

Job 23:1-17**He Knows, He Sees, He Cares**

¹ *Then Job answered and said:*

² *"Today also my complaint is bitter;
my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.*

³ *Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his seat!*

⁴ *I would lay my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.*

⁵ *I would know what he would answer me
and understand what he would say to me.*

⁶ *Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?
No; he would pay attention to me.*

⁷ *There an upright man could argue with him,
and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.*

⁸ *"Behold, I go forward, but he is not there,
and backward, but I do not perceive him;*

⁹ *on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him;
he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him.*

¹⁰ *But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*

¹¹ *My foot has held fast to his steps;
I have kept his way and have not turned aside.*

¹² *I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.*

¹³ *But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back?
What he desires, that he does.*

¹⁴ *For he will complete what he appoints for me,
and many such things are in his mind.*

¹⁵ *Therefore I am terrified at his presence;
when I consider, I am in dread of him.*

¹⁶ *God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;*

¹⁷ *yet I am not silenced because of the darkness,
nor because thick darkness covers my face."* – Job 23:1-17 ESV

Let's face it. We can't always understand what God is doing. His ways are sometimes mysterious and even frustrating. Like Job, we look for Him, but can't seem to find Him anywhere. It's as if He is hidden from our sight. But Job makes a profound statement that should bring us assurance and comfort: "But he knows the way that I take" (Job 23:10 ESV). In

other words, Job was confident that God knew exactly where he was and where he was going. That phrase could be translated, "He knows where to look for me."

Amid all his troubles, Job still believed that God was fully aware of all that was going on in his life. Despite the assumptions of his friends, Job was confident that had not lost sight of him, even for a moment. God had not gotten distracted or turned His back on His beleaguered servant. At no point in this sad story was God caught off guard or shocked by some unexpected change in Job's circumstances. No, God was right with Job every step of the way.

Of course, there were times when Job felt a growing distance between himself and God. It was only natural for him to question God's presence when everything was caving in around him. And yet, Job seemed to know that God was always near.

"I do not see him in the north, for he is hidden. I turn to the south, but I cannot find him. But he knows where I am going. And when he has tested me like gold in a fire, he will pronounce me innocent. For I have stayed in God's paths; I have followed his ways and not turned aside."— Job 23:9-11 NLT

Job found encouragement in the knowledge that God was faithful, if not always visible. He was watching and, for some inexplicable reason, waiting to step in and rescue Job. Despite the test in which he found himself, Job knew that God would eventually vindicate him and pronounce him innocent. While Job's three friends were convinced of his guilt, he knew that God would come to his defense and set the record straight. Job inherently knew that God had a plan for his life, and that plan included all that was happening at the moment. He didn't fully understand or like his circumstances, but Job knew there was a divine purpose behind it all.

So, Job continues to claim his innocence. He declares that he has remained faithful to God and has treasured His words. But then he states, "Nevertheless, his mind concerning me remains unchanged, and who can turn him from his purposes? Whatever he wants to do, he does. So he will do for me all he has planned. He controls my destiny" (Job 23:13-14 NLT).

Job seems to understand that this is not all about his guilt or innocence. It is about the sovereign will of God for his life. God controls his destiny. What He has set out to do, He will do. Nothing Job does will change that. You can detect a little frustration in Job's statement, and I don't blame him. I have been there more often than I would care to admit. I have found myself frustrated by God's plan for my life. Like Job, I know God is in control, and so I get frustrated that He can't come up with a better scenario for my life than the one He has chosen. Sure, I know I contribute to my own problems by bad decisions and outright sin, but sometimes it just seems like things take a turn for the worse and I didn't particularly do anything to "deserve" it. But that's when I have to remind myself that God's ways are perfect. And His love for me is flawless. He has the best in store for me. I am His child. He is my Father, And I can trust Him.

There are going to be days of darkness. Difficulties will come. Job knew that. In fact, he was in the middle of it.

"Darkness is all around me; thick, impenetrable darkness is everywhere." – Job 23:17 NLT).

Emotionally speaking, Job couldn't see his hand in front of his face. He couldn't see his God either but he knew that God was in control. That was his hope in the midst of his hopelessness. And it should be ours as well. Our God is both powerful and merciful. He sees us. Not only that, He loves us, and we are safely ensconced in the plan He has for us – no matter how the circumstances may appear.

When I find myself in a difficult situation with questions running through my mind and doubts racing through my heart, may the following prayer come to my lips:

Father, Your plan for me is perfect, but sometimes it is so hard to see, let alone understand. I feel like you are not there sometimes. I feel like I can't find you. But You remind me that You can always see me. You never take Your eyes off of me. You hold me in the palm of Your hand. You love me and are looking out for me. Help me see You in the midst of my trials. Help me trust You in the middle of my scariest moments. I know you don't have to explain Your ways to me, but help me to trust them. Amen.

Job 24:1-25**Life Isn't Fair, But God Is Just**

- ¹ *"Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty,
and why do those who know him never see his days?"*
- ² *Some move landmarks;
they seize flocks and pasture them.*
- ³ *They drive away the donkey of the fatherless;
they take the widow's ox for a pledge.*
- ⁴ *They thrust the poor off the road;
the poor of the earth all hide themselves.*
- ⁵ *Behold, like wild donkeys in the desert
the poor go out to their toil, seeking game;
the wasteland yields food for their children.*
- ⁶ *They gather their fodder in the field,
and they glean the vineyard of the wicked man.*
- ⁷ *They lie all night naked, without clothing,
and have no covering in the cold.*
- ⁸ *They are wet with the rain of the mountains
and cling to the rock for lack of shelter.*
- ⁹ *(There are those who snatch the fatherless child from the breast,
and they take a pledge against the poor.)*
- ¹⁰ *They go about naked, without clothing;
hungry, they carry the sheaves;*
- ¹¹ *among the olive rows of the wicked they make oil;
they tread the winepresses, but suffer thirst.*
- ¹² *From out of the city the dying groan,
and the soul of the wounded cries for help;
yet God charges no one with wrong.*
- ¹³ *"There are those who rebel against the light,
who are not acquainted with its ways,
and do not stay in its paths.*
- ¹⁴ *The murderer rises before it is light,
that he may kill the poor and needy,
and in the night he is like a thief.*
- ¹⁵ *The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight,
saying, 'No eye will see me';
and he veils his face.*
- ¹⁶ *In the dark they dig through houses;
by day they shut themselves up;
they do not know the light.*

- ¹⁷ *For deep darkness is morning to all of them;
for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.*
- ¹⁸ *"You say, 'Swift are they on the face of the waters;
their portion is cursed in the land;
no treader turns toward their vineyards.*
- ¹⁹ *Drought and heat snatch away the snow waters;
so does Sheol those who have sinned.*
- ²⁰ *The womb forgets them;
the worm finds them sweet;
they are no longer remembered,
so wickedness is broken like a tree.'*
- ²¹ *"They wrong the barren, childless woman,
and do no good to the widow.*
- ²² *Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power;
they rise up when they despair of life.*
- ²³ *He gives them security, and they are supported,
and his eyes are upon their ways.*
- ²⁴ *They are exalted a little while, and then are gone;
they are brought low and gathered up like all others;
they are cut off like the heads of grain.*
- ²⁵ *If it is not so, who will prove me a liar
and show that there is nothing in what I say?" – Job 24:1-25 ESV*

The world we live in is anything but fair. Every day, people suffer injustices of all kinds. Children are born into families in which they find themselves unloved and abused. The powerful take advantage of the weak and defenseless. Corrupt governments deny the rights of their citizens. Individuals harm one another. People who have worked all their lives and saved to provide themselves a decent retirement income, lose it all at the hands of unethical corporate executives and greedy lenders. The same was true in Job's day.

Despite his friends' assertions that the wicked always face justice at the hand of God, Job argues that this isn't necessarily so. Plenty of people in Job's day seemed to walk away without a scratch in spite of their unethical and immoral behavior.

