



Lessons Learned from a dude named Habakkuk

By D. Nicole

Lessons Learned Series
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Introduction

God's blessings follow you and await you at every turn: when you don't follow the advice of those who delight in wicked schemes, when you avoid sin's highway, when judgment and sarcasm beckon you, but you refuse. For you, the Eternal's Word is your happiness. It is your focus—from dusk to dawn (Psalm 1:1-2, The Voice).

How does one study the Bible? You may have come to passages of scripture that state we are to “hide God’s Word in our hearts.” What does that mean exactly and how do we accomplish that? I have found that studying the Word of God requires:

- 1) Reading God’s word intentionally & consistently
- 2) Reading God’s word conversationally & expectantly
- 3) Reading God’s word obediently

For the first, we need to remember that anything good in our lives requires intentionality & consistency. For instance, if you are trying to lose weight and get in shape, you can’t just go to the gym a few times a month and expect good results. This is something that requires discipline, dedication and intentionality. The same is true for the word of God. If we are going to have the necessary tools to disciple, evangelize, and fight off the enemy, we need to read God’s Word consistently. We must be intentional about implementing this daily.

Secondly, when we read God’s Word, we should read it conversationally & expectantly. You may have heard the word “meditate” used when it comes to studying the Bible. The word “meditate” means to “talk to oneself.” As we read God’s word, we should chew on it, sit with it, contemplate on what we are reading. As we do this we become more attentive to what God desires to teach us. When our hearts are open and willing God will lead us to those quiet places and speak tenderly to us there (Hosea 2:14). Questions that we can ask periodically as

we study the Bible are: “What are you trying to say to me Lord through this passage of scripture? How can these truths that I read be applied to my life today? We read the Bible with the expectation that God will speak to us. It is meant to be a conversation between you and God. Lastly, we need to read the Word of God obediently. It isn’t only about obtaining knowledge. Through our obedience in reading the Word of God as an intentional part of each day, it becomes alive in our heart and our life. The Word of God illuminates sin in our lives. It exposes what is going on in our hearts such as idolatry, which are things that we put before and above the Lord. It also reminds us that transformation and change cannot happen within our own strength. Studying and meditating on the Word of God tunes our attentions, allegiances, and affections to be centered on the Lord and not this world. It is with the ongoing study of God’s Word that reminds us of this hope, the hope in Christ that we can rely on and cling to in this life.

Think this through and Pray it in

Romans 15:4 states, *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”* It is with the ongoing study of God’s Word that reminds us of this hope, in Jesus Christ, that we can rely on and cling to in this life. Take a moment to pray that as you read and study His Word you would be reminded of this absolute hope and that your openness to the truth of God’s word will be transformative in becoming more like Christ.

Day 1

During World War I, Eddie Rickenbacker, a military pilot, was credited with destroying 26 enemy airplanes. His book, *“Seven Came Through”* describes his experience being shot down with six of his comrades in the South Pacific. He writes how they spent many days floating in the water nearly dying because they lacked food and water. But one day, they experienced a miracle. A sea gull landed on their raft and they were able to capture the bird and eat it. Shortly after this miracle, they were rescued. We cheer and applaud because who doesn’t love a happy ending? However, life is messy and we don’t always experience the happily ever after ending we desire. Sometimes the seagulls simply do not come. And I know this may seem a little doom and gloom, but, I believe it is an important element to process because life doesn’t always turn out the way we anticipate or expect. This study in Habakkuk is designed to help journey you through how you can choose dependency on the Lord when the seagulls don’t come.

Think this through and pray it in

How can we stand in faith and trust in the Lord when we are faced with challenging and difficult circumstances that seem to have no end? How can we experience joy in the midst of pain? Spend some time processing these questions with the Lord.

Day 2

Habakkuk was a prophet however; this book doesn't hold any writings of any prophecies or messages from God to a group of people. He was a man who initiated a conversation with God based on his own distress with what was happening in society, as well as what he perceived as God's apparent silence or lack of intervening to make things right. Habakkuk was consumed with so many questions as to why it seemed evil was winning and that God wasn't doing anything about it.

Often in the midst of trials, we tend to ask a lot of "why" questions such as: "Why do good people suffer and evil people prosper?" "Why doesn't God do something?" "Why isn't God answering my prayers?" "When I'm faithfully serving the Lord, why do I experience the worst from others?" "Why doesn't God just fix or clean up this mess?" "Why does God seem silent?" Habakkuk models for us how we too can approach the Lord, while at the same time trusting in God's sovereignty when His answers aren't what we anticipate or expect. Why is that so important? Because regardless of what is happening in our lives, we need to go to the Lord first, even in our distress. Habakkuk teaches us how we can continue to trust and have faith in the Lord even when we don't understand, which in turn deepens our ability to worship God in spirit and in truth. It is through this dialogue that helps educate us in how we too can approach the throne of grace; breaking down the barriers that we tend to build up.

I remember when I was younger developing this picture in my mind that if I got angry or frustrated that I couldn't go to God with how I was feeling because I had convinced myself it was disrespectful. The book of Habakkuk has helped remind me of the honesty and authenticity that I can have with the Lord as well as putting into perspective how my heart can be tuned in to sing His praises even in the midst of the storm. Studying this book of the Bible

journeys us through a deeper understanding of how to walk through those “why” moments with a Christ-centered heart when things don’t turn out the way we anticipate or expect.

Think this through and Pray it in

Take a moment and think through how you talk with God? Are you honest with Him when you are angry or sad? Read through Psalm 139. What is the psalmist saying? Pick out the different emotions represented in the Psalm and process through what words or phrases stand out to you.

Psalm 139

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

¹ *You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.*
² *You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.*
³ *You discern my going out and my lying
down;
you are familiar with all my ways.*
⁴ *Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.*
⁵ *You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.*
⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.*
⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?*
⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are
there.*
⁹ *If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,*

your right hand will hold me fast.
¹¹ *If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide
me
and the light become night around me,”*
¹² *even the darkness will not be dark to
you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*
¹³ *For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s
womb.*
¹⁴ *I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*
¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths
of the earth.*
¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were*

written in your book

before one of them came to be.

*¹⁷ How precious to me are your
thoughts, God!*

How vast is the sum of them!

*¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of
sand—*

when I awake, I am still with you.

*¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are
bloodthirsty!*

*²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.*

*²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion
against you?*

*²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.*

*²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

*²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

God knows everything that there is to know about you. What you have done or are doing, all the emotions, the thoughts, the actions, the words etc. There is nothing that you can hide from Him. No matter what has happened or is currently going on in your life, He loves you unconditionally, and is ready to forgive you completely. Process through Psalm 139 again with the Lord before moving on.

Day 3

(Habakkuk 1:1-4: His Complaint)

Habakkuk 1:1-4

The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

Habakkuk's Complaint

² *How long, Lord, must I call for help,*

but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, "Violence!"

but you do not save?

³ *Why do you make me look at injustice?*

Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

Destruction and violence are before me;

there is strife, and conflict abounds.

⁴ *Therefore the law is paralyzed,*

and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous,

so that justice is perverted.

