

BOOK OF JOB



CONTENTS:

Introduction	Page 3
Study 1: Testing Times Job 1-2	Page 6
Study 2: Wisdom That Wounds Job 3-27	Page 8
Study 3: When Heaven Is Silent... Job 19	Page 12
Study 4: Where is Wisdom found? Job 28	Page 15
Study 5: Watch your Tone Job 38-41	Page 18
Study 6: Humility & Blessing Job 42:7-16	Page 21

i Introduction

Suffering, like the cross, is an anvil on which God shapes us.

We know this in our own lives. Paul teaches us that suffering produces perseverance, which yields character, which yields hope (Romans 5:4-5). We know this, but we hate people quoting Bible verses at us (like Job's friends) when we suffer, and we instinctively would rather we avoided suffering altogether. Indeed, when we think about it, we realise that we spend most of our lives trying to insulate ourselves from suffering. Which is why the book of Job teaches us. In the New Testament, James says

‘As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.’ *James 5:11*

So Job teaches us about perseverance, and about what God will ultimately prove to be like for those who persevere - a God of immense compassion and mercy.

This series is called ‘Job: The Anvil of the Cross’. I have chosen that title for three reasons:

1. Job is brutally honest about the experience of suffering and evil.

Job suffers unjustly, and will not stand for sugar-coated platitudes. Job asks all the questions of the agonised sufferer. Why won't God do anything about suffering? Doesn't he care? Does everyone who suffers really deserve everything that they are dealt? Why can't I argue my case with him? These are questions that - if not asked explicitly - find their echo in Jesus' own words of abandonment at the cross ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'), which Job invariably leads us to. That very cry tells us that whilst not all questions we ask have easy answers, God is not distant from the cry. In fact, it is one that God the Son has uttered.

4 | The Anvil Of The Cross

2. Job will ask us to re-align our gospel to that of the cross.

Though we know suffering is part of our world, when we encounter it, we are regularly surprised, even shocked. It's not just that we encounter something beyond our previous experience: it's that it turns upside down our expectations of a painless life, and therefore challenges our faith in God. This may be because we have unwittingly adopted a gospel message which expects no sacrifice, expects no pain, and equates 'blessing' with heaven on earth. If so, the book of Job points us in a different direction, from the prosperity gospel to the gospel of the cross and the resurrection (see chapter 19). That is the pattern of the New Testament: suffering now, glory later. For the present, being a disciple of Jesus means taking up your cross and following after him (ie. walking in the footsteps of Job), with our eyes on the resurrection to come with Christ's return, when Christ will renew all things. Job tells us that now, the path to glory with God is cross-shaped suffering.

3. Job tells us what type of Saviour we need.

What Job experiences is extreme: it is not what most of us experience. In this respect, Job is a type of Christ. Job foreshadows the one whose greatness and suffering would exceed Job. Job points us to the one man needed in the Universe. The one man who would humbly submit and obey perfectly his heavenly Father in his life and death – by whose obedience many would be made righteous (Romans 5:19).

About the book of Job:

- It is **old**. Most likely, Job lived in the time of the early patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, around 1900BC), since he performed priestly sacrifices - a practice which later became unacceptable once a priesthood was established under Moses. Job himself was a non-Israelite, coming from the land of Uz, which would later form part of Edom to the south-east of Judah¹.

¹The only other reference to Uz as a place-name in the Bible is in the writings of Jeremiah, equating Uz with Edom (see, for example, Lamentations 4:21).

