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INTRODUCING JOB: THE BOOK AND THE MAN

BACKGROUND FROM THE AUTHOR

Hello, and welcome to this study of the Bible's book of Job! I'm Carol Bechtel, and it's my honor to be your guide through these seven sessions.

First, let me congratulate you for having the good sense to commit to studying the book of Job. It will stretch your faith in ways that may occasionally be uncomfortable. Yet, it will also stretch your faith in ways that may well be invaluable—for the care of your own soul and those of others.

I think most people are at least a little intimidated by the book of Job, so if you are a little nervous, you are in good company. There are a couple of reasons for feeling hesitant. First of all, the book of Job may seem awfully serious. I guess I can't argue with that. If you're looking for a little light reading or a few good laughs, Job is not your book. Having said that, however, I think you may be surprised at how much fun we'll have, even studying serious subjects! Second, the book of Job may seem awfully dense and difficult. To that I would say, "You don't have to be a biblical scholar to get a lot out of this book." The most important preparation anyone can bring to the book of Job is their own life experience. If you have been "around the block" a few times—or even just once or twice—then you have what it takes to appreciate the book of Job.

This brings up the question of what qualifies me to act as anyone's guide through the book of Job. Well, a Yale Ph.D. in Old Testament helps. But life experience has also been my teacher. I am thankful to report that I know nothing of suffering on Job's scale—hopefully few of us have! Still, God has granted me certain opportunities to think long and hard about the issues with which Job wrestles. Both death and divorce have been unwelcome visitors to my life. Two

serious illnesses came to call as well. During those experiences I came to know the book of Job from the inside out. I hesitated about whether I should share that much personal information, but I need you to know that I'm not talking about suffering in the abstract.

Here's the bottom line. If I had to choose one book of the Bible to send with my children on their journey through life, it would be the book of Job. That may seem like an odd choice. Yet, the more experience I get as both a person and a parent, the more I realize that I cannot protect them from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Bad things will happen to them, even if they are good people. Knowing that, I would choose this book because I think it has the potential to help them through those tough times with a faith that is both flexible and firm.

I hope and pray that it will help you to do the same. Bless you as you begin to probe the spiritual riches of the book of Job.

SESSION PLANS

Learning Objectives

This session is intended to enable the participants to accomplish the following:

1. Become acquainted both with each other and the basics of this *Kerygma* study.
2. Consider and discuss the ways in which the book of Job can be both a community project and inspired by the Holy Spirit.
3. Distinguish between the traditional retributive justice stance toward reward and punishment and other biblical traditions that tend to emphasize life's inequities.
4. Make some connections between their experience and the themes of Job.
5. Gain a basic familiarity with the outline of the book of Job.

Resources You May Need

- Name tags
- Writing implements
- Five poster board weight cards for scripture references
- Brightly colored copies of the outline to Job

- This Leader's Disk with either a TV and DVD player, or computer and projector
- Copies of Worksheets 1A
- DVD of *The Sound of Music*
- Hymnal and accompanist
- Extra Bibles, biblical reference books, and commentaries

Leadership Strategy

SETTING THE STAGE

- Have slide #1, the title slide for this session, projected as participants enter.

VIEWING THE SLIDE PRESENTATIONS AND VIDEO

The **slide presentations** and **video** segments are accessible with either a DVD player and TV, or a computer with a DVD-ROM drive and a projector.

Macintosh computer users select the DVD Player application installed with Mac OS. For Windows users *without* a DVD Player application, refer to this link:

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/dvd-playback-help>

To play these items on a computer, launch the DVD video player application and select the VIDEO-TS folder on the disc to launch the DVD MAIN MENU.

To play a slide presentation or video on a DVD Player, use the arrow buttons on your remote to select video or slides and then press ENTER. To advance the slides, use your remote control to press the NEXT or SKIP button ►► | or PLAY button ►► . To go back to the previous slide, press the PREVIOUS or SKIP button ◀◀ or ◀◀ . Press the MENU button to exit the slide presentation and return to the Main Menu.

