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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



Wisdom Books

**JOB, PSALMS, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES,
SONG OF SONGS, WISDOM, SIRACH (BEN SIRA)**

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Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our head. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson but the first also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. In his April 12, 2013, address before the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Pope Francis stressed that "the Church's life and mission are founded on the Word of God which is the soul of theology and at the same time inspires the whole of Christian life."

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 15 includes an Opening Prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section.

This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our heart and conscience to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)

2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.
3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' messages. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of the Wisdom Books, becoming therefore more aware of the spiritual nourishment these books offer. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When the authors wrote and edited the Wisdom Books, they were presenting a guide to living wisely and faithfully in God's creation. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of the five Wisdom Books, and two other Bible books often associated with them, this study is divided into eight lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 8 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers the Book of Job, chapters 4 through 42. The study group reads and discusses only chapters 4 through 7 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on chapters 8 through 42 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the first format on page 13. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the format at the bottom of page 13, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user-friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety

minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio divina* (see page 8) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Read each Scripture passage aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Read each Scripture passage aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 8.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Read each Scripture passage aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✠ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✠ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✠ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✠ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✠ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✠ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✠ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✠ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✠ Use a clock or watch.
- ✠ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✠ Ask participants to read the introduction (page 16) before the first session.
- ✠ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✠ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to the Participants

- ✠ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✠ Read the introduction (page 16) before the first session.
- ✠ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✠ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance.

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain with us always.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

Wisdom Books

JOB, PSALMS, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES,
SONG OF SONGS, WISDOM, SIRACH (ECCLESIASTICUS)

Read this overview before the first session.

The Wisdom Books in the Bible are not stories about the patriarchs or the Exodus. Except for several chapters in Ecclesiastes and Sirach, they mention nothing about the Israelites, the monarchy, or the prophets. Many of the writings in the Wisdom Books have their origin in ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Phoenician writings. Pagan authors, who worshiped idols, penned proverbs about living life in a peaceful and prudent manner. Hebrew writers borrowed from these ancient writings and added a new flavor to them. They wrote about living well and with faith in the one true God who created everything. Thus the Wisdom Books are about instructing readers on how to understand and best deal with the problems of life guided by the spirit of God. Their emphasis is (1) fear of the Lord, and (2) nothing is hidden from the God of Israel who knows everything that is happening in creation.

The Wisdom Books in the Catholic Bible include Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, and Sirach. Although the Book of Psalms and the Song of Songs are not strictly Wisdom Books, their strong association with the other five books allow them to be included as such in the Catholic Bible and hence in this volume as well.

The Book of Job speaks of suffering and the need to trust God in the midst of our suffering. It attempts to explain why bad things happen to good people.

The Book of Psalms contains the prayers of saintly Old Testament writers who used songs to express their love of God. The Book of Psalms includes a collection of liturgical songs, poetry, lamentations, thanksgiving prayers, and petitions for the Lord to curse the enemies of the Israelites.

The Book of Proverbs communicates practical wisdom for living a life faithful to the Lord and in accord with prudent human relationships.

The Book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), a cynical book, stresses the vanities of life and the reality that nothing is new under the sun.

The Song of Songs uses erotic images to illustrate God's intimate relationship with the Chosen People.

The Book of Wisdom personifies Wisdom as an attractive woman worthy of praise. It speaks of the rewards received by the righteous, and the punishment of the wicked, especially those who worship false idols.

The Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) has wise sayings, hymns to wisdom, sensible counsel, and reflections on the human condition.

Fear of the Lord

Fear of the Lord is an expression found often in the Scriptures, especially in the Wisdom Books, which tell us fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fear of the Lord in this context does not mean a terrorizing fear of a judgmental God. It refers to the reverence and awe a person has for God who is a wise, just, merciful, and loving God, who sees all. Reverence and awe before God is the beginning of wisdom and the foundation for our desire to know, love, and serve God and to live a life faithful to the Lord.

NOTE: Due to the vast amount of material in the Wisdom Books, this commentary will present a major sampling of the proverbs and counsels found in the books without commenting on all the material in the books. The sampling is intended to offer those studying the text a solid familiarity with the writings in the Wisdom Books.



