

**Pastor Kyle Mercer**  
How to Wrestle With God

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Series: When in Doubt  
Habakkuk 1

**BIG IDEA – TRUSTING GOD TOGETHER THROUGH DOUBT AND DISAPPOINTMENT**

All right, Two Cities Church. Today we begin a brand-new series, but before we do, we need to celebrate what happened on Monday night. We had an incredible prayer night. Clap if you were there. Yes! Guys, listen. It's okay. I know you can't make everything. We have busy schedules and all that, but if you missed it, you missed it. We had almost 1,400 people in this room, and this room can only seat 1,300. It was insane.

Afterward, there was this lady in her 70s. She didn't say this to me, but she said this to one of our staff. She said, "That was one of the top three experiences of my life." I know that's what we said, but I'm like, "Are you sure? I mean, you've lived a long time." Guys, it was an incredible time. It told us that God is on the move and that you guys are uniquely hungry. So, we're going to be doing another one of those in June and then another one of those in November. We're very excited.

Two other things before we get to the book of Habakkuk. The first is with this series we're launching a brand-new podcast. You can get it where you can get our podcasts or our YouTube. I've never said this from stage before, but could you subscribe, please? It would make it a little easier for us to get content to you guys.

Here's what we're going to do. We're starting this podcast for a couple of reasons. It's going to help us dive deeper into the themes and topics in these sermons. And believe me, this is going to be some deep stuff today and these coming weeks. Secondly, as we grow larger, we're figuring out ways we can continue to feel smaller. I'm going to be on this podcast. You guys are going to get to know me and some of

our staff better through that. It's really a way to give you guys relationships and resources to help you go farther faster.

Finally, before we get to our series, in three weeks from today...you want to mark your calendars and be here...Lee Strobel is going to be preaching here. Lee Strobel is a *New York Times* best-selling author, and, in a momentary lapse of judgment, he agreed to speak here. Isn't that amazing? Let me show you. He's going to be talking about this topic: *Is God Real?* It's a new book he wrote.

Listen. This is the week before Easter. What a great time. We never want to be the church that says, "Please bring your friends." We want to just create a church that you go, "I want to bring my friends." But what a unique moment to have somebody... He's a former atheist turned Christian.

He was working for the *Chicago Tribune*. He tried to disprove Christianity and ended up becoming a Christian. Some call him a modern-day C.S. Lewis, and he's going to be here. So, let's take a moment and pray. That might give you guys enough time to try... During my prayer, try to find the book of Habakkuk. Okay? Let's do that.

Lord, I thank you for our church. We love our church. Thank you for new opportunities and new technology, even just opportunities to use a podcast and a YouTube channel to, hopefully, get the gospel and biblical teaching to more people and to do online ministry to people. We pray for that.

Thank you for Lee Strobel. What a blessing and honor. It's very exciting to have someone of his stature come and bring God's Word to us. We pray that as we head into the spring, as we can feel it outside...everything is changing...that we would continue to invite people who are far from God and close to us to come and see. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right, guys. We're in a brand-new series called *When in Doubt*. You have to find the book of Habakkuk. If you go to your New Testament, if you have one of those real codex Bibles, just go back five books. It's a very, very small book. It's called *Habakkuk*. He's an interesting character. We'll meet him in a few minutes.

We called this series *When in Doubt* because the question is not *if* you're going to have doubts but *when* you're going to have doubts. I want to put you at ease. That's what we're going to do in this series, because doubt is not the opposite of faith. Unbelief is, but doubt is often an element of faith, and if you really believe, you're going to have some doubts at times.

Here's what's going to happen. We'll get here today. Your reality is going to feel very different than God's revelation. We're going to see today, basically, Habakkuk is going to go, "God, you said *this*. Do you remember saying that? Look at my life; it looks very different" or "Look at our culture" or "Look at our politics" or "Look at our church. It's very different."

