

How then can a man be righteous before God? (v.4)

Job has continued to justify himself before his friends. They keep accusing him of having some sort of sin in his life, and he continues to say that he doesn't know what he's done wrong. Bildad comes back at him here by saying that God is awesome and mighty. God it is who made everything and sustains everything. Bildad is responding to Job's insistence that he is righteous and that the problems he's been having can't be because of sin. So Bildad states that no one can be just before God.

And there is some truth here. We are all sinners before God. None of us is righteous. David said in Psalm 51:5 *'Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.'* Paul quotes from the Psalms in Romans 3:10 when he says *'there is no one righteous, not even one.'* And we know that other famous verse on the Roman Road (Romans 3:23) *'For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.'* Each of us on our own cannot be just before God. We were born into sin and have continued to sin throughout our lives.

But Bildad doesn't know the rest of the story. His trust in God is not complete. Though we are born sinners, there is a way we can be made right with God. One way. That's why Jesus came, to make us right before God. Jesus is the only human to have ever been born without sin and He lived a life without sin. This meant that He could be a perfect sacrifice, someone who could die for us, someone who could pay the penalty for our sins. Because He was also God in the flesh, when He died for us He was able to pay for all our sins, not just the sins of one person. We are made right with God when we decide to trust in Jesus, to believe that He and He alone has taken care of our sins by dying on the cross.

Can a man be righteous before God? Yes, but only by trusting completely in Jesus who died in our place.

Pray: thanking God that you are ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven.

Reflect: am I trying to justify myself before God? Stop now and put your trust completely in Jesus.

And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power? (v.14)

Job starts his reply and judging by the fact no one else speaks until chapter 32 this is the longest speech by any one person in Job. Job starts by lambasting his friends again as he more or less says “you lot are no help to anyone!” Then Job starts talking of the greatness of God. Bildad had said that dominion and awe belonged to God. Job says that this is even an understatement - that we can’t even imagine the depths of God’s might, since we’re only seeing the very fringes of the exercise of His power.

And if we think on only a few of the known facts about earth, God’s creation, our minds are blown and we are left in awe and wonder. Think on the fact that:

- Earth is ninety-three million miles away from the sun. If the sun were any closer to earth we would burn up. If it were further away from earth, we would freeze.
- Earth tilts exactly 23 degrees on its axis, giving us four seasons a year. If it tilted at any other angle we would have massive continents of ice.
- The moon is the exact distance from earth to give us two ocean tides a day. If it were any greater or lesser distance, the earth would be flooded.
- The ocean floor is at a depth that gives us oxygen, which sustains human life. If the depth were any different the air we breathe would be poisonous.
- The atmosphere is the exact density to keep meteors and space objects from hitting us. If it were any thinner we would be constantly bombarded by objects from outer space.

These are only a few facts; these are but the outer fringe. And yet we see how great and awesome our God is! Praise Him!

Pray: praising God for his amazing creation.

Reflect: do I spend time admiring God’s creation and thanking Him for it?

As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul...my lips will not speak wickedness and my tongue will utter no deceit. (v.2, 4)

Regardless of his suffering, Job would not give up his testimony of the Lord. He absolutely would not compromise and say, “Okay, I give in. You guys are right.” Though Job never curses God, he does have some things wrong. He’s concluded that God is infinitely unfair. He’s concluded that God is out to destroy him. Although not cursing God he does appear to blame God for his present situation – God has denied him justice and God has allowed him to suffer.

We do this today as well. What do insurance companies call earthquakes and tornadoes? Acts of God. We like to blame God too for things that happen. I was chatting to someone recently who had just discovered a family member had cancer. Her instant reaction was to blame God in a moment of anger and then to question “why?” We blame God for jobs lost, for money problems, for illness and basically for any suffering we have.

The problem is Job doesn’t see the bigger picture at this stage. He doesn’t know that God is showing Satan that Job will follow God even when life gets tough. He doesn’t know that it’s Satan that has caused all these calamities, not God. Yes God has allowed them to happen but he has not caused them – and that is the difference. Sometimes God allows things to happen in our lives in order to teach us something, or in order to strengthen our faith, or for a variety of other reasons that we will not see at the time.

The next time you face suffering of whatever kind, don’t blame God. Come before Him and ask Him for the strength to carry on and to reveal to you what He wants you to learn through the situation.

Pray: asking for God’s help in understanding your present suffering.

Reflect: do I blame God when things do not go my own way?

But where can wisdom be found? (v.12)

In the late 1970s, thousands of men and women rushed to the American West. In the tradition of the diehard prospectors of 1849, they dredged river bottoms and reopened gold fields long since abandoned. The activity, however, was not sparked by new finds. The same old metal had been there all the time. But because the value of gold had skyrocketed, the dust and flecks were now worth mining. Suppose you knew that 100 pounds of pure gold could be found somewhere in the walls of your house? What you wouldn't do to find it!

We like bargains. Some of us work hard for the best price even shopping around various shops and trawling the internet for that best price. It reminds me of the following story: Suits £5.00 each; shirts £2.00 each; trousers £2.50 per pair. Joe says to his pal, "Billy, look! We could buy a whole lot of those, and when we get back home, we could make a fortune. Now when we go into the shop, you be quiet, okay? Just let me do all the talking cause if they hear our accent, they might not be nice to us. I'll speak in my best Stirling drawl." They go in and Joe says, "I'll take 50 suits at £5.00 each, 100 shirts at £2.00 each, and 50 pairs of trousers at £2.50 each. I'll back up my van and" The owner of the shop interrupts, "You're not from here are you?" "Well...yes," says a surprised Joe, "how come you know that?" The owner says, "This is a dry-cleaners."

