

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of July 26, 2009
"Asking God Hard Questions"**

[Today's message focuses on the subject about hard questions. How do we deal with hard questions in life, especially if it means questioning or challenging God?]

[Topics: Hard Questions; Answers from God; Difficult Times; God's Perspective]

Excerpt: Pastor Glen has recently read in the Bible about men of God who were asking God some hard questions because they were struggling with what God was up to. So how do YOU deal with hard questions in life?

Maybe you just got some bad news from your doctor about your health and you are now facing a major trial. How do you deal with that question as you talk to God about it? Maybe you yell at God a little. You challenge God by asking, "Why did you let this happen?"

How do you teens deal with people at school who challenge your faith or ask hard questions? Maybe they mock God. Or maybe your biology teacher's talking about evolution that challenges your faith. And you ask God, "Are you there? What does this mean?"

The internet is an amazing place. Robert, from our congregation, sends out a head of time what the sermon's going to be on Face Book. This e-mail came to Pastor Glen out of Africa "Why does God allow children to languish in pain? Is God really God? What is the glory of God? Why does God allow innocent people to suffer?"

So we all struggle with hard things in life, don't we? Or we may have some hard questions about some of the things that are said in sermons or Bible studies. Are you able to ask a hard question, "What did you mean by that? I didn't understand it." Sadly some people hear something in a sermon that they disagree with or don't understand and they stop attending. Why didn't they come ask Pastor Glen about it? Or ask the person who said it?

Part of the problem is that when you asked the pastor a theology question in the past, you got into trouble. While at that has changed, some people still have that attitude that they don't dare question the pastor because he would stomp on them. Pastor Glen won't do that. He's not afraid of hard questions.

Now let's go to Habakkuk, chapter 1 and let's see how Habakkuk deals with God. He's living in Judah and the nation is down in the dumps. They are having difficulties. Things are bad.

Habakkuk 1:1, "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received." Habakkuk is going to receive a "download" from God. He's going to receive this oracle because he's asked God a couple of hard questions.

2) "How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" Have you ever said that prayer? Sometimes we ask God, "Why aren't you answering? I'm having this difficulty, don't you see?"

"Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?" Habakkuk is asking, "Don't you see, what's going on around us?" So Habakkuk is asking God some hard questions here. An interesting side note – the Hebrew word for violence is "hamas." That's relevant to our news today, considering there's a group in the Middle East with that name.

3) "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. 4) Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted."

Habakkuk wants to know from God, "Why are you allowing this wickedness to prevail? Why don't you defend the righteous?" Pastor Glen doesn't believe that God was upset that Habakkuk asked these questions. God doesn't get upset over hard questions. He knows that humanity wrestles with these things. God knows some of us are wrestling with some hard issues right now. We often ask, "Why did this happen to me? And what can I do about it?"

13) "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

Habakkuk is asking God some really hard questions. People today are asking similar questions like the gentleman from Africa. "Why does God allow children to be in pain? Why does God allow anguish?" Now we don't have all the answers but we should be afraid to ask God these questions.

Now let's look at a couple of complaints King David asked God about. **Psalm 6:1-3, O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. 2) Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. 3) My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long?"**

The book of Acts tells us that David was "A man after God's own heart." Yet he asked God a tough question. It's the same question Habakkuk was asking. The questions we ask today are like this. "Why isn't God healing me? Why isn't God healing this person I'm praying for? Why isn't God fixing my dilemma like finding me a job?" It's not wrong to ask God those questions. Hopefully we are crying out from our heart and saying, "God help" as we pray for ourselves and others.

And in **Psalm 13: 1**, David asks God this question: **"How long, O LORD Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"** Every one of us has had those moments and thinks that God has left us. Now we know that's not true. But we still have to wrestle with those thoughts, don't we?

We, Christians, like to put on a good face and so no matter when people ask you, "How are you?" we always answer "fine" or "OK." And lots of times we're not "fine" and we're not "OK." We're struggling with hard questions. We're struggling with issues of life we're trying to get through. Issues like how are we going to cope with this situation.

Or even sometimes our teens are afraid to ask their parents questions because too often they become befuddled when asked hard questions. We, as parents, need to be open in letting them ask those questions. We may not know the answers, but we need for them to ask their questions. It's OK to struggle with things. It's OK to ask some hard questions.

2) "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?" David was asking God, "How long must I carry this burden? How long do I have to struggle with this? How long will my enemy triumph over me?" At one point, David's enemy was a whole army that had pursued him.

Today we have different kinds of problems. We have health problems. We have human relationship problems that we have to work through in our marriages, with our kids, and with the various people around us.

Jesus in Gethsemane asked the Father: "Can't you take this cup from me? Isn't there another way?" That's Jesus. That's our Savior. That's our Messiah asking God for another way to do this. He completes his thoughts by saying, "**But nevertheless not my will, but yours be done.**"

How many times have you asked God, "Isn't there another way to get through this?" Pastor Glen recounted a story about a woman who had given birth to a healthy baby. But when a baby is born there is a valve in their heart that has to switch so that the blood that comes from the placenta would now be circulated within the baby's body.

But the valve didn't switch. And there's nothing they can do about it. Barring a whole heart transplant the baby has only hours to live. And here pastor Glen is in the hospital with this young couple asking God, "Can't you fix this?" And the baby is turning more and more blue in his mother's arms. The baby dies. The question was asked, "Wasn't there another way to do this?" But God allows things to happen.

So what's God's reaction to hard questions? Is God sitting there in heaven like Judge Judy ready to bonk you with his gavel? So let's look at **Psalm 6**. This is David speaking.

8) "Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping." God wasn't bothered by David asking, "How long?" David knew that God had heard. God was going to take care of things.

