

Habakkuk 3
When God Doesn't
Elizabeth Daigle
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It was late February 1944 when the Nazi's swept in and arrested 51-year-old Corrie ten Boom, her older sister Betsie, and their elderly father, Casper. They were charged with being part of the Dutch Resistance and hiding Jews in their apartment above their watch shop. Their commitment to Christ was the motivation for their dangerous work and it's estimated that they saved upwards of eight hundred Jews during the Nazi invasion.

An informant had tipped off the authorities and the three were carted off to prison. Corrie was placed in solitary confinement. Her father Casper died after only ten days in prison. After three months, the sisters were transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. The harsh conditions there took their toll, and Betsie even though gravely ill maintained her deep faith and trust in God. But on her death bed, she told Corrie, "There is no pit so deep that He (God) is not deeper still."

Corrie ten Boom miraculously survived the war – created a rehabilitation center for any in need of care, even including those who had collaborated with the Nazi's. She went on to write many books and spoke around the world sharing messages of forgiveness, hope, love, and salvation in Christ Jesus.

After all the atrocities she had witnessed and from which she had suffered, how could she overcome and maintain hope? Only because of her deep faith in Jesus and confidence in the justice of God.

Thousands of miles away, back here in the United States (U.S.), a young GI who had been awarded a purple heart returned to his hometown in Mississippi. His name was Clyde Perkins, and he was idolized by his younger brother, John.

When Clyde was shot and killed by a deputy sheriff in 1947 while trying to defend himself. Young John could barely contain his rage. At the urging of his family, John

moved to California to escape. He made a promise to himself that he'd never go back to Mississippi.

A decade later, Perkin's son attended a Bible class at a local church and eventually Perkins joined him. It was there, as Perkins wrote in his book "One Blood" that Perkins met Jesus. He says this about that time in his life: *"I met Jesus and He began to change me and challenge my prejudices and hatred toward others. . . If I had not met Jesus, I would have died carrying that heavy burden of hate to my grave. But He began to strip it away, layer by layer."*

Perkins eventually broke his promise and returned to Mississippi and along with his wife Vera established a foundation and many ministries to offer hope and help. Today, John Perkins, who was forced to quit school after third grade to work in the cotton fields, holds honorary doctorates from seventeen colleges and universities and has authored over a dozen books.

After the atrocities and suffering he witnessed, how did he overcome and maintain hope? Only because of the saving work of Jesus and his deep faith in the justice of God.

I wonder if these inspiring, faith-filled modern-day saints ever studied the writings of the prophet Habakkuk.

Of course, I can't say for sure, but I can picture Perkins and ten Boom, even though they're among the 20th centuries' spiritual superstars, looking up into the heavens, and asking why?

"Why do you seem silent?" Why does evil seem to go unpunished? Why are the wicked winning? You have the power to do anything, why do you seem unwilling to change my circumstances? To answer my prayers?

Habakkuk had these same questions for God. Perhaps you do too. If we're honest, we've all had seasons of questioning.

Remember what we've already learned about Habakkuk -- he was a faithful follower of God, a righteous man, yet someone who struggled to make sense of what was happening in his world. But as we're going to see today as we finish the

book he wrote, . . . Habakkuk overcame, not because he ignored what was going on around him – but because he chose to focus on God’s character rather than his circumstances.

Like Corrie ten Boom and John Perkins – Habakkuk had a faith strong enough to overcome. Not by looking the other way and ignoring reality and injustice, but by handing it over to the one who judges justly and promises to make all things new.

As we begin our study of Habakkuk 3 this is the main point, I want us all to walk away with:

Faith that overcomes doesn’t depend on what we see, but on who God has proven Himself to be.

And I see three ways he moved from his emotional distress to deeper faith.

And as I studied his book and especially this chapter this is how he did it.

- **Habakkuk looked in,**
- **he looked back,**
- **and finally, he looked up.**

And as we seek to hear and understand the wisdom and instruction for God’s Word and His Spirit, **will you join me in prayer?**

Anyone here this morning who lifts weights? I wish I could raise my hand too – because I know how beneficial it is, but I just can’t get myself there. I admire you all for your discipline!

Weightlifting builds your muscles by first seeming to hurt them – lifting weights causes microscopic tears in your muscle fibers – but it’s those little tears that create the growth. As your body repairs those tears, your muscles increase in size and strength.

But the only way to keep them growing is to challenge them with more and more weight. How many know the **process is painful?! And the results are slow!** In fact, you won’t see any results, you won’t get stronger unless you stick with it.

