

## Elihu's Speeches

- 1) Is Elihu trying to (a) warn Job; (b) console him; (c) advise him; (d) advocate for him; or (e) condemn him? Why is Elihu so angry?
- 2) The book of Job is often read as addressing innocent suffering. Others find in Job insight into how to endure suffering without falling away. How does Elihu address each of these? How does his response to Job differ from that of Job's three friends?
- 3) A great irony of suffering is that it not only isolates us from those close to us, but also from God. One of Job's repeated complaints is that the God he was once close to is silent. In fact, Job finds God simultaneously too close—he won't leave Job alone, but piles suffering upon suffering—and too distant and silent. Elihu takes issue with Job's complaint about God's silence, saying "For God speaks in one way, and in two, though people do not perceive it" (33:14).
  - a) What ways does Elihu include? (At least three? Cf. 33:12-19; 36:15, 33; 37:6-7, 13.)
  - b) What are your communication channels with God, when not in times of suffering?
  - c) In your times of loneliness, fear or suffering, has God seemed distant? How, if at all, did you perceive God's voice?
- 4) Even during times of suffering, Elihu says, God speaks through creation itself (36:24-37:13, esp. 36:33; 37:6-7, 13; cf. Ps 19:1-4; Rom 1:18-25). Even the Greek philosopher Epictetus concurred: "from everything that happens in the universe it is easy for a man to find occasion to praise providence." Hume disagreed:

Look round this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the only beings worth regarding. How hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them for their own happiness! How contemptible or odious to the spectator! The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or pastoral care, her maimed and abortive children (Diogenes Allen, *Theology for a Troubled Believer*, 74).

Some see God's loving hand in nature; others see only indifferent chaos. Job saw nature in much the same way Hume did (12:5-8); Jesus saw nature as evidence of God's provision (Mt 6:25-26).

Does your view of God's providence in nature precede or follow from your faith in God? When you are suffering, is it helpful to look for God's voice in other "channels" like this?

- 5) Elihu also sees God speaking through suffering: “They are also chastened with pain upon their beds, and with continual strife in their bones...” (33:19); “He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity” (36:15).

Tim Keller describes four types of suffering: (1) That which we bring on ourselves, like that of Jonah and David, whose sin brought harsh consequences; (2) the suffering of betrayal, like that of Paul and Jeremiah, persecuted by the Jews they sought to lead; (3) the suffering of loss, like the grief of Mary and Martha; (4) the “suffering of mystery”, like that of Job (*Walking With God*, 207-213).

What category did Elihu put Job’s suffering in? Can you think of even one person whose suffering was of this type? What kind of suffering have you experienced?

- 6) Read 35:9-16.
- What is Elihu warning Job against?
  - Do you think anything in Job’s attitude impedes his prayers?
  - Psalm 66:18 reads, “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” Many other passages warn that sin can impede our prayers (James 3:4; Prov 28:9; 1 Peter 3:7; Ps 34: 15-16; etc.). Should those undergoing trials first get their spiritual house in order? Or does God not do a white-glove test before hearing the cries of his people? Or put differently: how might our attitude toward God, when we suffer, affect his response to us?
- 7) In 36:24-26, Elihu exhorts Job to worship God despite, or perhaps because, Job can’t fathom God’s ways: “Remember to extol his work, of which mortals have sung. All people have looked on it; everyone watches it from far away. Surely God is great, and we do not know him; the number of his years is unsearchable.” When is it healthy and helpful to worship God in the midst of grief or suffering? If worship proves difficult, should you go through the motions anyway? (Cf. Hab 3:17-19; Pss 42, 43; Rom 5:3-5; 1 Peter 4:12-19.)
- 8) Elihu is not mentioned after his speeches, so while we learn God’s view of Job and his friends, we are left in the dark regarding God’s view of Elihu (unless silence means approval). This leaves on us our own as readers to decide what of Elihu’s wisdom is sound. Having studied his speeches, what do you think Elihu gets right, and what does he get wrong? Does he have any good ideas which are just expressed poorly?

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*Fun quote:* Elihu warns that God will not hear the cries of “evildoers” (35:9-16). John Piper expresses the same idea by saying, “**Jesus does not kiss a drunk wife**”: “He may carry her off the street and back to bed. He may be utterly patient with her, and set before her hot coffee and fresh starts. But he will not kiss a drunk wife.” (<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/that-your-prayers-may-not-be-hindered>)

## Leader's Preface:

The book of Job lets us crawl into the head of someone who undergoes immense suffering, but comes out the other side with his faith intact.

Job initially refused to speak against God, found himself questioning God's justice and actually calling for Job to judge him so he might be acquitted. We agreed that Job gets angry at God, but we couldn't come to a consensus about whether expressing this anger the way Job did was healthy.

Some things Job did seem like they must have helped him survive spiritually: Through all of his suffering, Job poured his anguish out to his God; he questioned God's purposes, never giving in to the idea that there wasn't a good reason; he never doubted God's existence; despite their galling words, Job remains in dialogue with those close to him. Probably other things could be added to this list.

Tonight we move on to Elihu's speeches. Elihu is an enigma. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the book, which means the author doesn't give us any clues as to whether he is to be read as another friend with flawed advice, or as the precursor to God's righteous response. Some commentators have seen the Elihu speeches as a later addition. Some see Elihu as representing a newer, Jewish view of suffering, distinct from the older wisdom of the three friends. Elihu sounds at first much like the three friends but he hits some important themes which we'll touch on tonight. Foremost are two ideas: The first is that God talks to us in various ways. The second is that our attitude toward God when we are suffering is important and can affect how God responds.