

Job 33
October 18, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: God speaks in different ways, but we don't always recognize His voice. What can distract us from hearing God, and how can we become more attentive to Him? [Let people engage]

Transition: Sometimes the busyness of life, our worries, or even our own expectations can make it difficult to recognize when God is speaking to us. In Job 33, Elihu reminds us that God may speak in ways we don't always recognize or understand. As we continue studying this chapter, let's consider how we can become more sensitive to God's voice and remain open to what He wants us to learn, even in difficult seasons. Let's read the text and see what we can learn.

BOOK:

33 “But now, Job, listen to my words;
pay attention to everything I say.
² I am about to open my mouth;
my words are on the tip of my tongue.
³ My words come from an upright heart;
my lips sincerely speak what I know.
⁴ The Spirit of God has made me;
the breath of the Almighty gives me life.
⁵ Answer me then, if you can;
prepare yourself and confront me.
⁶ I am just like you before God;
I too have been taken from clay.
⁷ No fear of me should alarm you,
nor should my hand be heavy upon you.
⁸ “But you have said in my hearing—
I heard the very words—
⁹ ‘I am pure and without sin;
I am clean and free from guilt.
¹⁰ Yet God has found fault with me;
he considers me his enemy.
¹¹ He fastens my feet in shackles;
he keeps close watch on all my paths.’
¹² “But I tell you, in this you are not right,
for God is greater than man.
¹³ Why do you complain to him
that he answers none of man’s words?
¹⁴ For God does speak—now one way, now another—
though man may not perceive it.
¹⁵ In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men

as they slumber in their beds,
16 he may speak in their ears
and terrify them with warnings,
17 to turn man from wrongdoing
and keep him from pride,
18 to preserve his soul from the pit,
his life from perishing by the sword.
19 Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain
with constant distress in his bones,
20 so that his very being finds food repulsive
and his soul loathes the choicest meal.
21 His flesh wastes away to nothing,
and his bones, once hidden, now stick out.
22 His soul draws near to the pit,
and his life to the messengers of death.(Or to the dead)
23 “Yet if there is an angel on his side
as a mediator, one out of a thousand,
to tell a man what is right for him,
24 to be gracious to him and say,
‘Spare him from going down to the pit (or grave);
I have found a ransom for him’—
25 then his flesh is renewed like a child’s;
it is restored as in the days of his youth.
26 He prays to God and finds favor with him,
he sees God’s face and shouts for joy;
he is restored by God to his righteous state.
27 Then he comes to men and says,
‘I sinned, and perverted what was right,
but I did not get what I deserved.
28 He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit,
and I will live to enjoy the light.’
29 “God does all these things to a man—
twice, even three times—
30 to turn back his soul from the pit,
that the light of life may shine on him.
31 “Pay attention, Job, and listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.
32 If you have anything to say, answer me;
speak up, for I want you to be cleared.
33 But if not, then listen to me;
be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.”

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:

Recognizing God's Communication in Difficult Seasons

Elihu emphasizes that God communicates with people in multiple ways, though they may not always perceive it¹. A practical takeaway involves cultivating attentiveness to how God speaks beyond direct, dramatic revelation. While dreams and visions were historically significant, Scripture now represents God's primary means of revealing his will, making regular engagement with biblical text essential rather than waiting for extraordinary spiritual experiences¹. This invites believers to examine whether they're actively listening through Scripture and prayer, or passively expecting God to interrupt their lives with unmistakable signs.

Reframing Suffering as Formative Rather Than Punitive

Unlike Job's other friends, Elihu distinguishes between punishment and discipline—presenting suffering as God's means of teaching and redirecting, not retribution; the divine purpose is preventative, aimed at preserving faith rather than destroying it¹. When spiritual complacency sets in during seasons of health and prosperity, sickness can awaken people to their soul's condition and increase receptivity to God's message¹. This reframes personal illness, loss, or crisis not as evidence of divine abandonment but as potential invitations to deeper spiritual alignment.

