

Habakkuk: Trusting in God in Times of Uncertainty

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Prayer of Illumination

Prepare our hearts, O God, to accept you Word. Silence in us any voices but your own, so that we may hear your Word and also do it; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Background

One of my favorite books is Dr. Seuss's *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*

In the middle of the story he talks about one of the more puzzling legs of the life journey:

*You can get so confused
you'll start in to race
down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace
and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,
headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.
The Waiting Place ... for people just waiting.*

*Waiting for a train to go
Or a bus to come, or a plane to go
Or the mail to come, or the rain to go
Or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
Or waiting around for a Yes or a No
Or waiting for their hair to grow...
Everyone is just waiting ...*

The book of Habakkuk is a meditation on how to live in the waiting place. We learn from Habakkuk that the waiting place is definitely a **difficult** place ... but not a **useless** place. God can use the act of trusting and waiting in the midst of our doubts, our fears, and our pain, to stretch us, to mature us.

It's natural to think that things will go smoothly along our faith journey because, well, *we're all in God's family!* We've got connections. *Of course* we'll be exempt from traffic jams, check engine lights, fender benders, detours, or dead ends. But faith isn't always a smooth ride. It can be a disorienting and disconcerting journey at times. Things don't always turn out as we expected. Things break down along the way. *We* have our breakdowns. We find ourselves stranded in the waiting place.

Thankfully there are guides for us in such times and places—and the prophet Habakkuk can help lead the way out for us.

Habakkuk was written in the 7th century B.C. We don't know much at all about Habakkuk, but some scholars think that his name means "**Embraced by God.**" Nahum announced the **falling of Nineveh**. Habakkuk wrestles with the **rising of Babylon**. The Babylonians were poised to destroy the temple in Jerusalem and send Israel away to exile. On top of that, the Southern Kingdom's economy, was going south.

Most prophets have a message from God to bring to the people. Habakkuk is different. We watch him ask his questions (and our questions) before the living God. Habakkuk relentlessly fires questions and cross-examinations God's way:

If God is loving and just, why does he allow his people to suffer under unjust and cruel nations? [\(1:1-17\)](#)

The good news of Habakkuk is that God is OK with our questions. He gives us freedom to question. We don't have to be **ashamed of** or **bury** our doubts. We can get them out in the open. We don't have to hide them—rather we can present them to God, we can pray them.

We can ask questions, but God doesn't always answer our questions—at least in the way we'd like. But God does challenge us to trust in him in that **waiting place** and **not-knowing** and **struggle**. Faith and doubt aren't at odds with one another—they're just different sides of the same coin. So even in his doubts and questions, Habakkuk shows a lot of trust:

I will keep watch to see what God will answer concerning my complaint. [\(2:1\)](#)
The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him. [\(2:20\)](#)

...

In the midst of his doubts and trouble, Habakkuk concludes his book by uttering one of the most powerful words of trust in God found in all of scripture. So let's listen now to:

Scripture: Habakkuk 3:16-19 (NRSV)

I hear, and I tremble within;
my lips quiver at the sound.
Rottenness enters into my bones,
and my steps tremble beneath me.
I wait quietly for the day of calamity
to come upon the people who attack us.

Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails,
and the fields yield no food;

though the flock is cut off from the fold,
and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.

God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
and makes me tread upon the heights.

To the leader: with stringed instruments.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Habakkuk: Trusting in God in Times of Uncertainty

There was a young woman who brought her fiancé home to meet her parents. After dinner, her mother told her father to find out more about the young man. So the father invited the fiancé into his study.

"So what are your plans?" the father asked the young man. "I'm a Bible scholar." he replied. "A Bible scholar. Hmm? Admirable, but how will you buy our daughter the beautiful engagement ring she deserves?" "I will study," the young man replied, "and God will provide for us." "And how will you provide a nice house for my daughter to live in that she's accustomed to?" asked the father. "I will concentrate on my studies," the young man answered, "and God will provide for us." "And children?" asks the father. "What's your plan to support any children you might have?" "Don't worry, sir, God will provide," replied the fiancé.

The conversation kept on going like this. With each of the father's questions, the young man pronounced "*God will provide.*"

Later in the evening, the mother took aside her husband and whispered,

"*So, honey, how did it go?*"

The father answered:

"Well, the boy has no job and no plans, but the good news is ... **he thinks I'm God!**" 😊

At the end of the day, Habakkuk knew God would provide. Even though circumstances all around him screamed otherwise.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not ... what? **Want.**

Habakkuk says, "the just shall live by faith."

