

When God Is Silent

1. Warm up: Although waiting is an ever-present part of life, we hate it! What's something relatively trivial that you've found yourself waiting for recently? How did that feel?
2. Our scripture this week comes from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. Unlike the other prophets, we know very little about Habakkuk or even when he lived. Based on subtle clues in his book, the best guess is around 625 B.C. His book decries the state of politics and society in his nation, but it's unclear whether the problems were inflicted by an outside invading force (maybe Babylon) or because of issues of internal governance. Either way, Habakkuk felt enormous despair and anger and found himself wondering "where is God?" as he anxiously waited for God's deliverance. Let's read Habakkuk 1:1-4 from the NIV, followed by the same passage in The Message Bible, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Habakkuk was clearly distressed about the state of affairs in his nation. How are you feeling about the state of affairs in our nation? Let's share our perspectives, but speak respectfully, recognizing we may not all agree. How are you feeling and what most concerns you or makes you hopeful?
 - b. Politics and society at large are not our only source of distress. In our personal lives, we also often find ourselves in situations that tempt us to despair and cause us to wonder, "Where are you God?" Pastor Vivian gave the example of how she felt when she was first diagnosed with multiple myeloma. In your personal life, as you look back over the years, when have you been most tempted to say, "Where are you God?"
3. Pastor Vivian said, "Habakkuk's opening lament captures a deep struggle – the struggle to find hope when faced with persistent injustice and apparent silence from God. Yet even in this raw questioning, there lies the seed of hope. Today, we'll explore how we can find hope when God seems silent."
 - a. Vivian urged us not to confuse hope with wishful thinking. What's the difference between the two?
 - b. Vivian said, "In the biblical sense, hope is a confident expectation based on God's promises. It is the assurance that God is who God says They are and will do what God has promised to do. Hope is a vital aspect of Christian faith that encourages believers to look beyond their current circumstances and to trust in God's goodness and faithfulness." Why is hope so critical? What happens when we don't have it? What happens when we do have it?
 - c. Vivian said, "Hope begins with honest questions. . . . Hope does not mean ignoring reality; it means bringing our real struggles to God without fear. When we ask, 'How long?' God welcomes our honest prayers." Vivian gave an example from the movie *The Apostle* where a preacher shouts and expresses his

anger toward God in his prayers. When you're angry or upset with God, do you feel comfortable openly expressing those feelings in prayer? Why or why not?

- d. When did you last express your anger at God in prayer? Why is it so important that we be able to ask hard questions and express anger in prayer?
 - e. As Vivian continued wrestling with God in prayer, her fear turned to hope. She decided, "If I lived, I could do all the things I had hoped to do. If I died, I would get to meet God. Toss up! Win/win! That's where I settled. Live or die, I was good. I trusted God, hoped that I lived, but would be happy with either outcome. So, I didn't pray for healing, you all were doing that, I prayed for the courage to face whatever was coming – the chemo, the stem cell transplant – the side effects, all of the accoutrements of cancer." What do you think of that way of praying?
4. As the book of Habakkuk continues, Habakkuk reminds himself how God, in the past, had brought Israel through times of distress and delivered them. We should do the same. Reminding ourselves of how God has delivered us in past circumstances builds hope in the present. The song Waymaker says, "Even when I can't see it, you're working. Even when I can't feel it, you're working. You never stop, you never stop working."
- a. Vivian told of a time when she was caring for her elderly Mom and had a meltdown. Her Mom had soiled herself from head to toe. Just then the phone rang. It was her niece telling her that her sister was being rushed to the hospital and asking her to come right away. Vivian hung up the phone and "let God have it!" Soon there came a knock at the front door. It was her cousin, unexpectedly asking if Vivian needed any help. When in your life have you experienced something like that – a time when God's deliverance appeared out of nowhere?
 - b. Read the Jayber Crow quote from a Wendell Berry novel, as found on p. 3. As you reflect on this quote, what are your thoughts and observations?
5. In the end, despite all the chaos around him, Habakkuk defiantly declared, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, 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.**" Habakkuk 3:17-18. In other words, Habakkuk made a choice to rejoice and have hope in God no matter what.
- a. Vivian said, "Living in hope means actively choosing to trust God each day. It means waking up and declaring, 'Today, I will put my hope in God.'" Do you agree that hope is a choice? Why or why not?
 - b. Someone once said, "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain." Where in your life right now do you find yourself waiting and wondering, "God, are you there?" Tell us what's happening in that aspect of your life, and whether you're prepared to defiantly choose hope.

Habakkuk 1:1-4, NIV

The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received. ²How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? ³Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. ⁴Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

Habakkuk 1:1-4, Message Bible

The problem as God gave Habakkuk to see it: God, how long do I have to cry out for help before you listen? How many times do I have to yell, “Help! Murder! Police!” before you come to the rescue? Why do you force me to look at evil, stare trouble in the face day after day? Anarchy and violence break out, quarrels and fights all over the place. Law and order fall to pieces. Justice is a joke. The wicked have the righteous hamstrung and stand justice on its head.

Jayber Crow in a Wendell Berry Novel

“Often, I have not known where I was going until I was already there. I have had my share of desires and goals, but my life has come to me, or I have gone to it mainly by way of mistakes and surprises. Often, I have received better than I deserved. Often my faintest hopes have rested on bad mistakes. I am an ignorant pilgrim, crossing a dark valley. And yet for a long time, looking back, I have been unable to shake off the feeling that I have been led—make of that what you will.”