

Trusting God When You Don't Understand

Trusting God in Trying Times

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Tonight we open up a series of messages titled "Trusting God In Trying Times," and I am delighted that you are here for it and there is just so much that's on my heart to be able to say to you. The first thing, the most important thing, two things that I would say, I guess, to start with: first of all, is that the weekend here is a package deal; all four messages are interlocked in a way that you need all four to get the totality of the message and that's important to realize; we're only going to get started here tonight. The other thing that I would say to you, knowing that some of you maybe are in some heavy turbulence in your life right now, some things that are disappointing on your hearts perhaps, is that the thing that I would insist on, the thing that I plead with you to embrace from the very beginning is everything that we're going to hear this weekend from God's word, it is not theoretical. This is not academic truth, this is not pie-in-the-sky teaching that doesn't really connect with real life and I need to explain and vindicate that to you from the start hopefully to encourage you to lay hold and sink your teeth into what lies ahead here tonight.

I had a difficult time, really, deciding how to start the message tonight because this series is rooted in some of the most difficult times that I have ever gone through, that I will ever go through in my Christian life, and it's not my pattern, those that attend here at Truth Community will affirm this to you if you're visiting with us, it is not my nature to tell personal stories from the pulpit, but because I want to help you personally here tonight, I need to be a little bit personal to help you see that what we're about to look at this weekend is real, it changes lives, it will change your life. If you're in a pit of discouragement and have been there for a while, what we have in front of us in God's word here this weekend has the capacity to reach into that pit and lift you out of it. I know because I speak from personal experience. There is no way to teach this this weekend without giving you some perspective on the personal history that lies behind trusting God in trying times. It's not theoretical to me, it's in, some ways, the most personal material that I could ever teach to you.

Let me just kind of walk you through a little bit of personal history by way of introduction. As I was growing up, I was never close to my father. He was home and our family stayed together but I was never close to him. We had nothing in common, really. He was somewhat remote and an intimidating man and so I grew up in that environment and I moved away to college and we rarely spoke to each other. He was my dad but, you

know, it wasn't a close relationship. And along the way, as my life developed and as I went through schooling, as a young adult, I became a Christian and the transformation in my life was immediate; the impact on my heart was profound. God gave me a new heart and as part of that new heart, he gave me a new love that I had never had for my remote, intimidating father, and I started praying for my dad, praying that one day he would come to the same faith that I had, that I would see him become a Christian. So I made a deliberate effort to spend time with him in a way that we had never done before and after a little bit of a thaw, you know, we started to trust each other, we started to talk to one another. There was a sweetness that came into that relationship that was profoundly special to me and I just gave thanks to God for how that relationship was changing. We went out and we did things that some fathers do with their sons when they were three, well, we were catching up for lost time when I was 23 and 24 and 25. And I had this dream with my dad as a new Christian, as I prayed for him, prayed for his salvation, I had this dream that one day I would walk into a living room and see him with an open Bible on his lap reading Scripture and knowing that he had come to saving faith in Christ and that would have been the culmination of my existence; to see that would have been everything for me, I would have been prepared to die and go to heaven if only that could come to pass.

So I continued to pray for him. He started to open up. He was always skeptical of the Gospel. He was skeptical of my conversion. But as our relationship grew together, walls started to come down and I was very hopeful about what lay ahead. Then the phone rang on Thanksgiving day and the voice on the other end of the phone says, "Your dad and your brother are dead. You need to get home as soon as you possibly can." There was a plane crash, they said, and so get home. So we packed up a few things and made our way home, about a five hour drive. I was in complete shock and a few hours later, a few hours after sitting down for our Thanksgiving meal, a few hours after that, I was watching television reports of the death of my father and my brother in a small airplane crash not far from where I grew up. Beloved, I want to tell you, I'm just going to be candid and not try to pull any punches with you: that was a completely perverse day, perverse in the sense that this was totally outside of anything that I expected of what was to come. I was a young Christian. I wasn't yet nurtured deeply in good theology and it was impossible what I was watching. The outcome of this was the exact opposite of what I expected in life.

