



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers  
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 3  
JOB**

**JANUARY 15-21, 2007**

<b>DAY</b>	<b>DIRECTED READING</b>	<b>DEVOTIONAL READING</b>	<b><i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i> READING</b>
<b>Monday</b>	Job 38-39	Psalm 11	Job 32-37
<b>Tuesday</b>	Job 40-42	Psalm 12	Job 38-42
<b>Wednesday</b>	Genesis 12	Psalm 13	Genesis 12-13
<b>Thursday</b>	Genesis 15	Psalm 14	Genesis 14-15
<b>Friday</b>	Genesis 17	Psalm 15	Genesis 16-17



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Connecting people to abundant life.

**READ**

Job 38-39

Psalm 11

**REFLECT**

Job's story is the supreme example of how the context of extreme suffering can bring up the most poignant issues of human and divine relationship, and the meaning of life itself. This is a book that is difficult to read both because of its style and its ideas. Probably more than any other book of the Bible, this book requires a grasp of its over-all structure before we get out of it what we are looking for.

The book begins and ends (ch. 1-2, and 42:10-17) with the story of the fall and restoration of material fortunes of Job, a wealthy patriarch. In between there is the account of the long discourses by Job and acquaintances of his, debating the fairness of his misfortunes. The first of these speeches are the comments of three men who have come to "comfort" Job in his affliction, although their words seem intended rather to challenge and goad him into admission of some great sin that is the reason for God's allowing his loss. The speeches of the "Comforters" are in cycles: First Eliphaz, then Bildad, then Zophar address Job, and in each case Job gives a long response. This sequence is repeated so that there are three sets of six speeches. Then another "Comforter" chimes in, Elihu, who has a rebuke for all present, and calls for a higher appreciation of the mystery of God than any of them seems willing to admit. As if in response to Elihu's point, God Himself then speaks from heaven, with a sort of answer – and a sort of non-answer – to the points of Job and his acquaintances. As we noted, the book then closes with the story of Job's return to material wealth.

The book raises many questions as we read it. One is about its unity, that is, whether it was written as a whole. The "story" and "speeches" sections seem very different, seeming to address issues in dissimilar

ways. Even their style is different: the “story” is in prose, and the “speeches” in poetry. I think it’s safe to say that it is certainly meant to *function* as a single work in Scripture, and that there are good reasons for taking it seriously as a literary whole. Other questions are theological. Job’s wife asks the question whether, in the face of total ruin, personal integrity requires not that we continue to worship God, but that we “curse God and die” (3:9). Is she right? If not, how do we frame an answer to her deeply bitter stance? This leads us into another profound issue, namely, the meaning of misfortune. Is it punishment for the unrighteous? Is it correction for the straying? Is it a challenging test for the upright? Is all of this too pat? The most persistent question is probably this: does the book of Job answer these questions, and if so, what is its answer?

I think these questions are answerable to some extent, and we will look at some ways to approach them over the next days. In the meantime it is important to emphasize that Job is a book whose over-all structure ought to be understood before we dip in to random passages. The speeches of the comforters have much truth in them, but they lie under the rebuke of the Almighty (42:7); the whole book needs to be the context in which we read any part of it. I think, though, that it is safe to say that the bedrock of truth in this book flows from the astonishing and majestic speech of God (ch. 38-41). We will see how these chapters set the rest of this see-sawing narrative on a firm foundation.

## **RESPOND**

“There’s nothing like food when you’re hungry,” and there’s nothing like the word of God when you’re floundering. As we cultivate ongoing personal familiarity with Scripture, we will find not only a resource of stability for ourselves, but we will be ready with “a word in season” for others as well.

## **PRAY**

Lord, Thank you for the life of grace and peace that flows from you.

D.D.

## **READ**

Job 40-42

Psalms 12

## **REFLECT**

Today we will look at the prose “story” sections of the book of Job, and what they tell us about this compelling personality. Again, these are found in chapters 1-2 (which we read last week) and in 42:10-17.

The story unfolds with the description of a godly man and his family, in which all is fine, until Satan, out of his own skepticism, raises a question: doesn't Job have it too easy? Would he be so godly if his situation deteriorated? So the Lord allows Satan to destroy everything Job has, including his health and children, except his life. Job's response is impressive, if it is faith we are considering. He continues to bless God, at least after the first wave of destruction, and even after the second refuses to “curse God and die,” as his wife in her distraction urges him to do. He refuses to “sin with his lips” (2:10), although the greatness of his pain seems to have silenced him completely (2:13). Even when, in the speeches, he does speak, and expresses deep bitterness and questioning, he never breaks with God, but only asks to understand Him more profoundly. For this reason we read at James 5:11 of the “steadfastness” of Job (a better translation than “patience”).

