1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Job
Theme: Obscured Vision

Overview: Job lost family, possessions, and health in quick succession, and his vision of God was often obscured. In this unit, students will learn from Job to keep trusting God when life does not make sense, to pursue integrity, to be a comforting friend rather than a miserable comforter, and to bow before the full view of God's power as Creator.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The book of Job does not name its author. Jewish tradition suggested Moses, and others have proposed Job himself, Solomon, or an unknown wise man of Israel. Whoever the human writer was, the book is a masterpiece of Hebrew wisdom literature, written mostly in poetry.

Audience

Job speaks to all who suffer and ask why. Though Job himself was not an Israelite, the book was preserved among God's people as part of their wisdom literature, alongside Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, to teach them to fear God and trust him in the darkest times.

Date

The events of Job seem to belong to the age of the patriarchs. Job served as priest for his own family (Job 1:5), his wealth was measured in livestock, and he lived 140 years after his trials (42:16). The date of writing is uncertain; suggestions range from the time of the patriarchs to the days of Solomon or later.

Setting

Job lived in "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1), probably east or southeast of Israel near Edom, and he was "the greatest man among all the people of the East" (1:3). The book opens with scenes in heaven, where Satan challenged Job's integrity, then moves to Job's ash heap, where he and his friends debated the meaning of his suffering, until God spoke out of the storm.

Theme

When our vision of God is obscured, God is still in control. Job cried, "If only I knew where to find him" (Job 23:3), yet he held to his integrity and declared, "I know that my redeemer lives" (19:25). His friends offered easy answers, but God answered Job with questions about creation that revealed his wisdom and power. Job learned to trust God even when he could not see him.

Why Study Job?

Job gives us words for our pain and a God who is big enough to handle our hardest questions. This study calls believers not to be silenced by the darkness, to seek and embrace integrity through consistent acts of love, to be comforting friends rather than miserable comforters, and to bow before the full view of God's power.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1:	Job 2:11-13; 23:1-17
WEEK 2:	Job 27:1-6; 31:5, 6, 16-23
WEEK 3:	Job 16:1-5, 15-21; 6:12-17
WEEK 4:	Job 38:16-41

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Don’t be silenced by the darkness.**

STUDY: Job

THEME: Obscured Vision

LESSON TEXT: Job 2:11-13; 23:1-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 6; 42:9-11; Job 1:1–2:10

I CATCH NO GLIMPSE OF HIM!

BY MARK SCOTT

When we were young, we were taught about the patience of Job. Then as we matured and read the book of Job, many of us may have felt a disconnect. Job did not sound very patient. To be honest, he seemed pretty cranky. But we can hardly blame him. He lost family, houses, livelihood, and health all in quick succession. Worse was that Satan was behind it, and God had suggested it.

Our title comes directly from the text (23:9). Job would be the first to admit that his vision of God often was obscured. But he still gave us a good example to follow. Continue to trust God when you do not understand and when life does not make sense. And do not be afraid to ask God your hardest questions. Do not let the dark nights of your soul silence your desires for answers. God will not crawl off of his throne just because someone asked him a tough question.

Friends' Best Efforts

Job 2:11-13

A man of Job's wealth and clout was bound to have friends. When Job lost it all (1:1–2:10), three of his friends showed up to offer their sympathy and comfort. [There was a fourth friend named Elihu. He was the young man in the group and perhaps Job's best friend. His advice came later in the book—32:2.] Job called these men *miserable comforters* (16:2), and God said they had not spoken what was right (42:7).

But . . . they meant well and started well. Eliphaz (translated "my god is gold," cf. Genesis 36:4, 10) was a Temanite (area east of Idumea). Bildad ("confusing love") was a Shuhite (an ethnic designation, Genesis 25:2). Zophar ("sparrow") was a Naamathite ("pleasantness"). They heard about Job's *troubles* (evil). They came, they *sympathized* (bemoaned, pitied, wagged their heads), and they attempted to comfort. To their credit, they initially did not say a word. They wept, tore their robes, and sprinkled dust on their heads. For one week they just observed his suffering. Sometimes presence matters more than words.

