper shall be a burden** most likely refers to one not having the energy and the strength to do what one once was able to do. The phrase **desire shall fail** likely is a euphemism for a loss of sexual drive.

At the end of verse 5, the Teacher transitioned to metaphors describing what happens when we die. **Man goes to his long home.** *Long home* was a poetic way of referring to the grave, which seems eternal compared to one's short life on earth. It also emphasizes the finality of death. The universal nature of the statement is evidence it is not talking about heaven. Added to this picture are those who walk about in the street mourning, highlighting the loss and bereavement of death.

## VERSES 6-7

The Teacher used six idioms or figures of speech to describe death. Each of the items in verse 6 has something happen to it suddenly, rendering it no longer functional and emphasizing the abruptness of death. Also, each of the items was valuable, emphasizing the great value of life. Silver and gold were precious metals. Both a **silver cord**, probably a necklace, and a **golden bowl** would have been rare, expensive, and extravagant luxuries. Given water was the most important resource for life in the ancient Near East, a shattered bowl **at the fountain** and a broken **wheel** that was part of the mechanism used to draw water from a **well** would have been serious matters. No water, no life.

In verse 7, the Teacher described death in terms more common to the Old Testament. The phrase ***then shall the dust return to the earth*** uses the language of Genesis 2–3, when Adam and Eve sinned and brought the curse of death on all of humanity. The ***spirit*** returning to God is appropriate since God is the One who gave us life in the first place.

## VERSE 8

As he closed this section and transitioned to his final point in the following verses, the Teacher expressed one last time the theme of the book. With 1:2, it serves as a bracket for the entire book before presenting the Teacher’s final conclusion. It indicates his work was complete. Again, the Teacher stated that everything done under the sun is fleeting and therefore meaningless. It means anything that has no eternal value, in reality, has no value at all.

## THE TRUTH (ECCL. 12:9-11)

**<sup>9</sup> And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. <sup>10</sup> The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. <sup>11</sup> The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.**

## VERSES 9-11

Solomon committed himself to knowing and understanding the truth so that he could pass it on to others. He labored at employing modes of communication that would best convey the truth and enable his students to embrace it.

Shepherds used large rods or staffs to prod their herds to make them go in a particular direction. Sticking out from the end of these rods or staffs were nails. These nails inflicted some pain to encourage the animals to go where the shepherd wanted. The meaning of the analogy is that learning and taking heed to wise instruction is often demanding and painful. Furthermore, all true wisdom is ***given from one shepherd***, and this Shepherd is God. In fact, all true wisdom comes from God and ultimately leads to God.

**What is the importance of passing on what a person learns?  
How does failing to pass on wisdom gained impact the next generation?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible concordance to gain understanding.*

Using a Bible concordance, read references to the “fear of God” in Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (biblical wisdom literature) and develop your own definition or understanding of this term. How does the fear of God relate to a person’s trust in God?

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**THE CONCLUSION** (ECCL. 12:12-14)

**<sup>12</sup> And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.**

**<sup>13</sup> Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. <sup>14</sup> For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.**

**VERSE 12**

The Teacher warned his audience to beware of being overzealous in the pursuit of learning just for the sake of learning. Such a pursuit is a self-centered waste of one’s energy that produces arrogance. Paul warned Timothy about false teachers who preyed on people who were always learning but never gaining knowledge (2 Tim. 3:7). These people were looking for the latest and greatest new idea. They were constantly looking for new “truth” because they refused to recognize the revealed truth of God or to accept it.

## How can the pursuit of learning replace the pursuit of knowledge? What are the dangers of confusing learning and knowledge?

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### VERSES 13-14

Everything the Teacher has written leads to this conclusion. Life has meaning only when lived in a right relationship to God, and in Old Testament language this is the expression ***fear God, and keep his commandments***.

The New Testament reveals that a right relationship to God begins when a person puts his or her trust in Jesus for salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). This meaningful life continues as a believer faithfully does the work God has called him or her to do (Eph. 2:10). Fearing God and obeying His commandments means having a faith and reverence for Him that leads humans to want to please Him. It involves wonder, submission, worship, love, and devotion inspired by His eternal attributes and sovereign authority.

Verse 14 provides the reason why all of humanity should fear God and keep His commandments. All people will stand before God in ***judgment*** to give an account of what they have done with their lives. ***Every secret thing*** will be laid bare. It is for this reason we should live circumspectly, recognizing there will be consequences for every decision we make, every thought we think, every word we say, and every deed we do. It is for this reason the Teacher exhorted his audience to fear and obey God. It is the only way to be prepared for final judgment.

**Why do people, even some believers, seem to wince when hearing the words “fear and obey God”? Why do these common expressions in the Bible, “fear God” and “the fear of the Lord,” get ignored today?**

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### KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

Christ will judge all men in righteousness (2 Cor. 5:10).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- We can finish well by continuing to focus on God as we age.
- Believers can pass on to others the truth and wisdom they have gained.
- Purpose in life is found through fearing and obeying God.

**What things have distracted you from continuing to focus on God as you move toward maturity? What actions can you take to minimize these distractions?**

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**What are ways believers can be intentional in passing on to others the truth and wisdom they have gained? To whom can you pass on what you have learned so far and how?**

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**On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your readiness to give an account to God for your life? What needs to change in order to increase your readiness?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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# *Job's Friends: Models of Compassion?*



*By J. Mark Terry*

All of us have gone to visit a grieving friend and have wondered what to say. Sometimes we say nothing. Other times when we do talk, we later question whether we said the right thing. Job's friends came to see him as he grieved over the deaths of his children (Job 2:11). How effectively did they comfort their friend? A

careful study of Job's three friends and their efforts will help us all become better comforters.