LESSON 2

The Book of Job (II)

JOB 4—42

*By hearsay I had heard of you, but now my eye has seen you.
Therefore I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and
ashes (42:5–6).*

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 15)

Context

Part 1: Job 4—7 Each of Job's friends speaks to him in a series of speeches, attempting to convince Job of his sinfulness and to encourage him to repent so the Lord will bless him. In these chapters, Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, refuses to blame God for Job's condition. In his reply, Job refuses to admit he has done anything sinful.

Part 2: Job 8—42 Job's three friends deliver three speeches to him, saying he must have sinned. Job replies to each, denying any guilt. A young man attempts to address Job, and he receives the same results as Job's three friends. The Lord finally challenges Job, who accepts the Lord's rebuke. The Lord eventually rewards Job for remaining faithful in the midst of his suffering.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (JOB 4—7)

Read aloud Job 4—7.

4—5 Eliphaz's First Speech

Each of the speeches usually begins with a question and a reference to Job's remarks. The first of Job's friends, Eliphaz, begins the first cycle of speeches by asking Job if he would mind if someone attempts to speak with him. He begins gently, reminding Job how his (Job's) instruction helped and strengthened many people. Now, however, when Job finds himself experiencing grief, he becomes impatient and disillusioned. Bidding Job to seek strength in his piety and integrity, Eliphaz urges him to recall that the Lord does not punish innocent people.

In a confusing passage that seems out of place and may have resulted from a later addition, Eliphaz speaks of a terrifying vision of a figure who asks if anyone can be more in the right than God. The unspoken answer is "no." Since the Lord's servants and messengers in the heavenly court cannot be blameless, how can those on earth be blameless?

In chapter 5, Eliphaz warns Job not to be impatient or resentful like a fool who imparts his foolishness to his household and children. He declares that trust in human beings alone is foolish and urges Job to state his case before God, the Lord over the earth and all human beings.

Eliphaz attempts to soothe Job, noting those whom the Lord reproves are blessed. He believes God does not discipline a person as a sign of rejection but for healing and repentance. The Lord may be punishing Job to eventually protect him from famine, war, or malicious speech. If Job can accept this, he will scoff at all adversity, knowing his household is secure. Eliphaz insists this is what he learned throughout his many years and what Job himself should know.

6—7 Job's First Reply

Job responds by speaking of the depth of his anguish, which has become heavier than the sand of the sea. Instead of seeking an abundance of blessings from the Lord, Job, at this point, seeks only to die and be free from anguish. His only consolation is his belief he has not sinned against the Lord.

Job rejects Eliphaz's comments, accusing him of speaking words that offer no help. Like caravans seeking refreshment in the desert, Job discovers no refreshing water in Eliphaz's words and finds himself perishing. He seeks nothing from his friends except knowledge about what he did wrong. If they can tell him, he will remain silent. He begs them to stop ignoring his statements about his innocence.

In chapter 7, Job speaks of the drudgery of life, comparing it to the life of a hireling or a slave. In his misery, he suffers sleepless nights and complains about his sores and the swift passing of hopeless days, informing his friends he will soon be gone down to Sheol, the place of the dead.

Job turns his attention to God, asking if he (Job) is a monster needing to be watched. When he seeks the comfort of sleep, the Lord frightens him with dreams and visions to the point he would rather be strangled to death than continue to exist. Since he expects to die soon, he begs the Lord to pardon him and remove his guilt so he may die in peace.

Review Questions

1. What advice does Eliphaz give to Job?
2. Why did Job feel Eliphaz was no help to him?
3. What are some sufferings endured by Job?

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 15)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 8)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 8 for further instruction.)

Eliphaz's First Speech (4—5)

Jesus had to correct some false beliefs of the people of ancient Israel, among them the idea that punishment is a sign of God's disfavor. Following the common thinking of his day, Eliphaz believes Job's punishment comes as a result of Job's sinfulness. Jesus, however, said the Lord "makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). According to Jesus, good and evil people experience the same joys and difficulties in creation. Spiritual writers say it is not what happens to us that matters, but how we respond to what happens to us.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Job's First Reply (6—7)

Job became deeply despondent over the loss of his family and possessions, but he remained faithful to the Lord. Many of the saints went through periods of suffering, doubt, great loss, and temptations to despair and they became saints because they remained faithful to God during such periods, as Job did. Depression, doubt, and despondency are not sins, but part of the struggle toward sainthood.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (JOB 8—42)

Day 1: The First Cycle of Speeches (8—14)

Bildad, the second companion, asks Job how long will he speak about such things. He declares the words Job speaks are like a mighty wind. If Job's children sinned, Job can still pray and the Lord will listen to his plea if he is blameless.

