



## Thinking rightly about sin and suffering

### Lessons from Job

The image of Job for this writing is a photograph I took of a friend.

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Since the future is uncertain, we must always be armed with the knowledge of His word. In His truth, we find rest, because we are always ready, and, with it, we recognize false teaching that could otherwise:

- weaken our defense,
- take away our assurance of our standing in grace, and
- make us the enemy's prey.

I discovered lessons in the book of Job that will arm us. This gorgeous poetry speaks to the connection between suffering, sin, and God's justice. It is another masterpiece of Scripture from the ancient world! Job holds many lessons, but I will give just a few that expose a certain, present-day, false teaching.

First, I'll share: 1) a brief summary of the book to see the context, 2) a present-day false teaching, 3) lessons that expose the false teaching, 4) and final thoughts.

### Job's Story

Job had a righteous, wealthy, wonderful life that God allowed satan to attack in ways beyond our imagination. Everything was taken from him including his family and health. He became the prey of four "friends" as they made it their business to "help" him and to assess his situation.

One by one, the first three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) gave their lengthy discourses. They all spoke the **wrong words** in different ways. Their themes were – "This is happening to you because you sinned; when you do evil, God does evil in return; and God is just and would not harm the righteous." In all their many, many words, they never identified a specific sin in Job's life.

The taunting words of his friends set Job on his own discourse (Job 29:1-31:40). First, he speaks of his glorious past life, "I put on righteousness and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban" (29:14). Then, he moans of his misery and the betrayal of all those he had loved and helped. He interweaves his treatise with beautiful parallelism, speaking of all his righteous acts as well as all the sin he did not commit. What an incredible person Job was before he was laid in his sick bed of torment and loss! His words are a poetic, comprehensive exhortation to all who desire to be pure; they are a plumbline of character to imitate. (Two excerpts offered stirring guidance to me – are Job 31:13-15 and 31:29-30.)

Finally, the fourth friend, Elihu, bursts forth his **wrong words** with great confidence, rebuking the other three friends and Job. Elihu's advice is the worst because the wrong words are mixed with beautiful truth about the grandeur of the Almighty and His creation; His words are like a perfect cup of tea mixed with a pinhead of poison. He rebukes Job for even thinking God might care about his anguish. (You can read Elihu's words on your own and see what you think – Job 33-37. I like to listen to Max McLean read the Scripture on Bible Gateway to hear the full swath of the message.)

Finally, God intervenes, answering Job out of the whirlwind and rebuking them all, “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man...” (38:1-3). He then displays His power in the form of questions to Job. And He speaks again out of the storm saying, “Gird up your loins like a man... adorn yourself with eminence and dignity...” (See 40:6-14) In the most beautiful last chapter, we see Job’s redemption and abundant restoration!

## The Present-Day Error

Years ago, my husband and I were leading a Bible study at a local church. A few people in the group were promoting the teaching of a certain TV preacher. Like Elihu, this teacher made many true statements and even performed healings. But after listening to one of his messages, the error was glaring. Here are two of many **wrong statements** this teacher made:

1. **Wrong teaching:** “Sickness is just a symptom of satan trying to trespass in our lives – he has no legal rights unless we allow him access. The only way we can get sick is if we accept it. The only way spiritual reality can change the physical reality depends on YOU.”
2. **Wrong teaching:** “We aren’t waiting on God to do anything in order to heal us. We receive healing by faith the same way we receive salvation.” The false teacher provided a list of deficiencies or spiritual “blocks” we need to remove in our lives in order to get healing.

## Lessons from Job

The book of Job teaches many lessons. I will give only those that speak to this present-day error.

- Our pain, sickness, and suffering is not always a result of our sin. Although we may sin and then suffer as a result, suffering is not an automatic mirror of inside sin.
- God carries out His holy purposes through our suffering. Although we must exercise faith, we cannot presume upon God’s timing or purpose.
- We should not defend ourselves against **wrong voices** when we are suffering. (Job did this.) Rather we should rest in our identity as His children, remaining armed and in His clothing of righteousness as God commanded Job to do (See Job 38:3 and 40:6-14).
- Although we sin, it is possible to live a righteous life by the power of the Spirit. Job did.
- The enemy gives harmful, often undetectable, subtle lies and hides them in truth. (See Matthew 24:24 and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.) The Holy Spirit through Scripture easily exposes these lies.

## Final Thoughts

- The disciple James mentions Job as a righteous man whose faith endures his testing:  
“We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” (James 5:11)  
“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)
- We believe in the healing power of God. If I am sick, I ask the Lord to show me the source. If it is the enemy, we rebuke him. If it is a virus, He can bring immediate healing, teach me to eat better, or give grace to persevere. If it is sin, we listen to His voice about it. If He does not point out specific sin, we let it go (Philippians 3:15).
- We pray for healing for strong and fragile souls. The false teaching (that we are sick because we “accept it”) brings shame, condemnation, disillusionment, striving, and confusion to a weaker brother or sister or to a new Christian who doesn’t yet know the Scripture.

Almighty Father, thank you for the safety of Your word. Teach us and guide us into all truth! Amen.