

## **Bristlecone Firesides Podcast, Season 2, Episode 2: Job and the Comforting Wild**

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### **Madison:**

Welcome to season two of Bristlecone Firesides, casual conversation around a virtual fireside about faith, the earth, the universe, and everything. In this second season, we will be journeying into the spiritual wilds as we explore the theme of wilderness.

### **Abby:**

Joining us around our virtual fireside will be some familiar voices, as well as some new guests to help us rediscover the spiritual power of wild things. We are your hosts, Abby and Madison.

### **Madison:**

Bristlecone Firesides is recorded in the tiny carpet covered attic of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance with our partner for this and future seasons. For more info about SUWA and the fight to protect Utah's stunning redrock wilderness, visit [suwa.org](http://suwa.org).

Well, then let's, let's jump into it. Bob, welcome to Bristlecone Firesides, season two, and this episode we're gonna be talking about Job and the comforting wild. The book of Job is definitely kind of an outlier in, in the Bible, both in terms of a subject matter and the way it's presented. but before we get into Job, Bob, can you give us a little brief bio or an intro to yourself?

### **Bob Rees:**

Yeah, I, in relation to this subject, which was, your question about, when I first realized the earth was something I cared about in my first years, I came out of a very disordered, disruptive, childhood. And, in those first years I was something of a feral child. I basically was left alone from dawn to dark and my brother and I were, as huckleberry Finn would say free as any creatures, to LA the natural surroundings in Durango, Colorado, including the Hills and the Meadows and the mountains and playing, probably dangerously on the Animas River. and there were lots of wonders that I remember, I remember going through the Hills and finding a wild apricot tree, on that land landscape and tasting its unbelievable sweetness and, fishing for trout on some mountain stream.

And then, because of, things in my, my family structure, which was totally disorganized from the beginning in terms of multiple marriages divorces and all kinds of other things, I found myself, living on the Arizona desert from the time I was about 10 and became really enchanted with the desert, with the beauty that was beyond and beneath it's barrenness. In those years I didn't have much consciousness about caring for the earth, but I simply felt at home in the river beds and, looking for lizards and snakes and, doing that kind of thing. And, I wasn't really aware of the limits or the fragility of nature. It was only when I went to college at BYU and took a course in American Renaissance and read Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson that I began both to think more deeply and to care more passionately about the natural world.

I remember being struck by Thoreau's lines in wildness is the preservation of the world. Yes. I loved Walden Emerson's essays, equipment's leaves of grass, Emily Dickinson's radical poet. All of these taught me things about the world of nature and my relation to it that I hadn't been really much aware of before. And it really wasn't until I started teaching at UCLA and started teaching these same writers and reading other writers, like, all the Leah John mu Gary Snyder that I began to care deeply about the national world and had some sense of my own responsibility to preserve it. All of those experiences have led me to where I am today.

**Madison:**

Yeah, no, I, and like we mentioned in kind of the prerecording was that Bob, but you and I met at Sunstone and you've given a number of panels at the Sunstone symposium. Some of them relate pretty directly to the earth, and, some tangentially. And so that's where me and you got first connected, which is why I was so, you know, giddy to have you on the podcast was because I know that you not only do you have such a good, robust background in your, you know, your professional and, you know, career connection to the earth, but I know that it's, it's, it's the passion of yours that, that transcends your, your career or your, you know, your professional world. So let's jump into the book of Job. And, we'll have you give us some kind of setup and context, how does the book of Job compare to the other books of the old Testament?

**Bob Rees:**

Great question. The book of Job is unlike any book in the Bible and in truth is like any book anywhere in the world or anywhere in history. It's one of those rare, radical books that shakes the foundations of both being and believing. Yes, it challenges our thinking and our faith. Job causes us to reexamine our understanding of ourselves, and it also challenges our axioms about God, it's drama, poetry, theology, it asks questions that Job can't answer, and we can't answer. And yet we feel it's, compelled

to try to answer them. So it's a story about a man whose faith is tested to the ultimate, and yet who's trust in God remains unshakable. It involves a contest between Jobs's for Job soul between two powerful cosmic adversaries, God, and a character named Satan. It's not Satan or Lucifer or the devil of Christianity, but rather a contester or a prosecutor who seems to be a member of some kind of divine council to which both he and God belong. And Satan contends that faith has its limits that it's easy and works fine when everything goes right, but fails when it doesn't.

And so to challenge Satan's contention, God says, well, consider my servant, Job. He is a faithful, upright man, and he gives to say 10, the power to take away everything Job has. And, he can, and that can say 10 continually, eggs God to up the andante each time, something happens to, Job. and what happens to him is cataclysmic and loses all of his possessions, his cattle, he loses, all of his children. He loses, his health, each time, when he, Job refuses, as his wife asking to curse God and die, Sayan says, oh yeah, okay. But if you take away this, maybe he would. And so, he ends up suffering everything. he, his vast wealth, his family, his friends, and finally his health, he reduced a, kind of a being a near naked creature covered with boils, sitting on a dumb meal, all this to prove that Jobs's trust in God is unshakable. And it's unlimited in many ways. It's a strange and disturbing, but also ultimately affirming tale. it asks more questions and many more questions than it answers.

**Abby:**

So in the book of Job, obviously there are Theodysseys and, you know, that being said, you know, what is the Theodysseys? And you know, is it important to do that theological work, you know, understanding Theodysseys is that important when, when considering theological work?

**Bob Rees:**

It's not only important, Abigail, I think it's inescapable. At least it is for me, Theodysseys from the French "Theos" that is the title of work by Libet comes from the Greek theos, meaning God and the EKI meaning justice. And so it refers this idea of defending God's goodness and omnipotence in a world rife with evil and injustice. I guess I feel that if a person has not wrestled with a cosmic conundrum of trying to resolve that, what seems unresolvable, that is how can you, package together a, a loving God in charge of a world that is filled with chaos and which the wicked seem to thrive and the right to suffer, that , you only have to read the morning paper to see that playing out. And so, how can God, if there is a God, how can God allow this to happen?

And I think if a person hasn't at least thought about this real, or at least maybe a seeming conundrum of some people, then I don't, he, he or she has looked deeply or widely enough either into nature in the nature of deity or the reality of nature or into his or her own soul. As a number of years ago, I was asked to make a statement of belief. and it was, you know, what, what is it? I believe it took a lot of thinking to come up with this, but I said, I know that God lives. I say this as someone who of almost every day with issues of Theo questions relating to God's justice and therefore his existence, I added, I cannot say with Emerson as I did many, many years ago, that all I have seen teaches me to trust the creator for all.

I have not seen . I can say that some of what I see leads me to that conclusion, but some does not. I do not understand the design of a world in which every year, millions of children suffer and die from starvation and disease or a world in which thousands of young girls are sold into sexual slavery are in which girls and women in some cultures are raped with impunity. In which hundreds of thousands of innocent people are tortured and brutalized in which innocent people are imprisoned. Sometimes their life are cruelly executed simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And the day I'm unable to harmonize the idea of adjust and caring deity with a blind indifference of natural disasters. The so-called acts of God, in which tens of thousands of people are drowned in the depths of the sea, buried in mud or volcanic Ash sucked into whirlwinds or their famine stricken bones left to dry on desert sand. A perplexing is a seeming randomness and capricious of birth disorders, crippling disabilities, and disease. I have no way to reconcile such things so others like them with a just and loving God. And yet I believe in a just and loving God.

### **Madison:**

You, so you set up the idea of a Theo is the defense of God's goodness in face of the universe that we live in. And it's funny that the book of Job seems to be both the defensive God's goodness, a defensive Job's goodness, and somehow a defense of the universe itself. that, I think, I think, you know, you set up, you set up the book of Job as, you know, kind of this contest between between God and Satan, but on this, but on the same level, it's almost a contest between Job and his friends that they are, there are, there are debating the paradigms of, of how they approach the world and how they approach, you know, the things that happen in the universe. So there's almost a paradigm in display all over the Bible and the world that we live of kind of a tit for tat universe that, you know, that if something happens to me, it's because of something that I did, that I deserve, whatever, you know, comes my way.

And, you know, we can even see it in the new Testament that Jesus is confronted with this when, you know, he, he's confronted with a blind man from birth and Jesus was asked, you know, who him or, or his parents and Jesus, you know, didn't answer the question the way that they wanted him to answer the question. And so it seems

though that this paradigm of deservedness occupies a lot of our imagination. So I'm, the question that I have is the ubiquitous nature of this paradigm of tit for tat us that most humans adopt this way of thinking. Why do we want a universe that operates like this?

**Bob Rees:**

That's a great question. As you were talking, it made me think of my, you know, I've taught 35 different courses in higher education. And one of them that was fascinating, that was a course in American purism. And remember reading Cotton Mather's diary. And he's saying something, you know, I've got, I've got this, this terrible toothache. What did I do that God's punishing me? And so that, that kind of, one for one correlation, I suspect that we, you know, want to believe in that because it relieves us of the difficult of comprehending and making sense of a world that doesn't fit the logic of cause and effect, that is if we, the Puritans, the Calvinist believed, in fact, they believe you, they kind of got, had got in a, in a, in a hard place, because if they could be righteous enough, then God was bound.

They had God bound to reward them, or if they did something, God was going to punish them. and so it relieves us of the burden of having to explain our own and behavior. If everything is in the control of others, including God and the devil, then we can avoid accountability for our own decisions and actions. If either God made us do it, or the devil did, then, you know, we escape that. And, but in escaping that, I think we escape the central, truth of at least, a restored gospel, which is that we have responsibility. and it's interesting that, this is the position, that Job describes, his, his so-called, this is why he calls his comforters, as, as miserable, because, they, and we try to fit the universe into a small box that we can tie with a ribbon and feel it's all kind of, explained and neat.

And in terms of the earth, we can take the position that what's happening with climate change, just part of a normal cycle. What's a result of God's displeasure with certain people's or groups, or that he is punishing some, deviant groups or, the whoever, whomever. It also leads some to believe that since the world is God's creation, he's gonna come and save us from our folly that, he's gonna allow the earth, that he, he will allow, he will, you know, wipe away all of this, that we've created and the earth is gonna receive its paired toy, regeneration and preparation for the second coming. And it'll be a kumbaya for eternity. yeah, that's, that's tempting to to, I think it's significant that in his play JB, this modernation of Job by arch MC MCLE presents Job's comforters, his three comforters as a, a priest, a psychiatrist, and a communist, each of who, each of whom in turn tells Job he's not responsible for what's happened.

The priests, you know, in Job, of course, they're all saying, it's your fault. You, you brought this on yourself, but in the modern shelling, the priest says it isn't his fault. He was born in sin. The psychiatrist says it wasn't his fault. It's 12 of his parents. and the communist says it isn't his fault. It's a fault of society. JB rejects J B the modern Job rejects all three of these attempts at absolution, because I think he understands that if you put the responsibility elsewhere, then all of that work of evolution that is at the heart of life and the gospel, is, is gone. And so Nick, a character in's drama who plays a part of Satan. he composes a little diddy that kind of summarizes this kind of theological dilemma. I heard upon his dry DG heap that man cry out who cannot sleep.

If God is God, he is not good. If odd is good, he is not, God take the, even take the odd. I would not sleep here if I could, except for the little green leaves in the wood and the wind on the water, that is, it is only the natural world that can give us comfort in the face of evil and injustice. But that, that, that formulation, if God is God, he is not good. That is, if God is responsible for all of this, he couldn't be God. And if God is good, he can't be the God that we see operating in the world. and this is, this is why, it seems to me that seeing everything through cause and effect and the temptation to blame others, clearly stifles spiritual development. If solutions lie beyond or outside of us, we have no chance to change or to grow. And therefore we cannot evolve.

**Madison:**

Yeah, no that, it reminds me of, oh, what's his name? The scapegoat mechanism. What, do you know who is that guy that, there's some sociologists that, that he, he talks about the scapegoat mechanism in human sociology and it's our, our proclivity is humans to externalize blame and to put somewhere else when the truth of the Gospel, as Jesus was trying to explain, it was no, you internalize that you internalize your own participation in all of this. And then that's ultimately what the heart of the gospel is, it's trying to resolve our woundedness and our pain on the inside of our ourselves instead of living it onto other people and externalizing it, Gerard– Renee Gerard, that's his name!

**Bob Rees:**

Yeah. Well, we do that very early, who broke this class? The dog did mama , it wasn't me. It wasn't me but then as adults, when we do that, we take essentially, we strip the meaning from life, because if we're not responsible, then we also are not responsible for producing joy and love and all of those things. And we want to take credit for the good things, and we want to blame the bad things on other people or on chance or on something else. In fact, one of the questions you said is that, there's something about this paradigm that ultimately holds us back, which is why Jesus,

God, most wisdom teacher ask us to leave it behind. And you say, why is, is this way of looking at the world spiritually stifling, stifling?

I really thought about that. And I think that it's stifling because kind of referring to what I just said, it runs counter to the entire plan of heaven, or as a lot of these things, colon plan of happiness, which is premised on individual and communal spiritual growth that is such growth. Can't take place without the burden of choice and responsibility without trial and error, without sacrifice and pain, without mistakes and forgiveness without mercy and grace, we're sent here to learn how to learn from our mistakes, from our sins, from our trans instructions, and a world without those, then we can't have the other, you know, this is this great thing of father Lehigh. You can't have the bitter without, or the sweet without the bitter. There must needs to be opposition in all things. And it is out that opposition out of that CA room out of that, chemistry and alchemy of life that we, can produce the wonderful things that is possible for us to produce as human beings, sometimes by ourselves and sometimes with the help of others. And certainly with the help of God.

**Abby:**

Yeah. I wondered too, if it, if it gives us an artificial sense of control over our environment, too, in that it instigates this way of thinking that if I can limit or reduce everything to something that is just simply cause and effect that then, you know, you know exactly the outcome of your actions, but also the actions of others. And then you can limit it to this kind of dualistic presence within the world of, okay, these things are good, these things are bad. And therefore, when someone does something bad, it will inevitably result in something bad. But I think that, that also, like you said, you know, limits our agency and limits like the possibilities, for goodness too, in that, in that very same sense that, if we're, if we're only living in this kind of dualistic presence, or if we only live in this kind of cause and effect world, that it really does limit the possibilities, for, for goodness to come, even from things that, that may not be quote unquote good.

**Bob Rees:**

Yeah, the well you've hit on something I think is really central, is that there a temptation to have some control somewhere else is, or to control everything. Those two things that is the people who want to control the world, that who AMAs the money and the power and attempt to do that. And the people who want control the outside of them, this was a seductive enough argument that a third of the billions of our brothers and sisters in the pre existence would've chosen that then did chosen choose it. and there's something I think, tempting it, I mean, I was thinking the other day that if I imagine heaven father and heavenly mother looking down on the earth today and seeing what we have done to desecrate the garden and on everything

outside the garden as well, the colossal the instruction, that we have set in motion, just look at what happened to Afghanistan and is happening to Afghanistan, to look down upon all of that.

And to, I could just imagine this, this conversation and one of them says to the other, you know, are we gonna do this world without him? it's just, are we gonna take the chance of this, of these other worlds? You know, this, this one we are told in the book of Moses, I believe this is the most wicked of all of the worlds that God has, created. Hopefully there's known more wicked, but it's hard to imagine. And a way a more, we could go on the best. And you can imagine saying, you know, I wonder that that idea that, Lucifer had, you know, it might be worth rethinking that . so I think that there is a, there is NA naturally I wish to control things and to control people. And this is why you have in politics, especially, but you also have it in religion, people who want to control everything, including thought, and then that needs to inevitable disaster. So, but you're right. and Abigail, that's, that's something that we, I think we are inclined to and have to resist.

#### **Madison:**

I'm, I'm thinking right now of the natural man, how the natural man is an enemy. God. And I think maybe a, if we were to, you know, what's a, a synonym for the natural man, I like to think ego ego is, is a, is the natural man. And in the ego wants three things. The ego wants superiority, it wants separation and it wants control. And the more, the more control, you know, even if it's false control, you know, if it's just a paradigm of, of, of way that I can scheme, you know, schema or structure the universe so that it makes sense that it maintains my, my paradigm of control. Then my ego is really happy. And ultimately, I think what God wants from us is a surrendering and a surrendering means letting go of control. I think about something Richard Roar says, is, that the purpose of good, the all is to keep God free for man and to keep man free for God. And that we can preserve those two independent freedoms. And, you know, in this season when we're talking about wilderness, I think, you know, for God and for humans to be wild, I think means for, to be free. I think that there's kind of a corollary there between wildness and freedom and not kind of the glib freedom of, you know, the, you know, of American like political freedom, but like the true spiritual kind of freedom of inner joy and the stuff that we've already been talking about.

#### **Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance:**

Hey all– thanks for joining us around the Fireside to talk about things big and small. An important part of Bristlecone Firesides is putting our faith and spirituality in contact with the Earth that unites us. So, we'd love to keep in touch with you in the future... whether it's to share a simple call to action, send an occasional, exclusive



behind-the-scenes update, or ask you for your input on the future direction of Bristlecone Firesides.

To stay in the loop, text us the phrase "FIRESIDEUTAH" to 52886. We won't fill up your messages. But when we do send you something, we promise it's gonna be good. That's F-I-R-E-S-I-D-E UTAH to 52886.

**Madison:**

As we continue the story of Job, that, you know, we've kind of done a good Job of set up what the initial paradigm of, you know, Job and his friends are working with the world, this tit for tat kind of controlling paradigm. but God's response to Job, is very, very different from all of that. And so, and God God's voice comes from the whirlwind. It comes from nature. and so the first question is what is the significance of God speaking from a whirlwind, especially considering that in first Kings, it's goes out, you know, the verses go outta their way to say that God's voice was not in the earthquake. It was not in the wind. It was not, you know, in the fire, but it was still still small voice. And so there seems to be some kind of internal tension in where God's voice is located. And so my, you know, what is the significance of God actually speaking from a whirlwind?

**Bob Rees:**

Now, I like to think, Madison, that initially God was speaking with a still small voice that, and, he kept getting louder and louder.

**Madison:**

[ laughter ] That's probably a good take.

**Bob Rees:**

Yeah. And so God then speaks from the whirlwind. It's interesting. The whirlwind is a symbol of evolution, but an evolution which is human control and an evolution that's directed from other some other or higher power. Therefore it stands both for God's power and human powerlessness. That is one of the things God keeps trying to tell Job, is I'd love to tell you the meaning of suffering, but Job, that's a, a school, lesson and you're still in first grade. and so according to the dictionary of symbols, the horror wind is characterized by spiral or OI D movements expressing the dynamism of interestingly, the three dimensional cross. Now the three dimensional cross is the cross that has an upward, and then, motion. Then it has the two crossbars. It's one of the, one of the kinds of crosses that is it's lengthened, width and depth. So these are qualities that constitute a kind of multidimensional person, as well as a much

multidimensional savior Andre for it's symbolic of universal evolution. and God is speaking to him out of this whirlwind, which Job is, you know, I I'm sure frightened by, but does not understand it's a language he has not prepared himself to understand. and this, this scripture reminds us of the scripture from that they have sown the wind, those who have sown the wind will inherit. The whirlwind are in this that I think we can say is a warning that we can expect to suffer serious consequences because of our wrong choices and bad actions, this idea of the wind. And I think this is particularly appropriate in relation to climate chaos and collapse that is been increasingly up honest, because we have chosen both to be selfish and to be indifferent to the choices we have made. And we're continuing to make in really the earth, our current, our current sewing of the wind of an action and indifference will surely reap a whirlwind of planet desecration with a consequent human and animal death and devastation. So I think you can see the whirlwind and in multiple ways. And I think it's kind of, it's a very rich form.

**Madison:**

Yeah, I think what's so unique about God's response, from the whirlwind is, and honestly, which is why Job is one of my favorite books, is that God's response to Job is almost a subversion of the question that Job, you know, presents to him. God takes Job on a tour of the cosmos. and so, in what way is a touring, the cosmos, a, an answer to the problem of human suffering and the problem of God's goodness and the goodness of Job. How is, how is that, you know, a response?

**Bob Rees:**

Well, I think it's a wonderful way, actually. I mean, it's very profound. It's interesting that we, from the time I was young, I kept hearing people talk about the patients of Job was one of the most impatient people who he just keeps begging and badgering God . and so what essentially, I thought, what he's asking is this powerful series of questions or challenges. it's kind of a, and it's really significant that he uses the world of nature to ask these questions. and because I think as we, we think we, we see ourselves as so powerful, but you know, here in California, every year now we're having these enormous five that we are powerless to stop. and, you know, anyone has to be humbled by the, by the, just the enormous power of nature that just, you know, what can we do except sit back and hope we can find a boat to save us or find something else that will do.

So I think that in some ways the, I like to contrast what is happening with this, this appeal for nature. I mean, essentially what God is saying in Job, Job, if you knew enough, I could tell you the answer to your question, but you, you, it's impossible. You and I are speaking really very different languages. You know, Paul speak talks about people speaking into the wind. Well, Job is speaking into the whirlwind and the

whirlwind is answering him and he has no vocabulary. He has no experience. He, it's alike trying to explain the Odyssey to a five year old, the five year old has no experience in which to understand that profound question they have not yet begun to see the complexity, the con addictions, the Kundra of the world. It's all, you know, they're they, to them, it's, very simple black and white, good and bad.

And this is why we appeal to them on a more primitive. If you eat your spinach, then you will get that. and so I like to think that the answer to Job or to, yeah, to Job's question in a way, it can be seen in, you know, one of your questions about AOSA seven, which is, the interplay between the Odyssey and the answers found in Job versus those found in the seventh chapter of Moses. I think it's a, it's a great question. It's a huge question. And I think it's particularly important in relation to the question of Theodyssey and its relation to the earth and to earth stewardship and earth care. That is God's answer God answers. Job's insistent question about the meaning of suffering by asking Job a number of questions that Job can't hope to answer in a sense, God is telling Job that the meaning of suffering is beyond is knowing if Job can answer the questions.

God is asking about the mysteries of creation and the infa undre of being and the wild mysteries, of the natural world. And perhaps Job will be able to understand the meaning of suffering. So God says, I will ask questions and your shall answer, dare you deny that I am just, or put me in the wrong that you may be right. Did you proclaim the rules that govern the heavens or determine the laws that govern nature on earth? That as if Job, God is saying to Job, if you have called the Dawn and shown the morning, its place that perhaps you and I can have a conversation , about your morning or over your loss, or if you have descended into the Springs of the sea at beautiful images, Springs of the sea, and walked in the unfathomable deep, then perhaps you can understand something or begin to understand something about injustice and death.

So it's significant that these questions largely concern the natural world, as you have said, that if Job has visited the storehouse of snow, if he know whether the rain has a father or who has SI the drops of rain, then God can begin to talk to him. If Job could understand who feeds the Ravens starving fledging, if he can open the wombs of goats and deer and bring their offspring to birth, if he tame the wild ox and make the wild horse prove like locus wings, then perhaps he can understand the ways of God. So after being confronted by this long series of Anang questions about the play at his, the Zodiac, the ostrich, the horse, the crocodile, Job finally gets it and answers his own unanswerable question, not with an argument of which his comforters had been given him, not with an argument, but with a witness of God's intelligence, justice, and wisdom.

I know he says, mal can do all things and that no purpose is beyond me. I have spoken of great things, which I have not understood things too wonderful for me to know. And I think that is such a beautiful way that, that Job finally comes to understand what God has been trying to tell him, including why good people sometimes have to suffer. And if God were telling that story, after the Meridian of time to Job, he would say, let me hug you about the best person who ever lived and the most perfect person who ever lived, my son, who will then one day suffer for you and for all of God's children. So if you want to know the meaning of why, and there is injustice, or why could people suffer? Let me tell you the story that's going to happen in a couple of thousand years.

**Abby:**

No, I just, I think that's so beautiful. And I think, you know, that analogy between the natural world, and you know, of course, humanity and kind of the tragedies and beauties that take place within, you know, our own human existence as well. is still such a, a tangible example that we can feel today. I mean, I feel like, in reading Job, it's so applicable still today. I mean, we, we often say the old Testament feels so distant from us, but I feel like each of us have kind of wrestled with these same question the Job has. and so I think, you know, continuing to relate it, even today, just, just the application still so thick. so it's really beautiful to hear you explain it as well. So thank you.

**Bob Rees:**

And one of the ironies is that here is God who has created the world, who has the power to have to brought it into existence and created, his human creatures. And here is Jesus who participated in that and who can not only call legions. He can walk upon the water, he can do all of these things, and he chooses not to, because it is necessary for him to teach us both the power of humility and grace and especially love. it's interesting that there is no real mention of love in Job. And in fact, the calculus of Job doesn't really work because if, if, if I were to lose all of my children, you know, wife and I between us, I have four and she had six. And so now we have 10 children and 19 grandchildren. If some whirlwind were to come along or some army and kill all of those, and somebody says, well, we'll give you 10 more.

No, they're not the same 10. You know, if, what, what, what seems restored is not restored in, it would seem to me to anyone's sensible, understanding of the calculus. But I think that, what's really interesting in relation to the book of Job is how God focuses on Job's ignorance of the earth and its creatures. Why does he do that? That is on the natural world. And why is this book so important for our time? I think it's a key book for our time, because we have so much greater knowledge of cosmology, geology, botany biology that the ancient had or could possibly have had. And yet with

all of that knowledge, we lack the will and the wisdom to affect the very things. God mentions the sea, the clouds, the winds, we, and be, and in our hubris we have, and our blindness and our indifference, we have, we have ignored that and we have been indifferent to it. You know, look, what's happening right now. I want to take Job mentioned by the neck of, of his neck and say, look, what's going to happen in 30 years because, you are thinking about some Jobs of people in coal, the coal industry and your children and grandchildren are gonna suffer enormously because we can't spend a, even if we had all the money in the world, I'm not convinced we could to change what we've unleashed, but at least we could begin doing things that will relief, relieve some of the suffering that's going to happen. And so when the scriptures say that God spreads his canopy of the sky over chaos and suspends earth in the void, we have had the power to do some of that.

And yet we have simply ignored it, used our power to just take care of ourselves and be indifferent to others. And so we're quickly speeding toward irreversible climate chaos and so how can we ask God to save or rescue us when we have ignored the knowledge we have been given and the time to act, and it failed in fact to rescue ourselves? I think that is the really the profound question. How can we, with any conscience, ask God to save us when we haven't been willing and are not now today willing to do us necessary to save ourselves? I was at, I was at a beach not far from where I live half an hour from where I live. And I was standing looking at the sea and I looked at a sign that says, by the end of the century, the ocean will be 10 feet higher right here. And I thought, oh my gosh, I'm, that's going to right here. And this is where my children or grandchildren come there will be. There's going to become a time likely, which there are no beaches in the world. Oh my gosh. I mean that, and it's hard to imagine , but, but that's, that seems to be a real possibility because the billions of years it's taken to produce, those is not going, those forces are not gonna be accept open to us.

**Madison:**

Yeah, no, I, what, I hear in, well with your response and God's response to Job is, there's this anthropo TISM right. That we are the center of all things. And that's kind of, that's kind of the main problem of that initial paradigm that tip for tap paradigm is that like, oh, you think the entire universe is, is, is set up to like answer for all the weird little things that, that you do that somehow an earthquake happened because you know, swore your neighbor or something like, there's a lot more going on here in this universe than that. And so I, what I hear in God's response to Job is kind of this deep time decentering experience, where Job, instead of seeing himself as the center or as human is even seeing themselves at the center becomes radically decentered and experiences himself as a part of something much bigger.

Because there's even, there's even that, that section where he talks where God is like, have you not seen the ostrich and how weird and clunky the ostrich is. and have you, do you, do you see that I send the reign to make the wild blossom where no man lives. And so there's this, this, this, this thing that God is trying to show the, to Job that like there's aspects of this universe that have nothing to do with you, that I'm intimately a part of and creating beauty in life and weirdness that have nothing to do with you. And that somehow in that process, that heals Job of his, his, his insanity. Yeah.

**Bob Rees:**

Yeah. And think about this: this whole thing has some much profound meaning for latter day scenes, because what God is saying is I'm trying to teach you how to become a God and make a world. And what you're doing is destroying the one world that you have. And that, and it seems to me, you know, we've talked about this, that well, latter day saints. It seems to me of all people should understand, this, this whole idea of, what we are sent here to do in this garden place that we have. And latter day saints, it seems to me by and large are, are really indifferent to saving here that really indifferent to reversing the terrible destruction that we've set in mind. I think, Madison, you know, I have talked about to Pado forest. I think it's a great irony that the oldest largest living organism in the world is in of a place called Zion.

And that we, that when I visited there a couple of years ago, I was talking to one of the, of the Rangers of the people there. And they said, you know, this it's been, it is the oldest living arguments in the world, but for the first time in human history, it's starting to die. And I just, it, that was heartbreaking that, this great clonal, gift this symbol of the national world, this symbol of, of, of endurance of resilience, which was, is it an accident just in the middle of Utah, maybe, but even if it is, it's there as a great lesson to us as Latterday change that we have just totally ignored. Most people that know about it, they know about it to some people are thinking, yeah, we could cut down lot of that and make good lumber.

**Madison:**

Oh my gosh. Something else that I wanted to make mention of was God's tone to Job. I think that in terms of, in terms of personifications of deity that we, that we have throughout all of our scripture throughout all of our Canon and the old Testament, the new Testament, the book of Mormon, the doctrine, covenants prog price, I think the God that we find and Job is very unique. He's, you know, sarcastic, to Job, you know, the opening lines of, of God's, of God's, poetry is like, excuse me, where were you when I built the earth?

**Abby:**

Yeah. Somewhat mocking.

**Madison:**

Yeah. It's very mocking, very sarcastic. And I think that depiction of God is very different than the kind of domesticated, divine being the word accustomed to. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Bob Rees:**

Well, that's interesting that you say that because I was just having a conversation with someone the other day, and I thought, you know, we think of God as a great comforter. And then I was thinking, here's Joseph Smith saying, you know, where are you? you know, where's the pavilion of your hiding place, the canopy and all of this. And God says, quit winding. You're not yet as Job. Yeah. well, it's, it's obvious is a, a piece of fiction. It's a, it's a strange, thing, but you could kind of understand, you know, Jesus at times is kind of, sarcastic and certainly his humor has, has an edge to it at time. And so, I, that the one can understand how, especially when somebody is as insistent as Job, is that God could just say, put a little edge to it.

He's been trying to teach him that he can't, he can't get through to him. I was thinking, I was thinking, in fact that I didn't know if you know, Kim, Sandy Robbs and, a new kind of sci-fi or some people calling it Cli-fi- climate fiction- called the ministry of the future. it's a current best seller. I just ordered it and I haven't read it, but, I read something he said recently, and he said, this recall science fiction, if you think about, what kind of fiction a Job is, he says, recall science fiction's basic exercise. Imagine that you're in the future, you look around at a changed world. Very interesting. And then you look back at your own time, seeing it as if it were already history, those people back in 2021, what were they thinking?

How do they do what they did and why? And you begin to judge those people of the past a judgment. We are always too quick to make. And then you say, oh, they were so ignorant and stupid. Why, why didn't they see the danger? Why didn't they act? How could they have been so foolish and selfish, but, but wait, that's us, this science fictions, this is science fiction. He says, great temporal reorientation. What happens next is the crucial turn who remember you're still in the present. You can still act that quick fictional visit to the future can turn utopian, having seen a good future. You can decide to make it happen. That way. Those people looking back at 2021 for the future will save us. They were, they were in crisis, but they faced it. They did the necessary things. And now we're in a better world coping with new problems. Sure. But it's not as bad as it might have been. that's an interesting perspective about, about the future.

**Abby:**

Yeah, that is, that is really interesting. I'm interested in reading that as well. Because I think, you know, we often get the reverse in climate fiction of, you know, when, when the world goes the other direction and if we're to continue on doing what we're doing, the results of that. So it'd be interesting to read, you know, if we are to reverse what we've done or at least adapt, like you've said, what that may look like. I'm very curious.

**Bob Rees:**

Go ahead.

**Abby:**

Well, I was gonna change the subject, but if you had more thoughts on that.

**Bob Rees:**

Steven and, Mitchell, coined very interesting phrase that, made me think he talks about how having nostalgia for the future and as you look into science fiction and see that kind of world, you understand why you, why you could have nostalgia for the future. Anyway, please.

**Abby:**

No, I think that's a good point. and thinking of things, you know, as resolved I do, sometimes I worry about the future. I'm a worrier. And so sometimes my natural inclination is to, you know, worry what it's going to look like, in 10 to 15 years, but perhaps, it might do me more service to look at how we might resolve the things that we're doing now and more of that nostalgia, but, you know, we'll, we'll see but, I think one thing, you know, in that, in that same kind of vein, is that obviously it's going to take some, some humility and kind of communal action to, making better progress toward, you know, reparations to the earth mm-hmm and a lot of that is kind of addressed, well, some of it, I guess I should say, is addressed in Job, this idea of, of humility that God is kind of calling Job to, and kind of decentering him, as you know, central to the creation. but how do you kind of find this decentering, healing and transformative within the book of Job, but also, you know, in our, in our kind of holistic reading of the Bible?

**Bob Rees:**



Yeah. It's a very, again, it's one of those, really provocative questions. We, and it seems to me it's really so relevant to what we talked about in terms of how the earth that is. We, we tend, from the time that we're young enough to have consciousness about ourselves as a human being, as separate from other human beings, we tend to see the world as centered on us. And then as we move out from that, if we go through the right process, and this is why it seems to me, the gospel calls us to do is to move outward from that and to center the world, not on ourselves, but on others and on God. and, you know, it's interesting that the three great commandments that we speak of them as the two great commitments, but they really are three.

So love your neighbor as yourself, which means you are commanded to love yourself and to love God. So the love of self, in God, those two are the first, focus, but in a way you can't really love God or others, if you don't love yourself. and it reminds me of what, the British, poet, why am I having a hard time with his name? I wrote the, a tribute to, to, Yates, the L of Yates. But, he, at the beginning of the second world war, he said, we must love one another or do, and I think that is what faces us now in the future, that is, we may love on another and die, but, we, as long as we can love and have the choice of loving, I think there is hope for us.

And that happens when, when we move, the center of our compassion away from ourselves to others and decenter. I mean, it's the whole thing about Christ. I mean, I, one of the things that I find profound about the temple is, is that, the temple is a series of steps. And this, this occurred to me many, many years ago. It's really when you did the Washington anointing before you did the endowment, ceremony, and there were other gestures and, ritual acts that you perform, but everything in the temple, and in the temple ceremony moves toward the center. you move toward the center of the temple physically, and, at the, veil, you center yourself on someone who stands for God and that, that certain ugly, signs and tokens are also related to, the crucifixion.

And so the purpose of the temple, I think, and the purpose of the gospel is to center ourselves on Christ, who centers himself on us and on the universe. And it is that centering as opposed to the egoistic, centering that, Madison spoke about, the ego, of seeing ourselves as the center. it is centering ourselves on something outside of ourselves, on others and on, on these creatures, these beautiful, oh my gosh, heavenly creatures that God has created, to also understand, I mean, I have been, and by all of the creatures dying in these forest fires and in these floods and in these cyclones and hurricanes and, droughts. And, so I think that the God, the scriptures say, God has put his heart on us. God has centered himself heaven, father and heavenly mother have centered themselves on us and asked us to center ourselves on others, especially those who are poor and hungry and desperate. So... someone just walked through your door.

**Madison:**

[ laughter ] I think we should wrap this up. We should bring this to a close, but first there's one thing. there's kind of a tension between, you know, being the dust earth, but also being God's work glory. You know, that there is, we don't wanna be anthropocentric, but, but on the, on some level, God is centered on us. Like you were saying, at the end of Job. Job says to God, he says, "I had heard of you with my ears, but now my eyes have seen you, therefore I'll be quiet, comforted that I am done dust." And so there's almost a comfort that, well, there is a comfort that Job, finds by considering himself as dust being very decentered. And, you know, I, I think a lot about, I thought, I think a lot about recently about participation, and I think what Job experienced was he his participation in something much bigger than himself mm-hmm , which blew apart that small story of just him and how he's got a tit for tat transaction and earn everything about his, his world and his life. And that if you can learn how to let go of that story, and you can accept, instead you're much smaller participation in something uni much bigger, much more universal. I think that, there's a really interesting kind of tension there. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Bob Rees:**

Yeah, I think that, that tension in a sense, I think we've just, kind of spoken, about it, and that, and I think that tension, it can be a kind of sacred tension, a kind of holy tension, yeah. That can lead us one way or the other, can lead us out of, that glory and that beauty of that into something else. one of the things I would like to, if we have, we're coming now to the end, I would really love to answer your, that last question you have.

**Madison:**

Oh, please.

**Bob Rees:**

About how we can, you know, this, this joyful motor line craze, I love the way you put this at the heart of odd poetic tour of the universe. How can we tap into the same enthusiastic, joyful, crazed love of all things?

I, my response is, and the more pertinent and timely question is the one that currently faces us as perhaps the only question we will have the choice of asking in the future is our enthusiastic, joyful, crazed love of all things sufficient for us to save them and ourselves from extinction, since it is now likely impossible for us to undo and reverse the destructive force that we have said in motion, will we have enough resolve and resilience to adapt to what seems and irreversible chain of forces and

events? Can we adapt to a world that likely has already passed the point of no return? That question is more urgent and more pertinent than Job's, and perhaps even, or, and perhaps as unanswerable, Job's question is about suffering and injustice that he not only didn't choose, but had no power to address or assuage, whereas a suffering and injustice resulting from our pride or selfishness is not about the fate of one man, but about the fate of all humanity and all creatures that as you can look at Job is the story of one man.

The question that faces us is our story and everybody's story and including all of those people. And so in Job, God allows temporary suffering and injustice to happen to one man, we are allowing and suffering suffering and injustice that would be experienced by hundreds of millions of men, women, and children experienced by all creatures. It promises to be a world of loss and injustice in which hundreds of millions of our fellow humans and fellow creatures will be drowned by floods. In writing seas starved by droughts, consumed by fires, swept away by hurricanes and bones of tornadoes and caught in violent conflicts over food and water. And this is where Enoch gives us an answer more pertinent and more profound. And what we find in the book of Job, whereas Job's God is content to let his righteous and faithful servant suffer, great loss and pain for a season to satisfy the challenge of his contestator.

We who have had the power to stop destruction caused by human choice and to diminish the effects of destructive forces. Our choices have unleashed will result in classical and cataclysmic, suffering and injustice to ourselves and others and all things far beyond our imagining God chose to let Job that his family suffer to prove that faithfulness and steadfastness and stoic endurance have no limits or as the suffering we have caused and will continue to cause will prove only the extent and adamant time nature of our pride and selfishness. So in Job, we encounter a very different God than we do in Job and a very different human in this scene. We also see a world of great conflict, a world with one society in which there was Supreme righteousness marked by the absence of any poor and another society of great wickedness in which the power of Satan, not Satan was upon the face of the earth with a chain in his hand, that veiled the face of the whole earth and darkness.

And after God has taken the city of Jerusalem into his bosom, he looks upon those who are left and he weeps seeing these divine tears has reigned upon the mountains in is astonished. How is it that thou canst weep seeing that thou art holy and from all eternity to all eternity, knowing this God who has power beyond any human understanding, who's got a peace justice truth and mercy in asks again, how can Sal weep? And God says, I created these, your brothers and sisters committed them to one another. And instead there without affection and hate their own blood among all the workmanship of my hands. There's not been so great wickedness as among your brothers. And so therefore the whole heaven shall weep over them. And the truly poignant thing that happens next, that is so profound and beautiful is that unique,

seeing what God sees and seeing God weep weeps with him, that profound weeping of heaven and earth of God and his prophet caused us all eternity to shake where I to summarize Moses seven, I would say that this scripture, both DFI, humanity and humanizes deity.

I'll say that again. It defies humanity. It makes Eddie, Amy like God and it humanizes de cuz it causes God to weep like men and women do as Terry given states in his reference to Eugene's powerful essay, the weeping God of Mormonism, God participates in rather than transcends the ebb and flow of human history, human tragedy and human grief. So in relation to the earth, I believe this scripture prepares us for a time. Almost certainly in this century when God, our heavenly father and heavenly mother will a weep over the condition of this beautiful earth, they prepared for us and that we have spoiled. Most of all, it challenges us to love one another, no matter how high the sea rise, how many people are swept away in floods, how many forests are emulate by fire? How many refugees are teaming at our borders and how many animal carcasses litter, our landscapes, whatever questions or challenges we face, even our own deaths.

The most important question we have to ask now, and in the future is will we choose to love at the end of his adaptation of Job, a leash as Sarah Job's wife, speak these words blow on the cold of the heart. The candles in churches are out. The lights have gone out of the sky, blow on the coals of the heart and we'll see by and by and Job respond. We'll see where we are, the wet won't burn and the wet salt smolders blow on the cold of a heart and we'll know, we'll know. And I conclude by saying, we can all do that. Blow on the coals of our hearts or in appropriate imagery for the good of the earth. Let us blow on the warmth of the sunlight that's in our heart and warm our souls. That is something we can do blow on the coals, on the sun of the heart, and we'll know. We'll know.

**Madison:**

Thank you for joining us in the spiritual wilds on this episode of Bristlecone Firesides.

**Abby:**

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This season's beautiful cover art was provided by Ash Rowan designs and, and our fresh new music was composed by Brenton Jackson.

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