God Responds to Job

Printed Text • Job 38:1-7; 40:7-9; 42:1-6

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **APPRECIATE** our own relationships with God in a new way; **RECOGNIZE** that God is indeed sovereign and that His children are totally dependent on Him mentally, physically, and spiritually; and **SEEK** God's presence in our daily lives.

In Focus

Phyllis had endured one tragedy after another: teen pregnancy that ended in miscarriage, multiple medical conditions, a messy divorce, and the death of her beloved grandmother who raised her. Yet, somehow, she managed to persevere. She secured a good job, earned her GED, and found a welcoming church where she enjoyed weekly fellowships. She even began dating Antwon, a kind gentleman from the church. However, everything changed when she visited the doctor. Her neurologist said that one of her previous conditions was getting worse. The treatment, if it even worked, would be painful and expensive. She found herself repeatedly asking God, "Why? Why me? Haven't I been through enough?" She cried out to God for understanding, but she was left frustrated and heartbroken.

Then, one day, she felt a calming presence and recognized it as the Spirit of God. He reminded her of all the new friends at her church who had been through similar struggles. She thought, *Mrs. Brown had had fertility issues. Ms. Miriam had survived cancer and a kidney transplant. Hadn't Mrs. Parker divorced too?* Phyllis' healing did not come overnight; it took time, and she struggled in the pain of yet another setback. Nevertheless, God provided her with what she needed, and her church family helped her become whole.

Have you ever felt like you had to wait on God for an answer, healing, or an improvement in your situation?

Keep In Mind

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. (Esther 4:16, KJV)

"Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." (Esther 4:16, NLT)

Words You Should Know

Answer (Job 38:1) ana (Heb.)—To respond, respond to a question.
Abhor (Job 42:6) ma'as (Heb.)—To despise, or reject.

Say It Correctly

Job. JOBE.
Theophany. thee-**AH**-fo-ne.

KJV Job 38:1-7; 40:7-9; 42:1-6

38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?
3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.
4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.
5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?
6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;
7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
40:7 Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
8 Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?
9 Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?
42:1 Then Job answered the LORD, and said,
2 I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.
3 Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.
4 Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.
6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

NLT Job 38:1-7; 40:7-9; 42:1-6

38:1 Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind:
2 "Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words?
3 Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.
4 Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much.
5 Who determined its dimensions and stretched out the surveying line?
6 What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone
7 as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"
40:7 "Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.
8 Will you discredit my justice and condemn me just to prove you are right?
9 Are you as strong as God? Can you thunder with a voice like his?"
42:1 Then Job replied to the LORD:
2 "I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you.
3 You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me.
4 You said, 'Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.'
5 I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes.
6 I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."

The People, Places, and Times

Whirlwind. As Job contemplated his situation, God showed up in the form of a whirlwind. A whirlwind is an example of a theophany. A theophany is a way for God's people to hear and experience being in His presence without being harmed. A theophany both conceals and reveals. It conceals the full glory of God, and it reveals His will to His people. Other examples of theophanies are found in Genesis 15:17 when God establishes his covenant with Abraham and does so in the form of "smoking fire pot." In Exodus 3:2, God revealed to Moses that He is the I AM and was sending him to Egypt to bring out the enslaved Israelites by way of a "flaming fire" that did not consume a bush. In 1 Kings 19:12, God spoke to Elijah, who was in a cleft of a cave by way of a "gentle whisper."

Background

At the beginning of Job's story, God said that Job was a perfect and upright man (Job 1:1). In God's own sight, Job had been faithful. He had been a righteous man. In chapters 32–37, a young man named Elihu, a bystander and much younger than Job's three other friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, rebuked them for being unable to give Job a reasonable answer for why he was suffering. Elihu contradicted Job and the other three. He was angry with all of them. The other friends still thought that Job had done something wrong and would not confess his sin. Therefore, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar saw no further need to discuss the matter with Job. No one was willing to change his position—especially not Job. He still held that he had done nothing wrong and refused to be persuaded otherwise.

Elihu felt that Job's suffering would not cease until Job confessed his present sins. He felt that Job was not suffering because of sins, but that he was sinning because of his suffering. Elihu felt that Job had become arrogant during his suffering as he tried to explain and defend himself. Elihu felt that suffering is not meant to punish us so much as to correct and restore us—to get us back on God's right path. Elihu reminded Job of God's justice (Job 35). He concluded that although God does not intervene immediately in every situation, He is still concerned. In fact, in the bigger picture, God executed His justice in place of man's. In Job 36, Elihu also reminded Job of God's power and of how He is incomprehensible because no finite being can know an infinite God completely; our minds are too limited. He reminded Job that we can never know enough about God to answer all of life's questions. Why do some people think that physical suffering is connected to personal sin?