Bildad declares they all have the wisdom of their ancestors. The lessons of the past teach about the lack of hope in those who abandon the Lord. Those who reject the Lord may seem strong and healthy during life, but when they die, they are forgotten. God, however, will reward the upright and fill their lives with joy. Those who hate the Lord will find shame and destruction.

In chapter 9, Job agrees with Bildad concerning God's protection of the good, and he asks who could contend with God and answer even one question out of a thousand God may ask. He stresses God's power over the mountains, the earth and its foundations, the sun, the stars, the heavens, the sea, and the constellations. He declares the Lord is unseen and performs many miracles. Although the Lord also brings death, no one dares to ask the Lord to explain what is happening. Job does not believe he could argue his case with the Lord even if he were right.

Feeling helpless before the Lord, Job speaks as though the Lord decided to punish him, whether he is good or evil. If he decided to forget his complaints against God and acted cheerfully, the Lord would still overwhelm him with even more sorrows, since he would not be telling the truth. Since the Lord will not accept his claim of innocence, he asks in frustration why he should try to speak with the Lord.

Since the Lord is not human as he is, Job feels he has no way to discuss the problem fairly with the Lord. He wishes an arbiter would be able to act between them so the arbiter could free him from the punishing rod of the Lord. If the Lord would at least cease punishing him, he would be able to speak to the Lord without fear and boldly defend his innocence. Since this is not happening, Job declares he hates his life.

In chapter 10, Job continues his rant against God, complaining about the bitterness he feels and his helplessness before the power of the Lord. He continues to beg God to tell him why he is being oppressed, sarcastically asking if the Lord enjoys oppressing him. He asks whether the Lord is unjust like human beings, searching for sins he did not commit, just to prove people cannot save themselves from the hand of the Lord.

In an effort to understand, he asks whether the Lord created him to destroy him if he sinned, not counting Job's good deeds. He admits the Lord gave him life and love, but these are now hidden in the heart of the Lord. In frustration, he asks why the Lord intended this misery, allowing him to be born rather than causing his death at the time of birth. He begs the Lord to leave him alone so he may enjoy a small moment of comfort before he enters the land of darkness in death.

In chapter 11, Zophar, the third speaker, questions if Job's tirade against the Lord should be left unchallenged. He mocks Job, whom, he says, appears

to think he is pure in the eyes of the Lord yet who is actually ignoring some of his own wickedness. He asks if Job thinks he is able to judge God, as though Job knows the mind and motives of the Almighty, who is without guilt. Zophar urges Job to remove all wickedness from himself so he can face God innocently and in peace. If Job repents, his misery will cease and he will live with security and hope, able to aid others who seek his help.

In chapter 12, Job replies for a third time, acknowledging the wisdom of his friends, but adding he too has wisdom. Claiming he is being mocked by his neighbors who say the just and perfect Job is disgraced, he points to robbers and the wicked as examples of people who receive security from the Lord. The dumbest creatures of the earth know the Lord is in control of creation. Job says just as wisdom and understanding accompany old age, so the Lord has wisdom, might, and understanding, yet whatever the Lord decides to do in all creation must take place.

In chapter 13, Job rants against his three friends, calling them worthless physicians who would be wise to remain silent. Since they are attempting to defend the Lord with their false accusations, he calls their advice “ashy maxims.” He tells them to remain silent and let him speak to the Lord, defending himself even if the Lord would slay him. Again, he asks what his sins are, pleading with the Lord not to turn away from him or to shackle him.

