

When Will God Finally Show Up?



Discover how God's plans are still
at work during your suffering.

Berni Dymet

Life Application Booklet

WHEN WILL
GOD FINALLY
SHOW UP?

by Berni Dymet

LIFE APPLICATION BOOKLET

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CHAPTER 1

How Long and Why?

Things in life just aren't fair sometimes! And when we look at those injustices we end up asking, "God, why do you let this happen? How long will you let it go on?" As it turns out, you wouldn't be the first person to have asked God those questions.

Personally, I don't question God all that often, but every now and then, I get to the point – when the going gets tough – of saying to myself, – and God, to be honest – *"Lord, what the blazes is going on here?"*

Have you ever been in a place – a tight spot, a difficult spot? Things aren't going right; things just aren't fair; it's ugly, it's painful and it's uncomfortable. And you think to yourself, *"God, what is going on here? What are you doing? Why are you letting this happen? This is so unfair!"*

Chances are, we've all been in that place. Sometimes, it seems as though God allows the suffering to go on forever – things that just aren't right, things that are so unfair. And it's easy for us to fall into this questioning, doubting mindset that runs something like this:

“Well God, why do you let this go on? I mean, you could step in any time and act. You can end the injustice. You can end the pain. You can do whatever you like. I come to You and ask You, day after day. I pour my heart out to You. You're supposed to be the God of love and justice, aren't you? Isn't that the whole point? Isn't that who you are?”

It's only human when you're at that point of struggling and despair, to wonder how the God of love – the God who is Love – can allow this to go on.

As we look back through our past, you on yours, me on mine, we think back to times where injustice has plagued our lives. For me, it was a time of betrayal – deep betrayal. And it seemed to me at that time, that those people who betrayed me so terribly, just to make things worse, just to rub salt in the wound, also came out on top. Not only had they been dishonest, not only had they done things that they simply should never have done, they stripped me of much of my dignity and worth, whilst enjoying their victory at the same time.

You see, pain and suffering, in and of themselves are bad enough. But injustice magnifies the pain. It makes the suffering much, much worse.

So this was a time in my life, going on three decades ago now, where I often went to God through the tears and the pain with two questions: “why are you letting this happen to me?” and “how long God can this go on?”

How about you? What do you see in your past, maybe even in your present? What circumstances, what injustices, caused you to ask those questions? “God, why ... and how long?”

I’m always terribly conscious as I share these things with you, that you’re probably reading this booklet in a place that’s relatively safe – perhaps uncomfortable, perhaps not quite where you’d like it to be right now – but in the scheme of things, pretty safe. And yet, the next person, that person could literally be in an incredibly dangerous place in a refugee camp where children are dying of sickness and starvation. In a jungle fleeing from soldiers or rebel fighters. In a village, should I stay, should I go?

These booklets go far and wide around the globe.

In fact, for every person reading this booklet in the relatively wealthy, relatively safe comfort of a middle class home in a country like Australia, England or the United States, there are thousands, tens of thousands, reading in their places of poverty and injustice, war and oppression. That’s the reality. So when we talk about these questions, “why?” and “how long, O Lord?” for many, many people, these are questions of life and death.

And that’s why we’re going on a journey in this booklet. A journey to discover what God is up to when we ask those questions of Him.

Because when we're in that place – when we cry out, “God, why and how long?” – we feel incredibly alone. But it turns out we're not.

I want to introduce you to a man with the rather uncommon name of Habakkuk. He was an Old Testament Prophet who was exactly, exactly in that place of fear and uncertainty. In fact, we're going to be looking at the discussion that he had with God from that very place.

As I've sat and read this conversation, this “*ping-pong match*” between Habakkuk and God, I've been really amazed. Amazed at these two things.

Firstly, how Habakkuk learned and grew and found himself in a completely different frame of mind as a result of his discussion with God. And secondly, how amazing God's plans were; how big and sweeping and surprising they were compared to Habakkuk's narrow human perspective.