- It is **long**. The book of Job covers 42 chapters. As such, it can be difficult to get a handle on. The following structure, sermon guide, and reading guide should help:

Week	Sermon & Reading Guide	Structure	Chapter
1	Sun Jun 5: Testing Times (Job 1:1-2:10)	Prologue	1:1-15
	<i>read beforehand</i> <i>Job 1-3</i>	Two Interviews between God and Satan	1:6-2:10
		Arrival of friends	2:11-13
2	Sun Jun 12: Wisdom that Wounds (Job 3-27)	Job's opening statement	3
	<i>read beforehand</i> <i>Job 3-18</i>	Three rounds of speeches	4-27
3	Sun Jun 19: When Heaven is Silent (Job 19)		
	<i>read beforehand</i> <i>Job 19-27</i>		
4	Sun Jun 26: Wisdom & Despair (Job 27-31)	Author's interlude	28
	<i>read beforehand</i> <i>Job 27-37</i>	Job's Closing Statement	29-31
		Elihu's Four Speeches	32-37
5	Sun Jul 3: Watch your tone (Job 38-41)	Two interviews between God and Job	38:1-42:6
	<i>read beforehand</i> <i>Job 38-41</i>		
6	Sun Jul 10: Humility & Blessing (Job 42)	Epilogue	42:7-17
	<i>read beforehand</i> <i>Job 42</i>		

May God teach you and me as we God fashions us on the anvil of the cross.

Chris Jolliffe, May 2016

Some helpful resources:

- 1) *Out of the storm: grappling with God in the book of Job*, Christopher Ash
- 2) CS Lewis: *A Grief Observed*

1 Study 1: Testing Times

Job 1-2

1. Discipleship Questions

- When you pray, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name', do you put conditions on this prayer in terms of what it might cost you?
- What are your assumptions of how God is meant to behave towards you?
- Pray for God to open your eyes to see what He wants us to see.

2. Read Job 1

- How are the characters introduced to us - Job? God? Satan?
- What accusation does Satan make to God of Job (verses 9-12)?
- What can we see that Job can't?
- What does Job understand that challenges us?
- What is God helping you to see in this?

3. Read Job 2

- How is Satan's challenge to God advanced in chapter 2?
- What is Job's temptation?
- Is Job's sinlessness in (verse 10b) driven by pride? (verse 9)
- Assuming Job's answer in verse 10 is not a pious platitude, what lies behind it?

4. The Anvil of the Cross

- Read Philippians 2:6-11. How does Job remind us of Christ?
- Read Isaiah 53:4. What does it mean that Christ carried our sorrows at the cross?
- Is God still worthy of worship, even if God withdraws our material comfort and blessing?

5. Pray in pairs about Christians you know (including perhaps yourself) who are undergoing intense testing through suffering.

2 Study 2: Wisdom that Wounds

Job 3-27

	Eliphaz	Job	Bildad	Job	Zophar	Job
Cycle 1	4-5	6-7	8	9-10	11	12-14
Cycle 2	15	16-17	18	19	20	21
Cycle 3	22	23-24	25	26	-	27

1. Discipleship Questions (5 minutes only)

- Choose one of these two introductions:
 - a) Quickly, on a whiteboard (or piece of paper), write down comments that have been made by well-meaning Christian friends that have been unhelpful and helpful during times of suffering. Reflect: what made those comments either helpful or unhelpful?
 - b) In John 9, Jesus' disciples saw a man who had been born blind. They asked Jesus, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?' What were the assumptions underlying their question?

2. Wisdom that wounds

Eliphaz the philosopher know-it-all.

- Read chapter 4:1-6. Helpful? Or not helpful?
- Read chapter 4:7-9. What is Eliphaz assuming about suffering and righteousness?
- Read chapter 5:1-7. What is Eliphaz implying about Job?
- Read chapter 5:15-27. What hope does Eliphaz offer?

Job's response

- Read chapter 6:14-17. What is Job's assessment of Eliphaz's wisdom?
- Read chapter 7:11-21. What does Job ask of God?

Bildad the traditionalist

Read chapter 8:1-22. What is Bildad assuming about God? ... implying about Job?

Job's response

- Read 9:1-4, 14-22. How would you describe Job's view of God?
- Read 9:32-35. Where might there be hope? (1 John 2:1-2)

10 | The Anvil Of The Cross

Zophar the theorist.

- Read 11:1-20. What is Zophar assuming of God? ... implying about Job?

