

WEEK 22 - COMMUNITY REFLECTION & JOB (PART 2)

RECAP & PREPARATION

Daily Readings for the Week

- Job 24-42, Psalm 134-140
- Psalm 1-2

Resources for this Week

- Scripture Video: Job
- Read Job 38-39

FOCUS OF TIME TOGETHER

To reflect on the last few weeks as we've journeyed together through Read Scripture Together and to take an honest examination of how the community has been relating, interacting, and loving one another.

GROUND RULE/GOAL/VALUE FOR THE WEEK

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.

CONNECTION AND UNITY EXERCISE (MUTUAL INVITATION, EXPLAINED AT THE END)

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

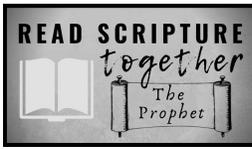
OPENING PRAYER

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 Missional Community interacts and relates to one another.

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 small group, 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.

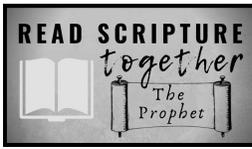
LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

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?

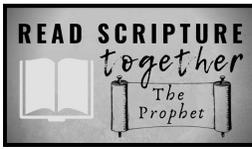
If yes, what was God's response to you? If you have not, what would it have been like to direct your anguish to God?

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 Missional Community values is faith. Faith 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 church whether we can recognize it or not. This means for instance, if there is a disagreement of opinion our small group, 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 looked 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?



CLOSING

End your time praying for one another.

MUTUAL INVITATION - A DISCUSSION TECHNIQUE

To practice humility and becoming aware of your tendencies in group discussions, we are going to utilize a special discussion technique. We've borrowed the exercise from Eric Law's book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*. Law calls it "Mutual Invitation" and uses it to reveal and equalize the power dynamics that exist in groups. He finds it especially effective in multicultural communities because it helps reveal how often the white majority members perceive greater personal power within the community than do many minority members. It is very helpful in making group members aware of how they interact within the group and then also assisting them to reflect on how this affects the community. It may be useful for your group to use this discussion format on a regular basis, or you may decide just to practice it a few times as a training of sorts. Here's how it works:

- The discussion leader should let the group know approximately how much time will be allocated for this particular portion of discussion.
- Then the leader will introduce the topic or question to be discussed. This will typically come from the small group material. It is often helpful if the small group has access to the material to refer back to the question during the discussion.
- Next, the leader introduces or reminds everyone of the discussion process which is as follows: "The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you don't want to say anything, simply say 'pass' and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited."

Note: The first time you practice this, it will likely be very awkward. The tendency will be to give up and go back to the whoever-wants-to-talk-can-talk approach. However, persist through this to at least try it a couple times. Also, do not allow people to interrupt or speak when it is not their turn. Gently remind them that it is not their turn to speak. Similarly, if someone "passes" and chooses not to speak, do not pressure them into doing so. If a person speaks very briefly or passes and then does not remember to invite the next person to speak, do not invite for him or her. Simply point out that this person has the privilege to invite the next person to speak. By ensuring that this person still has the privilege to invite, you affirm and value that person independent of that person's verbal ability.

