

OUR STORY

GOD'S WORK. OUR HOPE.

Chronological Readings

January



NORTH FORT WORTH
BAPTIST CHURCH

PRACTICAL APPROACH TO OUR DAILY READINGS

Commit to a consistent time and place (allow 15-20 minutes).

Read each day's passage prayerfully. Don't ask the question, "What does today's reading mean to me?" Read each day, asking, "What truth is God revealing?" Focus especially upon:

What does the reading reveal about God?

What does the reading reveal about humanity (about me)?

What does the reading reveal about what is "relationally" appropriate or inappropriate toward God? God isn't supplying us with a list of rules to follow. He's inviting us to relate to Him as God so we might walk with Him by faith.

What does the reading reveal about God's unfolding work of salvation?

Underline what stands out. We want to remember key ideas or verses.

Prayerfully identify one promise, insight, or action to carry with you into the day, and then commit it to the Lord in prayer.

Read each day's devotion for further perspective.

Keep in mind—the goal is NOT to read the Bible thru. The DAILY COMMITMENT is to draw near to God by faith and to experience the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

ENLIST A PERSON OR GROUP TO JOIN YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Agree to hold one another accountable.

Touch base consistently about your readings.

Exchange daily texts, emails, or social media posts to highlight the promise, insight, or action you seek to carry into the day.

Talk weekly or every other week by phone or in person. Discuss specific lessons or questions that especially stand out.

Adopt an approach that works best for you—consistency is the key.

Pray for one another by name for spiritual understanding and growth.

Encourage one another to press through the ups and downs of the journey.

January 1

Genesis 1:1-3:24

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

God created a beautiful and complex world that was visibly good by the power and authority of His spoken word. It was as God intended. He spoke, and then it happened. Humanity, however, was a more personal endeavor. As Genesis describes,

“The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.” (Genesis 2:7)

God desired humanity to reflect something more than His creative genius. God created humanity, male and female, to reflect His very image (Genesis 1:27). He designed Adam and Eve with the capacity to think, reason, feel, and love. He fashioned them so that goodness would be more than a descriptive word but the very character of their lives.

What went wrong? We went wrong. Created to reflect God’s image, Adam and Eve refused to trust the One who fashioned them. They chose to question the Creator’s wisdom and turned away. Their doubt led to disobedience, and their descendants have been forced to deal with the consequences. I don’t point the finger of blame in their direction because I see the same doubt and distrust within me. Their story is my story. It is our story.

Thankfully, God has not abandoned humanity to their sins. He seeks us (like Adam and Eve) when we are hiding. He provides what we do not deserve. And God ultimately supplies what is desperately needed. He works to restore what our sinful rebellion has marred. Of course, that’s getting ahead of the story. May God help us in our daily readings to better understand who God is, who we are, and His unfolding work of salvation on our behalf. Thankfully, there is hope for the sinful, and I pray we learn to experience His hope more fully in the year ahead. Join us for this journey. Let’s discover the hope that Jesus makes possible.

January 2 Genesis 4:1-6:22

Now Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the LORD’s help, I have produced a man!” Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel. (Genesis 4:1-2)

What do we learn about humanity in today’s readings? It further reveals both good and bad. The bad is particularly disturbing—a brother takes the life of his sibling (Genesis 4:8). Then, later, practically all humanity reflects the same disregard for life and all things sacred. I wonder how our generation compares with the wickedness and evil that characterized Noah’s day.

Amid the immorality and moral darkness, two flickers of light appear. The first is Enoch, who walked closely with God for 300 years. Think about that. His faithful relationship with God extends for three centuries. Can we imagine such a life? We’re informed that Enoch’s life was so pleasing to the Lord that Enoch did not experience death (Genesis 5:23-24). At the age of 365, God receives him unto Himself. Enoch’s example reveals that walking faithfully with the LORD is possible, even during morally dark and challenging days. And how does someone walk with God for 300 years? The answer is right before us—one day at a time. Like Enoch, we choose daily to respond to God in faith and allow Him to influence our lives for the better.

The second notable light from today’s reading is Enoch’s great-grandson, Noah. He, too, displays faith and righteousness in a way that moves God to act on his behalf. Noah refuses to give in to the evil influences surrounding him. He chooses (like his great-grandfather before him) to walk with God, which produces an outpouring of God’s grace. We will read more about Noah’s journey tomorrow, but for now, let’s be encouraged by Noah and Enoch’s examples.

Will our lives be distinguished from the moral decline around us? Will it be said of us today, “These individuals chose to walk with God”? I pray the answer is “yes.” And may one day lead to the next and the next—so that the testimony of the coming weeks and months will be as consistent as Enoch’s. May it be so!

January 3

Genesis 7:1-10:32; 1 Chronicles 1:5-23

When everything was ready, the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous.” (Genesis 7:1)

Today’s reading sobers me. We must be careful not to allow the account of Noah and the ark to become a children’s story. It’s easy to focus on the novelty of a floating zoo and lose sight of what is happening outside the safety of the ark—God is judging sinful humanity. We live in a day when many pretend our actions have no consequences. We can do as we wish, and it does not matter. Today’s passage warns us that this is not true. Judgment for sin is real. Jesus points to the flood as a warning of God’s coming judgment.

I don’t highlight this to depress us but direct us to Jesus. Jesus bore sin’s condemnation upon the cross so we might escape the judgment we deserve. In a sense, He is the spiritual ark that delivers us from the horror and suffering that will characterize God’s future judgment. Jesus offers sinners (like me) hope for the future.

Let’s not focus on the pairs of animals entering the ark. Let’s reflect upon the families of people who realize too late that there is no escape from the rising waters. May such a consideration cause us to renew our focus upon Jesus as our Savior and call for others to do the same. Consider Jesus’ words,

“When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day. In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes. Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left. So you, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know what day your Lord is coming.” (Matthew 24:37–42)

The time to trust in Jesus is now. The Bible declares, *“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.” (Romans 10:9–10)* Are we and those we know prepared?

January 4

Genesis 11:1-14:24; 1 Chronicles 1:24-27

Come, let's build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world. (Genesis 11:4)

Are you surprised that the fresh start with Noah and his descendants fails to alter the sinful trajectory of humanity? Pride and the selfishness that ensues continue to raise their ugly head. Personally, it's disappointing to see. I suppose we should not be too shocked by similar manifestations today. The inherent problem of sin persists.

