



# habakkuk

## SEEING YOUR LIFE THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

“O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear?” (1:2) Have you ever asked this question of God? Habakkuk’s name literally means *to embrace or to wrestle*—someone engaged, but struggling with something. He seems unable to reconcile what he knows about God with what he sees unfolding before his eyes. And as Habakkuk confronts his own doubts and fears, you too may find the answer is not found in your ability to reason with God, but in your willingness to trust Him.

Have you ever doubted God? Have you ever had something unfold in your life or in the life of someone you loved that was so devastating and disappointing that instead of falling on your knees and praying, “God have mercy on me,” you looked up and asked, “Really God? Would You really do this?”

In all honesty, we all would admit that in the uncertainties and anxieties of life, we have asked in our hearts, “God, why me? Why this? Why now?”

Although the Bible is a testimony of faith, it is not exclusively about the lives of great believers. As we read the stories of heroes in the Bible, many of them were people who doubted God.

Adam doubted God. Abraham doubted God. Isaac. Jacob. Moses. David. Elijah. Peter. You can go down the list. They all asked, “Why?”

One of the primary reasons we doubt is because of “poor sight-lines”. We don’t have a good perspective of the overall picture.

On one hand, God’s Word—the Bible—describes for us who God is, what God is like and how God has moved, worked and intervened in lives and nations throughout time and history.

On the other hand, many times our sight-lines are so poor we can’t see the big picture. We are like a child standing behind a crowd at a parade. Unless someone moves us up to where we can see, we are lost.

Let’s look at the life of the prophet, Habakkuk, who expresses and in many ways, declares what you and I have asked God in our hearts.

The book of Habakkuk opens differently than other prophetic books we have studied. Some prophets immediately declared

their message to the people and nations, but Habakkuk was a man more interested in solving a problem that was perplexing him than he was in delivering the message of God. Even though Habakkuk did see and share a message to the nation of Israel, so much of his prophecy is personal. It is more of a look behind the scenes—what was occurring in his heart and life. He was a man living with poor sight-lines and a limited perspective.

The book of Habakkuk begins with this: “The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw” (Habakkuk 1:1 ESV).

That is all we have. We don’t know anything about his background, family or history.

“The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You ‘Violence!’ and You will not save? Why do You make me see iniquity, and why do You idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted... Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have ordained them as a judgment, and You, O Rock, have established them for reproof. You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do You idly look at traitors and remain

silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-13 ESV).

Habakkuk, the prophet, was confused, perplexed and overwhelmed. From his perspective, he saw what was happening with his people, his nation and his world. He could not understand why God was not more quick, prompt or active to intervene and deliver his people. Therefore this creates an incredible conflict in the heart and mind of Habakkuk, and he begins to ask questions of God.

On a personal level, this oftentimes happens in our lives too, doesn’t it? Maybe you have asked one of these questions: *Why is it that when I try to do right, everything goes wrong? God, why won’t You heal me? Why won’t You heal this member of my family that I love? Why has my job been taken away? Why can’t we get pregnant? God, why would you allow betrayal? How am I going to get through this? I’ve acted in faith believing You and now I feel like a failure; have I believed in vain? My wife and my children have rebelled against God; why have so many of my dreams turned into nightmares? Why did we lose the baby? If You love me, why do I suffer? Why did this accident happen? ...*

So many questions and yet, these are the kinds of questions we often ask in the real world, and we struggle with knowing the answers.

Let me remind you that if there is no God, there are no answers—it is just the luck of the draw, the shortage of faith. However, if there is a God, then there are answers, and sometimes only perceived through the work of faith.

Habakkuk was a man whose name literally means *to embrace* or *to wrestle*. It is the idea of someone who is engaged, but struggling with something. He was a prophet who lived with a question mark, not an exclamation point.

Is that true of you today? Do you have more questions than exclamation points?

Let's begin our study of Habakkuk with a quick overview.

### **Faith Grappling With a Problem**

"Why do You make me see iniquity, and why do You idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise (Habakkuk 1:3 ESV).

Here we see faith wrestling and grappling with a problem. Habakkuk was struggling to understand God's government in light of everything seemingly out of control.

It was J. Vernon McGee, the notable Bible teacher, who once said that Habakkuk was the doubting Thomas of the Old Testament.

Habakkuk was struggling with What? Why? and How?. In particular, Habakkuk was trying to reconcile how to live for God in an unjust world and wondering, *"How is God going to bring justice through the wickedness and evils unfolding in a crumbling nation?"*

Everything around Habakkuk was a reminder that Israel's former glory was crumbling and fading. Israel was a nation that once honored God. Its walls around Jerusalem stood in testimony to the faithfulness of God. But in many ways, perversion now replaced grandeur. Even the temple of God (once exclusive to the people of Israel and their worship) now accommodated idols of pagan gods.