In chapter 14, Job speaks of the life span of human beings as being short. Since his life is so short, he asks the Lord not to bring him to judgment but to let him live his life. He points to a tree when it is cut down. The tree’s stump will sprout again when watered, even if it dies in the dust. When a man dies, his life ends, never to be taken up again. Job asks to be hidden alive in Sheol (the land of the dead) until the Lord’s wrath against him ends. Then the Lord could lift him up and not treat him like a sinner. When people die, they learn nothing more about their children, whether they are honored or disgraced.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

For Job, losing all his possessions was painful, but losing the feeling God loved him added to his pain. The saints often endure a spiritual

experience known as “the dark night of the soul.” Like Job, they feel abandoned by God and have great difficulty praying. During this period, God appears to be absent and seems to ignore them. Saints, however, keep praying, no matter how far away God seems to be.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 2: The Second Cycle of Speeches (15—21)

Eliphaz begins the second cycle of speeches, asking if a wise man would respond like Job with windy, puffed up, and useless wisdom. He accuses Job of abandoning piety and devotion before God, saying his own words condemn him. Questioning the source of Job’s wisdom, Eliphaz asks Job if he were born before the hills were created, or whether he belonged to the heavenly council before the creation of the world, or whether he knows more than those more advanced in age than his father. He rebukes Job for becoming angry against God, who does not trust the wisdom of the holy ones in the heavenly council, much less the wisdom of human beings. Eliphaz calls attention to the wisdom of the ancients who teach that the wicked, because they challenged the Almighty, will live a short life in torment.

In chapter 16, Job accuses his friends of offering only disturbing comfort with words that rattle on, admitting he would be saying the same thing if he were in their place. He claims the Lord has worn him down, shriveled him up, torn him apart in anger, and left him a prey to the wicked. Using material images to express his feelings of abandonment, he claims the Lord broke him in two, snatched him by the neck, smashed him to pieces, and made him a target for arrows. He bids the earth not to cover his blood so his innocent blood can incessantly call out to God. The people of ancient times believed the blood of the innocent calls out to the Lord, even after death. In the Book of Genesis, the Lord accuses Cain of killing Abel, saying, “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!” (Genesis 4:10).

Despite Job’s bitter words against the Lord, Job begs God to bring him justice. He accepts his place in life, speaking as a mere mortal who will live only so long before he travels to his death, from which there is no return. The people of Job’s day did not believe in life after death.

In chapter 17, Job declares he is surrounded by people who mock him and spit on him. He is just a shadow of his former self, shocking the innocent who see him. Since he finds no wisdom in his companions who refuse to believe his innocence, he urges them to leave. His only hope is the darkness of the grave and its decay.

In chapter 18, Bildad questions Job as to when his babbling will end. He urges Job to reflect on his situation and accuses Job of treating his friends like animals. He states the wicked live in darkness, deceived by their own ideas, falling into snares, surrounded by terror, hungry for strength, skin decaying, on the doorstep of death. They have no offspring to keep their memory alive. Although Bildad does not name Job as being among the wicked when speaking about the suffering in store for evil people, he is implying Job belongs among the wicked.

In chapter 19, Job objects to Bildad's implied accusation, saying he would know if he were a sinner. Job continues to accuse the Lord of dealing unfairly with him, toying with him as though he were caught in a net. Using military images, he accuses the Lord of counting him as an enemy, advancing troops against him, encamping misery around his life. His family and closest friends loath and avoid him. He hopes to be proven innocent, even if he has already died and his skin totally decayed. Being remembered after death as an honorable person was important to the people of Job's era. Job warns those accusing him of guilt their anger could be their sin.

In chapter 20, Zophar the Naamathite begins his second speech by asking in verse 5 if Job does not know that "the triumph of the wicked is short," despite their arrogant pride. Like his friends, Zophar stresses the afflictions accompanying evil and declares the end of the wicked is like dung used for fuel. Their prosperity will not save their life. Their children will live among the poor, experiencing in their own household the gloomy punishment for wickedness.

In chapter 21, Job argues with Zophar's idea about the afflictions of the wicked. For Job, reality provides a different picture. Good people suffer and die, and the wicked continue to live. The progeny of the wicked flourishes in their offspring, their homes are safe, they are not punished by God, their animals breed successfully, they live in joy with their families, and they die

in peace. They have no desire to know God, asking who the Almighty is that they should serve such a God. Job questions whether God is storing up a person's misery for the person's children. If so, it means nothing when the wicked person is in the grave.