If we then skip to the final chapter and the end of the prose “story,” we find that Job's testing results in the restoration of his material goods, and even a new brood of children. The effect is uncomfortable for many readers, since the emphasis seems to fall on the material rather than the spiritual. We would be happier with the result, perhaps, if Job had

realized that the deepest blessings of God had to do with inward resources rather than outward possessions. This is a good point, and the best readings of Job, I think, take notice of the fact that the “story” does indeed fall flat on its own, that it needs the richness of the speeches to catch our imagination and our love. Again, the center of mass in the book is the response of God, and the amazing truth that God does care to be with us, and known by us. The end of the “story” may intentionally be meant to show the shallowness of even the vastest fortunes. That is, it may be intended to give the reader a chance to feel that the return from God’s presence to the world of creature comforts is a loss of value. It is sometimes the most disappointing of experiences to get exactly what we thought we wanted, with no added value of richness or mystery. God’s true gifts never fall flat.

Today’s Psalm echoes this: “Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise,” says the Lord. “I will set him in the safety for which he longs.”

## **RESPOND**

It is often true that we attempt to approach the challenges in our lives as if we were the primary force in it, without the presence and partnership of God. Are we ready today to hand a particular problem over to God for resolution? Are we ready to grow in the process?

## **PRAY**

Lord, Thank you for the promise of your presence, for us and for those we love.

D.D.

## READ

Read:

Genesis 12

## REFLECT

As we continue to consider the experiences of Job, we will look today at his interaction with the three “comforters” in chapters 4-31. This is the longest section of the book, and it represents a complex array of arguments and counterarguments of possible reasons for Job’s calamity.

Despite the disagreements, Job and his interlocutors are agreed on the basic issues involved. God in His majesty requires human obedience, not as an arbitrary thing, but because human disobedience of God is always sin. It is always contrary not only to God’s will and way, but it works against human reality as well, since we are created by God to function as His joyful servants. Disobedience, then, cuts across the grain of everything that human life promises: joy, peace, fruitfulness, meaningfulness, and relationship. Job is in a position in which he has literally lost all those things. Therefore his “friends” conclude that at some point he has flagged in his obedience. Job agrees with them on the basic issues, but he claims he has not been disobedient, and so by the rules of the game, God needs to back down and explain Himself. Since the known rules of the game are not functioning, Job seems to want to shift to another set of rules – the courtroom – in order to set things straight (23:1-7). In fact, he seems to look for “justice” to deliver him from the hand of God entirely. His shocking words are that he wishes to be “delivered forever from my judge” (23:7).

In his frustration with God, Job even calls out for a “Redeemer” who will vindicate his cause before the harsh implacability of God (19:25-17). For Christians, there is much to think about here, as the trials of Job seem to require a deeper and more complex understanding of God’s love and justice. There will be an answer within the book of Job to this

cry for a second and “better” divine savior, as we will see when we look at the speech of Elihu. But the Church has seen here a powerful longing for what we have come to believe as the very ministry of Jesus the incarnate Son. Without denying the claims of justice and holiness, the Father and the Son set in motion the plan for salvation: the Son would be born as a human being, take on the sins of humanity, and answer for their full burden with His death in the cross. With His resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit would come the new opportunity of our fellowship with God in deeper understanding and friendship. The one-sided and agony-producing view of God held by Job and his friends would be a thing of the past.

The rules of the game as perceived by Job and the comforters were inadequate to reality. They contained enough reality for God to be able to use provisionally. But Job was quickly getting to the point where he was being forced to transcend them. What God had in store for Job was not a different game, not a “next level.” It was time for Job to leave games behind, and open to relationship itself. God was fully ready to give him the supreme gift: the gift of God Himself.

## **RESPOND**

Our culture has done some thinking about “the games we play.” We are aware of “rules of the game” in several areas of our lives. But we need to become more and more aware of the way the “games” attitude can flatten life. We need especially to be ready for God to come alongside us, transforming situations and possibilities with the wonder of His presence and love.

## **PRAY**

“How long, O Lord? Will thou forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?... But I have trusted in your lovingkindness. My heart will rejoice in your salvation.” (Psalm 13:1 and 5).

D.D.

## READ

Genesis 15

Psalm 14

## REFLECT

Today we look at the speech of Elihu (Job 32-7). Elihu is the odd man out in the story of Job. He is not one of the three “comforters,” either in their arrival as a group, or in their ultimate condemnation by God. He is not introduced at all, except in the things he says about himself. But he has two distinctions: Job never “answers” his speech, as he answered all the rest; and as soon as Elihu stops speaking, God Himself begins to address them all.