1. **Welcome.** Welcome participants and express your excitement about the prospect of studying the Bible together. Affirm them for their commitment to lifelong learning and their willingness to give time and energy to this important book of the Bible. Then open with prayer. The following is offered as a suggestion and is provided on ■ slides #2–4:

Eternal God,
 you call us to ventures
 of which we cannot see the ending,
 by paths as yet untrodden,
 through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us.¹

Come among us now and walk beside us
as we begin this journey through the book of Job.
Help us to listen well to you and to each other.
Lead us to new levels of faith and faithfulness.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

- 2. Introductions.** If members of the group do not already know each other, it is important to begin that process at this time. Name tags may be a good idea, at least for the first few weeks. Be sure to briefly introduce yourself at this time as well, perhaps sharing how you came to be leading this study and why you are excited about it.

and/or

Depending on the size of the group, you may want to ask members to give their names, along with a brief indication of what motivated them to participate in this study. Larger groups can still do this if divided into teams of five or six (seated at round tables, if possible).

- 3. Resource Book.** Participants should have their Resource Book with them and be prepared for this session. (See page 9 of this Leader's Guide under "Planning the Group Sessions.")
■ Project slide #5 and ask them to turn to page vi under "Preparing for the Group Sessions." Briefly review the design of the study. This would also be a good time to clarify expectations and underscore the fact that the quality of the sessions will be in direct proportion to the quality of their preparation. Summarize the points in "Preparing for the Group Sessions" and add any tips you have, based on your own experience of preparing for Kerygma courses. Stress that no prior knowledge of the book of Job is necessary.
- 4. Bibles.** Encourage participants to bring their Bibles to every group session. This is also a good time to get a sense for what translations participants are using. Encourage them to use

¹ From the *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 501.

the New Revised Standard Version (preferably a study edition like the New Oxford Annotated Bible, which will “be there” to answer questions as they arise). Explain that, while other translations are certainly allowed, the NRSV is the translation assumed by the Resource Book. Caution participants to avoid Bible paraphrases like *the Living Bible*, or *The Message* for the purposes of this study, since paraphrases are not precise enough to work well for this kind of serious Bible study. (They also tend to reflect the theological biases of the individual doing the paraphrase and do not have the benefit of the “checks and balances” of a group of translators from a variety of faith traditions.) We want, after all, to stay as close to the original languages as possible. The motto of the ecumenical committee that worked on the NRSV was “as literal as possible, as free as necessary.”² This accords well with the goals of our study.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

- 1. Getting the Big Picture.** Invite participants to turn to the outline on pages 8–9 of the Resource Book. Distribute copies of this same outline and encourage participants to keep it before them as they read. (You may want to copy it on brightly colored paper for easy identification.) Explain that this will help them see the forest even as they travel through the trees.

and/or

- 2. Take Up and Read.** Ask participants to share one or two reflections on their experience of the “Take Up and Read” assignment starting on page 6 of the Resource Book. Ask:

What did you learn about the book from this exercise?

What did you learn about yourself?

- 3. Background from the Author.** ► View the segment “A Word from the Author” for session one on this disk, or read aloud the “Background from the Author” section earlier in this session. This will not only introduce some of the themes of the study, but also help to establish a relationship of trust between participants and the author. If you have led or

² From the essay, “To the Reader,” which is an official part of the preface for the NRSV Bible translation.

participated in other studies with this author, now might be a good time to comment on that experience (if it was positive!). If you think it would be helpful, hit the highlights from the “About the Author” section on page iv of the Resource Book.

and

Response. Invite participants to respond to the author’s comment section.

and/or

- 4. Life Experiences.** ■ Project slide #6 and invite participants to briefly identify what life experience makes them especially interested in the book of Job.

Note: This discussion could easily be expanded as time allows. If this is the case, larger groups will want to divide into smaller groups for the purposes of this discussion. As you give instructions, be sure to stress the importance of giving everyone time to share, and that sharing is *optional*. People’s willingness to participate in this discussion may be limited by how well they know each other. As a leader, be sensitive about not trying to force participants into a level of intimacy for which they are not yet ready.

- 5. Retributive Justice.** Begin to explore the theme of *retributive justice* (Resource Book, p. 3) by showing the gazebo scene from the movie *The Sound of Music*. You will need to cue it up beforehand. (It begins just after the baroness breaks her engagement with the captain in the balcony scene.)

Ask participants if they had ever thought about this scene as theologically problematic. After listening to their responses, ask whether/how this scene relates to the book of Job.

and/or

- 6. An Ongoing Debate.** Summarize this section of the Resource Book from page 4. In order to make this material more graphic, ■ project slide #7 or write “Traditional Retributive Justice” and “Wisdom’s Minority Report” on opposite ends of the board. Ask for five volunteers and hand out five large cards with the following scripture references on them:

Psalm 1 Ecclesiastes 8:14 Psalm 34:15–18 Ecclesiastes 9:11 Proverbs 10:3

Ask the participants to stand at the front of the classroom, holding the cards. As each volunteer reads the passage in turn, have the group physically direct the cardholders to the appropriate end of a spectrum.

