

When God Seems Silent: A Study of Habakkuk


Lesson Four: The Danger of Despair (1:2-4)


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Introduction:


A tall chimney had been completed and the scaffolding was being removed. One man remained on the top to superintend the process. A rope should have been left for him to descend by. His wife was at home washing when her son burst in shouting, "Mother! Mother! They've forgotten the rope and he's going to throw himself down!" She paused, her lips moved in the agony of prayer, then she rushed forth. A crowd was looking up to the poor man, who was moving around the narrow top, terrified and bewildered. He seemed as if at any moment he might fall or throw himself down in despair. His wife cried, "Wait John! Take off your stocking and unravel the worsted." He did so. "Now tie the end to a bit of mortar and lower it gently." Down came the thread and a bit of mortar. Lower and lower it descended, eagerly watched by many eyes: it was finally within reach and was seized. They fastened some twine to the thread. "Now pull it up." The man got hold of the twine. Some rope was now fastened to the twine. "Now pull this up." In time the man seized the rope and made it secure. There were a few minutes of suspense while he lowered himself to the ground. Then, amidst the shouts of people he threw himself into the arms of his wife. That worsted thread was not despised for it drew after it the twine and then the saving rope. "Ah! My friend, you may have sunk very low in sin and woe; but there is a thread of divine love that comes from heaven's throne, and it offered even to you. Seize that thread! In may appear small, but it is golden. Improve what you have, however little and more shall be given. That thin thread of love, if you will not neglect it, shall lift you from despair to rejoicing!"

I. There is  no justified cause for despair in the believer's life.


"Despair" literally  means "to be without a way; to be at a total loss; without resource." It refers to a state in which there is no hope at all. All hope has evaporated.

II. "Despair"  dishonors God more than any other emotion. It degrades the Sovereign God to an impotent force and insinuates that He is either insufficient or unfaithful to His promised Word.




"Despair" leads to a practical  rejection of the Scriptures as God's absolute Word. Those who are captured by Despair have lost the faith essential in life (John 20:19a, "when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were together due to fear of the Jews").

"Despair"  distorts the eyesight of saints by forcing them to look at the world rather than up to heaven's provisions (Hebrews 12:3, "consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart").

III. However tragic Despair is, it is a familiar foe for all followers of God (Luke 18:1, "they ought to pray and not become discouraged").

 Paul struggled with it and won (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).

Habakkuk confesses that he, too, was vulnerable to Despair's onslaught (1:2-4). The prophet's cry reveals that he was "at the end of his rope." All hope had vanished.

1.  1:2—"cry out" – literally means "to shout or roar" in pain. Habakkuk literally wanted to scream! The Hebrew indicates that Habakkuk had been protesting the injustices a long time.
2. But, Habakkuk says that even if he screams it does not help.
3. Despair had a  chokehold on him.
4. Study this text and observe what it reveals about Despair. Using this as an acrostic outline we discover  seven significant facts. These actions and attitudes are often confessed by those who think God has withdrawn from them and the Divine connection is lost. Habakkuk shares the same emotions that Job confessed:

☞ Job 3:23-26, "God has been shut off...my groaning comes...and my cries pour out like water...what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread encounters me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes."

Job 6:8, "Oh, that my request might come to pass, and that God would grant my hope!"

☞ Job 7:3-11, "I am allotted worthless months, and nights of trouble are apportioned to me. When I lie down...I am continually tossing until dawn....My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope...My eye will not see goodness again...Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."

Body:

☞ "D" – it DESTROYS faith in God (1:2)

1. "LORD" is literally "Jehovah" and refers to the "Covenant God," which protected Israel after Sinai. As the "Covenant God," Jehovah was expected to uphold and protect. Habakkuk suggests that Jehovah is neglecting His covenant nation and the promised concern is lacking.

2. Habakkuk had given up faith in the Covenant God.

3. One's faith is always the first fatality when Despair attacks. When surrounded by the "impossible" we rule out God; forgetting His power and promises (Psalms 13:1,2; 22:1, 2; Daniel 9:13; Revelation 16:9-11).

☞ Psalm 13: 1, 2, "How long, Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long am I to feel anxious in my soul, with grief in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?"

☞ Daniel 9:13, 14, "we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our wrongdoing and giving attention to Your truth. So the Lord has kept the disaster in store and brought it on us."

