

# Job and the Dilemma of Suffering

## Summary and Goal

The story of Job confronts us with the question “Why do good people suffer?” And the story offers us insight into right and wrong ways to pursue the answer to this question. The suffering of Job points us forward to the ultimate answer to the problem of evil—the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ and the promise of a world made new. And as Jesus’ followers, we seek to alleviate suffering as we walk alongside others.

### **Main Passages**

Job 1:6-12,20-22

Job 16:1-5,18-22

Job 40:1-5; 42:7-9

### **Session Outline**

1. Job’s dilemma: Why do good people suffer? (Job 1:6-12,20-22)
2. Job responds to his friends’ wrong answers (Job 16:1-5,18-22).
3. God responds to Job and his friends (Job 40:1-5; 42:7-9).

### **Theological Theme**

God does not give us the answer to why we go through suffering, but He does give us Himself.

### **Christ Connection**

In his time of suffering, Job yearned for a mediator—someone to stand between him and God. Jesus is the mediator who suffered, even though He had never sinned, in order to pay the price for human sin and to put an end to suffering on earth.

### **Missional Application**

God calls us to comfort people going through a time of suffering, not by answering every question but by assuring them of God’s great love.

## Session Plan

# Job and the Dilemma of Suffering

## Session 12

### Introduction Option

Prior to the group meeting, enlist a group member to share about an experience of suffering and his or her response, either toward God or away from God. Encourage the volunteer to be honest about the struggle. Make it clear up front to everyone that your group should be a safe place for acknowledging our struggles so we can love and support one another in them with the love of Christ.

If this type of honesty is not yet characteristic of your group, perhaps you as the leader should share your own experience of suffering and response first, in order to model what this should look like for the family of God.

### ? For Further Discussion

How is maligning God's character in response to horrid circumstances prideful or presumptive, particularly in light of what Job 1:6-12 reveals?

How does Job's response to his circumstances in 1:20-22, and again in 2:10, model humility as well as wisdom for us?

### Introduction

Begin by noting the inescapable nature of human suffering. Introduce the story of Job as Old Testament wisdom literature that speaks to how we are to respond to suffering (*see Pack Item 7: Wisdom Literature*) (leader p. 142; PSG p. 110). Share the Eugene Peterson excerpt from the leader content about the importance of considering the bigger picture (leader p. 142).

- ? When have you asked questions about the trials in your life? Do you think it's wrong for a Christian to ask these kinds of questions? Why or why not?

Summarize the session on suffering in the life of Job, noting that the book points us to the ultimate answer to the problem of evil—the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ (leader p. 143; PSG p. 111).

### 1. Job's dilemma: Why do good people suffer? (Job 1:6-12,20-22)

Read Job 1:6-12, summarize how Job lost everything, and then read verses 20-22 (leader pp. 143-144; PSG p. 111).

- ? Based on Job's response in 1:20-22, how would you describe Job's character?

Explain that Job's story is an example of extremely bad things happening to a righteous man. Stress that the story does not tell us why good people suffer but that it does offer us some direction. Elaborate on the three things to keep in mind about Job's suffering (leader pp. 144-145; PSG pp. 112-113):

- **Job did not suffer because God was angry with him.**
- **Job did not suffer because he had sinned.**
- **Job suffered in order to reveal his faith.**

- ? Think back to a season of suffering in your own life. Did God use that suffering to lead you into a different kind of relationship with Him? How so?

- ? Why might suffering be an effective means of spiritual growth (*see Jas. 1:2-4*)?

## 2. Job responds to his friends' wrong answers (Job 16:1-5,18-22).

Set the context for Job 16:1-5,18-22, and then ask a volunteer to read the passages. Comment on how the story shows the need for good friends to surround us during our suffering, not ones like Job's miserable comforters (leader pp. 145-146; PSG pp. 113-114).

- What are some overused clichés or phrases that Christians tend to use during times of suffering?
- Why should we avoid being quick to give easy answers?

