

*Text of messages delivered by Mikayla Reid at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 3rd August 2025.
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Habakkuk: Holding Tight in the Wrestle

In this sermon we unpack the conversation between God and Habakkuk. Habakkuk wrestles with the social evils in his world, and even when God does not give the answers Habakkuk hopes, even when he sits in grief - Habakkuk continues to draw close to God. In this we see the true heart of the prophet, and the true heart of God for His people.

Kia Ora, Windsor Park whanau, it is a pleasure to be here with you all as we continue our series exploring the ways the ancient voices of the Minor Prophets speak into our modern lives. I have a real soft spot for the minor prophets - the first class I did at Carey was on the prophets, and they have captured my imagination and my heart. The imagery they use, the clear thirst for justice and righteousness, the call back to holiness and true worship - the pure wonder the prophets have for all God is and does and is doing impacted me profoundly. And this wonder - the wonder at who God is and the way He comes to draw His people to him - has been found throughout the prophets we've looked at so far.

In **Amos** we find a just God calling his straying people back to His ways, in **Hosea** we see a loving, kind God, who relentlessly pursues His unfaithful people, in **Micah** we see a grieving God who mourns what his people have become yet even still continues to call His children back to humility, to mercy and to justice, and in **Joel** we see a God who speaks of a hope for Israel - promising to be there as they return to Him.

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This morning, we turn our eyes to **Habakkuk**, again coming face to face with the wonder of who God is - but in a slightly different way. Because in Habakkuk, we don't find proclamations or monologues from on high. In Habakkuk, we find a conversation. A conversation between Habakkuk and God.

So if we've been around this thing called Christianity for a while, we know the first character in this conversation: God. But we might not know Habakkuk. In fact, I'm sure some of us haven't even got past attempting to pronounce his name. So, let's get to know Habakkuk. He was an Israelite living at a similar time to Amos. Israel appears to be doing well; they are performing economically, building temples, and observing their fasts. Habakkuk himself is a recognised prophet in the King's household and seems to be living the good life.

But Israel has fallen far from God - worship idols, live unjustly and oppressively, and lack love, especially for their poor and their marginalised. Israel is a far cry from being the light God intended it to be. Habakkuk, even from his privileged position, sees this. And, unlike the other Hebrew prophets, doesn't accuse Israel or even speak to the people on God's behalf. Instead, Habakkuk takes all he sees - all the corruption, the oppression, the broken and misdirected worship - all of this Habakkuk turns and takes to God.

So our book today opens not with a word from God, but with Habakkuk taking the world and presenting it to God.

How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?

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. (Habakkuk 1:2-3)

How long, Lord? This is Habakkuk's opening cry. As he looks at these seemingly insurmountable, corrupt and unjust systems, Habakkuk asks God how long. He asks why this God, this just and good God, seems to be standing back - letting this nation he loves crumble just like all those around them. Habakkuk is wrestling with the evil in the world - we often call this a theodicy - a theology of evil -

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much like Job, who wrestles with the sudden loss of his livelihood, here Habakkuk wrestles with social and institutional evil. And I don't know about you, but Habakkuk's prayer sounds rather familiar to me.

How long will God let people seeking aid in Gaza be bombed? How long must we ask you to stop the war in Ukraine? How long, Lord, must we keep asking for you to protect victims of domestic violence in our own nation? How long, Lord, must we watch the conflict in our own land - between political factions, religious groups, different cultures? How long, Lord, must we see children go hungry, and walk to school with nothing on their feet, while our country's richest continue to own investment properties that sit empty?

How long must I have to go and visit children who are sick yet again because their house is damp and mouldy, but their parents cannot afford to stay anywhere else? How long must the mental health system fail people who need it because there just isn't funding, how long will children suffer because their parents cannot access the support they need? Justice is indeed perverted, God. How long must we endure it?

Many of us likely resonate with Habakkuk, even as we occupy positions of power and privilege, feeling our hands are tied and that we can do far less than we long for.

And while we might seldom hear the audible voice of God as we utter these broken-hearted prayers, Habakkuk gets a very concrete response.

***“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.
I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.” (1:5-6)***

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God replies, and I imagine Habakkuk cringing, shaking his head with frustration as he hears what God has to say. My homegroup teases me because I pull a very specific face when I'm trying to hold myself back from arguing - and I imagine Habakkuk here doing the same.

