

Job 11
May 10, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have you ever spoken confidently about something you thought you fully understood and then learned that you were wrong? If that has ever happened to you, how can we avoid speaking confidently about things we may not fully understand? [Let people engage]

Transition: As we read today's text, remember that Job is still sitting in deep grief and confusion. Zophar enters the conversation convinced he has the right answers. His speech reminds us how easy it can be to mistake certainty for wisdom, especially when trying to explain someone else's suffering. As we read, let's consider what his words reveal about the human tendency to speak beyond our understanding. Let's begin.

BOOK:

11 Then **Zophar** the Naamathite replied:

² "Are all these words to go unanswered?

Is this talker to be vindicated?

³ Will your idle talk reduce men to silence?

Will no one rebuke you when you mock?

⁴ You say to God, 'My beliefs are flawless
and I am pure in your sight.'

⁵ Oh, how I wish that God would speak,
that he would open his lips against you

⁶ and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom,
for true wisdom has two sides.

Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.

⁷ "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?

Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?

⁸ They are higher than the heavens—what can you do?

They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know?

⁹ Their measure is longer than the earth
and wider than the sea.

¹⁰ "If he comes along and confines you in prison
and convenes a court, who can oppose him?

¹¹ Surely he recognizes deceitful men;
and when he sees evil, does he not take note?

¹² But a witless man can no more become wise
than a wild donkey's colt can be born a man. (*Or wild donkey can be born tame*)

¹³ "Yet if you devote your heart to him
and stretch out your hands to him,

¹⁴ if you put away the sin that is in your hand
and allow no evil to dwell in your tent,

¹⁵ then you will lift up your face without shame;

you will stand firm and without fear.

¹⁶ You will surely forget your trouble,
recalling it only as waters gone by.

¹⁷ Life will be brighter than noonday,
and darkness will become like morning.

¹⁸ You will be secure, because there is hope;
you will look about you and take your rest in safety.

¹⁹ You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid,
and many will court your favor.

²⁰ But the eyes of the wicked will fail,
and escape will elude them;
their hope will become a dying gasp.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Humility should shape the way we speak about God and suffering. Zophar was confident he understood why Job suffered, but he spoke beyond what he actually knew. We need to remember that human understanding is limited. We should be careful about making absolute claims about why God allows hardship in someone’s life. Let’s pray and ask the Lord how to practice humility when people ask difficult spiritual questions.

Truth without compassion can wound instead of heal. Zophar said some true things about God’s wisdom and greatness, but his words lacked empathy for Job’s pain. The chapter challenges believers to care not only about whether our words are correct, but also whether they are loving and timely. Let’s pray and ask the Lord to show us what compassionate truth-telling looks like in real life.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). Be Patient. (pp. 45-48) Victor Books

Job's three friends were old men, so Zophar must have been the youngest since he spoke last. His first speech is not long; but what it lacks in length, it makes up for in animosity, for it reveals that Zophar was angry. There is a proper time and place for the display of righteous anger (Eph. 4:26), but Job's ash heap was not the place, and that was not the right time. "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20, NKJV). What Job needed was a helping hand, not a slap in the face.

Zophar makes three accusations against Job: Job is guilty of sin (Job 11:1-4); Job is ignorant of God (vv. 5-12); and Job is stubborn in his refusal to repent (vv. 13-20). In his reply, Job answers all three accusations: He affirms God's greatness (Job 12) and his own innocence (Job 13), but he has no hope, so why should he repent? (Job 14)

1. Zophar's three accusations (Job 11:1-20)

After listening to Eliphaz and Bildad accuse Job, Zophar should have had enough sense and compassion to take a new approach. Job would hold fast to his integrity no matter what God did or his friends said, so why continue that discussion? How sad it is when people who should share ministry end up creating misery. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15) is good counsel to follow.

"Job is guilty!" (Job 11:1-4) Like Bildad (8:2), Zophar opened his address by calling Job a "windbag." How tragic that these three friends focused on Job's words instead of the feelings behind those words. A Chinese proverb says, "Though conversing face to face, their hearts have a thousand miles between them." How true that was at the ash heap! After all, information is not the same as communication. Sidney J. Harris reminds us, "Information is giving out; communication is getting through."