In this chapter, I just want to share with you the cry of Habakkuk's heart. This is just one man crying out to God. Have a read in Habakkuk. This is what it says:

The oracle of the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord how long shall I cry out for help and you will not listen. Or cry to you violence and you will not save. Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me. Strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous. Judgement comes forth perverted. (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

This oracle of the Prophet literally means an utterance, a burden, a load on his heart. Habakkuk comes before God with a heavy heart to ask God some serious questions. He's pouring out the burden of his heart.

What burden?

“Well, God you haven't answered my prayer. How long will I cry out to you for help? Where are you? What are you doing? Look at what's going on here! I've been telling you about this violence, crying out to you and you don't say anything. Wrong doing. Trouble. Destruction. Violence. Strife. Contention.”

This is all the stuff that was going on in the nation of Israel back when Habakkuk was writing in the late 7th Century BC. God's people, God's very own people, were doing these terrible things. And the one thing that was meant to prevent this – God's law, God's justice – even that had become slack and blunted to the point where there was no justice at all. The wicked outnumber the righteous. They surround them. Judgement was perverted.

It's pretty awful stuff, and as a man of God, as a Prophet of God, Habakkuk felt this deep, deep in his heart. It's difficult to imagine a less desirable combination of circumstances than wrongdoing, trouble, destruction, violence, strife, and contention. On top of all of that – injustice!

We're going to look at how God deals with this and how He answers this cry against injustice and against His own inaction, in the next chapter. But right now, I just want to rest for a moment in Habakkuk's burden, the cry of his heart.

It's easy to imagine that when we front up to God we have to put on our Sunday best. We have to make sure that we have our act together and be strong and confident and bold – a great man or woman of faith.

But here it is, in the Old Testament, in the Bible. One of God's own Prophets is crying out from the wilderness of his despair, sharing with God the deepest burden of his heart.

God look at what's going on here amongst your people. Look at the violence. Look at the wrongdoing. Look at the injustice. God, why are you letting this happen? How long are you going to let this go on?

We're going to see, over the coming two chapters, that the cry of this man's heart opened him up to a journey of discovery with God. He didn't necessarily discover the things that he wanted to discover. God is not going to dance to any man's tune. But by the end of it all, Habakkuk was a profoundly changed man. This man who came crying out to God out of these terrible circumstances, well, this dialogue that he has with God changes his heart.

It happened because he poured his heart out to God and then dared to listen to what God had to say. And by the end of this book in the Old Testament, Habakkuk is singing God's praises and yet none of his circumstances had changed.

I wonder if there's not something in that for you and for me.

EXPLORE

The oracle of the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord how long shall I cry out for help and you will not listen. Or cry to you violence and you will not save. Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me. Strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous. Judgement comes forth perverted. (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings. (Exodus 3:7)

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

Take a moment to think back to the last time that you suffered on the wrong end of an injustice. How did it feel? Jot down the emotions that were going through your heart and mind.

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QUESTION 3

Now, let's take a look at Habakkuk's circumstances. What do you think of an anointed Old Testament Prophet, talking to God in this tone? Is it right? Is it wrong? Why?

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QUESTION 5

Visit Exodus 3:7. What do you see going on in God's great and mighty heart for His people who were suffering in Egypt centuries earlier?

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CHAPTER 2

Just You Wait

Sometimes, as we go to God with life's problems, you know the doubts or the injustices or the hurts, He responds in ways that we never have imagined and, all too often, in ways that, quite frankly, we'd rather He hadn't.

These days we're not all that patient any more, you and I, are we? I mean, more and more, we expect everything to happen instantly. So when we read about this idea of *waiting on God* ... hmm, it doesn't always sit all that comfortably, does it? Especially if that waiting means waiting through injustice, suffering and pain.

Every generation looks at their parents and wonders, "Why did they do that?" Do you remember that as a kid? You'd want to have fun or play and yet your parents had different plans. Maybe it was time to set the table or do the homework or go inside and have a bath. It seems

that parents think and act so differently from their children. And when you're a child, it just doesn't make sense.

When you're a child it seems that our parents are there to stop you from having fun. And then, your kid brother does something to you, pokes you in the eye or something, so you hit him back and all they see is your response, not what provoked it, and you're the one that gets punished instead of this little brat kid brother of yours.

You're with me right?