Job's Shortsighted Argument

Job 23:1, 2, 4-7, 11, 12, 16, 17

When Job began to speak back to his friends in Job 23, it was his seventh response to them. His friends had leaned heavily into Job. From a human standpoint, they offered typical answers (i.e., Job had sinned, Job was trying to justify himself, Job was impatient with God, etc.). Job overextended himself and was speaking about things he did not understand. But he did seek his day in court with God. We cannot blame his heart for this desire.

His *complaint* was bitter. His *groaning* was real. He wanted to *state his case* (his sense of justice) and give liberty to his *arguments* (rebukes). He knew what he knew: he had tried to live for God. Would God be able to find anything against Job? Not from Job's perspective. He knew if the evidence was brought in that he would be *delivered* (acquitted). He admitted to following God's steps without turning aside. He kept the *commands* (*mitzvah*) and viewed them as his daily bread. He knew he was existing in darkness, but he remained blameless in his integrity.

God's Elusive Sovereignty

Job 23:3, 8-10, 13-15

Why does God sometimes seem so far away when in reality he is always near? It must have something to do with mankind living in a sin-stained world. But this does not mean God is not in control. God may have seemed elusive to Job, but he was more present in Job's trials than Job could possibly know. Because God is spirit (John 4:24) and because we are sinners, God will more often than not be elusive. Job longed to find him and go to his dwelling.

But all of Job's effort to find God (east, west, north, or south) would not provide even a glimpse for him. Job might not have been able to find God, but God could find Job. God even knew the way Job would take. God's sovereignty gave Job confidence that he would emerge from this experience as gold. Job understood that God *stood alone* (was unchangeable) as God and no one could *oppose* him (turn him back). Job recognized God could carry out his decree whether Job understood it or not.

Michael W. Smith and other artists sing a song about God entitled "Waymaker." The lyrics include, "Even when I don't see it, you're working," and "Even when I can't feel it, you're working." Job knew that at the end of the day, that would be true.

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IF ONLY I KNEW WHERE TO FIND HIM

BY DAVID FAUST

Certain things are rare, but you can find them if you know where to look. If you want to see polar bears, you can find them in countries that ring the Arctic Circle. Looking for penguins? Go to Antarctica. Redwood trees? They grow in California. Koalas? Go to Australia.

Travel to the right location and you can find rare works of art. Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris, and his *Last Supper* is on display at a convent in Milan, Italy. The famous portrait *Whistler's Mother* was painted in England by an American-born artist and sold to a French museum, but to see it you must travel to Abu Dhabi where it's on display.

Rare treasures are difficult but not impossible to locate. But where can you go to find God? That's the question Job asked. In the midst of his suffering, Job wondered about God's whereabouts and exclaimed, "If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments" (Job 23:3, 4).

Piercing Questions

Have you ever wondered where you can find God? I have. In stressful times, piercing questions flood my mind.

Can I find God in nature? Yes. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:20).

Can I find him in history? Yes. Down through the centuries, men and women of faith have borne compelling witness to the reality of God's presence and power.

Can I find him in Scripture? Yes. If I open my spiritual ears and eyes, I can hear his voice and see his revealed truth in the written Word. "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Can I find him in other people? Yes. Individuals who love well—whose lives overflow with genuine grace and truth—display God's character and make his presence known.

Can I find him in my mind and conscience? Yes. It's reasonable to consider God the First Cause—the Uncaused Cause—the architect of a universe far too orderly and complex to have happened by chance. The apostle Paul said the requirements of God's law are written in our hearts (Romans 2:15). C. S. Lewis observed in *Mere Christianity*, "When you argue against Him, you are arguing against the very power that makes you able to argue at all. It is like cutting off the branch you are sitting on."

But will all of the rational arguments for God comfort me when my life falls apart? For many of us, including Job, the issue isn't finding God in nature, history, logic, or even Scripture. The question is, *Can I find him in my suffering?*

Here is the bottom line. I can find him in Jesus Christ, the God-Man who endured grief beyond measure so that all my sorrows will one day be removed. I can find God in the Suffering Servant—the "man of suffering, and familiar with pain" whose punishment brings me peace (Isaiah 53:3, 5). My piercing questions find answers in the One who was pierced for my transgressions—who sacrificed, served, and suffered in order to find me.

