

The Book of Job, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Eliphaz Speaks and Job Replies

Job 4:1–7:21

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrine at stake in this lesson is the very engine of the book of Job, and one of the most pastorally important truths a Christian can learn: the rejection of simplistic retribution theology. Eliphaz voices, with sincere conviction, the belief that suffering is always the harvest of personal sin and prosperity always the reward of righteousness. It is an ancient and stubborn lie. It sounds pious; it even has a grain of truth, since sin does have consequences and God does bless obedience. But as a universal rule applied to every sufferer, it is false, and it is cruel. We readers know from chapters 1 and 2 that Job's agony is not the wages of secret sin, and at the book's end God Himself rebukes Eliphaz and the friends for not speaking what is right (Job 42:7). The Lord Jesus settles the matter for all time when, confronted with a man born blind, He says plainly that neither this man nor his parents sinned to cause it (John 9:1–3), and when He warns that those crushed by the tower of Siloam were not worse sinners than anyone else (Luke 13:1–5).

So this lesson aims to form the student in two ways. First, it aims to protect them from believing a lie about God and about suffering, a lie that can devastate faith. If we believe that suffering always proves sin, then either we will heap false guilt on the innocent, including ourselves, or we will lose faith in God when the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, which Scripture plainly says happens (Psalm 73). The student must learn that suffering has many sources in a fallen world, that God's purposes in it are often hidden, and that He can be wholly trusted even when we cannot trace His reasons. This is a truth predating the Law of Moses; Romans 15:4 tells us it was written for our learning, and we draw its timeless lesson without binding any Old Covenant practice.

Second, and just as importantly, the lesson aims to make the student a better comforter. Eliphaz is a sobering mirror. He was not a villain; he was a sincere friend who came to help and ended up wounding, because he was so certain of his theology that he stopped seeing the man in front of him. The student should leave this lesson slower to explain another's pain, quicker to sit and weep with the hurting (Romans 12:15), and deeply wary of saying true things in untrue ways at the wrong time. In all of it, we want the student to be drawn toward the Lord Jesus, who never crushed a bruised reed, who wept at a grave even knowing He would raise the dead, and who bore in His own body a suffering that was the very opposite of deserved.

Question 1

Student Question:

Eliphaz argues that the innocent never perish and that suffering is the harvest of sin (Job 4:7-8); what is wrong with this retribution theology, and how does the rest of Scripture, including the words of the Lord Jesus, correct it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Eliphaz lays his cards on the table in Job 4:7-8: 'Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.' This is retribution theology in its purest form. The good prosper; the bad suffer; therefore suffering is the proof of sin. It is a tidy, satisfying system, and it is wrong.

It is wrong, first, because it does not match reality. The Bible is full of innocent sufferers and prospering wicked. Abel was righteous and murdered. Joseph was upright and imprisoned. The psalmist in Psalm 73 nearly lost his footing watching the wicked grow fat and untroubled. Above all, the Lord Jesus, the only truly innocent One, suffered the most unjust death in history. If suffering proved sin, the cross would prove the Son guilty, which is unthinkable.

It is wrong, second, because God Himself rebukes it. At the end of the book the Lord tells Eliphaz, 'My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has' (Job 42:7). The very theology Eliphaz preaches with such confidence is the theology God condemns. We could hardly ask for a clearer verdict.

And it is wrong, third and decisively, because the Lord Jesus denies it outright. When His disciples asked whose sin had caused a man's blindness, Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him' (John 9:1-3). And in Luke 13:1-5 He flatly rejects the idea that disaster's victims were worse sinners. Scripture does teach that sin has consequences and that God blesses obedience, but it never teaches that every sufferer is being punished for personal sin. That leap is the lie at the heart of the friends' counsel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Eliphaz's premise: the innocent never perish; suffering proves sin (4:7-8).
- Reality refutes it: Abel, Joseph, Psalm 73, and above all the innocent Christ.
- God refutes it: He rebukes the friends in Job 42:7 for not speaking rightly.
- Jesus refutes it: John 9:1-3 and Luke 13:1-5 deny that suffering proves sin.
- Sin does have consequences; the lie is making it a universal law for every sufferer.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the retribution formula so attractive, and where does it break down?
- How does the cross of Christ shatter the idea that suffering proves guilt?
- What does Jesus actually say causes suffering in John 9:1-3?

Question 2

Student Question:

Eliphaz reminds Job that he once strengthened weak hands and steadied stumbling knees (4:3–4); when has someone strengthened you in a hard time, and how might the Lord use you to do the same for someone now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Before Eliphaz turns harsh, he says something true and beautiful: ‘You have instructed many, and you have strengthened weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have strengthened the feeble knees’ (Job 4:3–4). Job had been, in better days, a great encourager, a man whose words put strength back into failing people. The irony, of course, is that Eliphaz cannot now do for Job what Job once did for so many.

This question turns gently from doctrine to your own life. Most of us can remember a moment when we were stumbling and someone’s words or presence steadied us, a friend who sat with us, a believer who prayed, a word that came at just the right time. Such ministry is precious, and it is rarely forgotten by the one who receives it.

The point is not only gratitude but imitation. The same Lord who once strengthened your weak hands through someone else wants to strengthen weak hands now through you. Is there a person in your life with stumbling knees? You may be the one God intends to send. The ministry of encouragement is not reserved for the gifted few; it is the calling of every member of the body (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

And there is a caution folded in here too. Eliphaz, the man praising Job’s past comfort, is about to fail at offering it himself. Knowing how to encourage is not the same as actually encouraging the person in front of you. We will want to be doers, not just admirers, of this good work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Job had been a great encourager of the weak and stumbling (4:3–4).
- Eliphaz can praise such comfort but cannot now give it.
- Most of us have been steadied by someone in a hard time; we remember it.
- Encouragement is every member’s calling (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- Knowing about comfort is not the same as actually comforting someone.

Discussion Prompts

- Who strengthened your weak hands in a hard season, and how?
- Whose stumbling knees might the Lord be sending you to steady now?
- How can you move from admiring encouragement to actually offering it?

Question 3

Student Question:

Eliphaz bases his counsel on a frightening night vision and a whispering spirit (4:12–21); how should we test claims of private revelation, and why is the written Word our safe and sufficient guide?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Eliphaz grounds his authority in an eerie experience: ‘Now a word was secretly brought to me. In disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, fear came upon me, and trembling; a spirit passed before my face; the hair on my body stood up’ (Job 4:12–16). Out of this vision comes his message that no mortal can be righteous before God. Notice that Eliphaz leans on a private, spooky revelation to validate his theology.

We must be careful here. The content of the vision, that man is frail and not pure before God, is true enough in itself. But Eliphaz uses it to club a suffering man, and the spirit’s true-sounding words serve a false application. This warns us that even real-sounding spiritual experiences must be tested, not simply trusted because they were dramatic.

Scripture commands exactly this testing. ‘Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God’ (1 John 4:1). The Bereans were called noble for searching the Scriptures to check even an apostle’s preaching (Acts 17:11). A vision in the night, a strong impression, a voice, none of these stands above the written Word; all of them must be measured by it.

And the written Word is our safe and sufficient guide precisely because it does not depend on the goosebumps of a midnight encounter. God has spoken finally and fully in His Son and in the Scriptures, which are able to make us complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). When someone leans on a private revelation to bind something on a hurting believer, Eliphaz should come to mind, and we should reach for the open Bible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Eliphaz validates his theology by a frightening night vision (4:12–21).
- The vision’s content is partly true but turned to a false, wounding use.
- Test the spirits (1 John 4:1); search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).
- No vision or impression stands above the written Word.
- Scripture is sufficient to equip us fully (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Discussion Prompts

- How should we respond when someone bases counsel on a private revelation?
- Why is the written Word a safer guide than dramatic experiences?
- What made the Bereans noble, and how can we imitate them?

Question 4

Student Question:

Job says his friends have become like a deceptive brook that fails the thirsty traveler (6:15–20); have you ever felt let down by people you counted on in a crisis, and what does Job teach you about where to finally place your hope?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Job answers his friends with one of the most vivid images in the book. They are, he says, like a wadi, a desert streambed that runs with melted ice and snow in the cold but vanishes to nothing in the heat. Caravans turn aside to it expecting water and find only dry stones; ‘they were disappointed because they had been confident; they came there and were confused’ (Job 6:15–20). His friends promised comfort and delivered drought.

It is a painfully relatable picture. Many of us have leaned on someone in a crisis only to find them absent, awkward, or wounding when we needed them most. The disappointment is sharp precisely because we were confident; we counted on them, and the streambed was dry. Job names that ache without flinching.

But the deeper lesson is about where we finally place our hope. Human comforters, even the best of them, are streams that can run dry. They mean well and fall short; they are present and then absent; they help and then hurt. To make any person our ultimate refuge is to set ourselves up for the confusion of the thirsty caravan.

The Lord, by contrast, is the fountain of living waters (Jeremiah 2:13), the One who does not fail or run dry. This does not mean human comfort is worthless; God often sends His comfort through people. But it does mean our final confidence rests in Him, so that even when every earthly streambed disappoints us, we are not left without water. Job, even as he laments the dry brook, keeps turning his face toward God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Job likens his friends to a wadi that fails the thirsty caravan (6:15–20).
- Disappointment is sharpest where we were most confident.
- Even the best human comforters are streams that can run dry.
- Making any person our ultimate refuge invites the caravan’s confusion.
- The Lord is the fountain of living waters who does not fail (Jeremiah 2:13).

Discussion Prompts

- When has a person you counted on turned out to be a dry streambed?
- Why is it dangerous to make any human our ultimate refuge?
- How does Job keep turning toward God even while lamenting his friends?

Question 5

Student Question:

Job cries that the arrows of the Almighty are in him (6:4) and openly questions God in chapter 7; what does it mean that Scripture preserves such raw words, and what does it teach us about how God receives our honest pain?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Job's words in these chapters are searing: 'The arrows of the Almighty are within me; my spirit drinks in their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me' (Job 6:4). In chapter 7 he addresses God directly with breathtaking boldness, complaining of sleepless nights, of being watched and tested, of feeling like God's target. These are not polite, sanitized prayers.

The first thing to see is that God preserved these words in Holy Scripture. The Spirit did not edit Job down to acceptable piety. He recorded the arrows, the poison, the terror, the raw accusation, and He let it stand in the canon. That alone tells us something about how God regards honest pain: He is not scandalized by it.

This connects to the heart of lesson 3. Job laments toward God, not away from Him. Even when he says God has become his enemy, he says it to God, still in relationship, still wrestling rather than walking off. There is a world of difference between a man who shakes his fist at heaven and then keeps talking, and a man who turns his back and stops. Job does the former, and God commends him for it (Job 42:7).

So we learn that God receives our honest pain. He would rather have our true anguish than our false serenity. The Psalms are full of the same boldness, and the Lord Jesus Himself prayed a cry of dereliction from the cross. The student should be set free here from the fear that honesty will offend God. Reverent honesty, grief brought into His presence and not hurled from a distance, is welcome at the throne.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Job's words are raw: the arrows of the Almighty are in him (6:4).
- God preserved these unedited words in inspired Scripture.
- Job laments toward God, staying in relationship even while complaining.
- God commends Job's honest speech over the friends' tidy theology (42:7).
- Reverent honesty is welcome at the throne; the Psalms and Jesus model it.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God preserved Job's raw words in Scripture?
- Where is the line between honest lament and turning away from God?
- How does this free you to bring your real pain to the Lord?

Question 6

Student Question:

Eliphaz spoke true things in a wrong way at a wrong time (much of 4-5 is sound in the abstract); when have you been tempted to say something technically correct that would still wound a hurting person, and how can you grow in timing and tenderness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is a sobering truth about Eliphaz: much of what he says is true in the abstract. God is just. Man is frail. The wicked do reap trouble. Discipline can be a blessing (he even says, 'Happy is the man whom God corrects,' 5:17, a line the New Testament echoes in Hebrews 12). The problem is not mostly his content; it is his timing, his target, and his tone. He preaches a generally true sermon to a specifically innocent man at the worst possible moment.

This is a trap we all fall into. We can be technically correct and still deeply wounding. A grieving widow does not need a lecture on the sovereignty of God at the graveside, even though God is sovereign. A man who has just lost his job does not need to hear, in that hour, that all things work together for good, even though they do. Truth delivered without love, or without timing, can function as a weapon.

Paul tells us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and Proverbs says a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (Proverbs 25:11), the rightness being as much in the fitness, the timing, as in the word itself. There is a time to teach and a time simply to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15, Ecclesiastes 3:7).

Growth here looks like learning restraint. Often the most loving thing is not to explain the suffering at all, but to sit in the ashes as Job's friends first did so well before they spoke. The student should examine the temptation to say the correct thing and ask whether love and timing might call, in this moment, for silence, presence, and tears instead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Much of Eliphaz's content is true in the abstract; his timing and target are wrong.
- We can be technically correct and deeply wounding.
- Truth without love or timing can function as a weapon.
- Speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15); a word fitly spoken (Prov 25:11).
- Sometimes love calls for silence and tears, not explanation (Romans 12:15).

Discussion Prompts

- When have you said something correct that still hurt a grieving person?
- How do you discern when to teach and when simply to weep with someone?
- What would it look like to grow in timing and tenderness this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

In 7:17–18 Job turns the language of Psalm 8 inside out, asking why God makes so much of man only to test him every moment; what does this anguished question reveal about how suffering can distort our view of God, and how does the whole counsel of Scripture answer it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Job 7:17–18 Job takes the beautiful words of Psalm 8 and turns them inside out. The psalmist marveled, ‘What is man that You are mindful of him?’, amazed at God’s gracious attention. Job, in his agony, asks the same question with a bitter twist: ‘What is man, that You should exalt him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning and test him every moment?’ God’s attention, which the psalmist celebrated as honor, Job now experiences as relentless surveillance.

This shows us something important and sobering: suffering can distort our view of God. The same divine nearness that is a comfort in good times can feel like persecution in the depths. Pain has a way of bending our perception, so that the love of God looks like cruelty and His watchful care feels like a hunter stalking prey. Job is not a cynic here; he is a wounded man whose lens has been warped by relentless agony.

It is crucial that we treat this with compassion rather than condemnation. Job is wrong about God’s heart in this moment, but he is wrong the way a man in a fog is wrong about the road, not the way a rebel is wrong. The whole counsel of Scripture answers his anguished question: God’s attention to man is indeed grace, not malice. He visits us in mercy. The very Son of God would one day take on flesh precisely because God sets His heart on man.

The cure for the distortion is not to scold the sufferer but to keep speaking the true character of God over them, gently, and to trust that as the fog lifts the truth will hold. Job himself will come, by the end, to a far clearer sight of God. For now, the lesson is to recognize how pain warps our vision, to be patient with that warping in ourselves and others, and to anchor ourselves in what Scripture says God is truly like, even when our feelings shout otherwise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Job inverts Psalm 8: God’s attention now feels like surveillance, not honor (7:17–18).
- Suffering can distort our perception of God’s character.
- Job is wounded and fogged, not rebellious; he deserves compassion.
- Scripture answers: God’s attention to man is grace, supremely in Christ.
- The cure is patient truth-telling, not scolding the sufferer.

Discussion Prompts

- How can pain make God's nearness feel like persecution?
- Why should we meet a sufferer's distorted view with patience, not rebuke?
- What does the whole of Scripture say about God's attention to man?

Question 8

Student Question:

Job longs for rest and even for death to end his pain (7:13–16); when life has felt unbearable to you, what has helped you hold on, and how can the church be a refuge for those in that place?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Job's words in 7:13–16 are heavy: he dreads even his bed, for God terrifies him with dreams; he loathes his life and would not live forever; he longs for it to be over. This is a man at the very edge of endurance, and Scripture does not look away from it. We should not look away either, nor rush to fix it.

This question is tender, and it should be handled with care in any class. The aim is not to dwell morbidly on despair but to acknowledge honestly that faithful people have stood where life felt unbearable, and to ask what has helped us hold on. For many it has been the presence of others, a single faithful friend, the body of Christ refusing to let them sink alone. For others it has been clinging to the smallest promise of God when feelings gave out.

The church has a sacred calling here: to be a refuge for those in that place. That means making it safe to say, out loud, that one is struggling, without fear of shame or a quick scolding. It means presence over platitudes, casseroles and visits and prayers and patient companionship. It means, where the darkness is deep and dangerous, helping a brother or sister get the care they need, never treating their struggle as a moral failure.

Above all it means pointing, gently and at the right time, to the One who entered our suffering and did not despise the cross, who can hold what we cannot. We hold on, finally, because He holds us. The student should leave this question both more honest about the reality of unbearable seasons and more committed to making the church a place where no sufferer has to drown in silence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Job is at the edge of endurance, loathing life and longing for the end (7:13–16).
- Scripture does not look away from such depths; neither should we.
- What helps people hold on: faithful presence, the body of Christ, God's promises.
- The church must be a safe refuge, not a place of shame for the struggling.
- Presence over platitudes; help, never scolding, in dangerous darkness.

Discussion Prompts

- What has helped you, or someone you love, hold on in an unbearable season?
- How can our congregation become a safer refuge for the hurting?
- Why is presence so often more healing than explanation?

Question 9

Student Question:

The friends' belief that suffering always proves personal sin and prosperity always proves righteousness is the very error God rebukes in Job 42:7 and the Lord Jesus denies in John 9:1-3; lay out carefully why this simplistic view is false, and what the Bible teaches instead about the meaning of human suffering.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal weight of the lesson, and it gathers up everything the book is wrestling with. The friends believe that suffering always proves personal sin and prosperity always proves righteousness. Stated plainly, the formula is: righteous equals blessed, wicked equals cursed, always and without exception, so that a person's circumstances reveal their standing before God. This is precisely the view God rebukes in Job 42:7 and the Lord Jesus denies in John 9:1-3. We must learn carefully why it is false and what the Bible teaches instead.

It is false, first, because the whole book of Job is constructed to refute it. The reader is told in chapters 1 and 2, by the inspired narrator and by God Himself, that Job is blameless and that his suffering is not punishment for sin. Every confident speech the friends give is therefore built on a premise the reader knows to be wrong. When God finally speaks, He does not vindicate their theology; He condemns it: 'You have not spoken of Me what is right' (42:7). The book exists, in large part, to dismantle this very lie.

It is false, second, because the Lord Jesus explicitly rejects it. Faced with a man born blind, He says, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him' (John 9:3). Faced with reports of Galileans slaughtered and eighteen killed by a falling tower, He insists they were not worse sinners than anyone else (Luke 13:1-5). The Author of life draws a firm line through the friends' formula. And the cross is the final word: the one perfectly righteous Man suffered the most, proving forever that suffering is not the measure of guilt, nor ease the measure of innocence.

It is false, third, because experience under God confirms it. Psalm 73 records a believer nearly stumbling because the wicked were prosperous and the godly afflicted, until he went into the sanctuary and saw their end. Asaph's struggle would make no sense if circumstances reliably revealed character. The rain, Jesus said, falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). In a fallen world, suffering has many sources: the brokenness of creation, the sin of others, the testing of faith, the discipline of a loving Father, and purposes God keeps hidden from us.

So what does the Bible teach instead? It teaches that sin truly has consequences and that God truly blesses obedience, but never that every sufferer is being punished or every prosperous person is approved. It teaches that God's purposes in suffering are often hidden and always trustworthy, that the righteous may suffer deeply and still be precious to God, and that the final accounting is not in this life. These events predate Moses and Christ, yet Romans 15:4 tells us they were written for our instruction and hope. The timeless lesson is double: never use suffering to condemn the suffering, and never let the suffering of the righteous shake your confidence in the goodness of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The friends' formula: suffering proves sin, prosperity proves righteousness, always.
- Refuted by the book itself: Job is declared blameless (1-2); God rebukes the friends (42:7).
- Refuted by the Lord Jesus: John 9:1-3 and Luke 13:1-5; supremely by the cross.
- Refuted by experience under God: Psalm 73; rain falls on just and unjust (Matt 5:45).
- Suffering has many sources: a fallen world, others' sin, testing, discipline, hidden purpose.
- Sin has consequences and God blesses obedience, but circumstances do not reveal standing.
- Romans 15:4: written for our instruction; never condemn the suffering, never doubt God's goodness.

Discussion Prompts

- Lay out three reasons the retribution formula is false.
- How does the cross of Christ permanently overturn this theology?
- What does the Bible teach as the true range of reasons people suffer?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across Eliphaz's speech and Job's reply, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming you through this passage, whether in how you suffer, how you speak to sufferers, or how you trust God's hidden purposes.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We have listened to a confident friend wound a broken man, and we have heard that man cry out in raw anguish toward God. The capstone asks you to look back over the whole passage and name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming you through it. Not a general impression, but one concrete thing you will carry out the door.

The formation might come in how you suffer. Perhaps you are learning that your pain does not prove God's displeasure, that you can be deeply loved and deeply afflicted at once, and that you may bring your honest anguish to Him without fear. That truth alone can lift a crushing false guilt off a struggling believer.

Or it might come in how you speak to sufferers. Perhaps Eliphaz has been a mirror, and you see in him your own quickness to explain, to fix, to say the correct thing. The Lord may be forming in you a new restraint, a willingness to sit and weep before you speak, to be the streambed that does not run dry.

Or it might come in how you trust God's hidden purposes. We readers were shown the throne room; Job never was. Yet God was at work the whole time in ways Job could not trace. The Lord Jesus, who Himself suffered the most undeserved agony for a hidden purpose that was pure love, invites you to trust the Father in your own untraceable seasons. Name the one way He is shaping you, and take it home, so that this lesson becomes not just understanding but transformation into His likeness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The capstone asks for one concrete way Christ is forming you through the passage.
- Formation in how we suffer: pain does not prove God's displeasure.
- Formation in how we speak: Eliphaz as a mirror calling us to restraint and tears.
- Formation in how we trust: God works in purposes we cannot trace, as at the cross.
- The goal is transformation into Christ's likeness, not just understanding.

Discussion Prompts

- Name one concrete way Christ is forming you through this passage.
- In which area do you most need to grow: suffering, comforting, or trusting?
- How will you carry this lesson into your life and relationships this week?