

# SESSION 1: Winners and losers

*How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally*

## How to be positive

**Q. Do you think that you could train your brain to be more positive in just 21 days? Not 21 days sitting on a beach in the South Pacific - but 21 days of the hard slog of everyday life?**

Shawn Achor (New York Times best-selling author, TEDtalk speaker, researcher, business consultant) wrote in a Harvard Business Review article: "Another common misconception is that our genetics, our environment, or a combination of the two determines how happy we are. To be sure, both factors have an impact. But one's general sense of wellbeing is surprisingly malleable. The habits you cultivate, the way you interact with others, how you think about stress—all these can be managed to increase your happiness."<sup>1</sup>

An exercise:

**Q. What 3 things are you grateful for today?**

**Q. How do you feel about trying to make that a daily habit over the next 21 days?**

Achor is talking about making the *choice* to be happy. But how do we *explain* what is happening to us, particularly in the face of suffering and loss? Can we do better than just saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason"?

## A story of suffering and loss

The book of Job is a story written to teach its readers how to understand the role of hardship in life. It can be found in the Old Testament (first half of the Bible).

We do not know who wrote the book of Job, or when. Having said that, a copy of the book of Job was found at the Qumran Caves (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found) making it likely that the original book of Job was written before 300 BC.<sup>2</sup>

We also don't know if Job was a real person or not. There are no historical markers in the book to anchor the story in history. It reads like a "once upon a time" story<sup>3</sup>. The book of Job is located in the "Wisdom Literature" section of the Old Testament. Quite possibly the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://hbr.org/2012/01/positive-intelligence>

<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner, "The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes" (1985).

<sup>3</sup> For example, the story begins with "In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job" (Job 1:1). It is unclear whether "Uz" is a real place or not.

book was written to teach principles about the nature of suffering, the relationship between wrongdoing and suffering, and the role of God.

### Job 1:1 – 2:10 [New International Version]

*In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2 He had seven sons and three daughters, 3 and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East 4 His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.*

*6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."*

*8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*

*13 One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

*16 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

*17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

*18 While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"*

*20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." 22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*

*2:1 On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. 2 And the LORD said to Satan,*

*"Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."*

*3 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." 4 "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. 5 But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." 6 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life."*

*7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. 8 Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. 9 His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" 10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

## What is the story about?

Like any story, how the main character is introduced is important. What we initially learn about Job is very positive. He is introduced to us as "blameless and upright". Does that mean Job is perfect and has never done anything wrong? He does "fear God" and "shun evil" - but then he also makes sacrifices for his children to "purify" them from any sin or wrongdoing. Assuming that Job would also make sacrifices for his own sin, he is "blameless" in the sense that there is no wrongdoing that he can still be blamed or held accountable for. Job is also described as the "greatest" man in the east. This could be because of his wealth, given the details we are given about his assets. It could also be because his large number of children feasting together is a sign of family warmth and intimacy. However it is more likely that Job is the "greatest" in the sense of knowing what matters in life (to fear God and shun evil). Job even has God's commendation that he is blameless and upright and there is none like him. This is very important for the unfolding story. Job's suffering is not punishment for wrongdoing or because God decided he did not like Job for some reason.

Satan's name in the original language literally means "the accuser". Satan's accusation of Job is: Does Job fear God for nothing? In other words, Job doesn't fear God for nothing in return. Job fears God because of what God gives him. In saying this, Job is having a go at God too. If Job is prostituting himself, then God is the one who is paying. God is buying Job's love and then acting like it is real. God is participating in a sham. At the heart of this accusation is that God is not worthy of following because he just bribes people to follow him.

Is Job the sport in a tussle between God and Satan? It appears as if God is prepared to let Job lose everything in order to prove to Satan that his accusation is wrong. And yet - Job's initial responses are interesting. "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised". "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" Now Job wasn't privy to the dialogue between God and Satan in the heavens. But what he knows of God - God isn't sporting with him. God is exercising his divine right to do what he wants. That this is the right understanding is clear from the narrator's comments. "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." "In all this, Job did not sin in what he said". If God's honour is on the line in the light of Satan's accusation - then the stakes are high here. God is not using Job's severe suffering and loss to prove a minor point. The integrity of God is at stake.

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

### How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally

In the face of severe suffering and loss, Job chooses to read God's role positively. What will be interesting to observe is how Job's thinking stands the test of time.

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

**Q. How is this doing any better than saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason"?**

"Does Job fear God for nothing?"