When we look at things through the eyes of a child, they look so different from how they appear through the eyes of a parent. And it's not until we do the growing up, that we figure it all out. In fact, when we become parents, we look back on some of those things that our parents did that so offended our senses of justice at the time, and we can see exactly why they did what they did.

Why did they do this? How come they let this go on for so long? It all makes sense when we grow up and understand where they were coming from.

This man, Habakkuk, the Old Testament Prophet, had precisely this problem. He was a man who saw the injustices being suffered amongst his people, God's chosen people, and he poured out this burden to God. Let's read it again, just to remind ourselves, because the Word of God is so powerful, amen?!

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen? How long do I cry to

you 'violence' and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me. Strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous and therefore judgement comes forth perverted.

(Habakkuk 1:2-4)

Here he is, pouring his heart out to God because he doesn't understand why God's letting it go on and he's asking exactly the same questions that you and I ask of God in the midst of suffering and injustice:

Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen? (Habakkuk 1:2)

So God answers Habakkuk and right now we're going to take a look at what He had to say. And what He had to say may shock us. It certainly shocked poor old Habakkuk. And yet there's something really important in this for you and me, here and now.

Here's God's response:

Look at the nations and see. Be astonished. Be astounded. For work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told. For I am rousing the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own. (Habakkuk 1:5-6)

In other words, God is going to unleash the Chaldeans, the Babylonians on Israel ... In fact, His plan is already afoot, even though Habakkuk can't see it. Now, let's get this into perspective, so we understand the gravity of

God's response. He might well have said to Habakkuk, "I'm raising up Hitler's Third Reich to deal with the injustice amongst my people," because that's the effect of it. That's how the Israelites perceived the Chaldeans. They were evil, evil people.

And have a look at how God goes on to describe them:

Dread and fearsome are they. Their justice and dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more menacing than wolves at dusk. Their horses charge, their horsemen come from far away.

They fly like an eagle, swift to devour. They all come for violence with faces pressing forward. They gather captives like sand. At Kings they scoff and of rulers they make sport. They laugh at every fortress and heap up earth to take it. Then they sweep by like the wind. They transgress and become guilty. Their own might is their god. (Habakkuk 1:7-11)

Now, admittedly the things going on amongst God's people, well they're pretty ugly, they are. And interestingly, God has no dispute with anything that Habakkuk had to say about that. He doesn't turn around to him and say, "Well, no Habakkuk, you're being a bit tough on them – a bit emotional, don't you think? Pull yourself together man!"

No, clearly God agrees with Habakkuk.

That's great! God sees the injustices even more clearly than Habakkuk does. But His response is to promise Habakkuk a "holocaust"! I didn't use that word lightly, I use it very deliberately.

The Chaldeans had risen rapidly to become the dominant world power. And God promises to use them as His sweeping arm of judgement and justice against His very own chosen people, because of the strife and the injustice and the violence being perpetrated in their midst.

Now, let's be serious here. Let's put ourselves in Habakkuk's sandals for a moment. In his position, is that what you'd have expected God to do? No, me neither.

You see, I would have expected Him to step in and slap the bad guys across the wrist, even deal with them severely if that's what He felt to do, and then, to bring peace to the rest of us. You notice here that I rather conveniently number myself among the righteous rather than the unrighteous. I suspect we all do that.

But what Habakkuk discovers here, is that God's thoughts aren't his thoughts, God's ways, they're not his ways. This is a loving God and yet He promises a horrific judgement. Look at it again and let it sink in:

Dread and fearsome. Their justice and dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more menacing than wolves at dusk. Their horses charge, their horsemen come from far away. They fly like an eagle, swift to devour. They all come for violence with faces pressing forward. They gather captives like sand. (Habakkuk 1:7-9)

That's scary! It's simply not what we'd have expected our loving God to say or to do.

But I wonder if there isn't something in this for us; for you and me, here and now. We're the

little people. We're the people who, so are often impacted by forces of injustice and oppression that seem overwhelmingly greater than anything, anything that we could ever deal with. And when we're in the middle of that mess, suffering the pain of injustice, it feels as though God can't even do anything.

