

רבנו
 וזו
 יום ליל ש
 לה הזה ליהו
 משה ואהרן א
 איש מקנת כסף
 יאכל בו במית אה
 ונעצם לא תשברו
 גור אהרן גר ועשה פ
 קרב לעשתו והיה כאזרח
 ו תורה אחת יהיה לאזרח ולע
 שראל כאשר צוה יהוה את משה וא
 והו
 יהוה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים

Justice Sought

God is just in His treatment of all people.

JOB 36:8-23

MEMORY VERSE: JOB 36:10

STUDY Job 36:8-23 to determine how the message from Job's fourth friend is both similar and different from the discourses of the other three friends. Consult a Bible dictionary for information on the words *affliction*, *fairness*, and *justice*. Reflect on the way these words (or their synonyms) are used in Job 36:8-23.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 60–62. Be prepared to emphasize that not all adversity is a result of sin and that God's blessings do not always result in material wealth.

GATHER the following items:

- Extra Personal Study Guides (PSGs)

Prepare to Display:

- Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes*)

Make Copies of:

- Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Friends of Job*)

CONSULT the Explore the Bible website for ways of using a current news event to start and conclude the session (goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras). Also listen for tips on the weekly Explore the Bible Podcast to gain insights as you prepare for the session.

REINFORCE the study by examining your own life for areas of sin that need to be addressed. Contact the group through email or text, asking them to consider when they've trusted God's justice in their lives.

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Father

God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise (1 Pet. 1:17).

FIRST THOUGHTS

Most of us have been on the receiving end of something we thought to be unfair: the team running sprints because one person loafed; the class receiving extra work because one classmate misbehaved. One thing common to every person is we want to be treated justly by others. While people may struggle to always do what is right concerning others, Job 36:8-23 reveals God is just in His treatment of all people.

(In PSG, p. 46) **What is the relationship between fairness and trust?**

BIBLE SKILL

Memorize a Bible verse.

Focus on Job 36:10. Review the verse in different translations including both older and contemporary translations. How did the comparison of translations impact how you understand the verse? Write your own paraphrase of the verse and memorize the verse and your paraphrase.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOB 32:1–37:24

This section of the Book of Job primarily consists of Elihu’s speeches that offer his perspective on Job’s situation. Not only did Elihu offer a charge against Job, he also refuted Job’s claims of innocence (chaps. 33–34). This is followed by an assertion of Job’s stance before God, along with a description of God’s majesty and the futility of turning from His discipline (chaps. 35–36). While Elihu’s speeches do contain general truths about God’s dealings with the righteous and wicked, he wrongly applied these truths to the situation of Job. In fact, later in the book, Elihu’s perspective is not mentioned or commended, which should lead the reader to assume that his reasons for Job’s suffering were not entirely correct.

What seems to give Elihu’s speech initial weight is his claim to speak on God’s behalf. One might be tempted to believe what he said in its entirety because of his claim. However, this section of the Book of Job reminds the reader that it is a dangerous matter to claim to speak on God’s behalf, even when such attempts are aimed at bolstering one’s arguments with authority.

Who would be so bold as to speak for God in areas where God has not clearly spoken? It is somewhat ironic that Elihu reminded Job of God’s majesty and unrivaled power, and he hastily claimed to represent God’s providential purposes in Job’s suffering. If wisdom is found in the fear of God, one might assume Elihu would be more careful in asserting divine support for his personal perspective. True fear of God should cause one to pause in making such claims.

While Elihu claimed that Job was prideful (based on his refusal to repent), it is Elihu who comes across as arrogant. He accused Job of being judgmental, but it was Elihu who was being most judgmental. Before we hastily judge Elihu, much like he did Job, we should be reminded of our

propensity to judge others on the basis of appearance. We must be careful not to make condemning judgments based on what we see. We only see in part. There is mystery in the work of God, especially when it comes to His providential permission of suffering.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

PURPOSEFUL DISCIPLINE (JOB 36:8-11)

As chapter 36 begins, Elihu implied that his words for Job originated not from him but from God. We might assume that his speech is true and right, because he claimed to speak on God's behalf (36:2-3). In some ways, his words reflect the truth in part. Certainly (as Elihu said), God is mighty and understands all things (v. 5). And God does watch over the righteous and ultimately brings justice to the oppressed (vv. 6-7). However, the general principles that Elihu applied to all people are unconvincing when the entirety of the Book of Job is taken into account. Things are not as clear-cut as he presumed. What Elihu didn't account for is the fact that sometimes the righteous do suffer, and sometimes the wicked flourish. As Job's friends have done thus far, Elihu looked at Job's suffering and claimed divine inspiration as the grounds to accuse him of sin.