In addition, enemies were advancing. As this book unfolds, Habakkuk sees and understands God is going to send a more wicked and evil people against Israel (the Babylonians) to chastise and ultimately intervene in Israel, a lesser evil.

We now know from history that Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty ruler of Babylon, led the Babylonians against the Assyrians and destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (approximately 100 years after Habakkuk). In the book of Habakkuk, Babylonians are called Chaldeans—a nation representing the southern portion of modern-day Iraq.

Habakkuk's heart was overflowing with anxiety, struggles and questions as he contemplated the crumbling state of Israel and its impending doom.

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"Men of faith are always the men who have to confront problems."

—G. Campbell Morgan

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We have problems. On one hand, we have the problems about what we *believe*, and on the other, the problems we *perceive*.

Look at what Habakkuk asked:

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You 'Violence!' and You will not save?" (Habakkuk 1:2 ESV).

Is God indifferent? Does God not care?

"Why do You make me see iniquity, and why do You idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth" (Habakkuk 1:3-4a ESV).

It is as though Habakkuk is wondering if God is somehow inadequate, unjust, or not in control over what is happening.

"God is of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong" (Habakkuk 1:13 ESV). Habakkuk is unable to reconcile what he knows

about God with what he sees unfolding in the twilight of Israel's final days of freedom.

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"Those who are not believers don't have to worry about these problems. If there is no God, then whatever is cannot be blamed on Him, so why worry? War is war and crime is crime, and we don't have to worry about God."

—Warren W. Wiersbe

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The bottom line? If there is no God, we do not have to wrestle with issues of justice or good and evil. However, we *are* people of faith, and as a result, we strive to know and understand the ways of God.

Likewise, Habakkuk struggled with how God could use a people of greater evil to punish a people of lesser evil. He wondered how God could bring justice out of so much injustice and violence.

The following is an incredible passage of Scripture in Psalms when it comes to personally wrestling with God over what we see in life and the injustices we feel:

"Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... And they say,

'How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?' Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning" (Psalm 73:1-3, 11-14 ESV).

In the middle of Habakkuk's questions and complaints, look at how God responds:

"Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told" (Habakkuk 1:5 ESV).

Could it be the voice of God is whispering this to you amid your questions, disappointing realities, and out-of-control circumstances? Just as in ancient days, does God want you to know He is doing something greater than you can imagine today?

### Faith Grasping a Solution

Even though Habakkuk is struggling with things he does not understand, he says,

"I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. And the LORD answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its

appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but **the righteous shall live by his faith**'" (Habakkuk 2:1-4 ESV, *bold added for emphasis*).

The watchtower was a literal, physical place on the walls of the city. People would go there in order to see what was happening on the horizon. Habakkuk needed this change of perspective so he might grasp this truth: The God who is working in life will be working in this moment. The answer to the problems and questions Habakkuk had were not in *reasoning* with God, but in *trusting* Him.

Likewise the answers to those things in which you struggle are not found in your ability to *reason* with God, but in your willingness to *trust* Him.

"The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 1:4 ESV).

This is one of the most important verses in the Old Testament and a critical understanding about faith in the New Testament.

Faith is what makes sense out of confusing facts and conflicting experiences. Confusion is the result of viewing life from a limited perspective, rather than God's overall purpose.

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"If you say: I believe in God, I trusted God, and He didn't come through; then you only trusted God to meet your agenda." —Tim Keller

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Habakkuk had his own agenda for God. He had to learn God's way may be different.

### **Faith Gaining Joy and Peace**

In the first chapter of Habakkuk, we see a prophet sighing. In the last chapter, he is singing and shouting. What changed? His circumstances? No.

Look at this prayer of Habakkuk:

"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. O LORD, I have heard the report of You, and Your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy... Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the LORD, is my strength; He makes my feet like the deer's; He makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments" (Habakkuk 3:1-2, 17-19).

Habakkuk's perception and understanding changed regarding who God is, what God was doing, and how God would work in His faithfulness, goodness, grace and mercy. This is why Habakkuk said, "In wrath, remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2b ESV).

It is the mercy of God that is "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23). Habakkuk reminds us of the faithfulness of God in the hard and tough times of life.

I want you to hear this testimony in a very special, tangible way today through one of our contemporaries.

Shawn Watson is a man of God who is a hero in my life. He is an amazing young man. He served our nation through a tour in Afghanistan, but that is not the purpose for this interview. He is a man who was strong in body and stature, but there is a story behind the wheelchair to which he is bound today.

### **Interview with Shawn Watson and David McKinley**

**McKinley:** Shawn, as we begin, take a moment to tell the background story of the wheelchair and why you are here today.