Trusting God's Sovereignty Without Demanding Explanations

Job teaches that believers should trust God even when his ways remain mysterious, while also permitting honest questions about suffering and even strong emotions like anger or bitterness². God's sovereignty means he permits nothing to believers that isn't ultimately for their good and his glory; he doesn't owe explanations, and faith rests on promises rather than understanding³. This application encourages lament and questioning while maintaining confidence in God's character and care.

1. Peter Williams, *From Despair to Hope: Insights into the Book of Job*, Exploring the Bible Commentary (Epsom, Surrey: DayOne, 2002), [167–169](#).
2. Greg W. Parsons, “[Job, Theology Of,](#)” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), [418–419](#).
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993). [See [here](#).]

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *Be Patient*. (pp. 125-131) Victor Books

2. God is gracious (Job 33)

This is a remarkable speech because it introduces into the debate a new insight into the purpose of suffering. Job's friends had argued that his suffering was evidence that God was punishing him for his sins, but Elihu now argues that sometimes God permits us to suffer *to keep us from sin*. In other words, suffering may be *preventive* and not *punitive*. (See Paul's experience recorded in 2 Cor. 12:7–10.) God does all He can to keep us from sinning and going into the pit of death, and this is evidence of His grace (Job 33:24).

Before launching into his argument, Elihu assured Job that his words were sincere and given by God's Spirit, so Job had no reason to be afraid (vv. 1–7). Elihu didn't claim to have any "inside track" with God; he was made of clay just like Job. He promised not to be heavy-handed in his speaking, and he invited Job to feel free to reply. Elihu didn't want this to be a monologue, but that's exactly what it turned out to be. Either Job was silenced by what Elihu said, or Elihu didn't pause long enough for Job to speak (see vv. 31, 33), or Job didn't think it was worthwhile to respond.

Having assured Job that his words would be helpful and not hurtful, Elihu then proceeded to quote what Job had said about himself (vv. 8–11). Job's words will form the premise for Elihu's argument.

First, Elihu said that Job had claimed to be sinless (v. 9), *which was not what Job had said*. That Job claimed to be sinless was Zophar's interpretation, not Job's declaration (11:4). Job did say that he did not lie (6:30), that he was not wicked (10:7), that he was just and upright (12:4), and that he had not disobeyed God (23:11–12); but he never said he was sinless. He consistently maintained his integrity (2:3; 27:4–5), but never said he was perfect. In fact, he denied perfection (9:20–21). Elihu's basic premise was weak because he confused Zophar's words with Job's words. It may have sounded like Job was claiming to be *sinless*, but he was only saying that he was *blameless*, which is an entirely different thing.

Second, Elihu quoted Job as saying that God was unjust and was treating him like an enemy (33:10–11). This quotation was true (13:24, 27; 16:9; 19:7, 11). In his speeches, Job had repeatedly asked God why He was attacking him and why He didn't give him a fair trial. Elihu's great concern was not to debate what Job said about himself but to refute what Job said about God.

This "young theologian" knew something about public speaking because Job 33 is a model address. First, he stated his thesis in verses 12–14: God is greater than man and speaks to him in ways that he may not always recognize. He then described three different ways that God may speak to man: dreams and visions (vv. 15–18), suffering (vv. 19–22), and the ministry of the mediating angel (vv. 23–33).

The word “pit” is used five times in verses 14–33. God’s purpose in discipline is to save people from death (James 5:19–20) by breaking their pride and bringing them back to the place of obedience (Job 33:17–18). God seeks to keep them from the pit (v. 18), but rebellious sinners *draw near* to the pit (v. 22), then *go down* to the pit (v. 24), and *into* the pit (v. 28). When it is almost too late, the Mediator brings them *back from* the pit (v. 30), and they are rescued. “God does all these things to a man—twice, even three times—to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him” (vv. 29–30, NIV). God is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9).

