

Job 8
April 19, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: As we move deeper into Job, I'm finding it harder to come up with a good opening question, but I am going to give this a shot with a hypothetical:

If a friend insisted that your suffering must be your fault, how would you respond? [Let people engage]

Transition: Up to this point in the Book of Job, we've seen Job lose everything and pour out his grief. His friends have started to respond, and now in Chapter 8, Bildad speaks up. Unlike Job, who is wrestling honestly with his pain, Bildad is much more confident – he believes he understands how God works.

At the heart of what Bildad says is a simple idea: God is just, so suffering must be the result of wrongdoing. From his perspective, the situation is clear-cut. If Job is suffering, there must be a reason – and that reason must lie with Job.

But what makes this chapter so powerful – and uncomfortable – is that Bildad is not entirely wrong. He says things about God's justice that sound true. And yet, the way he applies those truths to Job becomes harsh and even harmful.

So as we read Job 8, we're stepping into a tension:

- What happens when good theology is applied without compassion?
- Can someone say true things about God and still be deeply wrong?
- And how do we respond when someone tries to explain our suffering too simply – which is why I opened with the hypothetical question this morning!

Let's read this chapter not just to evaluate Bildad, but to reflect on how we think about suffering, justice, and the way we speak to others in pain. Let's begin.

BOOK:

8 Then Bildad the Shuhite replied:

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.

⁷ Your beginnings will seem humble,
so prosperous will your future be.

⁸ “Ask the former generations
and find out what their fathers learned,

⁹ for we were born only yesterday and know nothing,
and our days on earth are but a shadow.

¹⁰ Will they not instruct you and tell you?

Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?

¹¹ Can papyrus grow tall where there is no marsh?

Can reeds thrive without water?

¹² While still growing and uncut,
they wither more quickly than grass.

¹³ Such is the destiny of all who forget God;
so perishes the hope of the godless.

¹⁴ What he trusts in is fragile (meaning of Hebrew word uncertain)
what he relies on is a spider’s web.

¹⁵ He leans on his web, but it gives way;
he clings to it, but it does not hold.

¹⁶ He is like a well-watered plant in the sunshine,
spreading its shoots over the garden;

¹⁷ it entwines its roots around a pile of rocks
and looks for a place among the stones.

¹⁸ But when it is torn from its spot,
that place disowns it and says, ‘I never saw you.’

¹⁹ Surely its life withers away,
And (or Surely all the joy it has) from the soil other plants grow.

²⁰ “Surely God does not reject a blameless man
or strengthen the hands of evildoers.

²¹ He will yet fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.

²² Your enemies will be clothed in shame,
and the tents of the wicked will be no more.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Let's be careful with "simple explanations" for complex suffering. Bildad assumes a simple cause and effect: suffering = personal sin. That mindset still shows up when people say things like, "Everything happens for a reason," or "You must have done something." Let's resist the urge to explain someone's pain too quickly. Don't assume you know why someone is suffering.

Second, true statement about God can be misapplied. Bildad is defending God's justice, which *is* true. But he applies it in a rigid, unhelpful way to Job's situation. It's possible to say something theologically correct and still be wrong in how or when you say it. Godly wisdom includes timing, humility, and sensitivity.

Third, compassion matters as much as correctness. Bildad prioritizes being right over being kind. His words lack empathy for Job's grief. When people are hurting, presence and compassion often matter more than explanations. We would do well to ask ourselves, "What does this person need right now?"

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). Be Patient. (pp. 35-39) Victor Books

1. Three logical arguments (Job 8:1-22)

"Your words are a blustering wind!" (Job 8:2, NIV) Can you imagine a counselor saying that to a suffering individual who wanted to die? Bildad did; in fact, he used the same approach in his next speech (18:2). Job had poured out his grief and was waiting to hear a sympathetic word, but his friend said that Job's speech was just so much hot air.

There is a reason for Bildad's approach: he was so concerned about defending the justice of God that he forgot the needs of his friend. "Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice?" (8:3, NKJV) Bildad preached a sermon on God's justice, and his text was taken from the "vision" of Eliphaz: "Shall mortal man be more just than God?" (4:17) In defending God's justice, Bildad presented three logical arguments.

The character of God (Job 8:1-7). It angered Bildad that Job even thought that God would do anything wrong. Had Job forgotten what God did to sinners at the Flood, or what He did to Sodom and Gomorrah? Isn't He the holy God, and doesn't His very nature demand that He do what is right? Job was blaspheming God by questioning Him and accusing Him of wrongdoing.

While Bildad's theology was correct—God is just—his application of that theology was wrong. Bildad was looking at only one aspect of God's nature—His holiness and justice—and had forgotten His love, mercy, and goodness. Yes, "God is light" (1 John 1:5); but don't forget that "God is love" (4:8, 16). His love is a holy love, and His holiness is exercised in love, even when He judges sin.