**Watson:** I love this man right here. He has been such a blessing to me in my life. I thank God he has given me this opportunity to tell my story.

The grace of God is so good. It is such a blessing to know that if you are breathing air today, it doesn't matter where you are in life or what you have done, the blood of Jesus is there to wash away every single sin.

Although this story is about me, I want you to search your heart as I speak. Can we just have a let's-do-business-with-God type of day? So many times in life, we put on "spiritual make-up" to hide the blemishes—what is really going on inside our hearts and lives.

We are real people who have real problems, and we need a real Savior. So if you need to do business with God, just cry out to Him where you are. I tell everyone I meet, "You are the only one who has to spend eternity with you."

It is ironic; God used a devastating accident to change my life. As a matter of fact, yesterday—October 22, 2012—was the four-year anniversary.

Before my wreck, my life was already a wreck. I was plagued by alcohol, sexual immorality and putting others before my family. If you could have taken a snapshot of my life, it would have resembled one of those beer commercials on television where everybody seems to be having so much fun. My motto was, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die."

Even though I was living that way, I was going through so much

depression and I was in bondage with alcoholism. By the time I was 25 years old, I couldn't even cut grass without having a pint of liquor by my side.

Around the time of my accident, my life was in complete chaos. I was fresh off a tour from Afghanistan, and I was partying. To others, it looked like I was having so much fun, but I was dying on the inside.

I put such a strain on my family (my wife and my two little girls) as a result of my partying and lifestyle. We weren't husband and wife anymore; we were just roommates in our home. I put myself first.

If someone would have asked me, "Are you a Christian?," I would have answered, "Of course!" I grew up in church. I knew John 3:16 in my sleep. I knew all the right answers about believing in Jesus, but I didn't have Jesus in my heart.

Sin and I were a match made in hell. I didn't want anyone to break up that relationship. I could fool anyone. I could say all the right things to all the right people. I was like a chameleon; I could fit into any crowd. I could fool everyone under the sun, but I could not fool the One who created the sun.

I'm from the small town—Greenwood, South Carolina. I remember going into a liquor store and thinking, "Man, I hope someone from church doesn't see

me." What I should have been thinking was this: *God sees me!*

I feared man, but I didn't fear God.

My fast living caught up with me on that October day. You can only run from sin for so long. Have you seen one of those scary movies when someone is running as fast as they can to get away from a monster? No matter how fast they run, when they turn around, the monster is right behind them, even though the monster may be barely walking. The person slips and falls, and the monster always gets his victim.

It is the same with sin. No matter how fast you run, eventually you will fall and your sin will catch up with you. And it caught me while I was drinking and driving.

I was about three miles from home. I don't know what happened. I was on a straight road, and I lost control of my truck. It felt like something just picked up my truck and slammed it with all its force upside down.

I knew I was about to die. I was on a backcountry road screaming for help, and I could feel my voice fading.

I had always taken God for granted. I remember times when I would get drunk—throwing up—and I would say, "God, please forgive me for my sins if I die in my sleep." I thought that would get me to heaven if I should die from alcohol poisoning.

When I was screaming in that truck, I knew my life was fading away and I didn't know how to cry out in the name of Lord. I did not know how to repent. My mind was discombobulated, in complete chaos.

All of a sudden I realized the women didn't matter, the alcohol didn't matter, the friends didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was where I would soon spend eternity. Life is so short whether you live ten years or a hundred years. It is just a drop in the bucket when it comes to eternity. I didn't know what to do, but thank God, by His grace He spared my life.

Once I was taken to the hospital, I learned I was paralyzed permanently from my chest line down. I became depressed. I was angry. I was mad. I blamed God. I wished my life was over. *Why me? Why did I deserve this?* Yet, I was the one who made the choice to drink and drive.

By God's providence, He knew what it would take to get my attention. Over the course of several months, I began to look at the gospel on You Tube—just on a whim. I became more and more convicted because this was the first time I really heard the gospel, and I was convicted of my sin.

Instead of being mad at God, I realized He spared my life. I could have died in the state of sin in which I was living, and I could be in hell right now.



I called out in the name of the Lord and over the course of months, God began to deal with me. He began to show me why I was in this position.

These are the verses that made me tremble when I realized I had been a hypocrite all my life. My life began to change when I read...

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 ESV).

When I read these words, I trembled at the grace of God. I was so thankful that God did not let me die deceived, thinking I was a Christian. The lifestyle described in 1 Corinthians portrayed me!

That was when I said, “God, I’m giving you all of me.” I saw that I deserved hell, but God gave me the grace to repent and put my faith in Jesus Christ who died for the sinful lifestyle I was living.

That is when it all changed.

