

Study Guide

Beholding God in Affliction: Job 35–36:21

Key Passage

Job 35:1–16; Job 36:1–21

Big Idea

Suffering exposes what we believe about God. Elihu teaches Job—and us—that righteousness does not place God in our debt, affliction is one of God’s tools for good, and our hearts must be guarded so that suffering draws us toward God rather than into pride or despair.

Setting the Context

As the book of Job draws near its climax, Elihu serves as a *bridge* between Job’s prolonged suffering and the moment when God Himself will speak. Job began well—trusting God and not sinning with his lips—but over time, suffering shifted his focus inward. Elihu’s final words prepare Job to behold God rightly before hearing directly from Him.

Outline & Teaching Notes

1. The Misreading of Righteousness (Job 35:1–8)

Key Question Being Corrected:

“What advantage have I? How am I better off than if I had sinned?”

Job’s reasoning drifts into a works-based mindset: *“I’ve done good—so I deserve good.”*

Elihu responds by lifting Job’s eyes upward.

- God is not affected, benefited, or hindered by human righteousness or sin.
- Our actions affect **people**, not God’s sovereignty.
- Righteousness does not obligate God to explain Himself or act on our timeline.

Key Truth:

A wrong view of righteousness leads to the wrong questions about God.

2. God Is Not Indebted to Us (Job 35:9–16)

Elihu exposes a critical flaw: people cry out in suffering but do not seek *God Himself*.

- Many cry out for relief, not repentance.

- God does not respond to empty, faithless cries.
- Job’s words have become “many words without knowledge.”

Key Truth:

God cares deeply for His people—but He does not owe explanations.

3. The Right View of Affliction (Job 36:1–15)

Elihu now reframes suffering itself.

What Affliction Does:

- Humble the proud
- Expose hidden sin
- Call sinners to repentance
- Display God’s power to sustain His people

“He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity.” (Job 36:15)

Affliction is not meaningless—it is purposeful instruction from a sovereign God.

Key Truth:

Affliction is not opposed to God’s goodness; it is often the means by which God accomplishes it.

4. Two Responses to Suffering (Job 36:11–12)

Elihu presents a clear contrast:

Response	Result
Listening & serving	Life completed in what God calls “good”
Refusing & hardening	Destruction without understanding

This is not prosperity theology. “Prosperity” here means *life as God defines good*, not ease or wealth.

Key Truth:

The issue is not whether we suffer—but how we respond to suffering.

5. Guarding the Heart (Job 36:16–21)

Elihu warns Job that pride and self-vindication can quietly lead him toward judgment rather than restoration.

- God’s discipline was meant to draw Job closer—not inward.

- Longing for relief over repentance is dangerous.
- Scoffing, bitterness, and self-justification distort our view of God.

Key Truth:

Suffering must soften us toward God—not harden us against Him.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Where do you see the temptation to ask, *“What have I gained by obeying God?”*
2. How does suffering reveal what you believe God owes you—if anything?
3. Why is it important to distinguish crying out in pain from seeking God Himself?
4. In what ways can affliction be a mercy rather than a punishment?
5. How can you guard your heart from pride, bitterness, or self-vindication during hardship?

Application

- Lift your eyes daily to behold God as He **is**, not as you wish Him to be.
- Let suffering expose and refine your faith rather than distort it.
- Trust that God’s purposes are at work—even when explanations are withheld.

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us behold You rightly in times of blessing and suffering alike. Guard our hearts from pride, teach us through affliction, and give us faith to trust Your purposes when we do not understand. Amen.