

The Book of Job
Session 30: Application of the Book of Job
By John Walton

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 30, Application of the Book of Job.

Introduction: Application, Not Action Point but Thinking Points [00:23-1:53]

So finally, how do we think about applying the Book of Job? What have we learned in the book of Job for our lives? When I think about application, I don't necessarily think of it in terms of action points that I can do this week. There's nothing wrong with that, and sometimes we can identify things that can actually change our behavior when we've been pointed to something that we've been doing incorrectly. That's fine.

But I think there's a more important aspect of application; instead of thinking in terms of action points, I would rather talk of thinking points. How can we think differently? In the end, we don't want the Bible just to give us a quick fix for this week. We wanted it to soak into our hearts and lives so that we actually begin to think differently. As we think differently, we will act differently. As we think differently, we will be prepared for whatever might come instead of just having a little strategy for one action point this week.

Being Prepared for Suffering [1:53-4:20]

On something like suffering and thinking about God, when life goes wrong, we have to be prepared for that. A marathon runner doesn't wake up one morning and decide to run a marathon that day. A concert pianist doesn't walk into the concert hall in front of thousands of people and decide to sight-read a complicated piece. It's the preparation that gives us the chance to succeed. Life is no different. We need to prepare for the

contingencies of life, the things that come upon us without warning. If you wait until it's upon you, then you're not really going to be prepared for it. It'd be too late to prepare.

When my kids were young and getting ready to begin driving, I decided that it really wasn't a good idea to wait until they had a flat tire somewhere along a dark abandoned road with no help in sight for them to learn how to change a flat tire. So, we chose a nice, comfortable day in the driveway and learned how to change a tire.

Prepare ahead of time because when the actual circumstance occurs, you might not really be in the mood. Sometimes I think that way about the Book of Job. I'm not sure it's a good book to read when you've actually begun suffering because you have to work through it so patiently, so almost tediously to get what it has to give. When suffering is flooded upon us, we just don't have the focus for it; we don't have the attention span.

So, it's important that we try to learn the lessons, get those thinking points ingrained in us, and fill the reservoir of understanding, so we can draw on it when we need it in life.

Job is Not for Bringing Us Comfort [4:20-5:01]

So, let's talk about it some. Does the book offer comfort? That's certainly not its intention. It's not trying to comfort you. Job does not receive comfort from friends or family or from Yahweh. It doesn't give comfort through explanations or answers. And it really, even when there's restoration, that's not intended as comfort bringing. No, the book does not bring comfort. That is not the way we should think of applying it.

Job Teaches Acceptance and Encourages Thinking Points [5:01-7:46]

The alternative to comfort is that the book helps us to learn acceptance. Acceptance is found in gaining a revised perspective on our pain or suffering. It helps us to think about ourselves and our situation in different terms and to see God in new light. The book can help us to cultivate acceptance of what we encounter in life, as difficult as it might be.

I'm not trying to kind of reduce it to something that really can be held at arms-length. We know suffering is not like that. The book of Job helps us to understand the terms of God's control rather than the limitations of God's control, the terms of God's control and what that should lead us to expect or not expect. Expectations are so important. We should not expect to find comfort in explanations. We want acceptance of the way God made the world to work, acceptance that what we experience is not in vain.

The book provides us with hope and a reason to trust. So, we don't have a set of marching orders here, a remedial application, that kind of tells us how to act this week. That could confront our inadequacies or our failures, but that's like paying the bills in a financial crisis. You just try to keep up with the flurry of bills. But it is teaching us to learn, to think. These thinking points are what I call constructive application. It involves more than doing what is right. It puts us on a path of thinking what is right, of getting into good thinking habits and routines. It involves how we think about ourselves, how we think about the world around us. And, of course, most importantly, how we think about God. It provides the basis for a lifetime of inner resources that will help us to respond well to the situations that we might face. Instead of paying the outstanding bills in a financial crisis, it's like opening a saving account and having money in the bank for the future. None of us like to live hand to mouth.

God is not Picayune [7:46-8:59]

So, what are the thinking points about God that we can apply to our lives and our thinking? God is not picayune. Discipline notwithstanding, of course, God does discipline those whom he loves. But remember grace; God is a God of grace.

I recently had a conversation with a person who had been a staunch Christian their entire lives. They were now in the final throes of a terminal disease. They expressed some fear that, somehow, they would come under criticism when standing before Christ that they had not done enough. This person had spent their whole life in selfless service to God, and there was a little bit of that God is picayune. Remember grace.

God is Not Accountable to Us [8:59-9:18]

Another thinking point about God is something we've mentioned a few times already. God is not accountable to us. Never think that God is accountable to us. We should not harbor suspicions against God such that we're ready to doubt him and think the worst of him.

God is not a Chaos Creature [9:18-9:53]

Another thinking point is that God is consistent rather than arbitrary. He's good rather than evil. He's characterized by displays of grace rather than abusing uncontrollable power. God is not a chaos creature who is powerful, mischievous, arbitrary, amoral, driven by instincts and selfishness. God is not a chaos creature.

Should Not Vindicate Ourselves at God's Expense [9:53-10:13]

Another thinking point, we should not vindicate or justify ourselves at God's expense. We've already talked about these issues in the Book of Job, and we have to absorb them into our lives and our thinking.