Well, it's time to think again. Because, God is an awesome and a mighty God; He is God who created the trillion, trillion stars that we know of in the universe; He is the God who created our Milky Way, just one little dot in the universe – a Milky Way so big that it takes ten thousand years for light to travel from one side to the other.

And this God is a God who hates injustice. This mighty, powerful God hates injustice and violence and unrighteousness and oppression with a vengeance. He hates it more than you and I could ever imagine. And that's why this God of infinite love is also the God of judgement.

For a long time, it never made sense to me that a God of love could be a God of vengeance. But the fact that He loves us so much, is the reason that His judgement against those who rebel against Him and harm those whom He loves is so great. It's the reason that His judgement is so awful.

Whatever injustice is going on in this world, whatever violence, oppression, evil, whatever it is, wherever it is, however it's being perpetrated, it will not go unpunished. God sees it. He aches for those being impacted by it. And one day ... one day He will bring His unique brand of

justice and righteousness and holiness to bear on all this injustice.

In the meantime, though, you and I may have to suffer. And when He acts, He may not act in the manner or in the timeframe that we had planned.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says 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. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

EXPLORE

Look at the nations and see. Be astonished. Be astounded. For work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told. For I am rousing the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own.

Dread and fearsome are they. Their justice and dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more menacing than wolves at dusk. Their horses charge, their horsemen come from far away.

They fly like an eagle, swift to devour. They all come for violence with faces pressing forward. They gather captives like sand. At Kings they scoff and of rulers they make sport. They laugh at every fortress and heap up earth to take it. Then they sweep by like the wind. They transgress and become guilty. Their own might is their god. (Habakkuk 1:7-11)

QUESTION 3

How would you have viewed God's response (and its inevitability, since it was already underway) in light of your expectations?

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QUESTION 4

Have you ever found yourself between a rock and a hard place, and prayed and prayed and prayed ... and all that happened is that things went from bad to worse?

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QUESTION 5

Now that you've seen the position Habakkuk was in, and how God responded to him, does that cast your petitions and God's responses in a different light?

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CHAPTER 3

Hang On A Minute

I don't know about you, but sometimes the things that God does, the things that He says, the things that seem to be in His will, just don't make sense to me. And so what I want to do is to find out from God what He's really up to here.

We don't like it when something unfair happens to us. And so we look up to God and say to Him, "*Hang on just a minute ...*"

You know something? There's this one thing about God that most of us would love to change – just one thing. We wish that we could make Him see things my way. No, not every day, just once in a while.

When we're in a difficult situation, we have a plan of how to get out of it. And our plan, in our view, is always the best one. We draw a straight line from where we am to where we want to be

– the most direct route, the quickest (and by the way, the most convenient and comfortable) path from A to B and our plan is for us to travel that path in the blink of an eye.

I mean, it's a pretty good plan, don't you think? It doesn't get any better than that, in our eyes. But can I tell you how rarely, how very rarely it actually happens that way? It seems to me that God's plan is always this convoluted journey over hill and dale, through deserts and storm, through pain and suffering ... one step forward and three steps back.

God's plan is so rarely my plan. God's way is so rarely my way. And hopefully you've gathered by now, I'm being just a little bit "*tongue in cheek*" here and having a bit of a go at myself. But wouldn't it be nice if God's plans were like our plans, just now and then? From point A to B by the shortest path possible?

In the previous chapters, we've been looking at the story of a man with the very same dilemma – Habakkuk who's been crying out to God about the violence, the injustices in his land amongst God's very own chosen people. Crying out. Unloading the burden of his heart.

Finally, finally God answers. But Habakkuk definitely doesn't get the answer he was looking for.

And so Habakkuk responds to God with a bit of a hissy fit. Have a read to what he has to say to God about this stunning plan that God's just unfurled before his very eyes:

Are you not from of old, O Lord my God, my Holy One? You shall not die. O Lord, you

have marked them for judgment; and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment. Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they? You have made people like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.