The question in this series is going to be...*What are you going to do with your doubts?* What direction are you going to head in with your doubts? Are you going to take your doubts and walk away from God or take your doubts and walk into a deeper relationship with God? What Habakkuk does today is take his doubts and walk in the direction of God.

We gave you a little card when you got in. You don't have to grab it now, because we're going to come to it at the end, but here's what I want you to know. I'm just declaring this. We are going to trust God together. We gave you that card because we want you to write something down. Be thinking about it. I'm going to give you a chance at the end. Is there a place you need to trust God in your life? Or not for you, maybe...for somebody you love, because we're only as happy as our least happy kid.

I don't know where it is for you. Some of you may go, "I need to trust God for healing. I need to trust God financially. I need to trust God in my marriage. I need to trust God with my son or my daughter." We're going to pray with you at the end. Here's the thing about community. Community makes the bad times half as bad and the good times twice as good.

## **00 BACKGROUND: THE ORACLE, THE PROPHET & LEARNING TO LAMENT**

So, if you'll turn to Habakkuk (hopefully you've found it by now), let's talk about this first verse here. Follow me. Habakkuk 1:1: "***The oracle...***" That sounds like something out of Harry Potter, right? "***The oracle...***" Whatever that means. We'll talk about that. "***...that Habakkuk the prophet saw.***"

Here's a cool thing. An *oracle* is a burden. You're going to see this in a few minutes, but Habakkuk basically starts out yelling at God. That's going to be verse 2. We'll get there in a second. He starts off going, "I have this burden." So, a burden, or you can think something that bothers you.

All of us have different things we're burdened by. That's the thing. As I get to know people doing ministry... You know, you meet somebody, and ostensibly you're like, "Well, they look like their whole life is together." Then you have one lunch with them,

and you realize, "Oh my goodness. They're heartbroken over *this*" or "I had no idea they were taking care of their parents." People have stuff all the time.

Your burden is your problem. Right? Sometimes we have burdens together, but a lot of times, you have a burden. You have something that bothers you. What Habakkuk is going to do... Here's one of the first principles. We're going to talk about wrestling with God. One of the principles of wrestling with God is you transfer the burden to God in prayer.

Sometimes you have to pray with someone else. You have to go, "I'm so burdened for my son right now." What you do with that person is you say, "You know what we're going to do? We're going to get transferred to God." First Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you."

Now, the word *Habakkuk* means wrestle. It's kind of a complex word. It means wrestle or it means cling or it means embrace. What I'm asking you to do, what I'm challenging you to do in this series is to wrestle with God. Here's the truth. Let me just make it easy on all of us.

Everybody wrestles with God. Everybody does. You might go, which would be a fair question, "Well, Kyle, what about atheists?" They wrestle with God more than anyone. Have you ever met an atheist? They're so angry at the God they don't believe exists. I'm not mad at Santa. Something to think about.

Jacob was the first to wrestle with God. Jacob is this guy in the Old Testament, and he ends up wrestling with God. It's this kind of strange, interesting story. At the end, God gives him a new name, and the name he gives him is *Israel*. *Israel* literally means those who wrestle with God. So, I want to normalize the experience of wrestling with God. This is what Habakkuk does.

Now, Habakkuk is human. A lot of times, we think about these prophets and think of a guy standing on the top of a building with his cape waving, but we're going to see Habakkuk is human. You're going to read Habakkuk today, and you're going to go, "I think this guy is depressed. I think he's anxious. He's certainly angry. He's very frustrated." See, Habakkuk was a prophet. It's hard to be a prophet, by the way.

In the Old Testament, there were three offices: the kings (that was cool, because you got to lead God's people) and the priests (that was cool, because you got to minister to God's people), but the prophet is the strange guy who comes out of nowhere and yells at people. The prophet is a truth-teller, and the prophet always gets the prophet's reward, which is rejection.

What happens oftentimes... This is the story of the Old Testament. A prophet rises up and tells people things they don't want to know. They kill him. Then 50 years later, they realize he was right and build a monument to him. That's what happens with prophets. So, Habakkuk says, "I'm this prophet," but this is what's interesting. In all of the other prophetic books...