It's a similar process if you're seeking to build deep faith. Not a flimsy, skin-deep kind of faith that's more about habit and can't handle the hard stuff of life.

How many know that faith doesn't grow in seasons of pleasure but in seasons of pain? I think it's because just like lifting weights creates small tears in our muscles, as our faith is exercised and challenged, our hearts are ripped, with those same small tears as we exercise our faith. We are strengthened and our faith grows as we choose to take God at His Word and believe what we do not see.

Faith is demanding – it requires us to risk. But that the only path to strength – to apply our faith to the hard and the heartbreaking. Trusting in the character of God.

Faith that overcomes doesn't depend on what we see, but on who God has proven Himself to be.

Two weeks ago, Pastor Alan unpacked the definition of faith found in the book of Hebrews. Let's look at it again here:

Now **faith** is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. [Hebrews 11:1]

Confident assurance in something we can't see. Big ask. But a critical one for all who follow Jesus – in fact, God values faith SO much – that . . .

. . . without **faith** it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that **he exists** and that **he rewards** those who earnestly seek him. [Hebrews 11:6]

Believe that God is real. He will always be who He says He is. Even when we don't hear Him and can't see Him.

So, with all this in mind, let's look at Habakkuk chapter 3 and learn from the prophet how to get there ourselves.

As we turn to Habakkuk 3, I want to mention that this chapter is different from the first two – it is structured like a psalm.

Your first clue is it begins with a musical notation. Depending on your translation you might see reference to a musical instrument – it was intended to be sung or performed aloud and with others.

Let's look at Habakkuk 3:1-2:

This prayer was sung by the prophet Habakkuk:

² I have heard all about you, Lord. I am filled with awe by your amazing works.

In this time of our deep need, help us again as you did in years gone by.

And in your anger, remember your mercy. [Habakkuk 3:1-2]

Right here in the first few verses in the prophet reframing his perspective by recalling what God has done. And it is the first step to building deep faith. You must

1. Look in.

Here the prophet remembers what God has done and asks Him to come through again, but this is really a continuation of his lists of complaints from chapters 1 and 2. Habakkuk cried out to the Lord:

- How long must I call for help, but you do not listen?
- Why do you make me look at injustice?
- Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?
- Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

Your faith will never grow unless you're honest with the Lord.

We describe Christianity not as a set of rules but as a relationship because that's what it is – and relationships are built on trust and honesty. Don't pretend. He can handle your questions and your doubts. Be authentic. And honestly, He knows what you thinking before you think it – so honor Him by begin straight.

Habakkuk approaches God with honesty and an appropriate level of respect.

His account says he was filled with awe as he acknowledged what God has done – but boldly asks Him to intervene.

He knew the invasion was coming. But he pressed in with honest dialogue. He respected the Lord enough to be honest. We need to do the same and share from our hearts.

As I mentioned this chapter is a psalm and any of you know that there are different types of Psalms, just like there are different genres of music.

There are psalms of praise and thanksgiving, wisdom, or royal psalms, but about one-third of all the psalms in the collection are laments. A Psalm of Lament is an expression of sorrow, pain or grief given to God. Laments are the largest category in the whole book. WHY?

I think it's because, just like us, the ancient believers struggled to make sense of it all. But they didn't walk away from God – they took their complaints to Him and processed with him – and one another.

The Psalms were the prayer and praise book of the ancient church – meaning they sang, chanted, or recited them **TOGETHER**. Do you see that? **We** need to remember together. **We** need to remind each other of the great works of God. **We** need to share our testimonies to encourage and build up one another.

The community of faith, the family of God. No lone rangers, we are better together, we need each other.

The psalms were written to be sung out loud. There's power in giving voice to your sorrow. God not only welcomes it He encourages it. Jesus did it in the garden when He asked that the cup of suffering, He was about to drink be taken from Him. And God said no. Jesus submitted to the Father's will, but He asked for another way.

Our Savior poured out His heart to the Father in His sorrow and pain, we should do the same.

As Habakkuk moved from looking inward, he shifted and rehearsed God's mighty actions from the past. And that happens when we:

2. Look back.

It's been my experience, and I'm sure the same for many of you – that when you're in the pit, just the simple act of remembering God is act of faith.

The prophet does the same and reviews events in Israel's history in which God miraculously intervened. Here in vs. 3:

I see God moving across the deserts from Edom, the Holy One coming from Mount Paran.

His brilliant splendor fills the heavens, and the earth is filled with his praise.