"There are people out there getting by with murder--stealing and lying and cheating. They rip off the poor and exploit the unfortunate, push the helpless into the ditch, bully the weak so that they fear for their lives. The poor, like stray dogs and cats, scavenge for food in back alleys. They sort through the garbage of the rich, eke out survival on handouts. Homeless, they shiver through cold nights on the street; they've no place to lay their heads." – Job 24:2-7 MSG

Job is simply stating the facts as he sees them. This is reality. It is the nature of life lived in a fallen world, and it was true in Job's day just as it is in ours. Job asks the obvious question:

"Why doesn't the Almighty open the court and bring judgment? Why must the godly wait for him in vain?" – Job 24:1 NLT

As we watch events taking place in our world, we tend to ask the same basic question. Why doesn't God step in and do something? When we read news stories of abuse, neglect, corruption, murder, hatred, and bigotry, we can't help but wonder where God is and why He isn't doing something about it all. The truth is that the wicked don't always suffer. Sometimes they actually get away with their actions and profit from their behavior. The innocent suffer while the wicked prosper. It happens all the time. We don't like it, and we can't explain it. And the fact is, God isn't obligated to provide us with an explanation.

But Job finds comfort in knowing that in the end, God will deal with all those who practice ungodliness.

"But God drags away the mighty by his power; though they become established, they have no assurance of life. He may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut off like ears of corn." – Job 24:22-24 NIV

God is always watching. His eyes are fixed on the ways of the wicked and He doesn't miss a thing. He is not asleep or indifferent. He is not apathetic or disinterested. Job knows that God will act – in His own good time. In the meantime, the righteous will continue to suffer while the wicked seem to prosper. Job isn't necessarily being pessimistic; he's simply being realistic. Life isn't a black-and-white affair. The good don't always win and the righteous aren't immune from suffering. Much to our chagrin, the bad guys don't always get what they deserve. Evil people sometimes prosper and too often than not, the weak and helpless come out on the short end of the stick.

It is a painful reality that Christians face persecution and even death at the hands of malicious governments. Innocent women and children are sold into slavery or used to feed the insatiable desires of the world's burgeoning sex trade. It's unfair. It's immoral. It's offensive and reprehensible. But it does not mean that God is out of control or disinterested. He is fully aware of what is going on and, one day, He will act. We can rest assured.

"But GOD hasn't moved to the mountains; his holy address hasn't changed. He's in charge, as always, his eyes taking everything in, his eyelids unblinking, examining Adam's unruly brood inside and out, not missing a thing. He tests the good and the bad alike; if anyone cheats, God's outraged. Fail the test and you're out, out in a hail of firestones, drinking from a canteen filled with hot desert wind. GOD's business is putting

things right; he loves getting the lines straight, setting us straight. Once we're standing tall, we can look him straight in the eye." – Psalm 11:4-7 MSG

Job's whole point is that things are not always what they seem. He is trying to get his three friends to understand that their assessment of his situation was inaccurate and unfair. They were judging him falsely because they didn't have all the facts. They were drawing their conclusions based on circumstantial evidence that gave a false impression of guilt. But God knew the facts of the case, and Job was convinced that He would rule favorably in the end.

*"God, in his power, drags away the rich.
They may rise high, but they have no assurance of life.
They may be allowed to live in security,
but God is always watching them.
And though they are great now,
in a moment they will be gone like all others,
cut off like heads of grain.
Can anyone claim otherwise?
Who can prove me wrong?"* – Job 24:22-25 NLT

Job was content to leave his judgment up to God. But he wasn't going to allow his friends to ruin his reputation by dragging his name through the mud and questioning his integrity. He was not guilty as charged. Job was perplexed and confused but he was willing to wait on God to make things right. For the moment, things seemed out of sorts and difficult to comprehend. But even in the upside-down world in which Job found himself, he knew he could count on God.

God sees all. He is just. And one day He will make all things right. May He give us patience to wait for His perfect timing. And as we wait, we must pray for strength so that we might be salt and light in the dark world in which we live. May we bring refreshment and hope to the suffering and the lost. Life is not far, but our God is just and righteous. And one day, He will balance the scales and set all things in order.

Job 26:5-14**You Don't Have to Understand God to Trust Him**

⁵ *The dead tremble
under the waters and their inhabitants.*
⁶ *Sheol is naked before God,
and Abaddon has no covering.*
⁷ *He stretches out the north over the void
and hangs the earth on nothing.*
⁸ *He binds up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not split open under them.*
⁹ *He covers the face of the full moon
and spreads over it his cloud.*
¹⁰ *He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters
at the boundary between light and darkness.*
¹¹ *The pillars of heaven tremble
and are astounded at his rebuke.*
¹² *By his power he stilled the sea;
by his understanding he shattered Rahab.*
¹³ *By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.*
¹⁴ *Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways,
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?"* – Job 26:5-14 ESV

Job is convinced of God's greatness and that is what motivates his cries for the Almighty's help. He is calling on the only one who is able to assist him during his time of need. His God was majestic and mighty in power and that is exactly why Job was willing to place himself at God's mercy.

Job understood that God was all-knowing and all-powerful. This great God knows things that no human being could ever hope to know. His knowledge is far beyond anything the human mind can comprehend. Just take a look at some of the Hubble Telescope images of the universe and the scope and size of God's knowledge starts to become clear. Job seemed to have a solid grasp of the greatness of God and could see it reflected in the world around him.

"By his hand the north is stretched out in space, and the earth is hanging on nothing. By him the waters are shut up in his thick clouds, and the cloud does not give way under them. By him the face of his high seat is veiled, and his cloud stretched out over it. By him a circle is marked out on the face of the waters, to the limits of the light and the dark." – Job 26:7-10 BBE

Job tells his friends that while they seem to be speaking for God, they have no clue what what they are talking about. They are ignorant of the ways of God, and are presumptuous to think that they have figured out the mysteries of life. These men have repeatedly made assumptions about Job's guilt as if they know for sure what has taken place, but they don't know. Only God does.

We can't understand the ways of God; our understanding is limited. We can't fully comprehend or explain what God does or why He does it, and He doesn't explain Himself to us. For Job, all he could rest on was his own integrity and his hope in God's rescue. He stood firm on his claim of innocence and, as he states in the very next chapter, he would go to his grave knowing he had done nothing wrong.

"Let it be far from me! I will certainly not say that you are right! I will come to death before I give up my righteousness. I will keep it safe, and will not let it go: my heart has nothing to say against any part of my life." – Job 27:5-6 BBE

Job didn't understand why he was suffering. He couldn't explain the reasons for all his losses. All he knew was that he had done nothing wrong to deserve any of it. And when it came to his understanding of God, Job was relegated to examining the world around him. He could not see God but he could gather insights about God from nature.

The apostle Paul provides insight into God's divine display of His glory through His creation. The universe bears the mark of its Maker, giving ample proof of His existence and providing visible illustrations of His power, immensity, creativity, and sovereignty.

They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. – Romans 1:19-20 NLT

At the end of the day, all any man can know about God is what He chooses to reveal about Himself. Job could see aspects of God's power and creativity in nature and within the world around him, but he couldn't fully comprehend how it all worked.

As modern human beings, we can look into the design of the human cell and appreciate its intricacy and complexity, but we can't explain how God made it. There is so much about God that we don't understand but we do know that He is powerful. His creation provides a daily demonstration of His power. From the sun, moon, and stars hung in the night sky to the storms that rage on this singular planet floating in the vastness of space, we have been given ample evidence of God's existence and essence.

King David recognized this cosmic display of God's glory and immortalized it in words.

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
 The skies display his craftsmanship.
 Day after day they continue to speak;
 night after night they make him known.
 They speak without a sound or word;
 their voice is never heard.
 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
 and their words to all the world. – Psalm 9:1-4 NLT*

Yet, fallen man has a way of looking past the signs of God's glory that surround him. In his pride and arrogance, he tries to write God out of the script by providing his own explanations for the existence of the universe. Yet, humanity would have a difficult time answering the probing questions that God directed at His servant Job.

*"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
 Tell me, if you know so much.
 Who determined its dimensions
 and stretched out the surveying line?
 What supports its foundations,
 and who laid its cornerstone
 as the morning stars sang together
 and all the angels shouted for joy?" – Job 38:4-7 NLT*

No man was there when God created the universe. Yet the creature still tries to explain away the Creator. Man, in his hubris, attempts to play god by providing answers to all the mysteries of life. But God exposes the absurdity of it all.

