

Pray the News, Fresh Insight from Habakkuk

How do we respond as Christians when the world around us seems to be spinning out of control and it generates inner turmoil or indifference within?

Habakkuk models to **pray the news** and use your inner state to respond to God's wooing you in closer to Him relationally.

Many of us get so amped up with inner turmoil that our conversations end up defaulting to mere speculation. This feeds into our fears and/or indignation and judgments without bringing resolution. Others listen to the news with stoicism and perhaps indifference and simply brush it off. The Lord God wants to use all this to draw us nearer to Him in intimacy. He is in His temple, the picture of OT connection with His presence, so **pray the news**.

How did Jesus respond to crushing needs He met, that is, the "news" He encountered?

Neither inner toil nor disinterested indifference, unaffected by what happens to people, are the kind of response Jesus, our Model, demonstrated while on earth. I see at least three consistent, fundamental responses in Jesus' life as our Model.

First, Jesus seems to bring everything to His Father in prayer, so much so that He could only do what He saw His Father doing (John 5:19). I imagine Jesus chose to **pray the news** since His Father had the only solution. When a crisis assaults His life, like the death of His cousin, John the Baptist, His first impulse is vertical. He seeks time alone in solitude with His Father.

Second, Jesus models "*boots on the ground*" availability with those He personally comes in contact with. Rather than indifference when face-to-face opportunities come, He responds with compassion to meet their immediate need.

Third, Jesus uses these opportunities to point those in need to their true highest and best, relationship with His Father. This is the ultimate answer of compassion, restored relationship with our Creator.

If you question this, I suggest "fasting" from current news for a season until you read through the four Gospels with these timeless thoughts in mind. And add your own. Then respond like you see Jesus responding.

So, if neither inner turmoil nor indifference is the answer for a follower of Jesus to world events, what is?

Habakkuk to the rescue to learn to pray the news!

The following threefold response has helped me as an **A-I-D** (**A**wareness, **I**nvestigate, **D**oing) to process any problem. When inaccurate answers arise from our "good" theology, lean into God in prayer. Inaccurate answers from an event strip off some of our blinders, expose our belief-set as faulted and set us up to partner with the Spirit in change. Ask the Lord God for fresh revelation to see Him and ourselves more accurately.

First Cycle to A-I-D Change, Habakkuk 1:2-13a

First, begin with **awareness**. As the prophet looked around, he became *aware* that "*something is happening*" that has stirred up inner turmoil. Israel had turned to wickedness and idols and the wicked, marauding Babylonians are drawing nearer. Habakkuk leaned into God with three questions of *lament* when as he noticed his inner confusion (1:2-3a). He sees in Israel violence, injustice, strife and a nation that seems paralyzed to change. He's confused so chooses to **pray the news**.

Even as He blames God!

*Have you been well-taught in what **lament** is?*

God demands honesty from His people, the only soil in which healthy relationships grow. And He bears Habakkuk's blunt and twisted, harsh and untrue cries of *lament*. *Lament* expresses our inner feelings, raw and real, uncut and unfiltered without holding anything back from God. To whine to others is a mark of *immaturity* that undermines our testimony (Philippians 2:14:16). Whining to God is a step towards maturity because it opens up communication. "*Now that this is finally in the open, My child, let's work on it,*" whispers the Spirit. Our Father delights in His children bringing everything to Him, even when it's harsh and untrue. Whatever "news" we are experiencing, whether joy or confusion, whether personal, local or international, **pray the news**. Bring everything to God.

Habakkuk's choice to falsely blame God for Israel's problems is no different than what many today do with our problems. My encouragement to **pray the news** means that we bring all of this to God, rather than gossiping with other about our views. Most today though don't walk in such a transparent relationship with God as Habakkuk, so they remain unchanged. The passion of *lament* coupled with its twisted views make many Christians a bit uncomfortable. *Our Lord God loves it!* He wants us to take these false ideas out of the hidden darkness in our hearts to expose them. *Awareness* is the first step towards inner transformation.

These inner feelings are *authentic* because they are ours yet seldom *accurate*.

Where do we go personally when we feel that inner anxiety or confusion? Vertical to God with our prayers of *lament* expressing our need for His help so we **pray the news**? Or do we feel an inner drive to pass along our turmoil or speculations to others through conversations and/or social media?

All five *lament* questions in Habakkuk arrive at *inaccurate* conclusions (the other two *laments* are in 1:13b) because of an inaccurate view of God, ourselves and the world around. Learn to be sensitive to the inner feelings of our hearts, yet please don't trust our feelings to guide us on our journey. And please take all these to God to **pray the news**, even when they are embarrassing thoughts about God. *He can take it!* And this leads to change.

