

LIVING ON THE EDGE "ON THE EDGE OF POVERTY" JOB 24:1-12

One of the most difficult questions for those who believe in God is, "If there is an all-powerful and all-loving God, then why is there evil and suffering in the world?" God is powerful enough to prevent all evil and suffering. God is all-loving and would want to protect all from evil and suffering. Yet evil and suffering are alive and well on God's green Earth. How can God and evil coexist in the same world?

Many would use this dilemma as a reason to reject belief in God. Using simple logic, some have argued that the following truths cannot coexist: 1) There is a God who is all-powerful. 2) This God is also all-loving. 3) Evil and suffering are present in our world. 4) God cannot be all-powerful if he cannot prevent evil and suffering, and God cannot be all-loving if he allows evil and suffering in the world. 5) Therefore, God does not exist. There are a number of problems with these claims, but many use "the problem of evil" to reject belief in God.

There are a number of lines of reasoning that attempt to answer the problem of evil and suffering as they relate to God. An attempt to answer the dilemma about God and the presence of evil is called a *theodicy*. The term comes from two Greek words: *Theos* which means "God" and *dike* which means "justice." Reconciling God and his working out of justice in the world is a way to reason through the problem of evil and suffering.

Evil will yet be defeated. It is a fact that an all-good, all-powerful God assures us that this will happen.

– Norman Geisler

God remains all-powerful and all-loving even if he does not solve the problem of evil and suffering immediately. God can display his power and love by overcoming sin and its consequences using his own timetable. God will ultimately overcome all evil. God will end all suffering in eternity. God's delayed justice is not diminished justice. God may have purposes and mercies he wishes to extend before he brings final and ultimate justice. God's omnipotence may be more observable in the restraint of his judgment than in his prevention of evil. God's ultimate love may be more evident in redemption through suffering than in pre-emptive and unperceived rescues from harms we never knew because of God's miraculous protection.

This Week's Core Competency

Compassion – I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Extreme poverty is an example of the presence of evil and suffering in our world. Many of the causes of poverty come from the hands of those who are practicing evil in our world. Wars, greed, and exploitation can create extreme cases of victimhood. Often people never recover from such mistreatment. Individuals can bring poverty upon themselves as well through bad choices, foolish habits and dangerous company. But poverty through oppression can come even to those who are hard-working and responsible.

God may very well delay his own intervention with the poor in order to give others the privilege of intervening on his behalf. Or better yet, God may use us to help those in need to learn that we have no other resources than what God supplies.

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When Jesus fed the hungry 5000, he did so through his disciples. The Twelve saw thousands fed with one boy's meager lunch. God's miraculous power and love was demonstrated to the hungry through human agents who had no means to prevent or remedy the dilemma.

When we see the world filled with evil and suffering, we should not doubt the existence of God. Rather we should plead with God to use us to extend his justice and his love. We may never be able to comprehensively understand poverty and all of its causes. But our frustration and failures in preventing poverty should never cause us to stop helping those caught in the trap of poverty. Doing something to help the fight against poverty is better than shaking our heads at the pitiful state the poor around us. We may not be able to help all, but we can always help some. God overcoming evil and suffering through the loving service of his followers may be the greatest of his theodicies.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Job 12:1-12

*"Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment?
Why must those who know him look in vain for such days?"*

- 2 *There are those who move boundary stones;
they pasture flocks they have stolen.*
- 3 *They drive away the orphan's donkey
and take the widow's ox in pledge.*
- 4 *They thrust the needy from the path
and force all the poor of the land into hiding.*
- 5 *Like wild donkeys in the desert,
the poor go about their labor of foraging food;
the wasteland provides food for their children.*
- 6 *They gather fodder in the fields*

- and glean in the vineyards of the wicked.*
- 7 *Lacking clothes, they spend the night naked;
they have nothing to cover themselves in the cold.*
- 8 *They are drenched by mountain rains
and hug the rocks for lack of shelter.*
- 9 *The fatherless child is snatched from the breast;
the infant of the poor is seized for a debt.*
- 10 *Lacking clothes, they go about naked;
they carry the sheaves, but still go hungry.*
- 11 *They crush olives among the terraces[a];
they tread the winepresses, yet suffer thirst.*
- 12 *The groans of the dying rise from the city,
and the souls of the wounded cry out for help.
But God charges no one with wrongdoing.*