Personal Challenge:

Imagine you're having a conversation with a non-Christian friend and the topic turns to how you can possibly know God. In your journal or a sheet of paper, write out how you would respond.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is one example of how you loved and obeyed God last week?

2. What was challenging for you this past week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the two readers to each read **Job 2:11-13** aloud, one after the other (possibly from different Bible versions). Then ask the same two readers to each read **Job 23:1-17**. Ask the third person to retell (not interpret) the story from these passages, taking about 60 seconds. (Keep it simple!)

3. What in Job's story captures your attention most?

4. Let's look more closely at the details in these passages:
   - How would you characterize the responses of Job's friends to his condition?
   - How would you describe the nature of Job's questions?
   - How would you describe his convictions?
   - His hopes?
   - His view of God?

5. What do you learn about God's supremacy from these passages?
   - About his love for humankind?

6. What does this passage reveal to you about people and how we should respond to God?

7. In what specific way this week do you need to closely follow God's steps, keeping his way without turning aside?

8. Who is one person among your friends, coworkers, or family members that is presently going through a dark time of suffering in their life?
   - What will you do this week to simply be with, sympathize, and comfort this person?

9. Based on this passage and our discussion, complete this sentence: This week, I will . . .

10. What challenge will you face this week?

For Next Week: Sometime this week, read and reflect on **Job 27:1-6; 31:5, 6, 16-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Seek and embrace integrity through consistent acts of love.**

STUDY: Job

THEME: Obscured Vision

LESSON TEXT: Job 27:1-6; 31:5, 6, 16-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Job 29:11-17; 31:24-34; Matthew 25:35-40

THE LOOK OF INTEGRITY

BY MARK SCOTT

Integrity is a subject of much discussion today—perhaps because there is so little of it. It means living an undivided life. It means doing what you say. It centers on consistency. It means you are the same person holding a Communion tray on Sunday morning as you are holding a remote control on Saturday night. Job had it. The writer told us this from the start (Job 1:1). While Job was not perfect, he was "blameless" (31:6—the same word also translated as "integrity"). To live a life you know God would honor need not show up as arrogance.

The Assertion of Integrity

Job 27:1-6

Before Job's youngest friend Elihu spoke (Job 32), Job gave his last defense to his other three friends (Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad). This defense is contained in chapters 26–31. Parts of it may seem like pride and a bitter man getting in his last shots against God. But there is an assertion of integrity here that actually is not just Job's best assessment of himself but an honest exposure of his motives to live the way God wanted him to live.

Job deeply felt as if God had *denied him* (taken away) justice. Like Naomi, he felt as if God had made his life bitter (Ruth 1:20 and Job 3:20; 7:11; 10:1; 23:2). When we strive to do right and bad things happen to us anyway, we inevitably feel this way. As long as God gave Job *breath* (the same word for "Spirit") he would strive for integrity.

Job asserted his integrity in lip and heart. Of course, the heart and tongue are inextricably linked (Matthew 12:34-37). His speech would not be anything wicked. His tongue would not utter *lies* (anything deceitful or full of guile). He refused to cave in to his friends' accusations. (The "you" is plural in verse 5.) Job felt bound to maintain his *innocence* (right or righteousness) and not let it go. His *conscience* (heart) was not convicting him because he strove to do right. Integrity can be asserted without pride.

The Evidence of Integrity

Job 31:5, 6, 16-23

Few people can claim the things Job claimed in chapter 31. No wonder God thought so highly of Job (Ezekiel 14:20). Even though Job's wife cried out for Job to curse God (Job 2:9—remember that as a mother, she had felt the losses too, so can we blame her?), he remained incredibly loyal to her. He remembered he made a covenant with his eyes to her when they married (31:1). He even asserted that if he had "lurked at my neighbor's door" (31:9), God could cause someone else to have her (i.e., "bow down on her").

