

The Book of Job, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: The Speeches of Elihu

Job 32:1–37:24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson asks the class to hold two truths in tension that the rest of the book has kept apart. The three friends taught that suffering is always punishment; Job has been crying that his suffering is not deserved. Elihu opens a third door that neither side had walked through: God can use suffering to discipline, instruct, warn, and refine, not only to repay sin. The doctrinal stakes are real. If we flatten all hardship into punishment, we will heap false guilt on the hurting and misread God's heart. If we deny that God can have any purpose in pain, we will despair. Elihu, for all his flaws, recovers a biblical category the New Testament will make explicit in Hebrews 12: the Lord disciplines those He loves. Teach the class to receive Elihu's true insights about God's greatness and the refining purpose of affliction without treating his every word as the book's final verdict, since God neither rebukes him with the three friends nor endorses him as the answer.

The spiritual formation aim is to move your students from demanding explanations to cultivating the fear of the Lord. Elihu's great service is to lift their eyes from the argument to the thundercloud, from the courtroom to the Creator. Many in your class are carrying private pain and a private accusation against God. Help them see that God may be opening their ears in the night, that affliction can be a tutor and not only a thief, and that a God too great to be unjust can be trusted with the parts we do not understand. Aim to leave them more reverent, more teachable, and more ready for the voice that is about to break out of the whirlwind in the next lesson.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does Elihu say qualifies a person to speak wisdom (Job 32:6–10), and what does this teach us about where true understanding actually comes from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Elihu begins by defending his right to speak, and his argument is worth lingering over. He had waited, he says, because days should speak and the multitude of years should teach wisdom (Job 32:7). That is the conventional assumption: wisdom comes with age. But then Elihu corrects the assumption with something deeper. There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding (32:8). Great men are not always wise, he says, neither do the aged understand judgment (32:9).

This is the doctrinal heart of question one. True wisdom is not finally a function of years lived but of God's gift. The breath of the Almighty, the same breath that gave Adam life in the dust, is what grants understanding. Age can accumulate experience, but it cannot manufacture wisdom, and youth is not automatically disqualified from it. Elihu is claiming that he may see something the three older men have missed precisely because wisdom comes from above, not merely from below.

We should let this both humble and encourage the class. It humbles the experienced, who can grow proud of their gray hair and deaf to younger voices. It encourages the young, who may assume they have nothing to offer until they have lived longer. The point is not that age is worthless; Scripture honors gray hair as a crown (Proverbs 16:31). The point is that the source of real understanding is the Spirit-given capacity to fear God and receive His truth.

Tie this to the New Testament charge that no one should despise Timothy for his youth but should see him be an example (1 Timothy 4:12). The qualification to speak wisdom is not a birthday; it is a heart open to the breath of the Almighty. That reorients where we look for understanding, both in ourselves and in others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wisdom is a gift from God's Spirit, not merely the product of age (Job 32:8-9).
- Age and experience are honored but are not a guarantee of true understanding.
- The young are not disqualified from speaking truth when they speak from the fear of the Lord.
- Pride can make the experienced deaf to correction from unexpected sources.
- The breath of the Almighty that gives understanding echoes the breath that gave Adam life.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you assumed someone had nothing to teach you because of their age?
- How can our class honor experience without closing our ears to younger voices?
- What does it look like to pray for God-given understanding rather than relying on your own?

Question 2

Student Question:

Elihu waited a long time before speaking, then admitted he was ready to burst. When have you struggled to know whether to hold your tongue or speak, and how do you discern the difference?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Elihu is honest about his inner pressure. He says the spirit within him constrains him, that his belly is like wine without a vent, ready to burst like new wineskins (Job 32:18-20). He must

Speak, he says, that he may find relief. There is something deeply human here, and the question invites your students to recognize it in themselves.

There is a real spiritual discipline in knowing when to speak and when to keep silent. Scripture commends both. There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7). The one who restrains his lips is wise (Proverbs 10:19), yet there is also a word fitly spoken that is like apples of gold (Proverbs 25:11). Elihu's pressure to speak is not by itself proof that speaking is right, and his eventual long-windedness shows the danger of mistaking inner urgency for divine commission.

Help the class develop discernment rather than a rule. The questions to weigh are these: Is what I want to say true? Is it the right time? Is my motive love or self-vindication? Am I speaking to help or merely to relieve my own pressure? Elihu got some things right, but his admission that he spoke partly to find relief should make us cautious about speaking just to discharge our own feelings.

