Unit 1, Session 6

Suffering and God’s Presence

Summary and Goal
We don’t know for sure when Job lived, much less when the book telling his story was written. However, it is likely that Job lived during the time of the patriarchs. So this session on Job is included in the midst of the patriarchal period in early Genesis to follow the chronology of Scripture. As we move through a quick view of Job’s story, we will learn a critical lesson about God’s presence in the midst of suffering, which has its origin in our rebellion against God.

Session Outline
1. God is in control, even over our suffering (Job 1:6-12, 20-22).
2. God is present in our suffering, even if it may not feel that way (Job 9:14-16, 32-35).
3. God uses our suffering to draw us closer to Him (Job 42:1-6).

Session in a Sentence
God is present and in control of our suffering and uses it for good.

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

Missional Application
Because we have experienced the goodness of salvation through the suffering of God’s Son, we trust God in our suffering and comfort others in their suffering by assuring them of God’s great care and love.
Group Time

Introduction

**SAY:** We don’t know for sure when Job lived, much less when the book telling his story was written. However, it is likely that Job lived during the time of the patriarchs.

**Commentary:** Three reasons to conclude Job lived during the time of the patriarchs in early Genesis: 1) Job’s wealth is measured in terms of livestock. 2) There is no mention of organized worship or the law in the Book of Job. 3) Job served as a family priest, much like Noah and Abraham did for their families.¹

**EXPLAIN** the significance of the story of Job dating back to some of the earliest moments of history: It is comforting to know that from the earliest days of the human race, we have wrestled with the idea of suffering. We are not alone in our struggle to come to terms with the pain we experience in our lives—we stand together with every other person who has ever drawn breath.

- The mid-level manager who is called into his boss’s office to learn he has lost his job and now wonders how he will provide for his family.
- The expectant mother who braces herself for what her doctor is about to say following the opening, “I’m sorry, but I have some bad news to tell you.”
- The husband who comes home to find all of his wife’s belongings gone and a note on the counter.
- The parents whose teenage child is on a destructive path but refuses to listen to them.

**READ** the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 56).

Collectively, we have been groping for an answer to why suffering happens and how we are to navigate adversity. The answer that we seek takes focus throughout the chapters of Job. The answer does not come to us from God but rests in God Himself dwelling with us—even in our suffering. Though God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), He chooses to be an immanent presence for us always.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members to answer the following question with honesty. Make sure to insist your group be a safe place for honest and transparent responses from group members.

**When have you suffered, perhaps even to the point of leading you to doubt God’s presence in your life? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)**

**SUMMARIZE:** As we move through a quick view of Job’s story, we will learn a critical lesson about God’s presence in the midst of suffering, which has its origin in our rebellion against God.
Point 1: God is in control, even over our suffering (Job 1:6-12,20-22).

READ Job 1:6-12 (DDG p. 57).

6 One day the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD asked Satan, “Where have you come from?” “From roaming through the earth,” Satan answered him, “and walking around on it.”

8 Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil.”

9 Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Haven’t you placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

12 “Very well,” the LORD told Satan, “everything he owns is in your power. However, do not lay a hand on Job himself.” So Satan left the LORD’s presence.

SAY: When we’re in the middle of suffering, the one thing we want most is relief. We just want the pain to end. So we call out to God and plead, or bargain, with Him to intervene as if His back were turned from us. But we must remember that our pain does not negate God’s authority. He is not absent; He is right there with us and fully in control.

EXPLAIN: Show from the text how God remained in control over the suffering of Job: 1) The Lord brought Job to Satan's attention (v. 8), and 2) He limited the reach of Satan's tempting of Job through suffering (v. 12).

Commentary: When Satan came in from roaming around—mostly likely to see what distress he could cause humanity—God was the one to point out Job’s faithfulness. God brought Job to Satan’s attention, not the other way around. Here we have a man living such a faithful life that the God of heaven points him out—not because of disappointment but because of His joy in Job.

Notice two things when God responds to Satan’s claim that Job blesses God only because he is blessed:

• First, Satan—the great adversary—knows he cannot act without God’s permission. This is not even up for debate, and Satan does not argue the point.