We search for items of value and bargains...and yet there is something we ought to be more concerned about than getting some new "stuff" for cheap or some valuable gold flecks. God is concerned that we acquire wisdom. Job says that although mankind had been able to mine precious metals and stones from the ground, there is no earthly way to dig for wisdom. It will not be unearthed with a shovel, and can't be found at the bottom of the ocean. He goes on to say how much more valuable wisdom is than any gold or crystal, so where can you find it? We find it in God. Solomon could have asked God for anything he wanted yet he asked for wisdom. Job here says that *'the fear of the Lord – that is wisdom.'*

Pray: asking God for wisdom.

Reflect: do I dig deep in God's Word to grow in wisdom?

Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me because...I put on righteousness as my clothing. (v.11, 14)

Poet Shel Silverstein wrote a heart-touching verse titled, "The Little Boy and the Old Man." In it he portrays a young boy talking to an elderly gentleman. The boy says, "Sometimes I drop my spoon." "I do that too," replies the old man. "I often cry," continues the boy. The old man nods, "So do I." "But worst of all," says the boy, "it seems grownups don't pay any attention to me." Just then the boy feels "the warmth of a wrinkled old hand." "I know what you mean," says the little old man.

But do we really know what those two meant? Are we like the righteous patriarch Job, who was a man of compassion, helping the helpless? (Job 29:12-13). We consider Job good and godly (Job 1:8) because he demonstrated love to others, not just because he believed in God and offered prayers for his own family. He had Christ-like compassion long before Jesus walked this earth. The Lord is still looking for people who will care for others. He is still asking those who love him to reach out in love to others.

Here in Job 29, Job remembers how it was before he was afflicted. He was living a life of comfort, popularity, and respect. Why was he respected? Because he did not oppress the poor or turn away the needy, as he has been accused. He did not live in unrighteousness, as he has been accused. He did not run with the wicked crowd, as he has been accused. He was a pillar of the community, a leader for the righteous, a patient man, and a minister of comfort.

As he remembers he longs for the days gone by...he longs for that fresh feeling of his first love. Job has not sinned but he feels far from God and in a dark place. Sometimes when we are in that dark place we need to simply trust...to simply trust that God is in control and will never leave us but will one day set our feet aright again in the light. It is good at those dark times to remember God's goodness in days past and to trust that he will bring them back again in days to come.

Pray: asking God to strengthen you in the dark place you are in.

Reflect: do I reach out in love to the needy and helpless?

But now they mock me, men younger than I. (v.1)

I think it's one of the hardest things in life to separate yourself from what others think of you. We all long to be liked and loved. We are concerned what other people think of us. It seems that we each have people in our lives that we long to have approve of us. It's not that we ought to feel this way, but truthfully we often do. We try to do things to make them approve of us; things to make them see how good we are; things to allow them to see how well we handle ourselves.

What Job is expressing is very, very real for most of us. We long to have "important" people fawn over us. About the lowest humiliation we can think of is to have people we consider to be stupid ridiculing us. What a long way Job has come. In the previous chapter he reminded his friends how much people respected him. He used to be honoured by the greatest of people. Now he's scorned and ridiculed by the lowest of people. They even keep their distance from him. And this is hard for him to take.

We do not like it in life when people look down on us or when people avoid us and don't speak to us. We long to be loved and liked and accepted. God's hope is that we become more concerned about what He thinks of us than what people do. In Matthew 10 Jesus says '*All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*' Nobody likes to be "hated". Some of us will do anything to keep people from "hating" us. If we would learn to have the proper "fear" of the Lord, then we would be less concerned about what other people are thinking about us. Perhaps we would be more likely to do the things that God is wanting us to do because we are more concerned with pleasing God than pleasing people.

Job is struggling with all this but he will not disown God. It's as if he knows the later verses in Matthew 10:32 '*Whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.*' Keep trusting God.

Pray: asking God what He wants for us to do.

Reflect: am I more concerned about pleasing people than pleasing God?

Oh that I had someone to hear me! (v.35)

In her book “Listening To Others”, Joyce Huggett relates her experiences of listening to suffering people. She says they often raved about all she had done for them. “On many occasions,” she writes, “I had not ‘done’ anything. I had ‘just listened.’ I quickly came to the conclusion that ‘just listening’ was indeed an effective way of helping others.” I’ve found this to be true over and over again. People long for someone simply to spend time with them and to listen to what’s on their mind. The old saying “a problem shared is a problem halved” carries weight. Often people need someone to simply listen to them so they can share what’s on their mind out loud with someone else.

This was the help that Job’s wordy, preachy friends failed to give him. He complained that they were ‘miserable comforters’ (Job 16:2) and was so distraught that he even accused God of not listening. He cried out, ‘*Oh, that I had someone to hear me!*’ (v.35). Let’s make sure we have time to stop and listen to people.

Here in chapter 31 Job is also keen to make sure his friends understand how he has lived his life. He basically says “God sees everything I do, guys, so I’ve done everything I can do to walk blamelessly. I don’t let my eyes look where they shouldn’t look. I don’t let my feet go where they shouldn’t go, I don’t let my mouth say what it shouldn’t say. The Lord knows all of these things.” He goes on to say that he has not concealed his sin like the world does. He has lived his life openly and honestly before God and men. He has tried to live as best he can following God’s guidelines for good living. I wonder how many of us can say that?

This is the end of Job’s speeches. This is the end of Job’s defence. He’s not going to keep this going on any longer. A wise man said to me recently, “When you’re going around in circles, there’s no better place to stop than right here.”

Pray: asking God to help us walk blamelessly through life.

Reflect: am I a good listener?

But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. (v.8)

Job's three friends stop now. They stop answering Job and talking with Job because they feel they can go no further. These guys saw the futility of arguing with Job anymore. Because Job would not admit that he was wrong, that he had sinned, they saw him as self-righteous. For Job, he was not self-righteous but he was righteous because of his faith in God which produced fruit in his life, or good works.

This gave Elihu the opportunity to wade in. Isn't it interesting that there is always someone else waiting in the wings to launch a tirade and join the debate, someone else who thinks they know what is going on and can end the argument and discussion. Sometimes things are best left where they are at...that way time allows us to think through all that has been said and to consider prayerfully the matter before God.

