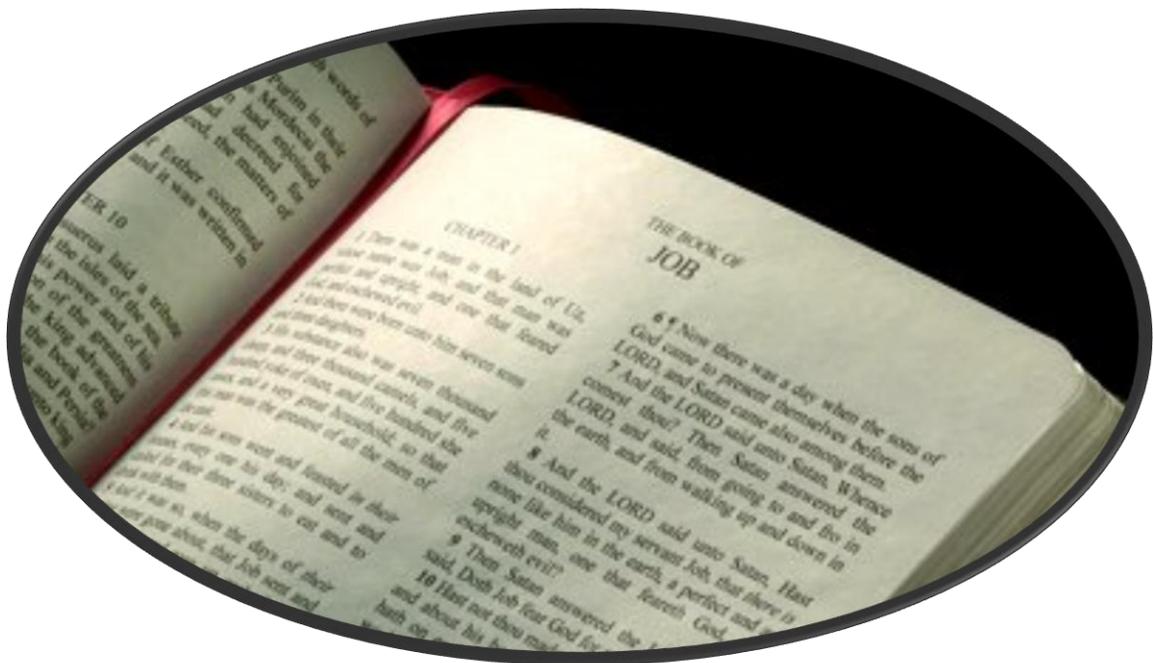


JOB

JOB'S CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

39:9-42:17: Job's Character Development

Job sees his sin and grows.

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T. M. Moore, Principal

tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

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1 Job 39:9-40:2 (ESV)

‘Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will he spend the night at your manger? Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes, or will he harrow the valleys after you? Will you depend on him because his strength is great, and will you leave to him your labor? Do you have faith in him that he will return your grain and gather it to your threshing floor?’

‘The wings of the ostrich wave proudly, but are they the pinions and plumage of love? For she leaves her eggs to the earth and lets them be warmed on the ground, forgetting that a foot may crush them and that the wild beast may trample them. She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers; though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear, because God has made her forget wisdom and given her no share in understanding. When she rouses herself to flee, she laughs at the horse and his rider.’

‘Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrifying. He paws in the valley and exults in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword. Upon him rattle the quiver, the flashing spear, and the javelin. With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground; he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds, he says ‘Aha!’ He smells the battle from afar, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.’

‘Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high? On the rock he dwells and makes his home, on the rocky crag and stronghold. From there he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it from far away. His young ones suck up blood, and where the slain are, there is he.’

And the LORD said to Job:

‘Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.’

God has asked Job a total of 43 questions, none of which he could hope to answer, plus schooled him on a few things. Job has to be glad it's over. His face must be burning with embarrassment.

But he's got to be relieved that his punishment is mere words. This is a great example of a loving father calling his child on the carpet. He makes him feel terrible, but there's no real punishment. The purpose is teaching, and this technique accomplishes that perfectly.

The book of Job is all about the great mysteries of life. Job is confounded by what has happened to him and wants an explanation. God's first step in answering Job is to pile 43 more mysteries on top of the ones that are bugging him.