Thankfully, a glimmer of hope again remains. God initiates a relationship with an aging man named Abram (Genesis 12:1-3). Interestingly, God calls for Abram to follow Him at 75. He asks a man (well along in years) to leave all he knows and follow Him to a place God would not define in advance. Here's a probing question: Would we have followed God's lead? Would we leave behind the comforts and familiarity of home to follow the LORD? There is something commendable about Abram's response.

Of course, Abram has his share of weaknesses and fears (Genesis 12:10-20). His faith journey would be a growing experience with both success and failure. We should take heart in knowing that the so-called "father of faith" was as flawed as we are. However, what distinguishes Abram is his deepening trust in the LORD, which would lead him consistently forward.

Yes. Today's reading contrasts a morally confused world with someone willing to follow God's lead. I pray we might be encouraged by Abram's example and choose to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world surrounding us. Will we commit to doing so?

January 5 Genesis 15:1-17:27

*And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.
(Genesis 15:6)*

We continue to focus on Abram's faith experience. At a time when Abram and his wife (Sarai) are beyond the typical age of having children, God promises his servant that they will have more descendants than he could ever imagine. God compares his future descendants to the starry heavens above (Genesis 15:5). How is that possible? Could we accept such a promise as true? Let's be honest. God's promises concerning Jesus, His Son, may also seem beyond the scope of possibility. Think about it. God promises forgiveness for ALL our sins. He promises the opportunity to approach God as Father and even extends the assurance of life after death. Can we accept these promises are true? To Abram's credit, he believed the Lord (Genesis 15:6).

Abram's faith, however, is a work in progress. Believing in God's promise, Abram also tries to help God out. Maybe he adopted the approach, "God helps those who help themselves." This approach (by the way) is NOT what God had in mind for Abram and NOT what He has for you. Abram's attempt to fulfill God's promise outside His will produces complications beyond his lifetime. Believing in God's promise requires trusting in God's timing and plan. Abram slowly learns this crucial lesson. Will we accept the same? I smile at God's humor as the LORD instructs Abram to name their promised child Isaac, which means laughter. Abram will eventually see things as God sees them. Will we?

It's also worth noting that Abram and Sarai experienced a name change in the process (Abraham and Sarah). Perhaps the name change is a reminder to take God at His Word. Whenever they hear their new names, they can say to themselves, "Trust the Lord." How about us? I'm not suggesting that we change our names, but do we need helpful reminders that cultivate and strengthen our faith? Think about it. The main thing is to keep moving toward the LORD's way of seeing things. Let's renew our commitment for the day ahead and trust the Lord.

January 6 Genesis 18:1-21:7

So the LORD told Abraham, "I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know." (Genesis 18:20-2)

Today, we are introduced to another example of God's judgment against sin. It's worth highlighting that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great in the eyes of God. Their sinful behavior rose to a level that demanded a response. What do you think the outcry against our nation might be today? More than 61 million babies have been aborted since 1973. Add to that the widespread rejection of God's wisdom concerning human sexuality and sexual behavior. And further, many increasingly reject the idea of objective truth and disparage the notion of God Himself. Again, I ask, "Is there an outcry against us?"

My intention is not to depress us but to provoke us to think and, even more, to move us to intercede. Abraham's example challenges me. His plea on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah should guide our actions (Genesis 18:20-33). Abraham likely believes that he has succeeded in averting God's judgment. He presumes that his nephew's presence would have positively influenced at least ten people. Wrong! Lot fails to sway his future sons-in-law to flee an imminent judgment, much less move people in God's direction. Abraham must have been stunned to see the rising plumes of smoke rising from the once fruitful plains.

Let's not allow Lot's ineffectiveness to discourage our course of action. First, let's intensify our efforts to influence those we love. Ask God to work through both your words and actions. Pray for God to open the eyes and hearts of those we seek to influence for the better. A future judgment is coming, and we are God's "angels" to lead those in jeopardy to safety through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The primary meaning of the biblical term "angel" is that of "messenger." It is the role that each of us should play—must play.

Second, may we also commit ourselves to becoming active intercessors like Abraham. Let's pray on behalf of our nation. Pray for mercy. Pray for the Church to be a spiritually effective source of light and truth. Pray specifically for our city. Come on! Let's take today's biblical account to heart and renew our commitment to prayer. Will you join me?

January 7 Genesis 21:8-24:67

Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means “the LORD will provide”). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” (Genesis 22:14)

“The Lord will provide.” I cannot imagine Abraham’s emotions when God asks him to do the unimaginable—to sacrifice his beloved son. How could God ask him to do this? The fulfillment of God’s future promise rests upon the well-being of Isaac, his son. Why must Abraham offer Isaac as a sacrifice? Maybe we struggle with God’s request as well. Is God heartless or cruel?

“The Lord will provide.” We benefit from a perspective that is not afforded to Abraham. We should know that a day will come when God Himself will offer His Son, His only Son, as a sacrifice for our sins. It is worth emphasizing that God leads Abraham to a particular mountain to erect the altar (Genesis 22:2, 9). The place in question is Mount Moriah, which would later be near the site of the Jerusalem temple (2 Chronicles 3:1). Is this coincidental? I think not. Abraham’s altar may have been where a future altar would also be erected—the site where Jesus would be crucified and die.

“The Lord will provide.” Abraham submits to God’s request because he trusts in God’s provision. Whether God would raise his son from the dead (Hebrews 11:19) or provide another way, Abraham trusts in the Lord. And God demonstrates that Abraham’s faith is not misguided.

“The Lord will provide.” What about us? Is this our perspective toward the Lord? I have already noted the future element of Abraham’s actions. Ultimately, God will sacrifice His Son, His only Son, on our behalf. There would be no last-minute substitution because Jesus would become our substitute. As the Apostle Paul will later describe, *“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 5:21)

May we never lose sight of the significance of Jesus’ actions on our behalf. May we marvel at God’s love for us and confess, “The Lord HAS provided.” Indeed, He has. May our hearts and our faith be strengthened as we enter the day.

January 8

Genesis 25:1-26; 1 Chronicles 1:28-34

And he died at a ripe old age, having lived a long and satisfying life. (Genesis 25:8)

The report of Abraham's death is short and to the point. He died at the ripe age of 175, which means he walked with God for 100 years. Abraham was 75 when he left the comforts of home to follow God's lead (Genesis 12:4), and for ten decades, his faith and understanding would deepen and grow.

The so-called friend of God (James 2:23) would experience both victory and defeat. At times, his heart would soar. There would also be episodes of great disappointment and loss. It may help to realize that this characterizes everyone's life of faith. No person of faith is promised a life without hardship. No child of faith walks without stumbling. What, then, does faith supply? It enables us to experience God's help, wisdom, and provision as we actively follow His lead.

