

TARA-LEIGH COBBLE

CREATOR AND HOST OF *THE BIBLE RECAP* PODCAST

THE
BIBLE
RECAP

A ONE-YEAR GUIDE

TO READING AND UNDERSTANDING

THE ENTIRE BIBLE

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TARA-LEIGH COBBLE



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This book is dedicated to every person who has tried and failed countless times to read the Bible, who has almost given up on understanding God and His Word, and who is here, trying one more time—with equal parts hope, fear, and skepticism—to draw near to the God of the universe.

May you come to know and love Him more and to understand that despite all your failures, He has never given up on pursuing you with love to this very page.

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

—Philippians 1:6

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A Letter from Tara-Leigh Cobble

For years I struggled with Bible reading even though I was in full-time ministry. Not only was Scripture challenging to understand, but the challenge also left me with a lack of desire. Every day I felt defeated before I even started, and many days I didn't start at all. Eventually, I learned I was making three primary mistakes that held me back from understanding and loving Scripture.

Mistake #1

My first major mistake was looking for myself. I viewed the Bible as a big to-do list, and if I checked all the right boxes, God would respond by fulfilling all my desires. I approached the Bible primarily to get my application points, feel like a good, moral person, and move on. Reading Scripture as a story about God—not me—felt unnatural at first, so I started asking myself a few questions to narrow my focus:

- What does God say or do in this passage?
- What does this reveal about what God loves?
- What does this reveal about what God hates?
- What does this reveal about what motivates God to do what He does?
- In all of that, what attributes of God are displayed?

The questions we ask of the Bible impact the wisdom we glean from it. Reading the Bible is not a means to self-help or an attempt to earn God's favor. It's an opportunity to behold the beauty of God and be drawn in by Him.

Mistake #2

My second major mistake stemmed from mistake #1. Since I was only looking for the steps I needed to take to appease God and have a perfect, joy-filled

life, I hovered over the same passages of Scripture and disregarded the rest. There were so many old laws we no longer follow and passages about people with names I couldn't pronounce—those parts confused or bored me. But my standard approach had me dropping down in the middle of a movie and staying for five minutes, with no real idea of the story line or who the characters were, and hoping to understand it. Not only is it impossible to understand something when you handle it that way, but it's also impossible to love it.

To correct this mistake, I decided to read through Scripture chronologically, not front to back. I wanted to see the overall story line or metanarrative. I began each book by identifying who wrote it, when they wrote it, whom they wrote it to, and what style they wrote it in. The Bible has sixty-six individual books that together tell one story, but they're from a wide variety of vantage points and styles—narrative history, poetry, prophecy—and much to my initial dismay, the bulk of it is not promises or action points. Most of it serves to tell me a story about God and His unshakeable love for His people.

Reading the story in order and paying attention to the context helped me make sense of verses that appear to contradict each other. I also learned how to sift through the confusing passages to find God's character.

Mistake #3

My first two mistakes worked together to create my other major mistake: drawing conclusions about God before I'd read the whole Bible. Since I had primarily read Scripture for selfish reasons, I was impatient and didn't take time to read it all. That was a dangerous approach because I didn't have all the information. I was tempted to build a theology around one verse without knowing what other verses had to say. I was tempted to read every verse as a command, even if the verse was just describing what was happening. I wanted quick answers, and I didn't take the time to consider context or evaluate the verses against the rest of Scripture to see the fullness of God's revealed counsel.

The Bible is the story of God pursuing His people despite their sin. Bit by bit, we see Him giving them more information about who He is and who He is making them into. But it isn't all revealed at once, because they can't handle it all at once. He's patient with them, giving them baby steps. For instance, it's easy to read through parts of the Old Testament and conclude that God is angry and wants to kill anyone who disobeys Him. But when we zoom out and read the whole story, we see a through line of grace and mercy and rescue.

It required patience to hold my questions and conclusions with an open

hand and continue to ask God to guide me in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding as I read each day. Some of the questions I had in Leviticus weren't answered until Hebrews. But all good relationships require patience, and they develop over time. It's worth holding some things with an open hand and waiting until God reveals more of Himself.