This is a self-examination question, so steer the class toward concrete moments. Most of us can remember both a time we should have spoken and stayed silent, and a time we spoke and wished we had not. Wisdom grows by learning from both.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Inner urgency to speak is not by itself proof that speaking is right.
- Scripture commends both timely silence and timely speech.
- Motive matters: are we speaking to help or to relieve our own pressure?
- Long-windedness can undermine even a true message.

Discussion Prompts

- Recall a time you spoke when you should have stayed silent. What did you learn?
- What questions help you discern whether to speak into a hard situation?
- How can we tell the difference between conviction and mere agitation?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Job 33:14–18 Elihu says God speaks in ways people fail to notice, in dreams and visions, to turn them back and keep them from the pit. What does this reveal about how patiently and persistently God pursues people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here Elihu opens the door that makes his speeches valuable. God speaks once, even twice, he says, yet man does not perceive it (Job 33:14). In a dream, in a vision of the night, God opens the ears of men and seals their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose and hide

pride from him, keeping back his soul from the pit (33:15–18). The picture is of a God who is constantly, patiently communicating, and of human beings who are constantly failing to notice.

The doctrinal weight here is the persistence of God's pursuit. He does not speak once and give up. He speaks again, and through means we might overlook, in order to turn a person back from destruction. The aim of God's speaking is redemptive: to withdraw us from a ruinous purpose, to hide pride from us, to keep our souls from the pit. This is the heart of a God who does not desire that any should perish (compare 2 Peter 3:9).

Apply this to the way God still pursues people. While we should not look for new revelation beyond the completed Word, the principle holds that God is relentlessly reaching toward us, now supremely through Scripture, providence, the conscience He gave us, and the conviction of truth. The tragedy Elihu names is not that God is silent but that we do not perceive His speaking.

Let the class feel the tenderness in this. The God who is great enough to thunder in the storm is also attentive enough to whisper a warning in the night to keep one soul from the pit. That combination of greatness and care is exactly what the suffering heart needs to hear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God speaks more than once and through means we may overlook (Job 33:14–15).
- The purpose of God's speaking is redemptive: to turn us from ruin and hide pride from us.
- God's pursuit is persistent; the failure is in our perceiving, not in His speaking.
- For us, God now speaks supremely and sufficiently through His completed Word.
- Greatness and tender care meet in the same God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where might God have been speaking that you simply did not perceive?
- How does God's persistence in pursuing people encourage you about a loved one?
- What does it mean that God's warnings aim to keep us from the pit?

Question 4

Student Question:

Elihu describes God opening the ears of men and sealing their instruction (Job 33:16). What is one way you can become a better listener to God in the ordinary moments of your week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Elihu says God opens the ears of men and seals their instruction (Job 33:16). The image is of ears being unstopped, of a heart being made ready to receive. This self-examination question presses the practical issue: if God is speaking, are we listening, and how do we cultivate ears that hear?

Listening to God is not passive; it is a learned attentiveness. Jesus repeatedly said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Matthew 11:15), implying that hearing is something we can fail to do even when the words are spoken. Mary chose the good part by sitting at Jesus' feet to listen (Luke 10:39–42), while Martha was distracted. Samuel learned to say, Speak, for your servant hears (1 Samuel 3:10).

Guide the class toward concrete habits. Becoming a better listener to God means slowing down, reading His Word with the expectation that He intends to address us, paying attention to conviction rather than rushing past it, and refusing to drown the quiet with constant noise. The ordinary moments of the week, the commute, the chores, the wakeful hours of the night, are exactly where Elihu says God often speaks.

Keep this warm and achievable. The aim is not to add a heavy religious duty but to invite the class to live with their ears open, treating Scripture and the prick of conscience as God seeking to instruct them rather than as background noise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hearing God requires cultivated attentiveness, not just exposure to words.
- Distraction and noise are the great enemies of listening.
- Scripture should be read expecting God to address us personally.
- Conviction is to be heeded, not rushed past.

Discussion Prompts

- What habit could help you read Scripture as God speaking to you?
- Where in your week is there room for quiet enough to listen?
- When did you last sense conviction, and how did you respond?

Question 5

Student Question:

According to Job 33:19–30, what redemptive purposes can God have in allowing suffering, and how is this different from the three friends' view that pain is simply punishment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Job 33:19–30 Elihu describes a man chastened with pain on his bed, wasting away until his soul draws near the pit, and then rescued. The striking thing is the purpose Elihu assigns to the suffering. It is not described as raw punishment for crimes but as a means by which God hides pride from a man, brings him back, enlightens him with the light of the living (33:30). The whole movement is downward into affliction and then upward into restoration and song.

This is the crucial distinction the lesson is built on. The three friends had only one category for suffering: it is what the wicked get. Elihu introduces another: suffering can be God's instrument

to humble, to instruct, and ultimately to save. The same affliction that the friends read only as a verdict, Elihu reads as a possible mercy in disguise. This does not deny that sin has consequences; it adds that God can be at work redemptively in pain that is not a simple payback.

Be careful and balanced here. Elihu is not the book's final word, and we should not flatten all suffering into discipline any more than the friends flattened it into punishment. Job's own suffering, as the reader knows from chapters one and two, was not because of his sin at all. But Elihu has recovered a true category that the New Testament will affirm: whom the Lord loves He chastens (Hebrews 12:6).

Help the class feel the pastoral difference this makes. To a person crushed by pain, the friends' message is, You must have sinned. Elihu's larger message is, God may be at work in this to draw you, to humble you, to bring you up into the light of the living. One message buries; the other can lift, when it is offered with humility and not as a glib explanation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering can serve to humble, instruct, and restore, not only to punish (Job 33:19–30).
- The friends had one category for pain; Elihu adds a redemptive one.
- This does not deny consequences of sin but refuses to reduce all pain to payback.
- Elihu is not the final word; not all suffering is discipline either (see Job 1–2).
- The pastoral effect of the right category is to lift rather than bury the sufferer.

Discussion Prompts

- How does adding a redemptive category change the way we read someone's pain?
- Why is it dangerous to assume all suffering must be punishment?
- How can we offer Elihu's insight humbly rather than as a glib explanation?

Question 6

Student Question:

Job 33:23–28 pictures a mediator who declares a person upright and ransoms them from the pit. How does this longing point your heart toward what you have in Christ, and how should that shape your gratitude this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Job 33:23–28 is one of the most remarkable passages in the friends' and Elihu's speeches. Elihu pictures a messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand, who declares to a man what is right for him, and who says, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom. Then the man's flesh is renewed, he prays, he sees God's face with joy, and he is restored to

righteousness. He sings, I have sinned and perverted what was right, and it did not profit me; God has redeemed my soul from the pit.

This self-reflection question lets the heart run ahead of Elihu's full understanding. Elihu could only long for such a mediator and such a ransom. We live on the other side of the cross, where the longing has a name. There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5-6). The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Point to Christ only as far as the text naturally allows, which here is quite far, since the very words ransom and mediator and deliverance from the pit are on Elihu's lips. The book of Job, written long before the Law and long before Bethlehem, is reaching for a rescue it cannot yet see clearly. That reaching itself is a gift, because it shows how deep the human need for a mediator runs.

The application is gratitude that shapes the week. If Elihu could glimpse the hope of a ransom and break into song, how much more should we who know the Ransomer live in thanksgiving. Let the class name the difference it makes to wake up already redeemed, no longer merely longing for an interpreter among a thousand but belonging to the One who has found the ransom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Elihu longs for a mediator and a ransom to deliver from the pit (Job 33:23-24).
- The hope finds its name in Christ, the one mediator who gave Himself a ransom (1 Timothy 2:5-6).
- Job, predating the Law and Christ, reaches for a rescue it cannot yet fully see.
- Our gratitude should exceed Elihu's, since we know the Ransomer.
- Point to Christ where the text genuinely opens that door, as it does here.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it move you that Job reached for a ransom centuries before Christ?
- What changes when you wake up knowing you are already redeemed?
- How can gratitude for your Mediator shape one specific choice this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Job 34-35 Elihu defends God's perfect justice, insisting that the Almighty will not do wickedly nor pervert judgment. What does it do for your faith to be certain that God can never be unjust, even when life looks unfair?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In chapters thirty-four and thirty-five Elihu rises to defend God's justice. Far be it from God that He should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that He should commit iniquity (Job 34:10). He says God will surely not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment (34:12). The bedrock claim is that the very nature of God makes injustice impossible for Him. He is too holy, too good, to ever be unfair.

This is solid doctrine and a vital anchor for the suffering believer. When life looks unfair, the temptation is to conclude that God is unfair. Elihu refuses that conclusion at its root. The problem cannot be in God's justice, because God's justice is part of who He is. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Abraham had asked (Genesis 18:25). The answer the whole Bible gives is yes, always.

Elihu does overreach in applying this, since he uses God's perfect justice to imply that Job must therefore deserve his suffering, which the reader knows is false. But the principle he defends is true and must not be discarded along with his misapplication. God's justice is perfect even when our perception is partial. We can be certain of His character before we have any explanation of our circumstances.

The pastoral payoff is enormous. To know that God cannot be unjust gives the heart somewhere solid to stand when everything else is shaking. We may not understand what He is doing, but we can rest in who He is. That certainty is meant to steady faith, not to manufacture false guilt, which is exactly where Elihu's application went wrong.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's justice is rooted in His nature; He cannot do wickedly (Job 34:10–12).
- When life looks unfair, the fault is never in God's justice.
- Elihu overreaches by inferring Job must deserve his pain; the principle is still true.
- We can be certain of God's character before we understand our circumstances.
- God's perfect justice steadies faith; it should not manufacture false guilt.

Discussion Prompts

- How does certainty about God's justice steady you when life feels unfair?
- Where have you been tempted to conclude God is unfair, and how does this correct it?
- Why must we keep the truth of God's justice even when Elihu misapplies it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Elihu warns against the pride of saying our righteousness profits God or demanding that God answer to us (Job 35:2–8). Where do you catch yourself keeping a quiet scorecard with God, as if He owes you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Elihu confronts a subtle pride in Job 35:2–8. He challenges the idea that our righteousness somehow benefits God or puts Him in our debt. If you are righteous, what do you give Him, or what does He receive from your hand? (35:7). Your wickedness affects a man like yourself, and your righteousness profits a son of man (35:8). The point is that God is not enriched by our goodness nor diminished by our sin; we are not doing Him a favor by obeying.

This self-examination question presses on a quiet attitude many believers carry without naming it: the scorecard with God. We keep mental tallies of our church attendance, our giving, our service, our clean living, and somewhere underneath runs the assumption that God now owes us an easy life. When hardship comes, the scorecard erupts: After all I have done for You, how could You let this happen?

Elihu's correction is bracing and healthy. We do not obey God to put Him in our debt. He gains nothing He needs from our righteousness; the benefit flows to us and to those around us. Grace is not a transaction. The laborers in the vineyard who grumbled (Matthew 20:1–16) had the same scorecard attitude, and the master's reply was that he was free to be generous, owing them no more than the agreed wage.

Lead the class to honest self-examination here without shame. Almost everyone keeps some version of the scorecard. Naming it is the first step to laying it down. The freedom on the other side is real: when we stop treating obedience as leverage over God, we can serve Him out of love rather than out of a creditor's expectation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God is not enriched by our righteousness nor put in our debt (Job 35:7–8).
- The scorecard mentality assumes obedience makes God owe us an easy life.
- Hardship often exposes the hidden bargain we have been keeping with God.
- Grace is not a transaction; the benefit of obedience flows to us and others.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you catch yourself keeping a scorecard with God?
- How would your obedience change if you stopped treating it as leverage?
- What would it look like to serve God out of love rather than expectation?

Question 9

Student Question:

In Job 36:5–15 and the storm hymn of chapter 37, Elihu insists that God uses affliction to discipline, warn, and refine the righteous, drawing them away from pride and opening their ears,

not merely to repay the wicked. How does seeing affliction as a refining tool in the hand of a great and just God reshape the way you carry suffering?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it gathers up Elihu's most important contribution. In Job 36:5–15 he insists that God is mighty yet despises no one, that He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous, and that when the righteous are bound in affliction He shows them their work and their transgressions, opens their ear to discipline, and commands them to return from iniquity (36:8–10). He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ears in oppression (36:15). Then in chapter thirty-seven Elihu builds a soaring hymn to God's greatness in the storm: the thunder, the snow, the lightning, the balancing of the clouds, the marvelous works of the One perfect in knowledge.

The doctrinal point to teach clearly is the difference between retribution and refinement. The wicked may be repaid, but for the righteous Elihu sees God using affliction as a tool: to open the ear, to draw a person back from pride, to instruct, to refine. Affliction here is not the verdict of a judge but the discipline of a Father and the fire of a refiner. This is precisely the truth Hebrews 12:5–11 will make explicit: God disciplines those He loves, and though no discipline seems pleasant at the time, it later yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those trained by it.