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle each occurrence of "poor" in Job 24:1-12.
- * Draw a line connecting "judgment" (24:1) with "claim" (24:12).
- * Draw a box around each word depicting property in Job 24:1-12.
- * Underline words describing work in Job 24:1-12.
- * Draw a line between "lacking" in Job 24:7-10.
- * Double underline geographic references in Job 24:1-12.
- * Number each occurrence of theft in Job 24:1-12.
- * Place brackets around the final actions of the poor in 24:12.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Job begins and ends this section (Job 24:1-12) with a complaint. What basic claim is Job making in this complaint?
2. List the crimes mentioned in Job 24:2-4. How do they relate to each other?
3. To what extreme are the difficulties faced by the poor according to Job 24:5-6?
4. What may have contributed to the lack of shelter among the poor as described in Job 24:7-8?
5. Who causes the extremes of injustice as described in Job 24:9?
6. What is ironic about the plight of the poor as described in Job 24:10-11?
7. What seems odd about Job's complaint in 24:12?
8. Describe how poor people today experience much of what Job details in 24:1-12.
9. According to Job 24:1-12, are people typically poor because they are lazy and evil or because of injustice? Explain your answer.
10. What is our responsibility to the poor as a result of understanding Job 24:1-12?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The Book of Job attempts to explain why evil and suffering exist. The book is a collection of perspectives on why good people experience bad circumstances. The book provides a number of "theodicies" to explain why God allows evil and suffering. Basic theodicies of the book include ideas such as: evil and suffering come as judgment for sin, or evil and suffering come because we are not pious enough. Job's theodicy is bad things just happen. God's statement at the end of the book transcends theodicy and challenges us to focus on his supremacy

Even though ancient, Job is surprisingly contemporary. "Possibly the oldest book in the Bible, Job reads like the most modern. Its extreme portrayal-one man confronting the abyss in a universe that makes no sense-foreshadows the predicament of modern humanity. People who reject nearly everything else in the Bible keep coming back to Job for inspiration" (Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, 184).

The Book of Job begins and ends with God. God initially speaks highly of Job. God's enemy is not impressed and challenges God to allow Job to suffer to show the insincerity of Job's devotion. God allows Job to suffer greatly with loss of wealth, family, and health. One commentator summarizes: "Three friends of Job come to comfort him, and for seven days sit silently with him. Job then breaks the silence in a monologue raising the question why he and other sufferers are born or compelled to live. There follow two cycles each of six speeches, one by each of the three friends and an answer to each by Job, and a third cycle which, whether so originally or not, is now incomplete, two only of the friends take part in it. In these speeches the friends assert and Job denies that his calamities are due to his sin. After Job's speech at the conclusion of the third cycle, a new speaker, Elihu, intervenes at great length. Then Yahweh replies to Job, eliciting brief responses from him. After the speeches the story is resumed: taking no account of Elihu, Yahweh condemns what the three friends had said, approves what Job had said,

and restores to him twice his former wealth. (Samuel Driver, George Gray, *International Critical Commentary: The Book of Job*, 21).

Job and his friends provide general observations about pain and injustice. Many of their observations seem incomplete or "half-baked." The speeches in Job are full of pain and emotion. What is shared, full of passion, may be lacking in wisdom or compassion. Reading the Book of Job is much like today reading the comments section of a hotly contested blog or social media post. When reading such comments, you observe a wide array of opinions, but rarely know whom to believe. Job and his friends are full of potential theories about God and the world, but few possess a solid handle on truth. God's response at the end of the book is authoritative and ultimate. But even God's concluding answer does not answer a majority of the questions raised by Job.

Although Job complains about pain, what bothers Job most is the silence or unresponsiveness of God. Yancey observes: "to get the full emotional impact of Job's plight, I winnowed the book's speeches for Job's own words. I expected to find him complaining about his miserable health and lamenting the loss of his children and fortune; but to my surprise Job had relatively little to say about those matters. He focused instead on the single theme of God's absence. What hurt Job most was the sense of crying out in desperation and getting no response" (Yancey, 279).

God's lack of response or judgment of those who oppress the poor comes out most strongly in Job 24. Job "bookends" a discussion of those who cause suffering and those who helplessly endure such abuse with laments about a God who does not judge the unrighteous in a timely manner (24:1) and a God who does not appear to press charges against those who cause so much suffering upon so many people (24:12). "Job could not understand why God did not always judge overt sin quickly (24:1-12). Most people still have the same question. He mentioned three sins specifically: removing boundary landmarks and

thereby appropriating someone else's land, stealing flocks of sheep, and mistreating the weak. Job could not see why God seemingly ignored the perpetrators of these terrible sins, yet afflicted him so severely" (Thomas Constable, *Soniclight.com: Notes on Job*, 88).

