

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 26 – Podcast

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Welcome back to the Deep Dive. You know, today we're going to try to tackle a question that I'm sure has crossed all of our minds at some point if you've spent any time at all with the book of Job. Right.

And that is like, what is the deal with God in this story? You know, He allows just unimaginable suffering to come upon Job, and it just seems like it's just on a whim, you know? And it's a tough read. It's a tough read, and it leaves a lot of us just scratching our heads and kind of wondering. So look, luckily we have some excerpts from a lecture series from biblical scholar John Walton to kind of help us unpack this challenging portrayal of God.

Yeah, you hit the nail on the head there. The character of God in the book of Job is one of the most perplexing parts of the book. And Walton offers a really unique perspective, I think a really helpful perspective on how to approach this.

Okay, so lay it on me. What is Walton's take? Well, his key insight is that we should view God as a literary character in the story. Okay.

Just like Job or his friends. Oh, so you're saying like we shouldn't take everything that God does or says in the book of Job literally. Not necessarily.

I think we have to remember that ancient audiences were accustomed to certain literary conventions that we might not immediately grasp today. Right. So, for example, when God is asking Satan for updates on Job.

Okay. That's not meant to imply that God is somehow lacking in knowledge or that he's not omniscient. It's more of a narrative device, a way to heighten the drama and set the stage for exploring these deeper theological themes.

Yeah, I think I'm tracking with you. So it's kind of similar to how we read parables, right? Exactly. Like we don't expect the story of the prodigal son to be a literal historical account.

Right. We understand that it's designed to teach us something about forgiveness and redemption. Exactly.

Think about the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Right. Would any of us use that as a model? Right.

To run a business or think about fair wages? Yeah. Of course not. The point of that parable is to highlight God's generosity, not to give us like a business model or something.

Right. So if we apply that same lens to the book of Job, we can start to see that the extreme suffering that's portrayed, the seemingly harsh actions of God that we see, these are all part of a larger literary design. The author isn't necessarily trying to give us a play-by-play of events in heaven.

He's using those elements to grapple with these big questions about faith and suffering. Precisely. And one of the most striking things about God and Job is his silence.

For much of the book, God doesn't intervene or offer Job any explanation for his suffering. And this inaction is deliberate. If God just provided easy answers, it would undermine the whole point of the story, which is about wrestling with faith, even in the absence of clear answers.

Right. That makes a lot of sense. But doesn't it make God seem distant or uncaring? I mean, how can a loving God just stand by and watch someone suffer so intensely? Yeah, that's a great question.

And that's where Walton's concept of God being irreducible comes in. Yeah. Now, he's not suggesting that God is uncaring, but rather that his ways are ultimately beyond our full comprehension.

Okay. I'm intrigued. What does it mean for God to be irreducible? It means that we will never be able to fully grasp the depths of God's wisdom and sovereignty.

There will always be an element of mystery, something that transcends our limited human understanding. So it's not about God being aloof or indifferent. Right.

But rather that his nature is simply more complex than we can fully grasp. That's a great way to put it. Yeah.

And this leads us to some really positive takeaways from The Butcher Job. Okay. Despite its difficult subject matter.

Okay. Like what? Well, for starters, it shows us that God doesn't need us to defend him. He's not sitting up there anxiously waiting for us to justify his actions to the world.

I never thought of it that way before. It's a liberating thought, isn't it? Yeah. And because his wisdom is so far beyond our own, we can ultimately trust that his ways are for our good, even when we can't see the whole picture.

Yeah, that's comforting. But I have to admit, it's still hard to reconcile the idea of a loving God with the sheer amount of suffering that Job endures. Yeah.

It's a natural human reaction to want to make sense of suffering. Yeah. We want to try to seek explanations.

We want to find someone or something to blame. Right. But the Book of Job challenges us to confront the possibility that sometimes those easy answers simply don't exist.

So are you saying that we should just give up trying to understand God altogether? I mean, isn't seeking understanding part of what it means to have faith? I don't think it's about giving up on understanding. I think it's more about recognizing the limits of our human perspective. OK.

We can still seek knowledge. We can still ask questions. But we also need to acknowledge that some things about God may always remain beyond our grasp.

So in a way, this irreducibility of God that we're talking about... Yeah. It invites a different kind of faith, one that's rooted in trust rather than perfect comprehension. Exactly.

It's a faith that can hold space for doubt and uncertainty, a faith that's willing to wrestle with those difficult questions without demanding neat and tidy answers. Yeah, that's a challenging concept, but I think it resonates with a lot of people's experiences. I mean, who hasn't gone through a period of questioning or doubt when life throws a curveball? Absolutely.

And the Book of Job shows us that even in those dark moments, even when we're angry or confused, we can still be in relationship with God. In fact, those struggles, those wrestling matches with faith, they can actually deepen and strengthen our relationship with the divine. You know, thinking about it that way, the Book of Job almost becomes a guide for how to navigate those inevitable periods of doubt and questioning.

Yeah. It's like a roadmap for the spiritual journey. Right.

It doesn't shy away from the tough stuff. Yeah. From the messy realities of human experience.

It acknowledges the pain, the confusion, the anger that we often feel when confronted with suffering. And instead of offering pat answers or easy solutions, it invites us to sit with those uncomfortable feelings, to wrestle with them, to engage in an honest dialogue with God. That's a beautiful way to put it.