By the way, Habakkuk is a Minor Prophet. It doesn't mean it's unimportant; it means it's a smaller book. There are 12 of them at the very end of your Old Testament. Habakkuk does something different than anybody else. All of the other prophets have messages for people. Sometimes it's one person, and that's kind of scary. It's like, "Go tell King [so-and-so]," and you're like, "Oh no! Not him."

A lot of times, they have to tell a message to a whole people. What's unique about Habakkuk is Habakkuk has a message from the people to God. Basically, he's going to just yell at God about the condition of his life and the world and his nation. Then God is going to respond, and he's going to respond. In fact, what you could think of is this is about as close as we have to a journal entry of a prophet. He's just journaling.

Let me show you what he says. Follow me. Verse 2. We have to get into this. There's a lot to talk about here. He says, "**O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?**" Okay. Here's what we're doing for the rest of the time. I want us to learn how to lament. We're not good at lamenting.

Here's what *lament* is. First of all, there's a book in your Old Testament called *Lamentations*. A third of the psalms... There are 150 psalms. Fifty of those are laments. Think sad songs. That's what they are...sad prayers. A *lament* is a prayer in pain that leads to trusting God. That's the definition of a *lament*.

Here's the problem with us, guys. We're not good (Americans especially, men especially, especially) with dealing with bad news or negative emotions. We're actually not too bad when good things happen. We're like, "All right. Hold on. What filter am I putting this on as I put this on social media? Okay, hold on." Then we tell people, and if you're extroverted, it's like the first thing... You're like, "I got the job! I got the promotion! She said yes! We're pregnant!"

We're really good with positive emotion, but let's just be honest. Most of us have no idea how to deal with negative emotion. When something bad happens... I've told you before we've had horrible things happen to people's kids, and they won't tell anyone for a month or two. It's like, "I don't even know. I had to process it."

This is why whenever someone gets engaged, it's on Instagram and Twitter. It's all over. When someone gets separated, you hear about it, and then you go, "Honey, go check their Facebook profile. Interesting. They got rid of all of their pictures of each other, and their Facebook profile picture is a picture of them and the kids. What's going on there? They didn't tell anyone about this."

## **01 HE TAKES HIS PROBLEMS TO GOD IN PRAYER**

The first thing Habakkuk does is he prays to God, and it says he cries out. Do you see that? There's the word *cry* twice. The English word is the same there (*cry, cry*), but the Hebrew word is different. The first *cry* means a general call for help. The second *cry* literally means to scream.

Here's what I think of. The image in my mind is Habakkuk honking the car horn as loud as he can because he feels like nobody is moving and nothing is happening. Religious people feel very uncomfortable with screaming and crying and yelling at God, because they have to act like their whole life is together.

Here's what happens. When you have horrible things happen to you and you need to process them and you have all of these negative emotions, there really are, at the end of the day, three options. You can *suppress* it. I wouldn't recommend that. Sigmund Freud, one of the great psychoanalysts (not a Christian, but interesting), believed most mental illness was connected to suppression. That was what he found in his studies. You do not want to start suppressing things.

The other thing is to *express* it. A lot of people can't handle it. They can't handle all of your anger or whatever. What you *can* do, instead of suppressing it or expressing it to others, is *confess* it to God. God can be your lightning rod. He can handle it.

By the way, I say this every time I talk about suffering. For some of you, this is a sermon for today, and you know that. If it's for you today, you know it. You're like, "Oh my gosh." Right? I mean, I had a couple of people after last service. "Here's what's going on in my life. This is for me today." For most of us, this is a sermon for tomorrow, but there will be a day that you're Habakkuk.

This is how you know you're Habakkuk: you have more questions than answers. I don't want this to happen to any of us, but some of us one day might be sitting in divorce court. You're like, "Dude, how did I get here? What does this mean? What does this mean for my future, and what does this mean for my kids?"