I spent years trying to build my life around a book I hadn't read about a God I didn't know. But now that I really know Him, I want to help others know Him better too!

By the way, I'm not an academic. I didn't go to seminary, and I'll only occasionally mention what the original Hebrew might mean, and even then, chances are I don't know how to pronounce it. I've learned much of what I know by studying and listening to a variety of scholars, so any wisdom you find in this book certainly didn't originate with me, but if you do happen to spot an error, it's likely mine.

Overall, my approach in this book will be less like a scholarly Bible commentary and more like an overview and a highlight reel rolled into one. What that means is, I'm less inclined to tell you about archaeological details and more inclined to point to the character of God as revealed in that day's reading. I want to help you learn how to find and see and know God and His character more than anything else. I don't care if you never know what year the temple was built and destroyed and rebuilt and redestroyed—those are great details to be aware of, but they will never serve you like the personal knowledge of God. They will never bring you joy or sustain you in trials. They will never draw you in to spend more time with God out of sheer joy and delight.

Here's what I'm imagining for you this year: Picture yourself being drawn to God and His character instead of feeling alienated by the God of the Old Testament. Imagine understanding the motives behind His actions instead of feeling confused or even frustrated by what He does. Picture yourself actually hearing from God in His Word directly and feeling closer to and more intimate with Him than you ever have before—just because you've committed to spending the first 1 percent of your day with Him. If all you gain from this is one new insight about God, that insight could change the rest of your life and your relationship with Him. And no matter how your circumstances change, I believe your joy will grow deeper and richer, because you will be spending time with Him—and He's where the joy is!

For the gospel,

Tara-Leigh

How to Use This Book

This book is arranged according to a one-year chronological plan, but you don't have to buy a chronological Bible. In fact, I encourage you not to because it's probably laid out differently than the plan we are doing. Each day's reading is listed at the top of each day in the book. Unlike a front-to-back plan (canonical), or plans that have you read from both the Old and New Testaments each day, the chronological plan takes you through the story of Scripture as it happened. Since Bibles aren't laid out in order, this plan will occasionally have you flipping back and forth a bit. You can go to thebiblerecap.com/start for a free printable calendar to chart your progress.

When it comes to Bible translations, it seems like everyone has a favorite among the many options. Some people prefer readability while others prefer precision. The ESV (English Standard Version) is what we'll be quoting primarily, and it has a great mix of both. While it's not necessarily the most readable translation, I've chosen it instead of other translations that are slightly easier to read because it is a "word-for-word" translation. The options that are slightly easier to read—like the New Living Translation or the New International Version—are often "phrase-for-phrase" translations. And some versions, like *The Message*, for instance, are best read as commentaries because they're more of a retelling than a translation.

Each day, you'll read the assigned chapters in the Bible. When something stands out at you as meaningful or encouraging, take note of it in your journal. When you're confused about something you read, write a question about it in your journal so you can research it later.

After you finish reading the day's Bible chapters, come back to this book to get a summary and highlight reel along with some explanations of the more confusing parts of the text. The D-Group team has also built a list of free resources for you on our website that correspond to the days of this

plan: thebiblerecap.com/links. We'll include a footnote in the days that have resources so you'll know when to look for those.

Each day in this book ends with a section called Today's God Shot, which points to one place where God's attributes are on display in that day's reading. It's called a God Shot because it's a snapshot of God's character. I encourage you to look for your own God Shot each day too. He's on every page of Scripture, so keep your eyes peeled for things that reveal Him to you—what He says and does, what He loves and hates, and what motivates Him to do what He does.

As we move through these books, the tone and feel will change regularly. That's because some of these books are written in a wide range of literary genres, such as narrative history, poetry and wisdom literature, prophecy, and letter. They were written over several hundred years by dozens of different writers, but they all have a cohesive theme in the metanarrative. As you begin each new book, take time to research who wrote each book, to whom they wrote it, when they wrote it, and the literary style in which it was written. Those details may seem unimportant, but they set the scene for reading it as it was meant to be read, which is the only way to truly understand it—and that's our goal! Let's get started!

