



# HABAKKUK'S PRAYER THROUGH ADVERSITY

WEEK 7  
10.15.17

## FOCUS VERSE

### Isaiah 25:1

O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

## LESSON TEXT

### Habakkuk 1:2-4

2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

### Habakkuk 2:1-4

1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.

2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

### Habakkuk 3:16-19

16 When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

Prayer, praise, and worship help a believer achieve victory in the midst of suffering and adversity.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## When Adversity Comes

**A**dversity is no stranger to humankind. We all face difficulties in life. Of greater significance than the nature of the adversity, however, is the way we deal with it.

In the article “How To Be At Your Best When Life Is At Its Worst,” Mike Maddock, contributor to forbes.com, identified three actions he had observed in his mentors when they faced difficulties in life:

- “I wonder, What will this teach me?”
- “Reinvent your future—constantly.”
- “Don’t get furious; get humorously curious.”

Maddock went on to state, “My friend Paul Landraitis loves to exclaim, ‘Fascinating!’ whenever a particularly troubling or unexpected situation arises. What’s inspiring to me is that he does so with a laugh, choosing

to look at every challenge through the lens of curiosity and humor.”

The three strategies observed by Maddock are good actions to take in the face of adversity. Humor and curiosity are especially powerful agents to bolster us through challenging times. Still, however, there is one action that is better than all the ones mentioned by Maddock: prayer.

When challenges come against us, we need to pray. We should not wait until trouble comes to pray, but we certainly should continue faithfully in prayer—even in the face of adversity. Praying through adversity will strengthen us to stand and remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

## OUTLINE

### I. ADVERSITY IN LIFE

- A. Storms Are Part of Life
- B. Embrace God’s Presence in Adversity

### II. HABAKKUK’S PRAYER IN ADVERSITY

- A. Habakkuk Stated His Frustration
- B. The Just Live by Faith
- C. Habakkuk Chose to Rejoice in the Lord
- D. Praise Recognizes God’s Power
- E. Praise Empowers the Believer

## CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

When we were born, nobody told us about one of the packages that accompanied our birth into this world—adversity. For most of us, this package remained inert and inconspicuous for the first years of our lives, but make no mistake: it eventually made its presence known. All human beings are born into a world in which they will suffer adversity—difficulties, pain, and challenges of every sort. The question is not whether we will encounter adversity but how we will deal with it upon its arrival.

We could choose to spend our time complaining and grumbling that nobody else suffers like we do or faces the challenges we face. It is true that every individual’s adversities are different. We must not buy into Satan’s lie that we alone face adversity, and we also must reject complaining as our normal response to it.



**Kenneth L. Barker wrote, “Human nature tends to be filled with complaints, but human beings typically complain in the wrong directions. For example, we tend to talk about God rather than to talk to him; we tend to complain about God rather than complaining to him. Habakkuk took his complaints directly to God. . . .”**

**“The very fact that Habakkuk took his complaints to God can help believers to be honest in prayer, taking all our burdens to the Lord. Habakkuk’s experience shows that God is willing to hear our needs and to help us deal with our problems, even when he does**

not answer in the way that we expect or in the way that we ask” (*Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, *The New American Commentary*).

We could spend our time feeling sorry for ourselves and pitying our circumstances, but it is unproductive to wallow in pity and sadness over things we cannot change or control.

There is a correct response, however, and Habakkuk unveiled it in the Book of Habakkuk, which we will explore in this lesson. Although he did begin by introducing his adversities through complaint, he directed his complaint to God. He ultimately experienced the power of advancing in the face of adversity through the keys of prayer, praise, and worship in the midst of life’s challenges. These disciplines will help believers to achieve victory in the midst of suffering and adversity in this present day.

The title for today’s lesson is telling: “Habakkuk’s Prayer through Adversity.” Adversity is not something we pray about and forget; adversity requires that we pray through it. We must pray, praise, and worship our way through the difficulties of life.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. ADVERSITY IN LIFE

Sources of adversity in life are as different as the individuals who encounter them. Some people may face adversity in the workplace; others may suffer adversity from family members, perhaps those who reject the Apostolic message of truth. Sometimes adversity may originate with neighbors, coworkers, or so-called friends. All individuals experience adversity—and there are significant keys to living in victory in spite of adversity.