Job uses the plight of the poor to counter the arguments from his friends regarding retributive justice. If mistreatment by oppressors causes the poor to suffer, how can one say that God is judging the poor when it is the oppressors who deserve judgment? Job is claiming that personal sinfulness is not the only cause of suffering.

As Job describes the awful condition of the poor, one would expect Job to lodge his complaint against the human agents of injustice. Instead, Job lays his complaint against God. Even though Job is striking out at God for being silent, he continues to appeal to God as judge. Job is not arguing against God. Job is pleading with God to be all that he is known to be as judge. God is judge in the balance of this chapter (24:18-24).

Job unpacks the interwoven effects of abuse that many poor experience. Much of this abuse leads to extremes of abuse. The poor are often victims of theft from people of privilege (24:2-3). Having lost essentials, the poor are often lacking in shelter and clothing (24:4-5,7-8,10). The striking image of wild beasts scavenging in the desert paints the poor as being made almost inhuman in their desperation (24:5). The poor can be taken advantage of by their employers (24:6,11). The poor are not described as indolent

or sedentary. Even as they are working for others they can be starving (24:11).

While Job's description of the poor is heart-wrenching, it is not describing all the poor, all the time. Nor is he describing all the wealthy. Not all the poor are oppressed and not all the wealthy are criminal. Using this passage to make sweeping conclusions about society is to treat the passage unfairly. Job 24 gives us a general state of the poor who are often oppressed.

Even though Job is using the poor to make a case for his own innocence, his comments about the poor are generally true and do invite us to take action against injustice. First, we should make sure that we ourselves are not knowingly or unknowingly taking advantage of those we work with or who may work for us. Second, we should be looking out to help those who are being abused. We should do what we can to call out injustice. We should do what we can to help those who are suffering, especially those who are suffering as a result of no fault of their own.

One of the very reasons God may not be bringing about swift justice is because he may be wanting us to do what we can to uphold justice and to extend mercy to those in need. Our response to avert evil and suffering for others is perhaps more important than our understanding of why evil and suffering exist. We should do all we can now to prevent injustice while we wait for the only one who can bring ultimate justice. He will make all things right in his time.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word. *The Message of the Passage*

Open your eyes to the plight of the poor around you. Seek God's justice and compassion for those in great need. God's perceived delay of judgment is no excuse for the human practice of injustice.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches (James 1:22).

What advice would you give to someone who is suffering while it seems God is silent?

What could you do to help someone who is struggling in poverty?

In what circumstances do you doubt God's timing? What can be done to address these doubts?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **judgment** "the word 'judgment' does not occur in the Hebrew, but is drawn by inference from the broader context. The more literal rendering would be: 'Why are not times stored up by Shadday?' The 'times' might refer to what is appropriate for the various events of life - assuming a quasi-determination by God. Or, more likely here, they might describe moments of divine appearance, so that humans might know his coming in advance and anticipate his appearing. Alternatively, the 'times' might represent the moments set aside for the judgment of human wrongs" (Gerald H. Wilson, *New International Bible Commentary: Job*, 265-256).

v. 2 **boundary stones** "An object used to mark the boundary of a field. Landmarks were often such movable objects as a stone or a post. Since a cunning and unscrupulous individual could take advantage of his neighbor by shifting the location of such boundary marks, thus robbing him of part of his means of support, such removal of landmarks was prohibited by Mosaic Law (Deut. 19:14; 27:17). Hebrew piety denounced the act (Prov. 22:28; 23:10)" (*The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, "Landmark", 582).

v. 3 **pledge** "Wealthy lords collect what is owed them from a Jowly orphan, perhaps a debt incurred by the deceased father, by entering the field where that young debtor is working unannounced and driving off his donkey. That animal is the orphan's primary asset to keep from starving. But that is no concern to these greedy lords in their drive to amass wealth by every means. In a similar manner they take ownership of a widow's ox put up as security for a pledge. The severity of this action is attested in the Code of Hammurabi (§ 241): the lord who takes an ox in security was fined one-third mina of silver, a heavy penalty. Such procedures also broke the statutes in the Pentateuch that guaranteed the means of support to the unfortunate (e.g. Deut. 24:6). The grievance in such a case is double. The wicked both insult the weak and impair the possibility of their earning a meager livelihood." (John E. Hartley, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Job*, 346).