The next day after watching those television programs and having a fitful night of sleep filled with nightmares of being in the plane when it went down, the next day I was at the scene of the accident. The plane had gone down in a small wooded area. I remember it like it was yesterday. In one sense, it was another lifetime ago and in another sense this was yesterday and it was 30 years ago, almost. I was at the scene of the accident and I was standing behind the yellow police tape that circled the crash site because it was still an active investigation, and as I stood there, it was more than just the death of my father and brother that I was looking at, I was looking at the death of every expectation I had and every hope and aspiration that I had. The highest hope and aspirations I had from God in my life at that time perished in that plane crash. I could only stand behind that yellow tape and shake my head in disbelief. This is where it ends? This was unspeakable.

It was perverse. This could not be happening and yet it was. I saw blood. And in embryonic form, the thought in my mind was this: how could my prayers turn out this way? This makes absolutely no sense. My father died despite that growing relationship, despite all of those prayers, despite all of that believing expectation that God would deliver his soul in a way that I could see. All of that was gone and it was completely contrary, the exact opposite of what I expected and my soul was overwhelmed.

What was God doing with that? Make sense of that for me, I thought as I stood behind that yellow tape. But I was a Christian and so I had some other expectations about what was to follow. I knew that God was a God of all comfort, he was a God of joy and so I thought, I expected as that young Christian, "Well, this is really awful but at least there is this time of joy and comfort just ahead," and I expected the comfort and peace of God to flood my soul in a way that would supernaturally compensate for the perverse outcome of that plane crash. Do you know what? The reality was completely different. Rather than ascending to new heights of inexpressible joy, I felt the deepest sense of grief and sorrow, the awful waves of separation, of finality, that I couldn't even put into words today. It was dark. It was very, very awful is the only word that I can use for it. But do you know what? I still had expectations. There were still other avenues to explore here.

I went off to seminary in the midst of that and grew close to and talked to some pastors before seminary and one in particular at seminary, and I sought their counsel. "Here's my sad story and I'm having trouble sorting through all of this. How do I trust God through this? How do I make sense of any of this?" This was a few years later. I asked those men, in essence I said, "How do I trust God in the midst of this?" Beloved, this was an existential crisis for me. Everything that I had committed to Christ, everything that I thought would be true about God turned out exactly the opposite. And there came a point, I'd have to go back and identify the date in my journal, I know where the journal is at, there came a point where I reached a breaking point and I just said, "I give up. I'm not going to follow this God if it's like that," and instantly I said, "No, I can't go there." But I was broken and so I shared that with some men over the course of time and the one man in particular and do you know what? Their interaction with me was useless. Not only was it useless, it was counterproductive because it was obvious to me that they had absolutely no idea how to actually help me in the midst of my sorrow. I asked them how to trust God and do you know what one guy told me? How do I trust God? He said, "Trust God." Are you kidding me? This is an answer? That's completely nonresponsive. You don't answer a question by turning it into an imperative and think that you've given somebody meaningful spiritual counsel. Can you imagine, you go to a mechanic and say, "How do I fix my car? My car is not running," and the mechanic says, "Fix your car." You would look at him like he had, you know, "What's wrong with you?"

So after a period of five years, you know, there were ups and downs, I have to give you the short version of it, after five years, I was a broken man. It was dark and there was nowhere to turn and it was like that for a total of almost seven years in my life, ups and downs. Beloved, are you here tonight or are you watching over the live stream and discouraged with chronic matters that you don't even dare to share with anyone because it's just too hard, it's too painful, you've shared them in the past and people have shut you

down or treated it superficially and you say, "Why do I even put my broken heart out on the table for people to finger it?" Well, I'm glad you're here tonight if that's you. That was a long time ago from me and it's in the past and I want to tell you, I want to promise you, that the things that we are going to look at this weekend, the things that helped me, will help you. Absolutely, without question, if you are here as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the things that I have to share with you from God's word this weekend will resonate with your heart, it will echo in your mind and you'll say, "This is what I've been waiting for." In some ways when I preach this material, what can I say? When I preach this material, when I preach on this topic, beloved, here's what I'm doing: I am preaching to you that which I desperately needed to hear, what I wish I would have heard at the time because it would have helped. So I'm kind of retroactively preaching 30 years back in my own life, I guess, and preaching into your life here tonight.