In the Bible, Jesus describes hell as a place of fire and outer darkness. I knew without a shadow of doubt that if I had died, that is where my soul would be now—that was where I was going.

Hypocrisy and a sinful lifestyle are like having pockets full of fool’s gold—it looks great, but it only lasts for so long and it has no value in the end.

Living in sin is also like a credit card; you enjoy it now, but you pay later with interest.

If I had died in that accident, this is what would have happened...

Since everyone in town knew me, my old church would have been full of people at the funeral. My pastor would have talked about how I grew up in church—in the Junior Brotherhood—and how I was a distinguished veteran. He would have mentioned how I was a good person and model citizen.

Do you think I would have been in hell saying, “Keep preaching, Pastor! You tell them how good I was.”? No!

I would have said, “That’s not real! Tell them to cry out on the name of the Lord! Come to Jesus in faith and repentance!” Hypocrisy means nothing in the end. It doesn’t matter how many people *think* I’m in heaven; I want to *be* in heaven.

Evaluate yourself. I want us all to be in heaven together.

Thank God that is not how my story ended. By God’s grace, He not only saved me through the accident, He used my testimony to save my wife. It is such a blessing.

My mom and dad started coming to Warren when I was in Afghanistan. Then when I started coming to Warren, Dr. McKinley just put the “cherry on my gospel sundae,” and I’ve been hooked here ever since.

**McKinley:** May I interrupt? For three years, Shawn drove from Greenwood, South Carolina, to worship here every Sunday. They live here now, but no matter his location, he has been a faithful, active member of Warren.

**Watson:** I am thankful to be here. Where I am right now, I would not change it for the world. God knew what He had to do to wake me up.

**McKinley:** Shawn, did you doubt God?

**Watson:** Whew, it’s not easy. Still some days the enemy gets in my ear and the doubts can come. But I know my enemy now and I know where those doubts originate.

It’s sometimes very difficult. I’m not immuned to shortcomings and frustrations. There are always temptations. The flesh never leaves us, so there is a constant battle with the flesh.

If I am home and I break a glass or I break a mug, I sweep it up and I put it in the trash. But God in His grace uses broken vessels. So even when the doubts and difficulties come, I know God in His grace still cares for me and I always have Him to cry to.

I would rather be alive in Christ in a wheelchair than a walking dead man, because that is what I was.

*(End of Interview)*

God does use brokenness and weakness. The Bible tells us that when we come to Him, He gives us His righteousness.

...the righteous shall live by his faith. —Habakkuk 2:4 ESV

None of us are here today because of a righteousness that is our own. It doesn’t matter your background, where you have been, what you have done, how good you have lived or how bad you have lived. The only way we can ever be saved is by God’s grace, His initiative, His work and His movement toward us in our rebellion running from Him. And in that moment, He apprehends us and brings us back to Himself.

It’s interesting this little verse (Habakkuk 2:4) is also found in the book of Romans:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:16-17 ESV).

It was on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, the great reformer, stood to confront the teachings of the

Catholic Church (a church that perpetuated the idea that people could live good enough lives as payment for their sins) and said, "No!"

The word of God says there is only one way we can be delivered—the righteous shall live by faith.

We put our faith in the faithfulness of God and the work that was done in Christ through His death, burial and resurrection—His death on the cross for our sins, His burial to take our punishment, His resurrection to give us life.

The key is this: Respond to the grace of God and in faith, put your trust and faith in Him.

So today, knowing there are people who are experiencing brokenness in their lives, I want to ask you, Shawn, if you will pray for the brokenness people are facing. Please pray that God might use this moment to be a "come to Jesus" moment in their lives, understanding that as God in His grace has worked in you, He in His mercy will also work in their lives.



**Watson:** *Father God, I come to You, thanking You for this opportunity and thanking You for all the wonderful people here today.*

*We come to You in our brokenness and humility, asking You to do a work in each and every one of*

*us. We come to You for those who need strength and salvation, asking that You grant it to them.*

*Help people who are going through problems in life, whether personal or professional or in their marriage. I ask You in Your grace to fix those issues. Show people and point people to Your Son, Jesus Christ.*

*Lord, we know You didn't come to make bad people good; You came to make dead people live. I ask You to give resurrection life to people today who need it. Set captives free—those who are in bondage.*

*God, I know if you can save me, you can save anybody. I pray You grant salvation today and that you fix the brokenness in people's lives.*

*I pray all these things in Jesus' name, Amen.*

**McKinley:** Thank you Shawn Watson, and thank you to Shawn's family: Andrea, Ariana and Autumn. God has restored this marriage, made this man a good and godly father, and is blessing his witness and testimony.

In the next service, there is a young person who will be baptized, who came to know Christ because of the witness of Shawn Watson. Shawn has never stopped telling people who Jesus is and what He can do in their lives.

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