• Second, when God does permit Satan to act, His permission comes with limitations. Satan did not have authority to affect Job’s health (though later he would, but he could not take Job’s life). At this point, Satan was only allowed to destroy all that he owned, which extended to the deaths of every one of his children in the collapse of a house by a powerful wind (vv. 13-19).

SAY: God was not the author or cause of pain in Job’s life; Satan was (v. 12). But it was in the greater plan of God to allow Job to be tested.
FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 57).

When you suffer, God hasn’t abandoned you. He is well aware of the brokenness of the world, the pain that our sinful choices bring, and how the enemy seeks to wound us. But in all of it, God is still in control.

READ Job 1:20-22 (DDG p. 57).

20 Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head. He fell to the ground and worshiped, 21 saying:
Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.
22 Throughout all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything.

EXPLAIN: Job’s response to the suffering that came his way was not anger but faithful worship. Likewise, our response to suffering reveals our faith in God to ourselves and to others.

Commentary: Job recognized that life and all of its good gifts have their origins in God’s kind and gracious provision. The same Lord who had authority to give him what he had also had the authority to take it away. Knowing this, Job chose to trust God, and our suffering presents a similar opportunity for us. Our faith in God can shine brightest in our times of suffering and pain. Worship through clenched teeth with tear-soaked cheeks glorifies God in a profound way. It cements our trust in God in our own hearts while simultaneously showing others the power of the gospel. Pain is but one more pathway to trust.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to plot their typical response to the suffering in their lives with the scale in their DDG (p. 57).

What is your typical response to suffering in your life?

Despair
Worship

READ the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 57).

The pain we face in our suffering is real, and we should be real about it as well. This is what Job did. Even as he maintained his faith in God during his suffering, he wept and mourned. He did not hide his pain or run from it. He lived in it. Pain and faithfulness are not mutually exclusive, but faithfulness in the midst of pain is right.
Point 2: God is present in our suffering, even if it may not feel that way (Job 9:14-16,32-35).


14 How then can I answer him or choose my arguments against him? 15 Even if I were in the right, I could not answer. I could only beg my Judge for mercy. 16 If I summoned him and he answered me, I do not believe he would pay attention to what I said.

............................................

32 For he is not a man like me, that I can answer him, that we can take each other to court. 33 There is no mediator between us, to lay his hand on both of us. 34 Let him take his rod away from me so his terror will no longer frighten me. 35 Then I would speak and not fear him. But that is not the case; I am on my own.

EXPLAIN why Job said these words, making reference to the following paragraph in the DDG.

These verses are part of Job’s response to a friend, who said Job must have sinned to be suffering so greatly. But suffering is not simply transactional; it is not always a result of our sin. And to view suffering this way diminishes God’s authority and goodness.

Commentary: When Satan’s first attempt to cause Job to curse God failed, God granted permission for Satan to try again—this time with permission to inflict great physical pain on Job (2:4-6). Even when Job’s wife called on him to curse God and die, Job did not sin (2:9-10).

Then Job’s three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, joined him in mourning on account of his suffering (2:11-13). After sitting with Job for a week saying nothing, Job broke the silence. The bulk of the Book of Job is a record of the lengthy conversations between these four men. The three friends’ basic position was that Job must have done something wrong to deserve this great suffering, and so he should repent. Job, however, countered that he had done nothing wrong. These friends looked at life through a transactional lens—a common mistake that comes from a worldly perspective.

• Illustration: When we view suffering this way, we diminish God’s authority to that of a cosmic traffic cop. When someone fails to obey the rules, the God up in the sky slaps them with a costly ticket.

• Illustration: Others treat God like a sanctified Santa Claus who is the jolly rewarder to good boys and girls. Of course, that also means coal and switches in the stockings of the bad kids.

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

How have you seen people treating God as an impersonal dispensary for rewards and discipline? (showing pride for the blessings of God; blaming God for the suffering and struggles in life; blaming the suffering of others on their “sin” without knowledge or context)
SAY: God wants us to have a better perspective. He wants us to think well about who He is and how He operates as sovereign Ruler. God is ruling over creation from His throne in heaven. But God is also immanent.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 58).