How are these two attributes of God reconciled? At the Cross. When Jesus died for the sins of the world, the righteousness of God was vindicated, for sin was judged; but the love of God was demonstrated, for a Savior was provided. At Calvary, God is both "just and the Justifier" (Rom. 3:24–26). God's law said, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20, NKJV); and God obeyed His own law in the sacrificing of His Son on the cross. In Christ's resurrection, the grace of God triumphed over sin and death; and all who repent of their sins and trust Jesus Christ will be saved.

In Old Testament times, believers looked forward to the Cross and were saved by faith in a Savior yet to come (John 8:56; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 11). Job was a believer; therefore, his sins had been dealt with by God. Even if Job had sinned against God in some great way, God would deal with His child on the basis of grace and mercy and not justice. When we confess our sins, God forgives us because He is faithful to His promise and just toward His Son who died for those sins (1 John 1:9).

It must have pained Job deeply when Bildad said that Job's children had died because they had sinned (Job 8:4). Bildad probably thought he was encouraging Job: "Perhaps they were not killed because of your sins but because of their own sins. They can't change anything now, but you can; so don't wait too long!"

Bildad's appeal in verses 5–7 is another echo of Satan's philosophy. "You say you have not sinned. Then plead with God to restore your prosperity. If you were right before God, He would do great things for you. Isn't prosperity better than pain?" Little did Bildad realize that his words would come true and Job's latter end would be greater than his beginning. However, Job would end up praying, not for himself, but for Bildad and the other friends because they were not right with God (42:7–13).

The wisdom of the past (Job 8:8–10). Eliphaz based his thinking on observation and experience, but Bildad was a traditionalist who looked for wisdom in the past. "What do the ancients say about it?" was his key question. To be sure, we today can learn from the past. "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it," wrote George Santayana. But the past must be a rudder to guide us and not an anchor to hold us back. "How the past perishes is how the future becomes," said philosopher Alfred North Whitehead.

The fact that something was said or written years ago is no guarantee it is right. As one who enjoys reading the classics, I am impressed with the fact that they contain as much folly as wisdom; and they often contradict each other. Dr. Robert Hutchins, editor of *The Great Books of the Western World*, wrote in his preface: "In a conversation that has gone on for twenty-five centuries, all dogmas and points of view appear. Here are the great errors as well as the great truths."

“Tradition” and “traditionalism” are two different things. Historian Jeroslav Pelikan expresses this difference accurately when he says, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” To Bildad, the past was a parking lot; but God wants the past to be a launching pad. We stand with the ancients so that we can walk with them and move toward the goals that they were seeking. This includes our knowledge of God as well as our knowledge of man and the world. As John Robinson said to the Pilgrim Fathers when they left for the New World, “The Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word.”

Bildad did not quote from the ancients; he knew that Job was as familiar with the past as he was. But Bildad made it clear that he respected the wisdom of the ancients more than the teachings of his contemporaries. The accumulated wisdom of the ages was bound to be worth more than the words of people who were “born only yesterday.” Life is too brief for us to learn all they can teach us. We are fleeting shadows, so we had better learn wisdom while we have opportunity. The evidence in nature (Job 8:11–22). In this “wisdom poem,” Bildad may have summarized some of the sayings of the ancients as he argued from the law of “cause and effect.” If this law applies in nature, why not in human life as well?

Take the papyrus plant as an example: If it doesn’t have water, it withers and dies (vv. 11–13). Job was withering and dying, so there had to be a cause: he was a hypocrite, and his hope was perishing.

Bildad then moved from plants to spiders (vv. 14–15). Can you lean on a spider’s web and be held up securely? Of course not! No matter how confident you may be, the web will break. Job’s confidence was like that: In due time, it would break, and he would fall.

The third example came from the garden: If you pull up a plant, no matter how luxuriant it may be, it will eventually die (vv. 16–22). Something had happened to Job’s “root system,” and he was fading away; thus, sin was the cause. Nobody pulls up a good plant and destroys it, so there had to be something wrong with Job for God to so uproot him. God doesn’t cultivate weeds and cast away the good plants! Bildad reaffirmed his earlier promise that God would restore Job’s fortunes if he would only admit his sins and get right with God. It was the devil’s invitation all over again!

Zuck, R. B. (1985). *Job*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 729-730) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

3. Bildad’s first speech (chap. 8)

Bildad accused Job of impugning the justice of God (v. 3) whereas Eliphaz had accused Job of resenting God’s discipline (5:17). Both of these self-appointed consultants held the view that a man’s calamities are the consequences of his crimes (8:11–13; cf. 4:7–8). Bildad, like Eliphaz, invited Job to repent as the way to recovery (8:5–7; cf. 5:8).

a. Bildad’s defense of God’s justice (8:1–7)

8:1–2. Beginning abruptly and bluntly, **Bildad** asked two questions, one pertaining to Job’s windy **words** and the other pertaining to God’s upright management of the moral universe (v. 3). Accusing Job’s words of being a **blustering wind**, Bildad probably was picking up on Job’s own reference to wind (6:26). The Hebrew word translated “blustering” is unusual; it means strong and abundant; thus Job’s words, to Bildad, were like a forceful, continuous windstorm. Perhaps Bildad also was hinting that Job’s rash, wild words were destructive, like the windstorm that killed his 10 children (1:19).