In the Old Testament the word *adversity* is translated from the Hebrew word *sara(h)*, which means “enmity, need, distress, anxiety, anguish, trouble” (*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*).

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* defines *adversity* as follows:

“an OT term, expressing the various forms of distress and evil conveyed by four Heb words . . . a halting or fall . . . straits, distress, affliction . . . straitness . . . bad . . . evil . . . harmful. These words cover a whole range of misfortunes caused by enemies, poverty, sorrow and trouble.”

Succinctly, adversity includes all the challenges and troubles we face in life, and this certainly includes the trouble we experience through direct opposition from various sources.

### A. Storms Are Part of Life

The storms of adversity are an aspect of human life. There is no denying their reality or escaping their inevitability. Each of us will suffer adversity in life.

It is vital not to make the mistake of presuming that the adversity an individual is suffering indicates that person’s level of righteousness or status with God. Storms do not determine the will of God in a person’s life, and they do not indicate that person’s spiritual standing. They can, however, build integrity and maturity in an honest-hearted believer who desires to grow in Christ and advance in His kingdom.

Sometimes adversity occurs in our lives simply because we are human and live in a sinful, fallen world. At other times the Lord uses adversity to create a trial or test to facilitate spiritual growth. But whatever the source of human adversity, Jesus Christ has promised to be with us in all things. For example, Jesus sent the disciples into a storm and then came walking to them on the water, demonstrating His desire to be with His people through every challenging situation, whatever the circumstance may be.

Jesus promised, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

In *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, R. C. H. Lenski observed the following regarding Matthew 28:20: “Their great Lord promises to be with them all the days until the consummation of the eon. He does not send his disciples out into the world of nations alone. Invisibly he will always be at

their side, assuring their success. Here he answers every fear, doubt, discouragement, weakness.”

God’s abiding presence is the answer to all our foibles, weaknesses, failures, and fears. Whatever fears we may have as we face the adversities of life, the Holy Spirit within us calms, strengthens, and upholds us. God is love and He abides within us. Since perfect love casts out fear, the abiding presence of the Lord leaves no room for fear caused by the adversities of life.

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment” (1 John 4:18).*

We can give thanks to God that we do not have to face the adversities of life alone; He is with us, and His presence gives us victory over fearful circumstances. Whatever we face, Jesus Christ has promised to be with us.

## **B. Embrace God’s Presence in Adversity**

How can anyone doubt the loving and compassionate care Jesus Christ has for His people? One could point an accusatory finger at the Lord for sending His disciples into a storm; however, His ultimate care became clear when He showed up, walking on the water.

*“And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: for they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid” (Mark 6:46–50).*

Several points of Jesus’ care for the disciples are obvious in this story.

1. Jesus “saw them toiling in rowing.” Jesus sees us in whatever circumstances we

may be encountering. Jesus sees and He cares!

2. Jesus knows when we are experiencing adversity: “the wind was contrary unto them.” That the wind was “contrary” revealed adversity, and Jesus is concerned when we face adversity.

3. Jesus went to His disciples: “he cometh unto them.” Jesus knows where we are and what we are enduring, and He will come to our aid.

4. Jesus encouraged the disciples in the midst of their fear: “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.”

While it is clear that Jesus cares very much for His people, it is also important to notice our responsibility as His people: to embrace His presence in our times of adversity. The scriptural account is clear: when Jesus came to the disciples in the storm, He would have passed them by had they not called out to Him (Mark 6:48). Disciples must cling to the promise of the Lord to abide with us forever, and they must not hesitate to call out to Him for help in times of fear and distress.

Understanding the Lord’s care for His own creates confidence in those who trust Him with all their hearts. In II Kings 6:8–17, the king of Syria came against Israel. After the Syrian king explained to his servants where the Syrian army would be setting up camp, God revealed the king’s plans to Elisha. Elisha then communicated the information to the king of Israel, who warned the people who were in that area. When the Syrian king found that the Israelites had been forewarned, he thought there was a traitor among his army. But one of his servants told the king, “Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (Isaiah 6:12).