*"Where does light come from,
 and where does darkness go?
 Can you take each to its home?
 Do you know how to get there?
 But of course you know all this!
 For you were born before it was all created,
 and you are so very experienced!" – Job 38:19-21 NLT*

When all is said and done, all we can really know about God is what He chooses to reveal about Himself. He is the unknowable, unsearchable God. He is beyond finding out and impossible to comprehend and yet He has made Himself known through His creation. And Job knew this God. He knew of the power and majesty of God. But He also knew of God's love, sovereignty, righteousness, and justice. He knew that God was always watching.

Job knew these things and he rested in them. While knowing these things did not stop his pain or eliminate his suffering, it did give him a sense of hope in the midst of it all. Job's approach to his situation is similar to that of King David reflected in another one of his psalms.

*I said to myself, "I will watch what I do
 and not sin in what I say.
 I will hold my tongue
 when the ungodly are around me."
 But as I stood there in silence—
 not even speaking of good things—
 the turmoil within me grew worse.
 The more I thought about it,
 the hotter I got,
 igniting a fire of words:
 "Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.
 Remind me that my days are numbered—
 how fleeting my life is.
 You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand.
 My entire lifetime is just a moment to you;
 at best, each of us is but a breath."*

*We are merely moving shadows,
 and all our busy rushing ends in nothing.
 We heap up wealth,
 not knowing who will spend it.
 And so, Lord, where do I put my hope?
 My only hope is in you. — Psalms 39:1-7 NLT*

My only hope is in You. Is God where you put your hope? Is He the first place you turn to in times of trouble? There is much about life we will never understand, but we can know that God is faithful, just, righteous, merciful, powerful, and completely in control of any and all circumstances. We can trust Him.

Father, I want to trust You, but I struggle so often with wanting to understand first. I want to have everything explained to me, THEN I'll trust You. But You aren't obligated to explain Yourself to me. You don't have to justify Your actions to me. Part of trusting You is learning to rely on You even when I don't understand You. You've never proven Yourself untrustworthy, Lord, so I'm not sure why I struggle so much with trust. But thank You for your patience. Thank You for Your love. Thank You for Your faithfulness. Amen.

Job 27:1-23**The Truth About False Words**

¹ *And Job again took up his discourse, and said:*

² *"As God lives, who has taken away my right,*

and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter,

³ *as long as my breath is in me,*

and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,

⁴ *my lips will not speak falsehood,*

and my tongue will not utter deceit.

⁵ *Far be it from me to say that you are right;*

till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.

⁶ *I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go;*

my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

⁷ *"Let my enemy be as the wicked,*

and let him who rises up against me be as the unrighteous.

⁸ *For what is the hope of the godless when God cuts him off,*

when God takes away his life?

⁹ *Will God hear his cry*

when distress comes upon him?

¹⁰ *Will he take delight in the Almighty?*

Will he call upon God at all times?

¹¹ *I will teach you concerning the hand of God;*

what is with the Almighty I will not conceal.

¹² *Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves;*

why then have you become altogether vain?

¹³ *"This is the portion of a wicked man with God,*

and the heritage that oppressors receive from the Almighty:

¹⁴ *If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword,*

and his descendants have not enough bread.

¹⁵ *Those who survive him the pestilence buries,*

and his widows do not weep.

¹⁶ *Though he heap up silver like dust,*

and pile up clothing like clay,

¹⁷ *he may pile it up, but the righteous will wear it,*

and the innocent will divide the silver.

¹⁸ *He builds his house like a moth's,*

like a booth that a watchman makes.

¹⁹ *He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more;*

he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone.
²⁰ *Terrors overtake him like a flood;*
in the night a whirlwind carries him off.
²¹ *The east wind lifts him up and he is gone;*
it sweeps him out of his place.
²² *It hurls at him without pity;*
he flees from its power in headlong flight.
²³ *It claps its hands at him*
and hisses at him from its place.” – Job 27:1-23 ESV

In this follow-up to his previous response to Bildad, Job takes all three of his friends to task. In Hebrew, his use of the word “you” is in the plural form and he repeats it several times.

*“I will never concede that **you** are right;*
I will defend my integrity until I die.” – Job 27:5 NLT

*“I will teach **you** about God’s power.*
I will not conceal anything concerning the Almighty.
*But **you** have seen all this,*
*yet **you** say all these useless things to me.” – Job 27:11-12 NLT*

Job has reached the end of his patience and wants Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar to know that he will never give in to their demands that he confess his sin. In fact, the first six verses of this speech are his unequivocal claim of innocence, and he backs it up by a vow or oath that is based on the very existence of God.

“As surely as God lives,” Job begins. The existence of God is undeniable and irrefutable, and on that basis, Job declares that his innocence is just as sure and steadfast. His steadfast belief in his innocence was as firm as his belief in the existence of God. Even the life-altering nature of his fall had not shaken his belief in God. Yes, he had plenty of questions he wanted to direct to God, but he had never questioned God’s existence. And he was willing to take unwavering belief in his own righteousness to the grave. No amount of pressure from his three friends was going to change his mind or shatter his faith in his own integrity.

“I will never say that you are right; I will maintain my integrity until I die. I will cling to my righteousness and never let go. As long as I live, my conscience will not accuse me.” – Job 27:5-6 BSB

Job was so insistent because he refused to place himself within the company of the wicked. For him, that was unthinkable because it would be a virtual death sentence. His view of the fate of the wicked was dark and hopeless. He flatly states, “what hope do the godless have when God cuts them off and takes away their life?” (Job 27:8 NLT). Their fate is sealed because they will fall into the hands of the righteous Judge of the universe. No amount of regret or remorse will change their future because God will not listen to their cries or defer His judgment.

*“Will God listen to their cry
when trouble comes upon them?
Can they take delight in the Almighty?
Can they call to God at any time?” – Job 27:9-10 NLT*

Job’s questions are rhetorical and have only one answer.: “No!” One day, as they face their inevitable judgment, the wicked of this world will see the error of their ways and attempt to make things right with God, but it will be too little, too late. Job is not describing true repentance or what we might call “saving faith.” He is talking about those who live their entire lives in opposition to the will of God and then, at death, when facing their just and righteous judgment, try to escape their fate by a sudden death-bed display of godliness. It won’t work, asserts Job.

The most surprising aspect of Job’s assessment of the fate of the wicked is that he hopes his three friends will experience it.

“May my enemy be like the wicked and my opponent like the unjust.” – Job 27:7 BSB

This statement appears harsh and unjustified to the modern reader but it was a common rhetorical device in Job’s day. This over-the-top denunciation of his three friends was meant to accentuate the unjust nature of their false accusations of him.

King David uses a similar style of imprecation when dealing with his own false accusers.

*O God, whom I praise,
don’t stand silent and aloof
while the wicked slander me
and tell lies about me.
They surround me with hateful words
and fight against me for no reason.
I love them, but they try to destroy me with accusations
even as I am praying for them! – Psalm 109:1-4 NLT*

These “friends” of David were not only guilty of slandering him but were going out of their way to ruin his reputation and life.

*They say, “Get an evil person to turn against him.
Send an accuser to bring him to trial.
When his case comes up for judgment,
let him be pronounced guilty.
Count his prayers as sins.” – Psalm 109:6-7 NLT*

David provides a shocking list of their prayers for his downfall and they are unsparing in their desire to see him completely humiliated and ruined, not only for life, but for eternity.

*“May all his offspring die.
May his family name be blotted out in the next generation.
May the Lord never forget the sins of his fathers;
may his mother’s sins never be erased from the record.” – Psalm 109:13-14 NLT*

So, David responds with a prayer of his own.

*May those curses become the Lord’s punishment
for my accusers who speak evil of me. – Psalm 109:20 NLT*

Again, those kinds of words seem out of place and unacceptable for a child of God to pray. But they are a common form of rhetorical argument among all the semitic people groups. In those days, a man’s name was considered sacred and an extension of his very nature. That is why false accusations were taken so seriously and dealt with so harshly. One of the commands in the Decalogue dealt with this very issue.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” – Exodus 20:18 ESV

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses outlines a further extension of this law, providing legal judgment concerning anyone who made a libelous accusation against another.