Highlight the passages from Proverbs pertaining to friendship. (*Consider printing these verses out and giving them to a few group members as they arrive so they can read them when called upon [available on the DVD in The Gospel Project of Adults: Leader Pack].*) Unpack the two things we need to do in order to have good friends: 1) be a true friend, and 2) look to the true Friend, Jesus Christ (leader p. 147; PSG pp. 114-115).

- What are some ways your friends have encouraged you during your suffering?

## 3. God responds to Job and his friends (Job 40:1-5; 42:7-9).

Read Job 40:1-5 and 42:7-9. Explain how Job received an even grander vision of God's power and goodness through his suffering (leader p. 148; PSG pp. 115-116).

- Why might a greater understanding of the power and character of God be what all of us in pain really need?

Observe two important truths we learn about God from Job: 1) **God is God and we are not** and 2) **God comes near in our suffering** (leader pp. 148-149; PSG pp. 116-117).

- In what ways have you been reminded that God is God and you are not?
- How has God come near to you during your suffering?

## Conclusion

Call attention to both the difficulty and beauty of Job's story, noting how it points us to Jesus' suffering (leader p. 149; PSG p. 117). *Call attention to **Pack Item 3: Seeing Jesus in the Kingdom** when making the connection between Job's request for a mediator and Jesus' role as the one mediator between God and man. Apply the truths of this session with "His Mission, Your Mission" (PSG p. 118).*

### Point 3 Option

Read the "Essential Christian Doctrine" *The Problem of Evil* (leader p. 149; PSG p. 117), and ask groups of 3-4 to discuss the following questions (consider writing them on a board or sheet of paper for groups to have; also available on the DVD in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*):

- How does the story of Job give insight regarding the problem of evil?
- How do Jesus' death on the cross and His second coming shape our understanding of the problem of evil?

After a few moments, encourage groups to share their responses and reflections.

### ? For Further Discussion

What do you think Job thought about his experience in looking back on it?

**Christ Connection:** In his time of suffering, Job yearned for a mediator—someone to stand between him and God. Jesus is the mediator who suffered, even though He had never sinned, in order to pay the price for human sin and to put an end to suffering on earth.

**Missional Application:** God calls us to comfort people going through a time of suffering, not by answering every question but by assuring them of God's great love.

## Expanded Session Content

# Job and the Dilemma of Suffering

## Session 12

### Voices from Church History

“The picture of God in the Bible is of One who suffers, and when the mask is torn off life and we see all its profound and vast misery, the suffering, sorrowing God is the only One who does not mock us.”<sup>2</sup>

—Oswald Chambers  
(1874-1917)

### Introduction

To live is to suffer. The question is not *if* we will suffer but how we will respond to suffering *when* it happens. Will we suffer *toward* God (allow our suffering to drive us to Him), or will we suffer *away from* God (allow our suffering to hinder our relationship with Him)?

In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, we find the story of Job—the classic story on pain and suffering. Even many people unfamiliar with the Bible know the basics of Job’s story, how everything was taken from him and how he remained devoted to God. The New Testament lifts up Job as one of our examples of patience and endurance (Jas. 5:10-11). Job suffered *toward* God and found that suffering gave him a greater understanding of God and His ways.

Eugene Peterson tells a story that illustrates this truth:

A friend showed me a series of pictures he had taken. The subject matter consisted exclusively of household items found in an ordinary kitchen: a matchstick, a pin, the edge of a knife. Household utensils are not ordinarily thought of as possessing much beauty, but all these photographs of very ordinary objects were quite astonishingly beautiful. The beauty was suddenly visible because the photographs had all been made through a magnifying lens. Small, ugly, insignificant items were blown up to great size, and we could see what we had overlooked in our everyday routine. And it turned out that what we had overlooked was careful, planned details that produced exquisite beauty.<sup>1</sup>

That last phrase is so important. When our lives are comfortable and easy, we don’t tend to think deeply about God. But when suffering comes, we “zoom in” on God. What we discover is that God is working our suffering for good and bringing about exquisite beauty and glory from even our deepest pain (Rom. 8:18,28). We discover, like Job, that God is even greater than we thought, and His goodness is even deeper than we ever dared to dream.