Second, choose to investigate. When I come to incorrect conclusions or confusion, despair or hopelessness, about what is happening within me or around me in my world, my mind needs transformed. My despair exposes "*gaps*" in my view of God, myself and the world that drive my reasonings to a wrong conclusion? We are still all very much in-process as followers of Jesus.

"Things are not as they seem."

Fortunately, we have a God of revelation (Ephesians 1:17. Lean into God in prayer and ask for insight, often coming from Scripture. David was in a similar situation when He gave us a great model in Psalm 13. After two verses of *lament* in Psalm 13 leading to *awareness* of his need, David leans in close to *investigate* by first asking for the specific answers He needs from God. "*Look on me.*" "*Answer.*" "*Give light.*" David first needs to be assured that the Lord God sees him in his current state of despair or confusion ("*Look on me*"). Then he asks for insight beyond what he currently has ("*Answer, give light*"). This is what I mean to **pray the news**. Bring everything to our Father.

For Habakkuk, God initiated directly and stunned Habakkuk with His answer! "*What I do will be so utterly amazing to your reasonings because it's beyond your current faith level.*" (1:5). The Lord God will raise up the wicked and self-sufficient Babylonians to discipline Israel for their

sins. Habakkuk got His answer, yet it only confirmed Habakkuk’s greatest fear and confusion (1:6-11).

Third, follow through by doing. Kudos to Habakkuk in his responses. His affirmations reflect good theology. God is everlasting, holy and a faithful protector of His people. He acknowledges that his Rock “gave them (the Babylonians) the job to discipline” Israel (2:12b, *The Message*). God cannot look on sin with favor (2:13a, **NASB** makes a crucial, accurate distinction, “cannot look with favor on sin”).

How can a faithful protector who is too pure to look on sin with favor use the wicked Babylonians to discipline Israel?

Habakkuk spins out again! Is he much different than us?

He cannot reconcile his theology with how a pure God can use wicked people for the ultimate good of His people. As I dialog today about benefits of trials with some followers of Jesus, this same seeming paradox (two ideas that *appear* to conflict) raises its head again, especially when applying Romans 8:28. When we focus around our own comfort or agenda, a similar distortion clouds many Scriptures.

Habakkuk was at a crossroad, like we are today when Scripture teaches something that does not fit with our current theology or practice. Will we attempt to fit the apparent conflict neatly into our existing pattern of life, essentially chopping off what is unclear? Or will we believe Scripture, and expand our current frame of reference to see the picture from a God’s-eye view? Have you seen the puzzle to the right? The object is to connect the 9-dots using only four line-segments without lifting our pencil. *If not, what’s the solution?*



Habakkuk models a great response. He doesn’t go to social media to air his complaint but leans in again to the Lord God with his honest questions in raw, unfiltered *lament* in prayer (1:13b).

As an aside, this simple **A-I-D** process for change is not necessarily a one-and-done cycle. I see **three** cycles in Habakkuk until He finally saw from God’s perspective.

The Lord’s answer to this cycle so startled Habakkuk that it elicited more inner turmoil. Habakkuk chose to live in his “*uncomfortable zone*.” He uses his confusion to pursue God’s truth wherever it takes him, no matter the pain or confusion. Habakkuk launches a second cycle of the **A-I-D** process towards insight and change with two more *lamenting* questions (1:13b).

Second Cycle to A-I-D Change, 1:13b-2:1

First, begin with awareness. This time two questions of *lament* were sufficient to openly challenge God with his utter confusion (1:13b). “*Why do you tolerate the treacherous Babylonians?*” God doesn’t. He has a plan for them, in God’s timing.

Why are you silent while the Babylonians swallow up Your people, who are more righteous than they are? God is not silent. Using wickedness to bring about good does not violate God’s purity. God’s people are not more righteous (spoiler alert for God’s answer in 2:4!)

Again, learn to appreciate and highly value *lament*. God loves our honest, raw, unfiltered lament when directed towards **Him** (yet not when it’s whining with others). *Lament* is usually inaccurate, rife with error and false views, yet always authentic. Even though Habakkuk is wrong, his transparent honesty prepares for fresh revelation. That’s what God is looking for...authentic followers.

I believe *lament* is crucial for followers of Jesus to bring stability followed by insight. Such a response protects from the two pendulum swings of stewing in our inner turmoil or settling in indifference. *Lament* is anything but indifferent! God calls for a passionate people who bring everything to Him. Passion with a faulty spiritual compass seems to be simpler for God to change than indifference with a spot-on spiritual compass (if such a thing were a possibility!) The indifferent and lukewarm easily become old wineskins resistant to change.