Because this is definitely not the answer Habakkuk expects. Look, says God - I will do something you will not believe. I am raising up the Babylonians - a group of people renowned for the brutality of their torture, for worshipping a myriad of Gods, none of them Yahweh, who come and trample and rob and strip other nations. Those Babylonians are the ones God is allowing to come and take over Israel. And it's not like God is blind to their evil, he names it Himself.

So Habakkuk is taken aback. He has asked God to bring justice, and God is telling Him he is going to bring a hostile takeover. Surely this cannot be. Not the God of justice, not the God of love, not the One who calls Israel his treasured possession?

Habakkuk knows the Holy character of God, so he cannot understand why God would judge wicked Judah by exalting even more wicked Babylon. It would be a little like if you were asking God to change something in our current government - you can choose your given pet peeve - and His response is to reinstate the Nazi government - you might begin backtracking a little too.

But Habakkuk - even in his distress and confusion does not turn away from God, does not accept apathy, does not accept helplessness or fall into despair. Habakkuk does not want to just let this go - he knows this is a hard conversation, that choosing to face suffering will hurt, that wrestling with God's work in that brokenness means no easy answers, but Habakkuk is willing to sit in it. Lingers in the grief, the heartache, the uncertainty, and in this place waits patiently for God's answer.

***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. (2:1)***

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Even as he wrestles with this seemingly incomprehensible plan of God, Habakkuk sits and waits, not ready to walk away from this wrestle. I don't like elevating characters in the bible - they are all fallible humans like us, but I do really admire Habakkuk for this. Because I feel like I tend to have a very short attention span with things like this - if I can't see a solution I like quickly, I'm done with the issue. The messiness of whole systems that seem built on oppression - how do you even start to unravel that?

But Habakkuk is willing to do the work, willing to sit and to hear God's heart, and see God's hand in this. I wonder if for some of us this is a call to go and sit once again on the ramparts, to be watchmen once again, and to pick up that cause, to face the darkness we once fought and have now become a little too comfortable with.

Because as Habakkuk waits, God again replies.

And it is quite some reply. Habakkuk's waiting appears to be well worth it, and there are a few things I really want us to take note of here.

Firstly, God knows the enemy is prideful, unrighteous, and He is mourning that too. God is mourning the state of Israel and the state of Babylon, just as Habakkuk is. This isn't God turning away while Habakkuk cries out, but Habakkuk's mourning and grief over the brokenness in the world is a direct expression of God's heart beating in him.

In this second reply of God's, we see four 'woes' - four things that God sees and grieves. In the first woe, God asks the same questions as Habakkuk - how long? How long will people continue to extort their way to wealth, lead unfairly, and exploit their workers? How long will this last?

Habakkuk has not brought anything to God's attention that He wasn't already aware of. We sometimes talk about God as this emotionally distant character - the bearded man in the sky who looks down, judging all of earth, but never feeling - but this is not the God we see in any part of the Bible, and certainly not in Habakkuk. This is a judgement from God - yes - but it is deeply emotive. God is hurt by what is happening. He grieves, he rages against those who uphold and benefit from

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these corrupt systems. This is a mark of the prophetic - that Habakkuk can hear God's voice but also feel his **heart**. Because God doesn't come as a distant hand to set the uneven scales of justice back to centre - he feels deeply about what is happening and comes close to reveal not just His words but his heart.

And I think we often fall into two camps here - might even ricochet between the two. Some of us forget to just sit with God's grief, His heart for the lost and for the broken world we live in. We glaze over Jesus' lament for Jerusalem, prophetic cries for the downtrodden, because we want solutions, we want it all put right, right now. And God promises He is working all things together for good, but he sits in the grief, he feels the breaking of his heart for what is happening here and now, too. For those of us who prefer to turn away, to numb the pain or to intellectualise our way to solutions - I think Habakkuk calls us to open our eyes and to lean into God's heart.

Part of why Habakkuk wrestles with God so well is that he comes to God first with his grief. This wrestle is not a diplomatic debate on how to fix things, but the reshaping of a heart so that it reflects the heart of God.