Elihu is younger than the other men, and he starts his speech with a careful civility that belies his furious anger with them. He bases his boldness, and their need to hear him, on the fact that a person of any age can speak the truth about God – especially since “it is a Spirit in a man, and the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding” (32:8). Elihu, then, intentionally stands apart from the tradition of Job and the “comforters,” with their platitudes about the rewards of obedience. He stands more in line with the prophets of Israel, rather than the teachers. He wants to shake them from their low horizons, and awaken them to a more wonderful world. He scoffs that they value human behavior as a way to get a handle on God:

“If you have sinned, what have you accomplished against Him?...

If you are righteous, what do you give to Him?...

Your wickedness is for a man like yourself,

And your righteousness is for a son of man.” (35:6-8)

Elihu is saying that God in His majesty is not ever to be compared with humanity, or placed in competition with us. That is a game we lose as soon as we try to play it. If we are to hear His response to our cries, we must listen with a different ear: “At this also my heart trembles and leaps from its place: listen closely to the thunder of his voice, and the rumbling that proceeds from his mouth” (37:1-2). God represents a whole different being, a vast separate continuum, and any attempt to horse-trade with him must give way to absolute humility. But Elihu also finds this God of wonder to be worth loving, since He is the author of salvation, wisdom, faithfulness, and life itself.

Elihu attempts to break the standoff that Job has backed himself into, with a fresh vision of God. In doing this he is performing the function that we are often called upon to perform ourselves, as Christians in relationship with others. Friends must often be ready to help break logjams in the lives of friends. But our particular contribution as Christian friends is to bring fresh perspective on the love and presence of God, as we have known it ourselves, and as the Bible so richly teaches. This is the function of the witness.

## **RESPOND**

Sometimes we need the counsel of others to recognize the logjams and standoffs in our own lives. Often the best help will come from someone willing to challenge us with a fresh vision of the love of God.

## **PRAY**

Dear Lord, Thank you that you offer us Your personal love and presence. Help us to share the truth of Your presence, in words or in actions, with those we meet today.

D.D.

## READ

Genesis 17

Psalm 15

## REFLECT

On this last day considering Job and his experience, we will look at the great speech of God (Job 38-41), and what it says about His relationship to Job. We said previously that God's speech is both an answer and a non-answer to Job. It is not an answer, since it doesn't address the presuppositions and arguments of Job and the "comforters." It doesn't pick up the question of whether calamity is always tied to some kind of sin. Instead, God begins with the memorable question, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" He continues with a powerful enumeration of the wonders of creation, with special emphasis on "Behemoth" and "Leviathan" (which may correspond to the hippopotamus and the crocodile). Surely God takes no account either of the obedience/rewards dynamic, or to the courtroom dynamic that is Job's final refuge from God. Rather, God seems to be making the point that those other "games" have very little purchase at all on the majesty of God. In this He is echoing and approving the insights of Elihu: "Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? Or do you have an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like His?" (40:8-9) God's speech to Job is first of all a rebuke for the assumptions that Job and the "comforters" have held and insisted upon.

But God's speech is more overwhelmingly a positive response. The theologian Karl Barth was fond of saying that whenever God addresses us, He will have to say both a "No!" and a "Yes!" – a "No!" to our sin, and a "Yes!" to us in His love for us and His promises. And His "Yes!" is always greater than His "No!" In the case of this speech to Job, the "No!" sounds pretty huge, and it is. But the "Yes!" still predominates. It is that God addressed Job at all, that He demonstrated himself as the God who

does wish to be known and loved. He is the God that leans in toward His created being, not hanging back, but ready to be involved, even when we misunderstand. It is as if someone, yearning all their lives for an absent father, discovered he was there all along, and that it was their own narrow perception that had shut him out. The circumstances of Job's calamity become the opportunity for him to learn the best lesson of all.

If this is a true reading of this complex book, then it may be that the primary lesson – what Job is “about” – is not so much the meaning of suffering, but the need for personal growth in knowing God. In light of the whole book, the problem with Job in the beginning was not “sin” so much as stagnation. Similarly, in light of the whole book, the material restoration of Job at the end is really an anticlimax, since the great enrichment has already occurred: Job has come to a personal knowledge of God.

Again, today's Psalm reads like a commentary on Job, with the question, “Who may abide in your holy hill?” The answer comes that integrity and righteousness are a matter of the heart, and spring from deep worship (“fear”) of the Lord. Finally Job shows us the heart that is at last obedient and responsive to the opportunity of life with God.

## **RESPOND**

Our knowledge of God grows in our lives as we become more and more familiar with Him in Bible study and prayer, in Christian fellowship, in witnessing to His love, and in service through the Church. Any of these can be rote; but all of them can be vital ways of spiritual growth.

## **PRAY**

Dear Lord, Thank you for the rich offer of relationship through your Son Jesus Christ. We welcome your presence and love, your “No!” together with your “Yes!”

Dave Dorman