Verses 8-9

In verse 8, Elihu's presuppositions began to fold as he returned to the idea of disciplinary suffering. We know from Scripture that God is holy and just and will judge all sin. Evil is present in the world due to human rebellion which demands divine punishment. Within the Bible we also find instances where divine discipline occurs within the context of evil. God disciplines His people—collectively and individually—that they may be brought to repentance and closer to Him. In these cases, the purpose of God's discipline is often to teach a lesson—to train and to mature His children through suffering—but this was not the case with Job. Job maintained his innocence throughout the narrative. Despite his friends' claims, Job argued that God would one day vindicate him and prove them wrong.

Elihu held strong to his position. In verse 8, he figuratively described sufferers as **bound with chains of affliction**. (We can assume he meant self-imposed chains.) He further pressed in and maintained that God would explain why they were suffering. To put it simply, Elihu described affliction using the imagery of captivity: people are bound in chains, even more, God binds them. From Elihu's perspective, God uses this imprisonment of affliction to bring people to repentance of their sin. It is their imprisonment that opens their ears to His correction. Again, Elihu was implying that Job was holding something back, namely, that he did indeed know why he was suffering and was hiding it from his friends.

VERSES 8-9

- ⁸ If people are bound with chains and trapped by the cords of affliction,
- ⁹ God tells them what they have done and how arrogantly they have transgressed.

VERSES 10-11

¹⁰ He opens their ears to correction and tells them to repent from iniquity.

¹¹ If they listen and serve him, they will end their days in prosperity and their years in happiness.

Verses 10-11

The solution then, was that the sufferer be brought to repentance. Those who repent will be delivered by God; those who do not listen to **correction** and **repent** will be judged even in the circumstances of their death. If Job would simply repent, then the weight of his suffering would be removed and he would experience joy once more. According to Elihu, those who respond well to God's disciplinary suffering will find **happiness** again. Elihu was not wrong. As Psalm 30 reminds us, those who repent will find their lament turned to dancing! However, he wrongly assumed this was the case with Job and was the solution to Job's problem.

While Elihu misinterpreted Job's situation, he was correct in explaining that God reveals to humans their need to repent. In fact, sometimes God uses trials and suffering to bring people to repentance, and if people in these situations repent then God will once again bless them. It is important to note that all suffering is the result of sin in general, but not all suffering is the direct result of a person's individual sin in particular. Even more, while God permits all suffering, all suffering is not for the explicit purpose of discipline. There do remain some things that we do not understand completely. Such as the way God orders the world's affairs. All of the solutions found in the Bible are legitimate approaches to the question of suffering and the problem of evil. Each principle has a specific application, but there is always an element of mystery. With this in mind, however, in some cases, suffering can be an opportunity for believers to examine their lives for sin of which they need to repent. What is always true, however, is that suffering is an opportunity to lean in and trust God deeply.

VERSES 12-14

¹² But if they do not listen, they will cross the river of death and die without knowledge.

¹³ Those who have a godless heart harbor anger; even when God binds them, they do not cry for help. ¹⁴ They die in their youth; their life ends among male cult prostitutes.

What are the dangers of claiming to speak for God when talking to people going through suffering or attempting to make sense of a difficult situation?

JUDGMENT COMING (JOB 36:12-16)

Verses 12-14

Elihu and his friends assumed Job had not repented because of his pride. They thought Job had not learned his lesson. Because of his pride, his friends asserted he was headed to **cross the river of death**, where he would find no comfort or knowledge. In Scripture, water often represents chaos or evil. It is no surprise then that Elihu utilized the imagery of a river to refer to Job's death. In his mind, Job had become hard of heart and resistant to repentance, so much so that God's discipline had not softened him. This mentality is exemplified in the godless who harbor anger toward God.