v. 5 **wild donkeys** "The onager (*Equus hemionus hemhippus*, commonly "wild ass") is an undomesticated member of the horse family. It was to be found in the wildernesses of the ancient Near East... One of the key elements in the depiction there is of the onager's ceaseless search for food, even in unlikely places, ranging over the mountains as its pasture and searching after any green plant (39: 8). In 6: 5 also the onager's life is centered on the quest for "green grass" (similarly the hind in Jer 14: 5- 6), and it brays no longer when it has found it. This is the point of comparison with the poor: their total concentration on the quest for survival" (David J. A Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 21-37, Volume 18A*, Kindle Locations 6221-6224).

v. 6 **glean** "The burden of their effort is compounded by the lord's [landlord's evil] practices. They are forced to gather grain from fields already harvested. They have to glean in this miser's vineyard. The owner is labeled wicked, because after the initial harvest he is supposed to allow the poor to glean freely in his fields (Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:21). Under these austere conditions there is little possibility of these poor gathering much food for their own families" (Hartley, 347). The fodder they are gleaning is literally "cattle's feed."

v. 9 **seized** "Worse than taking the animals of the disadvantaged (v. 3), they even take an orphan from the breast. One wants to ask, if the infant is orphaned how is it at the breast? But perhaps the idea is that the wicked steal the child and kill the mother and father. Maybe the "orphan" here is one who has lost father but not mother. Or perhaps the statement is merely trying to portray the worst situation possible. Verse 9b shows just how unfeeling the wicked are as they take an infant from a poor family as a pledge for what is most likely an advance that will allow the family merely to survive" (Tremper Longman III, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Job*, 302).

v. 11 **suffer** "Deut 25: 4 prohibits a landowner from muzzling an ox when it treads out the grain, but here the farmworkers are depicted as being treated worse than oxen. The Talmud applied the law of the ox to an agricultural worker. The farmworkers here do not even have the status of neighbors who visit a farmer's field and are allowed to pluck ears or eat grapes (Deut 23: 24- 25 [25- 26]). They are the embodiment of the oppressed and disregarded wage slave" (Clines, Kindle Locations 6335-6339).

v. 12 **wrongdoing** "The word is rare in [OT], occurring only in Jer. 23:13, Job 1:22 and 24:12. No cognates are available. From the context it seems that it means 'unseemliness.' The use of the word intends to stress the difference between Job's and God's reactions. As a powerless and limited in knowledge human, Job had to accept his lot [Job 1:22]. However, it is harder to understand how an all-powerful and all-knowing God could tolerate the obvious injustice meted out to the undesirables. In the past, God took care of his people in the desert, why doesn't he take care of the undesirables in the desert now? The observation in v. 12c propels Job to the ranks of the most sensitive prophets. It is also indirectly Job's harshest personal accusation against God" (Aron Pinker, "The Fate of Undesirables," *Old Testament Essays, Vol. 27/3* (2014), 986-987).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

How often are your children exposed to extreme poverty? As parents we have a tendency to shelter our children from life on the margin. My own kids have a hard time fully understanding that their grandfather grew up a sharecropper in Alabama with no indoor plumbing. I quickly get out of sorts when the electricity goes off during a storm or the AC unit breaks in the middle of summer. I complain about my own "discomfort," forgetting there are people everywhere who are just trying to figure out where their next meal will come from. We have some land in central Texas with a neighbor that lives on the margin. We love this neighbor and are honored to call him and his sweet family our friends. Several years ago, my son asked to use his birthday money to help our neighbor get windows for his house. All his birthday money. He didn't count it, didn't save a portion of it for himself, didn't hold anything back. He saw a need and was willing to give all he had. I love that my son, rather than shrink away, felt the call to embrace a family in need and had a desire to share God's blessings. I want to be more like him, openhanded with the blessings the Lord has entrusted to me. Parents, I'm praying for teachable moments to present themselves, open hearts to follow God's will, and for us to model extreme love to those in the margins for our kids.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Job 24:1-12

1. List injustices in verses 2-4.
2. How does Job describe the poor in verses 5-10?
3. How does God respond in verse 12?

What Do You Think

If Job were writing this today, what injustices would he see in the world? How would he describe the poor today?

What R U Going To Do

With your parent's permission, consider wearing the same clothes, sleeping on the floor, or not taking a bath this week. How do you feel at the end of the week?

Core Comp

Compassion - I believe God wants me to help others in need.

Memory Verse

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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