What many commentaries state is that Habakkuk was most likely written between 612 and 605 BC. This would have put the prophet Habakkuk between the fall of Nineveh 612 BC and the Babylonian invasion of Judah in 588 BC. During this time, religious reforms have long been forgotten and Josiah's son Jehoiakim has been leading the nation closer to disaster because he and other leaders refused to obey the Lord. As a result, the rich were exploiting the poor and the courts were crooked. There were riots, violence on the streets, civil unrest, oppression, and injustice throughout the land. Habakkuk bore witness to the deterioration of the Southern Kingdom of Judah where Jehoiakim was king. Habakkuk was deeply burdened by what was going on and it broke his heart. In his distress, he calls out to God and asks the questions, "*Why is there evil in the world? Why do they seem to be winning?*"

Currently there is a lot going on in our world that is very similar to what happened in Habakkuk's time. Many cities throughout the United States are overwhelmed with alarming criminal activity, businesses being looted, damage and destruction are everywhere, political corruption, and unbelievable injustices driven by hatred. There is currently massive persecution of Christians in our world and it just seems to be getting worse as the days go on. Studying a book like Habakkuk can help bring clarity in how we can move forward in such an unsettling and disturbing time.

In spite of all Habakkuk witnessed, he chose to bring his concerns directly to God, even though he couldn't understand why a just God would allow such evil to exist in the world. However, no matter the emotions he was feeling, Habakkuk models for us the importance of addressing these thoughts and feelings to the Lord first. The text models for us how he went to the Lord, asking these questions (conversationally), knowing that the Lord would answer him (expectantly).

Think this through and Pray it in

There is a quote from Corrie ten Boom that states, "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?" Let that quote sink in for a minute. Do you treat prayer like a steering wheel or a spare tire? Who or what do you turn to when you are feeling burdened about something happening directly to you or happening to others around you? Is there something that prevents you from first bringing your burdens before the Lord? Could it be fear? Mistrust? Lack of faith that He cares or hears your prayer? Read Matthew 11:28-30.

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What would it look like for you to take each and every burden to the Lord first? Read Matthew 11:28-30 again. What burdens might you be holding on to? Maybe you have been carrying them for a long time. He is calling to you now, "My child, you were

never meant to carry these burdens. These burdens weigh you down, can't you see? Let go and trust Me to take care of these for you. As you do, you will experience rest and peace for your weary soul. This is my promise and guarantee to you, through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit."

Process through what those burdens are and release them to the Lord. If you don't know what to say, here is a suggestion: "I come to you Lord with _____ (your burden). I have held so tightly to this burden and honestly Lord, sometimes I don't even know why? I desire that you take _____ from me and in its place give me rest for my soul. I'm sorry Lord for holding on to this and not trusting you to handle or take care of _____. I ask for your forgiveness for attempting to rely on my own strength to deal with _____. Thank you, Lord, for Your patience, Your love, Your grace, and Your forgiveness. Lord as I continue to study Your Word, I pray that I would learn from You and grow in understanding of how important it is to release these elements that keep me from focusing my attentions and affections on You, Lord. Thank you, Lord, for taking _____ from me and for helping me learn what it means to be fully dependent on you."

Day 4 (Habakkuk 1:5-11 Lord's first reply)

Habakkuk 1:5-11

The Lord's Answer

⁵ *"Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.
For I am going to do something in your
days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told.
⁶ I am raising up the Babylonians,
that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth
to seize dwellings not their own.
⁷ They are a feared and dreaded people;
they are a law to themselves
and promote their own honor.
⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards,
fiercer than wolves at dusk.*

*Their cavalry gallops headlong;
their horsemen come from afar.
They fly like an eagle swooping to devour;
⁹ they all come intent on violence.
Their hordes advance like a desert wind
and gather prisoners like sand.
¹⁰ They mock kings
and scoff at rulers.
They laugh at all fortified cities;
by building earthen ramps they capture
them.
¹¹ Then they sweep past like the wind and
go on—guilty people, whose own strength
is their god."*

Habakkuk was living in a time when society was completely falling apart. In Chapter 1:1-4, it outlines his burdens and not understanding why God was allowing bad things to happen in society. However, in this next section (1:5-11) God answers Habakkuk's first round of questions by letting him know that He would be sending the Babylonians to judge His people. God further explains that this will be accomplished through an invasion of the land and that God's people will be taken into exile. I can only imagine how overwhelming this answer would have been for Habakkuk.

Although the super power of Habakkuk's time were the Assyrians, the Babylonians were slowly making a name for themselves, even though they were a smaller threat at the

time. But, who & what the Babylonians were all about were described in the text and whether or not the size of their nation was smaller, Habakkuk did have knowledge of their ruthless and sinful behavior. Let's take a look at the Babylonians and find out why this answer from the Lord would have stunned Habakkuk.

- They were bitter, ruthless, hasty, feared and dreaded people (vs 6)
- They tortured, killed and plundered completely as they raided lands (vs 6)
- They were like ravaging animals who attacked (vs 7)
- Horses had the speed of leopards & the ferocity of wolves (vs 8)
- They came only for violence / they were like a hot and constant blowing wind (vs 9)
- They caught kings and humiliated them / there was no stronghold able to stop them (10)
- They gave credit to their false gods for their strength (vs 11)

Babylonian culture was infamous for its great cruelty and had a long tradition of paganism. They were completely intolerant of other religions and insisted that everyone convert to their religion. Habakkuk would have known this, which is why this would have been a major shock for him to hear and process. God has basically explained to him that He is going to turn the Babylonians loose and from what we know in history about their invasions it was fierce and horrible. For Habakkuk to ask "why?" seems to me to be the most appropriate question considering all that he had been told about the Babylonians.

Think this through and pray it in

What "why's" are you asking the Lord? Take a moment and process through your "why's" with the Lord.

Day 5 (Habakkuk 1:12-17 Second complaint)

Habakkuk 1:12-17 – 2:1

¹² Lord, are you not from everlasting?

My God, my Holy One, you will never die.

You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment;

you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish.

¹³ Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?

Why are you silent while the wicked
swallow up those more righteous than
themselves?

¹⁴ You have made people like the fish in the

sea,

like the sea creatures that have no ruler.

¹⁵ The wicked foe pulls all of them up with
hooks,

he catches them in his net,

he gathers them up in his dragnet;

and so he rejoices and is glad.

¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net

and burns incense to his dragnet,

for by his net he lives in luxury

and enjoys the choicest food.

¹⁷ Is he to keep on emptying his net,

destroying nations without mercy?

From the text we can feel Habakkuk's confusion, frustration, and even irritation with how God has responded. Not only was he troubled by how God was going to move in this situation, his argument is how could God be so inconsistent with His character? How could a holy God use an evil people to accomplish His plan? Based on Habakkuk's first response, it seems that he was expecting that God would send a revival to His people, judge the evil leaders, and establish righteousness in the land. God had a different plan. Habakkuk now comes back in questioning God's choice of action.

I believe that burdens intensify when we get answers that don't immediately benefit us. How many times have we brought requests to God and when He answers in a way that is not what we expected, we say, "Wait a second...I didn't ask for that to happen?" Habakkuk couldn't understand how God could use the Babylonians to punish His people. What I

appreciate about Habakkuk's response is how we too can approach the Lord when we have concerns or are confused as to why or how God answers. First, God is a big god and He can take our complaints. I believe that God does not desire for us to avoid communicating with Him through the tough questions. When we face these questions honestly and journey through them with the Lord, it helps grow and mature us in our faith and helps us gain further knowledge of Christ. It helps us focus in on the work of the cross, not our circumstances. Secondly, it is through the journey that we come to a better understanding that *His thoughts are not our own and His way are not our ways* (Isaiah 55:8).

