

Introduction to Job

Everyone is touched by suffering at some level. It's different for each person, and each person will react differently. What is considered suffering to one person, may not be to the next. But each person will have an experience or situation they can point to and say, "Why?".

The God of the Bible is big enough, powerful enough, personal enough and loving enough to ask questions of. Even questions that seem to question whether he is loving, powerful or even good. In fact, He encourages us to ask these questions, he takes our questions seriously, and He answers them. Not always in the way we'd like, or with as much clarity in specific areas as we'd like - but He does answer them.

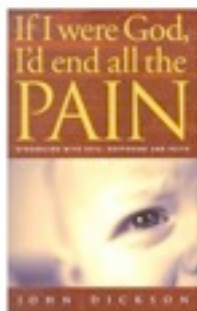
As we look at Job over the next 6 weeks, we're going to see God acting in some pretty strange ways, see Job's friends come up with some pretty frustrating answer, see Job asking some pretty confronting questions, and see how God deals with these questions. And as we walk through Job, you're going to be encouraged to ask your own questions that might echo Job's. And in turn, we're going to see what God's answers are in the Bible.

And we can do this with a lot more confidence than Job, because we have a much better vantage point to ask and get answers to our questions. We have a clearer picture of what God has done through history - where He's taking the world, and what He intends for His people - than Job ever did. And while we're not going to get all the answers, we're going to have enough that we can make a decision about what kind of God we're dealing with, and how we should respond to our own and other people's suffering.

To get the most out of Job, we want you to read Job at home,¹ and come loaded with questions and ideas to kick around as a group. When you meet as a Growth Group, we want discussion...not monologue! But while your group leaders can encourage this, YOU need help them. There's two things you can do to make your group the best it can be:

1. **Do the Personal Reading at home** during the week so you know what the passage is about, even if you don't understand it all. It's found at the end of this booklet, and it's good practice to be reading God's Word during the week anyway!
2. **Contribute when you get together as a group.** No-one likes awkward silence, and no question is too stupid...so do your group leader and the rest of the group a favour, and contribute where you can.

If you're looking for something to stretch you a little bit on the issues of evil and suffering, here are two great books you could get a hold of:



If I were God, I'd end all the PAIN
by John Dickson



How Long, O Lord?
by Don Carson

Derek Hanna

¹ Why not aim to read all of Job while we do it over the next 6 weeks? It's less than one chapter a day!

Job 1-2 A series of unfortunate events

Study 1

Personal Preparation 1 (1:1-5)

Read Job 1-2

One of the key parts to understanding the book of Job is to have a clear picture of who Job is, and how the author of Job views him. We'll think about why at the end of this personal preparation.

1. Describe Job's character from 1:1,5 and 2:3? Is he perfect?
2. What do Job's family, possessions and status suggest about him? (1:2-3)
3. How does Job describe others view of him in 29:11-17?
4. Describe Job in one short sentence.
5. If this book is going to explore the suffering of Job, why is it important to understand what Job is like before we learn of his suffering?

NOTE: In verse 5 we see that Job sacrifices burnt offerings for his children in case they had "cursed God in their hearts." It's a phrase that comes up a bit in Job, so keep an eye out for it, and how it's used.

Personal Preparation 2

Read Job 1:6-22

Here we have the first test of Job...and it raises a lot of questions. Some we'll get to, but the rest you might want to note down the bottom of this personal preparation and raise in your group discussion time.

1. How does this testing of Job get started? (verses 6-8)
2. We saw in the opening five verses what Job was like, but what explanation does the Satan² give as to why Job is like that? (verses 9-11)
3. Who do we see as being in control of the situation in verse 12? What are the parameters the Satan is given?
4. What happens to Job following this conversation, and how is it described in verses 13-19? (Look for the phrase "While he was still speaking...")
5. And what's Job's response and the conclusion? (verses 20-22)



NOTE: What we see at the end of chapter 1 is something that Job never knows. All he sees is his loss and suffering. But we know why. That's going to be important as we start to look at the responses of Job's friends to his situation.

Personal Preparation 3

Read Job 2:1-10

We've seen the first test of Job...and while I'm sure he hasn't enjoyed it, he hasn't gone down the track the Satan said he would (1:11). But as if things aren't bad enough for Job, round 2 is on it's way, with the Satan fronting up to God again to have another shot at bringing Job down a peg or two.

1. How does God describe Job and His own role in the situation? (verse 3)
2. What is Satan's contention about why Job won round 1? (verses 4-5)
3. In verse 6, God allows the Satan a freehand with one exception - don't kill Job. At this stage in Job, what would you say the reasons are for God allowing this?
4. When Satan finishes with Job (verses 7-8), what does Job's wife call on Him to do (verse 9)? Where have you seen this phrase before in Job?
5. How does Job reply, and how does this scene end? (verse 10)

So the story of Job is set up. A righteous man, suffering because of an eternal contest he knows nothing about, but refusing to curse God who he knows is responsible. At this point, write down the questions and problems the first two chapters raise so that you can share them with your group when you meet.

² In Job, where it says "Satan", it's not a name, it's a title. Literally, the Accuser.

Discussion Questions - Job 1-2

These first two chapters of Job really set up the entire book of Job, and raise some pretty thorny questions. Not all our questions are going to be answered tonight, and probably not even by the end of the series, but we want to ask and struggle over them as the book of Job does.

Start by reading the first Job 1:1-2:10.

<p>QN 1 - WHO SUFFERS?</p> <p>How is Job described in the first two chapters and would it make a difference if he wasn't described in this way?</p> <p>Does it make a difference in our thinking when those we consider evil suffer, compared to those who are innocent?</p>	<p>ANSWER:</p>
<p>QN 2 - WHY BE RIGHTEOUS?</p> <p>Why does the Satan suggest Job "pretends" to be righteous? (1:9-11, 2:4-5)</p> <p>If that was the case, how do you think Job should react to suffering? Can you see this in the way people relate to God now?</p>	<p>ANSWER:</p>
<p>QN 3 - WHY DOES GOD ALLOW IT?</p> <p>What is God's role and the Satan's role in this temptation and suffering?</p> <p>Do you feel uncomfortable about that?</p> <p>If you were Job, and not knowing what was going on, what conclusion would you draw?</p>	<p>ANSWER:</p>

4. Job is called upon to curse God at the end of the second chapter...but he refuses. How does his response mean that God wins the bet with the Satan?

5. From these first two chapters, what would you say is the **purpose** of Job's suffering?

While all people experience suffering to some degree or another, the New Testament points out that on top of this, Christians will be on the receiving end of a type of specific suffering.

Read 1 Peter 1:6-7 and 1 Peter 4:12-19, and discuss the following:

6. From these first two chapters in Job, we can see the purpose of Job's suffering. But what does Peter tell us about the type of suffering that Christians can expect and why?

7. What does this mean for how Christians should behave and react when they're going through suffering? Do you think it's realistic?

SCENARIO: A friend, who is a Christian, has just been diagnosed with an illness, and someone has told them that it's punishment from God for unconfessed and unrepentant sin. What does Job and the New Testament have to say?