God Is Immanent: God is not a distant deity who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Immanent”: When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity (as imagined by the deist) who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.

EXPLAIN Job’s point of view in wishing for a mediator between himself and God to plead his case. God Himself would one day provide a mediator between sinful man and holy God—His Son, Jesus Christ.

Commentary: Job was in such pain that if he could, he would have taken God to court to plead his case. But he recognized that he would need a mediator with authority over God. Given this impossibility, Job felt alone. But God had not abandoned Job. Contrary to Job’s feelings about his circumstances, God was still near to him and listening. And God would eventually prove His presence to Job when He revealed Himself in great power (Job 38–41). In time, there would be no mistake that God had not abandoned him (Job 42). But God has proven His presence in our lives in an even greater way by providing a mediator to bridge the gap between sinful man and holy God—His Son, Jesus Christ, who took on flesh, fully God and fully man (1 Tim. 2:5). He lived the perfect life we could not live, died the death we deserve to die, and arose from the grave conquering sin. Jesus is our great mediator who intercedes on our behalf and through His suffering brought us to the Father. And through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God walks with us in our suffering today.

INTERACT: Read the “Voices from the Church” quote, and then ask group members the following question.

How should God’s presence in our lives through Christ and the Holy Spirit impact our experience of suffering? (we should recognize that no suffering can separate us from God’s love; we will endure knowing that all suffering has the purpose of sanctifying us to make us more like Christ; we can display the love of God to the world even in our suffering)

Voices from the Church
“‘The inward joy of the righteous cannot be destroyed by outward misfortune, for his communion with God is safe from any change due to circumstances.”
—Francis I. Anderson
**Point 3: God uses our suffering to draw us closer to Him (Job 42:1-6).**

**READ** Ask a volunteer to read Job 42:1-6 (DDG p. 59).

---

1 Then Job replied to the Lord:
   2 I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3 You asked, “Who is this who conceals my counsel with ignorance?” Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wondrous for me to know. 4 You said, “Listen now, and I will speak. When I question you, you will inform me.” 5 I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore, I reject my words and am sorry for them; I am dust and ashes.

---

**READ** the first paragraph in the DDG.

---

Most of the Book of Job centers on Job’s desire to know why he was suffering, believing there had been a mistake. Answers were what Job wanted most, but when God showed up, He had something far greater in store for Job than answers—He had Himself.

---

**PACK ITEM 7: THE LORD SPEAKS:** Pass out copies of this chart detailing the Lord’s response to Job’s questions and concerns regarding his suffering. Then explain how God’s revelation of Himself to Job put his suffering and his questions into the proper perspective.

**Commentary:** After Job’s friends had consistently misinterpreted his suffering and Job had overplayed his desire to question God, Job heard extensively from God, who spoke from a whirlwind. Time and time again, the Creator asked if Job had the depth of knowledge to understand the mysteries of creation.

Of course, Job remained silent throughout most of God’s response. Job had been humbled before his Maker, reminded of God’s sovereignty and divine presence over the world, which is precisely what Job’s heart needed. Though God’s words may have initially stung, they were the path to reassuring Job of what he needed most. Job didn’t need an explanation from God in his time of suffering; he needed God Himself.

---

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG to show how our own suffering should drive us to Christ.

---

When we suffer, instinctively we cry out for God’s presence. Like everyone, we want relief from our pain, but as our faith grows deeper through life, what we ultimately want and need is a deeper walk with God. We should echo Paul, whose highest goal was to know Christ—even if that path was through suffering, pain, and adversity (Phil. 3:10). Suffering is simultaneously a driving force for and the path to growing closer with Jesus.
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

? How has God used suffering in your life to draw you closer to Jesus? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: God's message and presence demanded a response from Job. Job had begged for a personal encounter with the Lord, and it had happened. Now what was he to do?

EXPLAIN: Show from the text how Job's response was a humble response worthy of our imitation.

