

November 9th, 2025

Job 19:25-26 “What Disciples Do: Live by Faith”

Guess what came up in the lectionary today? My favorite book in the Old Testament—Job! It only appears four times in the three-year lectionary cycle, which is disappointing but understandable. The goal of the lectionary is to guide us through the whole Bible in nine years—not verse by verse, but by key themes and stories. Today’s reading is only two verses from Job, and that makes sense too. It’s not an easy book to read or understand. But it’s my favorite because it offers an alternative to traditional Jewish wisdom literature like Proverbs. Proverbs is full of straightforward, black-and-white wisdom: If you do good, good things will happen; if you do bad, bad things will happen. And for the most part, that’s true—except when it isn’t.

Proverbs was written for teenage boys. You don’t believe me? In the very first chapter, verse eight, the writer declares, “Hear, my child, your father’s instruction, and do not reject your mother’s teaching.” In other words, the foundation of wisdom is “listen to your parents young man!” Then in the last chapter, thirty-one, there’s an entire section dedicated to the women you should avoid and the women you should marry. The Book of Proverbs is for teenage boys who are learning the ins and outs of the Jewish tradition. But what is there for the adults? What is there for someone who discovers that in real life, the wicked get away with doing bad things and the righteous fall into calamity? Not all the time. But sometimes, and for no apparent reason. If you attended Gail’s last Bible study, you know the answer is, “Ecclesiastes and Job.” This is real wisdom for real adults. Our Old Testament professor in seminary said, “These books shouldn’t be read by anyone under 30.” Why? Ecclesiastes basically says, “Life’s a mess and then you die, so you might as well have fun along the way.” Job is even more blunt. The message here is, “Sometimes stuff happens and you’ll never know why.” You don’t tell that to a 13-year-old kid! You don’t say, “Nothing really matters, so eat, drink, and be merry!” You don’t say, “It doesn’t matter if

you're good or not -- stuff happens either way." You're just asking for trouble if you say this!

Job was a faithful man. Chapter one starts out with these words – “There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” After a terrible tragedy that took away his health, his material assets, and his children, Job tore his clothes, shaved his head, dropped to his knees and said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” That is a powerful statement of faith. That’s where we get the phrase, “the patience of Job.” Here’s a guy who lost everything, but he still says, “blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Then things go south when his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar arrive to comfort him. At first, they did something that Mary would applaud. The author writes, “They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.” Bravo guys. Way to hold space with this man who is weighed down by grief. Then Job finally spoke, and the first thing he said was, “Why?” That’s when Job’s friend Eliphaz chimed in. Did he affirm Job’s question by saying, “I hear your grief. Your ‘why’ shows me how difficult this must be for you.” No! He says, “Let me *tell* you why.” But the only thing that Eliphaz has in his tool belt is what he learned as a 13-year-old boy from Proverbs. “Well, Job, this is happening because you did something wrong. Everyone knows that when you do bad things, bad things will happen to you.” Then Zophar and Bildad say, “Yeah, what he said!” Meanwhile Job is trying to convince them that he has done nothing wrong. He played by the rules. He did everything that the traditional Jewish wisdom in Proverbs said he should do. He even found that perfect Proverbs 31 wife! And now she’s saying, “This is all your fault buddy! Just confess your sin and get it over with!” But he *didn’t* sin! And you might be thinking, “Yeah, but in Romans Paul said, ‘for *all* have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.’” Yes. But Paul wasn’t even born yet, so let’s stay in this book.

Then this other friend Elihu comes into the picture and says, “Listen, I understand how you must be feeling,” which is kind of a no-no, because does he *really* know *exactly* how Job feels? But at least he’s making an effort to empathize with his friend. Finally! A friend who’s more mature than these other three guys. Then Elihu says, “But you realize this *has* to be your fault because you know -- that’s just the way things are!” Then Job turns to the source – he starts demanding that God give him the answers. “O that I might have my request, and that God would grant my desire!” And he gets nothing but silence. Meanwhile his friends are *still* badgering him about how obvious it is that he did something wrong. Why? Because good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. That’s all they’ve got. That’s all they *know*.

Finally, after many chapters of Job crying out to God, and using weird metaphors like, “You poured me out like milk and curdled me like cheese,” God finally breaks the silence. God says, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” Words without knowledge. Is that what God is saying about traditional Jewish wisdom literature? Not really. God’s referring to the words of Job’s “friends.” They’re the ones speaking words without knowledge. God says, “Tell you what, now it’s *your* turn to answer *my* questions.” Then God asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Explain to me everything you know about snow. Better yet, tell me about thunder. How does that work? What about animals? Mountain goats. Deer. Tell me about a wild ostrich, or better yet a whale? What’s that all about? Tell me why they exist?” Then finally God says, “Job, sometimes stuff happens.” Mind you I’m oversimplifying things here. I’m trying to explain a tediously written forty-two-chapter book in 15 minutes or less.

The point is, there’s a *lot* of things in this world that we *don’t* understand, and that’s okay. I know it may seem like I sound like a broken record when I say this, but faith does *not* require certainty. It doesn’t require that we know everything there is to know. Even in the middle of Job’s arguments with his friends, he managed to say, “I know

my redeemer lives.” That’s authentic faith right there. Even in tough times, it’s enough to carry disciples through whatever circumstances come our way.

Martin Thielen is a United Methodist pastor who has written many books and articles about faith and doubt. He is the host of *A Doubters Parish* -- a website dedicated to helping thinking people navigate faith in the twenty-first century. His ministry is to shepherd people who are wrestling with traditional beliefs and institutional religion. His two bestselling books are *What’s the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian?* and *The Answer to Bad Religion Is Not No Religion*. In a commentary he wrote about Job, he told a story about Eli Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust. Wiesel was just 14 years old when he and his family were taken from their home to a Nazi concentration camp. His story of the Holocaust is awful – a nightmare beyond belief. In a public television interview, Wiesel recalled a vivid experience at the concentration camp. A group of men in his barracks decided to have a trial – a trial unlike any he’d ever seen or heard before. These men decided to try God for the horrors of the Holocaust. They had been men of faith but their faith profoundly disappointed them. So they decided to put God on trial for abandoning the Jewish people. And they asked Wiesel, this 14-year-old kid, to witness the proceedings. The charges were brought and the prosecutor listed them one by one: God’s people had been torn from their homes, deported from their families, beaten, abused, murdered, and gassed. Then they attempted to build a defense, but in the end they found God guilty of abandoning God’s people, maybe even guilty of not existing. When the trial was over, a dark silence fell over the room. Then a few moments later the men realized, “Oh! It’s time for evening prayers!” So they shut down this trial about whether God even existed so they could have their prayer time. At this point in the story, Wiesel recounted a remarkable fact: These men who had just put God on trial and found God guilty of abandoning them – these men still prayed their evening prayers.

And folks, *that's* what faith looks like. Those men had every reason to give up on God, every reason to walk away. And yet when the time for prayer came, they prayed. They prayed because somewhere deep inside, they still believed that even in the darkest night, God had *not* abandoned them. That's what Job did too. He didn't understand. He didn't get the answers he wanted. But he kept the conversation going. He held on to hope when hope made *no* sense. Friends, that's what disciples do. When life gets hard, we keep showing up. When God seems silent, we keep praying. When life seems unfair, we keep trusting. Why? Because we know that our redeemer lives, which means the story isn't over yet.