

“How long O Lord?” Habakkuk cries out to God in a prayer of lament. “Everywhere I look I see violence and injustice. Why won’t you fix it?!” Habakkuk looks around his community and it seems like the wicked are winning. Even the systems of authority that should be ensuring that justice is done are corrupted. How can God let this happen? I’m sure most of us can relate to this feeling. We look around at our communities, at our nation, at our world, or even as close as in our own families, and we see violence and pain. Greed seems to be more powerful than generosity, tear gas more prevalent than compassion, bullets more persistent than peace. Hate and prejudice more common than acceptance and love. In the face of all of this, Habakkuk turns to God and complains. Not only is the world around him falling apart, but Habakkuk asks God “why do you make me see the pain God?”

Lament is a sacred practice that I think we wrongly shy away from. Being mad at God can be scary. If we’re angry at God, what does that mean about our faith? Does it make us somehow bad Christians? Maybe we are worried that if we express our anger or our frustration to God, that God will leave us. But the act of lamenting or crying out to God is a normal part of the human experience and has been for thousands of years. It’s ok to be angry at God or to express our frustration with the difference between the world as it is and the world as it should be. I’m pretty sure God is frustrated too. This type of prayer can help us process our grief and our anger and give us a path forward. Sometimes just the act of asking the question or expressing the grief and anger gives us a glimpse of light. Sometimes merely asking these questions of God can give us some clarity. Habakkuk gives us this beautiful example of laying out his complaint to God and demanding an answer.

But then Habakkuk does something remarkable. He shuts up and waits. He listens and watches for God’s response.

Waiting is the worst. Many of you know that I have Attention Deficit Disorder, or A.D.D., which can show up in different ways for different people. Many people with A.D.D. have a hyperactivity component which changes the abbreviation to A.D.H.D. But I don’t. My form of A.D.D. mostly shows up in having difficulty staying focused on one

task at a time. That task can be anything from reading, to having a conversation, to driving, to writing a sermon. My brain wants more input and is constantly seeking ways to meet that need. My A.D.D. can also show up as impatience. Now, because being respectful of other people is really important to me and because the value of following the rules is deeply imbedded in my DNA, my desire to be good and nice is often strong enough to keep my A.D.D. impatience at bay. But I have come to accept that waiting does not always come naturally to me. I'm that person who hears someone wonder something aloud like, I wonder if actors Jennifer Garner and James Garner are related, and then immediately pulls out my phone to find out the answer. (They're not by the way). Even going to sleep is a challenge – what could be more boring than laying in bed waiting for nothing to happen. I feel like I should say that thankfully, with medication and learning some best practices, my A.D.D. is pretty manageable.

I know I'm not alone in this difficulty with waiting. Not everyone who hates waiting has A.D.D. of course. It's uncomfortable to be uncertain. Waiting for an answer to something painful and heartbreaking is even more difficult. Habakkuk does this beautifully. He stays in the conversation and continues to be in relationship with God. He doesn't use the state of the world as a reason to walk away from his relationship with God.

But waiting doesn't have to be passive. In fact, I think the waiting for God's vision to become real demands an active role on our part. I don't think waiting for God means we should just keep ourselves entertained while we wait for God to do her thing. Author and journalist Sarah Thebarger reminds us of this when she writes "Suffering continues not because God doesn't do anything, but because we don't."¹ Thebarger also reminds us that a better world is within our reach. Good news rarely gets reported in the race for ratings. We need to seek it out. Good news like the fact that rates of child mortality and extreme global poverty have dropped by 50% since 1990 because as Thebarger puts it "people have gotten involved and loved the world enough to do something about it." She

¹ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/sarahthebarger/2018/11/the-question-is-not-why-does-god-let-bad-things-happen-its-why-do-we/>

writes, “we’re on track to end child mortality and extreme global poverty by 2030 — if we make the effort. If we give, if we work, if we sacrifice, if we act as though the wellbeing of our fellow human beings depends on us (because it so often does!) So let’s stop sitting around, wasting time asking why God allows suffering to happen in the world and let’s ask ourselves, “Why do we?” And then let’s roll up our sleeves and care enough to do something about it.”²

We are called to prepare the soil for God’s vision to take root. To live in ways that bring God’s vision into the world. While we wait, we do small things that keep the vision alive. Refuse to let the difficult times beat us down because God surprises us all the time.

Habakkuk proclaims a faithful hope. “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 tread on the heights.”

There is hope. Hope God is full of surprises and can often show us a way forward that we couldn’t have possibly imagined moments earlier. Hope that God is with us. Hope that God is both coming and is already here. Hope that God has equipped us with the imagination and the persistence to continue seeking justice and love even when corruption and hate seem to be winning the day.

Let us close with this paraphrase of Psalm 2: “God laughs, cries, and says with anger: I have set my Love in your hearts and my justice in your minds. You are my children and I have given you the universe, your lives, and the tasks of your days. Be wise. Be warned. Stick to the paths of Love and Justice. Your restless hearts will find me there.”³

Amen.

² Ibid.

³ <http://doubterpsalms.blogspot.com/>