Dreams and visions (Job 33:15–18). In Bible times, God sometimes spoke to people through dreams and visions; today His Spirit directs us primarily through His Word (Heb. 1:1–2). If sinners have frightening visions or dreams, it might shock them and keep them from committing the sins they had planned. Job himself experienced terrifying dreams (Job 7:13–14), and Eliphaz had an unforgettable night vision (4:12–21). God sends dreams and visions in order to “open the ears of men,” which gets them to listen to God’s Word and obey. If they don’t humble themselves, they may go down to the pit of death.

A man stopped a stranger on a New York City street and said, “Can you share a dream with me? I’m on my way to my psychiatrist, and I haven’t slept for a week. I desperately need a dream to tell him!”

Not all dreams have hidden meanings, and not all dreams come from God with special messages in them. More than one nightmare has been caused by improper diet! People who plan their lives around what they learn from the “dream book” are asking for confusion rather than direction. God can use dreams to shake the confidence of a proud sinner, but this is not His normal approach today.

Suffering (Job 33:19–22). In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis says, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” God sometimes uses pain to warn us, humble us, and bring us to the place of submission (Heb. 12:1–11). Elihu describes a sick man, suffering on his bed, wasting away because he has no appetite. (Is this a picture of Job? See 6:7; 7:3–6; 16:8; 17:7; 19:20.) But this man is suffering because God wants to get his attention and prevent him from breaking God’s law.

It is a mistake to say that all suffering comes from God, because we cause some suffering ourselves. Careless driving may lead to an accident that will make many people suffer. Improper eating may upset the body and cause abused organs to protest with pain. There is pleasure in sin (Heb. 11:25), but sin causes suffering. “The way of transgressors is hard” (Prov. 13:15). If people defy the Law of God, there is a price to pay.

And we must not say that all suffering is a punishment for sin. Elihu argues that sometimes God permits suffering *in order to keep people from sinning and going to the pit*. God gave Paul a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from getting proud, and Paul learned to thank God for it (2 Cor. 12:7–10). Elihu hoped that Job would submit to God, accept his painful situation, and get from it the blessings God had for him.

Nobody wants to be sick; everybody prays for healing. But the British Congregational theologian P.T. Forsyth said, “It is a greater thing to pray for pain’s conversion than its removal.” That’s what Paul learned to do with his thorn in the flesh. What might have been a weapon to tear him down became, by the grace of God, a tool to build him up! Had he lost that messenger of pain, Paul might have become proud of his spiritual achievements; and that pride might have led him into sin.

Elihu has presented two ways that God speaks to people in order to keep them from the pit: visions and dreams, and sickness and pain. Now he presents the third.

The ministry of the mediating angel (Job 33:23–33). The Book of Job opens with a description of God’s heavenly court where the angels (“sons of God”) report for duty (Job 33; 1:6ff; 2:1ff). Eliphaz mentions the angels in 4:18 and possibly in 5:1 (“holy ones”), and angels are also mentioned in 38:7 as rejoicing at the creation of the world. Except for this present passage, these are the only references to angels in the book.

Elihu paints an awesome picture. The sinner has been warned by dreams and visions and has been chastened by sickness and suffering. He is drawing near to the grave, and “the destroyers” (“messengers of death,” NIV) are about to capture him (33:22). Then a special messenger suddenly stands up (“one among a thousand”) and pleads his case. This messenger has a twofold ministry: he tells the sufferer what he ought to do (v. 23), and he intercedes with God to have the person restored.