**Q. Is/could this be true of you: that your interest in God is related to what he could/does give you in return?**

## SESSION 2: Advice to losers

*How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally*

### How to be positive

**Q. Since the previous session, how have you gone trying to develop a gratitude habit - thinking of 3 things you are thankful for? (Absolutely no judgement here!)**

Shawn Achor (New York Times best-selling author, TEDtalk speaker, researcher, business consultant) says that happiness isn't a product of genetics and environment. We can train our brains to be more positive using repeated exercises over 21 days. The habits we cultivate, the way we interact with others, how we think about stress—all these can be managed to increase our happiness<sup>1</sup>.

An exercise:

**Q. To whom could you write an email today to express your appreciation for something they have done?**

Achor is talking about making the *choice* to be happy. But how do we *explain* what is happening to us, particularly in the face of suffering and loss? Can we do better than just saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason"?

### A story of suffering and loss

The book of Job is a story written to teach principles about the nature of suffering, the relationship between wrongdoing and suffering, and the role of God<sup>2</sup>

Extract 1: Job 2:11 – 13 [New International Version]

*<sup>11</sup>When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.*

*<sup>12</sup>When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. <sup>13</sup>Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.*

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#### Extract 2: Job 4:6-9, 5:17-22 Eliphaz' advice on Job's situation

*6 Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope? 7 "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? 8 As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. 9 At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish.*

*17 "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. 18 For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal. 19 From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you. 20 In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword. 21 You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes. 22 You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth.*

#### Extract 3: Job 8:2-6 Bildad's advice on Job's situation

*2 "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind. 3 Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? 4 When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. 5 But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, 6 if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.*

#### Extract 4: Job 11:2-6 Zophar's advice on Job's situation

*2 "Are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated? 3 Will your idle talk reduce men to silence? Will no one rebuke you when you mock? 4 You say to God, 'My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight.' 5 Oh, how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you 6 and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom, for true wisdom has two sides. Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.*

#### Extract 5: Job 16:1-3 Job's response

*Then Job replied: <sup>2</sup>"I have heard many things like these; you are miserable comforters, all of you! <sup>3</sup>Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing?*

#### Extract 6: Job 32:1-5, 33:8-14, 19-22, 29-30 Elihu's advice on Job's situation

*So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2 But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. 3 He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him.*



*4 Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he. 5 But when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused.*

*8 "But you [Job] have said in my hearing— I heard the very words – 9 'I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. 10 Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. 11 He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.' 12 "But I tell you [Job], in this you are not right, for God is greater than man. 13 Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man's words? 14 For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it.*

*19 Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, 20 so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal. 21 His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now stick out. 22 His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the messengers of death.*

*29 "God does all these things to a man— twice, even three times- 30 to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him."*

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

### What is the story about?

Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – Elihu joins them later) pay a condolence call. They sit with Job for a week in silence, out of respect for Job's grief. Then they feel compelled to offer some words of comfort. They attempt to explain to Job why these calamities have befallen him. These are snapshots of some very long speeches.

Eliphaz' understanding of the situation is that the innocent don't perish. Since Job's children have perished, then it must be they who reaped evil and sowed trouble. God is disciplining Job, it will be hard but God won't break him: "From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you".

Bildad (unsympathetically!) says that Job's children sinned and that's why they died and that's why Job is suffering. He appeals to Job to turn from his sin if he wants to be restored.

Zophar says that while Job might say he is innocent in God's eyes ("I am pure in your sight") however that is not the case – Job is not innocent. In fact God has forgotten or overlooked some of Job's sin. The implication is that Job's sin is the reason why he is suffering.

Elihu is upset because he thinks Job is justifying himself rather than God – in other words, that Job is in the right, not God. There is no way God would inflict suffering on Job if Job were innocent. Elihu believes that God sometimes speaks through pain, so that people might turn back from their intended path and enjoy life. So in the end, he's not saying

anything radically different from Job's other three friends. What is new with Elihu is the idea that God is using suffering to get Job's attention to turn back to him.

So if we were to summarise the explanation of Job's friends:

- Suffering comes because of sin – it is cause and effect
- Job is suffering therefore he must have sinned
- The way forward for Job is to turn from his sin
- God is using suffering to get Job's attention to turn back to him

The problem here is that the friends have a neat little framework of cause and effect thinking: that suffering comes because of sin. They then try to squeeze Job into that neat little framework of thinking. Job is suffering and so therefore Job must have sinned. They have no room in their neat little framework of thinking for:

- Job's blamelessness
- God's positive verdict on Job (God thinks Job is blameless)
- Satan's role in all of this

We are aware of these things because we know the start of the story. Granted Job's friends don't know this, so perhaps the strongest statement we can make is – what they got wrong was applying their neat little framework too rigidly.

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

## How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally

In the face of severe suffering and loss, Job now has to contend with his friends, who add insult to injury with their explanation for why he is suffering. Job describes them as "miserable comforters".

**Q. Is saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason" any better than what Job's friends come up with?**

"God does all these things to a man— twice, even three times- to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him".

**Q. How do you feel about the idea that God may be using suffering to get your attention?**



## SESSION 3: Not-so-blind faith

*How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally*

### How to be positive

**Q. Since the previous session, how have you gone trying to undertake more conscious acts of kindness - sending appreciative emails? (Absolutely no judgement here!)**

Shawn Achor (New York Times best-selling author, TEDtalk speaker, researcher, business consultant) says that happiness isn't a product of genetics and environment. We can train our brains to be more positive using repeated exercises over 21 days. The habits we cultivate, the way we interact with others, how we think about stress—all these can be managed to increase our happiness<sup>1</sup>.

An exercise:

**Q. Think about a time today that you were stressed. How could you reframe the stress to see it as the by-product of success rather than debilitating?**

Achor is talking about making the *choice* to be happy. But how do we *explain* what is happening to us, particularly in the face of suffering and loss? Can we do better than just saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason"?

### A story of suffering and loss

The book of Job is a story written to teach principles about the nature of suffering, the relationship between wrongdoing and suffering, and the role of God<sup>2</sup>.

Extract 1: Job 6:2-4 [New International Version]

*2 "If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! 3 It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas— no wonder my words have been impetuous. 4 The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me.*

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## Extract 2: Job 16:7-14

*7 Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household. 8 You have bound me—and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me. 9 God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me; my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. 10 Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn and unite together against me. 11 God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked. 12 All was well with me, but he shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; 13 his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. 14 Again and again he bursts upon me; he rushes at me like a warrior.*

## Extract 3: Job 13:15-23

*15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. 16 Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him! 17 Listen carefully to my words; let your ears take in what I say. 18 Now that I have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated. 19 Can anyone bring charges against me? If so, I will be silent and die. 20 "Only grant me these two things, O God, and then I will not hide from you: 21 Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me with your terrors. 22 Then summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply. 23 How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin.*

## Extract 4: Job 14:13-17

*13 "If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! 14 If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come. 15 You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made. 16 Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. 17 My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin.*

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

## What is the story about?

In the midst of his suffering, Job describes God as a terrifying enemy waging war against him. God is like an archer who fires poison arrows, who seizes Job by the neck and crushes him, who pierces his kidneys. Job is overcome by the onslaught.

Job wants to have his day in court. He wants God to explain himself: "Summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply. How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin." In other words, Job wants God to explain himself. For

Job, faith (or belief or trust – same words) is not just blindly accepting what is happening to him. He brings his issues with God to God.

There is agony and accusations – but also deep longing. “Though he [God] slay me, yet I will hope in him”. Job longs to come into God’s presence, to meet him, to be justified, vindicated and be seen to be right with him. Job longs for relationship with God, for which he knows he has been made. Job doesn’t want to endure God’s anger – he wants forgiveness and reconciliation.

Job is railing at God: ‘Why is this happening to me?’ but at the same time desperately longing to meet his terrifying, mysterious God, the God he does not understand and yet the God he needs and the God he loves.

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

### How to be positive when it doesn’t come naturally

For Job, there is agony and accusations but he will not abandon God.

“Though he [God] slay me, yet will I hope in him”

**Q. How is this any better than saying: “It is what it is” or “everything happens for a reason”?**

Job takes his issues with God to God.

**Q. How might this change how you approach God?**

# SESSION 4: Resolution

*How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally*

## How to be positive

**Q. Since the previous session, how have you gone trying to make stress your friend - reframing it as the by-product of success? (Absolutely no judgement here!)**

Shawn Achor (New York Times best-selling author, TEDtalk speaker, researcher, business consultant) says that happiness isn't a product of genetics and environment. We can train our brains to be more positive using repeated exercises over 21 days. The habits we cultivate, the way we interact with others, how we think about stress—all these can be managed to increase our happiness<sup>1</sup>.

An exercise:

**Q. What time have you spent with family or friends today?**

Achor is talking about making the *choice* to be happy. But how do we *explain* what is happening to us, particularly in the face of suffering and loss? Can we do better than just saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason"?

