

Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



November 2015 The Book of Job Discussion Guide

November Dates to Note:

MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION TO Job:

- Monday, November 2, 7:00 p.m., Gronseth Fellowship Hall, West Campus

BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Read Job.

- a. We suggest you read through "Job: Theme and Purpose" on page 4 and "Who or What Is . . . ?" on page 5 before you begin your reading.
- b. Use the "To Guide Your Reading" section on pages 6 - 8 to help you think through what you read, paying particular attention to the questions in boldface.

2. If possible, attend, listen to, or watch the DVD of the Pastor's Introduction to Job.

3. Read and recite this month's memory verse often! It is:

I know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.

– Job 19:25

Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a "message" just for you!

AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Welcome

Welcome to the November meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

Opening Prayer

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with his or her own prayer or pray the following together:

Dear Lord, We gather to learn and grow in our faith through the study of your Word. Let your Spirit move among us as we do, guiding us in understanding, and speaking to the individual needs and questions of each person here. .. In your name we pray, Amen.

This Month’s Memory Verse

Recite this month’s memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

I know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.
– Job 19:25

Getting Under Way

Share something about one or two friends God has given you and the gifts they bring to your life and faith.

Setting the Scene

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended, listened to, or saw the DVD of the Pastor’s introduction to Job to share what they learned.

Discuss Together

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 6 – 8. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that particularly struck members of your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

Following your discussion, go to “For Next Month” on the next page for reminders about your next meeting and closing prayer.

FOR NEXT MONTH

Our next meeting will be in December:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

December's Reading Assignment: Zephaniah

December's Memory Verse:

"The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."

– **Zephaniah 3:17 NIV**

Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:

- Monday, December 7, 7:00 p.m., Room 482-86, Minneapolis Campus

CLOSING PRAYER

Gather requests for prayers, encouraging both things for which God's help and guidance is needed and things for which people are grateful. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns can be brought to God. End with a prayer of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following together:

Dear Lord, We ask for your help: help in better understanding you and how you work in the world; help in bringing comfort to those who are suffering; and help in bearing our own suffering in trust and hope. And we thank you: for allowing us to come before you honestly, even with our anger and disappointments; for giving us reason to hope at all times, even in our suffering and pain; for the wisdom we cannot understand, but in which we can trust; and for redeeming us from our sins so that we may one day know life with you in heaven. Carry us home safely and guide our lives to your purpose. In your name we pray, Amen.

FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Ponder

Saint Teresa said, "As I see it, we shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God." What are ways in which I can seek to know God more fully?

Job Theme & Purpose

No one really knows who wrote the book of Job or when, but there is general agreement that more than one author was involved. It mentions no historical dates and is set in a strange land. The Hebrew text itself is very difficult and includes many words that appear nowhere else in the Bible. If you read it with a study Bible, it is quite likely you will come across footnotes indicating that “the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.” The difficulties in translation become quite obvious when different translations are compared. That said, Job as a person, if not a book, has become very well known in Western culture as evidenced in the common phrase, *the patience of Job*. As you will see, however, that phrase is not true to the full story of Job!

Job is not history, but a timeless story that wrestles with theological issues eluding simple answers. Structurally, it is a complicated book, with much repetition and passages that are very difficult to understand. Poetic dialogue within the story contain three cycles of questions and answers, Elihu’s speeches, and God’s response. It will be helpful to pay close attention to who is speaking, Job, one of his friends/counselors, Satan, or God.

The story begins by introducing the blameless and upright Job who fears and loves God. From this happy man in the Land of Uz, we move to a court of heavenly beings at which God boasts about Job’s goodness to Satan. In response, Satan challenges God to prove just how faithful Job is by allowing him to test Job. God agrees, and so Job’s loss, grief, and pain begin.

Job’s friends’ attempts to comfort or bring understanding to Job’s situation are at times well-meaning, but on the whole lessons in what not to say and do when a friend is hurting. Job cries out again and again to God in his misery, but only after much suffering does God speak, after which Job’s relationship with God is renewed and his good fortunes return. His questions about why such suffering befell him—an innocent—however, are for the most part left unanswered.

The questions Job raises about the causes and meaning of suffering and God’s participation in the tragedies of life have existed throughout history, whether in the lives of individuals or, perhaps, in the experience of a whole community or nation. Interwoven with these issues is another question: Is it possible to worship God without wanting something in return? If nothing else, don’t we want salvation? Behind all these questions is an assumption on the part of Job and his friends that the good are rewarded and the bad are punished. In answering from the whirlwind (chapters 38-41), God suggests this is a far too simplistic understanding of how God works in the world.

While our efforts to find the cause of suffering often lead to assigning blame to oneself, others, God, or Satan, the Book of Job asks us to look beyond blame, accept ambiguity and uncertainty, and trust God for what we cannot see or control.

Content on this page draws heavily from www.enterthebible.org’s summary and overview of Job written by Dr..Daniel Simundson, Former Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, and is used with permission.

Who or What Is . . . ?

Almighty. Based on the Hebrew word *Shaddai*, this name for God is used 31 times in Job—over half the times it is used in the entire Old Testament. Its meaning is uncertain, but one suggestion based on the root words *shad*, *shadad* and *dai*, is one with absolute power who can completely subdue or even destroy all things, but who also nourishes, provides, protects, and abundantly blesses.