You get the horrible diagnosis that you think people get but you don't get, and it's like, "How much longer do I have? Do I have enough life insurance? I'm ready to meet Jesus, but my kids are too young." You'll start to ask all of these questions. The first question everybody asks, outside of "Why me?" (that's assumed here) is "How long?"

The Bible is so honest. Here's the prayer. This is what it sounds like: "God, how long do I have to keep going to the doctor before someone can tell me what's going on?" It's so honest. It's hard to say out loud. "How long do the wife and I have to go to counseling that makes no difference in our marriage?"

"How long do I have to be single, because my biological clock is ticking and I'd like to be a mom and the window is closing?" "How long do I have to live basically paycheck to paycheck?" Or here's one: "How long do I have to suffer with all of these desires that I wish I didn't have?" He's crying out to God.

I heard a story of a guy one time getting angry and emotional with God. Imagine this. Some of you work in the hospital. This wasn't at our hospital. His son had cancer. As he tells the story, he was walking down the hallway, trying to process it, and the elevator opened up. There were people in the elevator, but he didn't care. He crawled into the corner and cried out to God.

We'll talk about what's going on with Habakkuk, but there's a lot going on. So, he cries out, "How long?" Why? Because one of the things that makes suffering so terrible is the duration of it. A friend of mine... This is a very horrible, sad story, but his dad became a quadriplegic in his 50s. Imagine. You were able to walk and live a normal life for 50-some years, and then you become a quadriplegic.

His dad died about a year or year and a half ago. I was at the funeral. We were talking about it. One of the things he said was, "My dad was a quadriplegic for 18 years." He said, "Do you ever sit for too long? Have you ever been on an airplane and were like, 'I just want to get up and walk'?" He was like, "My dad sat for 18 years." His dad was a faithful Christian. He said the hardest thing was not the intensity but the duration of the suffering.

The second thing we see here is he says, "God, I'm calling, and you're not hearing. I'm crying out, and you're not saving." Here's another thing. This is, I hope, a maturing sermon for me, for all of us. If we're going to be strong Christians, if we're going to make it through the ups and downs and struggles and sufferings of life, we're going to have to learn how to deal with unanswered prayer.

If you don't have unanswered prayer, it's probably because you're not praying anything big. If the only thing you're praying for is traveling mercies, then all of your

prayers are being answered...unless you are a horrible driver. But other than that... In fact, we don't like to pray for certain things, because if we pray for... Right?

Have you ever had that person...? They're like, "Hey, listen. I've got this horrible tumor. Will you pray for me?" You're like, "Do I pray for healing? What if it doesn't heal? Do I give them false hope?" So you do the double prayer. "Lord, I pray you'd heal them, but if you don't..." I've done that many times. "I pray they'd accept your will." We do the safe prayer.

I want you to know that if you're going to be in real Christian community that goes through hard life, real life, you're going to have so many unanswered prayer requests, and you're just going to have to go, "All right. We're going to walk through it together then." You know every middle schooler who's struggling with same-sex attraction and is in the church...

Imagine a middle schooler who's struggling with SSA, and he's in the church. Do you know what that is for a middle schooler? It is an unanswered prayer request. I promise you that he got on his knees before he told his parents, if he has told his parents, and said, "Something is wrong with me. God, please take this away."

We are all going to have certain... I guarantee you. Have you ever had certain desires...? "God, take this desire away." You wake up the next morning, and you're like, "It's still here." You pray for a husband and you're still single. You pray for a kid and you're still infertile. You pray to not be stressed about money all the time and you're still stressed about money all the time. It's very hard on people.

Then you have to go, "How does prayer work?" Here's what happens. Sometimes you pray for things and God doesn't answer. You're like, "Okay." But has this ever happened to you? I guess because I'm a pastor this happens to me a lot. People come up to me and say, "Will you pray for me?" I've gotten better. I normally say, "Yes. Let me pray for you right now." But I used to say, "Yes," and then I'd forget to pray for them.