Our faith journey should also lead us toward a "satisfying life." My heart is encouraged by this summary description of Abraham's experience. Even with his ups and downs, his heart and life were full. I would stress that this is not a result of his achievements or wealth. It is a testimony to Abraham's life of faith and his active journey with God. God is the One who satisfies the deep longings of the heart. God is the One who moves us toward a life worth living.

Let's not lose sight of Abraham as "our story" continues. May we learn from his example and choose to follow God's lead. Let's renew our faith in the Lord (whether we find ourselves at a high point or low) and anticipate a satisfaction only God can supply. Remember Jesus' words to His disciples,

"I am the gate. Those who come in through Me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." (John 10:9-10)

May it also be said of us, "Because they followed Jesus, they lived satisfying lives." O Lord, let it be so!

January 9 Genesis 25:27-28:5

From there Isaac moved to Beersheba, where the LORD appeared to him on the night of his arrival. "I am the God of your father, Abraham," He said. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you. I will multiply your descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will do this because of My promise to Abraham, My servant." Then Isaac built an altar there and worshiped the LORD. (Genesis 26:23–25)

Our reading today highlights a case of sibling rivalry, unhealthy parental preference, and increasing family strife. Yet God remains faithful to His promise. Perhaps we read of the developing dysfunction within Isaac's family and wonder, "How does God work through all of this?" The family is far from the people you expect to impact the world for the better. Nevertheless, in the middle of all the dysfunction, God reaffirms His plans to Isaac, the son of Abraham. The LORD also explains why. Look again at His pledge, *"I will multiply your descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will do this BECAUSE OF MY PROMISE to Abraham, My servant."*

Their future hope did not rest upon their collective piety or devotion. Instead, it is dependent upon God's fidelity to His promise. Their future hope is tied to their familial relationship with Abraham and God's covenant. That doesn't mean that God is indifferent to their actions. We will observe His continued efforts, in particular toward Jacob. It does, however, underscore the far-reaching power of God's promise.

I highlight all this to remind us that our future hope is likewise tied to God's promise. Our abiding confidence, however, rests upon our faith relationship with Jesus and His covenant on our behalf. We, too, are a people of the promise. That doesn't mean that our actions are somehow irrelevant. They certainly are not. Nevertheless, it should take our eyes off our collective efforts and place them more fully on God's promise and activity. Consider Jesus' words of hope,

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Let's renew our trust in the promise and be encouraged!

January 10 Genesis 28:6-30:24

At sundown, he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway. At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and He said,

“I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your Father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:11–15)

God dramatically reminds Jacob of His presence and covenant promise through a dream. God opens Jacob’s spiritual eyes to reassure his heart and influence his future actions. Perspective always influences activity.

What, then, is our perspective as Jesus’ followers? Do we view Him as distant and removed? Are we familiar with His promises on our behalf? Do we feel that we are on life’s journey alone? I remind you of Jesus’ final words to His disciples, which extend to us, *“Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)*

Let’s take heart! We are not alone as we make our way forward. God is with us, His promises are for us, and He intends to make a difference through each of our lives. Will we allow for His activity? Let’s enter the day with our spiritual eyes open to the truth. Let’s renew our confidence in the Lord despite the difficulties and uncertainties. Jacob erects a memorial stone to remind him of God’s presence and promise. Maybe we should look for personal ways to remind ourselves that God is also at work on our behalf. Perspective always influences activity. May our actions be influenced by a renewed perspective on God’s presence and work.

January 11

Genesis 30:25-31:55

Then the LORD said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your father and grandfather and to your relatives there, and I will be with you.” (Genesis 31:3)

It’s time for Jacob to return home. God’s words are direct and to the point, “Return to the land of your father and grandfather.” It has been twenty years since he traveled to Haran to find a wife. A great deal has happened over two decades. It is time for Jacob, his wives, and his children to journey home.

Jacob and the family depart secretly, failing to inform his father-in-law. He is fearful of his father-in-law Laban’s reaction. He has amassed a significant flock and wealth due to God’s activity, and he anticipates an adverse response on Laban’s part. However, Jacob fails to remember the promise accompanying God’s directive, *“I will be with you.”*

Of course, Laban’s initial reaction is not favorable, and to make matters worse, Rachel steals the household idols during their hasty exit. Even so, God is faithful to His promise. The night before Laban catches his fleeing son-in-law, God confronts Laban in a dream, *“I’m warning you—leave Jacob alone!” (Genesis 31:24)* Laban takes the warning to heart and ultimately enters into a covenant with Jacob, establishing a boundary line and assuring the family’s well-being.

And the lesson? Within today’s passage, Jacob refers to God twice as the fearsome God of Isaac (Genesis 31: 42, 53). The Hebrew phrase is literally translated as *“the fear of Isaac.”* The point is that Isaac displayed a proper understanding of who God is. He had come to view God properly and relate to Him appropriately. Perhaps Jacob, through the experience, is beginning to learn the same.

Make a mental note—to fear God is not to dread God. Instead, it is to relate to God with a healthy understanding of His power and authority. Jacob should have trusted God’s provision more than fear Laban’s reaction. Expressed another way—Jacob should have feared God more than man. Should we do the same? God is faithful both to lead and provide. Let’s renew our trust in the Lord as we, too, follow the fearsome God of Isaac.

January 12 Genesis 32:1-35:27

Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac—O LORD, You told me, ‘Return to your own land and to your relatives.’ And You promised me, ‘I will treat you kindly.’ I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness You have shown to me, Your servant.” (Genesis 32:9-10)

Jacob travels home at God’s command. He returns to the land that was promised to his father and grandfather. His homecoming, however, is accompanied by anxiety more than joy—the fear of his brother and the unknown. Jacob cries out in prayer, and the honesty of his words is revealing,

“I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness You have shown to me.”

Jacob’s confession is true. So much of his life has been characterized by less-than-commendable qualities. Marked by deceit, self-centeredness, and pride, Jacob is far from the poster child of faith and obedience, and he knows it. Even so, Jacob humbly calls to God. Though he has faltered, Jacob recognizes that God has not. He understands that his future rests upon God’s promise and testimony—not his own.

Do we understand the same? Though we seek to honor the Lord through our words and actions, let’s admit that we also falter. Like Jacob, we are grateful for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. And our confidence concerning the future is based upon God’s grace through Jesus, His Son, not our good works. The Apostle Paul expresses it beautifully when he writes,

“God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Like Jacob, we are unworthy of God’s unfailing love and faithfulness. Yet, thank the Lord, God seeks to accompany us in our journey. Let’s turn to Him again today. Let’s renew our trust in the One who makes the necessary difference—even if we feel undeserving. God is faithful. May we face the unknown expectantly with grateful hearts.