In cases where a person has hardened his or her heart against God, He will often bind them in discipline, and it is only God who can release

them. But if, in their hardness of heart, they refuse to call out to the only One who can set them free, then they will end up in judgment. For this reason, their untimely death is likened to young men who die with **male cult prostitutes**, a shameful way to die.

Verses 15-16

After the warning of dying a shameful death, Elihu shamed Job further. According to him, Job should be rescued by his **affliction**. Even more, he surmised that Job should be instructed by his **torment**. After all, isn't God in the business of punishing the wicked and rewarding the innocent? Verse 15 encapsulates Elihu's doctrine of disciplinary suffering. From Elihu's perspective, Job's suffering should have redirected his path through repentance. Through suffering, God was attempting to lure Job **from the jaws of distress**. If Job would just respond in repentance, he would not only be set free but would also enjoy the abundance of God's blessings, like a **table spread with choice food**. The imagery painted by Elihu is stark—either remain bound in a self-imposed prison or repent and eat freely at a lush table.

Once again, we would affirm the general truth of Elihu's words here, even though he wrongly applied them to Job. Elihu reminded Job that those who choose to ignore God face His righteous judgment and death. There are indeed times when God uses suffering as a means of inducing repentance. People must be informed of the consequences of choosing to ignore God. However, one must take precautions in wrongly ascribing meaning to a situation of suffering that is not explicitly revealed by God or the sufferer.

Elihu made the grave mistake of wrongly assuming a general principle in a particular case. This is instructive to us as Christians who will sometimes find ourselves consoling the suffering. Before making any assumptions about the reason for suffering, one must begin by weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). The sufferer will often find it difficult to maintain a proper attitude toward God and may even be tempted to rebel against Him or give up belief in God altogether. In these instances, the best Christian response is not to offer philosophical enlightenment but loving care. Certainly, once the initial shock of suffering lifts, the sufferer may begin to ask questions. In those cases, one can provide care by answering according to Scripture and providing counsel based on God's promises. However, we must remember that there is nothing more pointless than to answer a question that is not fully understood or fully posed.

There are times when God speaks through suffering. There are times when suffering and pain come to people not because of their sin. For this reason, the Book of Job reminds us not to draw hasty conclusions about a person's spiritual condition based on the circumstances of that person's life. This passage also reminds us that suffering is a complex situation that involves different perspectives on reasons and purposes. Most of which are not readily available to the human mind.

VERSES 15-16

15 God rescues the afflicted by their affliction; he instructs them by their torment.

16 Indeed, he lured you from the jaws of distress to a spacious and unconfined place. Your table was spread with choice food.

There are times when suffering comes about by people's actions, the actions of others, or cause-and-effect circumstances in the broken world. In these situations, why is it important for Christians to initially weep with those who weep rather than jump into philosophical explanations regarding suffering?

VERSES 17-21

¹⁷ Yet now you are obsessed with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have seized you. ¹⁸ Be careful that no one lures you with riches; do not let a large ransom lead you astray. ¹⁹ Can your wealth or all your physical exertion keep you from distress? ²⁰ Do not long for the night when nations will disappear from their places. ²¹ Be careful that you do not turn to iniquity, for that is why you have been tested by affliction.

JUSTICE SEEN (JOB 36:17-23)

Verses 17-21

In his final plea, Elihu concluded by asserting that while Job understood (was even **obsessed**) with the justice due to the wicked, he failed to see his suffering as just. Elihu appealed to Job very directly at this point by describing the change in his circumstances and warning him against choosing to harden his heart rather than embracing the divine purpose of his affliction.

In verse 18, Elihu returned to the idea that Job only loved God because of the gifts of **riches** that had been bestowed from God's hand. This is implicit in his warning to Job not to be lured away from God and his situation by riches. Neither riches nor self-effort could set his situation right again. Therefore, Job must be careful not to fall further, as Elihu assumed, into iniquity. According to his friend, if Job were to rely on his own resources and power, he would not find peace. Job should deem the greatness of the loss of his family, status, and belongings as the means by which God was pleading for his attention and calling him to turn from sin. From Elihu's perspective, there was no shelter in **the night** in which Job could hide from his pain. Essentially, Elihu closed this section in verse 21 with an ultimatum. Either Job would charge God with wrongdoing in his suffering, or he would look at his own life and repent in order to restore his relationship with God.

