

BILDAD MISSPEAKS GOD'S JUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Job 8:1-10, 20-22

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Job 8

JOB 8:1-10, 20-22

- 1** 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 seek God earnestly
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 prosperous state.
7 Your beginnings will seem humble,
so prosperous will your future be.
8 “Ask the former generation
and find out what their ancestors 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?”
20 “Surely God does not reject one who is blameless
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.”



KEY TEXT

Bildad the Shuhite replied: “How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind.”—Job 8:1–2

JUSTICE, LAW, HISTORY

Unit 3: Justice and Adversity

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Bildad’s explanation for Job’s suffering.
2. Explain the error of Bildad’s conclusion.
3. Be “Bildad” in a role-play of improved counseling of friends in distress.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Premises and Conclusions
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Condemnation (Job 8:1–4)
 - A. Blowing Winds (vv. 1–2)
 - B. Blasphemous Claims (v. 3)
 - C. Blistering Accusation (v. 4)
- II. Exhortation (Job 8:5–7)
 - A. Urgent Response (v. 5)
 - B. Favorable Reply (vv. 6–7)
- III. Reflection (Job 8:8–10)
 - A. Search the Past (v. 8)
 - B. Learn from the Past (vv. 9–10)
The Wisdom of a Mentor
- IV. Projection (Job 8:20–22)

- A. Double Retribution (v. 20)
- B. Double Vindication (vv. 21–22)
Victory from Afflictions

Conclusion

- A. The Greatest Ministry
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Bildad	<i>Bill-dad.</i>
Eliphaz	<i>El-ih-faz.</i>
Shuah	<i>Shoe-uh.</i>
Shuhite	<i>Shoe-hite.</i>
Socrates	<i>Sock-ruh-teez.</i>
Zophar	<i>Zo-far.</i>

Introduction

A. Premises and Conclusions

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who lived 300 years before Christ, influenced modern understandings of philosophy and rhetoric. Other aspects of his work focused on syllogisms, which are logic arguments where a conclusion is required by two premises.

One of Aristotle's famed syllogisms goes as follows: *All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.* The first phrase is called the major premise, while the second phrase is called the specific premise. If the two premises are properly stated, then the resulting conclusion will be valid.

In the midst of Job's suffering, his friends—who lived hundreds of years before Aristotle—attempted to explain Job's suffering through an implied syllogism. Their syllogism, espoused by Bildad in this lesson's text, went as follows: *Only wicked people suffer. Job suffers. Therefore, Job is wicked.* In the perspective of Job's friends, the premises were true, so it would seem the conclusion was validated!

B. Lesson Context

The book of Job is among the oldest biblical texts, and it deals with one of humanity's old-

est challenges: maintaining hope in the face of suffering. The text also addresses another shared experience: the desire for justice in the midst of suffering.

Job's suffering was the catalyst for his friends' arrival. At the onset of the book, Job was described as "blameless and upright," one who actively "feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). However, Job experienced undue tragedy. His flocks and servants were taken or killed (1:13–17), his 10 children died (1:2, 18–19), and he was afflicted with intense physical suffering (2:7). Without an explanation for the tragedies, Job remained faithful to God and "did not sin in what he said" (2:10).

Job's friends—Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar—are introduced when, on hearing of Job's suffering, they "met together ... to go and sympathize with him and comfort him" (Job 2:11). When they reached Job, they were shocked at his appearance and were unable to recognize him. They raised their voices, wept, and took a posture of mourning, remaining silent "for seven days and seven nights" (2:12–13).

Finally Job spoke, pouring out his anguish in great torrents of despair. His suffering overwhelmed him to the point of his cursing his own birth (Job 3:3). Job cried out that the thing he dreaded in life had happened: he experienced no consolation and no peace (3:25–26).

In response to Job's lament, his friends spoke in cycles of back-and-forth discussions. Eliphaz and Bildad each addressed him three times, while Zophar addressed him twice. Each argument was countered by Job. This lesson's Scripture text highlights Bildad's first response to Job's lament. It is reasonable to conclude that Job's friends were sincere in wanting to care for Job, even though their counsel was incompetent (see Job 6:21; 16:2).

I. Condemnation

(JOB 8:1–4)

A. Blowing Winds (vv. 1–2)

1. Then Bildad the Shuhite replied:

This is the first instance where *Bildad* speaks. His origins are mysterious, and there is little information to gather from the biblical text. Bildad's designation as *the Shuhite* was possibly a tribal name from an ancient ancestor. His ancestry may have been traced to Shuah, a child of Abraham and Keturah (see Genesis 25:2; 1 Chronicles 1:32).

2. "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind.

Bildad's speech follows a lengthy lament spoken by Job (Job 6–7). *Such things* spoken by Job consisted of his bemoaning the unjust nature of his suffering. Job did not question God's sovereignty but questioned the wisdom of his friends (6:11–30). Job's speech culminates in a pointed protest against God (7:11–21).

Bildad did not waste time expressing his disapproval of Job’s lament. By describing Job’s words as *a blustering wind*, Bildad used Job’s own word against him (see [Job 6:26](#)). To Bildad, Job’s words, while desperate, were meaningless and empty. That Job reeled over his multitude of losses (most significantly the death of his children), should give us a sense of how hurtful Bildad’s reply must have felt to Job. Bildad was, after all, one of Job’s closest friends.

What Do You Think?

What role should the correcting of doctrine play when comforting a friend in mourning?

Digging Deeper

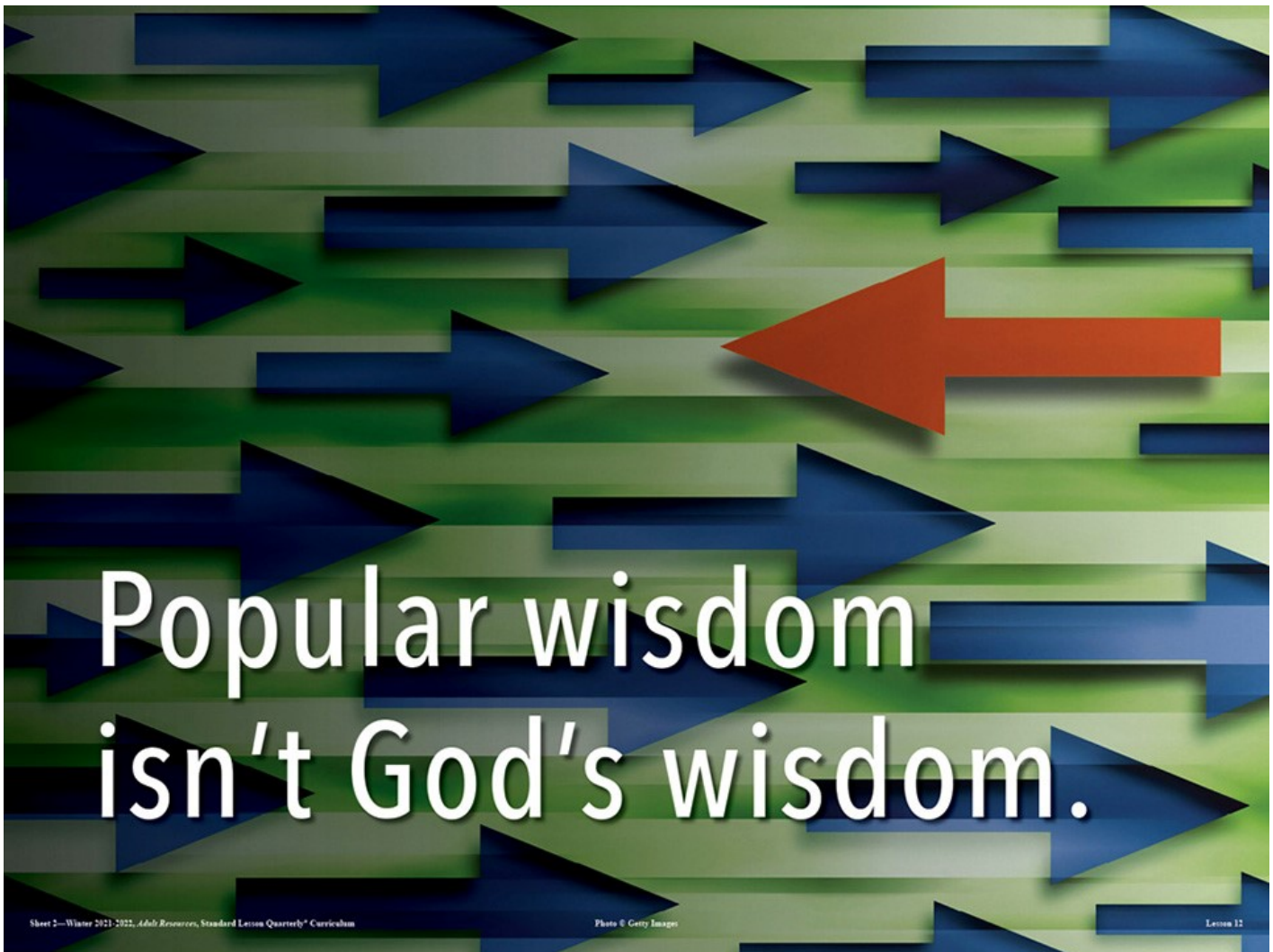
What factors might cause you to reconsider your general response?

B. Blasphemous Claims (v. 3)

3. “Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?”

The structure of this verse is such that the two questions are, essentially, the same. Such is an example of literary parallelism, common in Old Testament wisdom literature. This form of parallelism exists when two phrases carry the same meaning but with slightly altered and/or synonymous language. A similar example is stated by the prophet Isaiah: “Justice is driven back and righteousness stands at a distance” ([Isaiah 59:14](#)).

The Hebrew verb translated *pervert* means to bend, falsify, or make crooked (compare [Ecclesiastes 1:15](#); [7:13](#); [Amos 8:5](#)). The primary thrust of Bildad’s argument was rooted in his observation of the nature and character of *God the Almighty*. God does not bend or falsify *justice*. Elihu, another friend of Job, later echoed Bildad’s sentiments, affirming, “It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice” ([Job 34:12](#)).



Visual for [Lesson 12](#). Allow one minute for silent personal reflection on this truth before discussing the questions associated with verse 6.

Bildad's assertion is true. God himself is the standard of justice and righteousness, and he cannot violate his own character. He *is* just, and Job did not argue that point.

C. Blistering Accusation (v. 4)

4. “When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.

Bildad used Job's deceased *children* to illustrate his assumptions about the manner of God's justice. Previously, the actions of his children greatly concerned Job. Job “would make arrangements for them to be purified” because they may “have *sinned*, and cursed God in their hearts” ([Job 1:5](#)). What Bildad proposed provides an example of retributive justice.

Retributive justice argues that God blesses the righteous and, conversely, curses the wicked. Bildad supposed that Job's children sinned and so their deaths were the result of their

wickedness. This concept finds similarities in the Law of Moses. The promise of blessings came with obedience to God’s law ([Deuteronomy 28:1–14](#)), while the promise of curses accompanied disobedience to God’s law ([28:15–68](#)). Bildad’s assumptions appear accurate; God blesses obedience and punishes disobedience (compare [11:26–28](#); [1 Samuel 15:22–23](#)).

However, God sometimes works differently. Perhaps he chastens the righteous in order for their further refinement (see [John 15:2–3](#)) or allows the wicked to experience prosperity during their earthly lives (see [Psalm 73:3](#); compare [103:10](#)).

Bildad erred by assuming that Job’s hardships were the inevitable outcome of *sin*. Bildad’s strong desire to speak on behalf of God led him to make sweeping assertions. Such assertions carry little value, as the author of Ecclesiastes describes: “The righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them” ([Ecclesiastes 9:1](#)).

The existence (or nonexistence) of physical and material blessings does not correlate to a person’s spiritual vitality. A righteous individual may inexplicably experience hardship and suffering. This does not imply God’s absence or the wickedness of the individual.

Ultimately, it was not up to Job or Bildad to explain Job’s hardship and suffering. Instead, their interaction highlights that a silent presence often can provide the best comfort to those who are suffering. Bildad could have better served his friend through the comfort of silence and presence—as he started out doing in [Job 2:13](#).

What Do You Think?

What danger exists in assuming God’s motives behind earthly events?

Digging Deeper

How can you guard against thinking or speaking in ways that assume you know why God has allowed something to happen?

II. Exhortation

([JOB 8:5–7](#))

A. Urgent Response (v. 5)

5. “But if you will seek God earnestly and plead with the Almighty,

Bildad transitioned from condemnation to exhortation. Bildad concluded that Job was less sinful than others because the Lord spared Job’s life, at least for the time being. In this perspective, unless Job did *plead* to the mercy of *the Almighty*, there was no guarantee that his life would be spared.

The time for Job’s lament had passed, and Bildad challenged him to *seek God earnestly* and

make request of *God* in a rapid and timely manner.

B. Favorable Reply (vv. 6–7)

6. “if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your prosperous state.

The theme of God’s awakening occurs in the psalms, where the psalmist pleaded for God to “awake” and “rise” in order to defend the psalmist ([Psalm 35:23](#)). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah called for God to “awake” for the sake of restoring Israel ([Isaiah 51:9](#)). In these occurrences, God is called to action for the sake of his people.

In a similar way, Bildad promised that God *will rouse himself to restore* a truly righteous Job. God’s awakening does not imply that God is unaware or unavailable; the psalmist provides a reminder of the ever-present nature of God as one who “will neither slumber nor sleep” ([Psalm 121:3–4](#)).

Bildad proposed that the most notable way God would act for Job is through the restoration of Job’s *state*. The Hebrew word is here referring to Job’s overall circumstances (compare [Job 5:24](#)) but can also describe a pasture for rest, be it for a flock of sheep (see [2 Samuel 7:8](#)) or a group people (see [Isaiah 32:18](#)).

The Hebrew word behind *prosperous* implies peace, safety, restoration, and a return to wholeness. Bildad exhorts Job with hopes that Job can lead a restored existence, reflective of a righteous life.

What Do You Think?

How do you contradict doctrine that sounds right but is actually fundamentally flawed?

Digging Deeper

How does your approach differ if you are speaking to an unbeliever?

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

At the onset of Job’s story, he is said to be “the greatest man among all the people of the East” ([Job 1:3](#)). Bildad argued that if Job sought God and returned to righteousness, then he would experience an increase in prosperity and his previous life would *seem humble* in comparison.

This verse reveals one of the great ironies in the book of Job—and perhaps all the Bible. Bildad’s words were unknowingly prophetic in describing Job’s future. Eventually, Job was granted more children and more wealth, but not because of Bildad’s advice (see [Job 42:12–14](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you link material wealth with God's blessing?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures contradict doctrines that suggest God always gives wealth to those he favors?

III. Reflection

(JOB 8:8–10)

A. Search the Past (v. 8)

8. “Ask the former generation and find out what their ancestors learned,

Recognizing the limitations of his experience, Bildad appealed to the tradition of *the former generation*. Perhaps Bildad anticipated that a search of *what their ancestors learned* would confirm his view of God's justice, thus making clear Job's next steps.

Bildad's error, though, came in assuming that the tradition they have inherited was normative. It is one thing to accept tradition with a critical eye; it is something else altogether to use it to draw uncritical, sweeping generalizations. The latter is what Bildad seemed to do to bolster his claims about the nature of God's justice.

B. Learn from the Past (vv. 9–10)

9–10. “for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow. Will they not instruct you and tell you? Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?”

The appeal to the past is rooted in life's tenuous nature, as *our days* are but *a shadow* (see [Psalms 102:11](#); [144:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:13](#)). Previously, Job cried out, “Teach me ... show me where I have been wrong” ([Job 6:24](#)). In response, Bildad pointed to the teachings of the ancestors and the *words from their understanding*.

Like Bildad, when faced with a crisis, we might be tempted to provide comfort by appealing to past experiences, whether personal or anecdotal. The impulse to do so might arise from our feelings of discomfort and inadequacy during the crisis, especially if we struggle with what to do or say. In moments when we feel a sense of discomfort, we can remember Bildad's approach and behave differently, choosing to be present and quiet, if necessary.

What Do You Think?

What safeguards are necessary when studying with fellow believers about the Lord's ways?

Digging Deeper

Do these safeguards differ from generation to generation? Why or why not?