Not only was Job's speech a lot of wind, but it was also chatter ("lies") and mockery (11:3). What Job said about God was not true and could only be compared to the idle chatter of people who speak without thinking. And what Job said about himself was an outright lie, for he was not pure before God. In maintaining his integrity, Job gave the impression that he was sinless, which, of course, was not true. (See 6:30; 9:20-21; 10:7.)

Job is ignorant of God (Job 11:5-12). Zophar's request in verse 5 was answered when God appeared (38:1); but it was Zophar and his two friends who were later rebuked by God, and not Job! Job was commended by the Lord for telling the truth. Beware of asking God to tell others what they need to know, unless you are willing for Him to show *you* what you need to know.

Zophar wanted Job to grasp the height, depth, breadth, and length of God's divine wisdom (11:8-9). In saying this, Zophar was hinting that he himself already knew the vast dimensions of God's wisdom and could teach Job if he would listen. It's too bad Zophar didn't know the vast dimensions of God's love (Eph. 3:17-19) and share some of that love with Job. When Zophar said that the secrets of God's wisdom were "double" (Job 11:6), what did he mean? It could mean that God's wisdom is full and complete (Isa. 40:2), or that God has twice as much wisdom

as Job thinks He has. The NIV says that “true wisdom has two sides” (Job 11:6). There is the small side that we see and the huge side that only God can see.

Since God knows everything, He knows all about Job and could punish him more than He has. “It could be worse!” is certainly no comfort to a man who has lost his family, his wealth, and his health, and is barely hanging on to life. You don’t measure suffering in a quantitative way the way you measure produce at the supermarket. The flippant way in which Job’s friends were speaking about his situation shows they lacked understanding. “The deeper the sorrow,” says the Jewish *Talmud*, “the less tongue it has.”

The two questions in verse 7 expect a negative answer. Nobody can “fathom the mysteries of God” or “probe the limits of the Almighty” (NIV). Of course, Job never claimed to know everything about God; but what he did know encouraged him to hold fast to his integrity and not give up.

God is not accountable to us. He can arrest and imprison anybody He chooses, convene the court and pronounce the sentence; and nobody can say a word in protest (v. 10; see 9:12). God knows who is wise and who is foolish, who is pure and who is sinful. Since God has passed judgment on Job, Job must be guilty.

Zophar closed this accusation by quoting a proverb (11:12). It’s not easy to ascertain its meaning. The proverb may be saying that no matter how stupid a man is when he is born, even as dumb as a wild donkey, there is still hope for him to become intelligent. Or, the proverb might be saying just the opposite, as in the NIV: “But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey’s colt can be born a man.” The NASB agrees: “And an idiot will become intelligent when the foal of a wild donkey is born a man.” In view of Zophar’s anger and insulting language, it is likely that the NIV and NASB translations are correct.

Job is stubborn and should repent (Job 11:13–20). “There is hope!” is Zophar’s encouraging word to Job (v. 18), and he described what Job could experience. God would bless him abundantly, and his troubles would be over. Job could lift up his head again, and his fears would be gone (v. 15; 10:15). He would forget his misery like water gone over the dam (11:16). God would give him a long life, and it would be the dawning of a new day for him (v. 17). He would dwell in the light, not in the darkness of Sheol (10:20–22); and God’s security would put an end to all his fears (11:19–20).

But if Job wanted these blessings, he had to get them on Zophar’s terms. Yes, there was hope, but it was hope with a condition attached to it: Job must repent and confess his sins (vv. 13–14). *Zophar is tempting Job to bargain with God so he can get out of his troubles.* This is exactly what Satan wanted Job to do! “Doth Job fear God for nothing?” Satan asked (1:9). Satan accused Job of having a “commercial faith” that promised prosperity in return for obedience. If Job had followed Zophar’s advice, he would have played right into the hands of the enemy.

Job did not have a “commercial faith” that made bargains with God. He had a confident faith that said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (13:15). That doesn’t sound like a man

looking for an easy way out of difficulties. “Job did not understand the Lord’s reasons,” said C.H. Spurgeon, “but he continued to confide in His goodness.” That is faith!