Job admits no one can question God's wisdom. One dies in good health and another dies without any happiness in life. Both lie in the dust together. During times of disaster, the evil man is spared, and when he dies, he is gloriously carried to the place of burial where someone keeps watch over his grave. Job asks, in light of such reality, how Zophar's words could comfort him.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

When Job needed people to understand him, his closest friends misunderstood him completely, adding to his misery. Jesus experienced a similar misery when Judas, a close companion, betrayed him. Not only did the physical suffering harm Jesus, but the emotional betrayal of a friend he loved intensified his passion. When someone is suffering, a faithful friend is a great comfort and blessing, and an unfaithful friend is another thorn in one's side.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 3: The Third Cycle of Speeches (22—28)

Eliphaz begins his third speech asking if the Lord—who needs nothing—profits anything from human beings. Believing only the wicked receive punishment, Eliphaz sarcastically asks Job if it is his justice or piety provoking the Lord to reprove him. Ironically, it is Job's piety and justice that prompted his adversary, the satan, to test him.

Listing sins inadvertently committed by the rich, Eliphaz accuses Job of gaining his wealth sinfully by not sharing with the hungry or thirsty, ignoring the needs of widows and orphans, and acting as though the land belongs only to the powerful. Eliphaz asks if Job believes God cannot see his sins. Challenging Job's assertion that sinners prosper, Eliphaz points to sins of the past where the wicked were swept away by a flood and the just rejoiced.

He pleads with Job to intercede with the Lord who will hear his plea.

In chapter 23, Job responds, wishing he could present his case in person before the Lord and learn firsthand the intent of the Lord's punishment. He believes the Lord listens to the arguments of the just and blesses them and laments he cannot find the Lord in all the earth. Although he can claim he remained faithful to the Lord's command and has been tested like gold, he knows no one can contend with the decisions of the Lord, which, he admits, terrify him.

In chapter 24, Job again questions why the Lord's friends do not witness the punishment deserved by the wicked. He lists the sins the wicked inflict on the poor, the widow, and the orphan. They steal the possessions of the poor, their land, their herds, their donkeys, their oxen, and take their infants as collateral for a debt. Despite the plight of the oppressed, the Lord appears to do nothing against the wicked. Verses 18 to 24 in this chapter are unclear and may be a later insertion.

In chapter 25, Bildad delivers a short speech concerning the power of the Lord, asking how anyone can fight against the numerous troops of the Lord. How can anyone be innocent and right before the Lord? Compared to the glory of the Lord, the moon and the stars lack brilliance.

In chapter 26, Job asks Bildad how one can give counsel to those without wisdom. He stresses the power of the Lord by presenting a cosmic view of the world, using the common images of the universe at the time the author of Job penned this book. The shades (the dead in the Sheol) writhe in terror. The Lord covers the earth with the firmament and suspends the earth over nothing, while the clouds carry the weight of the waters without being split open like overloaded balloons. The Lord blankets the moon with clouds and sets the boundaries for the seas and for the days and nights.

The foundations of the earth tremble at the thunderous rebuke of the Lord, who then calms the sea and crushes Rahab (a primeval sea monster) and the fleeing serpent, both symbols of chaos. Through the movement of the wind, the Lord clears up the heavens. Since these are just a whisper of the power of the Lord, Job asks who would dare attempt to understand the thunder of the Lord's power.

In chapter 27, Job claims he will never deny his innocence, even though

God has made his life bitter. He finds no reason to reproach himself for his stance. Because the wicked plead with the Lord only in times of crisis, the Lord will not listen to their prayer. Despite the number of children the wicked have, they will be buried in death with no one to weep for them. The rich man's house and wealth shall be like a heap of dust. Although the wicked may attempt to flee from the power of the grave, they will still die.

Chapter 28 is a poem about the futility of the attempt of human beings to discover true wisdom. Human beings are capable of breaking open shafts and mine into the dark earth to find silver, iron, gold, and fine jewels. They know how to dam up streams in search of gold, but they do not know how to discover wisdom. She is not in the depths of the sea, nor can gold, silver, or precious stones purchase her. Wisdom is known only by God, who sees the ends of the earth, sends the wind, makes boundaries for the waters, and brings the rain and thunderbolts. The Lord established wisdom, scrutinized her, and proclaimed "the fear of the Lord is wisdom" (v. 28) and the avoidance of evil, understanding.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