There was no distance between Job's walk and his talk. His words and deeds were a perfect match (1 John 3:18). He was willing for God to weigh him in the scales of justice if he had walked with falsehood or hurried after deceit. This consistency of life showed up in how he cared for the poor, the widow, and the orphan. When they were in need of food, Job did not deny them. The poor had deep desires, the *widows* (i.e., silent ones) grew weary, and the orphans needed a dad. Job claimed that even from his youth he was conscious of the needs of the fatherless and the husbandless.

It was not just with food that Job concerned himself. He also supplied clothing to the needy. In the Ancient Near East clothing was viewed much like shelter. If anyone was *perishing* (destroyed or exterminated) or needy due to lack of clothing, Job made sure to shear his sheep and give the needy the wool for a covering. It is hard to miss the parallels of these things in Jesus' own teaching (Matthew 25:31-46). But Job's help went beyond food and clothing. He spoke for those who had no voice. He defended them in *court* (literally the "gates" of the city).

Earlier in the chapter, Job had challenged God to weigh him with honest scales to confirm his integrity. Now he claimed that if he had misspoken or misrepresented himself that God would cause his arm to fall from his shoulder or be broken off at the *joint* (socket). Job did all these things because he feared God and was captured by God's *splendor* (highness or exaltation). Giving evidence of one's integrity does seem like boasting about one's humility, but it certainly was not wide of the mark for one person (Matthew 11:29, 30).

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TIME TO ADJUST THE SEAT

BY DAVID FAUST

I am approximately six inches taller than my wife. Most of the time our height difference doesn't matter, and it comes in handy when Candy asks me to reach the dishes she keeps on the top shelf of the kitchen cabinet.

Our difference of height creates discomfort, though, when we drive each other's cars. Candy adjusts the seat of her Honda Civic to fit her shorter frame, so when I get in, the steering wheel presses so close to my chest that I can barely squeeze into the driver's seat. And in my Toyota Corolla, I keep the front seat so far back from the console that she has to stretch out her arms like Superman to reach the steering wheel. To drive each other's cars, we have to adjust the seat, and then remember to put it back into its original position when we finish driving.

The Winds of Change

There are deeper lessons we can learn from this example. When you and I find it difficult to settle into the driver's seat of life, it's not surprising that we feel a bit uncomfortable. God never intended for us to control the steering wheel in the first place.

The ministry environment I have been accustomed to for many years has been changing rapidly. I'm guessing you have noticed. Not only is the culture around us shifting dramatically, but so is the corner of God's kingdom in which I have lived and moved and had my being. Many trusted leaders have retired or died. My spiritual eyes are adjusting to an unfamiliar landscape as colleges, conventions, and other prominent features of the Restoration Movement that have helped to shape my walk with Christ respond to the winds of change.

Cincinnati Christian University has closed its doors. The North American Christian Convention has morphed into a new ministry called Spire. A public high school now stands on the site where Standard Publishing's magazines, children's literature, and Bible study books were printed for decades. *The Lookout* has merged with *Christian Standard* magazine, and so, for the first time since 1888, it is not a stand-alone publication. And during 24 years of *The Lookout*'s existence, I've written a weekly column for it. In some cases, these developments were predictable and some might say inevitable. But alongside many others who care about our movement, I feel a bit disoriented as I watch our beloved institutions, and the people who have served in them, endure the impact of changing times.

And yet . . . God is unchanging. His Word is true, his purpose constant, his love unrelenting. Human institutions come and go, but God's faithfulness will never fade away.

I am flawed, fallible, and shortsighted. I cannot always understand the ways of God, but like Job, "I know that my redeemer lives," and with Job, I insist, "Till I die, I will not deny my integrity" (Job 19:25; 27:5). Nor will I deny my faith in the Lord or abandon the ideals of our movement, which in their best moments our leaders and institutions have espoused and embodied.

God is infinitely taller than I am. Instead of adjusting the seat to fit my own comfort, I should adjust to his leading. I need to let go of the steering wheel, trust the Lord to do the driving, and move forward in faith.