4. Saul's defeat at Mt. Gilboa was due to his hope being buried by Despair because his faith failed (1 Samuel 28:15-20). Saul left the witch's hut at Endor pale, haggard, spirit depressed and courage sunken. Israel's leader had been conquered by Despair and the troops had no chance in battle. Saul's great distress was attributed to God's void in his life (verse 15b, "God has abandoned me and no longer answers me"). Habakkuk was close to this same defeat!

5. Modern saints quickly sympathize with this point.

a. We often walk away from God, thinking He does not care. We often cry out to Him of the violence surrounding us and feel that He does not care.

b. Why is the truth ignored about teenage immorality, AIDS and violence? Why are over one-million babies murdered each year and their mutilated bodies used for everything from cosmetics to medical experimentation? How is it possible for the leader of a "God-fearing nation" to advocate "organ harvesting"? Where is God? Why does He allow horrible things to happen?

c. The answer is in Luke 18:1. God's silence does not mean He has abandoned us!

d. We need a trusting and absolute faith in Jehovah!

"There's not a problem, not a care that life presents to you, that won't be easier to bear with faith to see you through."

☞ "E"—it ENCOURAGES strife, quarrels, and bitterness (1:3b)

1. When we allow Despair to drive us from God, we are only left with mortal understanding to confront injustice. And mortal wisdom is never adequate! (Jeremiah 10:23, "I know, Lord, that a person's way is not in himself, nor is it in a person who walks to direct his steps").

2. Those ensnared by Despair are marked by these actions:

- a. ☞ Blaming anyone but self for trouble.
 - b. ☞ Fault-finding that is renown, bar none; no one can be as negative as the one in despair. These are “the absolute best” of their kind!
 - c. ☞ Holding unforgivable grudges; Resentment rules their lives.
 - d. ☞ Directed solely by self-interest.
3. ☞ Deuteronomy 28:65, “you will find no peace, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul.” (See also Jeremiah 18:18; 26:11-14; Micah 7:1-6).
 4. Despair is like forward, contrary children who, when you take away one of their playthings, throw the rest into the fire. It grows angry with itself, becomes its own executioner, and revenges its misfortunes on its own head. It refuses to live under disappointments and crosses and chooses rather not to be at all than to be without the thing which it once imagined necessary for happiness (Foster, #1484, p. 187).
 5. Habakkuk surveyed his society. It had abandoned God and followed Self. Despair nurtured robbery and insensitivity. God’s people had broken into factions that bit and devoured each other. Despair promoted disturbance, hatred, and insensitivity. Witnessing such shook Habakkuk’s faith in God.
 6. When brethren today yield to Despair they experience the same strife!

☞ **“S” – SURRENDERS victory (1:2b)**

1. As Despair controls our hearts it leads us to surrender victory – we are convinced that there is no way we can “win”! We have no hope!
 - ☞ Jeremiah 18:12, “(T)hey will say, ‘It’s hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will persist in the stubbornness of his evil heart.’”

See also: Psalm 31:22a; Proverbs 24:10; Jeremiah 8:20.
2. Christians must confront Despair with strong resolve! Let us profess an unyielding commitment (Hebrews 10:35-39).

Winston Churchill attended a preparatory school in Britain (Harrow). He did not do well and graduated in the lower third of his class. After university studies he entered the military and eventually politics being twice elected as Prime Minister. His leadership in WW2 was inspirational. In later life he was invited to address Harrow’s student body. Anticipation was high regarding his speech. The speech was incredibly brief – eight words! “Young gentlemen, Never, Never, Never, Never give up!” He presented the secret to winning. Winning requires persistence.

3. Let all be prepared for Despair’s onslaught. Never give up your sure victory! ☞ (2 Corinthians 4:8, “we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing”; Romans 8:37-39).

☞ **“P” – PLACES all blame for evil on God (1:3).**

1. Habakkuk was angry because he ☞ thought God was forcing him to see rampant evil.
2. Despair often distorts our faith so that we see God all wrong. Consequently, we ☞ often blame God for what He has not done rather than seeing the good He has done.
3. Job 9:17 “He bruises me with a storm and multiplies my wounds without cause”; See also Psalm 77:7-9; Lamentations 3:3-18; 5:22.
4. ☞ Habakkuk failed to see that the evil came from man’s wrong choices and not from God (James 1:13, 17).