9) "The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer." Throughout the Bible people have cried out to God and he responds.

Now going back to Habakkuk, this is God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint to him that his nation was going to pieces and God was allowing it to happen. **Habakkuk 1:5**,

"Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed." Remember when God does things, he does them so he gets the glory and the people are utterly amazed.

"For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." Many times we don't believe what God can and will do. Listen to what God is going to do.

6) "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own." In the next few verses, God says I will bring the Babylonians to come in and take over this nation to fix the problem.

Now, this is not what Habakkuk wanted to hear. He wanted the corruption and problems fixed but not that way. Often, God doesn't give us the answer we want or the answer we've kind of worked out. God intervenes but in his own way.

Habakkuk 2: 2, "Then the LORD replied: 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.'" God is saying, "I want people to understand my message to them."

3) "For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay." Things will happen in God's time, at exactly the right moment, when he wants it to happen and in the way he wants it to happen.

We all know that until we really get in a hard spot. It's really easy for us to go into the hospital and tell someone else that God's in charge – God's working this out. But when it's us flat on our back in that hospital bed, it's a lot harder to hear that. That's because we're human. Jesus wrestled with that in the Garden. It's OK to wrestle with God like Habakkuk and David did, asking hard questions. That's OK. That's working through life.

So, now how did Habakkuk respond to God when he asked some hard questions?

Habakkuk 2:1, "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."

Habakkuk tells God that he will stand at his watch waiting for God's answer. Later on he gets a little more humble in chapter 3, where he offers this prayer to God.

3:2 "LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy."

Habakkuk is asking God, "As you take us through this, please show mercy to us if you have to work it out this way." God allows people to die. In fact, he's going to allow every single one of us to die – unless he returns before we do.

For some people God gives a long life. Some are rotten people with a lot of bad habits who live until they're a 100. And then there are others who are wonderful, caring people and they die in their teenage years. You ask, "How does that work?" Well, God has the bigger picture in mind, doesn't he? God says he knows our days.

17) "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,"

This is bad news. Everything has failed. Even though things are so bad, Habakkuk said he would rejoice in the Lord. **18) "yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."** He could rejoice because he knew God was going to take care of the situation.

The hardest thing for us is that we tend to put everything into this life. It's all about this life. We're so worried about protecting this life. And God is thinking eternity. God is thinking what will things be like a thousand or a million years from now.

God's thinking about what character you're going to have. God's thinking about how you are going to impact the people around you a million years from now. We are really going to "old" some day. Sarah thinks she's old now. She's 90 plus now.

You have just begun. You are just a twinkle in God's eye. We are going to live forever. And it's going to be more lively and more exciting and more real than it is now. And that's what God's looking at when we ask him our hard questions about this life.

God is working on things that are forever. God's thinking about us in the next life and what's going to happen to us after the resurrection. So we shouldn't get so uptight about what happens to us today.

Habakkuk said he was going to look to God and see how he was resolving things. Habakkuk continues in **verse 19. "The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights."**

In essence Habakkuk is saying that in trusting God, God allows him to reach the heights of where God wants him to be, God allows him to accomplish what God has in store for him.

God wants to help us through our hard places. But it's OK to ask the hard questions. We need to realize that God's working out something bigger, something that's eternal, something that is taking to the heights. And one day when we are there, we're going to look down the hill at all the circumstances and say, "Oh, I get it. Oh now it makes sense." And that's because we'll see things from a different perspective.

Psalm 13:5, "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6) I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me." This is David doing this when he was struggling with his trial. Even when we, today, question God and ask him hard questions even in a bad attitude, the Father is able to show his love for us. Jesus is able to intercede on our behalf sitting there with the Father saying, "I know what that was like. I experienced that."

Together they help us work through our specific trial or trauma. And they pull for us, so we can rejoice. Even though we don't like the way things are happening, we know that God is going to make it work. He's going to bring the best out of it.

So as you wrestle with things, get some other people around you and talk about what you're struggling with. That's one of the values of small groups. It gives you opportunities to talk about things. We're all human. We all struggle just like Habakkuk did, just like David did, even just like Jesus did, as he asked the Father if there was another way.

So together we pray for one another, we rejoice together, we sing together, we support one another. That's the body of Christ coming around us and standing with us.

We will face hard questions in life. Not maybe. Not perhaps. Someday we will all face hard questions, if we haven't already. We can always look to God to support us during our questioning times. God is not going to turn his back on us. He's not going to be angry with us. He's going to say to us like he did to Habakkuk, "Listen, I got a plan and it will amaze you. It will be bigger than you can imagine."

And for every one of us, that's true. One day we're going to stand in the resurrection and we are going to be amazed and say, "Oh, that's what he was doing. Oh, that's how he worked that out." It's going to be an exciting day when we get there.

And as we stand before him, he will show us the miracles that have taken place. Even though we've asked the hard questions. Even though we wrestled with God sometimes. It's going to great.

General Group Question: What hard question would you like to ask God?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Do you think God gets upset with us when we ask him hard questions? Briefly explain your answer.
2. Was Habakkuk pleased or shocked how God was going to resolve the issues that he brought to him in prayer? Please explain.
3. In your experience, does God answer your requests in the way you thought he would? Why or why not?
4. What was king David's relationship to God based on his various prayers that are recorded in the Psalms? Did David complain to God as well as give him praise?
5. Is it possible to be able to see the trial or trauma you are facing from a different perspective than the one you currently have? If so, please explain how.
6. Why did David rejoice and sing to the Lord even though he was distressed?
7. Is there value in sharing a difficult time you're experiencing with others? Could you give a brief example