January 13

Genesis 36:1-43; 1 Chronicles 1:35-2:2

This is the account of the descendants of Esau (also known as Edom). Esau married two young women from Canaan: Adah, the daughter of Elon the Hittite; and Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite. He also married his cousin Basemath, who was the daughter of Ishmael and the sister of Nebaioth. Adah gave birth to a son named Eliphaz for Esau. Basemath gave birth to a son named Reuel. Oholibamah gave birth to sons named Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. All these sons were born to Esau in the land of Canaan. (Genesis 36:1-5)

Genealogies may not be your favorite part of our chronological Bible readings. Even so, they are helpful. They remind us of the passing of time and the impact that is made upon future generations—good and bad. It's worth noting (in the case of today's reading) that God blesses the descendants of Esau because of their distant relationship with Abraham. God's covenant with Abraham is far-reaching. Whether they fully grasped how God's covenant with Abraham impacted their lives, we can't know. The fact that they benefitted from the relationship is undeniable.

Do we recognize the impact of our lives generationally? I look back over my life and see this principle at work. The faith of my grandparents on both sides of my parents' family directly influenced my life, which has shaped my children's lives, which now affects their children's lives. God's work with one generation reaches far beyond that single generation. Granted, it doesn't assure a favorable response to God for future generations. It does put into motion a lasting influence for the better.

Instead of reading the Bible's genealogical lists with indifference, let them prompt you to think about your life backward and forward. Let's thank God for those who have impacted us favorably toward the Lord. Thank God for their testimony of faith. May we also actively pray for those who follow behind. Ask the Lord to extend a Godly influence through your words and actions. May the testimony of your life be a light that leads them to Jesus and the difference He makes.

We will view the various genealogical lists differently if we allow the many lists to prompt us to pray. Let's give it a try today!

January 14

Genesis 37:1-39:23; 1 Chronicles 2:3-6, 8

How could I do such a wicked thing?
It would be a great sin against God. (Genesis 39:9)

We focus the next few days upon Joseph, the son of Jacob. He is hated and detested by his older brothers because of the preferential treatment he receives from their father. Of course, Joseph may also have exacerbated the situation by recounting his dreams. However, none of that would be a justification for his brother's betrayal. They sell him off as a slave to a passing group of Ishmaelite traders.

So begins a challenging series of events in the life of Jacob's beloved son. Joseph will be tried and tested in ways this young man never imagined. Even so, God would work with him, through him, and noticeably for him. Perhaps we should remind ourselves that God seeks to do the same with us—if we allow it.

God's hand is upon Joseph. He rises in position and influence. Yet, he also attracts the unsolicited attention of his master's wife. She seeks to seduce Joseph again and again. Each time, Joseph rebuffs her advances. He even takes measures to avoid future interactions. Joseph models a helpful approach for our benefit. Sometimes, the best way to overcome temptation is to avoid it altogether.

That said, some temptations may prove unavoidable. Even then, Joseph refuses to succumb. What drives his determination? Simply put, "Joseph refuses to dishonor the God he trusts." In his own words, *"How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God."* Joseph views his life and actions in the light of his continuing relationship with God. Do we do the same?

Joseph's confession contrasts starkly with so many in the book of Genesis. He refuses to adopt the selfish, me-first approach that characterizes many (including his brothers). Instead, Joseph chooses a God-first mindset, even if it costs him.

Let's learn from Joseph's example. Let's look at today's decisions and actions from a "God-first" perspective. May we commit ourselves anew to resist temptation and pursue that which honors the One we trust. Will that be easy? Probably not, but it will prove the right decision as we continue to follow God's lead and discover His unfolding plan on our behalf.

January 15 Genesis 40:1-41:57

“It is beyond my power to do this,” Joseph replied. “But God can tell you what it means and set you at ease.” (Genesis 41:16)

Hardship and difficulty can affect our perspective—positively or negatively. In Joseph’s case, he gains a deeper understanding of his dependence upon the Lord. As a teenager, one might conclude that Joseph had an elevated view of himself. He was his father’s favorite, and there were also two mysterious dreams—both of which single Joseph out in an exalted way. However, thirteen years as a slave and then a prisoner will shape one’s point of view. Instead of becoming embittered, Joseph recognizes God’s ability to work despite the hardship. His faith grows, and his perception of himself becomes inseparably tied to God’s work and power.

“It is beyond my power to do this.” Joseph’s response to Pharaoh is revealing. He doesn’t pretend to be something he is not, even though it might be to his advantage. He directs the ruler’s attention to God and His capacity to make the necessary difference. Joseph portrays himself as God’s humble servant. And what results from Joseph’s humility? God elevates His servant in a way that no one could have expected. Joseph goes from being an imprisoned slave to the second most powerful ruler in the land. Joseph experiences a dramatic reversal.

That will prove to be a consistent pattern with God. He will often take the unlikely to achieve the impossible to point people ultimately to Himself. And God will especially do so whenever He finds individuals who have learned to trust and humbly depend upon Him. Joseph embodies these qualities beautifully. What about you?

Do we allow life’s hardships to refine our faith or harden our hearts? Does disappointment draw us to God or push us away? Do we acknowledge God’s ability to make a difference in ways that point others to Him? There’s much we can learn from Joseph’s example. May the Lord strengthen our hearts as we renew our trust in Him.

January 16

Genesis 42:1-45:15

Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of selling grain to all the people, it was to him that his brothers came. When they arrived, they bowed before him with their faces to the ground ... Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him. And he remembered the dreams he'd had about them many years before. (Genesis 42:6, 8-9)

It must have been surreal for Joseph. The brothers who sold him into slavery are now kneeling before him. They fail to recognize their younger brother. Why should they? They presumed Joseph had died as a result of his prolonged captivity. If not, he would be nowhere near this setting. Little did they realize that they were kneeling before the one they betrayed.

Joseph recognized them immediately, and his dream involving them came back to mind. They were binding sheaves in the field. His sheaf rose and stood upright. Their sheaves, in contrast, gathered around and bowed before his (Genesis 37:7). A dream that served to antagonize his brothers over twenty years earlier would now help to preserve them.

What was the purpose of Joseph's dreams? Were they to inflate a young man's ego or prepare a future leader for the moment before him? The answer is clear. God was preparing Joseph for the future so that he might respond appropriately. It would have been easy for Joseph to let anger and bitterness consume him. Instead, the dreams were sent by God to help prepare him for the moment. Joseph recognizes that something greater than himself is at work.

