

CCF Study Notes
Tuesday 7 AM Study
15 August 2006
Job 1-7

Before beginning to read from Job let's spend time in prayer, considering what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus. Let's ask God to help us to:

1. **Live with integrity** whether we wealthy or completely destitute;
2. **Hold fast our integrity** and speak well of God even when sick and alone;
3. **Look beyond ourselves** when faced with great loss and adversity;
4. **See others through God's eyes** and in His love;
5. **Speak of God's Mercy** to all people – especially those in any trouble;
6. **Lean** on God's strength and righteousness alone, and
7. **Always thank God** for creating and sustaining us each moment we are alive.

We now start the wisdom literature where we see a progression of spiritual themes: Job: dying to self, Psalms: new life in God, Proverbs: living for Christ, Ecclesiastes: leaving earthly loves, and Song of Solomon: union with Christ. When Jesus called disciples he asked them to deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow Him. Taking up the cross involves the death of "self" – self-centeredness, self-righteousness, self-help and self-hope. We don't know who wrote the book of Job. (Elihu? Moses? Job?). We are not entirely sure who Job was. Job is thought to be the oldest book of the Bible – and one of the most beautiful. Through great loss and adversity Job came to the end of himself. When all else was stripped away Job still had to deal with "self". The same is usually true of us. God often uses troubles in our lives to accelerate the death of self.

Job was a godly man of great integrity and wealth, richly blessed of God. He was a man of prayer who regularly lifted up sacrifices and prayers for each of his children. The interaction of God and Satan is something Job did not know about until long after his ordeal. Like Job, we usually don't know why God allows trouble to come into our lives. Satan is called "the Adversary" in 1:6-12. Though he tests the saints his power is limited by God. Still, Job loses all his children and possessions in a very short time. Job goes into mourning and grief, yet still blesses the name of the LORD.

Job passed the test, but Satan wasn't satisfied. He asked for and took Job's health away as well. Once again, Job had no idea why any of this was happening until long after his ordeal. Loneliness was added to loss and physical pain as Job's wife betrayed and rejected him. "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" asks Job. What integrity! Along come Job's three "friends" – the world's worst counselors, who would eventually lead Job to speak wrongly of God. If only they had just held their tongues after the first seven days! Worldly counselors, like these men, often make matters worse, leading us to the place where

God steps in to bring us to the end of self, to bring us to trust fully in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation.

Job curses the day he was born in the opening lament. There is no better picture in all of scripture of spiritual depression. Depression isn't just physical or emotional. It starts as a spiritual problem in us quite often. At its core depression is just selfishness distilled. We focus so intensely on ourselves and our problems that we lose sight of God. Job spends the rest of this ordeal searching for God. Is God there when we are hurting?

Each of Job's three friends will speak to Job three times, with Job answering each time. The book of Job gets long and tedious at times – just like our trials and ordeals. A fourth friend speaks at the end of Job, followed by a word from God Himself. Job responds briefly to God, the final details are worked out, and Job moves on, greatly benefited by his trial. Eliphaz is the pragmatist, who speaks from experience – like most therapists today. His experience tells him that Job must have sinned. We know that was not why Job was suffering – Job didn't know that. But a person is never so low that a little guilt won't put them lower! Eliphaz advises Job to come in repentance before God, accepting God's chastening. When God finishes His chastening everything will be fine! We need to be careful to avoid the same mistake ourselves. Suffering doesn't always come as punishment from God. Often we misrepresent God when we throw this kind of Christian psychobabble at people who are suffering greatly. Jesus has compassion. Do we?

Job responds in self-righteousness, suggesting that the calamity far outweighs what sin may remain in his life. "What strength do I have, that I should hope? ... Is my help not within me?" asks Job. Job is still relying on his own righteousness and integrity. Next Job charges God with being a harsh task-master who makes our lives miserable. When we speak without mercy to those who are suffering we lead such people to the same conclusion. Modern psychology often makes God seem to be a harsh task-master who has no mercy. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light!" When we rely on our own strength and righteousness we reject the yoke that Jesus offers. Then we see God as harsh, demanding and unmerciful – when we are being harsh, demanding and unmerciful on ourselves.

Read those first seven chapters of Job again, remembering that neither Job's words nor those of his friends are necessarily God's truth. Job's friends will be seen to be misrepresenting God in much of what is said. Sometimes it is not so much that Job and his friends are wrong in what they say. They are just saying it at the wrong time and in the wrong context. Let us pray that we may see beyond our own experience to counsel one another in love.

"The Psychologizing of the Faith," by Bob Hoekstra is a booklet that describes Christian counseling as opposed to worldly counsel. It is a valuable resource for every believer's library.

P.S. Recordings of these studies in John and the Prophets and copies of these notes are now available on a new website at <http://www.jstoker.name>. A new podcast is also available there or at <http://feeds.feedburner.com/CCF-T-Podcast>.