THE
RECAPS
AND
CHRONOLOGICAL
READING PLAN

GENESIS 1–3

Genesis is a book of the law; it's not a science book or a history book, though it does tell us a lot about history. While Scripture is 100 percent true, it isn't always 100 percent literal. It's important to hold our scientific conclusions or opinions with an open hand. It's even important to hold our questions with an open hand, because this book isn't necessarily here to answer them; it's here to reveal GOD. Today's reading is a good example. Some people believe the days of creation were prolonged periods of time lasting tens of thousands of years. This is called the day-age theory, and it's held by many old earth creationists. Most young earth creationists believe God created the earth in six literal days. What's clear in Scripture is that God is the Creator; none of this was an accident.

In 1:26, God refers to Himself in the plural form: "Let us make man in our image." All three persons of the Trinity are present and active at creation: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. The Father gives the creation commands, the Son does the manual labor of creation (John 1:3), and the Spirit hovers over creation, sustaining and approving of it. They work in tandem toward the same goal. It's important to note that Jesus doesn't just show up on the scene when He's born in a manger in the New Testament. Before God the Son took on the name Jesus, He resided in heaven with the Father. He's been here all along. In fact, we'll see Him a lot in the Old Testament. Be on the lookout for Him!

In 2:4, the word *LORD* is in all caps; this is different from when we see the word spelled *Lord* or *lord*. All lowercase *lord* can refer to anyone who is in charge, like your *landlord*. When it's capitalized as *Lord*, it means "Adonai," the Hebrew word for *Master*, which is a proper name of God, not just a general term. When you see all-caps *LORD*, it represents an ancient Hebrew spelling of YHWH. It has no vowels, so when we try to pronounce it, it sounds like

For more information on today's reading, see thebiblerecap.com/links.

“Yahweh” or “Jehovah.” This is God’s personal name. By telling us His name, He’s showing us *right out of the gate* that He wants to be personal with His creation. He’s not setting Himself apart as one not to be known or spoken to. He tells mankind His name! Despite that, it doesn’t bring Him to our level. YHWH is still Lord (Master), after all.

Later, we see the fall of mankind in the sin of Adam and Eve. Because God is sovereign and isn’t confined to time, nothing surprises Him. Their sin doesn’t thwart His plan—His plan accounted for their sin. In 2:17 He tells them, “*In the day that you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you shall surely die.*” He didn’t say *if*; He said *when*; it implies certainty. The rest of Scripture supports this, letting us know that God wasn’t relegated to plan B after they ate the fruit; it was always plan A.

When Eve questions God’s goodness, she buys the lie that He’s holding out on her and decides she’d make a better god. That’s when the world was first fractured by sin, and it’s still fracturing. Not only do we still believe and act on the same lies, but the curses pronounced over Adam and Eve still resonate in our world today. Part of Eve’s curse is that her desire will be to control and rule over Adam. Part of Adam’s curse is that what he’s in charge of cultivating will work against him. We see this tension alive today: In general, women tend toward control and men tend toward passivity.

TODAY’S GOD SHOT

God is our Creator and the Lord over everything, but despite His lordship and His perfection, He’s merciful toward the sinners He’s in relationship with. He said they’d die if they ate of the fruit, but He lets them live! He doesn’t strike them down on the spot. Any time we see God hedge on His promises, it’s always on the side of mercy. He doesn’t break promises; He *exceeds* them. We see it again in 3:9–10, when they’re hiding from Him and lying to Him. Before they even repent, He pursues them out of His great love. At the height of their sin, He continues to show them both mercy and discipline. It’s such a gift to them and to us that He doesn’t give up on pursuing us, because He’s where the joy is!