Do we need the same perspective? We may not be the recipients of prophetic dreams. However, we are the beneficiaries of God's inspired Word—much of which points to our future day. The promised picture of what will be should also influence our perspective here and now. God's future promise should affect our attitude and actions. Will we allow it to do so?

Again, it must have been surreal as Joseph's brothers knelt before him. Let's continue to reflect upon his example today and consider how God would encourage our hearts as we move toward our future together.

January 17

Genesis 45:16-47:27

Then Joseph brought in his father, Jacob, and presented him to Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. “How old are you?” Pharaoh asked him. Jacob replied, “I have traveled this earth for 130 hard years. But my life has been short compared to the lives of my ancestors.” Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh again before leaving his court. (Genesis 47:7-10)

Jacob and the extended family have relocated to Goshen. Pharaoh provided fertile land for Jacob and his descendants to raise their families and maintain their flocks. God is meeting the needs of His people despite the drought and famine.

Joseph presents his beloved father to Pharaoh, and something noteworthy occurs. The sojourner Jacob blesses the ruler of Egypt—not once, but twice. The truth is that God had already blessed Pharaoh by warning him of the coming famine and providing Joseph to supervise the nation’s survival. Jacob now extends God’s blessing in a personal, tangible way. Jacob becomes an instrument of God’s grace to a ruler and people outside the covenant.

Jacob’s conversation with Pharaoh reveals something further. When asked about his age, Jacob grants us a perspective about his life that may be instructive. Jacob indicates that he has traveled this earth for 130 “hard” years. It contrasts with his grandfather, Abraham, who died at a ripe old age (175), having lived a long and “satisfying” life (Genesis 25:7-8). What made the difference?

Though neither of the patriarchs is perfect, Jacob made his journey harder than needed. His early actions contributed to the difficulty, and his testimony to Pharaoh suggests that Jacob knew it. May we understand the same. We should recognize the lasting impact of our good and bad choices. Our faith in God can protect us from so much difficulty if we trust the Lord enough to follow Him. Jacob learns the lesson the hard way.

That said, Jacob’s life appears to end well. God blesses Jacob with 17 prosperous years surrounded by those who love him. Let’s take heart. Even if we make life more complicated than needed, God still works to bring goodness into our lives if we seek Him. May the Lord help us to do so.

January 18 Genesis 47:28-50:26

But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.” (Genesis 50:19–20)

Jacob’s death causes an understandable fear among Joseph’s older brothers. They believe Joseph is merely biding his time to open a floodgate of pent-up anger and bitterness. For 17 years, they live with a foreboding fear and dread.

Joseph’s heart breaks as he becomes aware of his brothers’ misguided thinking. They allowed their feelings of guilt to close their eyes to Joseph’s sincere effort to forgive and restore. Joseph wishes them no harm. God is the arbiter of justice and vengeance. For that matter, Joseph discovers that God can take the ill intentions of others and produce something beneficial and good. Have we learned the same?

Joseph’s testimony should instruct our hearts. We can allow life’s hurts to mar and embitter us, or we can open our eyes to God’s transformative grace. God can reach down into the ugliness of life and produce that which is beautiful and noble. How did the Apostle Paul express it?

“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.” (Romans 8:28)

If you doubt this, think about Jesus’ death upon the cross. The hope of salvation dawns from the horror and darkness of the cross.

Let’s reflect upon this as we move into today. May God enable us to look at our hurts and difficulties differently. May we yield ourselves to God’s transformative work of grace so we might discover the far-reaching good the Lord can achieve

January 19 Job 1:1-4:21

*Should we accept only good things from the hand of God
and never anything bad? (Job 2:10)*

Today, we begin reflecting upon the well-known story of Job. Who hasn't heard of Job's misery and suffering? People unfamiliar with the Bible are familiar with his legendary patience, which raises the question, "Is it patience that Job displays?" Let's ask the Lord to open our eyes to the truth of this often-told story. What will Job's experience teach us about life? What does it reveal about God and Job's accuser? What are practical applications that we should carry with us? I pray that God will provide the appropriate insight.

To start with, let's remind ourselves of Job's exemplary character. He is a man God Himself commends to a heavenly audience (Job 1:8; 2:3). His suffering is not the result of wrongful behavior on Job's part. Instead, Job's suffering serves as a spiritual test. The critical question is whether Job does what he does because of the good things he enjoys. Or is Job's conduct a true reflection of his abiding faith in God?

The opening two chapters indicate the latter. Job refuses to denounce God or deny his faith despite his unimaginable losses. Even so, he finds himself conflicted and confused. Job struggles to make sense of what has happened. He even wishes that he had never been born. Can we identify with Job's confusion? Why bad things happen to good people continues to perplex many today.

So, how do we respond to life's unexpected losses? What are our expectations of God? Job asks, "*Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad? (Job 2:10)*" And our response? Once more, let's pray for God's wisdom as we begin this journey together. May the Lord encourage us as we wrestle with the difficult questions surrounding suffering and our attitude toward God. Will we trust the Lord through our suffering or point the finger of blame? That's not an easy question. And the answer has far-reaching ramifications. May God grant us the simple, humble faith of Job as he confesses, "*I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!*" (Job 1:21)

May God become our teacher as our readings continue!

January 20

Job 5:1-7:21

Look at me! Would I lie to your face? Stop assuming my guilt, for I have done no wrong. Do you think I am lying? Don't I know the difference between right and wrong? (Job 6:28-30)

Job has suffered immeasurable loss of resources, family, and health. His initial response is to confess his faith in God, but confusion descends as his misery persists. The arrival of Job's friends offers little comfort or support. Eliphaz's assessment is quick and to the point, *"I have seen that fools may be successful for the moment, but then comes sudden disaster."* (Job 5:3) In other words, "Repent Job! Plead for God's forgiveness so that the suffering may end."

A call for repentance appears to be a reasonable course of action, but Eliphaz is blatantly wrong. The present circumstances are not a sign of God's discipline or displeasure. God's testimony concerning Job is that *"he's the finest man in all the earth."* (Job 1:8, NLT) What then went wrong? This question will be the driving issue throughout the book. Why does a "good" person suffer in this way?