Think this through and Pray it in

Maybe there are circumstances that have sent you questioning the Lord? While you may ask for help are you also carrying an expectation of how you think God should answer? Or are you trusting in His sovereignty? Spend some time processing it with the Lord.

Day 6

Take some time to process through what you have read in this book thus far. Can you feel the burden that Habakkuk felt? Can you see his furrowed brow? Can you feel his confusion? Are you feeling this way right now? Take time and share with the Lord how you are feeling. Don't hold anything back. Be angry, be frustrated, scream, cry...it is OK. There have been times that I have been like Captain Dan on the shrimp boat from the movie *Forrest Gump*. The scene I'm referring to is where he is in his wheelchair at the top of the boat, screaming at the top of his lungs during huge storm. The difference is that although we may be feeling that very same way, we should still, always choose to go to the Lord with whatever emotion we are experiencing. My hope is that you will take a moment and just process through whatever "it" may be. He is God and He can handle whatever it is you want to say to Him right now. Here are some verses that are great reminders that the Lord hears you when you call:

OLD TESTAMENT

Psalm 4:3

Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Psalm 55:17

Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Psalm 66:20

Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

Jeremiah 29:12-13

¹² *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.* ¹³ *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

NEW TESTAMENT**Philippians 4:6**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

1 Peter 3:12

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

1 John 5:14-15

¹⁴ *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* ¹⁵ *And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*

Day 7 (Habakkuk 2:1)

Habakkuk 2:1

*I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me,
and what answer I am to give to this complaint.*

We read that after Habakkuk approached God with his concerns and questions, he chose to wait and “*look to see what he will say to me...*” I believe that Habakkuk knew that God’s care for us comes from a place of infinite wisdom and love, something our finite minds have difficulty comprehending. “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen*” (Romans 11:33-36). We aren’t always going to understand. But, by being in Christ, it helps our assurance stay lodged in the aspects of God’s character. As we learn of His character we do see that no matter what the circumstance God is in control and He never changes. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever. This is what I believe Habakkuk clung to.

Think this through and pray it in

As you have laid your concerns or questions before the throne of grace do you believe that God will answer? If so, are you, like Habakkuk, looking to see what God will say or do within your situation, no matter the response you get?

Day 8 (Proverbs 3:5-7a)

Proverbs 3:5-7a

*“Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don’t try to figure out everything on your own. **Listen** for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he’s the one keeping you on track. Don’t assume that you know it all”* (The Message ©1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene Peterson).

There have been moments in my life where every day presented some new challenge and where I found myself exhausted and frustrated as to what was happening. I have felt distraught, brokenhearted, frustrated, and alone. I’ve come to the Lord with anger and tears. But, He continues to show my sons and me how important it is to be solely dependent on Jesus Christ. I continue to learn how having these types of conversations with the Lord are important. Why? Because our emotions have the tendency to drive our actions and reactions in ways that are not honorable to Him. And beyond just having conversations with the Lord, we also need to learn and practice listening to what He desires to say. We are definitely more skilled in talking, than in being still and listening. But listening is so incredibly important. Read Proverbs 3:5-7a again before moving on.

Think this through and Pray it in

Do you desire God’s will for your life above every other desire? If so, it is important that we listen to Him. The way we hear Him is by immersing ourselves in His Word. Meditating on God’s Word is the most effective way to hear His voice. We live in a world of constant noise and chaos. This noise and chaos create dissonance that if not kept in check can hinder our relationship with the Lord. We need to be attentive to what is going on in our hearts because it might be what is making it difficult to hear the Lord. Psalm 143:8 states that David sought God’s direction in the morning. This is such an important discipline to have in our lives. We are so quick to make decisions without being still and bringing it to the Lord first. Being still and meditating on the

truths we are reading, chewing, and then digesting is crucial for our hearts to be transformed and changed. With that said, pause and reflect on the following verses about listening and hearing God's voice:

1 Kings 19:11-13

¹¹ *"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.*

Proverbs 1:23

Come and listen to my counsel. I'll share my heart with you and make you wise.

Jeremiah 33:2-3

² *"This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it—the Lord is his name: ³ 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'*

Matthew 7:24

[Jesus said] "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

Mark 4:24

²⁴ *"Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.*

John 10:27-28

[Jesus said] ²⁷ "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."

Hebrews 2:1-3

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ² For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

James 1:19

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...

Revelation 1:3

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

We need to remember that God doesn't always respond to us in these grandioso, powerful, miraculous ways. Sometimes it is a gentle whisper found in a humbled, quieted heart. We need to take a step back from all the dissonance, the noise and the chaos and simply be still. Take time to reflect and pray through these verses again before moving on.

Day 9 (John 15:1-17)

Even though Habakkuk was witnessing all these atrocities, he remained centered in going to the Lord in his distress. We too can learn how to be centered in going to the Lord in our own distress. You may ask, how does one accomplish this? I believe the first part of the answer lies in John 15:1-17. Take a moment to read through these verses. I've included both the New International and the English Standard Versions.

John 15:1-17 NIV

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

John 15:1-17 ESV

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

There is a lyric in the old hymn, *Come Thou Fount of every Blessing* which reads, "Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." We have a propensity to wander, which is why this passage in John is so important. Read through both translations again, but this time underline the word "remain" in the NIV and the word "abide" in the ESV.

Now count how many times John uses the words, "remain" and "abide." It is important to tune into words or phrases in God's word that are repeated multiple times. I believe it's because God is fully aware of our tendency to forget, so He gently reminds us of important elements through repetition. The words *remain* and *abide* mean to "stay with." What these verses outline is that we are to be committed in continuously "staying with" the

Lord. John 15:5b states “...*Whoever abides/remain in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*”

Think this through and pray it in

Are you committed in “staying with the Lord?” What type of fruit is your life producing?

Day 10 (John 15:1-17)

John 15:1-17 NIV

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Reflecting on my own life, there have been times when I have made poor choices; choices that were dishonoring to the Lord. I believe these dishonorable choices happened because I wasn't "staying with" Christ. I was trying to be my own vine, my own god. I was arrogant. I was complacent. All I was doing was going through the motions. Checking off the religious boxes, but not experiencing any transformational change. One day the Lord made it very clear where my life was headed if I chose to continue down the path I was

traveling on. It was in that moment I saw and experienced the depth of God's forgiveness, mercy, grace, and love. I didn't deserve it, but I'm eternally grateful for it. I chose to abide/remain in Him. It doesn't mean that temptations ceased, but what it does mean is that by abiding/remaining in Him, I'm equipped and given the strength to not give in to the temptations. It is in the abiding/remaining in Him that continues to grow and develop us in becoming who God desires us to be. It is a daily process and one that we need to be intentional about every single day.

Think this through and Pray it in

Take a moment to read and pray through this old hymn, "*Abide with me*," written by Henry F. Lyte. Henry was left an orphan at the age of 9 and taken in by an Irish minister. Even though the minister had 5 children of his own, he became a member of their family and even followed in the minister's footsteps. At the age of 45, Henry contracted tuberculosis and wasn't expected to live very long. He wrote these words as a part of his farewell speech in September 1847. Henry passed away 10 weeks after these words were penned.¹ I believe that these words show a man who had come to the depth of understanding of how important it was to abide in Christ every day, even at the end of his own life.