GENESIS 4–7

Yesterday, when God finished creating, He declared it *very good*, but that's different from being perfect and complete. Imperfect man can't live up to God's standard of perfection, and that's evident in Cain's murder of Abel. This happened about 2,500 years before God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, but Cain still knew murder was wrong; he even feared other people killing him in response to it (4:14).

People often wonder whom Cain married. Adam and Eve had lots of children after Cain and Abel, so it's likely he married one of his sisters or nieces. The scientific reason incest isn't problematic here is that there's no genetic load yet. God doesn't ban incest until much later, and up until that point it serves as a tool to populate the earth. This doesn't mean God changed; it shows He has an orderly plan. Only He can know the point when genetic mutations will be a problem, so only He will know when incest has served its purpose and has crossed into dangerous territory.

The phrase *sons of God* (6:4) is one way Scripture refers to angels. The prevailing view of ancient Jews was that *sons of God* referred to fallen angels who, in this text, took human wives and had kids with them, creating a crossbreed of angels and humans known as Nephilim. Scripture says angels in heaven don't procreate, but that could be because (a) the angels in heaven are the elect angels who live under God's rule and don't rebel against Him, and/or (b) all angels referred to in Scripture are male, so they can't procreate among themselves. But if they procreated with human females, then theoretically this kind of crossbreeding would be possible. If that's the case, there's a strong chance the presence of the Nephilim contributes to the increasing wickedness on the earth.

Why would fallen angels do this? Here's a theory: The angels who lived in heaven with God knew His plan from before creation was to send God

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the Son to earth as a human named Jesus to redeem and restore everything; but then they rebelled against God and His kingdom, so they tried to thwart and counterfeit His plan to deceive His people. It's possible the enemy is trying to corrupt the human bloodline to prevent the birth of the Messiah by counterfeiting the supernatural-natural union. We don't have all the information here, so we hold this with an open hand. But if this *did* happen the way the ancient Jews understood it, it makes sense that God would wipe out the crossbreed population via the flood. And in this scenario, the only family whose bloodline hasn't been infiltrated by fallen angels is Noah's, so God preserves them. Regardless of what happened, God sets apart this family, these particular descendants of Adam, as the family He is in relationship with.

The ark God has Noah build is one-and-a-half football fields long, the width of a six-lane interstate, and as tall as a four-story building. Noah probably takes the tiniest of each kind of animal, and there are more breeds of animals now, but God certainly knows the ark is the perfect size to hold whatever He needs it to hold. It probably doesn't smell great, though.

Then God mentions the word *covenant* for the first time. He singles out Noah as the start of this covenant; He's continuing to work through this one family of people. Before the flood comes, He tells Noah this is only the beginning of their relationship—he's not going to die in the waters. If the timeline is spot-on, the flood happened 1,656 years after Adam was created.

TODAY'S GOD SHOT

God's sovereignty is on display here. Nothing can thwart His will. Nothing can keep Him from His plan to rescue the people He entered into relationship with. The enemy's attempts to thwart the bloodline of Christ don't prevail. God is even sovereign over weather and creation. He's at work in all things to restore fallen humanity in relationship with Himself. What incredible news—He's where the joy is!

GENESIS 8–11

In the aftermath of the flood, everything on earth has been destroyed except what's on the ark. Postflood, God establishes the covenant with Noah that He promised preflood. He engages with this family and promises to be faithful to them, despite how every other aspect of their world has shifted dramatically. Everyone they know is dead. The world is muddy and gross. They live in a new location. Everything has changed. Even their life-span will change. God gave them a heads-up in 6:3 not to expect lengthy life-spans anymore. The environment has changed dramatically, and they're a couple of millennia removed from the genetic perfection of Adam and Eve, so it makes sense that they'd drop to a general range of 120 years. Others say this timeline refers to the years between God's warning about the flood and the time of its fulfillment.

Despite the changes, God promises something that will *not* change. In His covenant, He promises never again to destroy the earth with a flood. Later in Scripture (2 Peter 3), He says He'll someday destroy the earth with fire but not with a flood. And in the same way that the earth existed after it was destroyed by water, it will still exist after it's destroyed with fire. In fact, in the eternal kingdom, all of those who have been adopted into God's family will reign with Christ on the re-created earth (Revelation 5).