Personal Challenge:

Meditate on Job 27:5: "Till I die, I will not deny my integrity." Write that verse as a heading in your journal or on a sheet of paper and then jot down any adjustments you will make, with God's power and wisdom, to live with integrity this week.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. This past week, did you spend time with a friend, coworker, or family member who has been going through a dark time of suffering? If so, who, and how did that go?

2. What challenges did you face last week?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the two readers to read **Job 27:1-6** one after the other (possibly from different Bible versions). Then ask the same two readers to each read **Job 31:5, 6, 16-23**. Ask the third person to retell (not interpret) the story from these passages. (Keep it simple! About 60 seconds is all the time that's needed.)

3. What main themes do you observe in these passages?

4. What, if anything, do you struggle with in these passages?

5. Let's dig a little deeper into the details in these passages.
   - What words does Job use to describe his character?
   - What evidences do you see of Job's character?

6. What do you learn about God through Job's statements?

7. What do these passages reveal to you about humanity?

8. What do you learn about living to please God?

9. What do these passages compel you to do to serve others, such as the poor and needy, the widows, and/or the fatherless, this week?

10. Based on these Scriptures and our discussion, complete this sentence: This week, I will . . .

11. What will be a challenge for you this week?

For Next Week: Sometime this week, read and reflect on **Job 16:1-5, 15-21, and 6:12-17**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Be a comforting friend rather than a miserable comforter.**

STUDY: Job

THEME: Obscured Vision

LESSON TEXT: Job 16:1-5, 15-21; 6:12-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Proverbs 18:24; 17:17; John 15:13-15; James 2:8-17

THE LOOK OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP

BY MARK SCOTT

Karl Ketcherside said, "It's one thing to have salt rubbed in your wound; it's another thing to be billed for the salt." That is especially painful when the bill comes from one of your friends. That was how Job was feeling by the time we reach chapter 16. All three of his original friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) have spoken to Job at least once—Eliphaz has actually made two speeches.

Job responded to his "friends." In the Bible the word *friend* is used for an endearing relationship. We find this especially in the Gospel of John (John 15:15). But at times in Scripture the word *friend* is used as a synonym for *buster*. We find this especially in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 20:13; 26:50). However well intended they were, Job's friends fell into that latter category. Job referred to them as *miserable comforters* (grievous or perverse). But that is not to suggest we cannot learn from even unjustified criticism. In these selected Scriptures we learn some positive truths from some negative people.

True Friends Empathize

Job 16:1-5

Job's friends intended to empathize with him (Job 2:11-13). But when they heard Job attempting to justify himself, these friends became prosecuting attorneys. Job rebuked them by suggesting that they and he switch places. Perhaps then they would not be so quick to condemn. The long-winded speeches were not edifying. Job thought these friends were speaking out of what *ailed* them (i.e., made them sick).

Job made a bold assertion. If the tables were turned, he would act nobly. While he might be tempted to make fine speeches and shake his head (Psalm 22:7; Mark 15:20), he would, in fact, *encourage* (strengthen or make strong) and *comfort* (i.e., to cease quivering) them. Of course, Job's argument is a hypothesis contrary to fact (logical fallacy). Since it did not happen, we cannot know what might have happened.

True Friends Affirm

Job 16:15-21

Job admitted that he wore himself out arguing against God. In verses 6-14, Job felt God had worn him out, torn him apart, given him over to the ungodly, and broken him. He admitted he had evidenced the sign of deep mourning (sewn sackcloth over his skin), buried his brow in the dust, and wept until his face was red and his eyes had dark shadows. He cried out for the earth not to cover his blood (Genesis 4:10) and for his cry not to be laid to rest.

In spite of Job feeling he had been mistreated, he maintained his hands had been free of violence and that his prayer was pure. In other words, unlike what his friends had done to him, he would have tried to affirm them if things had been reversed. Job longed for friends who would function as *intercessors* and who would *plead* for a friend. Instead, his friends scorned him as his eyes poured out tears to God. Job so needed affirmation.