When have you asked questions about the trials in your life? Do you think it's wrong for a Christian to ask these kinds of questions? Why or why not?

### Session Summary

In this session, we will look at the dilemma of suffering in the life of Job. The story of Job confronts us with the question “Why do good people suffer?” And the story offers us insight into right and wrong ways to pursue the answer to this question. The suffering of Job points us forward to the ultimate answer to the problem of evil—the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ and the promise of a world made new. And as Jesus’ followers, we seek to alleviate suffering as we walk alongside others.

## 1. Job’s dilemma: Why do good people suffer? (Job 1:6-12,20-22)

The Book of Job begins with a bizarre scene. The Lord and Satan are having a conversation, and the Lord brings up Job as a model of uprightness and integrity. Let’s read how the story begins.

*<sup>6</sup> Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” <sup>8</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” <sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? <sup>10</sup> Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” <sup>12</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*

After this scene in the Book of Job, we read that Job lost everything. The Sabeans took his oxen and donkeys and struck down his servants (1:13-15), a lightning storm burned up his sheep and more of his servants (1:16), the Chaldeans raided his camels and the servants attending them (1:17), and worst of all, a powerful wind caused the house to collapse on his sons and daughters (1:18-19). After all this, what did Job do?



### Further Commentary

“The heavenly setting indicates that the ‘sons of God’ are angels (2:1; cp. Ps. 29:1; 103:20). ‘Satan’ (the Accuser; cp. Zech. 3:1-2) also came to the heavenly council. He always opposes the work of the Lord (Matt. 16:23; Rev. 12:9) but is limited in his power (Job 1:12; 2:6). ‘LORD’ translates the Hebrew name of the covenant God of Israel (Yahweh). The Lord’s questions suggest that ‘Satan’ came to the meeting uninvited but do not indicate that God was ignorant of Satan’s activities. God’s omniscience is attested throughout the Scriptures (Ps. 139:7-12). Instances in which He asks questions are acts of accommodation that allow Him to relate to humans via dialogue. Satan challenged Job’s motives for fearing God. He suggested that Job’s devotion to God depended on his life circumstances. The limitation God imposed on Satan’s testing demonstrated the Lord’s desire that Job be a trophy of God’s grace even in his suffering.”<sup>3</sup>

—Richard D. Patterson, *HCSB Study Bible*

## Further Commentary

“Job’s faith does not relieve his agony; it causes it. Job loved the Lord, his Father and Friend, as no Greek could ever love even the best of his gods, as no Babylonian, Canaanite or Egyptian could love any of their numerous gods. Contrary to the Satan’s forecast, Job has the same good opinion of God’s blessedness, even when things go wrong. But this faith cannot survive without a terrible struggle. Because Job sees nothing but the Lord’s hand in everything, how can he escape the horrible thought that God has done something bad? He knows no cause for such a wilful act. It is harder to say ‘Praise the Lord’ when he takes away than when he gives. Job is hurled into a cauldron of doubt concerning the justice and equity of God’s ways with him. He must suffer and grow before he can see why this has happened. So far he has begun superbly. His confidence in God’s blessedness goes beyond Eli’s submissive resignation (1 Sam. 3:18), beyond David’s (2 Sam. 16:11), for these are receiving the just deserts of their wrong actions. Job does not have the satisfaction of knowing that he is paying for his sins, for he has none. None, at least, deserving of punishments of such magnitude. What, then, is God doing to him that he can perceive to be good (Rom. 8:28)? The answer to this question will be found only when we reach the end of the story.”<sup>4</sup>

—Francis I. Andersen

<sup>20</sup> *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.* <sup>21</sup> *And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”*

<sup>22</sup> *In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.*



Based on Job’s response in 1:20-22, how would you describe Job’s character?