Elihu claims he has been waiting because he is a young man. He has respected the age and given deference to his elders. Elihu sees Job building himself up, making himself self-righteous, and putting God down. Elihu was upset because Job's friend could not find sin in Job's life and yet they condemned him. He saw their reasoning as faulty. These guys ran out of steam and had nothing left to say, but Elihu wants them to continue, not to stop.

That is very true; age does not always equal wisdom. In fact wisdom is given to us by God. It is applying the truths of God, found in the Word of God, in our life. Proverbs 2:6-9 says '*For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair - every good path.*' You do not need to be older to be wise...but you do have to be found in God's Word and be applying that to your life.

Pray: asking God for wisdom.

Reflect: do I respect my elders?

For God does speak – now one way, now another – though man may not perceive it. (v.14)

I wonder how many times in life we misrepresent people? How many times we take part of a story and turn it into the whole story? Elihu has been desperate to speak. He puts himself over as the mediator between Job and God and challenges Job to answer the charges he is about to bring. And as he starts he misrepresents what Job said previously. He says in verse 8 I heard you myself and these are your own words *‘I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt.’* He takes some of Job’s words and turns them into the whole. He takes a small proportion of Job’s words and uses them to build a case around him. Job had never said he was without sin. Job was not perfect and he knew that. When he did fail he offered the appropriate sacrifices to atone for his sin (Job 1:5).

May we be careful in how we speak of others, and how we represent them to other people. Let us not be guilty of misrepresenting them or only concentrating on one small phrase or action.

As Elihu continues he reminds us that God does speak. He says to Job you complain that God does not answer your words but God does speak. It might not be in the way you expect or look for but he speaks. God speaks to us in many ways, even when we are asleep He puts thoughts in our mind. Why? To keep us on track. To keep us from destruction. To keep us from doing things that will only bring pain and hurt into our lives because He loves us.

Why don’t we hear God speak? We don’t listen. It’s not always that God doesn’t speak. It’s that we don’t listen. Sometimes He’s speaking through our circumstances – but we’re not paying attention. All the time He’s speaking through His Word, but we don’t pick it up and spend time reading. Let’s remember that God speaks in various ways to us. Let’s actively look for his words – and let’s be reading His Word and asking His Spirit to reveal His truth to us.

Pray: asking God to give us ears to listen and eyes to see.

Reflect: do I speak well of people and represent them fairly?

His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. (v.21)

I don't know how many times I set off on a hill walk and look up thinking that's a great hill and wonderful peek. However as I climb I realise that the peek I saw was not the main one I was climbing, for it was hidden from sight by the first peek or by some low lying cloud.

The same was true of a first time visitor to Alaska who was excited that he was staying at the Mt. McKinley Lodge. As he was checking in, he caught a glimpse of a mass of rock through a large picture window, and he hurried out to the deck facing the mountain. "Wow," he murmured softly as he took in the view. A man standing a few feet away said, "Uh...that ain't it!" As the man discovered that day, visitors to Alaska often miss seeing all of "The Great One." Standing at 20,320 feet, the mountain is so tall that most of it is hidden on cloudy days. He was seeing only a part of the whole.

We often get satisfied with our limited view of life. Jeremiah says in 29:11 *'For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm, plans to give you hope and a future.'* With God's omniscient, panoramic view, He sees the people He wants us to help, the things He wants us to accomplish, the character traits He wants to develop in us.

Here in Job 34 Elihu is reminding Job that God sees everything. He misses nothing. Job might claim he is sinless but even although he and his friends cannot prove anything God can because God sees our every step. Of course he is misguided because all that has happened to Job has nothing to do with sin in his life – it's the work of Satan. There is a great reminder for us though that God does see everything. He knows everything we do, everywhere we go; he knows everything that is on our mind, everything that we say. Nothing escapes God's attention. When we sin, as we all do, may we be quick to confess it before God and ask for his forgiveness.

Pray: confessing your sin to God.

Reflect: am I satisfied with my limited view of life or am I asking God to expand my horizons?

But no one says "Where is God my maker, who gives songs in the night?" (v.10)

Elihu continues his rant against Job. Unlike his friends who had all been insisting that if Job repented, he would be restored, Elihu is claiming that repentance isn't possible. He says you can't just keep on sinning and keep expecting God to forgive you. In Elihu's opinion, repentance is making God agree to your terms, a reward for behaving wickedly. But we know that God is a God who offers forgiveness for the repentant. Remember that when Peter asked Jesus, Matthew 18:21-22 "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

We must be the same for each other as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:32 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.' Now of course the whole point of repentance is turning from our sin and seeking to follow the Saviour; it's a 180° turn. If we truly repent then we will strive to sin no more. That is not always possible for we are weak human beings but that should be our goal. And yes God will forgive us and restore us and help us to resist temptation.

Elihu goes on to suggest that when trouble comes people do not turn to God as they should. Many cry out for help during difficult times, but they look for their help in all the wrong places. They look to drugs, alcohol, therapists, relationships, and-so-on, that only bring more difficulty in their lives. They don't look to God who will put a song in their heart, God who will give them hope and joy again. You see, during those difficult times, in the blackness of soul, God can put a song in our heart and give us peace through the storm. Many of the great hymns were born out of these difficult times and many of the Psalms were also written from this vantage point. God gives us songs of hope, songs of joy. He does not give us the blues, but takes the blues away!

Pray: thanking God for forgiveness from your sin.

Reflect: do I turn to God in the darkness and trust in Him alone to help me when times are tough?