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.*

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see—
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*

¹ Christianity.com. Published April 28, 2010.

*I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*

*Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

Day 11

(Exodus 20:3-6,23 & Deuteronomy 6:13-15)

In the previous day's study, we learned how important it is to abide/remain in Christ. This is important because we are called to bear fruit that will last. What type of fruit? Read Galatians 5:22-23a, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control..."* Bearing "good" fruit will not be accomplished if we aren't "staying with" Christ. This next chapter helps deal with the next element in our journey and that is to remind us that the problem when it comes to worshipping God doesn't lie outside us, but within our own hearts. It's the problem of idolatry. Read the verses from Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Exodus 20:3-6, 23

³ *"You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. ²³ Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.*

Deuteronomy 6:13-15, 20

¹³ *Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. ¹⁴ Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; ¹⁵ for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.*

We can engage in what we perceive to be all the proper elements of worship – singing, giving, praying, and listening to God's Word – and still be actively serving false gods in our hearts. God makes it clear in Exodus 20 that He will not tolerate any competition for the attentions, allegiances, and affections of our hearts. *"You shall have no other gods before me."* Romans 12:1 it states, *"Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is true*

worship.” This implies that worship is not some activity that we casually implement in some form of daily routine. It involves something much deeper – it involves the heart. Through elements of worship like singing, praying or meditating, our hearts are awakened in remembering the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf. It is that awakening that our souls begin to crave. At that moment we realize that the chaos of life can be silenced and that we can be renewed and experience intimacy with our Creator. To worship God’s might and how awesome He is, one does not have to travel far. God does not need to be reminded of who He is. He already knows. However, it is important to realize that He desires our focused worship on Him. A.W. Tozer in his book, *Whatever Happened to Worship* writes, “The whole important and substance of the Bible teaches us that the God who does not need anything nevertheless desires the adoration and worship of His created children.”² If our time with the Lord is to mean anything, if we long for our souls to be cared for, then when will we slow down and make space for God? It seems that many are driven to emulate a strictly emotionally based experience, instead of immersing themselves in theologically grounded material that engage both the heart and the Spirit in worship. N.T. Wright states,

The task of shaping our world is best understood as the redemptive task of bringing the achievement of the cross to bear on the world, and in that task the methods, as well as the message, must be cross-shaped through and through.³

I love the part, “...*the methods, as well as the message, must be cross-shaped through and through.*” But I believe, in some of our churches, that the practices and elements of how we are worshipping are not always filtering through that process of being “cross-shaped through

² A.W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship: A Call to True Worship*, (Chicago, IL: Wing Spread Publishers, 1985), 37.

³ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 94-95.

and through.” In 1 John 2:15-17, it states that our hearts have a predisposition of getting seduced by idolatry.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

Even in John’s conclusion of 1 John 5:21, he warns his readers, “*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*” It is God alone who can safeguard our hearts against the enemy (Rom. 5:10). We will always worship something in our lives, and in turn what we worship is what we image to those around us.

When we live with any type of immorality such as: sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, hatred, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like, it is a result of not remain/abiding with Him and it breaks our testimony of Christ to the world around us.

We are God’s images and imagers. We are changed into God’s likeness, transformed into God’s character. We are God’s reflectors...Praise and reflecting God is the goal of the spiritual life – of human life...As the moon reflects the sun, so the people of God are to reflect and laugh and talk and suffer and die in the sunshine of God’s grace. We are God’s self-revelation.⁴

It’s very hard for idolatry to take root when we’re “*singing and making melody to the Lord with our hearts*” (Ephesians 5:19). Simply, a heart that’s focused on the eternal, a heart abiding in Christ, will not easily give in to temptation. However, faithful worship does not come naturally to fallen human beings. This is why it is so important to listen to the call of Scripture and flee idolatry.

⁴ Don Postema, *Space for God*, (Grand Rapids: MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1983), 183.

Think this through and Pray it in

Are you being effective image bearer and glory spreader? Take some time and process through that question with the Lord.

Day 12 (Exodus 32)

In the previous day, we studied and processed through the commandment in Exodus 20:4-5a, *(You are not to make any idol or image of other gods. In fact, you are not to make an image of anything in the heavens above, on the earth below, or in the waters beneath. ⁵ You are not to bow down and serve any image, for I, the Eternal your God, am a jealous God).* We learned that He forbids the use of images of God in worship, but He also forbids all human invention in worship. And to really emphasize the seriousness of idolatry, there is another story (Exodus 32) which shows how false worship offended God and brought judgment on His people. Take a moment to read Exodus 32 (NIV).

The Golden Calf

32 When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods^[a] who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

² Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” ³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods,^[b] Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” ⁶ So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

⁷ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

⁹ *"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."*

¹¹ *But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?" ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'"* ¹⁴ *Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.*

¹⁵ *Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. ¹⁶ The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.*

¹⁷ *When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp."*

¹⁸ *Moses replied:*

*"It is not the sound of victory,
it is not the sound of defeat;
it is the sound of singing that I hear."*

¹⁹ *When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.*

²¹ *He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"*

²² *"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. ²³ They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' ²⁴ So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"*

²⁵ *Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing stock to their enemies. ²⁶ So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him.*

²⁷ *Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'"* ²⁸ *The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day*

about three thousand of the people died. ²⁹ Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

³⁰ The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

³¹ So Moses went back to the Lord and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

³³ The Lord replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

³⁵ And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

The Bible teaches us that worship is meant to be directed to God alone. John 3:30 states, *“He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease.”* This means that we identify that God is worth more than anything else this world has to offer. It seems that all too often many current cultural practices are infiltrating our worship services to where it is becoming harder to distinguish differences between the church and the world. The irony of this is that we are commissioned from God’s word, “not to love the world and that it lies under the sway of the evil one”⁵ (1 John 2:15). Cultural practices of performance, technological and environmentally driven elements are what we would find in concerts, movies, and Broadway plays, but they are finding themselves more immersed in Christian worship services. What does worship look like in your personal time? In your church? Is it directed to God alone?

When one of my friend’s sons got married, one of her prayer requests was that Christ would be the guest of honor throughout the planning process as well as in the ceremony. As I

⁵ James K. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 188.

thought about where/what my attentions, allegiances and affections are centered on, I really liked that image of Christ being the guest of honor in every area of my life.

Think this through and pray this in

Is Christ the guest of honor in your home? In your relationships? In your marriage? In your parenting? In your job? In your decision making? In the events of life? In your finances? In your church? In your ministry? If any of these come up with a “no” answer then take some time and list elements that come to mind that may be competing for your attention, affection or allegiances. Take time to pray through this list with the Lord, recognizing, that you do not have the power within yourself to correct any of this.

Day 13 (Philippians 3:7-8)

As we study the Bible we gain a deeper understanding of who God is and what He has accomplished thru his son Jesus. Habakkuk models that no matter how bad life's circumstances got, he chose to respond to God's worth first. He models for us that by focusing and clinging to truths about the Lord is what helps our love for Him burn intently and consistently. It is a fire that can never be stifled or extinguished. No matter our "good intentions", the only way to be delivered, restored, and renewed is through the power of the Holy Spirit. Take a moment and pray through this next passage.