And for the bleeding hearts - those who long for justice, those who feel the hurt of the world - when you feel alone in the ache, when the weight of the world feels heavy on your shoulders - when you sit in the place of the prophetic - know that God is sitting next to you. Don't confuse the apathy you see in the world, in other Christians; don't confuse the apathy you see in the church with the apathy of God. The reason you have the gift of your broken, bleeding heart is because of God. He is the one who gives you that sense of justice, that sense that this is not how the world should be, that there could be and should be better. He has put heaven so close in your hearts that you mourn what is not yet but is certainly to come. The way you care is a beautiful, tender insight into the heart of God, and an essential reminder for those of us too caught up in the realities of this world.

Along with the grief and the heart of God in this reply, one other thing is very clear: God is not done yet. He sees the corruption not only of Israel but also of Babylon, and He already has plans for them to be overtaken.

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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.

The Lord is in his holy temple;

let all the earth be silent before him. (2:16-17, 20)

And now, if you're tracking this, at the surface level it seems like a vicious cycle - one country becomes corrupt, another takes over but is also corrupt, so it gets taken over. This endless cycle of injustice and brutality, and violence seems destined to haunt humanity endlessly. We might again want to take up that cry of 'how long, oh God.'

Because the practices described here aren't unique to Babylon - given the human condition, most nations will eventually become Babylon. This leaves us with the unsettling question: Will God let this cycle go on forever, letting Babylon-like empires ruin each other and his world? And this is the wrestle Habakkuk, and we ourselves sit with, and can sometimes even be broken by if we just wait for the right system or political leader to come and save us.

There's no answer in this book. There is no timeline, no instruction manual. There is no one perfect nation that will fix it all. We have Jesus, and we know the goodness of His kingship; yet still now, we wrestle with the same question: how long will this go on? Just as creation continues to groan as it waits for Jesus return, so we continue to cry, 'How long, oh God.' as we wait for Jesus to come with His Kingdom.

But if we continue to cry, continue to come to God in this pain we might not see answers, or at least not the ones we want - but we will grow our faith in who the God we call Father is. As God says to Habakkuk at the beginning of this second reply, 'The righteous shall live by their faith,' but that doesn't mean not wrestling; faith is not passive. God is calling us to a kind of faith that both embraces and wrestles, the kind that questions God, yet trusts him.

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And the example we see in this of Habakkuk is remarkable, worthy of emulation - but this is when we must turn our attention to the final chapter of the book. Because we see that Habakkuk does not simply wake up one day able to wrestle well, he does not simply decide to seek God's heart. No, Habakkuk is formed into the prophetic figure who wrestles with God, who maintains faith even in tragedy and uncertainty.

Because at this point there is a strange break in the book - the conversation stops, Habakkuk gives us a Psalm - a song - likely not one he wrote but one sung for many years by the Israelite people. There's no more conversation or clarification, but Habakkuk turns to worship.

This Psalm is beautiful. It speaks of God's greatness and His power, reminding us that He is the one from whom light and life come. ***His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. (3:3b)***

As it continues, it reminds us of how God relentlessly pursues justice - that He is the God of the last, the lost, and the least. That He cares for and works for the salvation of His people. ***You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. (3:13a)***

And throughout this Psalm, we hear descriptions of God in the wonders of nature—the unexplainable powers of the world, storms, and earthquakes—and Habakkuk is reminded of the old stories of God's faithfulness, mainly the Exodus. He is reminded, as he sings this, and as he turns to worship, of the way the same God he worships now rescued his ancestors from a corrupt and unjust nation.

Habakkuk turns back to these stories of God's faithfulness, God's power, the might and the awe of God. He turns to this song and the stories from old, that he likely remembers singing in his childhood, that is etched deep into his bones. And the way he remembers his God, the repetition of songs like this in his head, allow Habakkuk to hold tight to God's character, particularly His faithfulness, even in the midst of the wrestle.

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Just as the song Jesus loves the little children still comes echoing back from a preschool classroom when I feel like I have seen too many sick children in a day, just as your word is a lamp to my feet and light for heart comes back to me from my primary school when the world has run out of solutions and answers. Just as the faith of my grandparents and parents grounds me, knowing this God who has been faithful to them will also be true for me.