God is mighty, but does not despise men. (v.5)

Job must have been ready to speak again, but Elihu keeps it going. The words he speaks here are incredible. “I’m speaking on God’s behalf. I have perfect knowledge, and I’m sharing it with you.” Ah, the young man Elihu. Full of fire; excited about righteousness; ready to take on the world with his clear understanding of God’s truth. I know Elihu because I have been Elihu. Maybe you have too. Someone said to me just the other day, “Oh, how I wish I could erase all the dogmatic religious statements I made as a young man.” I am also in that camp. I look back at the theological arguments, the emphatic insistence, as I knew that God had entrusted all truth to me alone. I was the keeper of truth, and would dispense it as brutally as I saw fit. One thing I am learning with age is that most often it is the aged who have learned. Respect your elders and let’s be careful not to think we know it all.

As he goes on he says in verse 5 “God is powerful but he is also fair.” And how true. C.S. Lewis wrote a wonderful series of children’s books called The Chronicles of Narnia. The first book of the series is called The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe. The story is about four children who enter into a mythical land by pushing past the coats hanging in a “wardrobe”, a closet. It’s a story that’s filled with symbolism about God and His love for us. The main hero of the books is Aslan the lion, the great king of all Narnia. Aslan is a picture of Jesus Christ. When the children meet up with a friendly family of beavers, they hear about the great King Aslan for the first time. They hear that Aslan is coming to take care of the wicked White Witch. They are told that they must go and meet Aslan. But when they are told that Aslan is a lion, one of the girls, Lucy, asks, “Is He safe?” Mr. Beaver replies, “Oh He’s not safe. But He’s good.”

God is powerful. He can do whatever He wants. And He will come one day and deal with His enemies. He isn’t safe. But He is also good. He will never do something that would be wrong or evil.

Pray: thanking God that he is righteous and holy, just and fair.

Reflect: do I think I know it all? Do I act like God?

Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders. (v.14)

When a mother saw a thunderstorm forming in mid-afternoon, she worried about her seven-year-old daughter who would be walking the three blocks from school to home. Deciding to meet her, the mother saw her walking nonchalantly along, stopping to put a big smile on her face whenever lightning flashed. Spotting her mother, the little girl ran up to her. When the mother asked about the big smile every time the lightening flashed, the daughter explained enthusiastically, "All the way home, God's been taking my picture!" In her childlike way she stopped and considered God's wonders.

Here in Job 37, Elihu is speaking of the might and power and majesty of God as seen in the wonder of thunder and lightning. He speaks of the seasons of the year and the winter snow stopping men in their tracks. He speaks of the rain that comes. Sometimes rain is good, sometimes it's bad. If rain comes at harvest time, it's bad because it can destroy the crop before it can be harvested. Then the farmer stops and thinks about whether he's got his life together or not. If rain comes in the springtime, when the seed has been planted, it's seen as mercy. God waters the seeds and a crop grows.

I wonder if we could see trials like rain. Sometimes the trial comes as a correction, as a way of getting our attention. Sometimes a trial could come as mercy - God could be rescuing us from something.

Then he stops and says listen up Job. '*Stop and consider God's wonders.*' When was the last time you stopped and considered God's wonders? When was the last time you looked at creation all around and marveled at the beauty and majesty of it all? When was the last time you considered the seasons of the year and the value of them all? I encourage you to stop for five minutes today, to stand outside and look around at the wonder of God's creation. I guarantee your heart will be stirred to praise.

Pray: thanking God for all His wonders.

Reflect: do I stop and consider God's wonders often enough?

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? (v.4)

In *The Magician's Nephew*, one of the books in C. S. Lewis' Narnia Chronicles, Digory and Polly use special rings to go into other universes. In one instance, they are transported to a place where they witness the creation of a new world. In the darkness, a beautiful voice sings stars into existence, followed by a newly created sunrise. In the morning light, they see that a mysterious lion is the singer. In response to his voice, grass spreads out like carpet, and trees grow in moments. Then animals begin to form out of the ground. When Narnia's creation is complete, Aslan, its creator, gives the gift of speech to animals and celebrates with his creatures.

Lewis' skilful use of Christian symbolism provides a fresh perspective on the wonder of our own world's beginning. There was a time when our universe did not exist. There was no matter, no energy, and no time. Then the Son of God spoke into being what we now see (John 1:1-3). In response, angelic worship resounded from the heavenly places. The book of Job tells us that at the foundations of the earth *'the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy.'* (v.7).

Here in Job 38 the LORD comes to answer Job. And he starts by saying come on Job were you there when the world was created? No you weren't but the angels were and they sang for joy. God is trying to remind Job of who He is – how great and awesome and mighty He is. Job has no right to question Him or doubt Him.

Many people are confused by God's demeanour here. How is it that in chapters 1 and 2, He was boasting about Job's blamelessness, and now He sounds so mad? We must remember that God is our Father. And just like any father, He speaks to others about his kids' great accomplishments and attributes, but face to face, confronts him with where he has fallen short or needs correction.

Pray: thanking God for his wonderful creation.

Reflect: what is God correcting in my life at the moment?

Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south? (v.26)

God has reminded Job about creation and bringing everything into being in the previous chapter as he begins his response to Job. Here in chapter 39 he begins to speak about the habits of various animals and birds. He is trying to teach Job that he knows little and understands even less. God it is who created all things and brought them into being. God it is who wired their brains for life.

The Lord asks Job about the secret lives of mountain goats and deer. Before National Geographic or the BBC sent cameramen into the wilderness for months at a time, much of animals' lives were unknown to us. Now we know that deer calve in the November/December months. The odds of Job having seen this were next to none, since it occurs in the middle of winter, takes only about 2 hours, and the calves hide for the first four or five days. Similarly, Job would not have extensive knowledge of mountain goat behaviour. Each spring, 1-year old mountain goats will leave their mother - never to return - when the new kids are born. Does Job know how or why this happens? No, but God does.

God has built into birds some amazing things as well. Here he speaks of the hawk in verse 26 but think on the Pacific Golden plover which builds its nest in Alaska in the summertime. There it lays its eggs, hatches the eggs, then takes off into the Pacific Ocean where it will fly for thousands of miles until it reaches Hawaii. It spends the winter in Hawaii before flying back to Alaska to lay more eggs. An amazing feat of navigational skill, to land in Hawaii. But even more interesting is that the babies are left behind by the parents in Alaska. When the babies get big enough, they start off for Hawaii on their own. Without their parents to show them the way. How do they find Hawaii? Amazing stuff.

