

Explore the Bible: Dependence Declared

June 29, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for July 18 focuses on Job 42:1-11.*

Americans value *independence* much more than *dependence*. I don't know of a "dependence day" celebrated on our calendar. For a Christian, the essence of our salvation is discovering our desperate dependence upon God. As I heard a pastor offer the simple challenge, to trust in God is to simply say: "I can't. God, you can."

Ultimately, we learn throughout life that we are not as independent as we would like to think we are. Our lives on earth are dependent on one another—for food, protection, companionship and health. Even this fails to consider all of the needs of life are ultimately provided by our heavenly Father. As James 1:17 reminds us, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

In our country, we have fought for and celebrated freedom and independence. Yet, in the story of Job, we learn that earthly freedoms are fleeting. Learning to trust and be dependent upon the Lord, even in the darkest of days, will allow us to join Job in saying of God, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."

Who has the last word?

I admit it, I love a good story with a happy ending. When it comes to movies and TV shows, I am always pulling for the good guys to win the day, the guy to get the girl, peace to win the day and everyone to live happily ever after.

Apparently, I am not the only one as Disney has made billions creating stories that ended with that famous line.

John Goldingay writes in *Job For Everyone*, "...the reason why a story that has a happy ending is important—not because we are avoiding the toughness of the unhappy ending and fooling ourselves but because God is indeed one who brings stories to a happy ending." (p. 206) He also notes the Israelites at this point in their history would not have had a theology of resurrection or life after-death. Therefore, restoration in the story of Job is vital to understand that God alone has the last word in all our trials and struggles.

It will almost be impossible for us to totally understand the big picture or the perspective that our heavenly Father possesses of our lives. That is the point God is hammering home to Job in the final chapters. We cannot have God's understanding; therefore, we must trust in the one who *does* know all things. Job finally agrees with God in chapter 42—not just that God is greater or has superior firepower, as Goldingay puts it, but Job "...takes up God's own words about his not having enough insight to hold forth concerning the issues on which he has been pontificating and he acknowledges that God is right." (*Job For Everyone*, p.207)

Job and his friends end in a role reversal. As God restores Job completely to his community, there is a great banquet for all of Job's kinfolk. The Hebrew states "brothers and sisters" but according to Robert Alter, the context suggests a broader meaning of kinship. Those who had forsaken Job now are paying honor and homage to him. Job's friends that did not seek the Lord on his behalf at any point in the book are now in need of Job to seek the Lord on their behalf. Job's prayer is heard, and full restoration takes place for the maligned friends as well.

Not about answered questions

One area that we might never truly come to terms with in the book of Job is answering the question “Why?” It is the one that we have been facing since the Adversary first entered the heavenly court and God began the conversation. What is the reason given for all the suffering in Job’s life? Why do we not receive a divine “I told you so” to the Adversary in the epilogue?

Well, Fredrick Buechner concludes his chapter on Job in *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who’s Who* by observing, “...even if God gave him one [a reason why] that made splendid sense out of all the pain and suffering that had ever been since the world began, it was no longer splendid sense that he needed because with his own eyes he had beheld, and not as a stranger, the one who in the end clothed all things, no matter how small or confused or in pain, with his own splendor. And that was more than sufficient.”

The story of Job ends much like the final words to Paul when he asked God to take away suffering (thorn in the flesh): “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) May we remember the message of Job—that his original blessings or restoration were never a direct result of Job’s piety but because of the character of Job’s God.

For a great video overview of this powerful book, check out the Bible Project video synopsis on Job: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQwnH8th_fs

Davey Gibson is associate pastor of education and discipleship at Sugar Land Baptist Church in Sugar Land, Texas.