This is interesting, especially as it pertains to the ultimate limits of damage to the earth and climate. God, who is sovereign over it all, promises there's a *limit* to that damage. There'll be seasons and harvests as long as the earth remains (8:22). However, His promise to sustain the earth doesn't negate His call to us to be good stewards of His gift of creation.

God calls Noah to join in on His plans. Noah plays an important role; there are only eight people on earth, and God will be sending the Messiah in about two thousand years. These eight people have a role to play in accomplishing His purposes (9:1); He tells them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth. They partially obey, but they hedge on the "fill the earth" part. They multiply, but they prefer to stay put (11:4), pridefully rejecting His command. But God,

being sovereign, works out His plan despite their resistance. He disperses them all over the face of the earth by dividing their languages. God always accomplishes His plans; we can't thwart His will, despite our best sinful efforts. This is a comfort, not a threat; we can't mess up His plan!

There are a lot of theories about 9:18–27. The general conclusion is that Ham does something blatantly contrary to God's orders. This is long before the Ten Commandments, but there's still an understanding of what's right and wrong; it just hasn't been written out yet. As a result of what Ham does, Noah curses him and his descendants. One cursed line of descendants we'll see throughout the Bible are the Canaanites. They are enemies of God's people, but God does some really beautiful things by redeeming people outside of His clan, like Rahab the prostitute, who was a Canaanite but who is also listed in the lineage of Jesus. This shows us how God acts toward all of us whom He redeems. We are *all* enemies of God by birth. We are only children of God by adoption.

TODAY'S GOD SHOT

God did a lot of blessing in the first few chapters. It's true that God is love, but it's also an incomplete summary of His character. He doesn't just dole out blessing. He's much more complex than that. He's a God who blesses *and* curses. And even still, He's a God who blesses His enemies. That's where we all started; for those of us who have been adopted into His family, He pursued us as His enemies and clothed us in the righteousness of Christ. This is reminiscent of when He pursued Adam and Eve, who were running from Him, and chased them down—not to punish them but to clothe them. He did that with us too. It's evident every day on these pages that He's where the joy is!

JOB 1–5

Today’s reading lands us about four hundred years postflood, and we meet a man named Job. Initially, he sounds a lot like Noah; he’s blameless and upright and fears God. In Noah’s story, things got really dark, then there was some relief at the end, and we’ll see the same pattern play out in Job’s story.

After what we covered in Day 2, you may have noticed that 1:6 referred to angels as the “sons of God,” including Satan, who, in his created form, is an angel. God initiates a conversation about Job with Satan. The word *satan* means “adversary, one who resists, accuser.” Some scholars believe it’s not necessarily a proper name that refers to one particular being, but that it’s a general term referring to God’s adversary, who, in this instance, is a fallen angel opposing God’s reign.

Later in Scripture, there are references to a fallen angel named Lucifer, but there’s reason to believe that the word *satan* doesn’t always refer to Lucifer. There are many fallen angels who are God’s adversaries. In fact, a lot of people believe Revelation 12 indicates that one-third of all the angels God created rebelled against Him and were cast from heaven, so there are a lot of satans.

After God initiates the conversation about Job with one of His enemies, the enemy concocts a plan to test Job, and God allows it. There’s something noteworthy here: God doesn’t create the plan for testing Job, but God allows it. He isn’t the active agent in the evil perpetrated by Satan, but He’s still sovereign over it. And in His mercy, He *limits* it. Satan is on a leash. He isn’t allowed to take Job’s life.

Satan attacks Job in a variety of ways. Job’s losses come twice as acts of men (Sabeans and Chaldeans) and twice as acts of nature (fire from heaven and wind). God grants Satan the opportunity to influence both of those things: the acts of man and the acts of nature. For God to allow Satan to influence those things means that God Himself is the one who has control

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over those things, because you can't give someone influence over something that isn't in your domain.