Everything in God's creation was carefully planned and made. Praise Him for it all.

Pray: thanking God for the amazing life he brought into being.

Reflect: do I consider how great God is in all of creation?

Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? (v.2)

During an afternoon baseball game when American League umpire Bill Guthrie was working behind home plate, the catcher for the visiting team repeatedly protested his calls.

According to a story in the St. Louis Post Dispatch, Guthrie endured this for three innings. But in the fourth inning, when the catcher started to complain again, Guthrie stopped him. "Son," he said gently, "you've been a big help to me calling balls and strikes, and I appreciate it. But I think I've got the hang of it now. So I'm going to ask you to go to the clubhouse and show them how to take a shower."

Job also had been complaining about calls he didn't think were fair. In his case, the umpire was God. After listening to Job's objections, the Lord finally spoke out of a violent storm. Suddenly things came into perspective for Job. God was gentle, but He was also firm and direct. The Lord asked him the kind of questions that bring finite man back down to size.

Job had much to say before, when his eyes were focused on his situation. But now that God has his attention, and his eyes are focused upon God, he has very little to say. He rightly recognised his error and he saw himself in the light of God and now he is ready to listen to God. Job listened, gave up his complaining, and found peace in surrendering to God.

Friends, there are many times in life when we take our eyes off of God and then all our eyes do is look at our problems and our situation - it is at those times we become like Job and blame God or question God. When we look up, remembering who God is and all He has done, suddenly things come back into perspective again. If you are feeling down today, look up. See God in all His beauty and majesty, His power and His love.

Pray: asking God's help in keeping a right perspective.

Reflect: when trouble comes do I look up to God and keep things in perspective?

Everything under heaven belongs to me. (v.11)

Here in chapter 41 we are introduced to an unusual creature – a leviathan. It is surprising that most modern expositors call this animal merely a crocodile. Our text plainly calls it a “piercing serpent...the dragon that is in the sea.” He is also said to “play or frolic” in the “great and wide sea” (Psalm 104:25, 26). God’s description, in Job 41, says ‘*flames dart from his mouth*’ (v. 21) and ‘*he makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron*’ (v. 31). The entire description is awesome! Whatever a leviathan might have been, it was not a crocodile!

In fact, there is no animal living today which fits the description. Therefore, it is an extinct animal, almost certainly a great marine reptile, still surviving in the oceans of Job’s day, evidently one of the fearsome reptiles that gave rise to the worldwide tales of great sea dragons, before they became extinct.

But that is not all. In ending His discourse, God called leviathan ‘*a king over all that are proud*’ (v.34), so the animal is also symbolic of Satan, whose challenge to God instigated Job’s strange trials. He is ‘*the great dragon...that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray*’ (Revelation 12:9). Perhaps, therefore, the mysterious and notorious extinction of the dinosaurs is a secular prophecy of the coming Day of Judgment when God “will punish leviathan” (Isaiah 27:1) and the ‘*devil who deceived them*’ will be ‘*thrown into the lake of burning sulphur...and will be tormented day and night for ever and ever*’ (Revelation 20:10).

Some think great animals like the leviathan never existed. Clearly from Scripture they did. Sadly some believe that Satan is a myth and doesn’t exist either. It’s one of his greatest deceptions to fool the world into thinking he doesn’t exist. He certainly does! We need to be on our guard!

Pray: asking God’s help in resisting Satan’s temptations and lies.

Reflect: do I believe Satan exists? Do I guard against his deceitful ways?

My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. (v.6)

Just before Christmas 2003, Lydia came home from work to the sight of flames shooting out of her house. She was devastated by more than the loss of her home - seven of her family members died in the flames. When news about the tragedy spread that morning, a deacon from her church rushed to comfort her. She had some deep questions for him, but he had no answers.

Lydia could relate to Job's story. He lost all 10 of his children (Job 1:18-19), yet he continued to worship God (v.21). Then his health was affected, and his wife urged him to curse God and die (2:9). Job's friends thought they had the answer - he must have sinned and deserved his troubles.

Job complained bitterly to the Lord and pleaded for an explanation and relief, but God didn't give him any answers. He didn't even tell him about Satan's request to test him (1:6-12; 2:1-6). Instead, He reminded Job that He was the all-wise God and that Job was not. Job was humbled, and he repented for having questioned God's authority (42:1-6).

This side of heaven, we may not find answers for our desperate questions of "Why did this happen?" and "Why me?" but we can rest in the truth that God is in control and that He loves us. Romans 8:28 reminds us '*and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*' We might not always see it at the time but later like Joseph we will be able to say '*you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*'

Job did not get all the answers he wanted but his eyes were now turned to God. He had heard with his ears but now he saw with his eyes. May our focus be on God and then everything else will be in perspective. May we rest in the truth that God is in control and that He loves us.

Pray: thanking God that he works for the good of those who love him.

Reflect: do I always need answers or can I simply trust in the love and faithfulness of God?

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (v.2)

Legendary baseball manager John McGraw led the New York Giants from 1902 to 1932, running his team with unquestioned authority. Once, McGraw's wife wanted to talk to Fred Merkle, one of the Giants players. She gestured to Merkle several times, but wasn't able to catch his attention. After the game, Mrs. McGraw said to Merkle in mild exasperation, "Freddie, didn't you see me waving to you during the game?" Merkle was startled. "Good grief, Mrs. Mac. Are you giving signals now too?!" The story is funny, but Merkle had the right idea. He knew the only way to flourish in a Giants uniform was to pay attention to his leader. The same is true for us. If we want to flourish spiritually, we need to pay attention to the directions our Leader has given.