[Habakkuk 3:3]

The original audience would immediately see the connection to Mt Sinai and the giving of the Law.

Looking down further in this section:

⁸ *Was it in anger, Lord, that you struck the rivers and parted the sea?*

Were you displeased with them? No, you were sending your chariots of salvation!

¹² *You marched across the land in anger and trampled the nations in your fury.*

¹³ *You went out to rescue your chosen people, to save your anointed ones.*

¹⁵ *You trampled the sea with your horses, and the mighty waters piled high.*

[Habakkuk 3:8, 12-13a, 15]

This is a reference to God's miraculous power when He saved His people in the Exodus, releasing them from slavery in Egypt by miraculously parting the Red Sea and later the Jordan River. Throughout this whole section we see God's power over His creation – and His ability to harness it for His purposes and to save His people.

All this is true. All this is recorded for our edification – the mighty acts of God in the past are here to inspire us to hope and to trust in His power and might. But it comes with the qualification, one that Habakkuk had to embrace as we do.

We are not in control of how or when God moves. Even though we know He can, He works on His timetable, not ours.

At the end of this section, Habakkuk seemed to really embrace the reality of the invasion and look at how it made him feel:

I trembled inside when I heard this; my lips quivered with fear.

My legs gave way beneath me, and I shook in terror.

I will wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike the people who invade us. [Habakkuk 3:16]

Though trembling, even terrified as he came to grips with what was coming, there was a decisive moment here as he submits to God's will.

And from here the prophet chose to:

3. Look up.

It's a truth that you'll only see what you're looking for. If you have the courage and faith to look for God, you'll find Him.

Paul, in his admonition to the Colossians said this:

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. [Colossians 3:2]

That's what Habakkuk did.

And when the prophet fixed his gaze on the living God, his song changed.

For you musicians, one writer suggested it's like a bridge section in a modern composition where the melody morphs, changes key and a new theme or counter point is introduced.

Remember the song started in complaint, moved to faithful resolution, and now when he looked up, he composed one of the most powerful affirmations of faith in all of Scripture.

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty,

¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!

19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength!

He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

[Habakkuk 3:17-19]

The prophet opened with the description of a tragic scene – no provisions, anywhere. He lists all the places you would expect to find food in the ancient world – yet there is none. Even so, he made a courageous declaration of trust.

Do you hear an echo of Habakkuk in Paul's declaration?

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength. [Philippians 4:11b-13]

Like Paul, Habakkuk had learned the secret of trusting the Lord in any and every circumstance and because of that trust, he was able to declare:

I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful. [Habakkuk 3:18]

Friends these are the words of a survivor not a victim. The words of an overcomer, one who is willing to look at the hard reality in front of him.

Habakkuk resolved to be joyful in a bad situation not because he was ignoring what was coming but based on his firm belief that God is still good and will work it out for His glory and the good of His people.

This is not a white-knuckled, teeth-clenched response – his trust, his hope, and his joy were the natural byproduct of deep faith.

So, while, Habakkuk believed Israel would ultimately be delivered from the evil Babylonians, they first they had to endure the invasion.

You remember the three young men who survived the fiery furnace – we rejoice as we tell the story of their deliverance. They left the fire not even smelling of smoke – the only thing that happened is that their chains came off as they walked freely with the fourth man who looked like the Son of God.

But they still had to endure being thrown into flames by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers.

Paul and all who were sailing with him were miraculously saved from a ferocious storm, but they still endured the shipwreck and being tossed into the sea.

Habakkuk and these other faithful ones in Scripture are inspiring to me because they model perseverance. The Lord has a high regard for those who persevere.

But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."
[2 Chronicles 15:7]

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. **[Revelation 3:11]**

People who have the courage to persevere do it not by crawling under the bed or hiding in the closet, but by facing their giants and choosing to trust in the truth and promises in God's Word and the potency of His power.

That kind of courage comes from walking by faith and not by sight. By trusting God's view of the world rather than the world's perspective of itself.

Habakkuk looked back and remembered God's presence in the storm and now could experience His presence in the silence.

He had rehearsed God faithfulness to Israel and drew strength to face his own battle and concluded with a truth that no one, not even the powerful Babylonians could take away from him.

Look back at verse ¹⁹ which records his personal declaration.

The Sovereign Lord is my strength. **[Habakkuk 3:19]**

It's a choice the prophet made. And it begs the question we will all have to answer -- what is the source of your strength?

You know, people gain strength or find their value in lots of places – in their position, their reputation, their resources, their appearance, their power, and influence -- the list goes on and on.