## A story of suffering and loss

The book of Job is a story written to teach principles about the nature of suffering, the relationship between wrongdoing and suffering, and the role of God<sup>2</sup>.

Extract 1: Job 38:1-11, 41:1-2

*1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said 2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? 3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. 4 Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. 5 Who marks off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? 6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – 7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? 8 Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, 9 when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, 10 when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, 11 when I said 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?"*

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<sup>2</sup> The book of Job is located in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. We don't know if Job was a real person or not, since there are no historical markers to anchor the story in history. The author of Job is also unknown. A copy of the book of Job was found at the Qumran Caves (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found) making it likely that the original book of Job was written before 300 BC Derek Kidner, "The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes" (1985).

*[God speaking] "Can you pull in Leviathan<sup>3</sup> with a fishhook or tie down its tongue with a rope? <sup>2</sup> Can you put a cord through its nose or pierce its jaw with a hook?"*

#### Extract 2: Job 42:1-6

*1 Then Job replied to the Lord: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3 You asked 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 4 You said 'Listen now and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' 5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent<sup>4</sup> in dust and ashes".*

#### Extract 3: Job 42:7-9

*7 After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." 8 So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has'. 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.*

#### Extract 4: Job 42:10-16

*10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. 11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.*

*12 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. 13 And he also had seven sons and three daughters. 14 The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-Happuch. 15 Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.*

*16 After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. 17 And so he died, old and full of years.*

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<sup>3</sup> Another part of the Bible says: "In that day, the Lord will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea" (Isaiah 27:1). Given that one of the images for Satan in the bible is a serpent, this suggests that Leviathan is a reference to Satan himself (the sea in Ancient Near Eastern times was symbolic of chaos and destruction, which is why the serpent resides there).

<sup>4</sup> To "repent" is to change one's mind. The change usually occurs in relation to how one thinks or acts in ways that are displeasing to God.

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

## What is the story about?

*God makes it clear that he is the one who is in absolute control. He is even in control of Satan (the Leviathan) whom he has leashed as a pet. Nothing – not even the very source of evil itself – is above or beyond the control of God.*

*The word “repent” is usually used in the context of wrongdoing. What has Job done wrong? While Job did not do any wrong to cause his suffering (otherwise Job’s friends would have been right in their assessment) what he does need to repent of is his attitude towards God. In declaring himself innocent and wanting to call God to account for his suffering (session 3) he is implicitly accusing God of wrongdoing. Job’s repentance is seen in the way he shuts his mouth and questions God no further.*

*Satan’s original accusation (session 1) was that Job only follows God for what he can get. Job’s repentance shows quite clearly that he’s not in it for what he can get from God – in other words, he does loves God for nothing! Satan’s accusation is false. Job is even prepared to stick with God when God doesn’t give him the answers to his suffering that he had been asking for. It was only when all the blessings were stripped away, and he understood who it was that he was dealing with, that this becomes clear.*

*Interesting that all the characters (Job and his 4 friends) get something wrong about God and the way God works. What Job does differently to all the others is that he takes his issues with God to God. So while Job doesn’t get everything right, he is willing for God to teach him. The 4 friends have their neat little theory – sin is the cause and suffering is the effect (session 2). In holding on to this theory, they dishonour God by offering their own (incorrect) solution to Job’s suffering.*

*In what sense has Job spoken rightly of God? He gets it right at the beginning “the Lord, gives, the Lord takes away, may the name of the Lord be praised” (session 1). But then so much happens in the intervening 40 plus chapters...what Job has maintained rightly throughout the whole book is that God is in control, and that it is God who will provide the resolution, rather than relying on what human beings themselves can work out.*

*Interesting that Elihu (friend number 4) isn’t mentioned. Why this is so is difficult to answer. It could be because what he says overlaps with the other 3 friends (suffering is a result of wrongdoing) or because he cares about God’s honour (which is more than what could be said for the 3 friends).*

*Is this a story of “happily ever after” where God buys Job off with even more than before? Notice that Job repents before he is blessed again. Is this cause and effect – blessing*

*follows repentance? There's nothing in the text to suggest so. By repenting Job has demonstrated that he loves God for nothing...without even the promise of something good in the future. So it seems that the blessing here comes out of God's own initiative – from the nature of his character rather than as a reward for good behaviour.*

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

## How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally

For Job, things are still a mystery but he is prepared to trust God.

*"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted...Surely I spoke of things I did not understand".*

**Q. How is this any better than saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason"?**

**Q. What is your reaction to this powerful yet mysterious God?**