True Friends Are Kind and Dependable

Job 6:12-17

Job did not overestimate his ability to endure such pain. He admitted he did not have strength of stone. He admitted his skin was not made of bronze. He felt depleted of power and that any sense of success was not in the stars for him. He needed kindness and friends upon whom he could lean. What he received, instead, were friends (called *brothers*) who were as *undependable* (treacherous or faithless) as the ancient wadis of Israel. These riverbeds were dry most of the time until a flood came. Then they became white-water rapids. But then, as quickly as they had become full, they would dry up in the heat and vanish from their channels.

God is kind to the "ungrateful and wicked" (Luke 6:35), and Job longed for that kind of friend. In fact, he said, "Anyone who withholds kindness (*chesed*, i.e., covenantal love) from a friend actually forsakes the fear of the Almighty." True friends give away buckets of *chesed* (loving kindness).

One way to ensure that we are not miserable comforters is to become more like God. Tucked away in this passage is a very brief glimpse into what Job knew deep in his primal being. It is located in Job 16:19. Job knew his ultimate friend was the *witness* in heaven. God himself would be Job's best *advocate* (mediator). Job knew down deep that God would have the last word (Job 19:25, 26), and that is why he could commit to him (Job 13:15).

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DOWN IN THE DIRT WITH YOUR FRIENDS

BY DAVID FAUST

My barber is my best friend. You see, my wife cuts my hair. During our first year of marriage, I was on the receiving end of a particularly bad haircut—a near-scalping experience in a smoke-filled barbershop. Arriving home afterward, I asked Candy, "Could you cut my hair from now on?" She gazed at my freshly shorn cranium and replied, "I can do at least as well as the barber you just visited." The rest is history.

We've done the math. According to www.mistershaver.com (yes, that's a real website), the average price of a standard men's haircut in Indiana, where I live, currently stands at $18 plus tips. Prices have risen over the years, so let's conservatively estimate the average value of my haircuts at $15 each. If Candy has given me an average of one haircut a month for the last 44 years, she has cut my hair approximately 528 times. At $15 per haircut, we have saved $7,920. Of course, we need to deduct the cost of a few pairs of scissors—and the electric shaver Candy uses to trim my neck, which I later learned she also used on one occasion to groom our dog.

There has been another price to pay. Our home barbershop puts strain on our relationship, especially when the haircuts take place late at night when we're tired and grumpy. The Bible says not to let the sun go down on your anger, and that principle definitely applies when your wife is armed with sharp instruments. Over the years we have exchanged a few cutting words because she accidentally nicked my ear with the scissors or I dared to criticize her barbering skills. Thankfully, no blood has been shed during most of my haircuts. By God's grace, Candy and I remain best friends despite enduring a few close scrapes.

That's what true friends do. You trust them enough to put your safety in their hands. You help each other even when it's inconvenient. You stick together through complicated problems and late-night arguments. You forgive each other, and you laugh together whenever you can.

Job's friends weren't at their best when they offered opinions about why he was suffering. They served him best when "they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was" (Job 2:12, 13).

Job's friends served him best when they kept their mouths shut and sat on the ground crying with him. For a week they literally got down in the dirt with him—they even sprinkled dust on their heads—silently empathizing with his pain.

After taking a towel and washing his disciples' dirty feet, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Do you have friends who get down in the dirt with you? Are you willing to be that kind of friend?

Personal Challenge:

Think of a friend who is going through a tough time. Prayerfully consider how you can lovingly serve that person by empathizing with them, by "getting down in the dirt" with them. Then sacrificially do what God calls you to do.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what ways were you like Job this past week, by being thankful and able to praise God through hard times?

2. What difficult or challenging circumstances did you or people around you encounter?

   Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the two readers to read **Job 16:1-5, 15-21** one after the other (preferably from different Bible versions). Then ask the same two readers to each read **Job 6:12-17**. Ask the third person to summarize (not interpret) what these passages are saying as a whole. (Keep it simple; about 60 seconds is all the time that's needed.)

3. What is the general tone of Job's responses to his friends?
   - Which verses seem the most "negative" in nature?
   - Which seem particularly positive?
   - Describe how Job "turned the tables" on his friends.

4. What evidence indicates how Job's friends treated him in his misery?

5. What do these passages teach you about God?

6. What do these passages teach you about humanity?

7. In what specific ways does this passage change how you view and interact with others who are going through difficult times?

