**Small Group Ministry**

**Group Session Plan**

**In Praise of the Imperfect Life**

**Opening Words**

The first of Buddhism's Four Noble Truths is the one that our experience most easily confirms: that to be human is to suffer. In the biblical tradition, no one learns this lesson more powerfully than Job. Job, you'll recall, is that cosmic schlimazel who has the misfortune of being around when God, on a sort of dare from Satan, decides to test a good man's faith. Though Job is an upright and pious man, his children are killed, his worldly goods destroyed. Job responds by tearing his clothes, shaving his head, and falling to the ground in worship, saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But this doesn't satisfy Satan, who argues that Job is merely bargaining for his life.

To test him further, God allows Job to be covered "from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head in loathsome sores." Job then retires to sit in the ashes, scraping his sores with a piece of broken pottery, and cursing the day he was born. At this point Job's wife, wishing an end to her husband's suffering, urges Job to "curse God, and die." And here Job makes the most extraordinary answer: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

Philip Simmons, associate professor at Lake Forest College; contributing editor of *HU World*

**Check-in/Sharing**

**Topic/Activity**

Essayist Phil Simmons, who has Lou Gehrig's disease, accepts Buddhism's first Noble Truth: to be human is to suffer. He writes, "I've grown suspicious of perfection, seeking not a perfect life but a full one." It may be that "all things, good and evil, are divine, all part of the sacred dance of creation." (see <http://www.uuwor1d.org/2OO2/O3/feature2.html>)

1. To what do you attribute suffering, hardship, or evil?
2. Has personal or global suffering strengthened or weakened your relationship to God or to the divine?
3. How do you suffer?
4. How do you alleviate suffering in yourself? In others?

**Likes and Wishes**

**Closing Words**

What if there were a universe, a cosmos, that began in shining blackness, out of nothing, out of fire, out of a single, silent breath, and into it came billions and billions of stars, stars beyond imagining, and near one of them a world, a blue-green world so beautiful that learned clergymen could not even speak about it cogently, and brilliant scientists in trying to describe it began to sound like poets, with their physics, with their mathematics, their empirical, impressionistic musing?

What if there were a universe in which a world was born out of a smallish star, and into that world flew red-winged blackbirds, and into it swam sperm whales, and into it came crocuses, and wind to lift the tiniest hairs on naked arms in spring, and into it at some point came onions, out of soil, and came Mount Everest, and also the coyote...and dog. Into that world came animals and elements and plants, and imagination, the mind, and the mind's eye.

If such a universe existed and you noticed it, what would you do? What song would come out of your mouth, what prayer, what praises, what sacred offering, what whirling dance, what religion, and what reverential gesture would you make to greet that world, every single day that you were in it?

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