There is a story about the gods wishing to hide true wisdom from human beings. They thought of hiding it in the highest heaven, in the deepest sea, in the wind, and even in hell, but as they named each place, they realized human beings would search everything and would find it. In desperation, one of the gods suggested they hide the truth (wisdom) deep within people. Even if they find it, they will not believe it. The gods laughed and agreed with this idea. In the Book of Job, we learn true wisdom is known only by God who shares it with human beings.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 4: Job's Final Summary of His Cause (Job 29—31)

Job recalls the days when God walked with him like a lamp lighting his way through the darkness. He prospered under the shelter of the Almighty, with his children all around him and his oil flowed in abundance. At the

city gate, the young stepped aside for him and the elders stood up when he approached. Princes and the highest officials stood in silence in his presence. He helped the poor, the orphans, the dying, widows, the blind, and the lame. Strangers received a fair trial, and the wicked were forced to free their victims. Job expected to live a long life and die quietly. He corrected the people like their leader, living like a king in the midst of his army and like one who comforts mourners.

In chapter 30, Job laments over the children of the wicked. Although they have strong backs, they are driven from the community and huddle in the wastelands, in ravines and caves, eating roots and leaves. Now he is like them. Job finds himself the subject of the vulgar songs of the wicked, despised, and spit upon. He becomes deeply depressed, racked with pain, rapidly losing weight, and cast off by the Lord. He accuses God of being his tormentor, leading him to his death. Recalling the help he gave to the poor, he expected blessing for his deeds, but instead he received evil, with his skin black and peeling, his bones burning with fever, and a heavy heart.

In chapter 31, Job challenges the Lord to weigh him on a scale of justice, believing he would be found innocent. If any stain of sin is found in him, he declares his crops deserve to be eaten by another. If he allows his eyes and heart to roam and commits a sin with his neighbor's wife, he deserves punishment, accepting the verdict his wife should become the wife of another. For any sins he could have committed, he deserves to be sent into the valley of destruction.

Job continues to list one sin after the other. If he refused justice to his servants when they had a just complaint against him, or denied the poor what they needed, or allowed a widow to languish while he ate his portion alone, or ignored the orphan, or withheld a covering from a poor person, or raised his hand against the innocent, or put his trust in gold, or worshiped the sun and the moon, thus denying God, or rejoiced at the destruction of an enemy, or invoked a curse against his enemies' life, or hidden his sins, then he would justly receive punishment from the Lord. He wants to read what the accuser is saying against him, and if proven true, he will wear it for all to see. Wishing he had someone to hear his case, he called upon the Almighty to answer him.

Like a prince, Job is willing to present himself before the Lord. If his land

cries out against him, if he has eaten its strength without repayment, if he has grieved the hearts of its tenant farmers, then let thorns grow instead of wheat and stinkweed instead of barley.

The passage ends with the statement: “The words of Job are ended.”

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Job could recall the days he felt the Lord walked with him, lighting up his way. There are times in prayer when the Lord touches our heart and allows us to experience a deep love and dedication to God. God is so close. There are other times when we experience a dry period in prayer, a time when we must struggle to keep our thoughts on God. The memory of the former blessings in prayer can carry us through dry periods. Recalling his past experiences of the Lord’s presence helped Job through his desolation.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 5: Elihu’s Speeches (32—37)

When Job’s three companions realized Job would not change his stance about his innocence, they no longer conversed with him. A young man named Elihu, who remained silent because he was younger than the three, became angry with Job for considering himself to be innocent before God and with the three companions for not finding a good answer with which to condemn Job. He asserts wisdom comes, not with old age, but from God and declares he listened intently to the three men and noted none of them could refute Job.

The young man boasts he would not have answered Job in the weak way Job’s three friends did. Elihu likens himself to an unopened wine, like wine-skin near bursting. He hopes to find relief by replying to Job, protesting he shows no partiality or flattery to anyone. The Lord would strike him dead if he spoke in that manner.

In chapter 33, Elihu approaches Job as a friend, a human being whom Job need not fear. Recalling Job’s obstinate protests of innocence and his

complaint the Lord never answers him, he views his role as a type of mediator between Job and God. He tells Job the Lord speaks to people in dreams and night visions, inspiring them with wisdom and instruction, keeping them from becoming proud, and warning them about the penalties of sin.

