Compelled to Act
Special Focus Session
January 18, 2026

The Point: Let the fear and majesty of God compel you to look out for others.
Session Passage: Job 31:13-23

Job 31:13-15

Connection to the Point: Job acknowledged his responsibility to others because we are all created by God.

Setting. The book of Job begins with the phrase, "There was a man." Job was a real flesh and blood person who lived in history and experienced the events recorded in the book. Job is described as a man of "complete integrity," one "who feared God," and one who "turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). He was from the land of Uz (v. 1), a place whose exact location is unknown but commonly viewed as being in the land of Edom, just to the east of the promised land.

Job suffered, so much so that his name has become synonymous with suffering. He lost everything except his faith, and even that was severely tested. The overall theme of the book can be condensed into the question, "Will a man serve God for nothing?" This question could be underscored with several others such as "What kind of world do we live in?" "Why does God allow evil to happen?" and more importantly, "Why do we need a Savior?"

Context. In Job 31, Job was defending his righteousness before God and his peers. He was in the middle of a dialogue with three of his friends who had accused him of wrongdoing which, in their minds, resulted in his intense suffering. In this chapter, Job swore an oath of innocence, listing various sins which he claimed not to have committed. These include lust, deceit, adultery, injustice, and idolatry. He steadfastly emphasized his integrity and the righteousness of his life. He appealed to God as a witness to his innocence. Job very confidently asked for God's judgment knowing that he had lived according to the moral code of God. Job's statements reflect a deep belief in personal responsibility before God, the importance of living a life grounded in morality, and the expectation of God's divine justice for both righteousness and sin.

The case of my male or female servants (v. 13). This is the third example that Job gave concerning the way he treated others (see vv. 1-12). At the outset of the book, it was stated that Job had an estate and "a very large number of servants" (1:3). The Hebrew root of the term *servants* means "to work" and by implication "to serve," hence, servants or "slaves."

The accusation Job refuted here was that he had arbitrarily or indiscriminately dismissed cases or grievances brought against him by his servants. The phrase "dismissed the case" means to deny justice. That Job argued that he had not dismissed or rejected the cases of his servants shows that Job believed in treating others fairly. He did not ignore their grievances but instead held himself accountable to God's standard of justice, which applies to all relationships, including those involving power dynamics like master and servant. Going against the prevailing societal views of his day, Job recognized the inherent value of the people serving him, even though they were beneath him on society's social ladder. This reflects the biblical teaching that all people are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and thus deserve to be respected and valued as human beings, regardless of their status in society.

When God stands up to judge . . . calls me to account (v. 14). Job acknowledged that if he had mistreated his servants or ignored their grievances, he would have to answer to God. Job understood that God is the ultimate Judge of all human beings. He asked a rhetorical question, in which he recognized that in the face of God's judgment, there would be no excuse or defense for any unjust behavior on his part. This shows Job's deep awareness of his accountability before God. This verse reflects Job's fear of God, not in a sense of terror, but rather a deep reverence and recognition that God is holy, just, and will hold people accountable for their actions (Prov. 1:7).

That God formed or fashioned both Job and his servants "in the womb" (in the image of God) emphasizes that God is the Creator of all life and the sanctity of ever human life from the moment of conception (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6). All human life is precious because it comes from God's creative power and design. Psalm 139:13-14 is perhaps the best known of Scriptural passages concerning the value of human life. In it, the psalmist affirmed of God, "For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb . . . I have been remarkably and wondrously made."

Job 31:16-20

Connection to the Point: Job pointed to the way he treated and cared for those in dire need.

The wishes of the poor (v. 16). This phrase could also be translated "the desires of the poor." It refers to the needs, requests, or longings of those who are impoverished and vulnerable. In its most basic form, the phrase refers not simply to the things that the poor would desire but those which are the necessities of life—the essentials of food, clothing, shelter, and protection.

The Bible emphasizes that caring for the poor is a primary act of righteousness (Prov. 29:7). Job stated that he had not withheld any of these necessities from the poor. His words are a direct refutation of the accusations brought against him by Eliphaz, one of his friends (Job 22:6-9; 29:12-17). Scripture emphasized that the Israelites, and particularly the wealthy, had a duty to care for the less fortunate among them (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 14:21,31). Jesus stated that treating others as we desire to be treated was central to "the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12) and broadened the scope of those whom we are responsible to help by defining our neighbor as anyone in need of our aid (Luke 10:25-37).

Let the widow's eyes go blind (v. 16). This phrase refers to the idea of neglecting or disappointing a widow in her time of need. In ancient times, widows were often among the most vulnerable members of society, lacking both the financial and social support that a husband could provide. For a widow to have her eyes go blind symbolically meant she had placed her hope and trust in someone to help her, and that person had failed to deliver. It is the idea of a widow looking in vain for help. In this context, Job was the person that the widows had turned to for help with the expectation that he would have had compassion on them. Job's failure to aid the widows would have left them in difficult, dangerous, and possibly life-threatening situations.

The fatherless (v. 17). Job continued to use negative statements to reinforce the fact that he was innocent of the charges brought against him. The term "fatherless" speaks to a category of people in similar situations to those of widows. In the Bible, God commands His people to provide particular care and protection to groups such as widows, orphans, and resident aliens due to their vulnerable situations in society (Ex. 22:22-27; Deut. 10:18-19; Zech. 7:9-10; Acts 6:1-6; Jas. 1:27).