8. What do these passages teach you about obedience (or the lack of it)?

9. With whom will you share the lessons you have learned through these passages in the upcoming days?

10. Based on these sections of Scripture, complete this sentence: This week, I will . . .

11. What will be a challenge for you this week?

For Next Week: Sometime in the next seven days, reflect on **Job 38:16-41** as we continue to study the book of Job. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Bow before the full view of God's integrity and power.**

STUDY: Job

THEME: Obscured Vision

LESSON TEXT: Job 38:16-41

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Job 38:1-15; 40:1-5

SEE HIM ALL AROUND

BY MARK SCOTT

God is not everything—that is pantheism. But God can be seen in everything (Romans 1:19, 20; Colossians 1:16). Job needed to learn that, and in doing so he would find the answer to his suffering. Chapter 38 is a significant marker in the book of Job. God finally shattered his silence—as James Strauss put it in his commentary *The Shattering of Silence*—and interrogated Job. By this moment in this dramatic wisdom literature, all of Job's friends have weighed in, and Job has responded to them.

Job's real friend, Elihu, began his discourse in chapter 32. He rebuked Job's friends, condemned Job's attitude, and extolled God's greatness. Elihu encouraged Job to consider the wondrous works of God (Job 37:14). At this point, God stepped up and addressed Job in a whirlwind. This would not be fun for anyone. God interrogated Job as to his lack of knowledge and challenged him to look around. God's argument with Job had to do with his being Creator. In the first part of the chapter (vv. 1-15), God asked Job about the measurement of the earth, the foundation of the earth, the boundaries of the waters, the rhythm of morning, and the handling of the wicked. It's obvious God alone can handle those things.

God used 28 questions to interrogate Job in our lesson text. The questions deal with cosmology, oceanography, meteorology, and astronomy. God used a method of speech known as personification, so we probably should not interpret everything in this text in the purest scientific terms. But that is not to say there are not scientific statements in these verses.

God Is Creator of the Unseen Realms

Job 38:16-18

The *springs of the sea* and the *recesses* (unsearchable) *of the deep* refer to fountains of the oceans (Genesis 7:11). No one has seen these except God. The *gates of death* and the *gates of deepest darkness* are known only to God. These hidden places and even the *vast expanses* (broad places) of the earth are some of God's secrets.

God Is Creator of Light and Darkness

Job 38:19-21

Light and darkness were created by God (Genesis 1:3-5). But where do they dwell? From where do they come? Do they have houses in which they reside? Could Job possibly know where to take them? In this section God even chided Job with sarcasm, "Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!"

God Is Creator of the Sky

Job 38:22-30

The physical heavens came into existence when God separated the waters (Genesis 1:6-8). The sky became a great storehouse for God. It held snow, hail, lightning, wind, rain, and *thunderstorms* (flashing light). The purpose for this was to water the earth—even in the most barren of places.

Water in its various forms (rain, dew, frost, and ice) is held in the sky. The sky acted as a father in withholding water from the earth or flooding the earth with water.

God Is Creator of Stars and Clouds

Job 38:31-38

Even amateur astronomers can identify various constellations of stars. Pleiades is a constellation of seven stars. Orion is another belt of stars. God could bring forth these *constellations* (12 signs of the zodiac) in their seasons. Some have suggested the *Bear* was a reference to the Big Dipper. God set these things in place with various laws as he manifested his dominion over the earth.

Clouds are unique in nature and in the Bible. Clouds become symbols of divine presence and power. They are a significant part of the sky (mentioned earlier). As a human being, could Job possibly raise his voice to them in rebellion against God? Could he do anything to extrapolate water and lightning from them? Could he count the clouds? Could he predict the floods or droughts? The answers are obvious.

God Is Creator of the Animals

Job 38:39-41

On the fifth and sixth days of creation God made the birds of the air, the creatures of the sea, and the animals on the land (Genesis 1:25). Earlier in our text roosters were mentioned (v. 36). Now God mentioned the lioness, the lion, and the raven. God provided for them both shelter and food.