The Psalmist understands this well as he begins here in Psalm 1. He warns us about being separated and saturated. We are to be separated from the world. The world is anything that separates us from God or causes us to disobey Him. Separation is not isolation but contact without contamination. Sin is usually a gradual process. Notice the gradual decline of the sinner in verse 1. He is walking (Mark 14:54), standing (John 18:18) and then sitting (Luke 22:55). Becoming worldly is progressive; it happens by degrees. We make friends with the world; we become spotted by the world; we love the world, become confirmed to it and end up condemned with it.

We are to be saturated in the word as well. Whatever delights us directs us. We saturate ourselves with the Word by meditating on it. Meditation is to the spirit what digestion is to the body. When we meditate on the Word, we allow the Spirit of God within us to "digest" the Word of God for us. So not only do we delight in the Word, it becomes a source of spiritual nourishment for us.

Pray: asking God to help us delight in His Word.

Reflect: do I saturate myself with God's Word?

Then he rebukes them in his anger. (v.5)

Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, once complained to the President about a fellow army officer. Lincoln advised him to write the man a letter expressing his anger. Stanton did so, and showed it to Lincoln.

After approving the letter, the President asked Stanton what he planned to do with it. "Send it," he answered in surprise. But Lincoln told him to burn the letter. "That's what I do when I have written a letter while I am angry. It's a good letter. You had a good time writing it and you feel better. Now burn it and write another."

When it comes to human anger, it's almost always a good idea to think twice, count to ten, take a walk, or do whatever it takes to reconsider your response. But God never needs to reconsider or repent for His anger. Because God is holy and perfect, His anger is holy and perfect.

Here in Psalm 2 we find the defiance of the world as they conspire and plot against God (v.1-3). They are rebelling against. Even after all he has done for them they choose to turn from him. And is that not a perfect picture of us today? We know all that God has done – we have our Bibles to teach us – and yet we still rebel against God and sin against him.

So God laughs and scoffs at them and grows angry against them. His anger is not unjust – he is angry because he has done so much for his children and they are turning from him to their own ways. And yet in his anger he says that his son is coming to rule the world. There is a picture for us of Jesus coming to save the world from sin, and also to judge the world one day on account of its sin. The encouragement of the Psalmist is to take refuge in the LORD now while we can.

Pray: thanking God that he is our rock and salvation.

Reflect: do I get angry easily? Do I need to learn to count to 10 or to write a letter and then destroy it before sending it?

I lie down and sleep; I wake again because the LORD sustains me. (v.5)

How well do you sleep? When things are tough and difficult do manage to close your eyes and rest? When trouble is brewing do you get a full night's sleep? I manage to sleep well most of the time but occasionally if something is really bothering me I toss and turn and don't sleep well. David, the Psalmist, slept well. And he slept well because he trusted in God. The LORD was his shield and his deliverer.

Here in Psalm 3 David cries out to God. He is in conflict. This is the time when he was on the run from Absalom. He was fleeing from his son Absalom, who had turned against him and had driven him from Jerusalem. Now David was in the wilderness with his army. It would be difficult to lie down and sleep knowing that you are in a dangerous wilderness and that your own son is against you. So David cries out to God. Notice his prayer is very direct and arrow like – help, my foes are all around.

David shows his confidence next though as he affirms his trust in God. He says '*You are a shield around me, O LORD*'. David has his perspective right – he looks to God in the midst of his troubles and relies on God's protection. With that done he settles down and sleeps. I wonder how much better some of us would sleep if we took our problems and cares and concerns to God and left them at the throne of grace. God is our shield and defender. The next time you are in trouble, ask for God's help and look to him. And as you look to him everything is back in its right perspective.

As David wakes he praises God and looks ahead to celebration already. The battle hasn't even started and yet he knows the LORD sustains him and will deliver him. When was the last time you woke in the morning and the first thing you focused on was God. David awakens here and recognises God has sustained him. May we start our days by thinking on God and looking to him.

Pray: thanking God that he is our shield and defender.

Reflect: do I take everything to God in prayer? Is God my first thought each morning? How can he become my first thought each day?

I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone O Lord, make me dwell in safety. (v.8)

During World War II, an elderly woman in England had endured the nerve-shattering bombings with amazing serenity. When asked to give the secret of her calmness amid the terror and danger, she replied, “Well, every night I say my prayers. And then I remember that God is always watching, so I go peacefully to sleep. After all, there is no need for both of us to stay awake!”

There is a sense to which this is what David shares with us in Psalm 4. He says in verse 8 ‘*I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone O Lord, make me dwell in safety.*’ Why does he sleep in peace? Because God is watching over him. He has spent the preceding verses crying out to God for help and protection. He asks the Lord to hear his prayer. David is worried and anxious about Absalom and his men coming after him. This is the same situation from Psalm 3 yet rather than being the morning prayer and praise this is the evening prayer before lying down to sleep. He is lays his concerns before God so he can sleep in peace.

David also sets us a pattern in doing this that we lay our concerns before God and then in verse 4 we confess our sins before God too. The guilt of sin stops us sleeping as well so David says deal with it; confess it before God. And what sound advice for us too. David finishes by saying that God filled his heart with joy. This truly is the recipe for a good night’s sleep: lay your concerns before God, confess your sin, and ponder his might and love.

Alternatively we could us the simple traditional children’s prayer:
*Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.
If I should live for other days, I pray the Lord to guide my ways.*

Pray: asking God for a good night’s rest.

Reflect: do I sleep well or is my soul troubled? Try using David’s pattern from Psalm 4 before you lay your head on the pillow.

Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. (v.11)

In 1932, musician Thomas A. Dorsey experienced a shock. While singing in a revival meeting, he received a telegram saying his wife had just died in childbirth. A few days later, anguished and depressed, he sat down at a piano. As he toyed with the keys, a song emerged: “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.” Today, Dorsey is considered the father of gospel music and “Precious Lord” is considered one of the greatest gospel songs ever.