“If the accuser has brought false charges against his fellow Israelite, you must impose on the accuser the sentence he intended for the other person. In this way, you will purge such evil from among you.” – Deuteronomy 19:18-19 NLT

In a sense, this is what Job was calling for. He wanted the slanderous accusations of his three friends to have consequences. In his mind, they were attempting to ruin his name and tarnish his reputation amongst his neighbors. In Job’s case, the integrity of his name was all he had left and the malicious words of his three accusers were robbing him of even that.

Job’s anger is understandable. He has been through a lot and the attacks of his three friends have been relentless. It’s likely that these discussions did not take place in private but were conducted in front of an audience of Job’s peers. Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar had put their friend on trial. They probably sought evidence against Job by interviewing his neighbors. To bolster their case, they would have conducted pre-trial research and found individuals willing to testify against Job. The meteoric fall of Job would have been known to all in Uz, but the presence of the three friends would have fired up the rumor mill and stirred up all kinds of speculation concerning Job’s fate.

So, weighed down by his pain and suffering and angered by the destruction of his reputation among his neighbors and friends, Job lashed out. He couldn’t help but wish that his three friends would have their own words turned against them. It was only just and right in his mind that his false accusers suffer some kind of consequences for their actions, and his assessment was right in line with the will of God.

“Be sure never to charge anyone falsely with evil. Never sentence an innocent or blameless person to death, for I never declare a guilty person to be innocent.” – Exodus 23:7 NLT

Job was convinced of his own innocence, so his friends must be guilty of slander. It was a simple as that. His friends had been adamant that God punishes the wicked, and Job fully agreed. But in Job’s mind, the roles were reversed. They were the guilty ones and fully liable to the wrath of God. Their righteous-sounding rhetoric would not save them. Their claims of godly wisdom wouldn’t protect them. They had ruined Job’s name and they would pay dearly for their crime.

*“Terror overwhelms them like a flood,
and they are blown away in the storms of the night.
The east wind carries them away, and they are gone.
It sweeps them away.” – Job 27:20-21 NLT*

These verses are difficult to read and reconcile. But Job was desperately trying to protect and preserve the only thing of value that remained: His name. Without a good name, he had nothing. His future was ruined, and his legacy was utterly destroyed. But the only way he could restore his soiled reputation was by having God step in and declare him innocent. He knew that only God could provide a just and righteous verdict in this case, and he longed for that day to come.

Job 28:1-28

Wisdom is a Rare Commodity These Days

- ¹ *"Surely there is a mine for silver,
and a place for gold that they refine.*
- ² *Iron is taken out of the earth,
and copper is smelted from the ore.*
- ³ *Man puts an end to darkness
and searches out to the farthest limit
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.*
- ⁴ *He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives;
they are forgotten by travelers;
they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro.*
- ⁵ *As for the earth, out of it comes bread,
but underneath it is turned up as by fire.*
- ⁶ *Its stones are the place of sapphires,
and it has dust of gold.*
- ⁷ *"That path no bird of prey knows,
and the falcon's eye has not seen it.*
- ⁸ *The proud beasts have not trodden it;
the lion has not passed over it.*
- ⁹ *"Man puts his hand to the flinty rock
and overturns mountains by the roots.*
- ¹⁰ *He cuts out channels in the rocks,
and his eye sees every precious thing.*
- ¹¹ *He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle,
and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light.*
- ¹² *"But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?*
- ¹³ *Man does not know its worth,
and it is not found in the land of the living.*
- ¹⁴ *The deep says, 'It is not in me,'
and the sea says, 'It is not with me.'*
- ¹⁵ *It cannot be bought for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed as its price.*
- ¹⁶ *It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.*
- ¹⁷ *Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.*

¹⁸ *No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.*

¹⁹ *The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.*

²⁰ *"From where, then, does wisdom come?
And where is the place of understanding?"*

²¹ *It is hidden from the eyes of all living
and concealed from the birds of the air.*

²² *Abaddon and Death say,
'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.'*

²³ *"God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.*

²⁴ *For he looks to the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.*

²⁵ *When he gave to the wind its weight
and apportioned the waters by measure,*

²⁶ *when he made a decree for the rain
and a way for the lightning of the thunder,*

²⁷ *then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.*

²⁸ *And he said to man,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.'"* – Job 28:1-28 ESV

This chapter contains what appears to be Job's inner musings concerning man's endless and often futile search for wisdom. According to Job, humanity has an insatiable desire for wisdom and diligently seeks to find it like a miner prospecting for precious gems.

But despite man's most ardent efforts, wisdom remain illusive and difficult to find. While there are mines that contain rare metals and tunnels where sapphires and onyx are found, the source of wisdom remains a mystery. It's value is incalculable which makes its allure so irresistible.

In this chapter, Job asks and answers the question, "Do people know where to find wisdom?" And, at first glance, it appears as if Job is fairly pessimistic about the prospect of discovering wisdom. He asserts that we may be able to mine precious metals from the depths of the earth, but we don't have the foggiest idea where to find wisdom. It eludes us and remains a mystery to us no matter how hard we search for it. And yet, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, had a markedly different outlook.

*Wisdom shouts in the streets.
She cries out in the public square.
She calls to the crowds along the main street,*

*to those gathered in front of the city gate:
 "How long, you simpletons,
 will you insist on being simpleminded?
 How long will you mockers relish your mocking?
 How long will you fools hate knowledge?
 Come and listen to my counsel.
 I'll share my heart with you
 and make you wise." – Proverbs 1:20:23 NLT*

Solomon personified wisdom as a woman wandering the streets offering her valuable product to anyone who would accept it. There was no effort required; simply a desire to become wise. But wisdom discovered few takers. No one was interested in what she had to "sell."

Yet, men continue to seek it, traveling vast distances, consulting with sages, reading volumes of books, and offering their fortunes in exchange for it. They recognize its value but it eludes their grasp.

This entire soliloquy is a direct assault on the so-called wisdom of Job's three friends. They waltzed into Uz with a cocky assurance that they knew exactly what was behind Job's suffering and they have dispensed their wise words with abandon and a total lack of compassion. Their prideful assertions of Job's guilt and God's judgment have been relentless and have left Job demoralized and more than a bit defensive. He has had enough of their attacks and is now making a few assertions of his own.

When it comes to wisdom, "No one knows where to find it, for it is not found among the living" (Job 28:13 NLT), and that includes his three friends. Despite its great value, "It cannot be bought with gold. It cannot be purchased with silver" (Job 28:15 NLT). Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar may think they've garnered the market on wisdom, but Job asserts that they are sorely mistaken.

*"It is hidden from the eyes of all humanity.
 Even the sharp-eyed birds in the sky cannot discover it." – Job 28:21 NLT*

Again, Job's words seem to contradict those of Solomon. So, who is right? Which man offers the correct perspective? The answer is that Job and Solomon are both right. Each man is describing an invaluable resource that is impossible to find unless you know the source. And both Solomon and Job describe wisdom as coming from God.

*"God alone understands the way to wisdom;
 he knows where it can be found." – Job 28:23 NLT*

*Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge,
 but fools despise wisdom and discipline. – Proverbs 1:7 NLT*

Job knew that God was the sole source of wisdom, and He alone could solve the mystery of his suffering. Only God could explain why Job has lost everything and only God could resolve the debate about Job's guilt or innocence. The reason he kept demanding an audience with God was because of his fear and reverence for his Maker. Job didn't have all the answers, but he knew that God did.

Without realizing it, Job was taking the advice of Solomon.

*Tune your ears to wisdom,
and concentrate on understanding.
Cry out for insight,
and ask for understanding.
Search for them as you would for silver;
seek them like hidden treasures.
Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord,
and you will gain knowledge of God.
For the Lord grants wisdom!
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. – Proverbs 2:2-6 NLT*

Job wasn't searching for wisdom so he could impress his friends. He was seeking to know the will and the ways of God. He was trying to make sense of all the madness that had enveloped his life and left him destitute, disease-ridden, and alone. And he knew that the only one who could answer all his questions and bring relief to his suffering was God.