Evil. Satan in Job 1-2 is not the same as the devil in later Scriptures, though Satan does seem to want to stir up trouble. The Behemoth (chapter 40) and Leviathan (chapter 41) represent a common Old Testament way of personifying the presence of evil in the world. The sea and the monsters that live in the sea provide symbolic or mythic ways to identify the reality of evil at work in the world. These forces are so powerful that without God's help, we would be completely vulnerable in any encounter with such monsters.

Fire . . . Wind. In the Bible, God's presence often is revealed in fire and/or wind as it is in Job 1:16-19 and 38:1).

Redeemer. From the Hebrew word *Goel*, which often also is translated as “Defender” or “Savior.” In the Old Testament, a redeemer generally is one who “buys back” property that has been sold in order to keep it in the family. A redeemer also may be someone who buys back a family member who has become a slave, a relative who marries the widow of a man who died without children in order to preserve the family name, or someone who exacts revenge for a wrong against a murdered family member or defends the family honor in other ways. God is referred to as a redeemer often in the Old Testament.

Satan. In Job 1 – 2, Satan is not the same devil we meet in later Scripture, though he shares many characteristics like stirring up trouble and challenging God. The Behemoth (chapter 40) and Leviathan (chapter 41) monsters are a common Old Testament way of personifying evil's presence and work in the world and how completely vulnerable we are against it without God's help. (See “Evil” above.)

Seven . . . Three . . . Ten. In ancient times, the numbers seven and three signified perfection or completion. Using them to describe Job's children and animals (Job 1:1-2) indicates how perfectly full and abundant Job's life was. Ten is a round number meaning many times.

Sheol . . . Life after death. This underground place of the dead is usually described as completely silent and one feels nothing. Job refers often to this after-life or grave (3:13-17; 6:15-17; 10:21-22; 24:19; 30:23). Like most of the Old Testament, Job does not have a strong belief that there is a life for individuals after this life that we can see. Job's big problem with God's justice is that good people suffer in this life, wicked people prosper, and there is nothing after we die to make right what was an injustice in this life. In two places, Job seems temporarily to break through this skepticism. He sees the rebirth of a tree stump when watered and wonders why humans cannot be so revived (14:7-17). He hopes that a redeemer will vindicate his good name and that he will see it, even if he has already died (19:23-27).

Uz. The location of this area is not known, but may have been in Edom in northern Arabia since Uz is listed as a descendant of Edom (Gen 36:28).

To Guide Your Reading

Use the following questions to guide your reading and personal reflection, jotting down your thoughts in the space between each question. For those who wish, we have suggested a three-week schedule to help you in your reading and reflection.

Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest you consider at your small group meeting. Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest and concern to the group. Let the Spirit lead!

WEEK 1 – JOB 1:1 – 14:22

The prologue (chapters 1 & 2) introduces the reader to Job, relates two conversations between God and Satan in heaven, and recounts the tragedies that come to Job in two stages. Chapters 3–14 move into the first cycle of arguments, as three friends attempt to comfort Job and discuss the causes and meaning of his suffering and God’s place in it.

1. While many find comfort in the belief or assurances that God is present with them in their suffering, Job prefers his friends just leave him alone. Have you or someone you know ever experienced an episode when your attempts to comfort some “backfired”? What did you learn from it about how to comfort those dealing with what is clearly “unfair” suffering or loss?
2. *The New Bible Commentary* states that the Book of Job “takes its place in the testimony of the ages that there is a blank in the human heart which Jesus alone can fill.” How is God’s gift of Christ an answer to Job’s longings in Chapter 9? (See also Matthew 5:3-6 and Luke 11:8).
3. **In their attempts to comfort Job and explain his sufferings, Job’s friends attempt to shame him for his lament. Even today people beat themselves up or allow others to discredit their feelings of resentment toward God with a piety built on pathological happiness. In your opinion, could it be that complaint, lament and even anger aimed directly at God can lead to a more authentic relationship with God; or might our outcries ruin our God relationship?**
4. In 2:10, Job says to his wife, “Should we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” To what degree do you agree or disagree with him and why? How is his attitude the same and/or different by the end of chapter 14?

WEEK 3 – JOB 29:1 – 42:17

In chapters 29—31, Job concludes this section of the book with a monologue in which he longs for the "good old days," defends his innocence, and continues to wonder why so many terrible things happened to him, since he did not deserve them. This is followed by the appearance of a fourth counselor, Elihu (chapters 32—37), and finally God speaks (chapters 38—41).

1. One school of thought, found in both the Old and New Testaments, is that suffering is not just about punishment, but can be a way to bring us back to a proper sense of priorities and/or warn against behaviors that can only lead to greater suffering. Both Eliphaz (5:17-27) and Elihu (36:8-12) try to apply this answer to Job. What, if any, value do you feel there is in suffering?
2. **Both Job and his counselors are certain that everything that happens—good and bad—is the will of God. God has ultimate control, even when human beings (as in Job 1:13-15) are the ones who cause the suffering. It is a great theological dilemma to maintain that God is in control of all that happens and at the same time grant that humans often act in defiance of God's will. What insights, if any, does the Book of Job give into this dilemma?**
3. God listened to Job and responded, though not to answer the questions that Job has asked. Based on God's conversations with Job in chapters 38—41, how would you describe who God is and what God does?
4. **Not every sufferer can expect to regain all they have lost and more as Job does at the end of the book. In 42:1-5, however, Job implies that there is hope. What is that hope? Note Matthew 5: 10-11.**
5. What have you learned from reading and discussing the Book of Job as relates to your own suffering? When bad things happen in your life, how might it be helpful to balance *Why Me?* with *Why not me?*

To end your discussion time, go to "For Next Month" on page 3.