Philippians 3:7-8

"I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ" (New Living Translation)

Our job is simply to surrender and allow the Spirit to illuminate within us potential idols of our hearts and to show us where we might have been trying to find gain in this life outside of Christ.

When we choose to abide/remain in God's love, which is accomplished in immersing ourselves in His word (meditating on it and praying through it), our faith can withstand temptation against idolatry, stand strong in the midst of burdens, as well as move our hearts to praise (worship) the Lord in spite of our circumstances.

Think this through and pray it in

What is your worship like when you face trials or hardships? For me, I have failed at times clinging to what I know to be true about the Lord. I have chosen in the past not to rest or trust in Him. The result is that I've robbed myself by wasting time with

worry, fear, and anger about different circumstances or situations I have had to journey through. But, I am thankful for a God who loves me deeply, forgives freely, and continues to grow me day by day in what it means to worship Him no matter my circumstances. Take some time to process through what your worship looks like when you face trials or hardships?

Day 14 (Psalm 1)

Psalm 1:

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked

or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,

² *but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,*

and who meditates on his law day and night.

³ *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,*

which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither—

whatever they do prospers.

⁴ *Not so the wicked!*

They are like chaff

that the wind blows away.

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,*

nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ *For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,*

but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

In the prior days we learned the importance of abiding/remaining. We also learned the importance of who/what our worship is focused on. What both of these have in common is that they are both accomplished when we study, meditate, and pray through God's word. The outcome is that one's life can be "*like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.*" I would like to add that this type of tree has deep roots and can stand strong no matter the circumstances one may face. I also don't want to give the wrong idea of what is presently called "the prosperity gospel." To put it simply, if you obey, do everything right, think positively, etc. that you are

going to reap materialistic rewards. That is simply not scriptural truth. I believe the “whatever they do prospers,” found in these verses means that no matter the circumstance, they walk with confidence (or assuredness), even if they get nothing in return.

Think this through and pray it in

What type of tree are you? Are you delighting in God’s word? Are you spending time each day meditating on His word? Read through Psalm 1 again, but this time rephrase it into more of a prayer to the Lord.

Psalm 1:1-6

God’s blessings follow you and await you at every turn:

when you don’t follow the advice of those who delight in wicked schemes,

When you avoid sin’s highway,

when judgment and sarcasm beckon you, but you refuse.

² *For you, the Eternal’s Word is your happiness.*

It is your focus—from dusk to dawn.

³ *You are like a tree,*

planted by flowing, cool streams of water that never run dry.

Your fruit ripens in its time;

your leaves never fade or curl in the summer sun.

No matter what you do, you prosper.

⁴ *For those who focus on sin, the story is different.*

They are like the fallen husk of wheat, tossed by an open wind, left deserted and alone.

⁵ *In the end, the wicked will fall in judgment;*

the guilty will be separated from the innocent.

⁶ *Their road suddenly will end in death,*

yet the journey of the righteous has been charted by the Eternal.⁶

⁶ The Voice Bible Copyright © 2012 Thomas Nelson, Inc. The Voice™ translation © 2012 Ecclesia Bible Society

Day 15

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 22:37)

Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Matthew 22:36-37:

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’”

These verses show us how our hearts are to be postured in worshipping the Lord, as well as proclaiming these truths within our homes and communities. What both of these verses reveal is that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot proclaim we love the Lord, but also love the world. Let’s take a look at some additional verses. Exodus 20:3 & Deuteronomy 5:7 state, “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” Deuteronomy 6:6, Joshua 22:5, Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; and Luke 10:27 state, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.*”

Think this through and pray it in

Is there something in your life that is competing for your attention? How does one love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength? What does that look like? Take some time to pray through these questions with the Lord.

Day 16

(Habakkuk 2- Part 1)

Habakkuk 2

*I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me,
and what answer I am to give to this
complaint.*

The Lord's Answer

² *Then the Lord replied:*

*"Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.*

³ *For the revelation awaits an appointed
time;*

*it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.*

Though it linger, wait for it;

*it will certainly come
and will not delay.*

⁴ *"See, the enemy is puffed up;
his desires are not upright—
but the righteous person will live by his
faithfulness—*

⁵ *indeed, wine betrays him;*

he is arrogant and never at rest.

*Because he is as greedy as the grave
and like death is never satisfied,
he gathers to himself all the nations
and takes captive all the peoples.*

⁶ *"Will not all of them taunt him with
ridicule and scorn, saying,*

*"Woe to him who piles up stolen goods
and makes himself wealthy by extortion!
How long must this go on?"*

⁷ *Will not your creditors suddenly arise?
Will they not wake up and make you
tremble?*

Then you will become their prey.

⁸ *Because you have plundered many
nations,*

*the peoples who are left will plunder
you.*

*For you have shed human blood;
you have destroyed lands and cities and
everyone in them.*

⁹ *"Woe to him who builds his house by
unjust gain,*

*setting his nest on high
to escape the clutches of ruin!*

¹⁰ *You have plotted the ruin of many
peoples,
shaming your own house and forfeiting
your life.*

¹¹ *The stones of the wall will cry out,
and the beams of the woodwork will
echo it.*

¹² *"Woe to him who builds a city with
bloodshed*

and establishes a town by injustice!

¹³ *Has not the Lord Almighty determined
that the people's labor is only fuel for
the fire,*

that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?

¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁵ “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors,

pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk,

so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!

¹⁶ You will be filled with shame instead of glory.

Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed!

The cup from the Lord’s right hand is coming around to you,

and disgrace will cover your glory.

¹⁷ The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,

and your destruction of animals will terrify you.

For you have shed human blood;

you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

¹⁸ “Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman?

Or an image that teaches lies?

For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation;

he makes idols that cannot speak.

¹⁹ Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’

Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’

Can it give guidance?

It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.”

²⁰ The Lord is in his holy temple;

let all the earth be silent before him.

Habakkuk, chapter 2 starts right off with Habakkuk knowing that God will answer.

He doesn’t try to barter with God. Instead, he has chosen to wait for what the Lord will say to him. And God did answer. However, as I have read this passage multiple times, I get this feeling that as Habakkuk is listening to this it is still a shock to his system.

We often hear about God’s sovereignty; that He is in control of ALL things and that His plans are perfect, but let’s be honest, because sometimes it doesn’t seem that way. This is especially true when His plans involve elements that don’t make any sense or seem completely contradictory to who God is. Habakkuk being told by God that the Babylonians were going to invade didn’t seem like something that God would choose to do. However, in

regards to the story of Habakkuk there are two facts that we need to sit with a moment before moving on.

- 1) God had used other tools to chasten His people. He sent prophets to deliver messages about repentance and returning to the Lord. But God's people chose to ignore these messages.
- 2) The Jews claimed to know the Lord, but through ignoring these messages of truth they continued to sin against the very God they claimed to believe.

As it has been stated by many pastors, speakers, and authors throughout time, "The greater the light, the greater the responsibility." The Jews did not take responsibility against what they knew to be sinful before the Lord and now they were going to have to reap the consequences of their disobedience. I think we can all agree that the Babylonians were wicked people. They were sinful idolaters who did not know, nor follow the true and living God. Although this doesn't excuse their sins, it does explain their conduct. The Babylonians did not know they were only a tool, being used by God to bring His people back to Him.

