

I WILL HOPE IN HIM
PNW District Convention
June 7–8, 2022

Session 2: The dialogue

Task 1 Read the text below.¹ Circle what resonates with you.

By divorcing ourselves from texts of lament, ironically worship services become only for the well and not the sick, for the whole and not the broken (cf. Is 42:3, Mt 9:12-13). This is strikingly anti-evangelical. It not only misses opportunities for healing and compassion, but also refuses a hand of solidarity toward those experiencing divorce, unemployment, poverty, racism, or death. This disparity between God-given texts of lament and the ethos we have created in the church drives people away. Many cry out for an expression of the Christian faith that is honest, transparent, and real. Whether they know it or not, these people are longing for texts of lament.

Human emotions are like a river that flows out of the heart. This river needs a “bank” so that feelings take on depth and direction. Apart from Israel’s laments, we are left only with our culture’s shallow and despairing expressions of loss. . . . However, with the biblical texts of anguish, we have categories and expressions that allow our brokenness to come before God’s healing throne of grace.

Task 2 Read Job 3, the masterful poem with which the dialogue portion of the book begins. Then, read and comment on David Clines’s² description (below).

¹ R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, ConcCom (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 509–10.

² David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 104.

[What] makes this a poem of world stature is the exclusive concentration on feeling, without the importation of ideological questions. For a book that is so dominated by intellectual issues of theodicy, it is amazing to find here not one strictly theological sentence, not a single question about the meaning of his suffering, not a hint that it might be deserved, not the slightest nod to the doctrine of retribution. All that will come in its time, but here we are invited to view the man Job in the violence of his grief. Unless we encounter this man with these feelings, we have no right to listen in on the debates that follow; with this speech we cannot over-intellectualize the book, but must always be reading it as the drama of a human soul.

Task 3 Read Eliphaz's first speech (Job 4–5, which is paradigmatic in some ways for the friends' speeches to follow). Locate (at least) four of Eliphaz's thoughts that you agree with:

- 1) _____.
- 2) _____.
- 3) _____.
- 4) _____.
- (5) _____.

Task 4 The problem with what Eliphaz says is:

retributionism – the theology of Job's friends. Godliness is rewarded and ungodliness is punished. Therefore, rewards (happiness, health, wealth, etc.) are proof of a person's godliness. Suffering is proof of the opposite.

Task 5 The trouble with retributionism is:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Job's friends never give up their retributionist worldview, even though irrefutable evidence that it is false (Job!) is standing right in front of them. ***Explain why they are so adamant about this.***

Task 6 Read and comment on the text below (August O. Pieper, "The Book of Job in Its Significance for Preaching and the Care of Souls"):

A pious farmer planned a wedding celebration for his son. The pastor knew that there was going to be a big wedding dance. He urged the farmer to prevent the dance. The farmer would gladly have done so but was a little too weak to cope with the circumstances, so he permitted the dance to go on. After the wedding he with his relatives was engaged in moving a house. In the process, his foot got caught under a roller, and his leg was broken. The pastor's immediate comment was, "That's what he gets for permitting the dance! I warned him and he let it take place anyway; God has judged him." That was shameful judging. On what basis could he prove that this is what the man "got" for allowing the dance? In consequence of this judgment an uproar arose in the congregation which finally caused the pastor's removal—and rightly so. The pastor who judges his people instead of shepherding them has forfeited his office.