Job asserts that God alone "looks throughout the whole earth and sees everything under the heavens" (Job 28:24 NLT). This is a direct slam on his three arrogant friends. They spoke as if they had a monopoly on wisdom and insight, but they were nothing more than blind men seeking to find treasure in a darkened pit. Rather than heeding the cries of wisdom, they were filling the air with the sound of their own self-righteous ramblings and false assumptions.

But Job saw things differently. He viewed God as the source of all wisdom, it was God alone who "saw wisdom and evaluated it. He set it in place and examined it thoroughly" (Job 28:27 NLT). And if Job's three friends would shut up long enough to listen, they might hear the words of God.

"...this is what he says to all humanity: 'The fear of the Lord is true wisdom; to forsake evil is real understanding.'" – Job 28:28 NLT

Job was willing to put his trust in God. He continued to reject the words of his three friends because he knew they were wrong. They were not speaking for God and so their wisdom was not from God. Job was convinced that wisdom was available and accessible, but you had to go to seek it at the source. Godly wisdom could only be found in God's presence.

*"He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.
He guards the paths of the just
and protects those who are faithful to him."* – Proverbs 2:7-8 NLT

Wisdom is a rare commodity these days, but that doesn't mean it's illusive or unavailable. We just need to go to the source.

Father, I want and need wisdom. But I tend to seek it in all the wrong places. I look to myself and I look to others. Instead I need to seek it in You. I need to fear You. Not in a timid, cowering way, but out of awe, reverence and respect for Your power, majesty, and holiness. Rather than question You, I need to learn to trust You. Rather than whine and moan at You, I need to learn to thank You for the fact that You are in control of my life and my future. Help me get my focus off of me and put it on You. Because You alone grant wisdom. Amen.

Job 29:1-25

The Time to Shut Up and Look Up

¹ *And Job again took up his discourse, and said:*

² *"Oh, that I were as in the months of old,
as in the days when God watched over me,
³ when his lamp shone upon my head,
and by his light I walked through darkness,
⁴ as I was in my prime,
when the friendship of God was upon my tent,
⁵ when the Almighty was yet with me,
when my children were all around me,
⁶ when my steps were washed with butter,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!
⁷ When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I prepared my seat in the square,
⁸ the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose and stood;
⁹ the princes refrained from talking
and laid their hand on their mouth;
¹⁰ the voice of the nobles was hushed,
and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth.
¹¹ When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
and when the eye saw, it approved,
¹² because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to help him.
¹³ The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me,
and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
¹⁴ I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
my justice was like a robe and a turban.
¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.
¹⁶ I was a father to the needy,
and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.
¹⁷ I broke the fangs of the unrighteous
and made him drop his prey from his teeth.
¹⁸ Then I thought, 'I shall die in my nest,
and I shall multiply my days as the sand,
¹⁹ my roots spread out to the waters,
with the dew all night on my branches,
²⁰ my glory fresh with me,
and my bow ever new in my hand.'*

²¹ *"Men listened to me and waited
and kept silence for my counsel.*
²² *After I spoke they did not speak again,
and my word dropped upon them.*
²³ *They waited for me as for the rain,
and they opened their mouths as for the spring rain.*
²⁴ *I smiled on them when they had no confidence,
and the light of my face they did not cast down.*
²⁵ *I chose their way and sat as chief,
and I lived like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners."* – Job 29:1-25 ESV

Chapters 28 and 29 provide an interesting contrast. Both are the words of Job, but they reflect two extremely different views or outlooks. In chapter 28, Job asks and answers the question, "Do people know where to find wisdom?"

According to Job, wisdom is found with God.

*"God alone understands the way to wisdom;
he knows where it can be found...
...he saw wisdom and evaluated it.
He set it in place and examined it thoroughly.
And this is what he says to all humanity:
'The fear of the Lord is true wisdom;
to forsake evil is real understanding.'"* – Job 28:23 27-28 NLT

In chapter 28, Job asserts that only God knows where wisdom can be found, because He is its source. The problem that Job's friends faced was a lack of wisdom, understanding, and a knowledge of the ways of God. None of them truly understood what was going on, including Job. They could only guess as to what was the cause of his distress. Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz blamed it on some hidden sin in his life. Job blamed it on God's abandonment of him. But they each lacked wisdom. Job seemed to know that, which is what is reflected in his speech in chapter 28. He seemed to understand that the fear of God is where he would find the answer to all his questions.

But then there's chapter 29. In this speech Job suddenly reflects a perspective that is common to all men. He took his eyes off of God and focused on himself. Depending on the translation you are reading, there are upwards of 40 uses of the personal pronouns "I," "me," or "my" in the speech. Job uses the word "I" 20 times, the word "me" 12 times, and the word "my" 16 times.

You might put it this way: Job suffers from a serious "I" problem. He can't keep his eyes off of himself and the problems that plague his current situation. This leads to another dangerous disability. Job begins to exhibit the tell-tale symptoms of the-good-old-days syndrome. Weighed

down by the burdens of his present life, he chooses to find solace in the past. He begins to dwell on how things used to be when his life was good.

Without realizing it, Job begins to brag about all his accomplishments. He envisions himself as a kind of super saint who rescued all the helpless, always fought for the underdog, and was revered and respected by his community.

*“The young stepped aside when they saw me,
and even the aged rose in respect at my coming.
The princes stood in silence
and put their hands over their mouths.
The highest officials of the city stood quietly,
holding their tongues in respect.” – Job 29:8-10 NLT*

While there is probably a semblance of truth in Job’s words, his memory has painted an idealized vision of his past. Of course, compared to his current situation, everything in the rear view mirror looks bigger and better, and he longs to return to those halcyon days.

Now, I don't particularly blame Job, but in all his myopic obsession with his idealized past, he seems to lose his fear of the Lord. Like his friends, he starts to draw some unwise conclusions. His speech wrongly infers that God is no longer watching over him. He seems to believe that God is no longer his friend and has somehow abandoned him. Yet, these conclusions are all based on his circumstances. He still maintains his innocence, but he blames his condition on God.

Job wanted his honor back. After being constantly berated by his three friends, Job longed to be respected again. He wanted to remind everyone about all the good he used to do. He missed the respect he used to garner for all his good deeds and acts of kindness.

*“All who heard me praised me.
All who saw me spoke well of me.
For I assisted the poor in their need
and the orphans who required help.
I helped those without hope, and they blessed me.
And I caused the widows’ hearts to sing for joy.” – Job 29:11-13 NLT*

There's no doubt that Job had lost a lot, and I don't blame him for wanting to see his circumstances reversed. But when he turned his attention to himself, he took his eyes off of God. Reminiscing was not going to change anything, and it was not going to provide him with any answers to his questions or comfort for his pain. That would only come when he turned his attention to God. It's as if Job needed to go back and read his words recorded in chapter 28. In his heart, Job knew that God had all the answers he was looking for. He alone could provide the comfort Job was seeking.

Yet, whenever we become myopic and focus on ourselves, we lose sight of God. It is at those moments that we must turn to Him, fear Him, and seek Him. Job could have used a dose of Solomon's insight.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones. – Proverbs 3:5-8 NLT*

In chapter 29, Job leaves God completely out of the picture. He makes it all about himself, reminiscing about all his accomplishments, attributes, and well-deserved accolades. It's almost as if Job is giving testimony in a trial and acting as his own character witness. No one else seems to be stepping up in his defense, so Job decides to do it himself.

But Job would have been better off listening to the words of God that he quoted in the previous chapter.

*"...this is what he says to all humanity:
'The fear of the Lord is true wisdom;
to forsake evil is real understanding.'"* – Job 28:28 NLT

Job needed to shut up and look up. He needed to end his futile phase of belly button gazing and turn His eyes to the Lord. It's too bad that Job didn't have a friend like David, a fellow sufferer who could have given him just the right time-tested advice.

*Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will not be shaken.
My victory and honor come from God alone.
He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.
O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him,
for God is our refuge. – Psalm 62:5-8 NLT*

Job 30:1-31**Gratitude is Good Medicine**

- ¹ *"But now they laugh at me,
men who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock.*
- ² *What could I gain from the strength of their hands,
men whose vigor is gone?*
- ³ *Through want and hard hunger
they gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation;*
- ⁴ *they pick saltwort and the leaves of bushes,
and the roots of the broom tree for their food.*
- ⁵ *They are driven out from human company;
they shout after them as after a thief.*
- ⁶ *In the gullies of the torrents they must dwell,
in holes of the earth and of the rocks.*
- ⁷ *Among the bushes they bray;
under the nettles they huddle together.*
- ⁸ *A senseless, a nameless brood,
they have been whipped out of the land.*
- ⁹ *"And now I have become their song;
I am a byword to them.*
- ¹⁰ *They abhor me; they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.*
- ¹¹ *Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me,
they have cast off restraint in my presence.*
- ¹² *On my right hand the rabble rise;
they push away my feet;
they cast up against me their ways of destruction.*
- ¹³ *They break up my path;
they promote my calamity;
they need no one to help them.*
- ¹⁴ *As through a wide breach they come;
amid the crash they roll on.*
- ¹⁵ *Terrors are turned upon me;
my honor is pursued as by the wind,
and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.*
- ¹⁶ *"And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.*
- ¹⁷ *The night racks my bones,*

and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
¹⁸ *With great force my garment is disfigured;*
it binds me about like the collar of my tunic.
¹⁹ *God has cast me into the mire,*
and I have become like dust and ashes.
²⁰ *I cry to you for help and you do not answer me;*
I stand, and you only look at me.
²¹ *You have turned cruel to me;*
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
²² *You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it,*
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
²³ *For I know that you will bring me to death*
and to the house appointed for all living.

²⁴ *"Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand,*
and in his disaster cry for help?
²⁵ *Did not I weep for him whose day was hard?*
Was not my soul grieved for the needy?
²⁶ *But when I hoped for good, evil came,*
and when I waited for light, darkness came.
²⁷ *My inward parts are in turmoil and never still;*
days of affliction come to meet me.
²⁸ *I go about darkened, but not by the sun;*
I stand up in the assembly and cry for help.
²⁹ *I am a brother of jackals*
and a companion of ostriches.
³⁰ *My skin turns black and falls from me,*
and my bones burn with heat.
³¹ *My lyre is turned to mourning,*
and my pipe to the voice of those who weep." – Job 30:1-31 ESV

Job's moment of reminiscence is followed by a painful realization that there's no going back. All that he has lost is gone forever and, from what he can ascertain, it is all the handiwork of God. To make matters worse, Job feels as if God has emasculated him, leaving him defenseless against all those who would do him harm or further damage his reputation. He describes himself as being surrounded by a host of individuals, both young and old, who seem determined to grind his life and name into the mud.

"I am mocked by people younger than I,
by young men whose fathers are not worthy to run with my sheepdogs." – Job 30:1
 NLT

"...they mock me with vulgar songs!
They taunt me!

*They despise me and won't come near me,
except to spit in my face.” – Job 30:9-10 NLT*

And Job holds God responsible for the relentless attacks of these despicable people.

*“God has cut my bowstring.
He has humbled me,
so they have thrown off all restraint.” – Job 30:11 NLT*

Part of the frustration he feels is his inability to be able to defend himself. It is as if God has sent him into battle without a reliable weapon or ammunition. He is easy prey to all those who mean to do him harm, and the number of his enemies increases daily. Job describes himself as being surrounded and overwhelmed with no one to come to his aid or defense. He is convinced that God has abandoned him.

*“They block my road
and do everything they can to destroy me.
They know I have no one to help me.” – Job 30:13 NLT*

According to Job's estimation, he has suffered a litany of indignities at the hands of his oppressors. They mock and taunt him. They treat him with disrespect, avoiding him like the plague and only coming close in order to spit in his face. His enemies lay traps for him and attack him when he is weak and defenseless. The effects of all this mistreatment is a deep depression and a growing sense of despondency and defeat. Job has nowhere to turn and no one he can count on to come to his aid.

He even describes God as joining in the abuse, having grabbed him by the collar and cast him into the mud. His enemies kick him while he's down but it is God who put him in that vulnerable position. The middle portion of this speech reveals the depth of Job's despair as he levels his charges against God.

*“I cry to you, O God, but you don't answer.
I stand before you, but you don't even look.
You have become cruel toward me.
You use your power to persecute me.
You throw me into the whirlwind
and destroy me in the storm.
And I know you are sending me to my death—
the destination of all who live.” – Job 30:20-23 NLT*

He accuses God of neglect. No matter how often or hard Job has cried to God, his pleas have been met with indifference. It is now to the point where he feels as if God gone from being disinterested in his plight to being an active participant in his pain and suffering. He accuses God of being אֶכְזָר ('akzār), a Hebrew word that means “to act harshly” and implies cruel

treatment to the point of death. In other words, he is convinced that God is out to kill him. He even suggests that God is sending him to his death.

At this point, Job can't comprehend why all of this is happening to him. He recalls the many times when he was the friend of the helpless and hopeless. In his former life, when he was healthy, happy, and whole, he would "weep for those in trouble" and he "grieved for the needy" (Job 30:25 NLT). Isn't that the right thing to do, he asks. Wouldn't a righteous God expect His people to treat one another with love and care, not cruelty and harshness?

But when Job looks for good, all he finds is evil. When he could use a bit of help and hope, all he gets is a steady diet of mockery, cruelty, and false accusations – even from the hand of God. And this state of affairs has left him in a deep pit of despair.

*"My heart is troubled and restless.
Days of suffering torment me.
I walk in gloom, without sunlight.
I stand in the public square and cry for help."* – Job 30:27-28 NLT

It's interesting to note that in chapter 29, Job spent a great deal of time recalling and lamenting his former glory days. His memory took him back to the good old days when things were so much better. But while he look back longingly and remembers those trouble-free days, at no point does he thank God for making it all possible. This oversight on Job's part is glaring when you consider the words he spoke after the first news of disaster struck his life in the opening chapter.

"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." – Job 1:21 ESV

Job had just received the devastating news that he had lost all his flocks and herds as well as all ten of his adult children. Yet, he was able to bless God. But now, we find him throwing himself a pity party and bemoaning his lonely and ill-fated life. He doesn't thank God for all the amazing benefits he enjoyed during the vast majority of his life. Instead, he wallows in the memory of his former state and complains about the less-than-enjoyable nature of his current circumstances. It was an unknown psalmist called Asaph who recorded the following words from God:

*"Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God,
and keep the vows you made to the Most High.
Then call on me when you are in trouble,
and I will rescue you,
and you will give me glory."* – Psalm 50:14-15 NLT

God went on to say, "...giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me. If you keep to my path, I will reveal to you the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23 NLT). Job was so busy deluging God with

his complaints and declarations of mistreatment, that he forgot to thank God for all the wonderful blessings he had enjoyed. God had blessed him with life, health, financial prosperity, a large family, and a good reputation. Job had not earned or deserved any of those things. Now that they were gone, he longed to have them back but he failed to thank the One who had made them possible in the first place.

While Job had a rock-solid memory regarding his former life, he couldn't seem to remember the words he spoke when his health first failed.

"Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" – Job 2:10 NLT

Job suffered from selective memory loss. As time passed, he became less and less willing to accept anything bad from the hand of God. He didn't like the cards he had been dealt and was anxious to see God remedy the situation as soon as possible. Job was running out of patience and hope, and it seemed that his well of gratitude had run dry as well.

For all his reminiscing, Job struggled with forgetfulness that produced in him an unhealthy ungratefulness. God would have Job repent and remember just how blessed his life had been.

*"Repent, all of you who forget me,
or I will tear you apart,
and no one will help you.
But giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me.
If you keep to my path,
I will reveal to you the salvation of God." – Psalm 50:22-23 NLT*

Job didn't need any more lectures from his friends, but God didn't need any advice or criticism from Job either. They say gratitude is good medicine and the apostle Paul would have wholeheartedly agreed.

