

Lessons from Job

This important book of the Bible is not mainly about sunshine and smiles. Its narrative reviews human suffering from many different angles. It causes us to think deeply about evil, sin, darkness, humanity, and the deception of pride.

Nonetheless, we can learn many positive lessons from this profound book about suffering. I won't dive into all its rich theology, but I'll scratch the surface where most of us live.

Job's life most began slightly before Abraham. As a God-fearing man, he turned away from evil. He was a family man with a wife, 7 sons, and 3 daughters. He was so tangibly blessed one can say he ruled his own economy (7K sheep, 3K camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and many employees). He was regarded as the most influential man in his world. Yet he was primarily a spiritual man who faithfully worshiped God.

However, Satan is at work, and Job's perfect life fell apart overnight. His livestock were stolen, and ruthless mercenaries killed his workers. A hurricane struck his oldest son's house, where all his children had gathered, and all were lost. We read what he did in 1:20-22.

So, it has to get better from here. Right? Not exactly. Chapter 2 reveals that Job's health is attacked. His body broke out with sores from the top to the bottom. His wife sunk into bitterness. In her grief, she cooperated with the accuser (Satan). She asked Job (2:9): "Are you still holding onto your integrity?" In other words, do you still believe in the goodness of God? "Why don't you just curse God and die?!"

What do God's people do when bad things happen?

Job gives us a life strategy by example. Consider it a three-fold assignment.

1. Run to God: Get low, fall down, and worship Him.

That's what Job did, and that's what you must do when bad things happen. Don't avoid prayer, your Bible, or church attendance. Don't allow the bad things of life to become your excuse.

2. Refocus your perspective: eternity matters more than everything you see because all this is temporary.

Job understood the brevity of life and that one day he'd return to his maker. You must keep eternity in mind when bad things happen. You brought nothing into this world and you won't take anything with you into eternity.

3. Remember and declare: God is for me and not against me.

Job did not charge God with wrong because he knew his blessings came from him. He simply blessed the name of the Lord. You can rest assured that God is still for you even when bad things happen!

Much later in the book, we find Job's three friends have talked extensively. But they haven't really helped Job. Because of his intense and long season of suffering, they actually accused him of secret sin. I suppose they had no way of knowing how much God loved Job and testified about him.

So Elihu eventually shows up on the scene and speaks for God like a defence attorney. Go back and click the link to read the supporting passages.

What do God's people do when God is on trial?

4. In defence of God, we can trust His character.

God is greater than mankind. His faithfulness lasts forever! His covenant love endures forever. He is holy! And He is good!

Your job is to trust God's character. Fall in love with who He is!

5. In defense of God, we can treasure His sovereignty.

God reigns over Creation; He made it all. God reigns over history; it's simply His Story. God reigns over the ultimate course of the world. He is the only Potentate, and His Kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19).

Your job is to treasure God's sovereignty. Worship His Majesty!

6. In defense of God, we can trace His grace.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God did not destroy the world. He clothed them with the grace to continue His Story for humanity. Such is the story of our lives in an imperfect world. God desires to deliver us continuously as we live close to Him (see James 4:6-8). By God's grace, we can escape any dilemma and see restoration.

Your job is to trace God's grace. Call on Him and rest in Him!

When we reach the end of the book telling his life story, it's obvious that Job is in need.

What do God's people do when restoration is needed?

7. Look upward and pray.

He prayed to God, "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You" (2). That's why he prayed! Anyone who's ever done anything notable for God was characterized by the overcoming power of prayer.

Upward-focused prayer is about tuning your heart to meet with God. It's not about a loud and lengthy show for attention. Prayer works best when we humbly talk to God in faith and live in the light of His Word. Job looked upward and prayed to God, and you can, too.

Your job is to look upward and pray in faith. Turn to God in prayer and praise.

8. Look inward and repent.

We must examine our hearts before God. Job did and confessed his sinful attitudes: "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (6). Repentance means to change the mind, which must involve changing your feelings, thoughts, and actions (see Matthew 4:17; 2 Peter 3:9). It happens when you get saved and often as you grow in Christ.

Job had a small pride issue. Do you? Pride acts as a repellent to the grace of God. Persistent pride will leave you (naked) exposed and exploited by Satan. So, the Holy Spirit says to God's people, "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God..." (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Your job is to look inward and repent of sinful attitudes and actions. Examine your heart.

9. Look outward and forgive.

Job prayed for the ones who harshly judged him (9-10). He was not so self-absorbed by his pain to do the right thing. They criticized him and said he deserved all his troubles because of some secret sin.

Maybe someone has made false allegations against you. Although it hurts, don't hold a grudge. Forgive those who have spoken harshly against you even as Job did (Mark 11:25). Take it to the next step and ask God to bless those who've abused or spoken against you (see Luke 6:27-28). Job looked outward and forgave, and you can, too.

Your job is to look outward. Forgive and pray for those who hurt you.

10. Look forward and hope.

Job lost 10 adult children when tragedy struck. But through it all, he trusted God's character, saying, "Yet will I hope in Him" (13:15b). Even though he'd lost so much, he looked ahead.

The only way to move forward is in hope. God says, "I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for" (Jeremiah 29:11).

With hope, Job cooperated with God's restoration plan. Will you (Hebrews 10:23)? His turnaround began when he prayed for his friends. "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first" (12). God gave them more children and greater prosperity than ever. And he lived another 140 years, seeing 4 more generations.

Your job is to look forward. You have real hope for a better life.