It seems likely that this interceding angel is the Angel of the Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator who gave His life as a ransom for sinners (1 Tim. 2:5; Mark 10:45). As the Angel of the Lord, the Son of God visited the earth in Old Testament times to deliver special messages and accomplish important tasks (Gen. 16:9; 22:11; Ex. 3:2; Jud. 6:11). But Elihu saw this Angel not only as a Mediator between God and men, but also as the Provider of the ransom for sinners. *This is the heavenly “mediator” that Job has been asking for throughout the debate!* Job wanted an “umpire” to bring him and God together for a trial (Job 9:33), a heavenly “witness” to argue his case before God (16:19), a “redeemer” who would vindicate him even after his death (19:25). The ministry of this Angel is purely an act of God’s grace (33:24). “Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him” (v. 24, NIV). That sounds like our Lord Jesus Christ, who is both our Mediator and our Ransom (1 Tim. 2:5–6).

The concept of “the ransom” is woven into the fabric of biblical theology. The Hebrew word means “to atone for sin by the offering of a substitute.” The condemned sinner can’t be set free by the paying of some cheap price such as money (Ps. 49:7–9), good works, or good intentions. It must be a ransom that God will accept, and God asks for the shedding of blood (Lev. 16–17). Job didn’t ask his three friends to ransom him because he knew they couldn’t (Job 6:21–23). Only God can provide the ransom, and He did. If God has provided a ransom for lost sinners about to go down into the pit, *how foolish of them not to receive it!*

Elihu promised Job that God would radically alter his situation if only he would humble himself. It would be like a “new birth”! (33:25; see John 3) He would once more enjoy prayer and fellowship with God (Job 33:26). He would confess his sins and admit that God had punished

him far less than he deserved (v. 27). Job would move out of the darkness into the light and gladly bear witness of God's redemption (v. 28).

Job 33:31–33 suggests that Elihu wanted Job's response, but at the same time Elihu wanted Job to keep quiet! Elihu was filled to the brim with his subject and didn't want to stop talking. But Job didn't reply *because he was waiting for God to speak*. Job had already stated his case and thrown down the gauntlet. What Elihu thought about him or said to him made little difference to Job.

Job had taken his case to a much higher court; and when Elihu finishes speaking, the Judge will appear.

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. 757-760) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

c. Elihu's first answer to Job (chap. 33)

As seen in the chart "Overview of Elihu's Speeches," this young theologian was responding to three of Job's complaints. First Elihu replied to Job's charge that God is silent.

(1) Elihu's request that Job listen (33:1–7).

33:1–4. Three times Elihu addressed **Job** by name (vv. 1, 31; 37:14), and seven other times mentioned Job's name (32:12, 14; 34:5, 7, 35–36; 36:16). In contrast, the three older speakers never once mentioned Job's name either directly or indirectly.

Job had asked his three friends to **listen** to him (13:6, 17; 21:2); now Elihu turned that around and asked that Job hear *him* (cf. comments on 32:10). The young debater had paid attention to the three (33:12); now he asked that Job give him *his* full **attention**. Elihu's **words**, which he was **about to** speak (they were **on the tip of his tongue**), were sincere (**from an upright heart**) and would reveal insights into Job's situation (cf. **what I know**; 32:6, 10, 17). Elihu viewed himself as an equal with Job for both, he said, were created by God. Elihu said he was **made** by **God** (the Holy **Spirit** is involved in creating man) and given **life** (cf. Gen. 2:7) by **the breath of the Almighty** (cf. Job 12:10; 27:3; 34:14–15); Job had also said he was made by God (31:15).

33:5. The youthful speaker, after hearing Job out, challenged him to respond **if** he possibly could (cf. v. 32). Job, he said, should **prepare** his response and be ready to **confront** Elihu as in verbal combat. The word *ārak*, translated "prepare," means to arrange in order, often in the sense of marshaling military forces or weapons in battle order (cf. 1 Sam. 17:8, "line up for battle," and Job 6:4, "marshaled"), and so figuratively to arrange one's words or legal case (cf. 32:14, "marshaled"; 37:19, "draw up"; 13:18, "prepared"; 23:4, "state"). The word *yāšaḥ*, here rendered "confront," means to take one's stand or position, sometimes in the sense of readiness for battle (1 Sam. 17:16; Jer. 46:4, 14; Job 41:10). Elihu was ready for a skirmish! Of course Job had already set forth his arguments; perhaps his numerous forays with his other so-called friends had left him battle-weary.