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NLT

Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. – Colossians 3:16-17 NLT

Gratitude has a way of changing one's attitude. If Job could learn to give thanks as readily as he complained, his outlook on life would undergo a dramatic change. But his near-sighted focus on his circumstances left him with a distorted view of God and a disgruntled outlook on life and eternity.

Job 31:1-23**A Demand for Justice or Judgment**

- ¹ *"I have made a covenant with my eyes;
how then could I gaze at a virgin?*
- ² *What would be my portion from God above
and my heritage from the Almighty on high?*
- ³ *Is not calamity for the unrighteous,
and disaster for the workers of iniquity?*
- ⁴ *Does not he see my ways
and number all my steps?*
- ⁵ *"If I have walked with falsehood
and my foot has hastened to deceit;*
- ⁶ *(Let me be weighed in a just balance,
and let God know my integrity!)*
- ⁷ *if my step has turned aside from the way
and my heart has gone after my eyes,
and if any spot has stuck to my hands,*
- ⁸ *then let me sow, and another eat,
and let what grows for me be rooted out.*
- ⁹ *"If my heart has been enticed toward a woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door,*
- ¹⁰ *then let my wife grind for another,
and let others bow down on her.*
- ¹¹ *For that would be a heinous crime;
that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges;*
- ¹² *for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon,
and it would burn to the root all my increase.*
- ¹³ *"If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant,
when they brought a complaint against me,*
- ¹⁴ *what then shall I do when God rises up?
When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?*
- ¹⁵ *Did not he who made me in the womb make him?
And did not one fashion us in the womb?*
- ¹⁶ *"If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,
or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,*
- ¹⁷ *or have eaten my morsel alone,
and the fatherless has not eaten of it*
- ¹⁸ *(for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father,*

and from my mother's womb I guided the widow),
¹⁹ *if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,*
or the needy without covering,
²⁰ *if his body has not blessed me,*
and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep,
²¹ *if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,*
because I saw my help in the gate,
²² *then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,*
and let my arm be broken from its socket.
²³ *For I was in terror of calamity from God,*
and I could not have faced his majesty.” – Job 31:1-23 ESV

In what appears to be Job’s closing argument, he provides a long list of accusations that have been leveled against him. Since the first moment his three friends arrived in Uz, Job has endured a steady barrage of finger-pointing and fault-finding as they attempted to determine the cause of his suffering. In their minds, Job’s circumstances could only be explained by one thing: Sin.

To have suffered such inexplicable loss and pain, Job must have done something to offend God. That was the only reasonable explanation Job’s self-appointed prosecutors could come up with. So, in this rather lengthy speech, Job addresses each and every one of their accusations head-on but he does it in the form of a call for divine justice or judgment.

Repeatedly, Job uses the conditional statement formula, “If...then. In this rather strange declaration of innocence, Job uses their very accusations to say, “If I have done these things, then let me suffer the consequences.” But inferred by his statement is the counter-argument: “If I have not committed these crimes, then may God vindicate me.”

Job is not confessing guilt; he is demanding justice. He remains resolutely committed to his innocence and firmly confident that justice will be done. For Job, the one point of consistency in his topsy-turvy life was the sovereignty of God. While everything else crumbled around him, Job clung to his belief in God’s providential care and commitment to justice.

“Let God weigh me on the scales of justice,
for he knows my integrity.” – Job 31:6 NLT

Job’s theological underpinnings were quite simple and straightforward. His view of God was fairly one-dimensional and based on a righteousness-reward model. If you do what is right and good, you will be rewarded by God. If you don’t, you will suffer the consequences. Job provides the following synopsis of his thoughts about God.

“Isn’t it calamity for the wicked
and misfortune for those who do evil?

*Doesn't he see everything I do
and every step I take?" – Job 31:3-4 NLT*

It would appear that Job's view of God was somewhat unsophisticated. His entire theology was based on a belief that God's omniscience allows Him to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. In Job's simplistic worldview, good deeds guarantee a good life.

"As a consequence of his suffering, Job viewed man's relationship to God as being based on God's sovereign caprice; therefore man could hope for happiness only by adhering to an ethical rightness superior to God's whereby he could demand vindication." – Gregory W. Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job." *Bibliotheca Sacra*

It's easy to see how this view of God required Job to defend his innocence so rigorously. There had to be another reason for his suffering, otherwise, his friends would be proven right and he would be forced to acknowledge his own wickedness.

What if I were in Job's shoes? What if I found myself in a similar situation? Could I respond the way Job did? Would I be able to claim my innocence with unwavering confidence? No, I would probably be able to come up with more than a handful of reasons for why I was going through what I was going through. I could find plenty of things for which I was guilty and deserving of some kind of punishment. But not Job. Just take a look at his speech in chapter 31. Job continues to claim his innocence, and he does it by giving a list of possible options for sins that might result in the kind of suffering he is enduring.

If I have stolen...

If I have coveted...

If I have lusted...

If I have taken advantage of...

If I have been selfish and unmerciful...

If I have not been generous...

If I have shown no compassion...

If I have abused the defenseless...

If I have been greedy...

If I have made prosperity my god...

If I have enjoyed watching others fail...

If I have not shared with those in need...

If I have tried to hide my sins...

If Job had done any of these things, he would have understood why he was suffering. But, in his mind, he stood before God and men as innocent.

Could I say the same thing? No, I'm afraid not. I would be guilty. In fact, I would never have played the "What if game" that Job played. Too dangerous. Too risky. Too condemning. I have done all of those things and more. I know it and so does God. Because, just as Job stated in his rhetorical question at the beginning of his little speech, "Isn't God looking, observing how I live? Doesn't he mark every step I take?" (Job 31:4 MSG).

God knew every detail of Job's life and the same thing is true of me. But what is amazing for us as believers is that we get to stand before God as righteous – justified and pure – all because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. God looks at me through the blood of His Son and sees me as righteousness. I have had Christ's righteousness imputed to my account. He sees me as guiltless and, therefore, He does not condemn me. I am *positionally* righteous.

But I still sin. That is why I am called to become *progressively* more righteous. Paul commands us to "lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God" (Ephesians 4:1 NLT). In Colossians he tells us, "So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, [act] like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ--that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your [real] life--even though invisible to spectators--is with Christ in God. [He] is your life" (Colossians 3:1-3 MSG).

Yes, God is watching us. But He is also indwelling us and empowering us. He is providing us with all we need to live the life of righteousness to which He has called us. Peter reminds us, "Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received!" (2 Peter 31:3 MSG).

We have all we need to live a life of righteousness. And even when we fail and fall, we have the right to bring our sins before the throne of God and confess them. And "if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:9 NLT).

So, in actuality, we can stand before God just as Job did and say, "If I..." The key is confession and repentance. Our sins have been paid for in full on the cross. There is no more punishment for sin. We confess our sins not so we can incur God's wrath and judgment, but so that He can

cleanse us and make us more into the likeness of His Son. He *progressively* makes us more righteous. In 1 Peter 1:16, we are told by God to "Be holy, because I am holy." God is not telling us to become something new. He is not telling us to change who we are. He is telling us to become what we already are – holy, set apart, and uniquely His. Peter tells us, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:10 NIV).

We have the power within us to change everything about us. So that we can actually stand before God and say, "If I..."

Job 31:24-40**Learning to Trust God**

²⁴ *"If I have made gold my trust
 or called fine gold my confidence,
²⁵ if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant
 or because my hand had found much,
²⁶ if I have looked at the sun when it shone,
 or the moon moving in splendor,
²⁷ and my heart has been secretly enticed,
 and my mouth has kissed my hand,
²⁸ this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges,
 for I would have been false to God above.*

²⁹ *"If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me,
 or exulted when evil overtook him
³⁰ (I have not let my mouth sin
 by asking for his life with a curse),
³¹ if the men of my tent have not said,
 'Who is there that has not been filled with his meat?'
³² (the sojourner has not lodged in the street;
 I have opened my doors to the traveler),
³³ if I have concealed my transgressions as others do
 by hiding my iniquity in my heart,
³⁴ because I stood in great fear of the multitude,
 and the contempt of families terrified me,
 so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors—
³⁵ Oh, that I had one to hear me!
 (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)
 Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary!
³⁶ Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;
 I would bind it on me as a crown;
³⁷ I would give him an account of all my steps;
 like a prince I would approach him.*

³⁸ *"If my land has cried out against me
 and its furrows have wept together,
³⁹ if I have eaten its yield without payment
 and made its owners breathe their last,
⁴⁰ let thorns grow instead of wheat,
 and foul weeds instead of barley." – Job 31:24-40 ESV*

Job continues his list of hypothetical if-then scenarios in an attempt to strengthen his claim of innocence. He produces a lengthy and wide-ranging catalogue of potential infractions that would warrant some kind of judgment from God. He is basically challenging his friends to come up with one solid piece of evidence that might provide proof of their charges of guilt. “If I am guilty,” Job says, “then God can punish me accordingly.”