The story of Job is an example of bad things happening to a righteous man. In fact, it’s about *very* bad things happening to a *very* righteous man. You may never have faced all the tragedies that Job faced. And you may not be as upright as he was. But you probably know something of suffering and how it feels like the world is coming to an end. Job’s story does not answer the question of why good people suffer. But it does offer us some direction. Here are three things to keep in mind:

### **Job did not suffer because God was angry with him.**

One of the most interesting things about the conversation between God and Satan is that God is the One who brings Job into the conversation (v. 8)! The Lord suggested to Satan that he consider Job because of his faithfulness and integrity. God did not suggest Job to Satan because he was angry with Job. In fact, He suggested Job because He was pleased with him! God knew that Job trusted Him for reasons far deeper than cattle and oxen. He trusted God because of who He is.

One of the greatest temptations for Christians is to think that suffering is a sign that God is angry with us. *God is paying me back*, we think. But Job’s story reminds us that God’s anger is not why we suffer.

Furthermore, we know that on the cross, Jesus took the penalty for all our sins. He absorbed the wrath of God for us (1 John 2:2). Granted, God disciplines us. But the author of Hebrews reminds us that “God is treating you as sons” (Heb. 12:7). We aren’t treated as enemies of God but as sons and daughters of God. He disciplines us because He loves us (Heb. 12:5-7; cf. Prov. 3:11-12). This is the reason God brought up Job to Satan. God was pleased with Job.

### **Job did not suffer because he had sinned.**

The book begins by telling us, “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Then after Job’s family and livestock were taken, we read: “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (v. 22). The author is clear on this issue—Job was not suffering because he sinned.



When we suffer, we often think of particular sins we've committed or ways we've faltered in our obedience. We believe that we are getting what we deserve. Usually our minds go to that one sin that we cannot seem to overcome, and we blame that sin for our suffering. Our theology too often goes like this: *Do good, be blessed. Do wrong, be cursed.*

But Job's story shows us something different. The righteous *do* suffer. The apostle Paul suffered deeply during his ministry but said it was a source of deep joy for him (Col. 1:24-25). One look at the life of Jesus should quickly remind us that suffering and sin aren't always connected. Throughout His life, He was mocked, ridiculed, and rejected, even though He was completely sinless.

### **Job suffered in order to reveal his faith.**

When the Bible talks about suffering, it often uses the imagery of a furnace (1 Pet. 4:12). Gold, silver, and precious metals were put through fire in order to burn away any dross or impurities. God does this with our faith as well. He puts us through the furnace of suffering and trials in order to better reveal our faith. He is removing all the things that hinder our faith and showing us that He is really all that we need. He is helping us trust Him more and more and trust the world and ourselves less and less. It is because we trust Him that He brings trials our way so that our faith is revealed as genuine and mature.

If God did not test our faith, we may forget we have it. James said, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jas. 1:2-4). This is one of God's great aims for us during suffering. If God takes us through a season of suffering in order to help us love and trust Him more, it will always be worth it.

-  Think back to a season of suffering in your own life. Did God use that suffering to lead you into a different kind of relationship with Him? How so?
-  Why might suffering be an effective means of spiritual growth (see Jas. 1:2-4)?

## **2. Job responds to his friends' wrong answers (Job 16:1-5,18-22).**

After Job's life came unraveled, his friends showed up on the scene to offer counsel and comfort. Unfortunately, his friends gave answers that angered God and proved unhelpful to Job. Look at Job's response to their wrong advice.



### **Voices from Church History**

"None but the godly are capable of desertion...The being deserted, evidences you to be a child of God. How could you complain that God has estranged Himself, if you had not sometimes received smiles and tokens of love from Him?"<sup>5</sup>

—Thomas Watson  
(circa 1620-1686)



### **Voices from the Church**

"What is called for today is a growing core of Christians not who have martyr complexes but whose daily lives are lived in such winsome, habitual, and cheerful self-sacrifice that they can weather even adverse circumstances with God-glorifying wisdom and grace."<sup>6</sup>

—Robert Yarbrough

## Further Commentary

“So far Job’s friends had taught him nothing, had given no usable advice, and in general had aggravated his condition rather than alleviated it. So he branded them ‘miserable comforters.’ ‘Miserable’ translates *‘āmāl*, one of the last words Eliphaz had spoken, translated ‘trouble’ (15:35). According to [2:11] these three had come to Job ‘to sympathize with him and comfort him.’ To this point there has been none of either. The lesson is, ‘Helpful advice is usually brief and encouraging, not lengthy and judgmental.’”<sup>7</sup>