33:6–7. Though ready to take on Job and to show him the danger of criticizing **God**, Elihu did not intend to lord it over the sufferer, as the three disputants had done. He admitted to equality with Job because they were both frail human beings, made **from clay** (cf. Job’s similar words in 10:9 and cf. comments on 33:4). Therefore, Job need not **fear** Elihu for he would treat Job kindly. He would not terrify him as Job had said God had done (7:14; 9:34; 13:21; 23:15–16). Elihu promised that in this debating he would not pressure Job (his **hand** would not **be heavy** on him), as Job had said God had done (23:2, “His hand is heavy”; cf. 13:21, “withdraw Your hand”). Though verbose, Elihu was less arrogant and presumptuous than the other spokesmen.

(2) Elihu’s summary of Job’s charges against God.

In Elihu’s First Speech

33:9a “I am pure” (cf. 6:10; 9:21; 10:7; 12:4; 16:17; 31:6).

33:9b “Without sin” (cf. 13:23; 23:11).

33:9c “I am clean and free from guilt” (cf. 9:20–21; 10:7; 27:6).

33:10a “God has found fault with me” (cf. 10:6).

33:10b “He considers me His enemy” (cf. 13:24; 19:11).

33:11a “He fastens my feet in shackles” (cf. 13:27).

33:11b “He keeps close watch on all my paths” (cf. 7:17–20; 10:14; 13:27).

33:8–11. The junior attorney had listened carefully to Job, as evidenced by his quoting Job’s very words. Elihu reviewed Job’s position by stating that Job had criticized God for unfair treatment, even though Job was not guilty. Many of the words in Elihu’s review accurately reflect what the sufferer had said (see the chart “Elihu’s Quotations of Job”).

(3) Elihu’s refutation of Job’s claim that God was silent (33:12–33).

33:12–13. Elihu directly confronted Job, telling him, in this you are not right. “This” probably refers to Job’s accusing God of injustice (vv. 10–11). The reason Job should not charge God with wrongdoing is that God is greater than man. Because of His sovereign majesty (which Job recognized) he ought not criticize God. God, in other words, has purposes in His doings that may be beyond man’s comprehension and, as God, He has the right to do as He wishes. To complain to God that He does not answer man’s words is wrong, Elihu contended. The word “complain” is from *rîb*, a legal verb meaning “to present or debate an indictment in court,” used by Job five times (9:3, “dispute”; 10:2, “condemn”; 13:8, “argue”; 13:19, “bring charges”; 23:6, “press charges”) and by God once (40:2, “contends”). Four times Job used the noun *rîb* (13:6, “argument”; 29:16, “case”; 31:13, “grievance”; 31:35, “my Accuser,” lit., “man of my indictment”). Job had felt God was pressing charges against him in court (10:2) but, Elihu said, Job should not respond by pressing charges against God!

33:14–18. God does speak, Elihu maintained. God does so in various ways—now one way, now another. One means is through dreams (vv. 14–18) and another is through illness and pain (vv. 19–22). The problem is that often man does not sense that God is communicating.

When people dream, Elihu said, God may speak in their ears (lit., “opens or uncovers the ears of men” [ěňôš, “weak, mortal man”; cf. comments on 4:17]). To open one’s ears meant to reveal something to him. The words terrify them with warnings is one possible translation of the Hebrew. Another possible rendering is “seals their instruction” (NASB cf KJV) and another is “seals their discipline.” If the NIV rendering is correct, Elihu’s point is that dreams can terrify a person (cf. Eliphaz’s similar response, 4:12–17), to warn him. If the second or third suggested rendering is right then Elihu’s idea may be that God makes certain that the dreams will lead one to a more informed or disciplined life.