When we look at what is happening in our world, it seems as though evil has the upper hand. Like Habakkuk's day, it seems as though everywhere we look we see the atrocities and the injustice all being accomplished with selfish intent or gain. And when we look at our own circumstances, at times it leaves us with that same perplexed countenance as Habakkuk. Just like Habakkuk...we hope for deliverance, we pray for deliverance...we wait for deliverance. It is a natural, normal response. And honestly, I do not believe there is anything wrong with desiring deliverance. However, Habakkuk, chapter 2, got me processing on the element of deliverance and how God did have a plan. It just isn't always the type of plan we expect. I believe that to have an understanding, even when the answers from the Lord are disappointing or confusing, boils down to what has ultimate control of our lives. That is what then drives our perspective of deliverance.

Think this through and pray it in

What has control of your life? Is your life God controlled or self-controlled? As you process through the lyrics of this amazing song, *In Christ Alone*, you need to ask yourself if you are truly trusting the Lord to handle whatever it is we may be journeying through? Where are you placing our hope? Who or what are you leaning on?

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! – who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Day 17

(Genesis 37:12-36; 39:1-40:23)

When you think about staying with Christ (remaining/abiding), is Christ the guest of honor in every area of your life? When He is, it begins to change our perspective within our own circumstances. From the text in Habakkuk 2 we see that deliverance wasn't what God was asking Habakkuk to concentrate on as much as it was to be in awe of who God is and to trust that God did have a plan. His plan was to help teach His people, even though it was in a way that Habakkuk didn't anticipate or expect. With this in mind, read through the story about Joseph who dealt with some unfortunate circumstances on his journey yet never lost focus on his love and trust in God's ultimate plan for his life.

Genesis 37:12-36

¹² Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" ¹⁶ He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" ¹⁷ "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹ "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. ²⁰ "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams." ²¹ When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. ²² "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness,

but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. ²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" ²⁷ Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. ³⁰ He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?" ³¹ Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." ³³ He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

³⁴ Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

³⁶ Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Genesis 39-40 New International Version (NIV)

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

39 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. ² The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, ⁴ Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵ From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. ⁶ So Potiphar left

everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. ¹³ When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, ¹⁴ she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. ¹⁵ When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house." ¹⁶ She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. ²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

The Cupbearer and the Baker

40 *Sometime later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. ² Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.*

After they had been in custody for some time, ⁵ each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

⁶ When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?”

⁸ “We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.”

Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, “In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, ¹⁰ and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup and put the cup in his hand.”

¹² “This is what it means,” Joseph said to him. “The three branches are three days. ¹³ Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵ I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. ¹⁷ In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”

¹⁸ “This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are three days. ¹⁹ Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh.”

²⁰ Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand— ²² but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

²³ The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers. He later was thrown into prison for a crime he didn't commit. He helped some guys while in prison, but in return he was forgotten and left there. If there was ever a situation that you would expect someone to cry out for deliverance, it was Joseph. And yet, in the direst of situations, being used by God was Joseph's focal point, not deliverance. Again, I want to be clear, I do not think it is wrong to ask for deliverance from trials. However, if all of our focus is spent on asking for deliverance I do believe that we could miss out on so many learning and growth opportunities that the Lord desires for us. Pain and/or anger, if left unchecked can derail us. Remember that the enemy wants nothing more than to see us walk away from our relationship with the Lord. When all we see and concentrate on is our pain or anger we will not only lose sight of God's love for us we have the potential to damage our witness to those around us.

Think this through and pray it in

What would life be like if we focused more on how we could be used by the Lord, or lessons we can learn within our trials than to cry out for deliverance from them?

I want to end this chapter with reading and praying through the lyrics of the song, "*We Will Not Be Shaken*."

VERSE

Though the battle rages
We will stand in the fight
Though the armies rise up against us on all
sides
We will not be shaken
We will not be shaken
We will not be shaken

PRE-CHORUS

For in the hour of our darkest day
We will not tremble, we won't be afraid
Hope is rising like the light of dawn
Our God is for us He has overcome

CHORUS

For we trust in our God
And through His unfailing love
We will not be shaken
We will not be shaken
We will not be shaken

BRIDGE

All those against Him will fall
For our God is stronger
He can do all things
No higher name we can call

For Jesus is greater
We can do all things

CHORUS

For we trust in our God
And through His unfailing love

We will not be shaken
We will not be shaken
We will not be shaken

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Day 18 (Habakkuk 2- Part 2)

Chapter 2 is one of those chapters where you almost have to read it several times to catch all of the amazing elements that are being laid out for Habakkuk. In the first chapter Habakkuk's concern and ultimately his desire is for God's deliverance. In this chapter God answers outlining all that He was going to do. Although Habakkuk didn't understand the answer he received, God did lay out before him that He knew the Babylonians were a wicked people and that their sin would be their downfall.

Although God has a plan and His plan is perfect, I believe there are two things we struggle with in regards to God's plan. The first is that His plans are often misunderstood. Even if God did explain everything, it might be beyond our comprehension and difficult to believe. 2 Corinthians 5:7 states that we are "...live by faith, not by sight." We live by faith revealed in the promises of God (the Bible). He is perfect. He is just. What we need to remember within this particular story is that the Babylonians were simply being used to do God's will and execute His plans. The second is that God's plans are often mysterious. I know that for me I fall into these moments where I try and put God in this box of what seems reasonable or what makes sense to me within whatever situation I may be in. However, God does not work this way. In Genesis 6:5-22, the story of Noah, God sent word to him that He would bring a flood. Some theologians/teachers have taught that it is possible that no one in Noah's day had seen rain, so this message from the Lord would have seemed odd.

SIDE NOTE: No one really knows whether or not rain had been experienced before God sent the flood. The Scriptures don't specifically state that, however, some interpret from Genesis 2:5-6 when it states that *"no shrub of the field had yet grown on the land, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not made it rain on the land...water would come out of the ground and water the entire surface of the land."* The other passage that leads some to believe no one had witnessed rain

is found in Hebrews 11:7, *“By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family...”*

God tells Noah to build an ark and gives him all the instructions that he needs to complete the task. The reason he gives Noah is that God is going to flood the earth with a material (rain) that maybe no one had ever seen before. God does not exist in a box of traditions, assumptions, or expectation that we have built and commanded He stay in. What we can confidently cling to is that what God is doing is constant and consistent with what He has done before. Because He alone is God, He can do what He wants, how He wants, with whom He wants, and when He wants.

God provided Habakkuk with the details of what He was going to do, but He never explained why He was doing what He was doing. For Habakkuk, it becomes evident that the solution wasn't comprehension or knowledge, it was faith.

Think this through and pray it in

Faith is personal. It isn't something that is on a family plan nor is it something that someone else can provide for you. Take a moment to think about what is going on in your life. Do you believe that God is who He says He is? Do you believe that God's grace and His love are able to penetrate through the darkest part of any circumstance or situation you may be going through? Be honest with the lord before moving on.

Day 19

(2 Peter 1:12-15)

2 Peter 1:12-15

¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

I remember the day I was told that due to extreme financial hardship, I was going to be laid off from my job. I was beyond devastated. Disbelief, confusion, fear, worry, anger, and heartbreak were surging through every fiber of my being. Early on and often in the midst of many tears I would ask God, “why?” In my humanness, I just couldn’t come to any type of understanding why this had to happen. It wasn’t just happening to me either. This lay-off was adversely affecting my two sons as well. And yet, when our focus was centered on the Lord, it was within this circumstance that He brought greater clarity and understanding of what it truly meant to be dependent on Jesus Christ.