8:3–4. Bildad argued that to complain against **God** meant that Job was accusing Him of injustice (cf. comments on *mišpoṭ* in 9:19). Since God never does **pervert** (“distort,” used twice in 8:3) **justice**, He certainly would not be punishing Job for nothing. If Job had *not* sinned, then his suffering would mean that God had perverted His ways. And to Bildad that was unthinkable! Obviously, then, Job had sinned.

Anyone who has **sinned against** God suffers the consequences, Bildad said. Job’s **children** illustrated that fact. They died because they sinned, and now Job was dying because he sinned. Why else would Job be suffering? Bildad and his cohorts were blinded to other purposes in suffering besides retribution. Surely this cruel, heartless remark hurt Job deeply. After all, he had offered sacrifices to cover his children’s sins (1:5).

8:5–7. **If** Job were as **pure and upright** as he claimed to be, all he needed to do was **look to God and plead with** (lit., “implore the grace of”) Him (cf. 5:8). “Look” translates *šāḥar* (“to seek or search”), the same word Job had used in 7:2d. Bildad was saying Job should seek God, not expect God to search for him. Such a simple step, Bildad claimed, would result in God’s restoring Job to a **place** of blessing that would make his former estate seem like nothing!

However, since Job had *already* pleaded with God (7:20–21) and nothing happened, Bildad’s counsel was inappropriate.

b. Bildad’s proof from history (8:8–10)

8:8–10. Eliphaz had supported his viewpoints by appealing to his own experiences (4:8). Bildad tried to upstage him by introducing a supposedly greater authority, the observations made by people in past **generations**. Since Job’s and his compatriots’ knowledge was limited (**we ... know nothing**) and their lives were short (**shadow** may refer back to Job’s words about life’s brevity, 7:6–7, 9), they could learn from their ancestors. Their **words** came **from their understanding**, and were not words merely from their mouths, as were Job’s words. How could Job dare suggest that the accumulated wisdom of many others was wrong? Bildad believed that if the dead could speak they too would testify that people suffer because of their sin.

c. Bildad’s illustrations from nature (8:11–19)

8:11–19. To depict this cause-and-effect principle, Job’s antagonist number two gave three illustrations—two from plant life and one from the insect world. Just as **papyrus** wilts **without** the **water** of a **marsh** even **more quickly than grass**, so a person who opposes **God ... the godless** (*hānēp*, used eight times in Job, meaning “profane” or “irreligious”) will perish.

Anything such a person may depend on for hope—such as Job’s alleged innocence—is as useless and inadequate as leaning on **a spider’s web**.

Job’s wasting away, Bildad asserted, might be likened to **a well-watered plant** (with extensive **shoots** above the ground and entwining **roots** below the ground among **rocks** and **stones**) which is then pulled up (**torn**). It is then forgotten (**that place disowns it**) and **other plants grow** in its place. The words **its life withers away** are literally, “this is the joy of its way” (cf. NIV), that is, the only joy such a plant could experience is knowing that something else will replace it. Again, such virulent talk must have only compounded Job’s emotional wounds. Certainly, Job was not forgetting God, nor was he a godless person (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3) relying on perishable material things.

d. Bildad’s slim offer of hope (8:20–22)

8:20–22. Once again affirming God’s justice (cf. v. 3), Bildad said, **Surely** (cf. v. 19) **God does not reject a blameless** (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3) person, **or strengthen** the wicked. *If* Job were blameless (cf. 8:6) he would not be treated this way by God. Job, then, could experience **laughter** and **joy** once again, and any who opposed him would be shamed (ironically Job’s friends became his **enemies** and were later shamed; cf. 42:7–9). Besides blessing the blameless, God punishes the unrighteous (cf. 8:4, 13) by removing their **tents** (cf. 4:21), their places of security and protection. Bildad’s speech ended with the words, **no more**, the same words with which Job concluded his speech in 7:21.

Bildad’s harsh words included another heartless hint at Job’s losses. The antagonist’s attempt to defend God’s justice only intensified Job’s frustration about the Lord’s apparent injustice. Since the sufferer had not sinned, the counselor’s words were wasted.

Garrett, D. A. (1998). The Poetic and Wisdom Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 205). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Bildad’s First Response (8:1–22). Eliphaz did not directly accuse Job of having done something to deserve all that had befallen him. Bildad moved closer to doing this first in claiming that Job’s children did deserve their fate and second in promising that Job would be restored if he was upright. The “if” naturally implies that he may not be.

Bildad continued Eliphaz’s argument that the moral order of the world was not threatened by what had happened to Job. He claimed the accumulated wisdom of generations supported his point. He developed the familiar simile of the two plants in which the one that thrives represents the righteous and the one that withers represents the wicked (see Ps. 1 and Jer. 17:5–8).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job 8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.