Verses 22-23

In the transition of verses 22-23, Elihu began to remind Job of God's greatness in order to paint a picture of the futility of turning from Him. The rhetorical questions have obvious answers. **Who is a teacher like him (God)? Who has appointed his way for him?** Finally, and more poignantly, **who has declared** to God, **"You have done wrong"?**

Elihu assumed this was Job's attitude. He believed that rather than learning from his suffering, Job was choosing to harden his heart and would eventually reveal his trust in riches. Even though Elihu's interpretation of Job's life was incorrect, he was right to say that God's greatness is the source of all hope and wisdom. In this sense, we would also affirm that believers can trust God to be just in His dealings with humanity.

In the kingdom of God, things are not always as they seem. God can and does work in difficult situations to bring about good. The ultimate example of this is the cross of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus, which from

a human perspective was a tragic injustice, became the means by which the sin of the world would be taken away. Even in the events of our lives we can affirm that “all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

The doctrine of God’s providence is the truth that He controls the circumstances of everyday history so as to work out His purposes. There is nothing meaningless or out of control in human history that God did not sovereignly ordain or providentially will. In fact, there are three things we can affirm about God’s providential relationship to human history. First, we believe that God intervenes in human history. Second, we believe that God guides human history, even individual’s lives. Finally, we believe that God will bring history (even situations in our lives) to the conclusion He has planned. This is not merely an abstract academic or philosophical proposition but lies at the heart of our personal trust in God’s loving control over all things. When we experience difficulties, trials, or suffering, we might be tempted to think, where is God? What is He doing? Doesn’t He care? God does care, and He knows what He is doing.

***Most of the time, it’s hard to see
God’s hand in difficult situations,
so we must trust His heart.***

There are times when we may not understand what is happening in the moment, but we must reassure ourselves of the truth that God remains sovereign over every aspect of the universe and every detail of our lives. Most of the time, it’s hard to see God’s hand in difficult situations, so we must trust His heart. We can trust that God is in control—even in our trials.

How can the doctrine of God’s providence provide comfort in difficult times even when the purposes for our difficulty are not clear?

VERSES 22-23

²² Look, God shows himself exalted by his power. Who is a teacher like him? ²³ Who has appointed his way for him, and who has declared, “You have done wrong”?

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

INTRODUCE: Welcome the group and ask, *How would you describe fairness? Signal with a thumbs up or thumbs down if you can remember a time when you felt you were treated unfairly.*

GUIDE: Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph on page 46 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: *What is the relationship between fairness and trust?* (PSG, p. 46)

TRANSITION: *Job consistently indicated to his friends that he was being treated unfairly. He refuted the idea that his adversity was the result of his sin. In today's session, we find Job receiving counsel from a fourth friend, Elihu.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXTUALIZE: Utilizing Understand the Context (PSG, p. 47) and **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes*), establish the context for the session. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Friends of Job*) to any person in the group who did not receive one in an earlier session and introduce Elihu. Explain that Elihu's lengthy speech is recorded in Job 32:1–37:24, so share with the group that the study will be looking at only a small part of his speech: *Elihu reiterated that true wisdom comes from God alone. He expressed frustration with Job for placing more emphasis on himself than on God. He rebuked Job for questioning God's justice and told him he needed to stop complaining and turn to God. Elihu reminded Job of God's mercy even as he pointed out Job's self-righteousness and pride.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Job 36:8-11**, while the group listens for characteristics of God evident in these verses.

DESCRIBE: Guide the group to indicate specific words or phrases in these verses that reveal God's character.

EXPLAIN: *Elihu argued that God has a specific purpose for allowing someone to suffer. He said one reason for suffering is to reveal people's sins and call them back to God in repentance. He reminded Job that if he repented, then God would once again bless him.* Remind the group that not all suffering is a result of sin, but it is all part of God's plan and purpose. Supplement and clarify this information using the comments under Verses 8-10 on pages 48–49 of the PSG.