Second, choose to investigate. What do I know when I come to incorrect conclusions or confusion, despair or hopelessness about what is happening within me or around me in the world? I know for certain that my mind needs transformed. Instead of despair, I want to use confusion as a trigger for God to transform my mind. What “gaps” are exposed in my view of God, myself and the world that drive my reasonings to a wrong conclusion? We are still all very much in-process as followers of Jesus.

Habakkuk gathers the pieces that he currently sees, even though they don’t seem to fit. He accurately catalogs how the Chaldeans treat those they capture. They are like fish in a net, offering their captured gain to their gods (2:14-17).

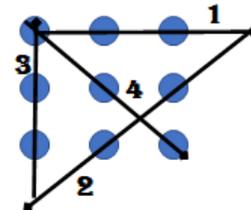
Third, follow through by doing. How do we respond as Christians when the world around us seems to spin out of control and we have no answers? **Even without a resolution or any changes**, Habakkuk chooses *faithfulness* in the midst of confusion (2:1). He focuses on what he knows is his present God-Assignment. “*I will stand at my watch.*” “*I watch to see what He will say to me.*”

Third Cycle to A-I-D Change, 2:2-3:19

First, begin with awareness. No need in this instance for inner *awareness*! God Himself honors such a faithful stance as in 2:1 and speaks again. He steps up to draw us near with the revelation of His divine perspective.

Even as I was working on this article, out of the blue I suddenly “saw” the resolution to a knotty spiritual problem. In the midst of my confusion, I was “*standing my watch.*” Suddenly three things I already knew linked together in ways I had not seen before. The resulting rest in Him gave me confidence that this came from the Spirit of revelation.

For my problem, I needed to see from a larger perspective. The Lord God did that for Habakkuk. God’s solution is most always to *expand* our *frame of reference* to begin to match His. And, yes, that’s a lifetime process! The only solution to the 9-dot puzzle I mentioned above is to expand our *frame of reference* **beyond** the nine dots.



Second, choose to investigate. The Lord God again initiates, so Habakkuk needs only listen and respond. Habakkuk could not grasp that the Lord God could use the wicked to bring about His good plan to discipline Israel. “*Yes, I will act in a way that so breaks the small boxes you have stored Me in that you will be astonished.*” This is one of God’s favorite ways to utilize existing trials, to expand our vision of who God is as we also see ourselves clearer.

When the Lord God answered Habakkuk, He exposed at least these following four “gaps” in Habakkuk’s views. Of God, of humanity, and of the fallen world-system. *How about your trials? Is God stretching you in similar ways?* These are also so crucial for God’s people down the centuries, that God commanded Habakkuk to write down this revelation (2:2). Now that his incomplete belief-set has been revealed, Habakkuk may choose to partner with God to change. Add any other “gaps” that you see.

1. ***Trust God's timing, not ours*** (2:3). One of our largest problems in the midst of trials is to wait patiently for God's timing. Don't draw final conclusions without the fuller scope of the problem. Our hidden desire to control lurks behind a drive to impose our timing... and to tell others our speculations. Just because we are blind to how history hastens towards God's goal, why conclude there's no progress? God's plan will not fail. From our perspective, it carries so wait in silence for the appointed time (2:20b), Like with trials and suffering, James challenges God's people to let tough times have their perfect work (James 1:4). Paul gives us similar insight. He tells us to "*exult in our tribulations*" to experience the final work of the outpoured love of God in our hearts through the Spirit (Romans 5:3-5). Guard against impatience because it may reveal a hidden desire to control.
2. ***Refocus on the true source of our favor with God*** (2:4). Habakkuk didn't think God's thoughts when he claimed that his people are "*more righteous than*" the Babylonians (1:13b). It was clear to Habakkuk that the Babylonians were "*puffed up*" (2:4). True, they were. However, Israel was also swollen by their own rightness, forgetting that "*the righteous will live by his faith*" (2:4). Their soul was not right within. So, perhaps the Israelites were even **more** wicked than the Babylonians. The Jews had received greater light. Light demands responsibility. "*God is opposed to the proud*" (James 4:6). The only way for right relationship with God is "*by faith,*" not by works or heritage or lineage. We must see ourselves the way Jesus sees us, not through the lens of traditionalism.
3. ***Develop a more accurate view of the world we live in*** (2:5+five woes in 2:6-19 describing the world). Verse 5 is an apt description of what we know historically of the Babylonians. The fivefold "*woes*" that follow in 2:6-19 describe characteristics of the world-philosophy or responses since Genesis 3. Why should we ever be surprised by wars and injustice? Jesus tells us we will have trouble in the world (John 16:33). He says the poor will always be with us. Our times are characterized by wars and rumors of wars. Have you taken time to note how the NT describes this groaning world-system system that He has sent us into (Romans 8:19-22; John 15:18-25; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4; Romans 12:2)? The world-system entwines self-indulgence into all it does. It arrogantly measures success by the toys gathered, the wealth gained, the positions attained, the power wielded. And none of these ever satisfy their deepest needs. The allure of the world taunts and mocks us by capturing hearts with its unfulfilled promises. The sad part though is that God's people often slip into the same trap. No wonder Paul tells God's people not to get entangled with the world-system (2 Timothy 2:4). Our citizenship is in heaven, not on earth (Philippians 3:20). As His royal priesthood, we are passing through this world (1 Peter 2:9+2:11). We are not of this world yet sent into the world to minister (John 17:16+18). When things seem to be out of control around us, that's the way the world-system is. Jesus warned His disciples in advance so they would "*not go astray*" (John 16:1). I hear Christians whining because the world does not act according to our standards. How foolish. It never has since Genesis 3.
4. ***God is on His throne so silence our speculations*** (2:20). ***God's part and our part.*** God is still in His holy temple, longing for us to experience His presence. And always will be. The world may look out of control to those without vision. Wickedness may be increasing beyond measure. It seem like the wicked are winning. *Things are not as they seem!* God is on His throne and let all God's people be silent before Him. Get entangled