However, I want to make something very clear. I have had to experience a challenging & difficult journey. There have been moments that during trials and circumstances that I have faced I have not always made honorable or godly decisions. These were moments where I was not placing my faith and trust in the Creator and instead tried to take matters in my own hands. As my attentions, allegiances, and affections were turned elsewhere I wandered and the result was chaos, restlessness, resentment, and bitterness. But, God with His unconditional love, His unlimiting forgiveness and grace saved me from myself. He has journeyed me through lessons to mature me, that although challenging, I’m incredibly grateful to have experienced. Maybe you find yourself in one of those moments of confusion,

surrounded by a thousand question marks as to why things have happened the way they have. Maybe you have not made wise choices or decisions in the midst of your situation and are struggling with the element of God's forgiveness and love. Something that has helped me is to be reminded of who God is and to be reminded of His promises. This is why studying the word of God is incredibly important. When I have had moments of doubt or weakness, or even times of frustration and sorrow, reading God's word helped bring clarity and a proper godly perspective time and time again. No matter how long one has been a believer, it is incredibly important to be in God's Word everyday. Look again at 2 Peter 1:12-15

*¹² So I will always **remind** you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to **refresh** your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to **remember** these things.*

Peter knew how important it was to be reminded, refreshed, and to remember spiritual truths. He even claimed that this would be his earthly pursuit. Do we run and claim after the same things?

Think this through and Pray it in

With this idea of being “reminded, refreshed, and to remember spiritual truths,” take a moment and pray through these scriptures. It is with Scripture like these that help our hearts to know how loving and forgiving our God is.

Deuteronomy 7:9

⁹ Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

Psalms 86:15

But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Psalm 103:10-12

¹⁰ *he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.*

¹¹ *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Isaiah 54:10

Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Micah 7:18-19

¹⁸ *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.*

¹⁹ *You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:37-39

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Ephesians 1:7-8

⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,*

Ephesians 2:4-5

⁴ *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Day 20

(Habakkuk 3:1-16a)

A Prayer of Habakkuk (Good News Translation)

3 *This is a prayer of the prophet Habakkuk:*

³ *God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.*

*His glory covered the heavens
and his praise filled the earth.*

⁴ *His splendor was like the sunrise;
rays flashed from his hand,
where his power was hidden.*

⁵ *Plague went before him;
pestilence followed his steps.*

⁶ *He stood, and shook the earth;
he looked, and made the nations
tremble.*

*The ancient mountains crumbled
and the age-old hills collapsed—
but he marches on forever.*

⁷ *I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,
the dwellings of Midian in anguish.*

⁸ *Were you angry with the rivers, Lord?
Was your wrath against the streams?*

*Did you rage against the sea
when you rode your horses
and your chariots to victory?*

⁹ *You uncovered your bow,
you called for many arrows.*

You split the earth with rivers;

¹⁰ *the mountains saw you and writhed.*

Torrents of water swept by;

the deep roared

and lifted its waves on high.

¹¹ *Sun and moon stood still in the heavens
at the glint of your flying arrows,
at the lightning of your flashing spear.*

¹² *In wrath you strode through the earth
and in anger you threshed the nations.*

¹³ *You came out to deliver your people,
to save your anointed one.*

*You crushed the leader of the land of
wickedness,*

you stripped him from head to foot.

¹⁴ *With his own spear you pierced his head
when his warriors stormed out to scatter
us,*

*gloating as though about to devour
the wretched who were in hiding.*

¹⁵ *You trampled the sea with your horses,
churning the great waters.*

^{16a} *I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.*

When is the last time you have been in awe of something? When something has
completely taken your breath away? When you have marveled and been incredibly amazed?

I love how this prayer of Habakkuk opens, *“O Lord, I have heard of what you have done, and I am filled with awe...”* How often do we take the time to reflect and/or remember and it thrusts us to stand or be in awe of who the Lord is and what He has accomplished through His son, Jesus Christ? For me, sometimes I struggle with becoming so preoccupied with what is going on around or with me, that I fail to take moments to reflect, remember, and praise God for who He is and what His son, Jesus did for me on the cross. I cannot emphasize this enough, that in consistently studying God’s word, we are constantly exposing ourselves to who our God is and what was accomplished on the cross. It’s being exposed to God’s character and what He has done for us that helps us keep our focus and perspective on the Lord instead of our circumstances. In turn, we are prone to release our situation(s) into the hands of the One who is capable and able to do all things.

Think this through and Pray it in

Take time to process and pray through these verses.

Deuteronomy 7:9

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

Psalms 19

¹ *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

² *Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.*

³ *They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.*

⁴ *Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. ⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. ⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth. ⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹ By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² But who can

discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. ¹³ Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 147:5

Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Psalm 33:6

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

Isaiah 46:9-10

⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'

Romans 11:33

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Colossians 1:17

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Day 21

(Habakkuk 3:16b-19 Part 1)

*^{16b} Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.*

*¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,*

*¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

*¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.*

For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

On a July afternoon in 1967, a 17-year-old girl dove into a shallow lake, broke her neck and became paralyzed from the neck down. Her name is Joni Erickson Tada. You may know her story. She stated in her books as well as interviews how she kept processing that if God was all-powerful and loving, then how could becoming paralyzed be a demonstration of His love and power? How could life-long paralysis be His loving plan for her life?

One of the greatest pieces of advice I have received is that when I go through something difficult that I should cling to what I know to be true about God. Yes, do we desire to have or find answers to the why's? Of course, we do. Is it ok to be angry or frustrated that we have to endure hard or difficult circumstances? Of course, it is. However, we have to remember that if our attentions or focus are on our emotions, like anger, then what is

produced from within us isn't going to be godly. It is God's Word alone that reminds us of who He is. He is holy. He is just. He is kind. He is compassionate. He is merciful and so on. It is in remembrance of these things that drives us to approach the throne of grace and give the Lord our anger, frustration, and sorrow. I heard a pastor mention that in an interview, Joni Erickson Tada stated, "Most of the questions I asked in the early days of my paralysis were questions voiced out of a clenched fist, an emotional release, an outburst of anger. I don't know how sincere my questions really were. I was just angry. But after many months, those clenched-fist questions became questions of a searching heart."

Are we coming to the Lord with accusations and demands? Or are we coming to the Lord, knowing that He is good, and searching with an honest heart? Hebrews 4:16 states, *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."* This is such a beautiful reminder that we can approach the throne of grace with confidence, and bold assurance, but with reverence and awe. God is in control because of who He is. It is incredibly important to be reminded of who He is so that we stay God-centered, not self-centered. We see that Habakkuk did this. Thirty-eight times in chapter 3, God is referenced. Habakkuk has now changed his focus in being completely God-centered.

Think this through and Pray it in

Take a moment and go back and read through Habakkuk 3:1-15 again. What words and/or phrases in this text help you to picture God's majesty and power? Look for the following reminders of who our God is:

- God is eternal
- God is self-existing.
- God is faithful
- God is almighty
- God is holy and pure
- God is patient

Take a moment to process these characteristics and then spending some time thanking Him for who He is.