If God wishes, God may chastise people with pain or sickness so they lose their appetite, become skin and bone, and live close to death. At such a time, God may send a messenger to rejuvenate them. Elihu, like Job's three friends, tells Job the Lord answers the prayer of people who repent and returns them to their former life. If Job has nothing to say, he is to keep silent and let Elihu teach him wisdom.

In chapter 34, Elihu speaks to Job's friends, addressing them as wise out of respect for their age. He says that just as the ear and the palate choose what is good, so they should all choose what is right and good. Because Job proclaims his innocence, Elihu accuses him of blasphemy and being a companion of evildoers. He challenges Job's belief that there is no profit in pleasing God, claiming God, the Almighty, can do no wrong. God, who rules over the world and keeps it in existence, cannot act with wickedness.

Elihu notes, if God so wished, God could make humans turn to dust in a second. He states Job, whom he views as an enemy of justice, cannot be in control. Human beings, no matter how powerful, are destined to die. Even in the densest darkness, evil people cannot hide from God. If God is silent or hides from view, no one can complain. Elihu accuses Job of lacking knowledge and deserving punishment because he sins even more in rejecting his (Elihu's) sound arguments and denying his sinfulness.

In chapter 35, Elihu castigates Job for declaring he, not God, is right and for asking what his innocence has profited him. Inviting Job to behold the vast heavens created by the Lord, he asks Job what his offenses or good actions do to God. In anguish, the oppressed call out to God, who makes human beings wiser than beasts and birds, and they often receive no answer. It is foolish to say God does not hear or act. God will help those who wait patiently. Elihu declares Job to be acting without true knowledge of God when he complains about the way God is punishing him.

In chapter 36, Elihu continues to instruct Job about God, declaring he (Elihu) has perfect knowledge of his subject. He tells Job that God is great

and just in judging the wicked and providing for the poor. God raises the just to places of honor, on thrones with kings, while the wrath of God punishes the wicked and arrogant, making them aware of their sins. If they listen to God and repent, they will prosper, but if they do not listen, they will perish in their ignorance. God entices the wicked to repent and share in a glorious life, but those who refuse to abandon their anger, like Job, choose evil.

Continuing to respond to Job's tirade against God, Elihu speaks of the power and goodness of God. Who could teach as the Lord does or who would dare accuse God of doing wrong? Elihu tells Job to praise God, whose greatness surpasses human knowledge and collects the water droplets for rain. Through God's magnificent power over nature, God punishes the people or blesses them with abundance. The lightning shaft is in the hands of God and strikes its target as God wills.

In chapter 37, Elihu speaks of the enormous power of God over nature. Thunder, lightning, rain, and sun are subject to the power of God. God's voice roars like thunder over the earth, and bolts of lightning flash across the entire earth. God commands the snow and rain to fall. Elihu mocks Job, asking him to instruct them if he is so wise. He compares God's glory to the sun, which can be seen when the winds sweep the clouds away, yet which can blind one's eye. Elihu ends his argument, saying people fear God whom no one can see, no matter how much wisdom a person may possess.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Job can agree with Elihu's image of a marvelous God, but because he knows a loving and compassionate God, he is confused. Why is God punishing him? The Book of Job answers the question of suffering in general. Love for God is not tested by prosperity but by one's faithfulness to a loving God, in good times and in bad.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 6: The Lord and Job Meet (38—42)

God speaks to Job from the whirlwind, a typical setting used when the Lord speaks to humans. God is harsh with Job. The Lord asks where Job was when the foundation of the earth was established. Mocking Job, God asks him who determined the size of the earth, created the stars, set boundaries for the waters on the earth, established limits for night and morning, shattered the pride of the wicked, knew the sources of the sea, understood about death, and measured the size of the earth. If Job is wise enough to know the answer to these questions, then God cynically asks him to share this knowledge.

The Lord continues to challenge Job, asking where light and darkness dwell, where snow and hail reside, where the winds split apart, who determined the direction of the rain and thunderstorms, who gave birth to ice and frost, and who created the stars. God challenges the power of Job, asking if he has power over the laws of the earth, commanding the clouds and the lightning.

