

Job 23
August 2, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Have you ever desperately wanted an answer from God but felt like He was nowhere to be found? What was that experience like? [Let people engage]

Transition: I bet all of us can relate to waiting, wondering, or feeling that God is silent. Job can definitely relate! Job desperately wants an answer from God as to why he's going through all of this suffering, and it feels like God is nowhere to be found. Job longs to find God's dwelling place so he can present his case before him and fill his mouth with arguments. ([Job 23:1–17](#)) I'm guessing this resonates with many believers who have experienced this ache—the desire to demand answers from God during suffering, yet feeling utterly abandoned.

Job articulates a paradox. He searches in every direction—east, west, north, south—but can't find God anywhere. ([Job 23:1–17](#)) Yet immediately after expressing this profound sense of abandonment, Job declares that God knows the way he takes and that when tested, he will come forth as gold. ([Job 23:1–17](#)) ***This tension mirrors what many believers experience: the simultaneous conviction that God is absent and the deeper knowledge that God is present and working.*** Let's read the text and see what we can learn.

BOOK:

23 Then Job replied:

² “Even today my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.

³ If only I knew where to find him;
if only I could go to his dwelling!

⁴ I would state my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.

⁵ I would find out what he would answer me,
and consider what he would say.

⁶ Would he oppose me with great power?
No, he would not press charges against me.

⁷ There an upright man could present his case before him,
and I would be delivered forever from my judge.

⁸ “But if I go to the east, he is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not find him.

⁹ When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;
when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him.

¹⁰ But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

¹¹ My feet have closely followed his steps;
I have kept to his way without turning aside.

¹² I have not departed from the commands of his lips;

I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.

¹³ “But he stands alone, and who can oppose him?

He does whatever he pleases.

¹⁴ He carries out his decree against me,
and many such plans he still has in store.

¹⁵ That is why I am terrified before him;
when I think of all this, I fear him.

¹⁶ God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me.

¹⁷ Yet I am not silenced by the darkness,
by the thick darkness that covers my face.

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:

Recognize Suffering as Refining, Not Punishing

Job alludes to the refining of gold, a process in the ancient world where gold was placed in a crucible with lead and subjected to great heat so that dross would adhere to the lead, leaving purified gold—a picture of how God employs adversity to reveal the sterling quality of Job’s life.³ This reframes suffering from divine punishment into divine refinement. When facing hardship, ask yourself: What character is God developing in me? What false confidence or shallow faith is being burned away?

Trust God’s Sovereignty When His Ways Remain Hidden

The book presents a lofty view of God as One worthy of worship and trust no matter how enigmatic our circumstances, teaching that a person ought to trust God even when his ways are inscrutable.¹ Job cannot find God, cannot predict what God will do, yet treasures God’s words and follows his path. The application demands radical trust—not because you understand God’s purposes, but because you trust his character.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *Be Patient*, (pp. 93-96) Victor Books

2. Two bitter complaints (Job 23)

Instead of arguing with his friends, or compromising his integrity by giving in to Eliphaz's appeal, Job ignores them completely and speaks to and about the Lord. Job has already made it clear that his dispute was not with men but with God, and he emphasizes this fact in his speech.

We may paraphrase Job 23:2, "My complaint today is bitter, and I have to keep a heavy hand on myself to keep from doing nothing but groaning." Job's three friends did not understand how much discipline Job needed just to be able to talk with them. Instead of giving in to his pain and doing nothing but groan, Job sought to master his pain and not give in to self-pity. The next time you visit somebody in pain, keep in mind that suffering drains a person's energy and makes great demands on his strength and patience.

Job said that he had two complaints against the Lord.

"God is hiding from me" (Job 23:1-12). "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat [throne]!" (v. 3) This was another appeal to meet God in court and have a fair trial. Job was prepared to state his case, present his arguments, and let God give the verdict. Job was confident that, despite God's great power as a Lawgiver, he would win his case for he was an upright man, and God could not condemn the upright in heart. "There an upright man could present his case before Him, and I would be delivered forever from my judge" (v. 7, NIV). But how does a mere man go about finding God? If Job went forward or backward (east or west), to the left or to the right (north or south), he could not see God or even catch a quick glimpse of Him. Of course, God is present everywhere (Ps. 139:7-12); but Job wanted a *personal* meeting with God. He had questions to ask and arguments to present!

God knew where Job was—in the furnace! (Job 23:10) But it was a furnace of God's appointment, not because of Job's sin; and God would use Job's affliction to purify him and make him a better man. This is not the only answer to the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" but it is one of the best, and it can bring the sufferer great encouragement.

Scripture often uses the image of a furnace to describe God's purifying ministry through suffering. "See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10, NIV). Israel's suffering in Egypt was like that of iron in a smelting furnace (Deut. 4:20), and her later disciplines were also a "furnace experience." "For You, O God, tested us; You refined us like silver" (Ps. 66:10, NIV). This image is used in 1 Peter 1:6-7 and 4:12 of believers going through persecution.

When God puts His own people into the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long and how much. We may question why He does it to begin with, or why He doesn't turn down the heat or even turn it off; but our questions are only evidences of unbelief. Job 23:10 is the answer: "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (NKJV). *Gold does not fear the fire*. The furnace can only make the gold purer and brighter.