Yeah. And through that process of wrestling, of questioning, of seeking, we often discover a deeper, more authentic faith than we could have ever imagined. So for our listeners who are maybe struggling with their own faith or wrestling with difficult questions, what's the takeaway from our deep dive into the Book of Job? I think the key message is this.

It's okay to ask hard questions. It's okay to doubt. It's okay to feel angry or confused.

Those emotions don't disqualify you from having a relationship with God. In fact, they can be the very things that draw you closer to Him. That's a powerful message.

It's almost like the Book of Job gives us permission to be honest with God. Right. To bring our whole selves to the table, even the messy parts.

Precisely. And what's more, it assures us that God can handle our honesty. He's not threatened by our doubts or our questions.

He invites us to come as we are with all our complexities and contradictions. So instead of viewing the Book of Job as some kind of divine riddle that we need to solve, maybe we should approach it as an invitation to an honest, open-hearted conversation with God about the things that matter most. Suffering, faith, the mystery of His ways.

You've hit the nail on the head. It's not about finding all the answers, but about learning to live with the questions, to embrace the mystery, and to trust that even in the midst of our struggles, God is present and walking alongside us. And that brings us to another intriguing point from Walton.

He argues that reading God as a literary character in jail doesn't diminish his reality or power. In fact, it can actually enhance our understanding of His nature. That's right.

Walton emphasizes that God, even when portrayed as a character within a narrative, remains ultimately irreducible. This means that He transcends the limitations of any single story or human interpretations. So even though we're exploring God through the lens of this specific story, we're not trying to box Him in or define Him in a way that limits His infinite nature.

Exactly. The Book of Job, with its complex and often unsettling portrayal of God, reminds us that faith is not about having all the answers or neatly packaged explanations. It's about embracing the mystery, wrestling with the tough questions, and ultimately trusting in a God whose ways are higher than our own.

And, you know, there's a certain beauty in that, isn't there? Yeah. The beauty of a God who isn't threatened by our doubts, our questions, our anger. A God who invites us to come as we are messy and broken and searching.

That's a beautiful thought. And it leads us to an important question that Walton raises. If God is irreducible, does that mean we should give up trying to understand Him altogether? That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? And I think the answer lies somewhere in the tension between seeking understanding and embracing the mystery.

We can and should continue to explore the scriptures, to grapple with theological concepts, to seek wisdom and insight into the nature of God. But at the same time, we need to hold that pursuit with a certain humility, recognizing that we will never fully grasp the infinite. Exactly.

The journey of faith is a lifelong process of seeking, questioning, discovering, and trusting. And sometimes the most profound insights come not from finding all the answers, but from wrestling with the questions themselves. So perhaps the real deep dive isn't about reaching a final destination of perfect knowledge.

Right. But about embracing the ongoing exploration, the continual process of uncovering new layers of understanding and meaning. It strikes me that this idea of embracing the mystery ties in beautifully with what we've been discussing about God as a literary character in Job.

Yeah. It's like the author is intentionally using this literary device to highlight the inherent mystery of God's ways. That's a great observation.

By presenting God as this somewhat enigmatic figure, the author is inviting us to move beyond simplistic interpretations and grapple with the profound complexities of faith. It's almost as if the book of Job is saying, hey, look, I'm not going to give you all the answers. In

fact, I'm going to present you with a God who is both powerful and perplexing, who acts in ways that might seem contradictory or even unfair at times.

And I'm going to challenge you to wrestle with that tension, to hold those seemingly opposing truths in your heart and mind. It's a powerful way to put it. And ultimately, I think that's where the true beauty and depth of the book of Job lies.

It doesn't shy away from the hard questions. It doesn't offer easy solutions or pat answers. Instead, it plunges us headfirst into the messy, often confusing reality of human experience, where suffering exists alongside grace, where doubt coexists with faith, and where the mystery of God's ways both confounds and compels us.

So as we wrap up our deep dive into this incredibly rich and challenging text, what would you say is the most important takeaway for our listeners? What's the one thing you hope they'll carry with them as they continue their own journeys of faith? I think the key takeaway is this. Don't be afraid to engage with the difficult parts of Scripture. Don't shy away from the passages that make you uncomfortable or challenge your preconceived notions.

Those are often the places where the most profound growth and transformation can occur. It's like those challenging workout routines. They might push you to your limits, but they're ultimately what helps you build strength and endurance.

Exactly. And just as physical exercise requires discipline and perseverance, so too does the spiritual journey. There will be times when you feel lost, confused, maybe even angry with God.

But the key is to keep showing up, to keep seeking, to keep wrestling, even when it's hard. Because ultimately that wrestling, that questioning, that persistent pursuit of understanding is what deepens our faith and leads us to a more authentic relationship with God. Beautifully said.

And on that note, I think we've reached the end of our deep dive. But remember, the exploration doesn't end here. The Book of Job is a text that continues to unfold its layers of meaning with each reading, with each life experience, with each new encounter with the divine.

So to our listeners, we encourage you to keep diving deep. Keep asking the tough questions. Keep wrestling with faith.

And above all, keep trusting that even in the midst of uncertainty and mystery, God is present and walking alongside you. And that there's a profound beauty in embracing the unknown, in surrendering to the mystery, and in trusting that even when we can't see the whole picture, God's ways are ultimately for our good. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive.

Until next time, keep exploring, keep learning, and keep seeking.