

Cycle One: Misconceptions of Suffering
Job's Friends Offer Consolation

Introduction: Priming the pump for tonight's discussion.

- Let's begin with our own observations. Was there a moment where God spoke to you, showed you something new, or reminded you of a familiar truth through the message this week?

Exploration: Questions to guide our group discussion.

1. Job's friends made an appointment to visit with Job and to console him during his intense season of suffering, but their consolation exposed serious problems with their theology. Job's friends believed that all human suffering was justifiably earned by human sins, and that suffering was God's way of punishing sinners. It's a familiar view...God blesses us when we're good and curses us when we're bad. Blessings and curses are earned. This is a view that issues God's mercy...God's grace! Where has this kind of thinking emerged in our own minds and in your encounters with others? How should we filter this kind of thinking through gospel lenses as people of the cross?
2. Job was really down in the dumps depressed when his friends arrived. When Job needed consolation, they only offered him correction. What did we learn about responding to human suffering from Job's experiences? Even if a person is suffering because of an unfortunate consequence of their sin, what are the ways that Believers should respond? Remember to think Biblically and to support your answers from scripture.
3. Without realizing it, Job's friends became tools in the hands of the accuser Satan. They began with good intentions, but relying on their own human wisdom, they missed what God was doing and joined Satan in accusing Job. One of them even claimed to have had a vision from God where the Lord told him that Job's suffering was the result of his iniquity. Clearly, the spirit that brought that vision wasn't the Holy Spirit! What are some ways that we can respond to the suffering of others while remaining Biblical, without allowing our biases to show through, and with a heart to be aligned with God's thinking on the matter?
4. There is an inward and an outward quality to each of the accusations made against Job. Inwardly, there was Job's personal reaction when he heard these things...his inward heart response. Outwardly, these three friends made judgments about Job's situation and vocalized their assessments. What can we learn from all of this about receiving

(inward) the words of others, and what can we learn about giving (outward) words to others?

Additional Scriptures for Deeper Study:

- Genesis 50:19-21
- Psalm 22
- Romans 8:28

Application: How can I apply this to my life this week?

- It is likely that at some time in your life, someone has offered “consolation” that felt more like a kick in the teeth than a compassionate response to your suffering. Perhaps you’ve even been the one to speak harshly to someone else who was suffering. Let’s take a moment to reflect on those times, to see it from God’s perspective, and to make amends with God. There may even be someone in your life who deserves your apology.
- Have you been guilty of thinking, like Job’s inept friends, that suffering is always an indicator of rebellion, sin, hypocrisy, or some other iniquity before God? How would Job’s situation challenge that preconception and inspire you to think more Biblically about someone who may be suffering in your circle?