So, part of God's answer is, “Yeah, there are lots of mysteries. And your point would be?”

But that answer isn't satisfying, especially to us. We knew that before we started reading Job.

But the full answer is starting to form. We already saw some of God's purposes (e.g., education and character development). We just need to see how they fit into the grand scheme of things.

2 Job 40:3-14 (ESV)

Then Job answered the LORD and said:

“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.”

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

“Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?”

“Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.”

Job does the right thing and grovels profusely, but then God goes on to make sure that Job understands exactly what he did wrong.

Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?

The funny thing is that Job wouldn't have said the things he did if his “friends” hadn't shown up and made a bunch of ridiculous accusations. Job has a fair excuse in that he was goaded into his errors.

But making excuses wouldn't go over too well right now. Job just needs to pay attention to the lesson.

And the lesson is simple – God can't be in the wrong. He invented right and wrong.

God doesn't just get to decide whether something is right or wrong, He decides whether there even is such a thing as right and wrong. That sounds weird, but the existence of the concept of right and wrong is an interesting and popular philosophical topic.

The animal kingdom has no right and wrong, but people do. We have a standard that virtually everyone agrees on – a definition of right and wrong that crosses cultural boundaries.

This was a favorite topic of CS Lewis's. He wrote an entire book on this universal standard of right and wrong titled, “The Abolition of Man.” He expanded on this in, “Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe,” which is the first section of, “Mere Christianity.”

We are blessed to have a God who created our system of right and wrong. The Declaration of Independence explicitly references this system (“self-evident truth”) and its creator.

Praise God for His creation, which is much more than just space, time, matter and energy.

3 Job 40:15-41:11 (ESV)

“Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox. Behold, his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. He makes his tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron.

“He is the first of the works of God; let him who made him bring near his sword! For the mountains yield food for him where all the wild beasts play. Under the lotus plants he lies, in the shelter of the reeds and in the marsh. For his shade the lotus trees cover him; the willows of the brook surround him. Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth. Can one take him by his eyes, or pierce his nose with a snare?

“Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he make many pleas to you? Will he speak to you soft words? Will he make a covenant with you to take him for your servant forever? Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls? Will traders bargain over him? Will they divide him up among the merchants? Can you fill his skin with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again! Behold, the hope of a man is false; he is laid low even at the sight of him. No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.”

Experts aren't sure what Behemoths and Leviathans are. Popular guesses include hippopotamuses and crocodiles. But it doesn't matter; both are animals you wouldn't want to mess with.

<http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20160108-why-you-should-beware-a-laughing-or-yawning-hippo>

The point here is that these animals aren't fazed by events that would intimidate us.

Behold, if the river is turbulent he is not frightened; he is confident though Jordan rushes against his mouth. ... Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again!

These are mere created beings, yet they almost seem like gods compared to us. If Job can't even measure up to some of God's created beings, where is he in relation to their creator?

This highlights a big problem in America – we worship created things, instead of the creator.

In the past, these were idols made by man – the statues and poles worshipped by pagans. It's not like that nowadays; it's worse. Now we worship people.

Think of the people you most admire. They might be great athletes, scientists, or musicians, or very attractive, or even great theologians. Would you just melt if you got to meet them? How crazy is that?

Our culture has turned stars into “American Idols.”

4 Job 41:12-34 (ESV)

"I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame. Who can strip off his outer garment? Who would come near him with a bridle? Who can open the doors of his face? Around his teeth is terror. His back is made of rows of shields, shut up closely as with a seal. One is so near to another that no air can come between them. They are joined one to another; they clasp each other and cannot be separated. His sneezings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth. In his neck abides strength, and terror dances before him. The folds of his flesh stick together, firmly cast on him and immovable. His heart is hard as a stone, hard as the lower millstone. When he raises himself up the mighty are afraid; at the crashing they are beside themselves. Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail, nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin. He counts iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee; for him sling stones are turned to stubble. Clubs are counted as stubble; he laughs at the rattle of javelins. His underparts are like sharp potsherds; he spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire. He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind him he leaves a shining wake; one would think the deep to be white-haired. On earth there is not his like, a creature without fear. He sees everything that is high; he is king over all the sons of pride."