Back in chapter 1 we learn that the Babylonians made a god out of their own strength.

. . . they are deeply guilty, for their own strength is their god.

Then they will worship their net and burn incense in front of them.

“These nets are the gods who have made us rich!” they will claim.

[Habakkuk 1:11b, 16]

We all must choose. In the words of singer song writer, Bob Dylan – *you’ve gotta serve somebody. It might be the devil, or it might be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody.*

Who do we serve – who is our god?

For those who choose to serve the Living God there is the promise of unfailing stability and strength – it’s an image the prophet undoubtedly witnessed on the rocky hills and mountain tops that surrounded Israel.

The high places are hard to reach. Rocky terrain is dangerous to navigate. But not for the deer. They scamper up and down with power and ease. That’s what we are promised – if we chose to embrace a faith strong enough to overcome. We are promised the strength to navigate the rough and rocky terrain. To be empowered with spiritual insight and fortitude to overcome. Strength drawn not from what we see, but from who God has proven Himself to be.

Last spring, my husband, Tim, and I traveled to North Africa to visit and encourage our workers there. I met a young woman who I’m going to call Amina. She was part of the same fellowship as our workers, and I met her at their home and asked her to tell me her story.

I learned that Amina was twenty-one and that she already had a leadership position in the church. She is a native to that part of the world where there are few Christians, so I asked her to share her testimony and how she came to know Jesus.

She told me about a woman who lived in her neighborhood and befriended her mother and siblings. This woman told them stories from the Bible and shared about Jesus. She was very kind, everyone liked her.

Soon after she was befriended by this kind woman, her mother had a dream – the Man in White came to her and invited her to follow Him. These kinds of dreams are common in that region of the world and Amina's mother understood that Jesus was calling her to become His disciple. Her new faith inspired her three children and her husband and soon all were followers of Jesus.

But there was trouble from the extended family and a long season of estrangement began. Gratefully, this little family experienced a certain amount of protection because all in Amina's immediate family received Christ, but they still suffered because of their decision.

But there was more suffering to come.

I asked Amina about her siblings – and she told me she had a sister and a brother, but that her brother had passed away. I gently pressed in, expressed my sorrow for her loss and while she was sad, she said something like, "It's really ok -- I know he is in heaven."

I later learned the rest of the story.

Amina's brother was a healthy 14-year-old with a beautiful smile, and he was known for almost always wearing it. Amina had a beautiful smile too so I felt as if I could almost picture his smile too.

Everyone in their fellowship had just participated in a camp and while he was there, he came down with what they thought was a cold. When his symptoms weren't resolved, they took him to the doctor who sent him home with some medicine and told him to rest.

But things took a tragic turn when instead of getting better Amina's brother grew worse and worse and finally at the urging of the woman who had introduced them to Jesus, they took him to the hospital. Sadly, they discovered his ailment wasn't a cold at all, but meningitis. The infection progressed rapidly, and he grew gravely ill.

Amina's mother left her son that night in the hospital, heartbroken to see him so sick. His face was hollow, his complexion ashen. It was as if life was draining out of him. That night she had another dream.

In her dream, she saw her son healthy, restored and smiling broadly. He was walking out of the hospital, dressed in white. But he wasn't alone, he was walking out, holding the hand of the Man dressed in White – the same Man who had bid her to come and invited her to follow.

A short time later, the hospital called with the news that her son had passed away. Their sorrow was great – but Amina's family knew that Jesus had rescued him. He was not with them, but he was safe with the Savior. Jesus came for Amina's brother because he belonged to Him.

Friends, one thing is certain, death will come for us all. There is no escape. And for all the things we put our confidence only one thing really matters –Who is your god?

Faith came to that house through the kindness of a neighbor and a miraculous dream of revelation. Faith can come to you right here and now too. All you need do is ask – and that same Jesus, who appeared to Amina's mother and who ushered her brother into heaven, is working here in this place and is ready to respond to any who will call out to Him.

Ask our prayer team to come forward.

God is real. He is here and is asking all of us to come.

To take a step closer despite your doubts and questions, to trust Him despite your circumstances and story.

Death is the worst this world can throw at us – but Jesus defeated death and made a mockery of the powers and principalities that hold most of the world captive on the Cross.

Will you trust Him today? Will you, by faith declare, as the prophet Habakkuk did, "Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord."

He is worthy of our trust, so great is His love for us.

Join me in prayer.

Benediction from Jude:

Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. 25 All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord.