

# UNRAVELLED

## SEEKING GOD WHEN OUR PLANS FALL APART

*What happens when our world falls apart? How do we press onward when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose ends? What do we become when our identity—or the path we’re on—comes undone? What if all this is not the end we fear it will be? In our unraveling, sometimes life surprises us with unexpected joy, love, and hope—with a new beginning we couldn’t have imagined. Sometimes we need God to unravel us, for we long to be changed. Throughout this summer we will explore biblical stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations. These are stories where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling of our plans—and us—into something new.*

### August 25, 2019 (NRSV) – Job 28:12-28 Job’s Lament and Loss

<sup>12</sup> “But where shall wisdom be found?  
And where is the place of understanding?  
<sup>13</sup> Mortals do not know the way to it,<sup>[a]</sup>  
and it is not found in the land of the living.  
<sup>14</sup> The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’  
and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’  
<sup>15</sup> It cannot be gotten for gold,  
and silver cannot be weighed out as its price.  
<sup>16</sup> It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,  
in precious onyx or sapphire.<sup>[b]</sup>  
<sup>17</sup> Gold and glass cannot equal it,  
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.  
<sup>18</sup> No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;  
the price of wisdom is above pearls.  
<sup>19</sup> The chrysolite of Ethiopia<sup>[c]</sup> cannot compare with it,  
nor can it be valued in pure gold.  
  
<sup>20</sup> “Where then does wisdom come from?  
And where is the place of understanding?  
<sup>21</sup> It is hidden from the eyes of all living,  
and concealed from the birds of the air.  
<sup>22</sup> Abaddon and Death say,  
‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’

<sup>23</sup> “God understands the way to it,  
and he knows its place.  
<sup>24</sup> For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
and sees everything under the heavens.  
<sup>25</sup> When he gave to the wind its weight,  
and apportioned out the waters by measure;  
<sup>26</sup> when he made a decree for the rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt;  
<sup>27</sup> then he saw it and declared it;  
he established it, and searched it out.  
<sup>28</sup> And he said to humankind,  
‘Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;  
and to depart from evil is understanding.’”

#### Footnotes:

- a. Job 28:13 Gk: Heb *its price*
- b. Job 28:16 Or *lapis lazuli*
- c. Job 28:19 Or *Nubia*; Heb *Cush*

#### New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

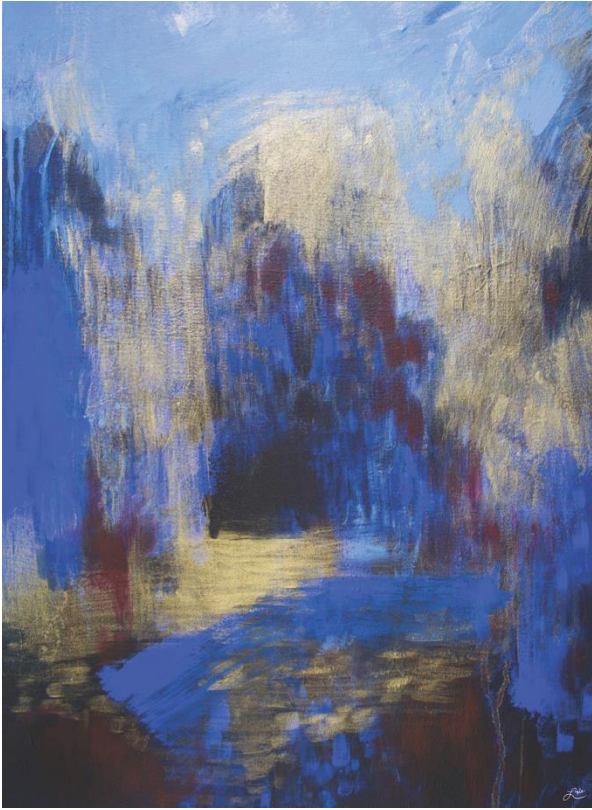
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### Theme Connections

Everything Job holds dear—his property, his family, his wealth, his physical health—has been taken from him. Reduced to suffering and misery, Job laments his circumstances and tries to make sense of what has happened to him. How do we also seek to make meaning of our pain? Ultimately, Job discerns that God is the source of all wisdom, and to turn away from evil is to turn toward the heart of the world, which God made good.

Today’s verses, in the form of poetry or a hymn, come as something of a break after a long siege of arguments and counterarguments between Job and his three friends about the reason for his suffering—arguments that finally lead nowhere. Job 28 offers us a calm moment of reflection on the ultimately impossible human quest to find and comprehend the wisdom that belongs only to God.

**From the Artist** – Lisle Gwynn Garrity reflects on her painting, *“The Way to Wonder: Job’s Lament & Loss,”*



*Everything Job holds dear—his property, his family, his wealth, his physical health—has been taken from him. His life has unraveled in every way imaginable. How can we possibly make sense of the pain we endure, especially the pain we don’t cause or deserve?*

*Much of Job’s journey requires him to untangle the punitive, quid-pro-quo theology he has absorbed: If I do good things, God will reward me. If I do bad things, God will punish me. On a cerebral level, I disagree with the logic of these words. But I remember how easily I can fall into the trap of feeling these words viscerally and bodily in moments of pain, especially in suffering that is so awful and unfair.*

*When I began this painting, I hoped to render Job’s hymn to wisdom visually. I imagined being stuck in the deep, as if my body was anchored underwater and I was looking up to the surface. I imagined textures and symbols were too literal, too formulaic. I almost scrapped the canvas all together, but decided to keep going, to add more layers, more depth, more gold.*

*A window, a doorway, or portal emerged in the middle of the painting. I felt a release and realized that, while I started with lament, I ended with awe, “To fear God is wisdom” (Joh 28:28). The Hebrew word for “fear,” yirah, literally translates to “awesome.” True wisdom lies in breathless reverence for God’s mystery and expansiveness—for God’s presence that is beyond what we can control, or reason, or make far too small.*

**Guiding Questions:**

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Job searches for an explanation for his suffering. How do you seek to make meaning of your pain for the pain of others?
- Scholar Michael Coogan writes, “Perhaps, the ambiguity of Job’s final reply to Yahweh, and of the book as a whole, is deliberate: No easy answer exists to the problem of suffering, no formula that can adequately explain the justice of God.”<sup>1</sup> What does it look like to embrace the mystery of God, even in the midst of suffering?

**For Further Reflection:** Read *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved* by Kate Bowler, New York: Random House. Bowler is a professor at Duke Divinity School, a recognized authority on the prosperity gospel, a creed that sees fortune as a blessing from God and misfortune as a mark of God’s disapproval. At 35, everything in her life seems to point toward “blessing.” She is thriving in her job, married to her high school sweetheart, and loves life with her newborn son, when she is diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer. The prospect of her own death forces her to realize that she has somehow bought into the prosperity gospel she has studied, living as if she can control the shape of her life with a surge of faith and determination. As she reflects on her journey, she discovers that she and many Christians who claim to reject the tenets of the prosperity gospel are tempted by this type of thinking when confronted with unexplained suffering, in much the same way Job and his friends are.

**Prayer:** *O God, unravel my need for answers into awe for the wonders of your expansive mystery. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Coogan, Michael D. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 481.