—Robert L. Alden

## Further Commentary

“Job wanted an audience with God to plead his case (9:34–35; 13:20–22). If his case came before God, a holy God would bear ‘witness’ to his integrity. Job placed his hope for vindication in God alone, despite his verbal attacks against Him. He could expect no help from his ‘friends’; God remained his only ‘advocate.’ Job repeated his need of and desire for an arbitrator to represent him before God. Although he longed for an audience with God (13:3) where a fair hearing would vindicate him (13:15–16), he felt inadequate to represent himself (9:2–4, 32–33). Jesus the Messiah became just such an intercessor for humanity (Isa. 2:4; 11:4; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1).”<sup>8</sup>

—Richard D. Patterson,  
*HCSB Study Bible*

<sup>1</sup> *Then Job answered and said:*

<sup>2</sup> *“I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all.*

<sup>3</sup> *Shall windy words have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer?*

<sup>4</sup> *I also could speak as you do, if you were in my place; I could join words together against you and shake my head at you.*

<sup>5</sup> *I could strengthen you with my mouth, and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.*

.....  
<sup>18</sup> *“O earth, cover not my blood, and let my cry find no resting place.*

<sup>19</sup> *Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high.*

<sup>20</sup> *My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God,*

<sup>21</sup> *that he would argue the case of a man with God, as a son of man does with his neighbor.*

<sup>22</sup> *For when a few years have come I shall go the way from which I shall not return.*



Not all advice is sound advice. While there may even be a grain of truth in unwise counsel, when we are suffering, we need more than grains of truth, and we don’t have the time to dig for nuggets of veiled wisdom. We need words that sink deep into our hearts and offer comfort and solace in our time of need (v. 5).

This story shows us how vital good friendships are to our lives. We need to suffer in community. We need good friends to surround us during our suffering, not like the miserable comforters who came to Job. We need friends who will carry the load with us and walk with us through the storms we are weathering.

❓ What are some overused clichés or phrases that Christians tend to use during times of suffering?

❓ Why should we avoid being quick to give easy answers?



The Book of Proverbs shows us over and over again the importance of good friendships.

- “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17).
- “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment” (Prov. 18:1).
- “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).
- “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Prov. 27:6).
- “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).

In order to have these kinds of friends, we must do two things, and we get clues from Job. First, we need to *be* these kinds of friends. Job said he would do the opposite of his friends. He would actually try to help (Job 16:5). We must model true friendship if we are going to have true friends. Many of us have consumer friendships. We take from our friends but do not give back. You must be a friend to have friends.

The second thing we must do to have good friendships is look to the true Friend. Job said he wished “that [his witness in heaven] would argue the case of a man with God, as a son of man does with his neighbor” (v. 21). If Job only knew then what we know now! We know there is One who stands between God and man and pleads for us as a man pleads for his friends. Jesus Christ is that man; He is that friend. He said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus is the true friend who stands between us and God and lays His life down for us. We need Him.

 What are some ways your friends have encouraged you during your suffering?

### 3. God responds to Job and his friends (Job 40:1-5; 42:7-9).

When we suffer, we ask many questions. We ask ourselves: *Why me? What is God doing right now? What did I do to cause this? Why does suffering come to those who love God? How could a loving God allow this to happen?* These are legitimate questions. They need good and thoughtful answers.