Like “Precious Lord,” Psalm 5 is a prayer for help and refuge in times of trouble. As he had done in earlier psalms, David began by describing his situation. He felt discouraged and was waiting in faith for God to act (v.1-3). In his prayer, he described not only his own state but the “state of God” as well: God loves righteous and humble people, but abhors and judges the proud, dishonest, and violent (v.4-6).

Because of God’s character, David had a valid basis for confidence that God was on his side (v.7-12). He was humble and worshipful. He honoured God’s loving kindness, sought His presence, pursued righteousness with His help, and tried to live blamelessly before his enemies. They, on the other hand, were untrustworthy, destructive, deceitful, and malicious. In a striking metaphor, their throats are compared to open graves (v.9). They were on the side of death, not life. David loved God’s justice so much that he boldly called on Him to judge and punish such people. In the meantime, he would remain safe and glad, enjoying God’s favour and praising His blessings (check out Psalm 30:5).

We too can pour out our hearts to God and he will hear us. He will surround us with his shield of protection and spread his protection over us.

Pray: thanking God for the joy that comes in the morning.

Reflect: are you confident that God will protect you and bless you?

The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer.
(v.9)

During every morning worship service in a small church, the congregation would share prayer requests. After each one, the pastor would say, “Lord, in Your mercy,” and the people would respond, “Hear our prayer.” One Sunday, a 4-year-old boy became more intense after each request, until he finally shouted out, “Hear our prayer!” The little boy probably expressed what a lot of people were feeling that morning.

As Christians we believe that God hears our prayers. We lift them before him in the confidence that he will hear and answer us. Often we bring our prayers quietly and confidently. Sometimes though we cannot help but cry out to God in heartbreak and anguish.

Here in Psalm 6 David comes and cries out in anguish to God. Psalm 6 is the first of the seven penitential psalms. A penitential psalm being one where the Psalmist comes and confess his sin before God. David starts by saying ‘*do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, O Lord.*’ We can almost hear the sobs and cries as David pleads for mercy, help and healing.

Sin is the Christian’s worst possible experience. It’s far worse than pain or suffering or even death itself. I had a young lady approach me recently who was in deep anguish because of sin in her life. She wanted to know what to do. I simply told her to confess it to God and leave the room forgiven. We are weak, and sometimes we fail. But let’s never be afraid to come to our Father with our appeal for forgiveness. The tragedy is that all around us, enemies are waiting for us to fall. They want to point at us and say, “See, that Christian failed.” But we can come before the Lord and ask Him for His forgiveness, and He will grant it to us. God will have mercy on us. David finishes this Psalm with the confident note that ‘*the LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer.*’

Pray: confessing any sin in your life to God.

Reflect: am I confident that God will hear my cry for mercy?

The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head. (v.16)

The Emperor Charlemagne wanted to have a magnificent bell cast for the church he had built. An artist named Tancho was employed by the church to make it. He was furnished, at his own request, with a great quantity of copper, and a hundred pounds of silver for the purpose. He kept the silver for his own personal use, however, and substituted in its place a quantity of highly purified tin. When the work was completed, he presented the bell to the Emperor, who had it suspended in the church tower. The people, however, were unable to ring it. So Tancho himself was called in to help. But he pulled so hard that its tongue fell down and killed him.

That bellmaker's death reminds me of the words of Psalm 7:16 '*The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.*' The saying we reap what we sow is a true one. Many of us are deeply troubled by the injustices we see in life. Unscrupulous, dishonest, God-denying people are often the ones who prosper the most. But you can be sure of this: '*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*' (Galatians 6:7).

We see this principle throughout the Bible. Saul wanted to kill David, but his own sword killed him. Pharaoh ordered the male Jewish babies to be drowned in the Nile and his own army was drowned in the Red Sea. Haman built a gallows on which to hang Mordecai and Haman himself was hanged on it.

David here questions what will happen to the evil and wicked. He concludes that they will indeed reap what they sow and God will deal with them in his time. Moreover he concludes that God is righteous and just. Let us not get caught up in worrying about what will happen to others but rather leave that to God. Let's trust his justice.

Pray: thanking God for being righteous and just.

Reflect: do evil people prospering worry me? Or do I trust that God will deal with them in his time?

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (v.1,9)

Researchers Wolfgang Kirchner and Axel Michelson performed a number of experiments to test a theory. The way in which explorer bees “dance” to tell other bees where to find flowers, sugar, or other food has long been studied by scientists. The bees’ dance conveys information - one part directs other bees where to go, another part tells them how far. But how is this accomplished?

Kirchner and Michelson believed the answer lay in noises pitched lower than the buzzing we hear. The bees could sense this, via their antennae, even in the dark. To test their theory, the two built a tiny robot bee which imitated an explorer bee’s informational dance in every detail. The robot bee worked perfectly. When it danced, the real bees “listened” and went straight to a pan of sugar water in a field. A bit more of the bees’ intricate “language” had been eventually unlocked!

The intricate design of the created world should inspire not only our study, but also our worship, as it does for David in today’s psalm. He recognises that God is great and holy and majestic. He says in verse 3 ‘*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers...*’ He is looking to the skies at this point and seeing the moon and the stars. He is amazed at them all. He recognises that God set them all in place. As he studies them he recognises that God made humanity to and is mindful of us and cares for us. This just blows his mind.

When was the last time you stopped to look at a part of God’s creation and to think on it? Did it not draw you to worship the creator and sustainer of the universe? Today go outside and look at the hills and trees and blossoming plants and think on them. Tonight go outside and look up at the stars. Marvel at them and then worship God.

Pray: worshipping God for being the creator God.

Reflect: do I take time to marvel at God’s creation? How can I make time for that today?

*I will praise you O LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders.
(v.1)*

I remember years ago starting work in the Bank and being placed in the back office out of the way from the public to begin with. One of my jobs was to answer the telephone and make calls to remind people of meetings with the manager. The first time I picked up the phone and dialled the person's number nothing happened. I placed the receiver down, picked it up and dialled again. Still nothing. I was getting frustrated. First day on the job and I couldn't even use the phone. Eventually in my helplessness I asked the typist how to work the phone...she simply said dial 9 for an outside line.