In Covid I felt a sense of connection to Habakkuk. I struggled to even read the bible - it all felt so far removed from what was happening in the world. But in those moments I looked back - I looked back to photos of camps where I'd encountered Jesus, I could still sing the songs that formed my faith, I learned new songs that if I hear them again pull extra hard at my heart strings because I know that they helped me wrestle well when I was singing them with a broken voice and through tears.

Our worship matters; it forms us, etches truths about God deeper into us than we could imagine. These stories, words, and songs etched into us tether us to God, even in the darkest moments. They allow us to wrestle, to question, even sometimes rage against God - because we know not just in our mind but deep in our heart, deep in my soul - who this God is.

This song from Habakkuk is less about clear answers, less about seeing the blueprint of the world before us, and far more about knowing the God who is the Alpha and Omega. The main characteristic of the prophets is not foreknowledge of the future, but insight into the present character of God. When the world is crumbling around us, is this where we seek comfort? Do we want the fortune-telling God, or can we sink deep into the peace of knowing His character?

At the end of this we get a beautiful prayer:

***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 Saviour. (3:17-18)***

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The fig tree, the vines, the olives and the fields here are taken from promises of God. That every man shall sit under his own vine, that each tribe shall have their own land. Habakkuk knows these promises of God, knows that God has promised these things, just as he knows God has promised to hold the unrighteous to account. But in this place, Habakkuk is saying even when we have no evidence before us of these promises, even when it looks like they might never come, even then he will rejoice in the Lord - because of who God is, because God has time and time again proved to be the God of salvation.

Habakkuk challenges us to say that these are promises of God - they will come. But even when they are not here yet, even when we cannot see any of God's goodness, even when it looks like all is falling apart, we will trust in God.

Habakkuk sees the darkness of the world as an invitation to faith. And not just a faith that hopes for a light at the end of the tunnel, but hope for light even in the darkness of the tunnel. Because God does not stop being faithful, does not stop calling us to Him in the darkness.

This is where Habakkuk is different - while the other prophets shine a light to the brokenness in the world, Habakkuk shows us how to sit in that darkness and know God is right there with us - to able to see the brokenness as God sees it and still hold trust, and hope in God. Habakkuk recognises just how dark and chaotic the world and our lives can become, but he also sees how this strengthens us in the journey of faith, trusting that God loves this world more than we can imagine and that he will one day deal with its evil once and for all.

Now, as we finish, I recognise this is quite heavy, that some of this might be weighing on your heart, so we're going to take a minute to come before God in whatever way you need to.

- Do you need to yell at God about something - let your heart break again and re-engage in that wrestle?
- Do you need God to show you His grief - to come and sit alongside you as you weep?
- Do you need to remember the character of God - to remember his goodness of the past, so you can hold hope for the future?

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These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

Reflecting on Sunday 27th July 2025: Last Sunday Pastor Grant gave us homework from the prophet Joel. To *return* to God in prayer at 4pm on Thursday. How did that go for you? Did you have other opportunities to *return* to God last week?

Questions from this week's teaching:

1. Habakkuk first comes to God because he looks around him and cannot understand how a good God is working in a broken world. Do you ever feel like this? When do you struggle with this most?
2. Habakkuk sits and waits on the ramparts for God. Do you feel comfortable sitting in grief, in confusion, in hard situations and waiting for God? What makes this hard/easy?
3. This sermon talked about how Habakkuk did not bring anything to God he doesn't already know. Do you feel like God knows your grief? Knows your anger at the brokenness in the world? What is a way you could bring that to God this week?
4. What are some forms of worship that keep you connected to God in the wrestle? That help you trust in Gods faithfulness? Is there a song, a bible verse, a memory, a spiritual rhythm you have that keeps you anchored to God even when the world looks dark?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. The **Bible Project** has excellent resources for the book of Habakkuk. Start by clicking on this link, <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-habakkuk/> and follow your nose at the bottom for more.
2. **The Prophets'** by Abraham Joseph Heschel is an excellent book looking at the character of the prophets and how they experience God. He writes insightfully about how they come not just to carry Gods word, but His ethos - His heart too.
<https://www.amazon.com.au/Prophets-Abraham-Joshua-Heschel/dp/0060936991>
3. **Pray Yet** is a RightNow Media resource that looks at the call of Habakkuk to engage with God and pray - there is so much in the book of Habakkuk so this is a great opportunity to dive in deeper. <https://app.rightnowmedia.org/en/content/details/476016>