Hold the balance the lesson requires. Elihu is right that affliction can refine, but he is not the book's last word, and we know from chapters one and two that Job's suffering was not aimed at correcting some sin in Job. So teach the category as true and precious without making it a universal explanation. Some suffering refines; some, like Job's, has purposes hidden even higher than refinement. The wisdom is to hold the truth without overusing it.

Then let the chapter thirty-seven hymn do its work. Elihu lifts our eyes from the question of why we suffer to the greatness of the God who governs the storm. Hearken to this, O Job; stand still and consider the wondrous works of God (37:14). The combination is the heart of the matter: a God great enough to balance the clouds and just enough to never do wickedly can be trusted to use even our affliction well. That is how seeing affliction as a refining tool in the hand of such a God reshapes the way we carry suffering. We stop demanding that pain be either deserved or meaningless, and we begin to ask what the Refiner intends to bring out of us through it.

Drive the application home pastorally. When you next walk through fire, the question shifts from Why is this happening to me, which often has no available answer, to What is God forming in me, and can I trust the One who governs the storm. That shift does not remove the pain, but it changes the posture of the heart from accusation to trust, and it prepares the soul for the voice that is about to speak out of the whirlwind.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God uses affliction for the righteous to open the ear, instruct, and refine (Job 36:8–15).

- Refinement and discipline are distinct from mere retribution for sin.
- Hebrews 12:5–11 confirms that God disciplines those He loves for their good.
- Elihu is not the final word; some suffering, like Job's, has higher purposes than correction.
- Hold the category as true without making it a universal explanation.
- The greatness of God in the storm makes the refining God trustworthy.
- The right question becomes what God is forming, not only why we suffer.

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing affliction as refining rather than only punishing change your posture in it?
- Why must we hold this truth without making it explain all suffering?
- How does God's greatness in the storm make His refining trustworthy to you?

Question 10

Student Question:

As the wind rises at the end of chapter 37 and Elihu cries that we cannot find the Almighty but should fear Him, what is one specific way Jesus is teaching you to trade your need for explanations for a deeper reverence and trust?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Elihu's speeches end with the wind rising. Out of the north comes golden splendor; with God is awesome majesty (Job 37:22). The Almighty, he says, we cannot find Him; He is excellent in power and in judgment and abundant in justice; He will not afflict (37:23). Therefore men fear Him; He respects not any who are wise of heart (37:24). With those words Elihu falls silent, and the next thing we read is that the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. The storm Elihu has been describing becomes the storm from which God speaks.

This capstone question, like all the even-numbered questions, turns the truth toward the student's own formation in Christ. Elihu's final note is the fear of the Lord, the reverent awe that admits we cannot find out the Almighty by searching and yet bows before Him. The whole movement of the book has been pressing Job, and us, away from the demand for explanations and toward this reverence. We cannot find Him; therefore we fear Him.

This is where Jesus completes what Elihu could only gesture toward. The same Lord who spoke from the whirlwind took on flesh and walked into the storm with us. In Gethsemane He prayed not my will but Yours be done (Luke 22:42), trading His own anguished need for relief for trust in the Father. He is teaching His people to do the same: to fear God rightly, to trust without a full explanation, to find peace not in answers but in the character of the One who holds the storm.

Ask the class to be specific. The question is not whether Jesus is forming them in general but to name one concrete way He is teaching them, in this season, to trade the need for explanations for deeper reverence and trust. For one it may be a diagnosis carried without bitterness; for

another a prayer that has gone unanswered; for another simply learning to say, I do not understand, but I trust You. That is the fear of the Lord, and it is the doorway into the next lesson.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Elihu ends on the fear of the Lord and the limits of human searching (Job 37:22–24).
- The book moves us from demanding explanations to reverent trust.
- The Lord who spoke from the whirlwind entered the storm with us in Christ.
- Jesus models trading the need for relief for trust in the Father (Luke 22:42).
- True fear of the Lord finds peace in God's character, not in answers.

Discussion Prompts

- Name one way Jesus is teaching you reverence in place of demanding answers.
- Where are you learning to say, I do not understand, but I trust You?
- How does Jesus' surrender in Gethsemane shape the way you face your storm?