When the king of Syria heard that Elisha was in Dothan, he sent an army to surround Dothan, planning to capture Elisha.

*“And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they*

*that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (II Kings 6:15–17).*

When the servant discovered they were surrounded by the enemy, he was greatly alarmed. But Elisha was not concerned; he knew the Lord's presence was with them and that the armies of the Lord were greater than all their enemies.

We must learn to put all our trust in the Lord and cry out to Him whenever we face adversity, for He is there and He cares for us! "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (I Peter 5:7).

## II. HABAKKUK'S PRAYER IN ADVERSITY

Let us examine Habakkuk's prayer to the Lord when adversity had nearly consumed him.

### A. Habakkuk Stated His Frustration

Habakkuk's frustration over the spiritual situation in Judah was clear. It is perhaps an interesting coincidence that Habakkuk 1:1 would use the word *burden* to describe Habakkuk's declaration. However, here the word *burden* does not mean what we typically associate with the word. Rather, it refers to his "prophetic pronouncement" or "utterance." Still, the idea of the pronouncement being a "burden" upon the prophet who was charged with delivering it is also recognized among many commentators.



**"Burden, oracle, pronouncement. A message of punishment from God. This noun refers to the pronouncement of punishment originating ultimately from God. It can identify an utterance directly from God against an individual, as in the case of the pronouncement of Ahab's coming demise, recalled by Jehu in 2 Kgs 9:25. More often it is included in a sort of formulaic introduction to prophetic speech predicting Yahweh's punishment upon**

**a city, nation, or people (e.g., Isa 13:1; 15:1)" (Joshua G. Mathews, "Cursing," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014]).**

Habakkuk made his complaint to God, and it is not unlike the questions believers today sometimes ask God. It seemed to Habakkuk that workers of evil were getting by without punishment, and he found that difficult to comprehend. Further, he found it unsettling that God would use Babylon, an evil people, to exact judgment against the people of Judah, the people of God. His questions were ones we can often relate to in our contemporary day.

Ultimately, God's revelation to Habakkuk unveiled a timeless biblical principle of truth: the just must live by their faith in God. We will not always understand the ways of God, but we can trust Him and serve Him by faith.

### B. The Just Live by Faith

*"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: But the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).*

One of the greatest tests of faith arises from the difference that exists between the perspective of God and the perspective of man. God's knowledge is perfect; ours is imperfect. God sees the full picture; we see only a minute part of the whole picture. God views all things through His eyes of grace, mercy, and compassion; we often fall short of mercy and compassion when we view the unrighteous behavior of others. But faith teaches us to trust God who knows all things and views the whole picture through His eyes of love and mercy. We must live by faith, trusting always in Him rather than trusting in our own human strength and abilities.

Ultimately, faith in God is trusting Him, which is fundamentally contrary to human nature. It is the nature of human beings to trust in themselves and in tangible objects they can see. To trust in a spiritual entity that is physically intangible and invisible requires complete faith—relinquishing reliance on

the human intellect and will and surrendering to God all of one's heart and confidence.

Reliance upon human resources as opposed to reliance upon God always turns out badly. The Lord knows the way we take; He knows the end from the beginning. We are foolish to trust in our own selves and reject His divine leadership in our lives.

*"Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men" (Hosea 10:13).*

*"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).*

In the face of the multitude of future judgments and pronouncements against Judah, which God had revealed to him, Habakkuk opted to embrace God and His ways by placing his complete faith in Him. Trust in God is always the optimal choice. He is righteous, sovereign, and omnipotent; to live by faith in Him is the only right decision for those who would be among the righteous people of God.

### **C. Habakkuk Chose to Rejoice in the Lord**

The final two verses of the Book of Habakkuk bring the prophecy to an apex. First, verse 18 reveals Habakkuk's ultimate response to God's pronouncements: "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:18). There is no better course of action when suffering through adversity than to praise and worship the Lord, rejoicing in Him. Praise and worship are keys to victory in our relationship with the Lord.