But what we learn from Job—who asked lots of questions—is that what we need most in times of suffering is God. We need His presence and His voice and His nearness when we are suffering. The greatest thing God can give us when we suffer is more of Himself. Listen to what the Lord said to Job:



#### Voices from Church History

“Never fear to go to God, since we have such a Mediator with him, who is not only our friend but our brother and husband.”<sup>9</sup>

—Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)



#### Voices from the Church

“God’s work of change has relationships at the core. They are a necessary means and a wonderful goal. Humble community is not the icing on the cake of the Christian life. In a real way, it is the cake.”<sup>10</sup>

—Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp

## Further Commentary

“Only when the issue with Job is settled does God turn to the friends. Although they are condemned, God does not deal with them according to their folly. Job is clearly pronounced to have had the better of the debate (v. 7). We have rested a great deal of our interpretation on this result. Job’s vindication over against them is made public. Their roles are reversed! In the course of their speeches, not one of them even hinted that they, not Job, might be the object of God’s ‘wrath’ (v. 7) and in need of his grace. Now they discover (it is a delightful irony) that unless they can secure the patronage of Job (the very one they had treated as in such need of their spiritual resources), they might not escape the divine displeasure. The effective prayer of a righteous man to turn away God’s anger from the wicked (cf. Gen. 18) adds another meaning to Job’s suffering that no-one had thought of.”<sup>11</sup>

—Francis I. Andersen

## Voices from the Church

“[God] really believes that He is the most worthy, most majestic, magnificent, glorious, stunningly beautiful being in the universe...that to Him alone belong honor, glory, and praise forever and forever...He is out of control—ours, not His.”<sup>12</sup>

—Timothy Stoner

<sup>1</sup> *And the LORD said to Job:*

<sup>2</sup> *“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.”*

<sup>3</sup> *Then Job answered the LORD and said:*

<sup>4</sup> *“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.*

<sup>5</sup> *I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.”*

.....  
<sup>42:7</sup> *After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”<sup>8</sup> Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”<sup>9</sup> So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer.*

What a wonderful ending to Job’s story! Job received an even grander vision of God’s power and goodness through his suffering. He was reminded that no one can put God in the dock and bring accusations against Him. Job saw just how small he was in comparison to the vastness of God’s glory. What’s more, Job saw an even deeper level of God’s goodness. The Lord accepted his prayer on behalf of his friends and removed His anger from them.



Why might a greater understanding of the power and character of God be what all of us in pain really need?

We learn two important truths about God from Job in regard to suffering and trials:

### **God is God and we are not.**

Suffering, if nothing else, reminds us that we are not God. It reminds us that our lives are not in our control. David said, “My times are in your hand” (Ps. 31:15). God is the One who directs our paths and determines our days. In our Western, consumerist society, we are accustomed to planning our own way most of the time, but often the Lord brings things into our lives that remind us that He is God and we are not. Job understood this well.

### God comes near in our suffering.

God revealed Himself to Job, as far as we know, in ways unlike before. God answered Job. God heard his prayer. God made Himself known to Job.

Of course, God always does this, but there is something about God's nearness and presence in our suffering that seems unique. Peter said something like this to those who were suffering under persecution: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet. 4:14). Something about the suffering they endured made them more aware of God's Spirit and glory resting on them. God pursues us when we are suffering. He makes known to His children that He is near and that He is good.

Many of us have heard stories of people who have endured intense seasons of loss and pain but said they've never experienced God the way they did as when they were suffering. Our God is not distant and aloof when His children are suffering.

Our God comes close to us. The greatest example of this is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through Jesus, God came close to us and entered into our suffering. He did not deal with us the way our folly deserves. He gave His own Son who suffered for us, in our place. His suffering reminds us that we never suffer alone and that one day He will put an end to all suffering. This is our great hope, and this is our great message to the world.

- ❓ In what ways have you been reminded that God is God and you are not?
- ❓ How has God come near to you during your suffering?

## Conclusion

Job's journey is both difficult and beautiful. It is difficult because we see just how deeply he suffered and what he endured. Even though many of us will never go through what Job did, we shouldn't minimize our own pain and trauma when trials come our way. But Job's story is also beautiful. The way God came to his aid, revealed Himself, and eventually restored Job gives us hope and courage. We are reminded that God will not leave us or forsake us. He will even give us His own Son to remind us He wants the best for His people.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** In his time of suffering, Job yearned for a mediator—someone to stand between him and God. Jesus is the mediator who suffered, even though He had never sinned, in order to pay the price for human sin and to put an end to suffering on earth.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 31. *The Problem of Evil*

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and knows everything, then evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a "good" moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and second, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God's character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).