

“THAT AIN’T RIGHT!”

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 November 2, 2025

A young couple has their first child. Their joy slowly turns to concern, however, when for three years the child never utters a word. They hire speech therapists, doctors and psychiatrists, but the boy simply refuses to speak. Then one morning when the child is 5, he looks up from his breakfast and says, “**My oatmeal’s cold.**” The couple is stunned. The father finally speaks. “**Son,**” he says, “**why have you waited so long to say something?**” The kid shrugs, “**Up till now, everything’s been OK.**”

One of the great things about being a grandparent is watching your grandchildren grow. Our youngest is 2 and he is learning new words and attaching those words to objects in the room. Verbs are a bigger challenge because the association needs to be a concrete action such as walk, run, jump and eat your applesauce. Of course, I think his biggest challenge will be getting a word in edgewise because his sister is a real chatterbox. But the granddaughter is at that stage where she can process information on a certain level. We know this because she can ask “**Why?**” Why do I have to go to bed, brush my teeth, slow down, etc.

While “**why**” questions might get frustrating for tired parents who just want to go to bed themselves, they are part of a child’s developmental process. And you know what? They are part of our developmental spiritual process too. In fact, the **Prophet Habakkuk**, I know weird name, was asking many why questions. Specifically, he was asking God what the reason for all this violence, wrongdoing,

destruction, strife, and contention is. Why is the law so loose, justice is perverted, and why do the wicked prevail over the righteous.

Habakkuk was writing clear back in **600 BC**, but it sounds like he is watching our evening news. I mean, haven't we looked at the floods, hurricanes, political corruption and lies, the weaponizing of the judicial department, money going to those least in need, parents abusing their children, ongoing wars in the Middle East, people publically spouting hatred and bigotry, shootings at schools and synagogues, people unable to get access to medical treatment, and the list goes on. Haven't we ever stood back and asked why?

The reason we ask the "why question" is because deep down we know these activities ain't right. They are an affront to our faith and our humanity. They are immoral and go against God's code of conduct. They cause us to go into a faith crisis.

I. HOW LONG

Have you heard of the "**But-First**" **Syndrome**? YOU know. It's when you decide to do the laundry. So you start down the stairs with the laundry, but then see the newspapers on the table. okay, you'll do the laundry.

BUT FIRST you decide to put the newspapers away. So on your way in to put the newspapers away, you notice the mail on the table. okay, you'll put the newspapers away.

BUT FIRST you'll pay that bill that needs to be paid. So you look for the checkbook. Oops ... there's the baby's bottle from yesterday on the floor. okay, you'll pay the bill.

BUT FIRST you need to put the bottle in the sink. You head for the kitchen. Darn it, there's the remote for the TV. What's it doing here? Okay, you'll put the bottle in the sink.

BUT FIRST you need to put the remote away. Head for the TV room. **Aaagh!** Stepped on the cat. Cat needs to be fed. Okay, you'll put the remote away.

BUT FIRST you need to feed the cat ...

So, here's what happens at the end of the day laundry not done, newspapers on the floor, bottle on the table, bills unpaid, checkbook still lost, cat ate the remote control And, when you try to figure out how come nothing got done all day, you are baffled because ... you KNOW you were **BUSY ALL DAY!!** That's the "**BUT-FIRST**" Syndrome.

I don't know if Habakkuk had the **But-First Syndrome**, but he thinks God does. He cries out, "**O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you Violence and you will not save?**" Habakkuk is not doubting that God is Lord and that God is good. The very fact that he dares to ask his questions is because he believes these things about God. What Habakkuk is asking is why aren't you doing anything about the situation? He is accusing God of procrastination. The danger of asking that question, is God may be asking us the same thing.

A difficult part of our faith is seeing stuff that just ain't right and it continues, and no one seems to care, not even God. Our theology tells us that God is the Lord of the Universe, that this is God's world, that God hears our cries for help, that God cares for the orphan and the widow, that

God hates liars and those who do violence, and that God acts in this world for good. **But our experience of life seems to indicate otherwise.**

Habakkuk is not a man without faith. He is a man wondering when God is going to get to business. When are you going to deal with the wicked, those who exploit others, those who enslave the most vulnerable, and stop the violence of this world. How long God must this go on?

Habakkuk wants to know where God is when things fall apart. This is the prayer of someone who has prayed for justice and heard nothing, waited for healing and seen none, and pleaded for change and was rewarded with stonewalled silence. Habakkuk is asking, “How long until the pain ends? How long must I hold out when nothing is changing?”

And here is the grace: God allows the question. The Bible never silences lament. It’s the language of faith under pressure, and many saints of the church have asked it. It is what the faithful do when hope is tested.

Lest we forget, “How long?” is a question God asks us also. God looks at our behavior and wonders what in the world we’re thinking. God asked Moses, “***How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my instructions?***” Even Jesus wondered, “***O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you?***”. Perhaps the seemingly silent God is waiting for us to respond before he will.

II. “**WHY?**”

This is the second question Habakkuk lobs at God. If “**How long?**” is the cry of exhaustion, then “**Why?**” is the cry of confusion. This is anguish, not curiosity. It is a heart trying to make sense of suffering.

- Why do the wicked thrive?

- Why does injustice get the last word?
- Why does God seem to stand by, as violence and destruction escalate?