Have you ever done this? Have you ever forgotten to pray for someone? Then they come back, and they're really excited. "Hey, listen. Remember when I told you about *this*, *this*, and *this* and you prayed? It happened." You're like, "Praise the Lord." But if you're honest, you're walking away going, "I didn't pray, and it happened, so maybe things happen and you don't need to pray."

Or sometimes we pray for things, and they happen, but then 10, 20, 30, or 40 percent of us goes, "I think it would have happened if I didn't pray." Here's what we



have. We have Habakkuk having an honest prayer, saying, "How long?" crying out to God, but getting only unanswered prayer.

## **02 SITUATION: WHAT IS GOING ON IN HABAKKUK'S DAY (AND OURS)**

Let me show you what happens next. Verse 3: "*Why do you make me see iniquity...*" He's going to mention six things he's seeing that he doesn't want to see. Here's the first. "*Why do you make me see iniquity...*" That's a good question. We'll try to answer that. "*...and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.*"

Let me really quickly give you the spiritual condition of Israel at this time. Like America, it was in spiritual and then moral decline. Those are always the right order, the order it happens. First, there's spiritual decline. I've told you before we live in the greatest decline of Christianity in the history of our nation, and it's happening on our watch.

Well, they were having the same thing. They were under King Jehoiakim at this time, and there was bad leadership in the church or the synagogues...abusive, adulterous, apathetic...all of those things. Then there was great moral decline in the nation. He's going to use a lot of words like *violence*. There's crime. He'll later use the word *injustice*. The court system isn't working well.

Then he says, basically (which is an interesting question), "God, why do you let me see evil?" Now, we know we shouldn't *do* evil. The Bible says, "Don't do evil." We shouldn't know evil by our own personal experience of doing it. That's very clear. Yet God allows us to see evil things. Why?

Well, first, so hopefully we won't be naïve. Hopefully, by the time you send your kids to college, if you send your kids to college, you'd like them to try to be innocent but not naïve. *Innocent* means "I know evil, but I'm not going to engage in it." But why would God let us see evil? Well, sometimes it's to warn us of where sin goes. It seems here with Habakkuk it's to call out of him a desire to do something about the evil he sees. Sometimes you just have to see it, as horrible as it is.

Guys, I've been to the Holocaust museum in D.C. That's an experience. Many of you have done that. I'll tell you what's an experience of experiences: going to the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem when every tour guide around you is Jewish and speaking in Hebrew. You go, "Why would they remember such horrible things? Why would they put the pictures up there? Why would they leave the kids' shoes like that?"

You know what I'm talking about? You see these things, and you go, "So that we would never forget."

I don't know if you've ever heard of Emmett Till. Emmett Till was a 14-year-old boy. I think this happened in Mississippi during the civil rights time. He looked at a white woman the way he shouldn't have, according to them. Well, they (they confessed this later) abducted him, tortured him, and lynched him. Why am I telling you this story? Because when his mother saw the body, she was completely overwhelmed.

They said, "Let's just do a private funeral, and let's do a closed casket." Emmett Till's mom is a boss. She said, "Nope. We're doing an open casket and a public funeral." Tens of thousands of people came. Pictures of Emmett's broken body were put in newspapers, and it was one of the key moments in the civil rights movement, because people had never seen the evil of racism.

I can remember the first time I went to [abort73.com](http://abort73.com). This was years and years ago. They show you (I don't know if they still do) on that website what an aborted baby looks like. Again, age appropriate and all this, but I'm just telling you, when you see the evil of these things, it wakes you up.

So, he says, "Why do you let me see this?" Then look at what he says here. He says two last things. **"So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth."** Have you ever felt this way? "God, nobody is doing what you're saying we should do." It's like, "You say, 'Love your enemies,' but, God, everybody hates everybody and there's cancel culture."

You're like, "You say, 'Be sexually pure,' and everyone is sexually promiscuous. You say, 'Be generous,' and everybody is selfish and stingy. You say, 'Forgive,' and everybody is resentful and revengeful." He says, "Your law..." It's an interesting illustration. He goes, "Your law is paralyzed." What does it mean to be paralyzed? Well, something that used to work doesn't work at all.

So, the first thing he says is, "God, your word is not working." The second thing he says is, "The wicked are winning." Look here. Verse 4: **"For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted."** He's looking around at his society, and he's like, "God, are you...?" I could give you the background for Israel, but it's more important for us to think about what's happening today.

I think if Habakkuk were here today he'd cry out to God and say, "God, they're killing babies in the womb. God, they're celebrating sin, and they're having parades for things they should be having funerals for. God, they're trafficking young children all

over the world to be sexually abused. God, they're doing transgender surgery on young boys and girls."

I mean, you see some of these things around the world, and you're like, "God, how do we...?" And this is a genuine question. How does a good, loving, all-powerful God allow all that stuff to happen? So, that's Habakkuk's question.

### **03 GOD'S RESPONSE (NOT SHY OR SILENT)**

Now in verse 5 we finally see God's answer. Let me show you this. God starts to speak in verse 5. **"Look among the nations, and see..."** Basically, Habakkuk says to God, "Look," and God says back to Habakkuk, "No, I need *you* to look at something." He says, **"Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told."**

Basically, God is like, "All right. Habakkuk, I hope you're sitting down, because I'm about to tell you what I'm doing in the world, and it's going to shock you." One of the main things about Habakkuk is... If you really get this, I think you're going to be shocked and bothered by this. God is often at work in the world in ways we do not see and do not like.

Let me show you how prayer works. This is how prayer works when God is working. The first prayer goes like this: "God, how long are you going to do nothing?" Then God starts to do something in your marriage or your family, or something, and you go, "God, I don't want you to answer the prayer *that way*." Right?

"Yes, Lord, I want you to save my prodigal son, but I didn't know you were going to do it through a divorce." That's what we're talking about. "God, I wanted you to bring my dad to Christ, but not through financial bankruptcy. They're getting old." We struggle with God's means.

Here's what God says. If you've never read Habakkuk before and you're just reading this so far, basically, here's how it goes. Habakkuk goes, "God, Israel, your people, are in a horrible situation. They're being sinful. The government is corrupt. Are you going to do anything about this?" Then God says, "I'm going to do something about it." Habakkuk is like, "Well, thank God."

Then look at what he says. You have to see this. **"For behold..."** Again, that means look, *really* look. **"...I am raising up the Chaldeans..."** That's the Babylonians. Same people. This is the worst enemy God's people have. He says, **"...that bitter and hasty**

*nation...*" In other words, God is like, "I know how bad they are." ***"...who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own."*** Basically, here's how it goes. Habakkuk says, "God, the world is sinful and corrupt, and you're not doing anything about it." God says, "I'm doing something about it."

"Oh, thank God."

"I'm going to bring the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, to destroy you."

It's like, "God, that's not the prayer I was praying." This is so... I have to show you, and then we'll talk about it for a little bit. Basically, God spends some time saying to Habakkuk, "I know how bad they are. Oh, I know how horrible they are." Watch.

***"They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour."***

In other words, "I know they have a great military." ***"They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand."*** They love to kidnap people and take hostages is what he's saying. ***"At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it."***

Look at this. This is interesting. Verse 11: ***"Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!"*** In other words, he says, "I know they have false gods." Here's what he's saying. He's going to tell us what ends up happening to the people.

He says, "Here's what's going to happen. The Babylonians are going to come in. They're going to destroy God's people, and they're going to think it was their gods that led them to do it." Here's what God is saying: "I use ungodly people who don't even know I'm using them to accomplish my purposes." That hurts my brain.

So, you have to ask a couple of things. What is God's goal? Well, unfortunately for us, it's not our personal happiness and personal safety. I mean, that would be... It's like, "God, could you reconsider? That would be a great goal...my personal happiness and safety."

I'm going to try to explain this. This is very deep. God's goal is to glorify himself and save sinners, so God occasionally allows evil things to happen for greater purposes. Think of it this way. God allows things he does not desire to happen because there's something greater he desires.

Let's think about this for a second. We all know this is true, because all of us, if we look through the rearview mirror of our lives... Not the windshield. You can never see through the windshield rightly, but if you look through the rearview mirror of your life, you'll see some horrible thing that happened, but given enough time, you can usually see the hand of God in it.

I'll give you an example. I could have given many examples, but here's an example from this week. This week I was with a group of pastors for a couple of days. We were getting to know each other. We're all about the same age. I'm getting to know this one guy, and I really like him. He's a great guy. He's leading a church in Denver, Colorado.

We were sitting in the back of a car on one of our final nights, and I finally asked him... I hadn't asked him this. I said, "How did you become a Christian?" He said, "Oh man. It's a crazy story." He said, "I've got a brother. He's two years younger than me. When I was 4 and he was 2, he went into a coma." I was like, "Dude, this is so horrible."

He was like, "Yeah, he went into a coma. He came out of it several days later, but because of that, he has never been the same. He has been disabled, and he still to this day has seizures multiple days a week, and he lives with my parents." He said, "I'll tell you the craziest thing, Kyle. Before my brother was 2 and got in a coma, my parents were godless, worldly, and arrogant."

He said, "When my brother got in that coma, my dad gave his life to Christ." He said, "I saw my dad become a Christian when I was 4 years old. Because my dad became a Christian, my mom became a Christian. Because my mom and my dad were Christians, I became a Christian."

Then he said, "It's the craziest thing." He started talking about it. He said, "Kyle, every time I see a person with disabilities, I'm drawn to them. In a lot of situations, I start crying when I see them, and I have to control myself not to be too excited to engage them." He said, "I still wish it never happened to my brother, but it's what God used to change my whole family, call me into ministry, and give me a heart for the disabled."

That's the mystery. The clearest picture of this is Jesus. It's like, "Okay. Kyle, prove to me that God uses even evil things for good purposes." Exhibit A: the cross of Jesus Christ, the worst thing happening to the best person, literally. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, is rejected. He's beaten. He's crucified.

It is the worst event in human history, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, that brings the greatest result in human history, the salvation of sinners all over the world. So, the mystery of God using evil for good purposes is literally at the center of our faith.

#### **04 HABAKKUK'S WRESTLES WITH GOD**

Okay. Let me show you this. So, he's praying all of these things. God speaks back to him, but then look at verse 12. He has more questions, which is fine. He's even more confused. Some of you are maybe feeling right now like, "This sermon isn't helpful. I'm more confused." I want to show you this. He's trying to figure it out.

Habakkuk says, **"Are you not from everlasting..."** Like, "God, haven't you been around forever? You're really old. You should be really wise." **"...O LORD my God, my Holy One?"** Now, here's a principle when you're wrestling with God in suffering: you have to remind yourself of who God is. It's very hard.

He uses six different words, some repeated, to talk about who God is. Look. He says, **"We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof."** He processes his pain in prayer. I'll show you this. Verse 13: **"You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong..."** He's like, "That's who you are. You have pure eyes."

Then he says, **"...why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?"** Habakkuk is modeling what lament looks like. He's modeling what wrestling with God looks like. He's modeling what trusting in God looks like. It's something like this. You get to this place where you say, "God, you are...but here's what I'm experiencing."

"God, you are the provider. I know that's true, but we don't have any money." "God, you are the person who transforms desires, but I have the same horrible desires." "God, you are the God of life, but we can't get pregnant." You're like, "God, I don't understand it."

"God, you're a good God, and you say marriage is a good thing and he who finds a wife finds favor from the Lord, but I'm still single." "God, you love to save sinners, but my dad (or my mom or my brother or my sister) is not a Christian." You just wrestle with it. You're like, "God, this is who you say you are, and I believe it, but this is my current experience."

This is interesting, and this is why you'll need to come back for the next two weeks. In verses 13-16, it's kind of sad. If you read this this week, you might have been like, "Man, this is a confusing book." I'll read it to you in a second. Let me tell you what he's going to say, and then I'll read it to you.

In verses 13-16, he basically says, "God, I feel like I'm just a fish in the water, and you're up above the water, and I never know what net you're going to use to catch me and where you're going to take me next." We live in a time where we can control so many things, but he kind of ends going, "God, okay. I see what the world is doing. I see how you're responding, and I just feel hopeless and helpless."

Here's how he ends: ***"You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. He brings all of them up with a hook..."*** He's like, "Are you going to catch me or not?" ***"...he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich."***

This chapter ends with a question, which is why we'll have to come back next week. Here's the final question: ***"Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?"*** When you're at your lowest point, you'll ask something like he asks here. Basically, he asks, "God, how bad is it going to get? How long is it going to last?" Whenever you get the diagnosis, it's like, "All right. How bad is this going to get, and how long is this going to last?"

What we've seen today is how doubt works. There are always three stages to doubt. This is an anatomy of doubt, you could say. You have a difficult situation. It might be in your marriage. At first, you pray about it. You read a book about it. You go to counseling. What happens... A difficult situation you can deal with. What you can't deal with is a difficult situation with continually unmet expectations.

You had a hard marriage, but you're like, "By year 10 we'll figure it out." You don't figure it out, and you're like, "This is horrible. I had a difficult situation, and I had an unmet expectation." This is what you have to know with doubt: "I have a limited perception. I don't see everything." Sometimes we need each other to see things. We obviously need God's Word to see things.

In fact, the way we want to end today, if you have a second, is just to grab that card. No one is going to be looking at yours. They're going to be focusing on their own. If you'll grab that card, we just want to give you... We want this to be real. Where do you need to trust God?

Here's what trusting God means. We say we're going to trust God together. Yes, there's God's Word. That's the foundation of our trust, but you have to say, "Okay. Here's what I'm committed to, Lord. I'm asking you to answer this prayer, but I'm submitting to two things: for you to answer it in your way and for you to answer it in your timing." That's the hardest thing.

It's like, "God, I need you to restore my marriage, and I'm submitting. I'm submitting to your timeline for it. I want to microwave it, but you may want to marinate it." Like, "God, I need you to work in my kid's life. Here's the prayer, but I'm submitting to your timing." Then there's a little scarier thing. "And I'm submitting to your way."

"I don't know what you're going to use to get my attention. I don't know what has to happen in our marriage. I don't know what has to happen at my work. I don't know what needs to happen in my friend's life for them to come to Christ, but I'm committed to two things: your way and your timing."

Here's the prayer we're going to pray in just a minute: "God, would you show up, and would you show off?" That's what we're asking. The great question Habakkuk had was, "God, are you absent from here? Are you indifferent? Are you inconsistent? Are you incompetent?" He hears God's response, and he's like, "All right, God. Now I need you to show up, and I need you to show off." Let's pray that together.

Lord, across this room, some people wrote down a name...a friend, a family member, a coworker. For some people, it's something really sensitive, and they maybe didn't even feel like they could write it down. They kind of symbolically wrote something or used an acronym. Some people know it's marriage.

Lord, for some people it's health. For a lot of us it's our kids. Lord, we want to trust you together. We want the church to be the safest and best place for anyone to deal with their doubts and their disappointments, that no one has to leave here because they're having doubts and disappointments.

As we sing the promises of God in a few minutes here, if you need prayer, we have elders and a prayer team on my right and on my left. If you want to come down and say, "I'm struggling to trust God in this area. Would you trust God with me?" that's what we're going to do together.

Lord, would you do this? Lord Jesus, we know that you in the garden of Gethsemane had to wait, and you had to say, "Is this the only way, and is this your timing?" and the answer was "Yes." We thank you, Lord. We celebrate at the cross of Christ that even through the most evil events, the best things can happen. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.