THE WISDOM OF A MENTOR

As a new mother, the pressures of parenting weighed heavily on me. I lived far from my extended family and did not have the support of other mothers. I wanted to learn from the wisdom of other mothers who could guide me and offer encouragement.

In an effort to find that support, I asked the minister of my church if church leadership had ever considered starting a mentoring program for new mothers. My minister responded that they had tried to start such a program, but it did not take root. The minister elaborated that “a lot of [the mothers] feel they made too many mistakes with their own children to be of use to another person.”

I felt deflated; I longed to learn from former generations and apply their wisdom to my own parenting practices.

Bildad challenged Job to seek wisdom from previous generations. For Job’s situation, that challenge was not helpful. On the other hand, godly individuals can provide helpful insight and wisdom that coincides with the wisdom of Scripture. What traits do you look for in a mentor? How are you fostering traits of godliness in your life? Can you live up to the words of the apostle Paul, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1)?

—L. M.-W

IV. Projection

(JOB 8:20–22)

A. Double Retribution (v. 20)

20. “Surely God does not reject one who is blameless or strengthen the hands of evil-doers.

Bildad continued to project assumptions of God’s justice. The Hebrew word translated *blameless* here is also translated that way in Job 1:1, which establishes that Job was indeed “blameless and upright” (Job 1:1). But Bildad seems to have been looking at Job’s tragedies to conclude the opposite. Thus Bildad has constructed a syllogism as follows:

Major Premise:	God does not cast away those who are perfect.
Specific Premise:	God has cast Job away (as evidenced by Job’s troubles).
Conclusion:	Job is not perfect and, therefore, needs to repent.

The problem lies in the specific premise, which everyone assumed to be true. But the narrative of the first two chapters of this book—unknown to Job and his friends—informs us

otherwise.

The flip side of the idea is found in the tradition of biblical wisdom literature that describes the righteous experiencing God's blessings. These individuals are like a "well-watered plant" (Job 8:16; compare Psalm 1:3).

Eliphaz made similar claims (Job 4:7–9), which Job would later refute (see Job 12:6). Various Old Testament voices reflect Job's sentiment, lamenting the ways the wicked seem to flourish, even as they speak against God (see Jeremiah 12:1; Malachi 3:15). Jesus' teaching reminds us that the righteous and unrighteous alike receive rain and sunshine (see Matthew 5:45). When compared to Bildad's assumptions, a fuller understanding of Scripture creates a big problem for those determined to maintain a rigid understanding of how God works.

B. Double Vindication (vv. 21–22)

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

What greater satisfaction could Job experience than for God to *fill his mouth with laughter* and his *lips with shouts of joy* after recovering from such prolonged lament, personal loss, and intense pain? But Bildad's implied solution—that Job needs to repent—follows from defective reasoning.

VICTORY FROM AFFLICTIONS

For several years, I lived in Eastern Europe and experienced the celebrations of May 8. Every year on this day, people flood parks and downtown areas to celebrate Victory in Europe day (VE-day). It was on that day in 1945 that Allied forces formally accepted the surrender of Nazi Germany, thus ending World War II in Europe. After VE-day, people felt free to rebuild from the rubble of war.

Some celebrants lived through the war and remembered the fear and deprivation they endured during that time. They remembered losing loved ones, being displaced from their homes, and scavenging for food and shelter. For these individuals, VE-day celebrations serve as a reminder of previous afflictions and eventual freedoms.

Though not as Bildad envisioned, Job did find freedom from his afflictions and again experienced joy. How has God freed you from afflictions and filled your heart with joy? May the words of the psalmist become your worship: "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy" (Psalm 126:3).

—L. M.-W

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

The false logic continued as Bildad again unknowingly spoke prophetic words (see commentary on [Job 8:7](#), above). Yet this time Bildad's words addressed his own future situation before God—Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar are the ones *clothed in shame* (see [42:7–9](#)).

God's ultimate and lengthy response was to affirm his own sovereignty ([Job 38–41](#)). In a general sense, this corrected Bildad's faulty assumptions.

What Do You Think?

What Scriptures suggest that Bildad's statement in [Job 8:22](#) is true?

