

## EXPERIENCES AND RESPONSES TO SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB

### Day Outline

#### WELCOME (9 a.m.)

Your name and what church are you from?  
Most pain you've ever been in?

#### INTRODUCTION (9:15 a.m.)

Opening remarks  
Synopsis of whole book  
Wisdom literature in general  
Who was Job?

#### EXPERIENCES OF SUFFERING (9:45 a.m.)

Introduction  
Job's 4 sufferings

15 minutes to respond (journal)

#### RESPONSES TO SUFFERING (10:15 a.m.)

Job's Wife

#### COFFEE (10:30 a.m.)

#### Job's Three Friends (10:45 a.m.)

Eliphaz - *Job, you're a sinner!*  
Bildad - *Job, cheer up!*  
Zophar - *Job, can anyone really understand?*

15 minutes to respond (groups of 2 or 3)

#### Job (11:45 a.m.)

A Case Study: Movie, *A Serious Man*

#### LUNCH - 12:15 p.m.

#### Faith (1:15 p.m.)

Curse my birthday  
God is far away  
Futile to Argue  
Direct Appeal  
Blame God  
Hope  
Let the good times roll  
Do what you want God

15 minutes to respond (large group)

A Case Study: Movie, *A Serious Man*

#### COFFEE - 2:45 p.m.

#### God (3 p.m.)

15 minutes to respond to quote (groups of 2 or 3)  
15 minutes to journal on what has spoken to you

#### CONCLUSION (3:45 p.m.)

#### FURTHER READING

Baker, Wesley. *More than a man can take*, 1966.  
Clines, David. *Job (3 vols)*, 2009.  
Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-talk and the suffering of the innocent*, 1987.  
Haber, Norman. *The Book of Job*, 1985.  
Janzen, Gerald. *Job*, 1985.  
Kushner, Harold. *When bad things happen to good people*.  
Pope, Marvin. *Job*, 1965.  
Rohr, Richard. *Job and the Mystery of Suffering*, 1996.

## SCRIPTURE AND OTHER QUOTES

### INTRODUCTION

#### Job's Song

by Joni Mitchell

Let me speak, let me spit out my bitterness--  
Born of grief and nights without sleep and festering flesh  
Do you have eyes?  
Can you see like mankind sees?  
Why have you soured and curdled me?  
Oh you tireless watcher! What have I done to you?  
That you make everything I dread and everything I fear come true?

Once I was blessed; I was awaited like the rain  
Like eyes for the blind, like feet for the lame  
Kings heard my words, and they sought out my company  
But now the janitors of Shadowland flick their brooms at me  
Oh you tireless watcher! What have I done to you?  
that you make everything I dread and everything I fear come true?

(Antagonists: Man is the sire of sorrow)  
I've lost all taste for life  
I'm all complaints  
Tell me why do you starve the faithful?  
Why do you crucify the saints?  
And you let the wicked prosper  
You let their children frisk like deer  
And my loves are dead or dying, or they don't come near  
(Antagonists: We don't despise your chastening  
God is correcting you)

Oh and look who comes to counsel my deep distress  
Oh, these pompous physicians  
What carelessness!  
(Antagonists: Oh all this ranting all this wind  
Filling our ears with trash)  
Breathtaking ignorance adding insult to injury!  
They come blaming and shaming  
(Antagonists: Evil doer)  
And shattering me

(Antagonists: This vain man wishes to seem wise  
A man born of asses)  
Oh you tireless watcher! What have I done to you?  
That you make everything I dread and everything I fear come true?

(Antagonists: We don't despise your chastening)  
Already on a bed of sighs and screams,  
And still you torture me with visions  
You give me terrifying dreams!  
Better I was carried from the womb straight to the grave.  
I see the diggers waiting, they're leaning on their spades.

(Antagonists: Man is the sire of sorrow  
Sure as the sparks ascend)  
Where is hope while you're wondering what went wrong?  
Why give me light and then this dark without a dawn?  
(Antagonists: Evil is sweet in your mouth  
Hiding under your tongue)  
Show your face!  
(Antagonists: What a long fall from grace)  
Help me understand!  
What is the reason for your heavy hand?  
(Antagonists: You're stumbling in shadows  
You have no name now)  
Was it the sins of my youth?  
What have I done to you?  
That you make everything I dread and everything I fear come true?  
(Antagonists: Oh your guilt must weigh so greatly)  
Everything I dread and everything I fear come true  
(Antagonists: Man is the sire of sorrow)  
Oh you make everything I dread and everything I fear come true

“The Summerian *Man and his God* tells about a sufferer who complains to the gods, although conceding that non is born sinless. In the end he confesses this guilt and is restored...The Babylonian *I will Praise the Lord of Wisdom* denies that anyone can discern the will of the gods; nevertheless, this sufferer trusts in divine mercy....and experiences restoration.... *The Babylonian*

*Theocidy...* comprises a debate between innocent sufferer and his friend..." (Oxford Bible Commentary, 332).

"There was once a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." 1:1

## RESPONSES TO SUFFERING

Job's Three Friends

### Eliphaz

"Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Of where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed." 4:7-8

"Can mortals be righteous before God? Can human beings be pure before their Maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error: how much more those who live in houses of clay, whose foundation is the dust, who are crushed like a moth. Between morning and evening they are destroyed..." 4:17-20a

"As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause. He does great and unsearchable things....Happy is the one who God reproves..." 5: 8, 17a

"Should the wise answer with windy knowledge, and fill themselves with the east wind? Should they argue in unprofitable talk, or in words with which they can do no good? But *you* are doing away with the fear of God, and hindering meditation before God. *For you iniquity* teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you and not I; your own lips testify against you. Are you the first born of the human race? Were you brought forth

before the hills? Have you listened in the council of God?" 15: 1-8a.

"I will show you; listen to me; what I have seen I will declare...The wicked writhe in pain all their days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. Terrifying sounds are in their ears; in prosperity the destroyer will come upon them...Because they stretched out their hands God...running stubbornly against him...they will live in desolate cities, in house that no one should inhabit...they will not escape from darkness...their recompense (it) will be paid in full before their time." 15: 17-21, 25-31 (selected)

"Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities. For you have exacted pledges from your family for no reason (*you can hear Job saying, what?*), and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry...You have sent widows away empty-handed and the arms of the orphan you have crushed." 22: 4-9

"Agree with God (*by which he means 'Agree with me'*) and be at peace; in this way you will come to good...[God] will deliver even those who are guilty." 22: 21, 30.

### Bildad

"Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression."  
8: 4

"If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to your rightful place. Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great." 8: 5-7

“He who has removed the world to such a distance that it doesn’t hurt has also made himself inaccessible to understanding his brother who needs him sorely” (Baker, 49).

## Zophar

“Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves” 11: 6

“O that God would speak, and open his lips to tell you the secrets of wisdom! For wisdom is many sided...Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? Is it higher than the heaven - what can you do? Deeper than Sheol - what can you know?” 11: 6a-8

“Our task here is to find the words with which to talk about God in the midst of the starvation of millions, the humiliation of races regarded as inferior, discrimination against women, especially women who are poor, systematic social injustice... [and] the sufferings of the people who are struggling for their right to live...” (Gutierrez, 102)

## JOB

Blessed by your Name  
Beth & Matt Redman, 2002

Blessed be Your name  
In the land that is plentiful  
Where Your streams of abundance flow  
Blessed be Your name

Blessed be Your name  
When I'm found in the desert place  
Though I walk through the wilderness  
Blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out  
I'll turn back to praise  
When the darkness closes in  
Lord still I will say

Blessed be the name of the Lord  
Blessed be Your name  
Blessed be the name of the Lord  
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name  
When the sun's shining down on me  
When the world's all as it should be  
Blessed be Your name

Blessed be Your name  
On the road marked with suffering  
Though there's pain in the offering  
Blessed be Your name

You give and take away  
You give and take away  
My heart will choose to say  
Lord blessed be Your name

“Let the day perish in which I was born....Let that day be darkness...Let gloom cover it. That night - let thick darkness seize it! let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months. Yes, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry be heard in it....Because it did not shut the doors of my mother’s womb, and hide trouble from my eyes.” 3: 1-3

“I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, but trouble comes.” 3: 26

“If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity?” 7:20

“I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint: I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favour the schemes of the wicked? ....You...search for my sin, although you know that I am not guilty and there is no one to deliver out of your hand?” 10:1-7, selected verses.

“Only grant two things to me, then I will not hide myself from your face: withdraw your hand far from me, and do not let dread of you terrify me. Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak and you reply to me....Will you frighten a windblown leaf and pursue dry chaff?” 13: 20-22, 25

“Surely now God has worn me out: he has made desolate all my company. And he has shriveled me up, which is a witness against me....He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me; my adversary sharpens his eyes against me. They have gaped at me with their mouths...They mass themselves together against me. God gives me up to the ungodly...I was at ease, and he broke me in two; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as a his target; his archers surrounded me. He slashes open my kidneys and show no mercy....He bursts on me again and again; he rushes at me like a warrior.” 16: 7-14, selected verses

“[God] has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me. You lift me up on the wind, you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm. I know that you will bring me to death...” 30: 19-23

“Why do the wicked live on, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? Their children are established in their presence and their offspring before their eyes....They sing to the tambourine and the lyre, and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to She ol. They say, ‘God leave us alone!’ We do not desire to know your ways. How often is the lamp of the wicked put out? How often does calamity come upon them? How often does God distribute pains in his anger? [The wicked] die in full prosperity, being wholly at ease and secure, his loins full of milk and the marrow of his bones moist.” 21: 7, 13-14, 17, 24-25

“For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant. But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire and where are they?....You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands. For then you would not number my steps, you would not keep watch over my sin; my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity” 14: 7-10, 15-17

“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock *forever!* For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth; after my skin has been thus destroyed, then my flesh shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold and not another.” 19: 23-27a

Handel’s Messiah: Part 3 (45) I know that my redeemer liveth Job 19: 25. I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand on the latter day upon the earth: 26. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

20. [For] now is Christ risen from the dead. . . the firstfruits of them that [sleep]. 1 Corinthians 15:20

“Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me; when his lamp shone over my head and by his light I walked through darkness; when I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent; when the Almighty was still with me, with my children were around me.”  
29: 2-5

## **GOD**

“Where you there when I laid the foundations of the earth?...Have you entered the storehouse of the snow...?...Can you lift up your voice to the clouds...?” 38: 4, 22, 34

“In a world where paradox and incongruity are integral to its design, there is no simplistic answer to the problem of innocent suffering. The baby eagle survives because another young creature dies. God does not eliminate the forces of chaos, the role of Death, or the presence of the wicked. The operate within the constraints of his design. Light is balance by darkness....No mechanical law of reward and retribution operates in his design....Job’s complaint that the innocent suffer unjust is never refuted. It stands side by side with the answers of Yahweh as part of the paradox of that design” (Habel, 535).

## **CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE DAY**

It is an amazing gift, Lord,  
to end the day in prayer,  
to close the doors of the daytime in your presence,  
and in the knowledge of your blessing.

Yet, even as we pray,  
we realize that prayer,  
like all your gifts can be abused.  
Preserve us then, Father,  
from that false use of prayer  
which seeks to use you as an escape  
from the trials and troubles of this world.

Let this, our time of worship,  
be an hour in which the suffering of humankind  
becomes more, and not less, real for us.

Grant us to share at least a little of your perspective  
on the agony of your children,  
our brothers and sisters.  
Reveal to us the failure,  
the inadequacy, of our vision,  
which does not yet compel us  
to see ourselves, and yourself,  
in each and every victim of despair.  
Permit me a glimpse  
into the anguish of your heart,  
that anguish which only Jesus fully knew  
and shared upon the cross.

And, in the power of that cross,  
deepen our compassion,  
renew our dedication,  
to the way of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
who came, not to be ministered unto,  
but to minister,  
and to be servant of all.  
Amen.

Barrie S. Shepherd, Daily Prayer