“Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm” (38:1). He told him, “Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me” (38:3). He had asked for God’s presence, and God finally arrived. Then, however, the explanations were not forthcoming. Instead, God put Job on trial. Job got more than he asked for.

 God begins by asking Job where he was when God was busy creating the universe and putting everything in place. “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?” (38:12). He then makes the appeal more personal. “Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?” (38:36). God knows the ways of man and beast because they are His design. God concludes, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?” (40:2), and Job admits, “I am unworthy . . .” (40:4). “I spoke of things I did not understand . . .” (42:3b).

 To meet Job’s need, God gave him a fuller picture of Him. Seek Him, not answers.

Saturday, January 28, 2017—Exodus 1-4

 Simple statements can have profound meaning. “Then a new king who did not now about Joseph came to power in Egypt” (1:8). How could a Pharaoh not know about Joseph? He had given the Egyptians the necessary insight to prepare for a drought and assert themselves as provider and power during its ravaging years. For whatever reason, this new king did not know about Joseph, and this ignorance (or willful oversight) meant bad things for Joseph’s family.

 Remarkably, the descendants of Abraham—one man who had no children until he had a son at age 100—now numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Their time in Egypt had been fruitful to say the least, but their sheer numbers were intimidating to the new king. He oppressed them, hoping to thin their ranks, but the hand of God allowed them to flourish even under difficulty. The fear of God among the Hebrews allowed God to work through their humility for their good and His glory.

 While Pharaoh forgot Joseph, God remembered His covenant with Israel (2:24). He was at work through the entire process to raise up a deliverer for His people. As with Abraham, God called one man to fulfill a mission. This time, Moses was able to go with a plan for freedom and provision and the very name of God, the I Am (3:14), to convince the people and the king.

 Thank God for sending us on mission, especially in difficult settings, and giving us the words to say (4:12).

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 4

Sunday, January 22, 2017—Job 21-24

 When life doesn’t make sense, a variety of emotions arise—confusion, anger, and hopelessness are just a few. We can try to investigate or compensate in order to resolve the issue, but that often leads to more confusion, anger, and hopelessness. There are times we can do nothing.

 Job was in one of those situations. His friends spouted platitudes about what happens to wicked people and how God would restore Job if he repented, but that was not helpful at all. Furthermore, Job noted how they all saw wicked people who prospered. Their families were large, and their herds were flourishing. They tell God to leave them alone (21:14), and they seem to be okay. Job had confidence he would see God personally once his life was over (see 19:25-26), but nothing his friends could offer would make sense of this current madness (21:34).

 Eliphaz then listed things Job had done wrong in life, as if to say, “Here’s where you’re sinful.” He encouraged him to repent. Then everything would return to normal. How much easier could this be?

 Job did not address anything Eliphaz mentioned. Instead, he returned the subject to God Himself. He wished he could stand before him and state his case. Job was beginning to see God in a new, more important light. He was not losing his sense of awe before God (23:15), but despite the suffering, his faith in God was growing.

 Ask God to strengthen your faith so that rough roads draw you closer to Him.

Monday, January 23, 2017—Job 25-27

 The interaction between Job and his friends is extremely uncomfortable to read. The back-and-forth conversation indicate a rather heated exchange between Job and his friends, so experiencing the conversation was likely even more uncomfortable, but the continuation of the dialogue seems to reveal something extremely important. These men are wrestling with an uncomfortable situation by spending time with one another speaking the truth of God aloud. They may not understand all that is happening, so they are weighing what they know about God with the reality they see around them.

 Job had earlier lamented the injustice of wicked people’s success, yet he also spoke of how God ultimately judges all. His friends said he needed to repent so he could be restored, but Bildad admitted no mortal can be righteous before God (25:4). This provided little comfort to Job, yet his lament was an admission of the greatness and majesty of God (26:6-14).

 Job gives a valuable admission. Though frustrated with his situation and his friends, he would not speak wickedly (27:4). How important it is to know one can express emotion while remaining faithful to God. Job wanted to know God’s heart and his ways, and he wanted to sense His presence in a new way, so he would not let the circumstances cloud his judgment. God remained sovereign and was worthy of worship and obedience.