In chapter 39, God continues to test Job's knowledge, using the habits of animals to question Job. Does Job know when mountain goats are born or the number of months a deer must wait before she gives birth? Has Job given freedom from family bonds to the donkey and other animals? Would Job trust the powerful ox to bring in the harvest alone? God recognizes the need for humans to practice some control in creation. Because an ostrich lacks wisdom, she uncaringly abandons her eggs in the sand where someone may step on them. God asks Job if Job gave the warhorse its strength or its courage and prowess in battle, and if Job commanded the eagle to build its nest up high where he can watch for food for his young.

In chapter 40, God asks if Job still wishes to argue with the Almighty. A subdued Job replies he accounts for little and puts his hand over his mouth. He declares he has already said too much.

The Lord chides Job, asking if he is able to condemn the Lord to show himself justified and if he is as strong as God, able to roar with a voice like thunder. If so, then God sarcastically invites him to clothe himself in grandeur and majesty, venting his fury, disgracing the proud with a glance, overpowering the wicked, and burying them in the dust. These powers belong to God, but if Job can do them, then the Lord will praise him for recognizing his (Job's) own strength will save him.

The Lord invites Job to look at Behemoth, whom God has created, a primeval monster of chaos that some scholars identify as a hippopotamus or a crocodile. He eats grass, possesses powerful muscles, with a tail as straight as a cedar, a back like bronze tubes, and limbs like iron rods. Only God dare approach him without a sword. He eats the plants of the wild and preys on animals. He hides in the weeds near streams, undisturbed when the rivers grow violent, even when the swelling Jordan surges up to his mouth.

The Lord asks who could control such an animal as Leviathan, another monster of chaos, or put a ring through its nose to lead it around. Will the monster agree to a covenant, accept the role of a slave, speak with soft words, transform into a pet to play with little girls, be traded among merchants, or be captured with barbs or spears for catching fish? Those who fight with him will recognize no other conflict to be as difficult as this.

In chapter 41, the Lord continues to speak. Since no one except God dares to stand before Leviathan, who would dare to stand before the Lord? Everything under the heavens belongs to God. Only the Lord can penetrate the monster's tough outer skin. Rows of scales cover the monster's back, and when he sneezes, light flashes from him. Smoke comes from his nostrils and his hot breath can ignite fires. He is powerful, causing terror wherever he goes, even to the gods. No weapon can stop him. The waters churn up after him like a path of white hair, and there is no one on earth like him. He is the king of all proud beasts.

In chapter 42, Job expresses his belief that the Lord can do all things, and no one can hinder the plans of the Lord. Job admits he spoke without truly understanding some things too marvelous for him to understand. He heard of the Lord in the past, but now he has seen God and repents of all he said.

In an epilogue to the Book of Job, the Lord expresses anger with Job's three friends, telling them to take seven bulls and seven rams to Job and to sacrifice them as a burnt offering for themselves and to let Job pray for his friends. A burnt offering was one fully consumed as an offering to the Lord. The men did as the Lord commanded and showed favor to Job. Elihu is not mentioned as having to make an offering.

After Job prayed for his friends, the Lord restored twice as much to Job as he had before. This followed a custom of the day which was to restore twice

as much for damage inflicted on another. Job's brothers and sisters and his former acquaintances came to him and dined with him, a sign of renewed relationships. Each one gave him some money and a gold ring.

The Lord blessed the later days of Job more than the earlier ones. He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 she-donkeys. He had seven sons and three beautiful daughters who received an inheritance with their brothers. The daughters' names were Jemimah (dove), Keziah (precious perfume), and Keren-happuch (cosmetic jar). Ordinarily, daughters did not receive an inheritance with their brothers unless they were the only children. The names of the daughters and the gesture of generosity emphasized the vast goodness of Job. He lived another 140 years and saw his offspring as far as his great-grandchildren, a glorious blessing for the people of Job's era. He died of old age after a full life.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

In the first speech of the book, Eliphaz tells Job to accept for himself what he taught others, namely blessings come for the good and suffering for the wicked. At the end of the book, Job learns a different lesson. The book tells us we cannot judge people's spiritual life by their success or failure in life. Jesus put blessings in perspective when he said, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Luke 12:48). The more prosperous we are, the greater our obligation to share with others.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. What common theme is found in the speeches of Job's three friends?
2. What is Job's quandary?
3. How does the Lord treat Job?
4. What is Job's response to the Lord?