Job's response is humble here. "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:22). He acknowledges that everything comes from God's hand, and he receives it (2:10). He's handling his grief pretty well until three of his friends show up on the scene. They come to show him sympathy and comfort him, and they do a great job of that during the seven days when they sit in silence with him. The problem is when they start to speak. Maybe you've had friends like that. Or maybe you've *been* a friend like that.

There are some good lessons for us here in how to comfort someone who has experienced trauma or loss. Sitting with them in silence is a safe bet. But Job's friends start giving him bad counsel. We heard from the first one today, Eliphaz. He claims to have a word from God about what Job has done wrong (4:12–16). He insinuates that Job has brought this trouble on himself, but we know from the story that Eliphaz is wrong here. Tomorrow we'll see how Job responds to his opinionated friend.

TODAY'S GOD SHOT

God's sovereignty over evil should serve as a great comfort to His kids. God limits the actions of the enemy. And every action the enemy takes against Job serves God's greater purposes as we see them unfold in the rest of Job's story. This story gets dark, but it has a happy ending. Keep looking for God in the dark spots of this story, because He's where the joy is!

JOB 6–9

After losing everything, Job has to continue listening to and responding to bad advice from his three friends. In response to Eliphaz, Job defends himself. He's despairing, but he doesn't curse God. He knows this pain isn't the result of sinful actions. A couple of the questions counselors train you to ask yourself in relational difficulty are, "Where is my sin in this situation?" and "What can I take ownership of?" Those are important questions to ask, especially because we're often blind to our own sin. But there are times when life is just hard, or when you've been sinned against, and your troubles aren't the result of something you contributed. For instance, we'd never tell someone who had been raped or physically abused to think about what they did to deserve or cause that. It's not always true that our circumstances are the result of our choices; sometimes they're the result of our fallen world.

Much like Eliphaz, Bildad gives bad counsel. He tells Job he needs to repent. But chapter 1 told us that Job was blameless and upright and that these problems occurred *because of* his uprightness, not as the result of sin. Job's friends are attacking him in the midst of his grief, but they really think they're on the right track. They think they're helping him and that if they can just convince him to repent, all his troubles will subside. Stay tuned to see how that plays out.

Job replies to Bildad with a lot of truth about God. Job says he'll appeal for mercy to his accuser (9:15). Who is his accuser? While this could be a reference to God, it could also refer to Satan, whose name means "the accuser, the adversary." However, one of the other ways the Hebrew can be translated is "I must appeal for mercy to my judge." If that's what he's saying, then it seems he's referring to God.

Regardless of whether Job is referring to his accuser, Satan, or his judge, God, this is a good place to point out something about the word *mercy*. We often use the words *mercy* and *grace* interchangeably, but they actually mean very different things. They're like a pair of opposites that work together.

Mercy is when you don't get what you deserve. For fallen humanity, we all deserve hell. We've sinned against a holy God and tried to elevate ourselves to His rank. We deserve nothing but punishment. The fact that we're breathing right now is God's mercy toward us. Just like He showed mercy toward Adam and Eve when they sinned in the garden, He hasn't given us the immediate death we deserve for our rebellion.

On the other hand, grace is when you *get* what you *don't* deserve. It's everything over and above not being annihilated. It's the way food tastes delicious, it's the way music brings us joy, and mostly, it's the way we get to enter into a relationship with God despite our wickedness.

Job has done nothing wrong in this situation, but he's still a sinful, fallen human like the rest of us. He knows he deserves annihilation, but he also knows God might still show him mercy, because he knows God's character.

TODAY'S GOD SHOT

God's power is on display in Job's story. Job waxes about His power for several verses. God commands the sun, He does great things, He is wise in heart and mighty in strength. But this enormous God also steps down to be intimate with mankind, like Job says in 7:17, "What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him?" God created and is in charge of everything, but His heart isn't set on the mountains or on Orion or the Pleiades; it's set on humanity. What a shocking gift! He's where the joy is!