Manipulating God is a Bad Idea [10:13-10:51]

Manipulation of God is always a bad idea -- always a bad idea. We dare not try to change God. He needs to change us. Any picture that we think we can create with God to coerce him to address our desires is bound to diminish him in the end. You don't want that result. We don't want a God who is at our beck and call. Such a God is no God. We should never think that we can back God into a corner by throwing his promises at him; likely, the ones we're using aren't promises anyway. Or, as Job did, with his vow of innocence, trying to manipulate God. We can't back him into a corner. We don't want to. We must not.

We Can't Make Demands on God [10:51-12:44]

We should never think that we can demand that God answer us by our specified mechanisms at our chosen times. We are not in a position to make demands. We should never think that because we consider ourselves faithful that God therefore owes us this

sort of response that we desire. God owes us nothing. We have earned nothing. We can feel free to pray for those outcomes that we want, healing, guidance, whatever it might be, but in the process, God must be free to be God. It can't be any other way. Sometimes we need his strength to live with physical problems rather than his healing from those problems. We need to accept that. Sometimes we need his encouragement to continue in what seems to us an untenable situation rather than getting him to change our circumstances. After all, remember the Lord's prayer, "Your kingdom come"--not mine. "Your will be done" -- not mine.

Disinterested Righteousness [12:44-14:55]

The prayers God most delights in answering are those that ask him to shape us into people who can serve and honor him wherever he places us. So, let's get to this issue of disinterested righteousness. Job demonstrates that there is such a thing. And so, is our righteousness and faithfulness disinterested? If we'd lost all evidence of the blessing of God in our lives today, as Job did, if we had no hope of future blessings, heaven, or eternal life, that's the situation that Abraham had to contemplate, would we still remain faithful to God and serve him with our lives? Do we serve him because he is worthy or because he is generous? It's a simple question. Would we serve him if there were no benefits? We're not on a ride that has a prize at the end. We are in a relationship that carries responsibilities. Our relationship with God through Christ is not just about being saved from our sins. More importantly, it's about being saved to a calling and a relationship, a relationship with God where we are partners in the kingdom work. Our relationship with God through Christ gives us that new status, that new identity, partners in the kingdom of God, working toward his plans and purposes. The relationship is not on hold till heaven. Being in Christ is more important than being heaven bound.

1 Peter 3:15 An Answer for Hope in Context of Suffering [14:55-16:55]

1 Peter, 3:15 "In your hearts, revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." I find it incredible that we often use that verse as if it's a call to apologetics. And so, giving a

reason for the hope is giving a reason and interpretation for all of our beliefs. That's not what the verse says, and that's not what the context indicates. This is a passage about suffering. And when it says, "Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have," it's referring to that situation where you are obviously suffering, and everyone around you knows it and sees it. When they see you responding with hope, they're going to want it now. They're going to ask, how can you remain full of hope when your life is in such a shambles? And Peter says, have a ready answer. It's about us explaining how we think about God, about the world, about suffering. Be ready to give an answer.

God's Wisdom and Our Trust Response [16:55-17:41]

If we really believe that God is wise and we are not, then we can turn over control to him in spite of our lack of understanding. When we look to the past, we're seeking causes; we should look to the future seeking purpose. We don't have to imagine that there is an explanation. We cannot out God, God. These are the points we have seen. We should strive to have a righteousness that is not based on the benefits we receive. God's wisdom prevails. Trust is the only possible response.

The Shack: God is Good [17:41-20:25]

This was brought out very poignantly in the quite controversial novel by William Paul Young entitled *The Shack*. There are lots of things people found controversial in the book, and maybe some of them appropriately so. But I found that the book had some incredible insights to offer. I want to read two short passages from the end of the book, as the God figure is speaking to the character who has been suffering. Listen to this in light of what we've learned from the Book of Job. "You try to make sense of the world in which you live based on a very small and incomplete picture of reality. It's like looking at a parade through a tiny knothole of hurt, pain, self-centeredness, and power and believing that you are on your own and insignificant. All of these thoughts contain powerful lies. You see pain and death as ultimate evils, and God is the ultimate

betrayor or, perhaps, at best, fundamentally untrustworthy. You dictate the terms and judge my actions and find me guilty. The real underlying flaw in your life is that you don't think I am good. If you knew I was good and that everything that means, the ends, and all the processes of individual lives is all covered by my goodness, then while you might not always understand what I'm doing, you would trust me, but you don't. You cannot produce trust just as you cannot do humility. It either is or it is not. Trust is the fruit of a relationship in which you know that you are loved. Because you do not know that I love you, you cannot trust."

Rom. 11:33-35: Depths of His Wisdom [20:25-23:05]

Powerful insights. It describes many of us. We come to doubt God when our lives are falling apart. I conclude with a well-known passage from Romans chapter 11, verses 33 to 35. It's a doxology that we've heard many times but think about it in light of the Book of Job. And I'll expand as I read it. "O, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God." Notice how it headlines wisdom and the depth of the riches of God's wisdom. But then look at the next line. "How unsearchable his judgments." Judgments, that's his justice. That's what we've been talking about. "How unsearchable are his judgments." You can't work all of that out, "and his paths are beyond tracing out." Then it goes to the next logical place. The next great step is "who has known the mind of the Lord." We can't discern what he's doing. "Or who has been his counselor." Don't think for a minute; you can advise him, tell him a better way, explain it all. And then it comes down to exactly the point, "Who has ever given to God that God should repay him." He owes us nothing. We deserve nothing. And then it concludes with a peon of praise "For from him and through him and to him are all things. And to him be the glory forever." -- trust.

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