

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 21: Community Reflection & Job Part 1

Daily Reading for Week

- Zephaniah, Psalm 134
- Job 1-3, Psalm 135
- Job 4-7, Psalm 136
- Job 8-11, Psalm 137
- Job 12-15, Psalm 138
- Job 16-19, Psalm 139
- Job 20-23, Psalm 140
- Videos: Zephaniah, Job

Focus of time together

To reflect on the last ten weeks as we've journeyed together through the Year of Biblical Literacy and to take an honest examination of how the community has been relating, interacting, and loving one another.

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 131 aloud to open your time together.

Intro to Discussion

This week, we transition from the pre-exile prophets to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. As we did ten weeks ago, we want to use this transition between literary genres to pause and thoughtfully reflect on how our community is relating to one another as we journey through the Bible together. We will attempt to use Job and his friends as a framework to examine how we view, interact with, and speak to one another.

The book of Job begins our look at the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. One of the unique aspects of Job among the Old Testament books is that it is a story that on the surface does not involve Israel or Israelites at all. We don't know much about Job, only that he was wealthy and righteous and lived in the land of Uz east of Israel. Early in the book, God gives permission to the Accuser to take Job's children, wealth, and eventually health away from him.

The Accuser is convinced Job will curse God once his many blessings are removed. Puzzlingly, God not only gives the Accuser permission to torment Job but singles out Job in the first place (Job 1:8). From Job 3-42:6, the book is comprised of a series of poetic discourses. The bulk of these come from Job and are directed at God and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who come to comfort and offer Job “wisdom” in the midst of his suffering. There is a brief section in Job 32-37 where a fourth friend (Elihu) speaks, which most scholars recognise as being added at a later time. Interestingly, God himself doesn’t even reply to Elihu when he speaks in Job 38-42:6.

Job raises profound theological questions and also profoundly human questions which every person must wrestle with. Throughout the Old Testament narrative and Israel’s history is the repeated refrain of God responding to covenant faithfulness with blessing: be faithful, do good, act wisely, and you will prosper. Be unfaithful, do evil, act foolishly, and you will reap the consequences. But this religious logic isn’t the picture painted in the Book of Job. In fact, it is likely that Job was written in part to caution against this dangerously simplistic version of an Old Testament theology of sin, suffering, and God. While living righteously/well does indeed typically beget well-being and living unrighteously/poorly typically leads to suffering, life cannot be boiled down to a few simple rules about rewards and consequences. Indeed in Job’s case, it is his faithfulness and righteousness that cause him to be singled out for suffering in the first place. This raises the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Or more pointedly, “Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?” The book of Job touches the shared human experience of inexplicable suffering and dares to ask the question, “Why, God?” — a question ultimately (and frustratingly) God does not answer.

Whole Group Discussion

Questions for Self Examination

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware of who we are in the light of of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

To begin our discussion, we are going to do a reflection exercise involving two readings of Job 3 and several minutes of silent reflection and/or journaling. After this, we will invite share reflections with the group.

Have someone read the following reflection and Job 3 aloud:

Imagine Job is a friend expressing the following to God in your presence. Pay attention to what is going on inside of you as you hear Job’s words. What do you feel as Job cries out in his despair. Does his frankness make you uncomfortable? Do you think it is acceptable to speak this way to God?

Read Job 3.

Then have the same person read it a second time, slowly, as the group reflects on the same questions. Then continue in silence to meditate and journal for 5 minutes.

Questions for Practicing Community (25 minutes)

These exercises/questions are to help us reflect thoughtfully on our felt experiences together as community and provides opportunities to build on it further.

Read Job 2:11-13.

Job's three friends are not bad friends. They show up in Job's suffering and weep with him for a full seven days and allow Job to speak and mourn first. However, when they do speak, they do not speak with humility but with a misguided piousness and proverb-like platitudes, convinced that Job must have sinned against God in some way. It is a piercing example of how a sense of religious over-certainty, even when our theology is widely considered orthodox, can actually hinder us from loving people well.

Take a moment to reflect on the past two months in your home group. Have there been any moments in home group where someone has shared as rawly and emotionally as Job did? How did the group respond? Specifically, what attitudes were expressed and what words were shared? How loved and known did the person who shared feel?

If you can't recall such a moment, imagine it. Based on how the group habitually engages with one another, how safe do you think it would feel for someone feeling like Job to show up as their true self to your home group? How do you think your group would emotionally, physically, and verbally respond to such sharing?

Specifically consider how the group has read and studied and discussed the Bible together. Are there any ways that the pursuit of theological truth during the Year of Biblical Literacy has actually hindered us from loving one another well and humbly? In other words, have there been moments where someone's conviction about a religious idea has caused them to listen poorly or speak proudly or to fail to connect altogether with others?

How might we as a community adjust the way we regularly interact in order to better live out our value of humility? Be specific. Name actions or habits that hinder humility or expose a lack of humility and describe the kind of actions that you desire instead.

Closing Prayer

Close your time by corporately praying for your community. Acknowledge what was voiced during your discussion and ask the Holy Spirit to grow your capacity to relate and love one another in humility.