It's important to note that Job's life was pleasing to God *before he went into the furnace* (vv. 11–12). Eliphaz had warned Job to receive God's words and obey them (22:22), but Job had already been doing that. God's Word was his *guide* as he walked the path of life, and he was careful not to go on any detours. But even more, God's Word was his *nourishment* that was more important to him than his daily meals. Like Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16) and Jesus (Matt. 4:4; John 4:31–34), Job found in God's Word the only food that satisfied his inner person. (See Pss. 1:2; 119:103; 1 Peter 2:1–3.)

Some people go into the furnace of affliction, and it burns them; others go in, and the experience purifies them. What makes the difference? *Their attitude toward the Word of God and the will of God*. If we are nourished by the Word and submit to His will, the furnace experience, painful as it may be, will refine us and make us better. But if we resist God's will and fail to feed on His truth, the furnace experience will only burn us and make us bitter.

Job had a second complaint.

"God is frightening me" (Job 23:13–17). "But He stands alone, and who can oppose Him? He does whatever He pleases" (v. 13, NIV). Job had no other gods to turn to for help, and no way to oppose God or change His mind. God runs the universe by decree, not by consensus or democratic vote. His thoughts and ways are far above ours, but He knows what is best, and we must accept His will and rejoice in it (Isa. 55:8–11).

Those who resist or deny the sovereignty of God rob themselves of peace and courage. "There is no attribute of God more comforting to His children than the doctrine of divine sovereignty," said Charles Haddon Spurgeon. "On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings." Why? Because the human heart is proud and does not want to submit to Almighty God. People want to "do their own thing" and "do it their way," rather than find delight in doing the will of God.

If this doctrine is such a source of strength, then why was Job so frightened when he thought about the sovereignty of God? It was because he suffered so much and wondered what Almighty God would send to him next. It's one thing to submit to God when you can see His face and hear His voice in His Word. But when, like Job, you are in darkness and pain, it is easy to "fall apart" and become frightened. "He carries out His decree against me, and many such plans He still has in store" (Job 23:14, NIV). What will happen next?

But Job 23:14 must be contrasted with Jeremiah 29:11—" 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (NIV). *The future is your friend when Jesus Christ is your Lord, and you need not be afraid*. Psychologist Rollo May writes, "The most effective way to ensure the value of the future is to confront the present courageously and constructively." And the best way to do that is to submit to the Lord and realize that He is in control. "Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. 19:6).

Zuck, R. B. (1985). *Job*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 746-747) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

a. Job's desire to find God (23:1–9)

23:1–7. In his bitterness (the fourth of five times he spoke of it; cf. 3:20; 7:11; 10:1; 27:2) and groaning Job still sensed that God's **hand** of affliction was weighing him down (cf. 13:21; 33:7). (**Heavy in spite of my groaning** should read, as in the NIV margin, "heavy on me in my groaning.") Job certainly wanted to turn to God (as each debater had advised, 5:8; 8:5; 11:13; 22:23), but he could not **find Him** (cf. 13:24). **If** God could be found then Job would present his **case** (23:4, *mišpot*, another court term used frequently in the Book of Job), arguing persuasively (cf. 10:2) and weighing God's reply (23:5). Faced with the facts of Job's innocence, God would no longer **oppose** Job with His awesome **power** or **press charges** (*rîḇ*, lit., "contend, or bring a court litigation") **against** him. Earlier Job had stated that it would be pointless to present his case before God (9:14–16), but now he was certain that **an upright man**, meaning himself, **could present his case** (*yākah* "argue, debate in court") and the **Judge** (cf. 9:15) would acquit him and his troubles would terminate.

23:8–9. If a judge does not appear in court, cases cannot be presented to him. Because of that problem, Job searched in all directions for God, but in vain. God continued to be silent, to elude Job.

b. Job's declaration of innocence (23:10–12)

23:10–12. Job felt that God was evading him, because if He did show up, He, knowing **the way** of godliness Job followed, would have to declare him not guilty. Yet the sufferer perceived that when God finished with him in court, he would **come forth** (or, in view of Ugaritic and Akk. parallels, "shine" [H.H. Rowley, *Job*, p. 202]) like **gold**. Finishing with Job's trial in court may be the meaning of verse 10, rather than the more common view that God was putting him through a test so that he would be more pure than before. Job could lay claim to gold-like purity all along—before and during the trial—because he had **followed** the Lord closely, keeping to **His way** (in contrast with Eliphaz's accusation that Job followed "the old path" of "evil men," 22:15) **without** deviating and while obeying Him (cf. 22:22) and relishing every word of **His**. This is another of Job's many affirmations of his nongUILTY status.

c. Job's exacerbation with God's sovereignty (23:13–17)

23:13–14. Again Job recoiled from the idea of confronting God in a court hearing. How could he dare counter God (cf. 9:3, 14, 17) who is unique (**He stands alone** is lit., "He is in one," i.e., He is in a class by Himself) and **does** what **He** wishes (cf. Ps. 115:3), including what He had in mind for Job (cf. Job 10:13).

23:15–17. Since God was so elusive (vv. 3, 8–9) and sovereign (vv. 13–14), Job was **terrified** (*bāhal*, "disturbed, dis-mayed," 4:5; 21:6; 22:10; 23:15–16) and weakened (**faint**). Terror came not because of his sinful nature, as Eliphaz suggested (22:10), but because of the Lord's awesome nature. Even so, Job would **not be silenced by the darkness** (*hōšek*; cf. 3:4) or **thick darkness** (*ōpel*; cf. 3:6) of trouble that weighed him down.

³ Daniel J. Estes, Job, ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 140–141.

¹ Greg W. Parsons, “[Job, Theology Of,](#)” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), [418–419](#).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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