- First, Job acknowledged God's sovereignty (Job 42:2). Rather than continuing to dwell on wanting an answer for his grievance, Job transitioned to focus on God's authority instead. He had moved from demanding an answer about earthly things to acknowledging God's control over eternal things.

  Application: Consider how acknowledging God’s sovereignty in your heart can mature your faith in Christ. When we suffer, we are like Job; our natural inclination is to crave and perhaps even demand relief and explanation. We can even speak to God like Job spoke to Him. But also like Job, our true need is to see Jesus for who He has revealed Himself to be. True relief is found not in the cessation of pain but in resting in the sovereignty of God. Since Jesus has been revealed as the Savior, we can trust Him in both the temporary circumstances of this world and in the eternal realm that is yet to come. Whether it is death, disease, or some other discomfort, Jesus’ reign as the sovereign King is enough for us to trust Him in the daily grind of life.

- Second, Job responded in humility (42:3-6). Job recognized that his speeches had been an overreach on every account. His personal demands for the God of the universe to give an accounting to a mere mortal were too much. Job discovered that all he needed was to be silent before the God of the universe. The presence of the Creator filled every void that suffering had brought into his life. This was what Job needed most, and what we need as well.

READ the third paragraph in the DDG.

God used Job's suffering to draw him closer to Himself, not despite his pain but through his pain. The same is true for us. Jesus has told us that His people will be persecuted, endure hardship, and suffer for His name (Matt. 10:22). And it is this very adversity that will draw us closer to Him as we identify with Him through our suffering (Col. 1:24). There is beauty alongside the pain in our suffering for this reason: It brings us closer to our Savior.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 59).

Our response to suffering should be to acknowledge God’s sovereignty in humility, knowing our suffering identifies us with Christ.
EXPLAIN: The suffering of Job is a real-life story that represents a greater reality. We should not diminish Job’s suffering, nor ours, but at the same time, we should put it into an eternal perspective. When the Lord revealed His eternal character to Job in the whirlwind, He was speaking to us as well. The ultimate answer to pain and suffering in this world is God Himself. The ultimate answer to the suffering of our sin is the same—Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection provides the forgiveness we need so we can experience what our hearts need most, relationship with our Creator.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 60), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have experienced the goodness of salvation through the suffering of God’s Son, we trust God in our suffering and comfort others in their suffering by assuring them of God’s great care and love.

- How will you choose to respond to your suffering, knowing that God is in control and Jesus suffered that we would experience the goodness of salvation?
- What are some ways you can encourage and care for one another in times of suffering?
- Whom do you know is in a season of adversity or suffering, and how can you assure him or her of God’s care and love?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You are our loving and faithful Creator. You are our sovereign God. So we come to You in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, in the midst of our suffering from sin and hardship. Help us to be content with Your presence and confident in Your forgiveness so that our lives may tell the world of your sovereign goodness found in the gospel of Jesus. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 61-63), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 64) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 61-63) help group members get into God’s Word for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 64) helps group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 61-63) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

• Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

• Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 2 as a part of point 2 in the session: Jesus humbled Himself and suffered greatly, all the while fixing His gaze on the Father’s glory and our good. For that reason, we too are to strive to live selflessly always, even in our times of distress.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

• Day 3: “Jesus knew the suffering He was enduring in that moment would not last, but more importantly, that it would lead to victory.”

• Day 5: “Our service to God is not conditioned on what we experience; it is conditioned on who we are—His children.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the DDG (p. 64) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

• Encourage group members to consider and to share in their small groups how God has used suffering in their lives for His glory and their good.

• See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

© 2018 LifeWay Christian Resources
Additional Commentary

**Point 1: God is in control, even over our suffering (Job 1:6-12,20-22).**

“Job does not know it, but his suffering has a higher purpose. God is proving that there is such a thing as real integrity in relationship between God and a human being. Job suffers because of Satan’s attack on God’s character and reign. Satan implies that God is being manipulated by Job, and Job by God. By allowing Job to suffer, God demonstrates that goodness and righteousness are more than just enlightened self-interest. Job’s experience reminds us that we do not have a heavenly perspective on earthly events. The disasters and suffering that come into our lives may have an eternal purpose of which we can know nothing.”