in fewer conversations about contentious disputes we see only in part (Paul's advice is simple yet brilliant, Romans 14:22a, hold your conviction before God alone). Focus on the main and plain, what's both clear and crucial.

Third, follow through by doing. Habakkuk praises God for who He is and for what He does (3:1-19). All our responses begin with God. God intends that all the confusing and crushing circumstances that spin like a tornado around us lead us back to deepening intimacy with Him. This was, and still, is our Creator's Eden-intent for humanity.

Before Habakkuk "*heard of your fame*" yet now he stands in awe of the deeds he now sees (3:2-3). Growing intimacy for hearing to experiencing. Habakkuk already knew, yet he knows the Lord God in a deeper and fuller way now. This change happened because Habakkuk chose to **pray the news**, bringing his confusion and false views to God and listening for His answers.

That's one, primary purpose for trials or suffering in our lives. If we lean in, our view of God sharpens and deepens and broadens into ongoing praise. Habakkuk praised the Lord God for His power (3:4-7), for His purposes (3:8-16) and for His endless provision (3:17-19). This is the same pattern as in the *lament* Psalm 13 in verses 5-6. In Psalm 13, two verses of *lament*; two verses of *prayer* for insight, followed by the last two verses of pure praise...*without any change in circumstances*.

I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! (Habakkuk 3:18-19a).

Some of My Applications

Pastor Travis Twyman from the Inland Vineyard Church in Corona, California preached from Habakkuk in his sermon on March 20, 2022. He suggested the third option to the two extremes of inner turmoil or indifference in response to a world out of control. **Pray the news** from the book of Habakkuk. Especially if what's happening around you brings inner turmoil, or the opposite, a settled indifference, make it a spiritual discipline to **pray the news**. Begin by honestly leaning in with **lament**. God's solution is most always to *expand our frame of reference* to begin to match His. Here are some additional suggestions that align with Jesus' life.

1. Use troublesome personal, local and world events as a trigger. I've been challenged afresh to partner with the Spirit to **pray the news**. By **pray the news**, I mean to convey to bring every event of our daily life to the Father, Son and Spirit. *How much detail do you need to pray the news?* I just need enough to know there's a need, but not the details. Monitor your heart to be sure you don't flood it with people's commentary on and speculation about the news. Regain God's perspective in our lives. Habakkuk prays for God to "*renew them in our day*" (3:2b).
2. Jesus models "*boots on the ground*" availability with those He personally met. Rather than indifference when face-to-face opportunities come, He responds with compassion. He didn't heal all the sick in Israel. He knows we would have the poor with us always. But Jesus healed all the Father was healing and fed those the Father was feeding. When you meet need face-to-face need, ask "*What are You doing here, Father?*" And join Him.
3. Jesus did not just heal and feed. His deepest desire was to use these opportunities to point those in need to their true highest and best, relationship with His Father. *Are you praying and inviting those with crushing needs to meet Jesus?* This is the ultimate answer of compassion, restored relationship with our Creator.

4. You may be led by the Spirit to do more. Test His prompting that they are really His. Invite respected peers into this discernment process. Then do them.