His friend's indictment compounds Job's pain and adds to his confusion. Job appeals to God, *"If I have sinned, what have I done to You, O watcher of humanity? Why make me a target?"* (Job 7:20) Job's cry to understand is heartfelt. He then adds, *"Why not just forgive my sin and take away my guilt? For soon I will lie down in the dust and die. When you look for me, I will be gone."* (Job 7:21)

Do you hear Job's desperation? Can you identify with his confusion? How often have you been disturbed or heartbroken by a situation but unable to make sense of it? Do we allow our hurt and confusion to push us away from God? Do we begin to doubt God and His intentions? These are relevant questions. You may even find yourself in that state of mind today. If so, express your confusion and emotions honestly. Don't step away from God, but let's step toward Him.

Will we find all the answers that we seek? Probably not. Can we discover a better understanding of God and His willingness to help? Absolutely. Let's continue our journey with Job and allow God to strengthen our hearts as we wrestle with our problems and even ourselves. Life can be admittedly challenging, but God is not against us. Let's draw near to God today and seek His help as honestly as we can.

January 21 Job 8:1-11:20

Your children must have sinned against Him, so their punishment was well deserved. But if you pray to God and seek the favor of the Almighty, and if you are pure and live with integrity, He will surely rise up and restore your happy home. (Job 8:4-6)

Grief and loss are emotionally debilitating. Add to that the disorientation caused by physical pain and suffering, and Job is in a terrible state. He's mourning the death of his ten children and might have expected sympathy from his friends. None would be extended.

Bildad and Zophar speak bluntly to Job, presumptuously. Bildad blames Job's children for their disaster. From his perspective, they brought their deaths upon themselves. Zophar targets Job. He accuses the grieving father of being self-deceived and spiritually dimwitted. *"An empty-headed person won't become wise,"* Zophar asserts, *"any more than a wild donkey can bear a human child."* (Job 11:12) His words lack the compassion you would expect from a friend.

Set the "why" behind Job's situation aside. Let's learn, instead, about WHAT NOT TO DO as we respond to the suffering of others. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar seem more interested in condemning a perceived sinner than extending comfort and support to a friend. The truth is that they were the most helpful when they sat silently with Job. As soon as they open their mouths, they add to Job's sorrow instead of relieving it. They seem more interested in making statements based on inaccurate information than supporting a man in his loss.

Let's then conclude today with that as our focus. How can we comfort those we see grieving and confused? Though they may raise questions, they're not looking for answers. They need someone to identify with their pain and sympathize with their loss. Granted, sometimes we don't know what to say following a tragedy or a death. Even so, avoid sermonizing and try to be a sympathetic friend. A loving embrace will go much further to help a grieving heart than empty clichés or lofty platitudes. Become a friend whose presence and listening ear become the means of God's comfort and support. Job would have benefitted from such a friend in his loss. May God help us become that kind of friend to others.

January 22

Job 12:1-14:22

True wisdom and power are found in God;
counsel and understanding are His. (Job 12:13)

Job makes a statement about God that is very much true. True wisdom, power, counsel, and understanding are absolutely the Lord's, and we are wise to affirm this. Yet, it is one thing to confess the truth, and it is something else to embrace it.

In Job's defense, he suffers in ways that I can't imagine. I don't pretend to share Job's perspective and wouldn't offer him advice—much less condemnation. Knowing myself as I do, I would likely grimace with him in pain and try not to glance at his oozing wounds.

Job's disorientation can also be instructive. He knows the truth, but Job's current situation appears to prevent him from accepting the truth. How so? If God possesses all wisdom, power, counsel, and understanding, shouldn't Job then trust the Lord in the present situation?

Job's problem is a misguided presumption. He presumes that the all-knowing, all-powerful God would never allow a good person like him to suffer in this way. Job also supposes that he sees the whole situation for what it is. Neither of these is accurate, and Job's lack of understanding erodes his confidence in God and his knowledge of Him.

Do we fall into the same trap? How often do we know the truth intellectually but (for whatever reason) fail to embrace the truth inwardly? Once again, I give Job a great deal of leeway in light of the situation. His perception is obscured by the enormity of his suffering and loss. And what of us? Let's be careful not to allow the circumstances to undermine our perception of God. Instead, let our understanding of God's wisdom and power determine our perception of the circumstances. We see the world around us through the truth of who He is, not vice versa. Let's trust the Lord's wisdom, power, counsel, and understanding for the day ahead—even if it turns out badly.

January 23 Job 15:1-18:21

Terrors surround the wicked and trouble them at every step. (Job 18:11)

“Wicked, wicked, wicked Job, you are a wicked man!” That’s how I summarize Bildad’s second response to Job. Go back and look at the number of ways Bildad describes a wicked person’s demise. It’s not a pretty picture, and he’s pointing the finger of blame and responsibility at Job. It might be said, “With friends like these, who needs enemies?”

Keep this in mind. Bildad’s indictment follows Job’s most recent attempt to assert his innocence. Job tries to plead his position, even asking God to stand up on his behalf (Job 17:3). All this is to no avail. The judgment and condemnation of his friends persist. Three voices against one take an inevitable toll. Job cries out in despair, *“My days are over. My hopes have disappeared. My heart’s desires are broken.”* (Job 17:11) Job’s emotions plummet helplessly.

Job’s outburst brings us back to an earlier consideration. Do we hear the cries of those who are hurting? Do we respond to those in need? The recent pandemic has caused a tidal wave of fear and depression. So many are being swept away by the circumstances, isolated and confused. If that’s not enough, verbal attacks have characterized the past few years more than compassion or love. Too many have chosen to wag a finger of indictment instead of extending a helping hand. They are more interested in directing blame than showing compassion or concern. Something has to change for the better, and (with God’s help) that change can start with us. We have enough Bildads on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Let’s adopt a better approach. Think about someone that you know who is discouraged or downhearted. Pray for the person even now by name. Our prayers are effectual. But let’s do more than pray. Let’s also look for an opportunity to listen for a while and, even more, to offer a shoulder to lean on. We may not be able to eliminate their present difficulties, but we can become a source of light in the darkness—a light that reminds them that they are not alone. We can become friends who help, not so-called friends who blame or condemn. Do you think such a friend would have been a blessing to Job? Let’s be that kind of friend to someone today.

January 24 Job 19:1-21:34

But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and He will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see Him for myself. Yes, I will see Him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought! (Job 19:25-27)

Job's mind and emotions are jumbled. The accusations of his so-called friends haunt him. He's also confounded by his inability to make sense of the situation. Job struggles within. Even so, he fixes his heart upon a singular truth: "I know that my Redeemer lives." Despite Job's confusion, he remains convinced that God will ultimately be his deliverer. Though disturbed and unsettled, Job's hope remains in God—even through death.