Job's (& God's) response

- Read 12:1-3, 13; 13:2-7. What does Job desire of his friends?
- Read Job 42:7-9. How should we consider their counsel?

3. Reflection

- The basic assumption of Job's friends was that we live in a just world, which - being ruled by God - means that if someone suffers, then they must be guilty. Job's friends had a theology which drew a tight connection between individual righteousness (or guilt) and well-being (or suffering). But we know from chapters 1-2 that Job was a *righteous* sufferer. Some suffering (at least) is innocent. In what ways are their words to Job pastorally cruel?
- Having said that, not everything that Job's friends tell him is wrong. But their wisdom is if they speak truth, they apply it mechanically, in an insensitive way.

What is wrong with their wisdom?

- a) There is little room in their thinking for a developing relationship with God. Whilst Job expresses his anger and wrestles with God in the agony of his righteous suffering, they attack him for his choice of words. Yet in this exchange, it is their words (not Job's) that God finds fault with (42:7). God allows people to wrestle with him (think of Jacob in Genesis 32, or Jesus in Hebrews 5:7-10); through Jesus, God allows this of us (Ephesians 3:12).
- b) There is little room in their thinking for the mystery of suffering and injustice. They have it all worked out, and think that they can put God's case better than God does in his silence. Yet Job comprehends that many of God's ways are unknown. True, that causes Job frustration, but he does not assume he has God completely worked out.
- c) They do not listen - either to God, or to Job (13:4, 19:21). The impression is that they come with their prepared speeches. Eventually, the whole debate grinds to a halt in chapter 25 after 3 cycles of Job listening to them and responding.

5. The Anvil of the Cross

- How does Jesus' cry of abandonment from the cross show the wisdom of Job's friends wrong?
- What wisdom DOES comfort those in suffering?
- When IS it right to share with sufferers the encouragement of the scriptures?

6. Pray for those you know who are suffering.

3 Study 3: When Heaven is Silent... Job 19

So many Christians just want to eradicate pain and present Jesus as the great Panadol tablet. We just want to fix things up for people, and sometimes we are not prepared to consider their pain. Yet suffering is a part of growing. The great dilemma is that even after a person becomes a Christian, pain remains the reality of life. It is just that our perspective on it has changed.

Job's friends have been rambling on between chapters 4-18 with all sorts of advice. They began with general platitudes, but have increasingly become more vindictive. Eliphaz has told him that all suffering is a result of sin, and so concludes that Job has done something terribly wrong. Bildad suggests that Job's children may have been the cause, while Zophar tries to suggest God is actually kind and the situation could be a lot worse. But Job has a rebuke for his friends in chapter 19.

Job's friends know about his suffering, but they don't know suffering. They haven't listened to what he's said. Job said that he is innocent. He says that he is in a living hell ... but they won't accept it. Why? Because their set of beliefs about God logically tell them that God doesn't let innocent people suffer. These fellows know about God, but they don't know God. They have their formula of beliefs about God and cling to them.

But Job clings to God. He has much more - he has confidence and faith in a just God.

1. Discipleship Questions

- Have you ever asked after God, demanding an answer from him?
- If so, what was it about God that made you cry out?
- What was the outcome of crying out?

2. When Heaven is Silent ...

- Read Job 19:1-6, 21-22, 28-29. How does Job answer his friends?

- List the frustrations Job experiences in verses 7-22.

- Job holds on to two truths: one, that he is suffering innocently; two, that God is his Rock (faithful, dependable, just and true). Where do these two truths lead? (verses 23-27)

- Why must they lead there?

14 | The Anvil Of The Cross

3. The Anvil of the Cross, and the Hope of Resurrection

- Why was the resurrection a surety for Christ? (Acts 2:22-26)

- Coming out of Job's experience of unjust suffering, and his beliefs in God as faithful and just, Job's individual hope of resurrection finds its parallel in the prophesied resurrection of the Messiah (Psalm 16); and then its national counterpart in Ezekiel's prophecy of a national resurrection (following the national experience of suffering in the Exile - Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 26:19); and finally in the Old Testament hope of a resurrection of to life all who are righteous (Daniel 12:1-2).

- How does the resurrection address the issue of unjust suffering?

- How does the resurrection of Jesus show comfort you? (1 Corinthians 15:48-55; 1 Peter 1:3)

4. Pray with thanksgiving

4 Study 4: Where is Wisdom found?

Job 28

Chapter 27 concludes a lengthy discourse that involves exchanges between Job and his three friends. Despite some variations in emphasis, Job's friends all agree that Job's suffering is as a result of unconfessed sin. Job must have done something wrong to deserve the trouble he is experiencing. But Job knows of no sin bad enough to warrant the degree of suffering that he is going through, and this leads to a stalemate.

In the flow of the book, chapter 28 gives a profound reflection true wisdom from God's perspective (for Job is in desperate need of the same). From the outset of the book we have known Job as a righteous man, and nothing has changed. We have been alerted to the reality that suffering can happen to anyone, even those who don't deserve it. In this fallen world, it seems that even the innocent suffer. Job's friends make the mistake of reducing God to virtually an impersonal system of cause and effect. Good things happen to good people; bad things happen to bad people - simple as that. But a true understanding of the wisdom of God will not allow such a simplistic conclusion, for he is a personal God who acts in the world and in our lives, and ultimately in the cross of Christ. Here is true wisdom that denies the shallow view of life that Job's three friends espoused.

1. Discipleship Questions

- It is often remarked by older people that true wisdom lies in knowing that we don't know everything. Is that all wisdom is? Or is it more?
- Try to recall a moment where a piece of wisdom from the Bible changed your life. What happened?

16 | The Anvil Of The Cross

2. Read Job 28

- Summarise in a sentence each part of the chapter (perhaps one section each, or per pair of group members), to get the flow:
 - verses 1-11
 - verses 12-19
 - verses 20-28
- This chapter falls between the three rounds of speeches, and Job's final speech. What would we miss if this chapter was not here?
- What does it mean to 'fear the LORD'?

3. The Anvil of the Cross.

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Here, Paul adds to the notion of wisdom being equated to fearing the LORD, by speaking of the wisdom of God. What is the wisdom of God?
- Who is the wisdom of God for us?
- What can Paul possibly mean?

4. **Reflect**

- Apply this to Job and his friends: if you able to speak to them knowing what you know about God's wisdom in Christ, what would you say to Job's friends? ... to Job himself?

- What would you want to say to your future self or close friend who may suffer unjustly?

5. **Pray** with thanksgiving for the wisdom that God gives us in Christ.

5 Study 5: Watch your Tone Job 38-41

For 37 chapters, God has been silent over why Job has been suffering, leaving Job to wrestle with possible answers with his ‘friends’. During these chapters, Job has spoken with vigorous honesty, speaking in a tone which many of us might balk at, and others find refreshing (see, for example, 30:16-21, 31:5-12). Of course, we (the privileged readers) know from the two interviews between God and Satan in chapters 1-2 *why* Job is suffering, but Job knows none of this. Now, those two introductory interviews between God and Satan at the start of the book are matched with two interviews between God and Job at the end of the book. Here, at last, we expect some resolution to the seeming unjust situation Job finds himself in. Yet surprisingly, instead of letting Job into the answer of *why* he is suffering, God lets Job come to terms with the One who knows why things happen.

1. Discipleship Questions (5 mins)

- What is the boldest thing you’ve ever said to God?
- Would you say it again? Why or why not?
- What was the boldest thing one of Jesus’ disciples said to him? Did Jesus respond as you’d expect God to respond?

2. ‘Brace yourself like a man!’ Round 1!

- Read Job 38:1-40:5 (all of it - it’s worth it)
- How do you account for God’s initial remarks to Job? (38:1-2) Fake dramatics designed to instil some fear in Job? Or something else?

- Which rhetorical questions posed by God instil awe in you?
- How would you summarise God's answer to Job thus far?
- How would you summarise Job's answer to God thus far?
- What does this teach you about wisdom?

3. **'Brace yourself like a man!' Round 2!**

- Read Job 40:6-42:6 (all of it - it's doubly worth it)
- What issue in particular does God take up with Job? (40:8-9)
- How do the various challenges that God poses Job address God's basic criticism of Job?
- How would you summarise God's final answer to Job?

20 | The Anvil Of The Cross

- In the end, what does Job repent of?

4. The Anvil of the Cross

- How can suffering shrink our horizons and cause us to lose perspective on God?

- How does the cross help us focus our perspective on God during times of suffering?

5. Reflection

- God spoke to Job out of the storm, but Christ entered the storm of God's anger on the cross for us. Now, Paul says that 'through Christ, we may approach God with freedom and confidence' (Ephesians 3:11). What does the book of Job teach us about speaking to God boldly?

- What has God taught you about wisdom?

6. Pray boldly with thanksgiving and humility.

6 Study 6: Humility & Blessing

Job 42:7-16

At the end of the book, Job still does not know why his life has been made a misery. Half way through the last chapter, Job's life changed for the better as quickly as it changed for the worse. Eventually Job dies 'an old man and full of years' (42:17) which is a commentary that his life was met with much blessing despite his times of despair and misery.

The ending to Job is happy even if it is a little confusing. No reason is given for Job's return to blessing. Interestingly, Satan is given no mention, despite being the perpetrator of Job's sufferings. Yet Job's friends are held responsible for their faulty counsel and directed to repent in the light of it. We are left in no doubt that their wisdom was not God's, and there is a distinct difference between the two.

Job is a book about suffering. It asks lots of questions, but we ought not to expect that it gives all the answers. The wise way to live is not by knowing why everything happens, because that knowledge belongs to God alone. The way through the struggles and challenges of life is to know that the God who knows everything. The way to negotiate life is to know Jesus Christ, who has become for us the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:30). The main question we must address is not, 'Why is this happening to me?', but 'since this is happening to me, how can I use it to know God better through Jesus Christ?'

The book of Job is about remaining faithful to God, and trusting him, even when bad things happen, because knowing God is more valuable than not suffering.

1. Discipleship Questions

- What do you expect 'blessing' from God to look like in this life?

22 | The Anvil Of The Cross

- Christians oscillate between embracing the prosperity gospel (if not in name, then in principle), to feeling guilty for owning things they enjoy. Honestly, do you include material and relational prosperity in your expectation of God's 'blessings' to you?
- What does it mean for you presently in your life to 'deny yourself, take up your cross, and carry your cross'?

2. Read Job 42:1-17

- Recap last week: What words describe Job's final response to God?
- How does God assess the efforts of Job's friends? Where would you say that Job's friends got it wrong?
- Job prays for his friends. How does Job's intercession (and the LORD's answer) turn their underlying premise on its head?
- Look at the epilogue to the book in verses 10-17. How do Job's circumstances compare with how the book began? What does this tell us about God?

3. The Anvil of the Cross

- In many respects, Job is a Christ-figure: his descent from riches to rags, subsequent suffering is almost unprecedented, as is his subsequent vindication (anticipating the pattern of Christ in Philippians 2:6-11). Read 1 Peter 1:3-8. What is the parallel New Testament vindication of Job that all believers in Christ will share? Does this call for an adjustment of our expectations of material prosperity now?

4. Reflect

- Comment on this statement: “It is not always possible to know why, but Job shows us it is always possible to be wise.”
- If you had to sum up the lesson of Job in one sentence, how would you do so?
- Reflect back to Job’s initial statement, ‘The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.’ (1:21). After all that has been covered, what reason does Job have to say that with even greater resolve? To what extent do you share his resolve?

5. Pray with thanksgiving



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