Beloved, here's the thing, I'm done talking about myself now. I'm glad for that. It does not matter what your issue is. It doesn't matter what the cause of your sorrow, your discouragement, your despair; it doesn't matter what it may be because the principles that we're going to talk about here today transcend all of it. It is not specific to a young man's grief over the loss of his father. It's not specific to death. It's not specific to illness. It's not specific to finances. It transcends all of it and that's what makes this so wonderful. Here's the thing: every one of you, every one of you has enough biblical knowledge and enough common sense in a place like this to know that you are supposed to say, "I must trust God." You know that and if all we were going to do in this weekend together was for me to give you commands to trust God stated in various forms, we would utterly be wasting our time. You already know that you're supposed to trust God. Here's the problem, here's the question, here's what you need: you need to know how to trust God. That's a different question. "Should I trust God?" Yes. We're all on the same page. "How do I trust God?" That's a question that isn't as often answered.

You know, there is just one thing that I've just got to say here: in the book of Job, I'm going to have to paraphrase because I didn't write this reference down, but in the book of Job, Job said that those who are at ease hold calamity in contempt as reserved for those who are not rightly related to God. In other words, when someone is at ease and they find a man who is broken and discouraged like Job was, scraping the boils with broken pottery, having just buried his 10 children and having lost his immense fortune and the three counselors come and start to tell him he must be hiding sin in his life, Job responded to that and said, "People like you who are at ease, you find it easy to hold people like me in contempt. Because you're not going through the suffering, you find it easy to criticize those who are." And I certainly found that to be true in my own experience. Well, I hope that what you see here tonight with our time together is this: is that I'm on your side. I lay all of that stuff out to you simply for you to see that I'm on your side and that everything that flows here this evening, tomorrow and on Sunday, is from someone who is sympathetic with the darkness of the difficulties that you are facing and that's the perspective from which we speak. I want to help you know how to trust God in trying times which is a different question than the command, the imperative, "Trust God."

You know, as I was speaking to that seminary professor, this was 20 years ago or more, you know, you're in a completely unequal position. Here's the guy with the degree and the nice office and he's in his realm and you come as an underling and he doesn't really know you and you're saying these things and it's completely unequal and so it's just so easy when you're in the underling position to just be brushed off and the problem is with you. Well, that's not what we're doing here tonight. That's not how we are dealing with your broken heart here tonight. We're on the same page. We're on the same side. We're together. We're in this together as we come to God's word here this evening and one of the things that, a responsibility that I have, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we have been comforted by God." So tonight we look for God's comfort.

How do you trust God? I'm going to give you a paragraph that I will repeat here are a number of times over the weekend. How do you trust God? Write this down if you're taking notes and if you're not taking notes, commit it to memory, I guess, I don't know. How do you trust God? You trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word. You trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word, his word, and then you rest your confidence that he will ultimately deal with you consistently with those ways. I'll say it one more time because I know it's a mouthful: you trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word and then you rest your confidence that he will ultimately deal with you consistently with those ways. Beloved, if you are a Christian, it is absolutely certain, it cannot be violated that God will ultimately work in your life in a manner that is consistent with his own holy character. God does not violate his own character ever and your worst problems will never contradict that fact. Ever, ever, ever. And here's the problem when you're in the shoes that I was in, when you're in the shoes that some of you are in this evening, is that you're in a position where everything that you can possibly see, everything that defines your existence screams at you that this is the exception; that this is the time where God let it down, God let it go, and God dealt with you in a way that is different than what he has revealed in his word. And at that point when that becomes clear to you in your mind, you have to kind of make a decision about what you're going to believe. Are you going to believe and trust in God's word and what it says about God's character or are you going to trust your feelings and your own perspective? This is where the ground is won on trusting God.

Think about it this way, those of you that like to do crossword, not crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles. I dislike them both but one of them is a useful analogy for me. I have a family member that does 500 piece, 1000 piece puzzles, and I never go near them because that's just not my thing. But you know what puzzles are like and you've got a box full of pieces just all jumbled in together there and there is no order to them and you pick up one piece out of the box and you hold it up and you look at it and that individual puzzle piece makes absolutely no sense isolated from its own context. There is nothing to connect it with anything else, but when you put the picture on the box lid in front of you, you get the even sided pieces and you get a frame together and you start to hold that puzzle piece up against the box and into the frame, then you say, "Oh, I start to see how

this might connect. I see how this might relate to one another." The piece is intelligible when it is seen in its context. There is a picture of those awful sorrows in your life that you can't make sense of. When you look at them alone, when I stood looking at that airplane alone, there was no context to make any sense of it whatsoever. However, when you take that and put it into the context of the eight principles that we're going to look at this weekend, you'll say, "Do you know what? This makes sense. I can see that there is a connection. I may not understand it all," but here's the key, beloved, here's the key, "I have enough context to inform my heart that I can trust God even though I don't understand this one individual thing." And that is crucial. Here's what it means: it means that these eternal principles that we are going to look at give you a context to understand, to actually trust God even if nothing changes.

You know, looking back in retrospect, I'm kind of getting ahead of the end of the story here; this is what you'd say on Sunday afternoon, not Friday night, but whatever. We're all with friends, right? One of the things that was most awful about it, I know I said I was going to stop talking about my own story but this is so woven together in my heart I can't separate the two. One of the things that was so difficult about it and, you know, I'm not the first person to have lost a loved one, I get that, but those of you that have lost loved ones, you can relate to this. One of the hardest things, if not the hardest thing about responding to death, especially a sudden death like that, is the utter finality of it. You can't negotiate. You can't hope that it's going to get better. Even someone that has a serious form of cancer, well, you've got tomorrow, you've got the hope maybe this next treatment will work, and even if it's a slender thread, you say, "Well, there's something to hang onto." With death, there's nothing to hang onto. You can't get it back. You can't say, I remember thinking, "If I could just have five minutes with dad. That doesn't seem unreasonable. Just give me five minutes to say the things that are on my heart." And that doesn't happen. The utter finality of it was severe but in the providence of God, beloved, here's the thing: that lack of alternative forced me and forces you into a position where you have to come to grips with eternal principles because there is no earthly answer to what you're facing. As it turned out, the utter finality of it and the severity of it was actually a blessing that forced me into answers that would actually satisfy. As long as you think there's an earthly answer, you're not completely dependent upon what God has to say about these things in his word.

So there is a man in Scripture who can show you how to move from your tears to triumph, from fear to faith, from being a victim to being a victor, if you want to put it that way, and I'm speaking of a prophet named Habakkuk and I encourage you, I should have told you 10 minutes ago to start looking for Habakkuk in your Bible. It's several books after Leviticus. Habakkuk is one of the minor prophets after Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, after Hosea, for those of you looking for it in your Bible. Habakkuk, acknowledging that in other parts of the world they pronounce his name differently. I was teaching in another place and they were laughing at me for how I was pronouncing Habakkuk and I just laughed right back at them and said, "You're the ones who have it wrong here."

The prophet Habakkuk. This is not the likely place that you would go to try to find comfort. You might turn to the Psalms or something like this but there are things in

Habakkuk that you cannot find anywhere else. The prophet Habakkuk and I'm going to condense a lot of material here, the prophet Habakkuk ministered about 600 years before the time of Christ and God assigned him to a role in prophetic ministry when the nation of God's people was in serious decline. It was a spiritually depressed time: violent, unjust. Though they were the covenant people of God, there was no evidence that they had any relationship with him whatsoever. They were not responsive. They were not obedient. They were going 180 degrees in the other direction from what being the covenant people of God should have led them into and as Habakkuk steps onto the scene, the nation is teetering on the brink of divine judgment.

Habakkuk, as we're going to see, he was a sensitive, tender man of God, tender in the sense that he loved God, he loved God's law, he loved God's people and he wanted to see God's people manifesting obedience and manifesting the glory of God because that was central to who he was. And he sees the society going in another direction and he prayed about it, "God, do something. God, act in this." And what did he find in return? He only found a disturbing sense of divine silence. His prayers were going unanswered and that's where we join him in the beginning of the book.

The book of Habakkuk, just to give you a little bit of an overview here, the book of Habakkuk is the inspired record that shows how God brought Habakkuk from a position of doubt and discouragement to a position of full joy without changing a single iota of the surrounding circumstances. That's really crucial to understand. From a circumstantial perspective, Habakkuk is in the same position at the end of the book as he is at the beginning and yet his discouragement had turned to joy from chapter 1 to the end of chapter 3. How do you get from point A to point B? That's what we're going to look at this weekend. The book of Habakkuk is a dialogue. It's a dialogue between Habakkuk and God and we'll see those divisions unfold as we go through the text but Habakkuk prays and God responds. Habakkuk prays again, God responds. And then finally, chapter 3, Habakkuk gives his final prayer of things and so you realize that there is a dialogue going on between the prophet and God. And here's what happens, we open up, the book begins and Habakkuk is very discouraged but as the dialogue unfolds, you start to see the soul of Habakkuk maturing before your very eyes. He grows as he interacts and dialogues with God in this book and at the end, he comes to a place of confident, exuberant joy even though his circumstances did not change.

Beloved, here's what I want you to grab hold of at the start, here's what you really need to see. I understand that when you encounter difficulties in your life, you're like me and you say, "God, please change these circumstances. Change that person. Change me. You know, since some unexpected resources, we are really in a difficult spot here. God, change my kid." Whatever, and it's kind of oriented toward manipulating the circumstances around you, the circumstances or the people around you to one degree or another. I get that and God welcomes the prayers of his children but here's the thing; if you going to trust God, if you're going to learn how to trust God, you need to embrace something really basic right off the start. Your circumstance – oh, this is going to be hard to hear but I've got to say it because this is how you address God. You can't understand how to trust God unless this general overarching principle is settled in your mind: your

circumstances do not have to change at all in order for you to know a fullness of joy even in the midst of what you're going through. Your circumstances don't need to change. The people that burden you don't need to change in order for you to experience a fullness of joy and trust and calm in the presence of God and that can become the operative, defining, controlling principle of your entire existence. Period. End of story. That's the way it is. It's really important to recognize that because as long as you're waiting for the circumstances to change, you're stopping short of the fullness of what it means to trust God.

Here's another thing, saying all these things that aren't even in my notes, here's the thing: when it comes to trusting God and particularly in the mindset of the American so-called evangelical church, we have been conditioned to think that trusting God means that we are trusting him to do what we want him to do, to give us the outcome that we desire. "I'm trusting God to do this or that in my family, this or that in my situation." Beloved, that's not trusting God, that's wanting a change, notice it and own it for what it is, it's wanting a change which is different than saying, "I trust the character of God alone and that is enough to satisfy my soul." Those are two different things. If you're withholding a sense of satisfaction in life until the circumstances change, you have the opportunity to grow through what you're going to hear here this evening.

So here's the thing to kind of build on what I just said: beloved, it may not be God's will to give you deliverance. It may not be in his purpose to change things to your liking. That was one of the hardest things I had to come to grips with but I had to come to grips with it. My dad was not going to come out of the grave and be alive again. That was not going to change and so where did that leave me as a sputtering Christian? That meant that somehow there must be an answer to this because it can't be that the whole nature of my Christian life was going to be determined and defined by this black grief that was dominating it at the time. That can't be true. But then where do you find the answer? How do you trust God, then? Well, here we go, let's get into it. The first key to trusting God, how to trust God is to remember this, first of all, first point here tonight finally: God's ways are not your ways. God's ways are not your ways. This is the starting point. You have to remember some really basic things. Here's another way I've said this so many times, where you start your thinking determines the outcome; the direction, the trajectory that a plane takes when it takes off from the airport and it sets its course determines where it's going to go. You have to examine what the trajectory of your thinking is and the trajectory of your thinking starts here: God is God and you are not. God is God and you are not, remembering that I know I'm speaking with a lot of animation. I can't help myself on that. It's just a problem with my preaching but, beloved, I'm saying for the good of your soul and out of love for your soul: God is God and you are not. You have to start there. That has some very basic implications that flow from it that we're going to see from the text of Habakkuk.

As you open up to Habakkuk 1:1, we are joining the prayer life of Habakkuk in process. Look at chapter 1, verse 1. Finally we get to the text,

1 The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

So this is kind of a title to the whole book. This is a record of the vision, the burden of Habakkuk and it starts in verse 2. Habakkuk says, notice that he's praying,

2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save. 3 Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.

Remember, he's a prophet to the people, he's a prophet of God to the people and he sees utter disorder, sinful chaos in front of him; his ministry is having no visible effect. The more he preaches, the harder in sin people get and so he says to God, "Why are you making me see this?" Verse 4,

4 Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.

He's utterly discouraged. Notice this, beloved, those of you that have been wrestling with a problem for a long period of time, praying about it and nothing seems to change, notice the heart of what Habakkuk is saying here, he says, "How long, O Lord, will I call for help and you won't hear?" He had been praying for an extended period of time before the book of Habakkuk ever opens up. That's why he was frustrated. That's why he was concerned. That's why she was puzzled. He says, "God, I've been praying about this. I'm a prophet of God. I'm a mouthpiece for the living Yahweh and as I preach, as I proclaim, nothing is happening. I pray to you and nothing changes, it just goes from bad to worse. Why aren't you responding to me? Hello? God?" And there's no answer. He had been praying and all he had met with was a baffling sense of divine silence.

What do you do? I mean, for a man of God, for a sincere earnest question, that's the worst thing in the world. "God, why aren't you hearing me? I can take everything else but if I'm going to live in a sense of isolation that God isn't responding to me, that God is somehow appearing to me in hostile ways, I can't tolerate that. Why don't you answer me?" Here's what I want you to see, is you just peel back a little bit of the onion on what's going on in Habakkuk's heart at this point. Habakkuk thought that God should act; that God should use his omnipotent power and change this awful situation that he was witnessing on an ongoing basis. That's what he thought. That's what he prayed for. That's what he sought. It's obviously what he expected to happen and his expectations were met by something different, a total inaction by God up to that point from his perspective. So Habakkuk thought God should do something and apparently God was content to just stand by, as it were, and let things go. Distilled down to the most simple way of explaining it, God was not doing it Habakkuk's way. "God, I think you should be doing this." That's not what's happening. There is a conflict between what Habakkuk thought and apparently what God thought, what Habakkuk wanted to have happen and what God was orchestrating through his providence, they were in conflict with one another.

So, beloved, how do you trust God? Start here, start right here. This is incredibly humbling: God does things his own way. God does what he thinks is right. God orchestrates things according to his wisdom, according to his eternal purpose and do you know what? He doesn't submit the idea to you for approval. He doesn't need your affirmation. He's not threatened by your veto, "This isn't what I want." He just with sovereign majesty, sovereign authority and perfect omniscient wisdom, works things according to his will and plan. Do you know what? That's what God should do. That is God's prerogative. Why is it God's prerogative? Because he is God. He rules. This is his universe. This is his purpose and he gets to do what he wants to do because he's God.

Now, you know, there may be times where that's hard for us to accept but, beloved, what does it mean for you to call Jesus Lord except that you submit to him? You receive him as your divine teacher and you receive him as the Lord who has absolute prerogative to do exactly what he wants in your life even if it hurts. When you think about it like that, there's nowhere to go, is there? You can't object to that. When you step back and say our Lord Jesus has the preeminent position in the universe, then it's obvious that I need to let him be Lord by which we mean we follow, we submit, we accept what he does even when it's contrary to our desires.

Look over at a passage in Isaiah 55. You'll recognize the text even if the immediate numerical reference doesn't connect with you. One of the great statements about the essence of God, the omniscience of God, the prerogative of God, Isaiah 55:8. God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD." Isaiah 55:8. I hear some of you still turning your pages. That's fine. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts." Wow! What a statement. What a statement. Think about it. Here you are, a creature, your life began 20 years ago, 50 years ago, some of you maybe 75 years ago, and God has been God all omniscient from before the beginning of time and would we really – think about it – would we really call God to account by our narrow, limited, sin impaired judgment based on our little 30 or 40 years of experience? Don't you see that God is high above all? That he is high above you? That his position as Lord gives him the prerogative to act? His omniscience gives him a mind from which to do things that you can't begin to comprehend? When we see God high and lifted up and exalted in his great omniscience, all we can do is say, "Well yeah, of course."

So, look, for some of you, I understand that life is not working out the way that you want and it hurts and it's painful and it's a grind just to get through the day. I understand that. I have lived through that grind of wanting just sleep to come so that you can forget about it and then when you sleep, you've got nightmares and you wake up and you start the whole cycle over again. I get that. I really do. And it is a condescension of God that when we're like that we can go to him honestly in prayer even just like Habakkuk did. "Oh God, why? I don't get this. I don't understand." But here's the thing: you can't be content to stay there. You need to grow. You need to take a step where you're no longer praying in utter bewilderment. Watch this: you should expect in life as a Christian, you should expect and anticipate in life things that you do not understand, things that bewilder you, things that

leave you saying like I said earlier, "This is perverse. This makes absolutely no sense." You should expect that. Why? Because you have your ways, you have your thoughts, you have your expectations at a human level but Scripture teaches us to realize that God has thoughts and ways and purposes that far transcend what we see in our time. So when things are contrary to your desires and you know that God orchestrates life in your purposes, orchestrates the things in your life, when those times of bewilderment come, your first thought, your first stop in trusting God is to say, "Okay, this is not unexpected in the sense that I know as a general principle there will be things in my life that I can't understand. Scripture teaches me to expect that. Men of God have walked this path before me and so there are bound to be times in life where I say this doesn't make sense. Do you know what? This makes sense. The fact that this doesn't make sense, makes sense to me when my thinking is informed by the fact that God's ways are not my ways."

So what you have to do, your first step in trusting God, is you need to – and this is really, really hard. This takes a lot of spiritual effort enabled by the Holy Spirit to do this: you set aside your problem for a time, for a moment, you take a break in your thinking and you let your thinking go down this track, thinking beyond your discouragement to put things in proper context, you say to yourself, "Well, of course life is perplexing. God thinks differently than I do. God thinks bigger than I do. God thinks better than I do." And with that perspective you say, "Do you know what? I'm willing to allow the possibility that God knows what he's doing here and I just don't understand." That's a way of trusting God where you submit and say, "I don't have to understand in order to affirm big principles about God." And say, "I'm confident, I understand that he thinks in ways that are not like mine." And here's the thing, oh, this is it, this is it, beloved: the fact that I don't understand doesn't suggest a problem with God, it just suggests a problem with my understanding. The fact that I don't get it doesn't mean that something's wrong with God, that something's wrong with his ways, it just means that I don't get it. That simplifies things and puts it in the perspective where it needs to be. God's ways are not your ways.

There is a second point that you need to remember tonight, point 2 is this: God's ways are often hidden. God's ways are often hidden. Oh, I love this. Look at Habakkuk 1:5. God is now speaking although the text does not explicitly say, "Then God said." You can tell that God is speaking by the content of what follows. And what does God say to Habakkuk in chapter 1, verse 5? He says,

5 "Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days - You would not believe if you were told. 6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, That fierce and impetuous people Who march throughout the earth To seize dwelling places which are not theirs."

What is he saying? Well, notice this: God responds to Habakkuk but, do you know what? He doesn't answer Habakkuk's question. Habakkuk said, "God, why?" God doesn't give him why, he simply tells him, "Habakkuk, I'm doing something." And what he does here in this section, chapter 1, verses 5 through 11, he tells Habakkuk to look out on the world scene and what Habakkuk would see when he looked was that there was a rising nation

coming out of Babylon led by the Chaldean people who were on the march. They were gathering strength and there was a momentum to the expansion of their empire and what God is saying to Habakkuk in this passage is that that rising power, if you look out on the world scene, you'll see on the horizon, as it were, a nation rising in strength and he says, "Habakkuk, that nation has a purpose in my plan." And what God goes on, what God is laying out to Habakkuk is this, he says, "Habakkuk, I know that my people are sinful. I know that they are corrupt." And he says, "That nation that you see rising up, let me tell you what they're like." Look at verses 7 through 10, he says,

7 "They are dreaded and feared; Their justice and authority originate with themselves. 8 Their horses are swifter than leopards And keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, Their horsemen come from afar; They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. 9 All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. 10 They mock at kings And rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress And heap up rubble to capture it."

What did he just say there? He said, "Habakkuk, this is one powerful nation, and not only are they strong, they are ruthless. There is no human instrumentality that can stop them. They laugh when a king comes against them. 'You can't stop me, ha ha, look at this guy! He thinks he's going to stop us? Ha, that's hilarious!' They see a fortress and they just heap up rubble to capture it." He says, "" Habakkuk, no one can stop them and do you know what? They're coming into power because I'm strengthening them to do that."

And he says in verse 11, in verse 11 he tells Habakkuk that that nation is going to sweep through God's people and conquer them and carry them into exile. Verse 11,

11 "Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on."

Sweep through where? Sweep through God's people. Sweep through Judah. Sweep through this sinful people and just as they have been conquering nations all along, they're going to conquer my people too. God knows the nation is sinful and he plans to judge it at the hands of this world power that is on the rise.

What is he saying to Habakkuk? Go back to verse 5, "Habakkuk, look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder!" He says, "Habakkuk, here's your problem, you only see part of the picture. There is a jigsaw puzzle here. You've got two pieces in your hand and you think you understand it all and you don't. There is information that you don't have. There is something that you need to know. Habakkuk, you think I'm not doing anything? Quite to the contrary, I am in the process of changing the course of world history to address the very problem that you are praying about." Habakkuk, saying this somewhat sympathetically, foolishly accused God of inactivity, of indifference and Habakkuk had absolutely no idea what he was talking about because the truth of the matter, behind the scenes, beyond immediate human perception, pulling the veil back, God sees this sinful nation, sees his people in need of discipline and he is gathering together a world force to come through and march through and discipline them and give

them an incredible divine spanking so that they would learn not to sin like that down the road.