His testimony should serve as an example and encouragement. We, too, may find ourselves disoriented and emotionally worn. At such moments, we should focus on the stabilizing truth of our Redeemer. Some interpreters see Job's confession as prophetically pointing to Jesus. What Job understood only in part, we can know profoundly. Jesus, our Redeemer, has made Himself known and can be known. Though, like Job, we may find ourselves confused by life. Let's not be confused about our future hope. Our future hope is Jesus.

Jessie Pounds Brown expressed this hope over a century ago in her uplifting hymn, "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth." May her words be a further encouragement as we move into the day.

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and on the earth again shall stand;
I know eternal life He giveth, that grace and power are in His hand.

I know His promise never faileth, the word He speaks, it cannot die;
Tho' cruel death my flesh assaileth, yet I shall see Him by and by.

I know my mansion He prepareth, that where He is, there I may be;
O wondrous tho't, for me He careth, and He at last will come for me.

I know, I know that Jesus liveth, and on the earth again shall stand;
I know, I know that life He giveth, that grace and power are in His hand.

Is this our confession as well? May God strengthen our faith as we gaze intently on Jesus, our Redeemer!

January 25 Job 22:1-25:6

God has made me sick at heart; the Almighty has terrified me. Darkness is all around me; thick, impenetrable darkness is everywhere. (Job 23:16–17)

Job is experiencing an emotional and spiritual freefall. Though he tries to grab any element of truth that might slow his descent, his so-called friends do all they can to accelerate his downward spiral. Eliphaz rails, *“Is it because you are so pious that He (God) accuses you and brings judgment against you? No, it is because of your wickedness! There’s no limit to your sins.” (Job 22:4-5)*

The irony is this: Job presently suffers because he is pious and righteous. God is not displeased with His servant, but everyone (Job included) misconstrues the situation. Job blames God, the friends blame Job, and everyone is misguided and wrong. And the result? Job plummets all the more into mental and emotional darkness.

What do we learn from all of this? The most devoted of souls can find themselves in the darkest of places. Our faith in God may not prevent us from an emotional freefall. Let’s be honest. The right combination of suffering, disappointment, and criticism can leave anyone bewildered and unsure. It can push us over the emotional ledge, and then what?

Be patient with yourself. We may all experience what St. John of the Cross describes as “the dark night of the soul.” We feel detached from God, discouraged, and unsure of our situation. Like Job, everywhere we turn to find God or experience His help may appear unsuccessful. Even so, don’t lose heart. More is at work than meets the eye. Don’t reach conclusions about the situation prematurely. Admit your confusion, acknowledge the darkness, and (as honestly as you know how) embrace the silence. God is still at work. I do not pretend this is easy but don’t panic in the darkness. Your story is still being written, and God is not yet done.

May God help us take this to heart. I pray that we do!

January 26

Job 26:1-29:25

I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days. (Job 27:6)

Job's final speech to his detractors again defends his honor. He's lost his family, his resources, and his health. The only thing that remains is his good name. Though Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have done everything they can to criticize and accuse their so-called friend, Job will not relent. *"I will never concede that you are right,"* he asserts. *"I will defend my integrity until I die."* (Job 27:5)

And that Job most certainly will do. Though Job's suffering would cause him to question God's actions, of his own actions, Job is assured (Job 27:6). His devotion to God would withstand scrutiny. Can I assert the same? Can you?

Job's claim, however, is not egotistical nor delusional. Job (as honestly as he knew how) lived according to God's wisdom. Succinctly stated, *"The fear of the Lord is true wisdom,"* Job declares. He then adds, *"To forsake evil is real understanding."* (Job 28:28) To the best of his ability, Job lived this out. *"Everything I did was honest,"* Job testified. *"Righteousness covered me like a robe, and I wore justice like a turban."* (Job 29:14)

I mention this to influence our perspective further. Job is a righteous, honorable man who endured unimaginable hardship. It is clear from Job's experience that bad things happen to good people—sometimes horrible things happen to very good people. We would be wise to let that sink in. If we fail to grasp this lesson, we will miss a crucial element of Job's message—bad things happen to the best of us.

Interestingly, the book of Job doesn't explain why that is. Job's "why me" questions go essentially unanswered. Instead, the book informs us that suffering can come unexpectedly and often appear undeserved. Will we take this lesson to heart? Will we view our losses and disappointments differently?

Of course, there is still more to Job's story, but let's allow today's consideration to influence our perspective into the day ahead.

January 27

Job 30:1-31:40

Job's words are ended. (Job 31:40)

You may have wondered when the back and forth between Job and his friends would end. Around and around they go, each arguing his point of view. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar denounce Job as a sinner. Job, in self-defense, pleads for his innocence. He even offers a moral checklist to prove his righteousness.

Sexually pure (Job 31:1, 9-12)—CHECKMARK!

Honest toward others (Job 31:5-6)—CHECKMARK!

Fair toward his servants (Job 31:13-15, 31-32)—CHECKMARK!

Generous to the poor and helpless (Job 31:16-23)—CHECKMARK!

Trusts in God, not money (Job 31:24-25)—CHECKMARK!

And the list goes on. The character of Job's life is consistent with God's earlier commendation (Job 1:9). But why the thorough self-evaluation? The truth is: Job can't make sense of his plight. The more he mulls it over, the more confused and discouraged Job becomes. He finally reaches the end of his argument, and perhaps the end of himself, and Job stops talking.

There's a lesson here. It's worth noting that God speaks up when Job is finally ready to listen. As long as Job persists in arguing his case, he will be unable to hear God's perspective. His friends were no help. Their constant attacks kept Job in a defensive posture. However, things are finally winding down.

It's funny. Before God addresses Job, someone else attempts to fill the silence. We'll consider Elihu's take on Job's situation over the next two days. His unexpected input is somewhat typical. People often interject themselves into situations better off left alone. That said. Let's focus on today's emphasis. Sometimes, we need to stop talking so we might finally listen. Is God trying to address our hearts? Have we reached the end of our arguments with God, the end of ourselves, so we might finally consider God's point of view? May God give us ears to hear.

January 28

Job 32:1-34:37

Listen to my words, Job; pay attention to what I have to say. (Job 33:1)

Job concludes his final plea of innocence. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar remain silent, unable to refute Job's latest claims. Has the debate come to an end? Not quite yet. A new voice enters the theological fray. He's identified as Elihu, son of Brakel, who's been a quiet spectator to their verbal wrangling. Elihu, however, has reached his breaking point. He's fed up with both sides. He's angry at Job for challenging God's actions. He's upset with Job's friends for failing to prove Job's guilt, which would justify God's actions. In disgust, Elihu lashes out.