JOB 10–13

We've already heard from Eliphaz and Bildad, who gave their reasons for Job's life falling apart. Today we meet Job's third friend, Zophar. The hard part about listening to these guys and discerning what's applicable is that sometimes they do say true things; it's not all wrong. For example, when Zophar is talking about God, he says, "God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves" (11:6). This is true of *all* of us. We all deserve death, but He's merciful; He lets us live. We even get to live on His earth and breathe His air and eat His food—that's so much more than we deserve. That's His *grace*.

Zophar says a lot of things that are true about God. It's when he starts drawing conclusions about Job that things take a left turn. At this point, Job seems to be exhausted by the attacks from all three friends, and he starts getting sarcastic in his responses to them. He says, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you" (12:2). Maybe he's been hoping that at least one of his friends will understand, but none of them gets it. They've all joined forces against him.

He offers some words of wisdom for those of us who want to comfort grieving friends. He says, "In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune; it is ready for those whose feet slip" (12:5). He's pointing out that those who aren't struggling don't understand those who are; and in fact, they have contempt for them, not compassion. Job is beginning to sense their contempt for him. Perhaps some of it is rooted in jealousy. It sounds crazy to be jealous of Job at this point, but he's a man who had everything and who was honorable. This period following the recent disasters might be the first time his friends have felt superior to him, and they jump at the chance to try to point out his sins.

In 12:9, Job acknowledges that God is the author of everything, even when He isn't the active agent in what's happening. God didn't commit these actions

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against Job, but if God could have stopped it and He didn't, doesn't it still kind of terminate on Him? This is a mysterious aspect of God's character; He's not the agent of evil, but it's a necessary part of the story He's writing. We'll talk more about this as we move through Scripture, so don't get hung up on it. In the meantime, resist the urge to reach conclusions about God based on what you think humans deserve—unless you're primarily recalling that we deserve nothing but hell and death. That kind of entitlement is a dangerous trap. Most, if not all, of our frustrations about God's actions are rooted in the lie that we deserve something.

The word *deserve* is saturated with the poison of entitlement. Companies use it in advertising to appeal to and feed our self-centeredness. Advertisers know how gullible we are when it comes to our comfort and pleasure. Because of God's mercy and grace, what His children are promised is that we *don't* get what we deserve—and that's a good thing.

TODAY'S GOD SHOT

“Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (13:15). Job knows the only place his hope is found. After all he's been through, even as a righteous man who is being wrongly called to account by his friends, he knows that the mercy of God is his only salvation. If you're in a dark place, dig deep into the story of Job. He gets it. Not only is God our hope in the darkest night, but ultimately, He's where the joy is!

JOB 14–16

Bad friend number one is back with his busted theology today. But before Eliphaz starts talking, Job has some good things to say. He says man’s “days are determined.” You know the phrase “your days are numbered”? If you’ve ever heard someone say that in conversation, they were probably using it as a threat: “Your days are numbered, buddy.” But in the grand scheme of things, that’s no threat; it’s a promise and a comfort! Job said to God, “You have appointed [man’s] limits that he cannot pass.” God is sovereign over our life-span! Each day is appointed, and our lives will last the exact amount of time He has determined—no more, no less.

In the second half of chapter 14, Job grows melancholy while talking about his future, which makes sense given all he’s been through. It’s hard not to want to rush him to healing; it’s hard to sit with him in his pain.

In chapter 15, Eliphaz speaks again. He’s falsely accusing Job, misunderstanding his heart and his motives. He thinks Job’s grief is a sign that he doesn’t trust God. But those two things aren’t mutually exclusive. After all, Jesus grieved and mourned, and He *is* God. It’s hard to feel alone in your pain, but even harder to feel unknown in your pain.

In the ESV, chapter 16 is titled “Job Replies: Miserable Comforters Are You.” Job shoots straight. He calls them out for being terrible friends. In 16:3, he even begs them to be silent and to stop advising him. “Shall windy words have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer?” We’d be wise to think carefully about when and how we advise others. God calls us to mourn with those who mourn, not to advise those who mourn—and certainly not to condemn them for their mourning.