The Bible tells us Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar learned of Job's despair and agreed to meet and travel together to visit Job (v. 11). This demonstrates they knew each other and Job before the sad events transpired. Clearly, sincere concern prompted their visit, and they meant for their words to console Job in his loss and instruct him in righteousness.

When the three friends approached Job, grief overcame them, and they dramatically expressed their anguish. First, they wept loudly for their friend and his suffering. Second, they tore their robes. Third, they sprinkled dust on their heads. All of these actions expressed deep sorrow. Beyond these actions, they sat silently in Job's presence for seven days and seven nights.

This period of mourning was typical of mourning for a prominent person (Gen. 50:10). It showed their respect for Job and their identification with his sorrow. Who were these concerned friends?

### ***Eliphaz***

Eliphaz always spoke first. This indicates that he was the oldest and most prominent of the three men. He was the kindest of the three friends. Before coming to see Job, Eliphaz had a dream that affected him greatly (4:12-21) and likely set the tone for all three of his speeches. Eliphaz believed that all suffering was punishment for sin. Therefore, in Eliphaz's mind, because Job was suffering greatly, he must have sinned grievously against God.

Eliphaz made three speeches in the Book of Job (chaps. 4–5; 15; and 22). In his first speech, he reminded Job that sinful men suffer for their sins, and he promised Job forgiveness and restoration if only Job would repent. In his second speech Eliphaz used sharper words. He expressed shock at Job's defense of his actions. He called on Job to repent and seek reconciliation with God—lest Job experience the terrible fate of the wicked. In his third speech Eliphaz cast

off all restraint and accused Job of wickedness; nevertheless, Eliphaz ended his speech with praise for God's mercy on those who repent.

Eliphaz was a good man, a man of upright character and sympathy. Were he not kind and sympathetic, he would not have traveled many miles to see his friend. Still, his narrow and limited understanding of human suffering led him to misdiagnose Job's problem.

### ***Bildad***

Most Bible commentators believe Bildad was younger than Eliphaz, as it was customary for the oldest person to speak first. He expressed amazement that Job would question the traditional belief that suffering is the result of sin. The Book of Job includes three speeches by Bildad (chaps. 8; 18; and 25).

In his first speech he implied that Job's sin may have contributed to his children's deaths. In his second speech Bildad discussed the awful fate of the wicked, and in his third speech he extolled the power of God and the sinful nature of human beings. His last speech was quite brief (chap. 25), maybe an indicator that Bildad had grown tired of talking to

someone who would not agree with him.

## **Zophar**

The fact that Zophar spoke third suggests he was the youngest of the friends. Like his friends, Zophar focused on Job's disobedience as the cause of his suffering.

The Book of Job records only two speeches by Zophar (chaps. 11; 20), though some commentators suggest that a portion of chapter 27 might be Zophar's third speech.

## **Evaluation**

The Bible says Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar came to comfort Job. How well did they do? Job gave them a bad evaluation. He declared that they were "miserable comforters" (16:2). Surely they meant well, but they made Job feel even worse than he did before their arrival.

Job's friends did some things right, though. They did visit Job, which was good. Many persons will avoid those who are grieving. Second, they sat with Job in silence for seven days. Often silence is healing. Many times one's presence is more helpful than one's words. Third, they expressed their opinions to Job personally. They did not talk behind his back.

Still, they failed completely in their efforts to help Job. Why did they fail? They failed because they held these convictions: (1) All suffering is the result of sin. (2) God punishes each act of sin with a penalty that corresponds to the gravity of the sin. (3) Suffering is proof of personal guilt. These ideas prevented them from understanding Job and his problem.

Not surprisingly, the three friends struggled to understand suffering. Four thousand years later we still wrestle with this issue. Truly, some suffering is the result of sin, but in Job's case the friends' assumptions were wrong. The Book of Job presents a new understanding of suffering. Not all suffering is the result of sin. Sometimes the innocent do suffer in this life. However, "suffering may be used as a means of demonstrating the faith of the saints, strengthening the faith of the saints, and extending the influence of the saints." That which can easily be overlooked may be one of the most hope-filled lessons from the book: "Suffering, faithfully endured, defeats Satan."<sup>1</sup>

1. J. W. Watts, *Old Testament Teaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 134.

J. Mark Terry is Professor Emeritus of Missions at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. This article originally appeared in the Fall 2005 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*.

# COMING **NEXT QUARTER**

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## **PHILIPPIANS; COLOSSIANS; PHILEMON**

- Session 1*     **Joy in Prayer** • Philippians 1:1-11
- Session 2*     **Joy of Adversity** • Philippians 1:12-26
- Session 3*     **Joy Through Humility** • Philippians 2:1-15
- Session 4*     **Joy in Knowing Jesus** • Philippians 3:8-21
- Session 5*     **Joy Through Peace** • Philippians 4:1-9
- Session 6*     **Joy and Contentment** • Philippians 4:10-20
- Session 7*     **The Gospel's Power** • Colossians 1:9-23
- Session 8*     **The Gospel's Goal** • Colossians 1:24-2:3
- Session 9*     **The Gospel's Forgiveness** • Colossians 2:4-15
- Session 10*    **The Gospel's Freedom** • Colossians 2:16-23
- Session 11*    **The Gospel Lived** • Colossians 3:1-17
- Session 12*    **The Gospel and Relationships** • Colossians 3:18-4:6
- Session 13*    **Restoration** • Philemon 8-21

PHI/CO