 Pray for the community of faith in which God has placed you. Ask God to use you all to sharpen and support one another.

Tuesday, January 24, 2017—Job 28-31

 The American folk tale of John Henry describes how this steel-driving man was pitted against the workings of a steam-driven engine to see which one—man or machine—could complete the task more quickly. John Henry won the race but died in victory. Working against nature is a tall order for anyone or anything.

 Job describes the vast effort man is willing to expend in order to find buried treasure like silver, gold, or iron. Like those miners, Job and his friends are swinging the heavy picks of conversation trying to discover the wisdom of God. Nothing on earth compares to its value, but no earthly effort can reveal it. “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding” (28:28). Job fears Him. His friends are urging him to shun evil. They are laboring together to find the wisdom at the root of it all. The search for wisdom is possibly the hardest task one will ever undertake.

 The search can also be lonely. Job was surrounded by friends, but he felt no support. He called out to God but felt very distant (29:1-6, 30:18-23). He no longer had the standing in society he once held (29:7-30:17).

 What should one do when seeking wisdom and finding labor and loneliness? Remain faithful. Job made a covenant with God (31:1) and was willing to stand before God to be weighed (31:6). Make a similar agreement with God today. Be willing to seek Him faithfully no matter what comes.

Wednesday, January 25, 2017—Job 32-34

 A new perspective can make all the difference. People find one during a vacation or a visit with a spiritual advisor. Robin Williams’s character in “Dead Poets’ Society” encouraged his students to see differently by standing on a desk. Job and his friends found a new perspective because of someone’s joining the conversation.

 Elihu was admittedly young and without standing before the four men to whom he spoke, but he couldn’t remain silent. Job and his friends were at a standstill because Job was righteous in his own eyes. No more could be said that would change their respective perspectives, but Elihu was angry because Job had justified himself rather than God (32:2) and because his friends condemned him without evidence (32:3). In essence, he was waiting for them to conclude, “Job, we cannot imagine why you’re experiencing this, and we know God is just, so there has to be a reason. Let’s trust in the goodness of God.”

 That never happened, and Elihu could not remain silent. He assured Job his words came from an upright heart (33:3) If Job had done something wrong, God would have told Him. This was God’s pattern (33:12-33). God repaid men for the evil they committed. Job struggled because he was suffering and didn’t know why, but he had failed to say, “God is just.”

 Even when life does not make sense, God is just. When we suffer, God is still loving. Pray for clarity when life presents confusion.

Thursday, January 26, 2017—Job 35-37

 Christian Smith’s groundbreaking study, *Soul Searching*, explored the current belief systems in the United States. Many who called themselves Christians actually followed what Smith described as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. These adherents believe God wants His people to be good, and in turn He exists for their benefit. While a recent study, the findings point to an ancient belief.

 Elihu chided Job for similarly “flipping the script.” Job said God was far off, not punishing the wicked. He said Job considered what profit it was to him not to sin. So much of the focus of conversation had been from the human perspective when the focus should have been on the majesty and might of God. In contrast, man is extremely limited and short-sighted.

 The pattern of man was, in fact, to ignore God. When life became difficult, they would not cry out to Him. His ways had not worked in the short-term, so they turned to other sources of relief. In those moments, temptations filled the gap and led them into darkness. For those who were willing to resist temptation or suppress selfishness, God would speak (36:10) and deliver (36:15). He did not exist to make their lives easier. He existed to bring Himself glory, and He wanted to use them for the same (37:23-24).

 Pray for a renewed sense of God’s greatness. Admit those times when you have turned the focus to self and comfort. Look for signs of His glory today. Point others to Him and His goodness.

Friday, January 27, 2017—Job 38-42

 “Be careful what you ask for. You just might get it.” That ageless wisdom recognizes life’s penchant for giving more than we imagined—both good and bad—when wish becomes reality. For 37 chapters, Job and his friends endured Job’s hardship and commented on the cause. Frequently, Job expressed his desire to hear from God, to be able to plead his case before Him, and his recognition of his own frailty before Him.