This sounds like one of those indestructible sci-fi characters, like the alien in "Alien," or Gort in "The Day the Earth Stood Still."

Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail, nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.

God's point is simply that He created a creature that can rule over Job.

He sees everything that is high; he is king over all the sons of pride.

The real problem is that we're "sons of pride."

We're not the biggest, or the strongest, or the fastest of God's creatures, but we are created in His image. That makes us precious in God's eyes.

That's important because, face it, lots of other creatures are prettier. They're also less prone to make a mess of things. If you see a place that's totally trashed, you can be pretty sure that people trashed it.

But if our worth is due to our being created in His image, then what of the way we think some people are better, or more valuable, than others?

It's toast. The biggest loser in the world is created in God's image too.

That's why Jesus emphasized charity so much. Charity teaches us to value others.

5 Job 42:1-17 (NIV)

Then Job replied to the LORD:

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shubite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

Job finally gets it and says the magic words, *"I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

Mission accomplished. Lesson over. Job has advanced to the next level.

"Are you telling me that this advancement in Job's character explains God's purpose in knocking off his ten children, plus all the other pain and suffering? Is his character development worth all that?"

Yes, but this isn't **the** explanation; it's **an** explanation. There may be other purposes besides character development, some way beyond our comprehension. Producing the book of Job is another purpose.

"But I still don't see how it makes sense to value Job's character development over the lives of his ten children. When they died, their character development ceased."

To answer that, we need a lesson from general revelation. This will take a whole nother devotional.

Job – Epilogue

God gave us a wonderful clue about Himself and His purposes when He created us in His image. And of all the ways we're created in His image, one stands out – our creativity. We are like the Creator in that we're creative. This is one of the great differences between us and the animals. No animal is one-percent as creative as a small child. A child's playtime is an explosion of creativity.

And therein lies a great lesson. Because we're creative, we pretend things. Part of that pretending is to write plays, novels, and other things that create pretend “universes.” The universes we create are nothing compared to the universe God created, but we still get to have purposes in our little pretend universes that are vastly different from what the characters we create might want (or even understand). This helps us see that a creator's priorities are different from a created being's priorities. So, could the development of one main character outweigh the importance of everything else?

It does in *David Copperfield*. In the same way, God could prioritize Job's character development over everything else – even life or death issues.

This isn't easy to get comfortable with. The universe isn't a novel or a play, and it's almost insulting to compare God's purposes to Charles Dickens's. Novels and plays are created for an audience; our universe has a much grander purpose. Still, a creator's purposes can be very different from those of the created beings, and the dramas we create help us see that.

The problem people have with the book of Job is that God's purposes don't seem to make sense. Now we see one possible purpose that does. The one that we understand probably isn't the main purpose, but it's still one that makes sense. Almost everything God does seems to push character development.

“But that means our spiritual lives are more important than our physical lives.”

Bingo, but even that understates it. If the pain and tragedy in Job is beyond understanding, you can forget about trying to make sense of the cross. At least Job's suffering is in the same universe as his character development. Christ's suffering isn't. So, could our character development have significance that transcends our world?

Sure. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. – Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

Obviously, this is way beyond our comprehension. That's why the book of Job is so wonderful; it gives us one glimpse of God's priorities that we can wrap our minds around. It's only a tiny slice but, like seeing the tip of an iceberg, we realize there's something really big just outside our view.

It is both the scariest and the most comforting thing in the whole world.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever had a crisis that scared you, but in the end was nothing? In hindsight, do you think God was just getting your attention?
2. If you can get your hands on a copy of *The Abolition of Man*, consider the categories in the appendix. How can all these different cultures be so similar?
3. Which famous person would you most like to meet? Could you stay cool during that meeting?
4. Some people are not easy to love. What's the secret to loving them?
5. Have you ever had an "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" moment? Do you know someone who has (like the prodigal son)? How did this change them?
6. Go back and reread the beginning of Job and note how God initiates the entire sequence of events. What was His purpose in this? Does it make sense that God sent Jesus to die on the cross so that we would be transformed?

Items for prayer: