

# biblestudy: august 2021

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury’s Adult Bible Study Series

## August 1, 2021 Text: Job 1:8-20 “Job’s Response to Suffering: Worship”

Shortly after my beloved wife of almost 52 years died, I attended a service to worship God. A couple of days after my son B.J. died unexpectedly, I was in Michigan to be part of a service to worship God. During the havoc created by the coronavirus, I was on Zoom every Sunday, often at more than one congregation, to worship God. This week’s study begins a five week series on Job’s response to suffering and today’s text seems like what we might do: worship God.

Job was not ignoring what had happened. He was deeply saddened by the loss of these whom he loved. In fact, tearing the clothes, shaving the head, and falling to the ground (Job 1:20) were traditional expressions of mourning. Even though he is worshiping God, Job is not making like this is no big deal. He mourns, even as he worships.

The Hebrew word for “worshiped” is *shâchâh*. It literally means to fall down or to bow or to stoop down. Our American culture is not much into bowing before our leaders. Rather, we tend to think of worship as “hip, hip, hooray” and songs and shouts of enthusiasm. This idea of worshiping by humbling oneself may even seem a little “off putting.” Bowing our heads when we pray may be as close to this as we come.

What might be “suffering” for one person may be no more than an “inconvenience” for someone else; however, it is hard to imagine the loss

after loss after loss that Job is experiencing. Yet, here he is *shâchâh*, worshiping God, bowing down to honor the presence of the Almighty

How does my daily life honor the presence of God? How constant is my praise of God in the uneven flow of life? How do I bow down before God, not merely physically but mentally, emotionally, spiritually?

Out of our memories banks we know enough of this account to know that Job’s worship of God is not the end of the story. Even so, let us appreciate his instinctive awareness of God even in the midst of tragedy. That is a good ingredient for life’s journey, for the losses we suffer and the tragedy that befalls us. Job worshiped.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* (Schmul Publishers), John Wesley wrote of this text: “Instead of cursing God, which Satan said (Job) would do, (Job) adored Him, and gave Him the glory of His sovereignty, of His justice, and of His goodness also, in this most severe dispensation.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “I bow before You, O Lord...”As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “I bow before You, O Lord...”

## August 8, 2021 Text: Text: Job 1:21-22, 2:7-10 “Job’s Response to Suffering: Resignation”

The plot thickens. Job has been dealing with the deaths of his children (Job 1:13-19), but now the suffering rattles his own physical person: itching sores all over his body (Job 2:7-8). His response seems to be: “You win some and you lose some” (Job 1:21, 2:10).

From our perspective, it does not seem fair that Job should be getting the short end of the stick. After all, if I have integrity (Job 1:1) and avoid even the most delicious sin (Job 1:22), isn’t it a fair swap for God to protect me from bad stuff? I can understand if my liver gives out if I abuse alcoholic beverages, but surely if I haven’t touched a drop I am due a first-class liver. Job, on the other hand, simply resigns himself to the human condition: Life has both good and bad.

Job mourns the situation (sitting on a mound of ashes was a sign of lament, Job 2:8), but he is not ready to join his wife in blaming God (Job 2:9). [Incidentally, the word used here to describe his wife (Job 2:10) as “foolish” is *n bâlâh*, a word that carries with it a hint of moral wickedness. That’s a pretty strong way for Job to address his wife!

Is resignation (Job is resigned to his fate) a sign of giving up? People resign from positions for lots of reasons: to take a better offer, to give relief from some pressures, to save from the embarrassment of being fired, to put the employer under pressure—lots of reasons. Job seems to feel that to challenge his situation would be to challenge

God and he does not want to do that. So, Job simply responds to his suffering by resigning to his circumstance. He’s not going to blame God!

Job is determined to remain faithful to God. It is as if he has shouted the words of the psalmist: “Examine me, God! Look at my heart! Put me to the test!” (Psalm 139:23). He will receive this suffering, tolerate it, and still not say a word that would put God at fault (Job 2:10). The patience of Job exceeds my patience! I talked with someone who had lost a family member to death. He said to me, “I am mad at God.” Job will not admit such anger. So far, so good.

Life may not be like Job would want it, but he is not going to challenge God to change it.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In Jan Karon’s novel *Come Rain or Come Shine* (G. P. Purnam’s Sons), two of the characters have this conversation: “I’m in over my head, Dad. I look at you---always so patient. I could never be patient like you.” “I don’t know that I’m so patient. Ambrose Bierce called patience a minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord Jesus, calm my anxiety, renew my faith, and stay with me...”

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August 15, 2021 Text: Job 19:1-6, 13-19 “Job’s Response to Suffering: Protest”

When I was in elementary school, there was a boy that the other fellows (not me, of course!) enjoyed teasing and bullying. One day, with no explanation, the “victim”, out-of-the-blue, simply jumped up from his classroom seat and ran into the hall, sobbing and calling for his mother. No one—teacher included—blamed him for this moment of screaming protest.

So it is with Job. We can hardly blame him for his torrent of protest. In Job 19:1-6, he bellows at his so-called friends who have tormented him about all the ills that have befallen him. He yells (Job 19:4) that if all his distress is because of some way in which he failed God, he certainly does not know what it might be. “My error remains hidden inside me” (Job 19:4). He as much as says, “If there is a problem it is between me and God so why don’t you stay out of it!”

Do you remember how during the desperate days of the 2020 coronavirus we felt that almost every social relationship was down the tubes? That is what Job is describing in Job 19:13-19: Family (v. 13), visitors (v. 14), guests and servants (v. 15-16), wife (v. 17), children (v. 17), closest friends (v. 19)---they all have turned against him or ignore him or actually despise him. It is a long roll call of distress.

Is there something spiritually healthy in naming the broken relationships in our life? There is an honesty in naming the hurts: racism that

chooses up sides, homophobia that denies a fullness of life, classism that claims privilege. In John Wesley’s day, the “in crowd” insisted that God must love them more than God loved “the outsiders.” Wesley preached that grace toppled those distinctions; God’s love (Christ’s atonement” was universal.

Job’s words of protest are authentic. He is not pretending that everything is peachy-keen. The account will continue to unfold, but as long as there is no fakery in Job’s thoughts and feelings and statements, there is a place where God’s understanding and redeeming love can get a foothold.

What is the role of protest in my life? Is it public demonstration? Is it quiet occasions of prayer? Is it open sharing with trusted companions? As the Book says: Think on these things.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Layton Williams (*Holy Disunity*, Westminster John Knox) has written: “Protest functions as an inescapable mirror of truth, reflecting back to us how often the unity we idealize is a hollow illusion that requires silent suffering and injustice to persist.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Listen to my heart, Lord Jesus, and open the door for truthful protest...”

August 22, 2021 Text: Job 30:16-23 “Job’s Response to Suffering: Angry Despair”

Job does not pretend. He spills his story of despair and anger. In today’s study text, he labels God as cruel and silent in the face of Job’s pleas (Job 30:20-21). The pages of this Old Testament book are filled with Job’s hurts, disappointments, devastations, financial collapses, relationship torments, and damaged spirit. I can get upset over a whole lot less than that! How about you?

As I was typing this, my cell phone signaled an incoming email. It was from a friend who is writing a musical based on Simon Peter. Peter—Jesus called him ‘the Rock’—had been a faithful disciple until push came to shove and he denied the Lord three times (Mark 14:66-71). The risen Christ forgives him and trusts Peter with His Church (John 21:15-19). Is that the story of Job re-visited? Someone who has been a loyal follower gets caught up in turmoil and says “No, I never knew him.” Job has been faithful, but now in the full throttle of these crises, he accuses God and sputters a kind of denial.

Give Job credit. He reads his heart well. He must have left his sugar-coating in another closet! There is no effort here to camouflage his anger, his disappointment, his despair. (Do I ever try to make God think I feel one way when I really feel another way? Hmmm.) I suspect God is not fooled by my mumbling efforts to make believe.

Anger is not usually seen as a virtue in our faith tradition (James 1:19, Ephesians 4:26), but we recognize here the unshielded honesty of Job. From his perspective, his relationship with God is tenuous, at best. (That attitude shows up elsewhere; look at Psalm 44:18-25.) But, note: Job’s anger and upset is aimed at a God he still knows to exist, a God who is still involved in the affairs of humankind. At least at that level, Job has not given up on God.

In some ways, Job’s experience is an “even though” experience. Even though he hurts, he stay faithful. Even though, others attack, he stays sin free. Even though God seems punitive, he acknowledges God’s presence. What are the “even though” experiences of my life? Is this book about Job or about me...or both?

What Someone Else Has Said:

The fourth century archbishop of Constantinople, Chrysostom, (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament, Volume VI*, Inter-varsity Press) wrote: “The excess of misfortune that have befallen (Job) force him to groan and to wail. Even if I wanted it, I could not stay silent, (Job) says.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “O God of all ages, read not just my lips, but also read my heart...”

August 29, 2021 Text: Job 40:1-5; 41:1-10; 42:1-6 “Job’s Response to Suffering: Acceptance”

As we have traveled through the Book of Job, we have certainly seen this “man in the land of Uz” (Job 1:1) in lots of different lights. This variation has led many students of the Bible to conclude that this book is a composite of the writings of several people, probably even over a span of time. Isn’t it marvelous how God can keep on inspiring!

Job enters into dialogue with God. He acknowledges that some of his comments (his snarls, his mutterings) were spoken out of ignorance. “I have indeed spoken about things I didn’t understand, wonders beyond my comprehension.” (Job 42:3)

Even as Job accepts the fact that the workings of God are mysterious, he moves toward a “happy ending” (Job 42:10-17). This turn in God’s movement in Job’s life occurred when Job prayed for those friends who had so shamelessly persecuted him (Job 42:10). Had Job harbored resentment and revenge, God would not have had the open door through which to move the abundant forgiveness and grace that God wanted to pour into the life of Job and his friends.

The closing verse of the Book of Job is often translated “full of years” or “full of days.” The Common English Bible has a different way of putting this into English: “Then, Job died, old and satisfied.” I looked up the Hebrew word for “full” as it appears in this verse. The word is *sâbêa*. A literal translation of that word might be “saturated.”

Job is now saturated with God’s grace!

Job’s acceptance of God’s work in his life is not based on understanding all the intricacies of God’s doings. In fact, he makes a point of saying he does not understand (Job 42:3). Accepting God’s moving presence in our lives is not based on finally figuring it out. It is based on the freely given, undeserved, favor of God.

Job finally says “Yes” to God’s Yes.” That is the invitation that comes from our study of Job and suffering. The question is not “Do you understand God?” The question is “Do you accept God?”

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Triptych* (World Fellowship of Methodist and Uniting Church Men), Andy Morris writes: “‘Grace upon grace’ is the concept of the overflowing favor with God....The only way to have grace upon grace is to give grace away. Share your grace and make room for more.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Yes! You love me, O God!...”