I wonder if you've ever been in church and got frustrated like that. You're singing. You're praying along with the pastor and following the Bible passages as they are read. But nothing's happening inside. You want to worship the Lord, but you're just going through the motions. What can you do?

Can I suggest instead of dialing 9 you turn to Psalm 9. As you read it through follow the prompts that David gives as he wrote this Psalm. He begins by saying that he praises God with all his heart. Open up your heart to Jesus, don't keep it closed. Let praise just come out. He says I will tell of all your wonders. Think back on the past few days. What has God done in your life? Thank God for all the blessings you have received during that time. He says be glad and rejoice so let's be joyful. Let's not be inhibited by anything or anyone else, let's simply be glad in God for all He has done for us. David then speaks in verses 3-5 about God defending him from his enemies. Thank God for his protection. Verse 9 he speaks of God being his refuge – turn to God so he can be your refuge and strength in times of trouble. Verse 11 he reminds us to speak of all that God has done for us – shout it out in praise. And then in verse 13 and 14 receive His mercy and rejoice in His salvation. There is so much to praise God for if we would but take time to consider His many blessings.

Pray: thanking God for his many blessings.

Reflect: use Psalm 9 to lead you into praise and prayer today.

Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. (v.12)

The United Nations recently estimated that 25,000 people a day die of hunger around the world. Every year, six million children under the age of five suffer from hunger. There are about 840 million malnourished people globally, with 95 percent of them in developing nations. While the number of such people has decreased in Asia, it has actually increased in Africa. In addition, as many as two billion people are said to be undernourished - that is, they are technically getting enough to eat, but their diets lack key nutrients.

The hungry are often victims of war, corruption, or greed. When we hear about the poor and the powerless, we should be moved to prayer, as the psalmist was in today's reading. He cries out to God and asks '*do not forget the helpless.*'

In this prayer, the oppressors are described as arrogant, powerful, wicked, self-confident, and self-centred. They hunt, trap, lie, threaten, ambush, plot against, and crush those who stand in their way or have something they want. Their attitude toward God is even worse. They pay no attention to Him or His laws, and when they do they slander His name, claiming that He either doesn't see or won't do anything (v.11, 13). Their sinful appetites are the centre of their lives (v.3).

Although such observations might make it feel as though God is far away (v.1), David prayed for Him to teach the oppressors a severe lesson and break their power. He believed that God does see and will hold the wicked accountable. After all, He is the defender of the fatherless (v.14). He hears and encourages the afflicted and steps up to defend the victim - there's a special place for them in His heart (Isaiah 61:1). Why? Justice must be done, and people must understand their finite place in the order of things (v.18).

Pray: for the poor and helpless today.

Reflect: how can I help the helpless? What can I do so that I do not forget them?

For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice. (v.7)

King James I of England, the monarch whose name is linked to the King James Version of the Bible, once tried his hand at being a judge. But after hearing both sides in one case, James was so perplexed that he gave up his “career” in despair. “I could get on very well hearing one side only,” he said. “But when both sides have been heard, by my soul, I know not which is right.”

King James is not alone in his perplexity. We often don’t know who’s right and who’s wrong, or which side in a dispute is telling the truth. Just ask any parent quizzing two children who take turns insisting, “Did too!”...“Did not!” If you’re like me, you very quickly give up and send them both to their mum or to their bed!

There are two very good reasons that human judgment is often faulty. We are not absolutely holy or just, and we lack perfect knowledge in any situation. But heaven’s Judge possesses both of these qualifications. From His heavenly throne, God ‘*observes the sons of men*’ (v.4). He examines hearts and discerns motives and judges accordingly. According to verse 5, God examines the righteous. Since He is righteous and loves justice, those who are upright before Him will see His face (v. 7). But because nothing escapes the sight of heaven’s Judge, the wicked will not escape His justice (v.5-6).

David has been wondering what to do. Some suggest he should flee on account of the wicked but that doesn’t seem right to him. As he looks at the trouble around, he could so easily fear and run. But in those latter verses he looks up and suddenly everything fits into place. He sees God on his throne and he knows God will know what to do. He trusts God’s righteousness and justice. The next time we feel like fleeing because we do not know what to do, let’s look upwards and remember the Lord is still on the throne.

Pray: thanking God that he is still on the throne.

Reflect: how reassuring is it to know God is still on the throne?

Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. (v.1)

The summer of 2003 set a record for tornadoes. In the first ten days of May, over 400 tornadoes were reported in the midwestern and southern United States. President Bush issued disaster declarations for Oklahoma, Tennessee, Kansas, and Missouri. In Oklahoma alone, more than 130 people were injured, more than 300 homes and businesses were destroyed, and storm-caused damage hit \$100 million. “We just don’t have a down day,” said a meteorologist at the time. “It just doesn’t seem to stop.”

That’s what David must have felt like in Psalm 12. All around him, evil seemed to be winning the day. It appeared as though the godly had vanished from society. That wasn’t literally true, of course, but it reflects the psalmist’s very human fear and depression at that moment. There are times in our life when we look around and think the same. People lie, cheat, and are untrustworthy. People are violent and nasty. People have no respect for others and simply look out for number 1. We see wars and rumours of wars. We see evil dictators in power and the poor and helpless struggling. And we think “when will it ever stop!”

“Help, Lord,” sounds like a feeble cry under the circumstances! But David was looking in the right direction (v.1). God had heard his cries before and he knew God could and would help again. And as he cries out God comes with words of promise *‘I will arise...I will protect.’* (v.5) David is reassured.

When down days come and you are tempted to think “When will it ever stop?” look to God and cry out to him for help. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. And as we see today in Psalm 12 he still promises to arise and protect us. Keep looking to him and trusting in him.

Pray: thanking God for his protection.

Reflect: rather than giving in, how can I assure others that the good and godly are still around?