Day 22

(Habakkuk 3:16b-19 Part 2)

Habakkuk 3:17-19:

*¹⁶ Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.*

*¹⁷ Even though the fig trees have no fruit
and no grapes grow on the vines,
even though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no grain,
even though the sheep all die
and the cattle stalls are empty,*

*¹⁸ I will still be joyful and glad,
because the Lord God is my savior.*

*¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord gives me strength.
He makes me sure-footed as a deer
and keeps me safe on the mountains.*

I remember the first time I read these verses. I think I read them multiple times because I was so fascinated with how Habakkuk, knowing what he knew, could pen these words. He was so centered on who God is that no matter how dire his situation he could still worship the Lord. This whole concept of becoming “God-centered” in the face of adversity was a principle that I’m continuing to be challenged with in my own life. Being God-centered helps us embrace passages like, Psalm 18:32 – 33:

“It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places.”

And sometimes our circumstances can be incredibly overwhelming. I think at times we can feel alone, like no one understands what we are going through. The world desires to keep us in this frame of mind that we are alone. That there is no one to help. However, that is not what God desires for us. Spending time in the Bible every day helps us keep the proper perspective of His character and keeps us tuned in with His promises to us. It doesn't matter if things are "flower-stream pathways" or not. His word will remind us time and time again that we are not alone and that Jesus does understand what we are going through.

Think this through and Pray it in

Jesus himself experienced pain and suffering. He knows exactly how we feel and what we are going through. Read Hebrews 4:14-16:

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Spend some time reading and processing through these verses and then move on in praying through the lyrics of this hymn.

What a Friend we have in Jesus

By Joseph Medlicott Scriven
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What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
And what a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer
Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear

All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Day 23

(Habakkuk 2:1 & Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Habakkuk made the choice to wait with anticipation and awe as to what the Lord would do. He states in 2:1 that, *“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what He will say to me...”* He was patient with God. Willing to stand and wait to see God answer his prayer. At that moment he made a choice and realized that he needed to simply cling to what he knew to be true about God. By making that choice it led him to write these words in the 3rd chapter verses 17-19,

“Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”

Think this through and Pray it in

Read through Habakkuk 3 again. When you get to the word “Selah” take a moment to pause and reflect on what you just read. As you reflect on what you have read, spend some time praying and praising the Lord before moving on. I know that it isn’t easy to always sing songs of praise. However, by staying in the Word, it allows our hearts to stay focused on who our God is instead of focusing on our circumstances.

Habakkuk 3

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.
³ God came from Teman,
and the Holy One from Mount
Paran. *Selah*

His splendor covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of his praise.
⁴ His brightness was like the light;
rays flashed from his hand;
and there he veiled his power.
⁵ Before him went pestilence,
and plague followed at his heels.
⁶ He stood and measured the earth;
he looked and shook the nations;
then the eternal mountains were scattered;
the everlasting hills sank low.

His were the everlasting ways.
⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;
 the curtains of the land of Midian did
 tremble.
⁸ Was your wrath against the rivers,
 O Lord?
 Was your anger against the rivers,
 or your indignation against the sea,
 when you rode on your horses,
 on your chariot of salvation?
⁹ You stripped the sheath from your bow,
 calling for many arrows. *Selah*

You split the earth with rivers.
¹⁰ The mountains saw you and writhed;
 the raging waters swept on;
 the deep gave forth its voice;
 it lifted its hands on high.
¹¹ The sun and moon stood still in their
 place
 at the light of your arrows as they sped,
 at the flash of your glittering spear.
¹² You marched through the earth in fury;
 you threshed the nations in anger.
¹³ You went out for the salvation of your
 people,
 for the salvation of your anointed.
 You crushed the head of the house of the
 wicked,
 laying him bare from thigh to
 neck. *Selah*

¹⁴ You pierced with his own arrows the

heads of his warriors,
 who came like a whirlwind to scatter
 me,
 rejoicing as if to devour the poor in
 secret.
¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses,
 the surging of mighty waters.
¹⁶ I hear, and my body trembles;
 my lips quiver at the sound;
 rottenness enters into my bones;
 my legs tremble beneath me.
 Yet I will quietly wait for the day of
 trouble
 to come upon people who invade us.

Habakkuk Rejoices in the Lord

¹⁷ 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,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
 I will take joy in the God of my
 salvation.
¹⁹ 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.

Day 24 (Conclusion)

Life is tough and we all live with a hope that things will get better. But regardless if they do or don't, we need to choose to be God-centered; not circumstance or problem centered. Are we coming to the Lord with accusations and demands? Or are we coming to the Lord, knowing that He is good, and searching with an honest heart? Do you know why the rearview mirror is so much smaller than the windshield? Because what is behind us isn't what we should spend all our energies focusing on. In becoming God-centered, trials can draw us nearer to Him and lift us above the circumstances so that we walk on the heights with Him. Thirty-eight times in Habakkuk 3, God is referenced. Habakkuk teaches us how important it is to be God-centered in the face of adversity. To complete this story, it is important to know that the Babylonians came and destroyed Judah and Habakkuk, more than likely, died in that battle. Habakkuk remained God-centered to the very end. He was willing to stand and wait to see God answer. We learn from Habakkuk that we too can make the choice to simply cling to what we know to be true about God so that we too can worship in the midst of pain and trials. It didn't matter what the end result was going to be, Habakkuk chose to keep his focus on the Lord instead of on his circumstances.

God is bigger than what I'm going through. God is bigger than what you are going through. He wants us to yield to Him, and surrender the chaos of life to Him. We need to choose to wait with anticipation to see how the Lord will work. From Habakkuk's life we can see that it isn't up to us to try and understand what God is doing, it is up to us to trust Him. God doesn't always change the circumstances we may find ourselves in, but He can change our hearts to be able to meet the circumstances we face. Phil 4:6 states, "*Do not be anxious*

about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” We can come before His mighty throne and lay our burdens at His feet. Trust in God. Let Him take the worries, stresses, and daily struggles from you. Then wait in expectation that God will answer. We must devote ourselves to prayer (Colossians 4:2). We must approach the throne of grace with yielded hearts. A yielded heart does not whine or rebel when the going gets rough. Isaiah 28:16 – *“Whoever believes will not act hastily.”* A yielded heart helps us face our doubts and questions honestly. A yielded heart remains thankful to the Lord no matter what. Isaiah 30:15 (*“in quietness confidence shall be your strength”*) reminds us that a yielded heart musters courage to thank the Lord even during hard times. It is a yielded heart that allows us to accept whatever God’s answers may be while at the same time worshipping in who He is and what He has accomplished for us through His son Jesus Christ. Psalm 37:7, *“Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him”* reminds us that yielding yourself to God’s will is ultimately an act of trust. Habakkuk could wait quietly and patiently because he knew that God was at work in the world. No matter how he felt about what was going to happen to him and the rest of God’s people, he chose to worship the Lord and cling to what he knew to be true about Him.

As Habakkuk modeled for us at the end of his book, I want to end this study with worshipping the Lord by processing and praying through the lyrics of the beautiful hymn, “How Great Thou Art.”

HOW GREAT THOU ART

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Verse 1

Oh Lord, my God
When I, in awesome wonder

Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

Chorus

Then sings my soul,
my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul,
my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art

Verse 2

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

Chorus

Then sings my soul,
my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul,
my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art

Verse 3

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

Chorus

Then sings my soul,
my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul,
my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
How great Thou art, how great Thou art