As an aside, seldom is it helpful to speak out in anger. Anger amplifies our words and actions in ways that frequently diminish an effective result, especially in conversations. However, Elihu feels compelled to defend God's honor. He's troubled by Job's assertions and seeks to put him in his proper place.

To his credit, Elihu raises a relevant consideration. The argument thus far has centered upon Job's suffering as a sign of God's displeasure. What if there is another possibility? What if Job's suffering is a means of God speaking to Job (Job 33:14-24)? He's not punishing Job for past offenses. Instead, God is instructing Job, disciplining him for the future good. That is a worthy consideration as we reflect upon our struggles and disappointments. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis notes, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Of course, we know Job's suffering is unrelated to personal sin or guilt. Human suffering is more complicated than "bad things happen to bad people." The Book of Job helps us realize this. Let's continue to reflect upon the implications of what this means. Resist simplifying what is profoundly complex. May God encourage our hearts as we do.

January 29 Job 35:1-37:24

*Then Elihu said: “Do you think it is right for you to claim,
‘I am righteous before God?’” (Job 35:1–2)*

Elihu continues his appeal to Job. He’s convinced that Job has overstated his innocence and, even worse, wrongly maligned God’s actions. It should again be noted that Job’s declarations of innocence are grounded in the truth. He’s not suffering due to his sin or wrongful acts. Job, however, is mistaken. He misinterprets his present struggles to be an expression of God’s judgment. Job’s falling into the same mental trap as his three friends. They, too, assume that all suffering is a form of God’s punishment.

Elihu challenges Job to step back and rethink his presumptions about God. Is it possible that Job has diminished the truth of who God is in his attempt to prove his innocence? The answer is “Yes.” Elihu appeals,

“Look, God is all-powerful. Who is a teacher like Him? No one can tell Him what to do, or say to Him, ‘You have done wrong.’ Instead, glorify His mighty works, singing songs of praise. Everyone has seen these things, though only from a distance. Look, God is greater than we can understand.” (Job 36:22–26)

Elihu is on to something. Has Job allowed his suffering and pain to distort his perception of God? If so, Job is not the only person who allowed life’s disappointments to influence his perspective negatively. Personal loss and suffering can frequently cause us to view God differently. It also causes us to look at life in a self-centered way. We fail to appreciate life’s complexity and underestimate God’s wisdom in the process. We make it all about “me” when there is more than our individual lives and experiences to consider.

Elihu helps us to step back and take another look. As he does, God steps forward and opens our eyes further to the wonder of who He is. Of course, that’s tomorrow’s reading. For today, let’s wrestle with the following questions, “Am I allowing my pain and suffering to distort my perception of God? Have I become self-centered in my focus?” If “yes” to either, may God open our spiritual eyes so that we see Him more clearly and view ourselves more appropriately. May it be so.

January 30 Job 38:1–40:5

Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind. (Job 38:1)

What does Job feel as God answers him from the whirlwind? Is he thinking, “Uh-oh, maybe I was a bit hasty?” Indeed, Job had been insistent that God grant him a hearing. *“If only I knew where to find God,”* Job exclaimed, *“I would go to His court. I would lay out my case and present my arguments. Then I would listen to His reply and understand what He says to me.”* (Job 23:3-5) Is Job second-guessing his plan as the sound and force of a violent whirlwind confronts him?

God certainly had Job’s attention and proceeded to challenge his thinking. Job accused God of being unfair, even unjust. He questioned the appropriateness of his suffering and the perceived prosperity of the wicked. From Job’s vantage point, something appears off. Of course, Job’s vantage point is essentially the problem. He doesn’t see nor understand nearly as much as he thinks.

To illustrate this, God raises a series of questions. Were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth? Do you appreciate its dimensions and the complexity involved (Job 38:4-20)? With pointed sarcasm, God adds, *“But of course you know all of this! For you were born before it was all created and you are so very experienced.”* (Job 38:21, NLT)

If I’m Job, I swallow hard, but God is not done. The LORD directs Job to consider the wisdom required to create and maintain the natural order of things. What does Job understand about the constellations above and sustaining seasons below (Job 38:4-41)? To what degree does he grasp the diversity of life itself and how each part of God’s creation functions and thrives (Job 39:1-30)? Then the LORD bluntly states, *“Do you still want to argue with the Almighty? You are God’s critic, but do you have the answers?”* (Job 40:2)

Is God being too harsh? Or is the LORD enlarging Job’s perspective? Job’s response says it all.

*“I am nothing—how could I ever find the answers? I will cover my mouth with my hand.
I have said too much already. I have nothing more to say.”* (Job 40:4-5)

God is not finished with the discussion, but that may be enough for today. What do we learn from this exchange? Will we admit the inadequacy of our vantage point? Do we presume to know and understand more than our perspective allows? Maybe we should echo Job’s confession and humble ourselves before the One who knows and understands. May our trust in the LORD deepen as we do.

January 31 Job 40:6–42:17

Then Job replied to the LORD: “I know that You can do anything, and no one can stop You. You asked, ‘Who is this that questions My wisdom with such ignorance?’ It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me.” (Job 42:1–3)

Job faced the unimaginable. He suffered in so many ways, leaving him discouraged and confused. At times, his emotions would get the best of him. He would say things to God and about God that he now painfully regrets. However, is that not the nature of grief and suffering? We find ourselves thinking, feeling, and saying things that God helps us process and work through. That doesn't always happen quickly. Sometimes, our questions and disappointments linger. Even so, God faithfully seeks to help us along.

In Job's case, God's revelation of Himself at the end of the book is humbling. God permits Job to see Him in ways that he had not considered. God's patience is also evident. Nowhere in the book does God punish Job for his emotional outbursts or questioning. He allows Job to be honest with his emotions but then opens Job's spiritual eyes to the truth of who He is. Interestingly, God doesn't answer the “why me” questions that Job raises. Instead, God works to reassure Job that His wisdom and actions on Job's behalf are trustworthy—that He is trustworthy.

I pray God will grant us the same realization. We'll all be confused and unsettled at points along the way. The question is, “Will we consider the LORD trustworthy amid the storms?” Will we doubt Him? Will we challenge Him? Job's mistake was that he failed to give God the benefit of the doubt. He failed to appreciate that there is often more going on than meets the eye.

Life is not as simple as “good things happen to good people” and “bad things happen to bad people.” May we remind ourselves of the same and respond to God in humble faith, even though the circumstances confound us. I pray the story of Job will grant us a perspective that enables us to navigate life's disappointments with patience and trust. May the Lord teach us to do so.

Devotions written and prepared by Stephen Lowrie
All references unless noted: New Living Translation