EXAMINE: Lead the group to examine Genesis 50:20; Job 1:8; 2:3; and John 9:2-3 to confirm that not all suffering is a result of sin. Emphasize this statement from the PSG (p. 49): *Job suffered because there was no one else on earth like him, a man of perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:8; 2:3).*

ASK: *How does one know the difference between being disciplined for a sin and being shaped or tested by a challenge?* (PSG, p. 49)

IDENTIFY: Reread aloud Job 36:11, asking the group to listen for an if-then situation revealed in the verse.

EMPHASIZE: Highlight that God does not guarantee material prosperity, but He does offer peace and happiness to those who obey and serve Him. People who have repented of their sin, are teachable, and have listened to God's instruction find contentment in their earthly situations and look forward to an eternal prosperity with God.

DISCUSS: Lead the group to turn to a neighbor and discuss why repentance is important for the believer.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Job 36:12-16, as the group listens for the consequences of not listening to God.

ASK: Why do people choose to ignore God, even when experiencing adversity? What are the consequences of ignoring God, and why are they so serious? (PSG, p. 51)

EXPLAIN: *In these verses Elihu, in a more gracious way than his other friends, encouraged Job to repent of his sin so that he could once again receive God's blessings. Elihu offered hope that Job might see an end to his suffering.*

TRANSITION: *According to Elihu, God always gives people what they deserve.*

READ: Read aloud Job 36:17-23, while the group considers how Job might have been receiving Elihu's message.

DISCUSS: Why are people prone to question God and to instruct Him on what He should do and how He should do it? (PSG, p. 53) **When we can't understand our circumstances, how can our faith in God's power help us wait on His timing?**

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize the Key Doctrine (God the Father) on page 53 of the PSG: *God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise (1 Pet. 1:17).*

ASK: When have you seen God work in a way that was completely unexpected? How was God's outcome the perfect answer to a seemingly impossible situation?

TRANSITION: *Although not all adversity that we experience is a result of sin, all of our circumstances provide an opportunity for us to grow in our relationship with Christ.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Solicit responses to the bulleted statements under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 54). Encourage the group to modify or add to the statements.

EVALUATE: Lead the group to quietly reflect on the following question:
List situations you are facing that are challenging to your faith in God. How can you express trust in God with each challenge you listed? (PSG, p. 54)

STATE: *God is just in His treatment of all people even when we feel life is unfair.*

READ: Lead the group to read Job 36:10 together chorally.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking that the Lord will lead us to examine our hearts and confess our sins before Him. Ask that He will instruct us in His ways and grant us peace as we face life's struggles. Pray that He will guide us to honor Him with our praise.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Prior to the group time, enlist four people to read one verse each of “Search Me, O God,” by J. Edwin Orr. The hymn can be located in the *Baptist Hymnal*. As an alternate idea, pre-enlist one person to sing the hymn for the group.

CASE STUDY

Lead the group to share situations where people might feel they have been treated unfairly. Ideas might include being passed over for a job promotion or being penalized for something they didn't do. As a group, develop a case study of three to four sentences followed by a question. Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and discuss possible responses to the question.

WORD STUDY

Gather Bible dictionaries.

Divide into teams of two to four, providing a Bible dictionary for each team. Direct each team to utilize the Bible dictionary to discover more about the words *affliction*, *fairness*, and *justice* (or their synonyms) as they are used in Job 36:8-23. Each team could be assigned one word or all three words. Highlight Psalm 99:4; Proverbs 2:6-9; and 2 Corinthians 4:17 to enhance the understanding of the words studied.

NATURE

Read aloud Job 36:24-33 directing attention to God's power over creation. Create a list of the ways God demonstrates His sovereignty over nature. Discuss how this evidence in nature supports the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 53) that God the Father is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. Lead the group to offer praise to God for His creation and mighty presence by allowing people in the group to share one sentence of praise. After each sentence is shared, direct the group to respond with the words “Great is our God.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Gather paper and pencils.

Distribute paper and pencils to the group. Direct them to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 49 of the PSG: *Focus on Job 36:10. Review the verse in different translations including both older and contemporary translations. How did the comparison of translations impact how you understand the verse? Write your own paraphrase of the verse and memorize the verse and your paraphrase.*

TESTIMONY

Prior to the group time, enlist a volunteer to share about a time when he or she was (1) lovingly compelled by a friend to reconsider actions taken and repent, or (2) encouraged to wait on God's timing in a difficult circumstance (health, financial, parenting, legal, and so forth).