Maybe Satan asked the key question in this book. "Does Job fear [or serve] God for nothing?" (Job 1:9). Essentially the answer is yes, because God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

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THE CROSS EXAMINATION

BY DAVID FAUST

The prosecuting attorney approached the bench with a confident stride. He had done his homework. Eager for the trial to begin, he came armed with a long list of grievances against the defendant.

It was time for opening statements. The prosecutor paused for dramatic effect and then began. "This trial will be an unusual one because, Your Honor, the one on trial today . . . is you!"

A murmur filled the crowded courtroom. The Judge himself was on trial? Who dared to bring charges against the court's presiding officer?

Questions for God

The prosecutor began to state his case.

"Your Honor, the charges against you are many, and they are not new. Indeed, the complaints I raise today have been voiced by numerous accusers throughout history.

"Why do you allow evil? Why do innocent victims suffer sickness and death? Why don't you prevent accidents? If you are good and all-powerful, why do you allow violent crimes and child abuse? What about tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, famines, droughts, and wildfires? Why are babies born to face lifelong deprivation? What about cancer and Alzheimer's? Why do you bewilder us by saying yes to certain prayers and no to others?

"With all due respect, Your Honor, some of us consider your requirements narrow and demanding." Holding up a leather-bound volume, the prosecutor continued, "I enter this Bible into evidence as Exhibit A. Are you aware of all the critics who dispute the contents of this book? Why are your followers often so divided and so disagreeable? Their actions contradict this book's teachings! And what about the many individuals who have no exposure to this book? Is it fair for you to judge them?

"To be frank, Your Honor, these are just a few of the accusations brought against you. As the trial continues, I shall raise many more."

Questions from God

Breathlessly the crowd awaited the Judge's opening statement. How would he defend himself against these charges?

"Many of your questions are addressed in Exhibit A," the Judge said solemnly. "But now I will ask a few questions of my own.

"Were you there when I created the universe out of nothing? Can you explain how I did that? If you struggle to explain stars and seas, snow and ice, donkeys and ostriches, how will you comprehend profound mysteries of the soul? You complain about evil, but without me as a reference point, how can you be sure what is good?

"I welcome honest inquirers and earnest seekers," the Judge continued. "If I shied away from scrutiny, I wouldn't have sent my Son to earth for 33 years. He confirmed my existence, revealed my grace, and experienced all the temptations common to mankind.

"If you're serious about your cross examination, have you examined the cross where Jesus died? I haven't overlooked your suffering; I identified with it. I understand suffering more than you can possibly imagine. I confronted the problem of evil head-on when nails pierced my Son's hands and feet, and after the cross, I pierced the darkness with resurrection hope. Have you pondered how Jesus' death and resurrection can remove your own fear of standing trial in my courtroom?

"I care about your questions. But you won't find the answers by merely repeating your list of grievances. Look closer. Dig deeper. Examine the cross."

Personal Challenge:

If you could speak with God face-to-face, what would you ask him? Talk about that question with a trusted Christian friend or discuss it with an unbelieving friend who may wonder about the same issue.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are two things for which you are thankful right now?

2. In the difficult or challenging circumstances you faced this past week, how were you comforted?
   - In what ways were you a comfort in the misery of others?

Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the first two to read **Job 38:16-41** one after the other (preferably from different Bible versions). (Option: Read Job 38:1-41; 40:1-5.) Ask the third person to summarize (not interpret) the passage as if sharing it with a middle schooler. (About 60 seconds is all the time you need.)

3. What big-picture observations do you have about this passage? What stands out to you most?
   - What if anything amazes you in this passage, or what have you never before considered?

4. Let's look at some of the details in this passage:
   - How would you characterize God's responses to Job in general?
   - What different realms of creation do you identify?

5. What does this passage teach you about God?

6. What do you learn about humankind?

7. If God were to ask you a series of questions like he asked of Job, what might he ask?

8. What do you learn about obedience and trusting God from this passage?

9. How will you encourage someone with what you've learned from this passage as they encounter difficulties in the upcoming days?

10. Based on this section of Scripture and our discussion, complete this sentence: This week, I will . . .

11. What challenge will you be facing this week?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.