Digging Deeper

When have you needed to hear this promise?

Conclusion

A. The Greatest Ministry

Being present to someone in the midst of a tragedy presents unique challenges. In an effort to explain the suffering, we may put too much pressure on ourselves to comfort in a wrong way. Platitudes will likely overstep the bounds of what is helpful. At best, our words might be little more than hollow clichés; at worst, they might cause further harm.

Bildad's counterproductive interaction with Job reminds us of the best ministry we might offer: the ministry of presence in the midst of difficult seasons. At first, Job's friends approached him in this manner ([Job 2:13](#)). But their silent presence changed to unhelpful arguments. They were quick to suppose that wickedness was the primary reason for Job's suffering. However, Bildad's logic did not account for the entire story of how God works. In reality, wicked individuals might experience blessing, while righteous individuals might experience suffering. Unbeknownst to everyone present, Job's suffering was an example of the latter.

When others experience suffering, our natural response is to *be with* them. To draw near, cry, and share in grief is an appropriate course of action to comfort the sufferer. Conjecture on God's behalf is unwise and unnecessary. Sitting silently with a grieving person often provides the best support.

B. Prayer

God of all comfort, grant us the patience to be silent for as long as it is needed in difficult moments. Help us say only what will be received as grace and comfort. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our loving presence is the greatest ministry we
have to offer those who are suffering.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Lead the group in playing “Two Truths and a Lie.” Have three volunteers each think of two little-known facts about themselves along with one plausible non-fact. Have each volunteer come to the board in turn and write on it their three statements. Then invite the class as a whole to vote on which of the three statements is the lie. Have the volunteers identify the truths and lies. (*Option.* Allow a certain number of yes/no questions to be asked of each volunteer.)

Pose the following questions for whole-group discussion, which can serve as a transition to Bible study:

- 1–How did you determine which statement was false?
- 2–Why is it sometimes challenging to discern lies from the truth?

Into the Word

Divide the class into four small groups to study today’s passage. Designate them **Pervert Justice Group**, **Seek God Group**, **Ancestors Group**, and **Rejoice Group**. Assign the four groups the four text segments of [Job 8:1–4](#), [5–7](#), [8–10](#), and [20–22](#), respectively. Distribute handouts (you create) with these identical instructions:

- 1–Identify elements of truth, if any, in Bildad’s words.
- 2–Identify incorrect information or false presuppositions.
- 3–Create a short phrase that sums up what Bildad is saying in the group’s text segment.

After each section is considered in small groups, compare conclusions in ensuing whole-class discussion. Be alert for conclusions of one group that don’t match conclusions of another group. Refer to the commentary as necessary to resolve issues.

Following the discussion, ask each group to think of at least two examples from the Bible

(specific verses or broader stories) that refute Bildad’s position. Challenge groups to use their examples as a basis to create a new short phrase to counter Bildad’s words.

Option. Form learners into study pairs and announce a closed-Bible pop quiz. Distribute copies of the “Fact-Check the Speech” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow a few minutes for the pairs to complete as directed. When pairs are finished, have them score their own work.

Option. For a deeper study of defective beliefs that Christians sometimes embrace, distribute copies of the “Say What?” exercise from the activity page. Form learners into study pairs or triads to complete it as indicated. After subsequent whole-class discussion, ask if participants have more entries for the list.

Into Life

Have participants pair off to role-play this situation: one person will represent a person experiencing great loss and the other a trusted friend who is doing his or her best to provide comfort.

Ask participants first to imitate Bildad’s approach in the texts and then to alter it. Allow time for each member of pairs to act in both roles. Note: this happens only between members of pairs, not before the whole class.

Reconvene and ask for after-action reports. Some questions that you, the teacher, can ask of role-play pairs for the benefit of the class are:

- 1–What did you find most useful in this exercise?
- 2–What did you find to be the most intimidating?
- 3–What “God-talk” errors did you make that were similar to that of Bildad, if any?
- 4–Did anyone quote [Romans 8:28](#) or other passages? If so, was that a useful thing to do?
- 5–What role did silence play, if any? (See [Job 2:13](#).)

Draw the discussion to a close with a consideration of [Job 16:1–5](#) and [42:7](#).