What is the proper response to adversity in life? As Habakkuk demonstrated, we worship our way through our problems. There is no power above that of the Almighty, and when we worship Him as the Sovereign God who has all power, He delights in exhibiting His delivering and keeping power through us and on our behalf. He can keep us secure through the most trying circumstances, and if He so wills, He can completely turn the events to our blessing and eventual advantage!

*"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).*

### **D. Praise Recognizes God's Power**

Habakkuk also recognized the glorious power of the Almighty and he praised God. According to *The New American Commentary*, Habakkuk 3:19 is the only verse outside of the Book of Psalms in which the combination name for God, *Yahweh Adonai*, appears. This is significant because this name for God, which means "Sovereign Lord," emphasizes the power and majesty of God. In his praise for God, Habakkuk was acknowledging and exalting the Lord's supreme power and glory.

Those who place their complete trust and confidence in God will triumph. There is no better expression of such trust and confidence than when His people exalt Him in praise and worship. As Habakkuk praised the almighty God, he was both extolling the Lord and also exhibiting his faith in the power of God.

Too many believers turn inward when facing adversity. They may draw into themselves, avoid church services, or fail to worship when they do attend. This is not the solution for victory but for continued failure. The solution for victory in Christ Jesus involves faithfulness to Him and attendance to the house of God, fellowship with other believers, and exuberant worship of the Almighty, who can deliver from all adversity. We should praise our way to victory!

### **E. Praise Empowers the Believer**

Finally, Habakkuk gained spiritual empowerment through worship of God. He extolled the Lord: "He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places" (Habakkuk 3:19). The word *hind* refers to the "doe of a fallow deer" (*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*).

Concerning verse 19 and the reference to hind's feet, *The New American Commentary* observes, "Surefooted, untiring, bounding with energy, the Lord's people may expect to ascend the heights of victory despite their many severe setbacks. The heights of the

earth, the places of conquest and domain, shall be the ultimate possession of God's people." The verse speaks of occupying "high places" in God, of confidently scaling the heights of the enormous mountains of challenge and opposition.

Regardless of the source of adversity and opposition, the believer whose faith is anchored in Jesus Christ will be victorious and experience the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As long as the Lord God is the well-spring of our spiritual strength, we can be certain of ultimate victory through Him.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The message of Habakkuk provides nearly three chapters of pronouncements of future judgments against the people of Judah because of their wickedness. There are many biblical truths and principles to be gleaned from these three chapters; however, perhaps the greatest truths we can glean from Habakkuk's prayer involve how to face and deal with adversity when it comes to us. Since adversity visits all humans, it is vital that believers prepare themselves for facing it with faith in God.

There are positive lessons to be learned from the adversities of life. Although often

painful, the lessons that come to us through the challenges, troubles, and difficulties of life seem to make the greatest and most lasting impact upon us.

An unknown author once identified five positive things about problems in this life:

1. Problems often provide us with greater opportunities.
2. Problems can promote our spiritual maturity.
3. Problems prove our integrity (1 Peter 3:15).
4. Problems produce a sense of dependence.
5. Problems prepare our hearts for ministry (more empathetic).

No person really wants to experience adversity in life, and it is certain no one goes seeking after it. Still, some of the greatest lessons we will ever learn in this life will flow out of adversarial circumstances. Adversity is the classroom of human life. It is there we become the students of life, face the tests of life, and ultimately determine our successes or failures.

May we pass the course with high marks through unswerving faith in Jesus Christ, faithful prayers unto Him, and high praise and worship to the only One who deserves all praise, honor, and glory! ■

## REFLECTIONS

- Why does Satan try to convince believers that the adversities they face in life are unique to them and that no one else experiences such difficulties?
- Discuss some of the things we might categorize as adversities.
- Does suffering indicate the level of a person's righteousness or status with God? Why or why not?
- Discuss how the differing perspectives of God and humankind cause a test of faith.
- How was Habakkuk's choice to rejoice in the Lord a significant key to his victorious attitude in the face of great adversity?