The enemy brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net, he gathers them in his seine; so he rejoices and exults. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his seine; for by them his portion is lavish, and his food is rich. Is he then to keep on emptying his net, and destroying nations without mercy?? (Habakkuk 1:12-17)

In other words, Habakkuk's saying,

"Umm ... just hang on a minute here God. I just want to remind you of something. You're God, remember. You're the Holy One. You're Holy, that's spelt H-O-L-Y! That means you can't go using the Chaldeans against us. You've marked them for judgement and punishment because they're not your chosen people. Your eyes are far too pure to look upon their evil. You can't let these evil people bring greater evil upon your own people. You can't let these treacherous Chaldeans swallow us up. You just can't stand by and let this happen.

No, no, no! This is not a very good plan God. It's nice that you agree with me that what's going on among our people is no good. But just, just hang on, let's sit down, let's talk about this. Let's rethink this plan of yours."

That's what old Habakkuk is saying here. He's telling God that this is just not a very good idea, using the evil Chaldeans against His people.

But it's exactly what ends up happening – just a few years later. The Chaldeans come and destroy Jerusalem and they take God's people into captivity, into slavery for seventy years in Babylon.

So let me ask you, what do you make of this?

Well, eventually, Habakkuk comes to his sense. Eventually, after going into the foetal position and letting out this guttural cry, he comes to his senses. He decides to listen and watch.

The Spirit of God comes upon Him and this is what happens:

I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. Then the Lord answered me and said:

Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. (Habakkuk 2:1-4)

And through this terrible knowledge of the impending judgement that is about to fall on Israel, Habakkuk becomes God's mouthpiece.

This decision – the decision to, to put it bluntly, shut up and listen, to calm down and stop arguing with God, to allow God to be God, to position himself on the rampart and see

what God will say and do – this decision is the turning point of Habakkuk's life.

It's at this point that he can start cooperating with God. It's at this point that he can be used of God in this terrible time.

It's at this point that he can see the glory of God before him:

O Lord, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work. In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known; in wrath may you remember mercy.
(Habakkuk 3:2)

And it's at this point that he can have confidence in God, despite the fact that his circumstances are screaming at him to the contrary:

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Friend, listen to me. During those terrible times of injustice, those terrible times of suffering, those times when God's words and God's ways simply don't make sense to us, we have a choice to make. You have a choice to make.

You can either rant and rave and argue with God, pulling in the opposite direction, trusting more in your terrible circumstances than you do in Him.

Or, like Habakkuk, you can decide to wait quietly on God – to see what He will do, to give Him glory and praise and honour along the way, to cooperate with him.

The choice is yours.

Okay, perhaps the fig tree isn't blossoming in season, perhaps there's no fruit on the vines, perhaps the olive harvest has failed, the fields haven't yielded their fruit, the flock is cut off from the fold and the heard isn't in it's stalls (in other words, everything has gone wrong all at the same time, as sometimes things tend to go) ... but will you exult in the God of your salvation anyway?

Will you cry out, "God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights?"

Well, will you? The choice is yours.

A Quiet Prayer

Father God,

You know when my heart aches, when my mind is confused. You know when I'm suffering. You hear the cries of Your people and Your heart is moved. Forgive me Lord for forgetting that. Forgive me Lord for my ranting and raving; for questioning Your wisdom and your judgement. Thank You for remembering that I am but dust, as human as the rest of Your people.

Forgive me.

But Lord, what I've heard through Your Word today, is a message of hope. A message of a God who doesn't always do things the way I'd expect, but of a God who can be trusted, no matter how bleak things get.

Lord, as I struggle through this and that, I've decided that I want to listen to You. I want to give You all the praise and glory that's due Your Name. I want to exult in You.

So my Lord, my God, take Your Word and write it on my heart. Fill me with Your Spirit to overflowing. Strengthen me so that I can stand at my watch post and station myself on the rampart to keep watch and see what you will say and do.

And may Your glory shine through me, as You make right that which is wrong. As You bring your justice into this world, however and whenever You may choose to do that.

In Jesus' mighty Name I pray.

Amen!

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When Will God Finally Show Up?

Discover how God's plans are still at work during your suffering.

We all go through times in our lives where there are things happening that we wouldn't have chosen for ourselves. Be it a difficult relationship, a health issue, financial troubles ... the list goes on. And when we're in the middle of all that, all we want is for the suffering to end. Why is God letting this happen to *me*? When will He finally show up?

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