

# **Family Bible Series for Nov. 13: Look to God for answers to life's hard questions**

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# **Look to God for answers to life's hard questions**

- Job 4:6-8; 8:4-8; 11:13-15

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When tragedy strikes, there are generally two extreme explanations immediately raised. One states all bad things that happen are sent by God as judgment on the people involved. The other explanation holds that tragedies solely are the result of human choice and bad luck.

While either of these may be true for a particular situation, one must be very cautious about any general statements universally applied to explain why certain events occur. As is often the case, the truth usually lies somewhere between these two extremes.

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God has told us his ways and thoughts are much higher than ours. Human explanations usually fall far short of offering fully satisfying answers that can speak to the soul of the one suffering. Believers should shun overly simplistic explanations and carefully seek God's help with each unique circumstance. The story of Job's encounter with his three friends clearly illustrates this.

### **Job 4:6-8**

Before looking at what each of these friends said, we should point out these three men truly were Job's friends. They were genuinely concerned about their friend and sought to help Job through his trying times. Their explanations were based squarely on the commonly held theology of the day that God would bless the obedient and punish the disobedient. While the basic idea is central to much of the Torah, especially the book of Deuteronomy, this explanation is based on mistaken assumptions and misapplication of this truth.

Having heard about Job's misfortunes, three of his friends come to console and support him. For seven days and nights, they all sit together without speaking a word. Finally, in chapter 3, Job breaks the silence as he gives voice to his lament. The words recorded there are the words of a man genuinely grieved and perplexed concerning his situation. In this lament, Job curses the day he was born and questions why God would give life only

for the person to suffer.

Eliphaz is the first to respond to Job's lament. In his response, Eliphaz immediately appeals to God's justice as the reason for Job's misfortunes.

His reasoning is certainly logical. Why would God send discomfort on a "blameless" person (v. 6)? Since the only reasonable answer to this question is that God would not do that, Job must be hiding some unconfessed sin.

God is thus justified in sending calamity as punishment. Yet the reader knows Job stands blameless before God. Still, Eliphaz continues into chapter 5 to encourage Job to "come clean" and confess his sins.

In chapters 6 and 7, Job affirms his initial lament was indeed emotional instead of rational (6:1-3) and then continues to lament his situation while maintaining his innocence before God. Even today, well-intentioned believers may dismiss the emotional laments and outcries of innocence from those suffering and counsel the person to "just get over it." Yet God honors such appeals as honest expressions of human emotion. God desires this type of complete openness and honesty from his people.

### **Job 8:4-8**

Bildad is the next to speak. His explanation largely is the same as that of Eliphaz in that he attributes Job's suffering to God's punishment for sin. Yet whereas Eliphaz had based his argument on God's justice, Bildad based his on religious tradition.

This is perhaps most clearly evident in verse 8, where he encourages Job to "ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned." The idea here is that God-fearing men had determined long ago suffering was

the result of sin. This was now the essential teaching of their theology.

Such appeals to traditional beliefs have been common throughout history and frequently are used today. Yet the mere fact that a certain belief or practice has been around for a long time, does not strengthen its validity.

For example, for centuries the church taught the earth was flat and excommunicated anyone who taught otherwise. We now know, however, this teaching was false. God constantly is in the process of revealing more of himself and creation to us. While we are certainly called to test new ideas against the teachings of the Bible, we also should be open to new revelations from God and should always refuse to readily accept explanations simply because they represent traditional teachings.

### **Job 11:13-15**

After Job once again affirms his innocence and laments his circumstances, Zophar offers yet another explanation. While the idea is once again that suffering is evidence of God's punishment, Zophar bases his argument on human reason. He offers a series of "if ..., then ..." statements designed to get Job to see the logic behind this idea. Yet rather than focusing on the negative side, Zophar emphasizes what the logical result of turning to God in obedience would be. For Zophar, it is only reasonable to think that if Job confesses his sin, God would bless him.

After each of these friends have spoken, Job offers a final reaffirmation of his rejection of their explanations and expresses a desire to bring his case directly to God (13:20-24). While God does not immediately answer Job, Job has taken the best course of action. Instead of seeking guidance from human ideas of justice, tradition or reason, Job wishes to take his concerns to God to see what God might say. What better course of action could there be?

## **Discussion questions**

- What are some other explanations people offer for why bad things happen?
- What are some other traditional beliefs and practices that have been or should be reconsidered?

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