For our purposes tonight, everything that God was doing, Habakkuk could not see. There is so much more going on in reality in the purpose of God, beloved, than what you see, and when those difficult times hit you and the things that break your heart come to pass, you need to trust God in this way, you need to humble yourself enough to say, "I don't know the whole story." Isn't it obvious that you don't? Isn't that obvious? You don't know what the ultimate outcome of your current difficulties are. You don't see the hidden hand of God. You don't know the unrevealed purposes of God in the different things that are happening in your life so how could it be that you're in a position to judge and evaluate it and say this is not fair or this is not right? We can't do that. In my own foolishness, I looked at that plane crash and said, in essence, "This isn't right. This isn't fair. This was a trick." Do you know what? What was not right was me thinking that way. Can you imagine a 26-year-old man who had been a Christian for five years presuming to evaluate the ultimate purposes of God in bringing to pass an event like that? On what basis did I think I knew what I was talking about? Shame on me. Shame on me. You see, we have to step back and remember some basic things about God. Who is God? God is the God who controls world history. Daniel teaches us that nations rise and fall at the command and hand of God; that our times are in his hand. Here's the thing: Habakkuk's accusation was untrue. God was acting, it was just simply hidden from Habakkuk's eyes. God acts and works all things together in ways that you cannot see.

Here is the question as we close tonight: how does that help you trust God? How do you take that and let that inform and shape you into someone who trusts God? It's so basic. It's so simple. It's so humbling. God's ways are not your ways and God's ways are often hidden. You don't know the full story. What does that do? How does that help you trust God? It does this to your heart, beloved: it checks your impulse to assess a situation based on what you understand now. We so much want to jump to conclusions. I remember talking to a friend that something didn't work out for him and he said, "There is no way that this can turn out good." You don't know that. You don't know the future so how can you make definitive statements about what is and is not good based on what is happening now? You can't because, beloved, even in your sorrow and even with your broken heart, you need to come to God humbly and acknowledge that you don't know the full story. I didn't know the full story behind that plane crash. I still don't. It doesn't even matter what I know and understand. It's enough for us as Christians to say God's ways are not my ways and his ways are often hidden.

And where does that leave you, beloved? What you understand today, the way that you feel about that situation in your life now, whatever else we say about it, whatever else we could say, what you feel and what you see today is not a reliable indicator about what is good. You can't know that. You don't know the outcome of the broken lives that have caused you sorrow. You don't know the outcome of the financial reversals that you've faced. You don't know the outcome of the sorrow that others have inflicted on you. You don't know any of that. You don't know the outcome so how could you possibly be in a

position to evaluate whether it was good or not? The most that you can say is, "This is hard," which is different from saying, "This is wrong or this is bad."

So trusting God begins with some negative things that corral your thinking. Negatively, God's ways, not my ways. Negatively, God's ways are often hidden. So trusting God with these principles in mind, it starts to divest you, it starts to cleanse your soul from pride that you don't even recognize, a pride that says, "I know what's best. I know enough to make judgments." Do you know what? You don't and neither do I. And when you make that initial statement, then you are in a position to say, "Lord, teach me. Lead me. Help me because I don't know, because your ways are higher than my ways and therefore I must need your help more than I realized in life." And when you take that posture, you start to develop a sense of perspective of patience that says, "I need to give God time to unfold his faithfulness." We'll pick it up there tomorrow morning.

Bow with me in prayer, if you would. Thank you for your patience in a very long message.

Father, first of all, we would pray for those who are here who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that, Father, you would open their eyes to recognize the value of the blood atonement of Christ and put their faith in him for salvation. Father, as we consider what it means how to trust you, we pray that you would grant us the humble spirit that is necessary to simply say, "I don't see the whole picture. I don't know the fullness of the ways of God. Maybe I should withhold judgment until God unfolds more in the days to come." And as we say these things, and as we pray these things, O God, we ask for your grace and comfort upon those who are so discouraged and the problems have been so long and so chronic and it seems that there is no change to be had. God, we pray that you might have grace and mercy on those who are discouraged. May the things of the loftiness of God give them the ray of hope they need to see light that would bring them encouragement and strengthen them in the days to come. We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

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