This question is woven through Scripture: David, Job, Jeremiah all as the Why question. They are all struggling to understand how and why God works the way God does. It is not a question of doubt, but uncertainty. Even Jesus, in a moment of anguish, asks a question that echoes this lament: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

These are our questions, too:

- “How long will cancer rob us of our loved ones?”
- “How long must I wait until my daughter will speak to me again?”
- “Why do good people suffer while the cruel prosper?”
- “Why does violence seem endless, even when we pray for peace?”
- “Why can’t we find a path to peace in the Middle East?”
- “Why can’t we all just get along?”
- “Why did this happen to me?”

Habakkuk stands in for all of us. And the good news is that he is not silenced, shamed or scolded for asking Why.

III. WATCHTOWER

In 2014, I took a group of college age students to Hungary for a mission trip. In the capital city of Budapest we toured **St. Stephen’s Basilica**, which was named in honor of Stephen the first king of Hungary. His right hand is housed in the reliquary. The people began building in 1851 and completed their work in 1906. This place is very ornate. It has domes, altars, a pipe organ, bronze reliefs of Stephen’s life, statues,

marble columns, bells towers and the works. But one of my favorite features is tourists can take steps all the way up to the flat roof. From there one can see the whole city. Its an incredible view.

Habakkuk climbs a watchtower to get a larger perspective. He doesn't run away, doesn't give up on his faith, nor get angry. Instead, he sits and waits for God. And low and behold, God shows up and answers. However, he doesn't give Habakkuk a divine itinerary, but a lesson on how to survive and thrive in times of chaos.

1. Take Notes. The actual words are “**Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.**”. **Put up a billboard**. God is saying, “This message isn't just for you but for all who are struggling to understand.” The lessons we learn on our journey of faith are not just for us. That insight, that struggle, that pain, that victory may be the very message someone else needs to hear and take courage.

As a boy I enjoyed reading about the saints and martyrs of the faith. Reading about what they endured, what they accomplish, and how God worked in their lives inspired me to trust and follow Jesus. Your faith feeds you and it becomes someone else's lifeline. Take Notes and share them with your fellow travelers.

2. Wait for it. God continues, “**For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.**” God's second message to Habakkuk is I will act at the right time. You be patient and wait for it. Just because you don't see the victory yet doesn't mean it isn't on the way.” The vision has its appointed time. It's not a matter of *if*—

it's a matter of *when*. Faith doesn't mean we get instant answers. It means we trust the outcome even in the delay. The greatest spiritual victories are often preceded by the longest silences.

3. Reject Pride. Thirdly, God tells Habakkuk, “**Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them ...**” God tells Habakkuk the day of reckoning will come. The proud and mighty may look like they are winning, but they will fall. Their pride and wickedness will bring violence down upon their heads. Their evil spirits will ruin them.

God is essentially saying to us, “Don’t envy the wicked. Don’t fear the oppressors. Their moment is temporary.” Pride looks like power. But it is paper-thin. Don’t be tempted to build your life on appearances. God sees deeper, and justice will come.

4. Live by faith. “... **but the righteous shall live by their faith.**”. This is the challenge and call of all who follow Christ. Live by your faith.

- Not by what you see.
- Not by what makes sense.
- Not by who is winning or losing.

I believe one of the qualities of a great quarterback is their ability to see the field. It's not their speed, their arm, or their height. Sure those things help, but a great quarterback is able to read the defense, see where the receivers are, and make split decisions. Folks we follow a God who not only sees the whole field in the present, but all the fields both past and in the future. And that God is asking us to trust his arm. We just need to run the field and get in place trusting in God's perfect timing. Yes, life can

be confusing and sometimes evil seems to win, and justice feels delayed. But the righteous don't panic. They persist. They live by their faith.

There's an old story about a **farmer**, who, when asked to lead prayer in church, would end with a peculiar statement: **"And, oh Lord, prop us up on our leaning side."**

His pastor asked him what he meant by that. He explained: "I've got an old barn, and it's been there a long time. It's been through a lot of storms, and the bugs have eaten at it. I got to looking at it one day, and I noticed it was leaning to one side. So, I thought to myself, this can't be good: it's only a matter of time before it falls."

"So, I went and got some pine beams, and I propped it up. It still leans, and probably always will. But it's not going to fall down because I supported it on its leaning side."

"I got to thinking about it," he went on. "I thought about the kind of year I've had, and some of the storms I've been through, and some of the people who are bugging me: eating away at my joy. And I got to thinking, I'm still here! I'm still standing after all I've been through. The howling winds: they couldn't topple me. It's because God's grace was propping me up on the leaning side."

How do we live in times like these — when politics seem broken, when the economy feels uncertain, when violence fills the headlines, and our prayers seem to go unanswered?

Like Habakkuk, we must:

- *Climb the watchtower.* Keep showing up in prayer.
- *Take notes.* Pass along the truth.

- *Wait for it.* Trust God's timing.
- *Reject pride.* Don't envy the seemingly successful.
- *Live by faith.* Walk forward when you can't see the finish line.

Habakkuk's honest complaint and confession and God's straightforward response helps us to remember what anchors us when the life gets tough. We live by faith. Not passive faith. Not silent faith. But with a faith that is resilient, responsive and real. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, November 2, 2025

Second Scripture Lesson

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

1 The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

2 O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?

3 Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

4 So the law becomes slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous; therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

Habakkuk 2:1-4

1 I will stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

2 Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.

3 For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

4 Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faithfulness.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.