Job has been acknowledging God’s hand in all this. He recognizes that God plays a role in what’s happening to him, albeit a passive one. But in 16:7, he begins to attribute the harm to God and to doubt His goodness. He believes God hates him. He blames God for all the things Satan did.

If you're in a dark place, this book is probably serving as a comfort to you. But if you're *not* in a dark place, be patient with Job. Don't engage with Job's story the same way his friends did; they wanted him to repent or change so they could get on with things. Suffering always lasts longer than we want it to. But sitting in someone else's suffering with them teaches us patience and compassion. And those are certainly the kinds of things we want others to display toward us when we're struggling. Let this book help you strengthen your patience and compassion muscles.

TODAY'S GOD SHOT

God—not the enemy—is sovereign over our life-span. This should serve as a great comfort, because God is trustworthy! Job recognizes that God is sovereign over his life and his family members' deaths (14:5). We've seen God's sovereignty over many things this week, and it's fitting that we notice all these separate areas, because *sovereign* really means that God is the supreme authority over all things, that everything is under His control. Notice if and when it feels offensive to you that He's in charge. Where do you want to be the god of your own life? Where do you feel like He's infringing on your rights with His sovereignty? Keep looking for Him in these pages, because He's where the joy is!

JOB 17–20

Today Job tells his friends, “My spirit is broken.” Have you ever been there? Then Bildad, friend number two, speaks again; he’s the one who told Job he needed to repent. Today he’s doubling down with reminders that God punishes the wicked. This is a catch-22; it not only means Job’s suffering was punishment for his wickedness, but that if he doesn’t change his ways, more punishment is coming for him!

Job points to God’s role *and* rescue in his troubles. He says, “He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths” (19:8), and yet he also says, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth” (19:25). This isn’t just a hopeful statement—it’s actually prophetic. It points not only to the first coming of Christ, which has already happened, but also to the second coming of Christ, which is yet to come. Even in his darkest moments, Job points out eternal truths about God.

Then Zophar, friend number three, speaks again. He claims a spirit spoke to him, and he believes it was a word from God. Eliphaz claimed the same thing when he first spoke (4:12–16). Zophar and Eliphaz presumably do this to add more weight to their words and force Job to listen and comply. But here’s what’s interesting: This “spirit” (or spirits) referenced in chapter 4 and chapter 20 never identifies itself. Scripture doesn’t tell us who it is. Hold on to that thought as we continue reading, because you may reach some conclusions about who this spirit was.

The last part of Zophar’s speech today reinforces the idea that he may be jealous of Job, because he accuses Job of being greedy and selfish. He says, “He has crushed and abandoned the poor; he has seized a house that he did not build. . . . He knew no contentment in his belly, he will not let anything in which he delights escape him” (20:19–20). But when we weigh Zophar’s words about Job against God’s words about Job, they don’t align. These passages with Job’s friends are examples of why we shouldn’t take Scripture out of context. If you were to pull some of their quotes out of this section, you’d

think Job was a terrible person. The statements are in Scripture, and Scripture is God's Word, but this passage is a personal quote within God's Word; it's God quoting someone else. We have to pay close attention to context, or we'll miss what's actually being communicated to us by God.

TODAY'S GOD SHOT

Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth." So much of God's character is evident in this verse. First, we see the nature of God's relationship with Job even on his worst days. Job doesn't just call God a Redeemer or *the* Redeemer, but *my* Redeemer. It's personal, intimate. Second, we see that God is a redeemer! *To redeem* means "to buy back." Job has hope that this isn't the end of his story, even if it's the end of his life. Job trusts God will redeem this somehow. Third, we see that God is alive: My Redeemer lives. So many of Job's loved ones passed away, but not God. He knows that God is still with him and will be forever: "At the last he will stand upon the earth." Storing up truth about God, like we're doing as we read, is one way to make sure our feet are on solid ground when the storms come, because He's where the joy is!