Zuck, R. B. (1985). *Job*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 733) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

5. Zophar’s first speech (chap. 11)

Zophar retorted viciously to Job for claiming to be innocent and for accusing God of malpractice in the universe. This third friend hardly lived up to the name “friend”; he was rude, insensitive, and brash.

a. His rebuke of Job’s words (11:1–6)

11:1–6. Zophar was furious because of Job’s many **idle** words (vv. 2–3), his mocking of God (v. 3), and his boast that he was blameless (v. 4). In stinging sarcasm, Zophar said he wished **God would** answer Job (cf. 9:3, 16) and give him insight into **true wisdom**, which is difficult to penetrate (**has two sides** is lit., “double, folded over”). Zophar said God was letting Job off easy, giving him less punishment than he deserved! This certainly was a heartless jab.

b. His praise of God’s wisdom (11:7–12)

11:7–10. Zophar’s laud of God’s wisdom may have been a rejoinder to Job’s comments about His wisdom (9:4). Zophar pointed out that the Lord’s mysterious, plummetless, unknowable wisdom exceeds the height of **the heavens ... the depths of the grave**, the length of **the earth**, and the breadth of **the sea**. How, then, could Job possibly **oppose** God in **court**? (cf. 10:2)

11:11–12. Since God is so wise, Zophar reasoned, certainly He knows the difference between **deceitful** and honest people, though Job did not seem to think so (cf. 9:22). Zophar called Job a nitwit (**a witless man**, lit., “a man who is hollowed out,” i.e., empty in the head). The chances of Job’s becoming **wise** were no greater than the possibility of **a wild** donkey, considered the most stupid animal, giving birth to **a man**! This was another insensitive barb.

c. His plea for Job’s repentance (11:13–20)

11:13–20. Like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar recommended that Job repent (vv. 13–14) and receive restoration. God would **then** remove his **shame** (cf. 10:15) and give him security and confidence. Job would be able to **forget** his **trouble** (*‘āmāl*; cf. comments on 3:10) and he would have joy (11:17; cf. 9:25; 10:20), security, **hope**, and **rest** (11:18). Fear would be gone and people would again look to him for leadership. If Job continued in his wickedness, however, he would die (his **eyes** would **fail**), he would be trapped by his sin (cf. 18:8–10), and his **hope** would die with him.

These first speeches by Job’s compatriots offered no comfort. Though their generalities about God’s goodness, justice, and wisdom were true, their cruel charge that Job repent of some hidden sin missed the mark. They failed to see that God sometimes has other reasons for human suffering.

Garrett, D. A. (1998). *The Poetic and Wisdom Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 206). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Zophar's First Response (11:1–20). Zophar, in an angry retort, was the first to accuse Job of having committed some sin by which he deserved his fate. To be sure, he did not yet make a specific accusation. He was only sure Job must have done something.

Zophar's rejoinder turned on the fact that Job, a mere mortal, could not possibly have understood God's ways. He used four dimensions—height, depth, length, and width—to show how far God's ways were beyond Job's (see Eph. 3:18, which uses similar language to encourage Christians to pursue deeper wisdom rather than to prove that it is beyond their reach). Zophar wished God would rebuke Job. He was sure God could point out Job's sins. Still, like his two friends, Zophar encouraged Job to turn to God, who would hear his prayer and restore what Job had lost.

To the reader, Zophar's speech is laced with irony. God's wisdom is indeed far deeper than Job's, and God would speak to him to that effect. Afterwards God would restore Job's fortunes, as Zophar predicted. But how different it would all be from what Zophar expected. For it was not Job but the three friends whom God would accuse (42:8).

The proverb in 11:12 should probably be translated, "A stupid man will get sense when a wild donkey [perhaps zebra] is born tame." This metaphor of human stubbornness means that some fools are all but beyond hope (see Jer. 13:23). It was a thinly veiled reproach against Job, who had described himself as a braying wild donkey. But in 39:5–8 God said it was He who gave the wild donkey his freedom. What to Zophar was a worthless animal was of far more value to Job and God.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job 11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.