But the obvious inference behind Job’s little speech is that he has done nothing wrong. He goes out of his way to list petty “crimes” that everyone commits everyday without suffering the kinds of loss he has faced. He is not trying to minimize the gravity of these “lesser” sins; he is simply pointing out their ubiquitous nature. Whether it’s the sin of lusting after another man’s wife or the mistreatment of household servants, Job claims that his hands are clean. He also demands that he is innocent of neglecting the poor and needy.

*“No, from childhood I have cared for orphans like a father,
and all my life I have cared for widows.” – Job 31:18 NLT*

He asserts that these kinds of selfish actions are commonplace and yet no one seems to incur the level of judgment that he has had to face. What makes matters worse is that he has refrained from doing these kinds of things and has still lost everything.

Job is demanding proportional justice. He is asking that his punishment match his crime. If he has committed a sin worthy of God’s wrath, then it seems only fair that his judgment be balanced and equitable. He is willing to accept God’s verdict but only asks that it be in keeping with whatever wrong he has committed.

*“If I raised my hand against an orphan,
knowing the judges would take my side,
then let my shoulder be wrenched out of place!
Let my arm be torn from its socket!
That would be better than facing God’s judgment.
For if the majesty of God opposes me, what hope is there?” – Job 31:21-23 NLT*

From Job’s perspective, his punishment has been disproportional to any sin he may have committed. This once wealthy man was now impoverished and destitute. Yet he declares that he never put his trust in money or gloated over his superior financial status. So, what would have caused God to take away all his material possessions?

Had Job been guilty of idolatry, worshiping the sun, moon, or stars in place of God Almighty, the judges of his community would have dealt with him severely. There were already laws and punishments in place for just such infractions. But what he suffered was far worse than any punitive measures an earthly judge would have meted out.

When Job looked back on all the disasters he had endured, he could more readily accept their occurrence if he had been guilty of wishing that same fate on one of his enemies.

*“Have I ever rejoiced when disaster struck my enemies,
or become excited when harm came their way?” – Job 31:29 NLT*

The answer was, “No!” Job claims to have never wished ill-will on anyone. Yet, he was forced to endure a litany of devastating disasters that had left him nothing. That is the part he was wrestling to understand. He was willing to accept any and all punishment as long as it was deserved. But he could think of nothing he had done that was worthy of the kind of pain and suffering he had endured.

He had not lived a secret life, clandestinely committing his sins behind closed doors and hiding his indiscretions from the eyes of others.

*“Have I tried to hide my sins like other people do,
concealing my guilt in my heart?
Have I feared the crowd
or the contempt of the masses,
so that I kept quiet and stayed indoors?” – Job 31:33-34 NLT*

Job wasn’t a hypocrite or a pretender. He couldn’t be accused of being a fraud or an impostor. His former life as an outstanding pillar of the Uz community had been anything but a sham. His righteousness had not been a cleverly crafted veneer designed to hide a secret life of sin and shame. He was exactly what he appeared to be. And yet, he had lost everything.

All Job is asking for is a fair trial. The vigilante justice of his three friends was wearing then and he longed for an opportunity to stand before God and defend himself from all their false accusations.

*“If only someone would listen to me!
Look, I will sign my name to my defense.
Let the Almighty answer me.
Let my accuser write out the charges against me.” – Job 31:35 NLT*

As far as Job could tell, no one had come up with a single piece of evidence that proved his guilt or adequately explained his losses. If they could produce the crime, Job would “wear it like a crown” (Job 31:36 NLT). In other words, he was so confident in his own innocence that he would take their indictment into the throne room of God and boldly give a defense of all his actions. But their accusations were all speculative and unspecific. They were forced to guess because they didn’t know the facts. But Job did and he was confident that God would decide in his favor.

Job was willing to accept punishment – *if* he was guilty. But that was the rub. He did not believe he had done anything to deserve what he had suffered. His judgment was way out of proportion to any sin he could have committed, and he firmly and consistently denied having done anything wrong at all.

There is little doubt that Job longed for relief from his pain and suffering. But his greatest desire was to have the integrity of his name restored. His reputation had been ruined, and it didn't help that his three friends continued to drag his name through the mud as they hurled unsubstantiated rumors and allegations against him. None of this was done in a vacuum. This was a public trial that placed Job in the awkward position of being the "celebrity" defendant whose entire life was put on display for all to see. Rumors ran rampant. Gossip made its way through the streets of Uz as everyone debated the guilt or innocence of this former icon of the community.

This entire scene brings to mind another man who suffered unjust treatment at the hands of his fellow citizens. In this case, it was King David, as he fled from Jerusalem because his son, Absalom, had staged a coup and taken over the throne. As David and his royal retinue made their way out of the city in shame, he was met with a less-than-favorable reaction from one of his own citizens.

As King David came to Bahurim, a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, from the same clan as Saul's family. He threw stones at the king and the king's officers and all the mighty warriors who surrounded him. "Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!" he shouted at David. "The Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul's clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer!" – 2 Samuel 16:5-8 NLT

David's companions offered to kill Shimei for his mistreatment of the former king, but David restrained them. Instead, he took a more reasoned reaction to the reproach of Shimei.

"Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it. And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today." – 2 Samuel 16:11-12 NLT

David was willing to leave the matter in God's hands. He was able to see the entire affair through the lens of God's sovereignty. David had a firm belief that God was behind all that happened in his life. That doesn't mean the pain wasn't real or that Shimei's words didn't hurt. In fact, David would later record the state of his feelings at that very moment.

*O Lord, I have so many enemies;
so many are against me.
So many are saying,
"God will never rescue him!" Interlude*

*But you, O Lord, are a shield around me;
you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.
I cried out to the Lord,
and he answered me from his holy mountain. – Psalm 3:1-4 NLT*

David went on to say that, despite the negative nature of his circumstances, he was able to sleep at night because he knew he was under the watchful gaze of God.

*...the Lord was watching over me.
I am not afraid of ten thousand enemies
who surround me on every side. – Psalm 3:5-6 NLT*

Job demanded resolution and restoration. He would not be happy until his lot in life had been remedied and his former lifestyle had been reinstated. But David was content to accept his situation and rest in the sovereign will of his all-knowing and ever-watchful God. This doesn't mean that David didn't desire rescue or vindication. He makes that point perfectly clear.

*Arise, O Lord!
Rescue me, my God!
Slap all my enemies in the face!
Shatter the teeth of the wicked!
Victory comes from you, O Lord.
May you bless your people. – Psalm 3:7-8 NLT*

David didn't waste time arguing his innocence or allowing the false attacks of his "ten thousand enemies" to get him down. He kept trusting in the Lord and patiently waiting on Him to set things right. He had full assurance that God would ultimately avenge him and all his enemies would get what they deserved. But in the meantime, he was able to sleep peacefully and wait patiently for God's will to be done.

Job was having a difficult time resting in the will of God. He was far from content with his circumstances and less than willing to trust God to determine the outcome. It's doubtful that Job was getting a lot of restful sleep, and it seems obvious that he didn't share David's view of God's watchful and protective care. He felt abandoned by God. He believed he had received unfair treatment at the hands of God. And it's hard to imagine Job saying, "you, O Lord, are a shield around me; you are my glory, the one who holds my head high" (Psalm 3:3 NLT). But in time, he will come to see things from David's perspective and learn to see God as a friend and not a foe.