Such dreams, whether of a warning, instructional, or disciplinary nature, are designed to turn people from wrongdoing or pride (the sin Elihu believed Job was guilty of; cf. 36:9) and to preserve them alive (pit, referring to the grave, is used five times in chapter 33; vv. 18, 22, 24, 28, 30). Yet Job had said that when God terrified him with dreams (7:14), he wanted to die (7:15). Whereas in Old Testament times God often spoke in dreams as well as through other media (Heb. 1:1), He now communicates to people through Christ, the Living Word (Heb. 1:2), and the Bible, the written Word (2 Tim. 3:16).

33:19–22. Another way God gets people’s attention, Elihu suggested, is by causing them pain. A serious illness (with distress in one’s bones, i.e., intense inner pain; cf. 30:17) can steal one’s appetite and cause him to lose weight (cf. Job’s appetite loss and emaciation, 3:24; 6:7; 19:20) so that his bones protrude. Such a sickness can bring a man close to death (the pit; cf. comments on 33:18). The messengers of death may refer to angels who bring (or announce) death (cf. Ps. 78:49).

33:23–24. In sickness God may send an angel (mal’āk) as a mediator (mēlîš) to: (a) remind a person of the proper conduct and attitudes he should maintain in his life (what is right) and to (b) intercede with God to keep him from dying (going down to the pit). Elihu disagreed with Eliphaz, who had said that no angels could assist Job (5:1). Elihu was also disagreeing with Job, who felt he had no intercessor to arbitrate his case (9:33). By the words one out of a thousand (cf. Job’s use of that phrase in 9:3) Elihu meant that such intervening angels are plentiful, or, perhaps better, that they are rare (cf. Ecc. 7:28). The angel’s interceding work (in contrast with angelic “messengers of death,” Job 33:22) was based on his providing a ransom for the sick person. The “ransom,” while not specified, means something that can be regarded as a consideration or reason for the sufferer to be relieved from his illness.

33:25–28. As a result of the angelic intercessor, the sufferer is restored to health and enjoys spiritual strength as well, including prayerful communion with God, acceptance by God, fellowship with God, joy in God’s presence (cf. Eliphaz’s similar words in 22:26 and Bildad’s in 8:21), and restoration to his former righteous state (cf. Bildad’s words in 8:6). In addition he tells others: (a) that he sinned but that his punishment of illness was less than his sin called for (cf. 11:6), and (b) that God diverted him from death (the pit; cf. comments on 33:18) and restored him to life (to enjoy the light, i.e., of the sun, which means to enjoy life; cf. v. 30; Ecc. 11:7). Thus out of his affliction comes a deeper walk with God and a ready witness before others.

33:29–30. According to Elihu, God often brings dreams and illness (both bad experiences) to man. The idiom twice, even three times means often (or perhaps, as some suggest, it refers to the three means Elihu had discussed: dreams, illness, an angel). Again Elihu stated why: negatively, to divert people from death (the pit; cf. comments on v. 18) and positively, to help them enjoy

life more than before (cf. v. 28). Though illness may seem to be leading to death (vv. 21–22), God can use it to deter a person from death (vv. 24, 28, 30) and to give him a more fruitful life.

33:31–33. Again, the new spokesman asked Job to bear with him, by hearing him out. Then if Job had something to say, he could speak up ... but if not, Elihu would continue. Listen and be silent (v. 31) are repeated in verse 33.

For Elihu, suffering, though related to sin (v. 27), was more protective than punitive. The first three speakers said God afflicts in order to punish; Elihu said God afflicts in order to teach. He emphasized that suffering can help divert one from sin and resultant death, whereas the three older men felt that unrequited sin would surely lead to death.

All four counselors were wrong about Job's case, however, for all assumed a sin-results-in-suffering viewpoint. When God spoke (chaps. 38–41), He did so directly, not through an angel. And Job's experience did result in his enjoying a deeper relationship with God (42:2, 5–6, 9) and he did enjoy a long and full life (42:10, 12, 16).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job 33). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.