In Job's context, he emphasized that he had in fact shared his resources with those in need. The fatherless were among those most vulnerable in ancient times because they had lost their primary source of protection, provision, and inheritance. Job, by ensuring that the fatherless shared in his food, demonstrated his recognition of his responsibility to care for those who lacked these necessities and that he had in fact done so. In ancient times, orphans were often abused, neglected, and exploited because they had no father to provide protection and guidance. God is often described as "a father to the fatherless" (Ps. 68:5) thus showing His particular care for those with no earthly protection. Job's actions (Job 31:18) reflect the heart of God who commands His people to defend the cause of orphans and all those who are needy, neglected, and/or being exploited (Isa. 1:17).

Did not bless me (v. 20). The fact was that the needy had blessed Job for the actions he had taken to aid them in their distress. Those benefiting from Job's blessings were blessing him. As Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus, "In every way I've shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' " (Acts 20:35).

Job enabled the needy person to be warm by providing them "the fleece from my sheep." As noted at the beginning of the book, God had greatly blessed Job. Among his possessions were seven thousand sheep and goats (1:3). Job was certainly blessed with an abundance so he could spare a few fleeces for those in his community who were cold. He was also able to meet their other needs. The concept of blessing others is prevalent throughout the entire Bible. The idea is that those who have been the recipients of blessings should realize those blessings came from God. Furthermore, He is the owner of all things, and we are His stewards. Thus, when we see others in need we should willingly and cheerfully share what we have. Such blessings lead those who aid people in need to be blessed themselves (Prov. 11:25).

Job 31:21-23

Connection to the Point: Job pointed to his stance for justice on behalf of the orphan.

The city gate (v. 21). The city gate served as the center of business, the legal court where justice was administered, and as a central meeting place for social interaction. Hence, it was the place where important decisions and transactions were made (Gen. 23:10; Deut. 22:15; Ruth 4:1-12). Those being described as "at the city gate" could refer to those serving in some official capacity for the city (Deut. 25:7).

Cast my vote against (v. 21). Job now moved from denying he had neglected the needy to arguing he had not been openly hostile and aggressive against the poor and defenseless. "Cast my vote against" is a translation of a Hebrew idiom which means to condemn someone in a public or official setting, to act in the role of a judge to decide a case. The same Hebrew wording appears in Isaiah 19:16 and Zechariah 2:9, both of which describe God raising His hand against someone. The idiom indicates that Job had some sort of official position in the community, serving as some type of regional judge.

In the context of Job, there is no clear consensus as to the specific meaning of the gesture, but it generally indicates that the one who raised his hand was seeking to use his influence to persuade others to stand with him against another. This is further indicated by Job stating he had "support in the city gate." Two hypothetical situations are possible. It could mean that he was pressured into casting a wrong decision for fear of ridicule or negative consequences. Or, it could mean that Job realized he had influence in the court and had used that influence against the needy to gain a desired verdict. In either situation, to take such an action against the poor and needy would have been a gross dereliction of his duty. In contrast, Job maintained his innocence and insisted that he had not abused his power or acted to exploit the fatherless child.

My shoulder blade . . . my arm (v. 22). Job stated that the one who raises a hand against the innocent will find his arm and shoulder dislocated by God. As he had harmed the needy, so he himself would become one of the needy.

Disaster from God terrifies me (v. 23). Job further defended himself by stating that the prospect of experiencing "disaster from God" for having neglected, harmed, and/or ignored the poor and needy terrified him. The Hebrew term for "disaster" describes calamity, ruin, and destruction. "Terrifies" refers to trembling in great fear or dread of something.

Scripture calls on people to fear God (Prov. 3:7; 9:10; 10:27). Psalms and Proverbs state that "the fear of the LORD" is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 2:5; 9:10). "Fear" in this sense brings humility, a deep reverence, and submission to God. Those who fear the Lord have a proper understanding of who God is and live in relationship with Him according to that understanding. This yields a life in which the individual has a clear understanding of reality and which in turn (generally) leads to better decision-making and ultimately better life outcomes. Such fear in part flows from knowing that God is holy; He hates and punishes sin. In this context, Job feared God in the sense that he was contemplating what would happen to him if he were indeed guilty of neglecting, harming, or exploiting the poor. He realized that ultimately God would not allow such crimes to go unpunished.

Because of His majesty (v. 23). The second overlapping reason Job would not exploit the poor but rather care for them was because of God's majesty. The Hebrew term for "majesty" refers to exaltation in rank or character. Similar to fearing the Lord, human beings should live their lives in light of God's majesty, which refers to His perfection or holiness in all His attributes. God's majesty is demonstrated in His glory, power, actions, and judgments. In the face of God's majesty, the proper response is reverence and awe. Such a response recognizes that because God is perfect in all His attributes, His commands are good and just. The other side of this coin is that God will judge those who violate His commands through their actions of exploiting others, who deny them goodness and justice. This is especially true of people who neglect or harm those who are helpless and in dire need. The wise person, who is aware of and understands God's majesty, will pursue righteousness and shun evil (Prov. 3:7-8; 14:16; 21:21). Throughout this passage, Job was defending himself, saying that he was a godly individual and not guilty of the sins of which he was accused.

God does not change. What was true of God in Job's day is still true today. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors (Luke 10:25-37; see Lev. 19:18), meaning anyone who is in need of our help. He also calls us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us (Matt. 5:43-48). The God who gave His Son for us so that we could be forgiven of our sins, reconciled to Him, and adopted as His children calls us as His children to demonstrate the same type of sacrificial love toward others.