“Sons of God refers to heavenly beings gathered before God like a council before a king (see 15:8; Ps. 29:1; Isa. 6:1-8). The Hebrew idiom ‘sons of’ can be used of a group that is led by a figure referred to as their ‘father’ (e.g., the ‘father’ of a band of prophets in 1 Sam. 10:12). Satan. The Hebrew noun satan is commonly used to refer to someone generally as an adversary (e.g., 1 Sam. 29:4; 1 Kings 11:14) but here refers to a specific individual (‘the Adversary’) who does not appear to be one of the company but who also came among them. The dialogue that follows reveals the character of this figure to be consistent with that of the serpent in Genesis 3, a character who is also referred to by the use of this noun as the proper name, ‘Satan’ (e.g., 1 Chron. 21:1; see also Rev. 12:9).”

**Point 2: God is present in our suffering, even if it may not feel that way (Job 9:14-16,32-35).**

“Job resorts to using the metaphor of a court case as he talks about his situation. This metaphor was common in the wisdom literature, and is also often found in the prophetic books of the Bible, where God summons nations or people to appear in court before him (see, for example, Isa. 41:21). Job, a mere mortal, knows that he would be the loser if he were to attempt to confront God’s charges as an accused might confront his accusers in a court of law (9:32). He longs for a mediator, someone whom both parties to such a lawsuit would accept as a neutral figure. This mediator would bring both parties together and protect Job from the terror of God’s wrath (9:33-34). Then Job would be able to present his case without fear of him, but in the current circumstances he dare not do so (9:35). Job’s longing for a mediator takes on additional resonance when we think of Paul’s words, ‘there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim. 2:5; see also Heb. 9:15). Job longs to speak to defend himself; but as believers we have no need to do this—our eternal mediator intercedes with God on our behalf (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). That is why we can approach God confidently, without fear (Heb. 4:16). The Holy Spirit too intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27).”
“Job lamented the rapidly passing days of his life (vv. 25-26). Feeling that God would continue to punish him no matter what he did, Job ruled out other possible responses as futile (vv. 27-31). He recognized the vast gap between God’s holiness and man’s sin (vv. 32-35). He longed for someone to mediate his case impartially (v. 33), one of the themes of the book of Job. The book’s treatment of this theme reveals the need (and anticipates the solution) for a perfect Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus (cp. 16:19 and 1 Tim. 2:5).”

**Point 3: God uses our suffering to draw us closer to Him (Job 42:1-6).**

“Job now understood something of God’s justice and wise dealings with the strongest of creatures. Although Job had previously considered himself to be upright, he confessed that he had been influenced by traditional but errant understandings (15:17-19; 16:2). By saying he now saw God, he meant that he had experienced God’s presence and understood him better.”

“It is clear that not only has Job seen God, he has also seen himself, as is clear from his next words: *Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes* (42:6). His experience is similar to that of Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5). As in Job’s experience, so in ours. It is only when we meet God that we can understand who we are. Job’s words in 42:6 are the climax of his reply to God and the last statement in the poetic dialogue. But what exactly does Job mean? The crucial point involves the understanding of the Hebrew roots translated here as ‘despise’ and ‘repent.’ The word ‘despise’ is much stronger than the mere ‘unworthy’ of 40:4. Does it mean that Job hates himself? It is worth noting that the word ‘myself’ is not in the Hebrew of the phrase translated ‘despise myself’ in English. It seems that Job is not despising everything about himself, but rather the sin of his arrogant talk against God. Job’s deep contrition is implied in the second phrase as well—he repents ‘in dust and ashes.’ ‘Dust and ashes’ are regularly associated with mourning and humbling of oneself in the OT (2:12; Josh. 7:6; Esth. 4:1). What needs to be emphasized here is that the ‘I despise … and repent’ are not related to any one particular sin which might have precipitated Job’s suffering—as his friends insisted.”

**References**

For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.