

YEAR OF
BIBLICAL
LITERACY

1. Week 22: Community Reflection & Job Part 2

2. Recap & Preparing for CG:

Daily Reading for Week:

- Job 24-28, Psalm 134
- Job 29-31, Psalm 135
- Job 32-34, Psalm 136
- Job 35-37, Psalm 137
- Job 38-39, Psalm 138
- Job 40-42, Psalm 139
- Psalms 1-2, Psalm 140

Resources for Week:

- Read Scripture Video: Job
- Read Job 38-39

3. Focus of time together:

To reflect on the last ten weeks as we journeyed together through the Year of Biblical Literacy and to take an honest examination of how the community has been relating, interacting, and loving one another.

4. Weekly ground rule / goal / value:

Our goal for the week is to learn and practice the skill of community examen, where we corporately reflect on our health as a group and consider any communal repentance or reform that may be necessary, especially around our shared value of faith.

5. Connection and Unity Exercise (Mutual Invitation):

The Connection and Unity Exercise will take place in our Questions for Large Group Discussion section this week.

6. Opening Prayer:

Have someone open your time in prayer. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to bring your group clarity as you reflect on and discuss the ways your CG interacts and relates to one another.

7. Intro to Discussion:

Last week, we began a two-week communal reflection centered on the book of Job. We read Job's words of despair in Job 3, saw the way his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) came alongside him in good and bad ways, and asked the question: if Job were to voice what he does in Job 3 in our CG, how would we have responded to him? Would we have had the humility and hospitality to allow him to be in pain and grieve without offering cheap platitudes, unfounded judgement, or dismissing him?

This week, we will focus on God's response to Job in Job 38 and see how it dovetails with our communal value of faith. In Job 38, God finally responds to Job and his three friends after 37 chapters of silence. His words are surprising, and perhaps, disquieting. He reminds Job in a powerful and beautiful poetic discourse of His immensity and power. His language recalls the language of Job 3 and offers a direct response to Job's use of darkness and death imagery. In Job 3, Job paints a picture of grief and gloom so all consuming that it darkens the stars and makes him wish for death or worse, non-existence. In direct response, God's words, especially in chapter 38, are full of life and light. He draws Job back to creation itself, to the stars, angels, moon, sun, and the dawn; to brightness and birth and life-giving rain. "Who are you?" God asks Job in so many words. "Are you the Creator God who has spoken everything into existence and whose very being sustains all life and the universe?"

God's response leaves us as readers with a lot to interact with. Robert Alter, professor of Hebrew literature at Cal observes, "Many readers over the centuries have felt that God's speech to Job is no real answer to the problem of undeserving suffering, and some have complained it amounts to a kind of cosmic bullying of puny man by an overpowering deity." It is easy to feel this way when you remember that God is speaking to a man who has lost not just his fortune but multiple children at the beginning of the story. However, we would be wrong to read God's words as bullying or cruel. Alter continues, "God's thundering challenge to Job is not bullying. Rather, it rousingly introduces a comprehensive overview of the nature of reality that exposes the limits of Job's human perspective, anchored as it is in the restricted compass of human knowledge and the inevitable egoism of suffering."

Ultimately, God's response to Job is a challenge and invitation to practice a kind of faith that moves far beyond cheap, shallow expressions of wishful thinking. God allows Job to cry out and rage and weep for nearly 35 chapters. When He does reply, God responds directly to Job's initial cry of despair in chapter 3. The implication is that God has been present to Job from the very beginning and subsequently throughout his many cries and prayers. While God does not answer Job's question of "Why?" He also does not rebuke Job for asking the question, expressing his doubt, voicing his rage, or questioning God's motives. Instead, He reminds Job of His unlimited power and Job's limited perspective. God invites Job, after he has had the space to mourn, complain, doubt, rage, and ask all his questions, to practice a deep abiding faith.

8. Questions for Large Group Discussion (60 minutes):

There will only be large group discussion tonight. Please be sure to save enough time to answer the Practicing Community questions.

Questions for Examining Ourselves (Mutual Invitation, 30 minutes):

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture, and consider any appropriate action.

To begin our discussion, we are going to do a reflection exercise involving Job 38-39 and several minutes of silent reflection and/or journaling. After this, we will use mutual invitation to invite every person to share their reflections with the group. Have someone read the following reflection and Job 38-39 aloud:

Job as a character is an archetypal figure. He represents humanity as a whole and the ways we are confronted with the reality of suffering and pain during our lives. Imagine you are Job and this is what you hear God say to you after you have spent many nights expressing your hurt, anger, doubt, and suffering. It may help to think of a time in your life where you have suffered deeply. Notice what is going on inside of you when you hear God's words.

1. *What do you feel as God replies to Job's despair?*
2. *Does His response make you uncomfortable or angry?*
3. *Does it bring comfort and relief?*

Read Job 38-39. Then continue in silence to meditate and journal for 5 minutes.

Using the discussion technique of mutual invitation, share your answer to one of the questions you were reflecting on during the time of silence.

Have you ever voiced your anger, pain or doubt to God in times of deep suffering in your life? If yes, what was God's response to you? If you have not, what would it have been like to direct your anguish to God?

Questions for Practicing Community (30 minutes):

These questions are to help us reflect thoughtfully on our felt experience together in light of our shared ground rules, goals, and values.

One of our foundational CG values is faith. Faith in CG is the belief that God is in control and we are not. It is remembering and believing that the Holy Spirit is at work in every person's story in our CG whether we can recognize it or not. This means for instance, if there is a disagreement of opinion in CG and both parties cannot come to an agreement, there is a shared belief that God is still at work in each person and loves them deeply.

1. Take a moment to reflect on the past two months in community group. Have there been discussions or moments where your community has been in disagreement? For

instance, maybe it was a disagreement about an interpretation of Scripture or a practical decision such as what the group's next social outing should be — even a difference of conviction about what is a good life decision or what God requires of our lives. Did the parties involved (and the community as a whole) practice our shared value of faith in this moment? What would it look like for each person involved and the community as a whole to practice faith?

2. How has your group done over the past ten weeks in practically living out our value of faith in discussion? In prayer? During meals?
3. How might your community adjust the way it regularly interacts in order to better live out our shared value of faith?

9. Questions for Small Group Discussion:

There will be no small group discussion this week.

10. Closing (5 minutes):

Close your time with a Unity Prayer.