Point out that the book of Job has both ends of this spectrum represented in its bounds. (For instance, the friends assume the traditional stance, while Job himself bewails the fact that the righteous do often suffer.)

Ask which end of the spectrum rings true to participants' experience. Does it help to make a prescriptive/descriptive distinction? If so, in what way? (In other words, do some passages seem like prescriptions for how to live life, while others seem like descriptions of how life often works out?)

End with an acknowledgment that even some of the traditional passages may not be as black and white as they seem. For instance, Psalm 34:19 does at least acknowledge that the righteous do *have* afflictions. It is, perhaps, a matter of degree of emphasis rather than out-and-out contradiction. Still, the book of Job will give us plenty of opportunity to feel the tension within the canon on this issue.

- 7. The Book of Job as a Community Project.** ■ Project slides #8–9 or hand out copies of Worksheet 1A: “Possible Editions of the Book of Job.” Note that this is a summary of some of the most prevalent scholarly theories on the development of the book of Job.

As you work through each edition, begin to imagine how the book of Job would feel in each edition. For example, how would the book feel without the prose epilogue? Would you prefer it that way?

■ Project slides #10–11 with the discussion questions from the bottom of the worksheet. Use either in small groups or as a committee of the whole.

CLOSING

- 1. Thanks.** Bring the session to a close by thanking participants for their hard work and enthusiasm.

- 2. Hymn.** Sing a hymn such as “God of Our Life,” “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” or if appropriate, one of the many fine evening hymns, such as “Abide with Me” or “Day is Done.” The latter are particularly appropriate for the book of Job, since they encourage a sense of radical trust in God. The same could be said for the following prayer:

Abide with us, O Lord,
 for the evening comes and the day is almost over.
 Abide with us,
 for the days are hastening on
 and we hasten with them.
 Abide with us and with all your faithful people,
 until the daystar rises and the morning light appears,
 and we shall abide with your forever.³

or

Gracious God,
 we thank you for your presence here among us [today/tonight.]
 Continue to be with us as we go our separate ways.
 Guide us in the coming days
 as we live into a deeper appreciation of this mysterious book.
 When we would ask for certainty,
 grant us patience.
 When we would supply answers,
 grant us appropriate questions.
 When we would rather not apply it to our lives,
 grant us the courage to look long and hard its implications for us.
 Bless each person here
 and bless us as a group
 as we seek to know you and follow you more faithfully.
 In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

³ From the *Book of Common Worship*, 522.

Looking Ahead

1. Recruit a volunteer to do a short mini-lecture on the character of *the satan* for next week, using “Research” question #1 from page 19 of the Resource Book as a guide. Be clear about time limits (5 minutes?), or this could potentially take over the entire session. This will be used in “Exploring the Scripture” activity #4, “Character Checks: Upstairs.”

2. Preview the play from Worksheet 2A. This play does not require formal rehearsal, but it does require some advance planning. Think about the following:
 - Location—a place with a raised platform for the “upstairs” scenes is ideal,
 - The narrator’s role is important. Either prepare for this role yourself, or recruit a good reader and give him/her the script in advance.
 - You may wish to highlight the parts of the script for each character with a speaking part (9 total) in advance for extra clarity.

Worksheet 1A**POSSIBLE EDITIONS OF THE BOOK OF JOB**

- 1st edition: The oral tradition of a righteous man who suffered much
- 2nd edition: The prose introduction (1:1–2:13)
- 3rd edition: The poetic dialogues only (3–27; 29–31; 38–42:6)
minus the wisdom hymn in Job 28 and the Elihu speeches in 32–37
- 4th edition: Prose introduction plus the poetic dialogues (minus 28, 32–37)
- 5th edition: Prose introduction, poetic dialogues (minus 28, 32–37), plus the prose conclusion (42:7–12)
- 6th edition: Entire book (wisdom hymn in 28 plus Elihu's speeches in 32–37 added here)

Begin to imagine how the book of Job would “feel” in each edition.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Do you find it disconcerting to discover that the book of Job might be the product of such a long and complex history? Why or why not?
- 2) To what degree is inspiration tied to a book's being the product of one author? Have your views changed on this over time? Why or why not?
- 3) How important is it to you to know that Job was a real person?