At-A-Glance

1. The Lord Challenged Job (Job 38:1–7)
2. The Lord Challenged Job Again (40:7–9)
3. Job Responded to the Lord (42:1–6)

In Depth

1. The Lord Challenged Job (Job 38:1–7)

Up to this point, Job wanted to question God about his suffering but lacked the opportunity. In fact, sometimes God was even silent. But then God answered Job out of a whirlwind (Job 38:1). God began by telling Job that he doesn't have knowledge (v. 2). This is a profound statement because the arguments Job has had with his friends all center on what they understand about God. However, the declaration that Job doesn't understand points to an understanding that goes beyond what humans can comprehend. God demands that Job respond to His questions (v. 3), questions that Job obviously cannot answer because his knowledge is not like God's.

God then asks Job for his whereabouts when the earth was established. This question, which Job cannot answer, points to the greatness of God who identifies himself to Job as the Creator of all creation. Again, he points to Job's understanding by commanding him to answer if he understands, in other words, answer if he knows the answer. God further speaks to the details of creation, such as measurements that Job does not know. Then God speaks about the morning stars, which likely are the sons of God who are the angels who worship God (Job 1:6). Since God was and is the standard and there is no one higher than He, there was no one or nothing else by which to judge an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God who was and is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Even if He told us, we still might not understand, just as Job did not. Has God ever said or done something that you just don't understand? What was your response?

2. The Lord Challenged Job Again (40:7–9)

Once again, God demonstrated His love and care for Job. This time, He told Job to brace himself, because He had some questions for him to answer (Job 40:7). God wanted to know if Job was going to question or discredit His justice and condemn Him based on his own limited knowledge and understanding. In other words, God reminded Job that he was a mere man. God is God! God asked Job in verse 9 if he (Job) was as strong as God or even had a voice like God.

These questions helped Job put his own questions in perspective. God let Job know that nothing can compare to His awesome presence and power. No man can speak for God or take Him for granted, not even Job. No man can interpret His silences, not even Job or his friends. Like all of us, Job had to learn to wait on God, who moved and moves in His own time and in His own way. Why is it such a challenge for believers to wait on God?

3. Job Responded to the Lord (Job 42:1–6)

Throughout the book, Job had questions about his suffering and pain. In verse 1, Job finally gets what he desired, an opportunity to respond to God. But it is not like he had hoped— to plead his case (Job 23:3-4). Job responds that he knows God can do all things and that God has purpose for what he does. In other words,

God is not careless or without intent in how He deals with His creation.

In verse 3, Job repeats back God's question and responds that his questioning was an error and that he was asking about things that he did not understand, and he describes them as too "wonderful" for his understanding. In humility, Job made things right with God. He truly did not understand the cause of or reason for his dilemma. In verse 4, he again repeats God's words back to him, showing that he really listened to God's words and questions. In verse 5, Job compares his understanding to "seeing God," although he had not literally "seen" God. In verse 6, he repents with sackcloth and ashes—a position usually when someone is fasting or mourning. Job was truly sorry for questioning God without understanding. What does Job's response to God tell us about Job's character and his relationship with God?

Search the Scriptures

1. Who answered Job out of the whirlwind? (Job 38:1)
2. Can we withhold our thoughts from God? (42:2)
3. What did Job do before Almighty God to make things right between them? (v. 6)

Discuss The Meaning

1. Are there times when a Christian can faithfully question God about our suffering?
2. What are the benefits and possible setbacks of talking to someone when in the midst of trial?
3. What are some things we can do when our faith is being tested?

Liberating Lesson

We can learn a lot from Job's experience. God will provide what we need when we need it. The world does not have the advantage we have in knowing that a loving God has the answer to the dilemmas of life. They scoff at those who put their trust in God's integrity. Let us acknowledge God in all our ways, knowing His power to deliver cannot fail.

Application For Activation

Invite God to walk and talk with you and pray daily for God's presence in your life. Ask Him to draw you closer and to let you encounter Him in all that you do and say. Then, ask God to let your relationship with Him impact you to such an extent that you understand your relationship with others in a new way.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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_____

_____

_____

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

_____

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More Light on the Text

Job 38:1-7; 40:7-9; 42:1-6

1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said.

The Hebrew word for "answer" is 'ana (aw-**NAW**). It can also be translated as "respond" to a question. The text indicates that God is now responding to Job, using a "whirlwind" to convey His message. God can choose various ways to communicate with His people. Sometimes God speaks directly, and the listener simply hears, as in the case of Samuel. Other times, He uses different forms, such as a "flaming fire" (Exodus 3:2-6) to express His message to His people.

2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

The Hebrew word for "darken" is hasak (khaw-**SHAK**). However, in this context with the verb form used here, it means "to conceal" or "to hide." God asks Job who it is that conceals counsel without knowledge. In other words, God is telling Job that he lacks understanding. God tells Job he is obscuring God's good counsel by trying to speak when he doesn't know what he's talking about.