Living by faith is ultimately a **trust issue**. Faith believes that God takes care of us and will provide for us—even when we're in a place of lack and vulnerability. We can calmly wait, take a deep breath along with Habakkuk and say, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God," even if all appearances speak otherwise.

I love Habakkuk's mantra. He didn't live life with **what ifs**.

He chose to live with **even thoughts** . . .

- **Even though** there are no figs on the fig tree.
- **Even though** there are no grapes on the grapevine and no olives in the olive garden.
- **Even though** the sheep pens are sheepless.
- **Even though** the cattle barns are cattle-less.
- **YET will I rejoice.** (Not "yet will I grit my teeth.")

Yet will I rejoice. Paul talks about rejoicing in our trials. Not for our trials, but in them. We can rejoice in the midst of our struggles because we serve a God who has a great track record of delivering and providing ... *not a moment sooner* than he has to!

"Yet will I rejoice" is another way of describing faith as the book of Hebrews describes it:

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
[\(Hebrews 11:1\)](#)

Habakkuk's honest and questioning faith has blossomed and ripened into a trusting intimacy with God. He trusts that God can still be at work, even in undesirable events. That God can be at work even in our times of endless waiting.

Faith believes Habakkuk's name is also our name, "**Embraced by God.**" Even in times of fear, we can **trust against trust** that we're in **good hands**. No, we're in **better hands** when Jesus takes the wheel

of our **lives**. But we need to be honest with ourselves. Sometimes it feels like Jesus has taken the wheel—*the wrong wheel!*

We scratch our heads along with the prophet Habakkuk and say, “I don’t get it.” Or even more honestly- “I don’t get *you* God.” This is OK—it’s an important part of faith.

Questioning God is a way to **engage God**. To get to the bottom of things. When you ask a question, you are saying **you don’t know all the answers**. You’re also saying that **you’re willing to wait for and hear** an answer from God. Asking requires **listening and slowing down**.

Being spiritually baffled is not a sign of immaturity or weakness. It helps us refuse pat answers and pay closer attention. God can use our doubts and struggles to strengthen our resolve and deepen our faith to new levels.

Questions help us slow down, reflect, and go deeper. Questions can open us up to God’s mystery and majesty—where we tremble at our smallness and God’s vastness. And in the stillness, our doubts are put in perspective. We see that our mountains are really just mole hills.

When we put aside our distractions and are quiet, we can more easily recollect and rehearse what God has done in the past. This then helps us trust that God will act in our future the same way. It’s counter-intuitive: stillness and staying and waiting with God help build momentum for our faith. God’s promises become enough to help us keep calm and carry on through the chaos and uncertainty.

Habakkuk started with doubt,

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?

But he ends in worship,

Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, for God the Lord is my strength.

God is our strength—especially when things are tough. Faith has the courage not only to face our problems, but to face God. In the face of adversity, uncertainty, and perplexity—God gives us **spiritual stamina** to stick it out.

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” [\(Psalm 121:1\)](#)

When we worship God our Help and God our Strength, he not only makes us mount up with wings like eagles, he makes our feet like the feet of a deer. He makes us able to tread upon the heights.

Mountain climbers who want to scale Mt. Everest need to start at the bottom. They need time in the foothills and then slowly and steadily ascend up the heights. You can’t be airlifted high up close to the summit. It makes it harder, rather than easier. If you don’t climb the whole way, your body hasn’t been given time to slowly acclimate to the higher altitudes. You won’t survive.

...

But with **practice** and **preparation** and **expert help** and **steady climbing**, the summit can be reached.

Not all at once, but with the steps of faith we slowly ascend the heights and scale our challenges, little by little.

And finally, Habakkuk has a great reminder for us at the end of the book—a little PS:

To the leader: with stringed instruments.

Habakkuk shows us that faith needs times of **silence** and **solitude**. But he also reminds us we need times of **singing**.

Immanuel, let's sing our faith together. Let's belt it out together. There's a power to music and song.

- Cervantes wrote, "Sing away sorrow, cast away care."
- Stroke victims who are unable to speak, often times can sing.
- People with speech impediments may stutter in their speaking, but they can often sing fluently.

So in those times that we feel we have a **faith impediment**, let's not only **ask questions** and **be still** before the holy God, but let's also **keep singing our faith** together and to God.

Amen.

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