3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

The Hebrew word 'azar (aw-**ZAR**) can be translated as "gird," but it also means "clothe" or "to equip." This conveys the idea of preparing oneself for battle. Today, God might have told Job to buckle up or strap in. God was about to reveal Himself powerfully to Job, and he needed to be ready for it. The Hebrew word sa'al (shaw-**ALL**) means "to ask," but with the verb form used here, it can be translated as "demand." In this context, God is speaking firmly with Job and is demanding a response.

4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

The Lord begins with a question regarding the foundation of the earth. God states that He laid the foundation, which can also be understood as establishing it. Without God's involvement in establishing the earth, there would be no earth at all. Obviously, there was no human around when God was creating the earth. Unlike the creation stories of other religions around Job, God clearly revealed to his people that He was the only Creator. No other divine power was even around, let alone helping God create, and certainly no lowly human like Job.

5 Who hath laid the measures thereof if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? 6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof.

God once again emphasizes the details involved in the creation of the earth. He is the one who makes measures (Heb. memad, may-**MAD**), This term appears only once in the Hebrew Bible, but from its context and linguistic relatives, scholars can know that it refers to measuring. The word "stretched" (Heb. nata, naw-TAW), which can mean to extend or turn, is also significant. This focus on detail underscores that the creation of the earth is an act that only God can accomplish.

7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
An understanding of Hebrew poetry, specifically synonymous parallelism, is helpful in determining the meaning of "morning stars." Synonymous parallelism involves expressing the same idea in the first line of poetry and reiterating it in the second line using different words. In this case, "morning stars" refers to "the sons of God," and "sang" is synonymous with "shouted for joy." In other words, God's divine creation brings Him glory.

God reminds Job that he was not there when God made the world, but that does not mean there were no other entities present. Still, these entities were not His helpers in creation. They were too busy singing and shouting, overwhelmed by God's greatness.

40:7 Gird up thy loins like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. 8 Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?
In this passage, the Lord shifts to a more personal and direct line of questioning to address Job's incorrect understanding of divine justice. The Hebrew word for "disannul" is parar (paw-**RAR**) and can be translated as "void." This word appears in the Hiphil stem, which conveys a causative meaning. In other words, God asks whether Job can cause God's judgment to be void. Of course, no human being can change God's Word; it is an impossible task that Job cannot accomplish. The subsequent question—"Will you discredit my justice and condemn me just to prove you are right?" (v. 8, NLT)—is also an impossible task. Who among us can judge God and condemn Him? No one is more righteous than God. The intensity of the situation shows that God is genuinely upset. Job has not only questioned God but has also assumed there is something wrong with God's judgment.

9 Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?
This verse emphasizes God's power. The Hebrew word for "arm" is zeroa' (zuh-**ROH**-ah). This term is an example of an anthropomorphic expression, which uses human body terms to describe attributes of God. God's arm is unmatched in power. This same word is used to describe God's outstretched arm that delivered the Israelites from bondage to Pharaoh (Exodus 6:6; Psalm 136:12). Similarly, the "voice" of the Lord also refers to His power, as highlighted in Psalm 29.

42:1 Then Job answered the LORD, and said, 2 I know that thou canst do everything and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

The first time Job responded to God's questions, he mentioned that he did not have much to say; he felt he had already said enough, or perhaps too much (Job 40:3-5). This time, however, Job does offer a response.

Job begins his response to God by acknowledging God's authority and focusing on His power and purposes. Job's declaration that he knows God can do all things shows his understanding of his own limitations and his recognition that he cannot question God's actions.

3 Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. 4 Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
Job responds to God by repeating His question and fulfilling what God demanded of him—providing an answer, which consists of a list of things he does not understand. He acknowledges that these things are wonderful or marvelous and admits that he lacks knowledge about them. Ultimately, Job affirms that his own understanding is insignificant when compared to God's. Job once again echoes the words of God, and this act of repeating God's words is crucial in resolving relational conflicts. By demonstrating attentiveness, Job shows that he values and appreciates the person he is relating to, acknowledges what has been said, and recognizes the importance of their relationship.

5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. 6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.
With the Lord's repeated challenge as a reference point, Job distinguishes between what he had heard about the Lord and his current encounter. The Hebrew word for "abhor," ma'as (maw-**AS**), can be understood as "despise" or "reject." In the context of Job, he despises or rejects himself. He no longer seeks to understand why he is facing his suffering; instead, he trusts that God is just in His judgments, and all he can do is repent. For Job, repentance leads to two significant outcomes: 1. He renounces his misconceptions about God, and 2. He reconciles himself with both God and his friends.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday
Jacob Sees God
(Genesis 32:22–32)

Tuesday
Moses Sees God's Glory
(Exodus 33:17–23; 34:5–8)

Wednesday
Isaiah Sees God
(Isaiah 6:1–8)

Thursday
Everyone Called to Repent
(Acts 2:37–41)

Friday
God's Sovereignty and Wisdom
(Job 38:1–7)

Saturday
Human Limits
(Job 40:7–9)

Sunday
Repentance and Trust
(Job 42:1–6)