☞ **“A” – ALWAYS sees the negative, never the positive (1:4).**

1. As Habakkuk looked around, all he could see was wrong – he was so blinded by Despair that he could not see any positive qualities of God. His words describe a terrible situation:

- a. ☞ God's Word was viewed with contempt (literally means to be dead; of no force; paralyzed).
 - b. ☞ Justice was never visible.
 - c. ☞ Those upholding right were treated with hostility, threats, and treachery.
2. We are often captured by Despair and see only the negatives (Job 3:1-26; ☞ Psalm 42:3, 10, My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"...As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?").
 3. A man had once been active in the Church but had quit becoming only a "pew warmer". It was not uncommon for him to forsake the Lord's assembly if something else conflicted. When asked why he had undergone such a disappointing shift he replied, "I suppose I lost faith in my brethren. I saw how they would act on Sunday and then totally change and act another way the rest of the week. Some lied, others cheated in business. Many did not come to services as they should, etc." The list went on and on. This brother failed to realize that Christ didn't use this standard or He, too, would have given up. He endured a Judas who was a traitor and a Peter who was loud-mouthed. He was in the midst of adulterous women, unscrupulous businessmen, critics, and Pharisaical hypocrites. Yet, He did not give up!

We need to follow Christ's example. Not everyone in the Church is perfect, but not everyone in the Church is a disappointment! We need to do as Jesus, just go ahead and work the work before us and refuse to be discouraged by Despair's attempts to persuade us to ignore the positives by looking only at the negatives!

4. When Despair tempts you to see only the negatives, refuse! Look for the good that is present. ☞ You may have many negatives "before" you as Habakkuk did, but there are also many positives as well!

☞ "I" – INSISTS upon "now" instead of waiting (1:2).

1. Evidently, Habakkuk had been praying about this a long time. He had despaired of an answer and wanted ☞ God to respond "right now".
2. This is another subtle behavior of Despair. It ☞ causes us to place God upon our schedule rather than on His (Jeremiah 18:12, ☞ "(T)hey will say, 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will persist in the stubbornness of his evil heart'"). This always leads to hopelessness in which Despair delights (2 Peter 3:8-10).
3. When we are tempted to join Habakkuk in insisting that God respond on our time schedule, let us remember how foolish such is (Psalm 31:22, "I said in my alarm, 'I am cut off from Your eyes'; nevertheless You heard the sound of my pleadings when I called to You for help").

☞ "R" – RUINS all hope for the future (1:3, 4).

1. Habakkuk did not believe any good could come from the situation he faced. ☞ All future hope was dashed by Despair's control (Job 17:15; Proverbs 13:12a "Hope deferred makes the heart sick").
2. Let us understand that ☞ hope is banished when faith in God is conquered by Despair (Deuteronomy 28:66, "your lives will be hanging in doubt before you; and you will be terrified night and day, and have no assurance of your life;" See also Lamentations 3:18).
3. The believer's hope is sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:19). This hope is founded upon faith that our God can be trusted and will guarantee a great future!

A farmer watched a bird building her nest in a heap of pruned branches. All day long the bird toiled. In the evening the farmer destroyed the work, scattering the tiny twigs that had been diligently brought. The next day the bird, undaunted, began the nest again. Again, at the evening her work was destroyed. Judged by the feeble standards of the bird, ignorant of all beyond the cycle of her instincts, the man was cruel and not to be called good. The third day she began her nest again, but this time she built it in the rose bush beside the kitchen door. In the evening the farmer smiled upon her work and allowed the nest to remain. Day after day she continued her cyclical rounds. The nest was completed. The eggs were laid and warmed beneath her bosom. But long before the time of hatching the pruned branches from where she had been twice driven

were burned. Had the far-seeing farmer allowed the bird to have her own way, all of her nest, her little ones, and her hopes for the season would have been destroyed. She could not see beyond the moment but the farmer saw the end from the beginning.

So, this is like our God who knows the end from the beginning, and the true believer who has submitted himself to God in Christ has received a new set of senses by which he learns to trust God in all things, even those he cannot understand (Donald Grey Barnhouse).

Conclusion:

- I. The New Hampshire troops went forth to engage in the siege of Louisburg, a French stronghold deemed impregnable, called "The Gibraltar of America", in the spirit of the Crusades, with the motto inscribed upon their banners, "Never despair with Christ for leader." It was a constant inspiration. The surrender of the fortress to the English was regarded as little less than miraculous. This event occurred in what is known as "King George's war" in 1745 (Foster, #7988, 245).

As we march onward through life's injustices and disappointments, let us resolve to maintain faithfulness in God.

🔔 2 Thessalonians 1:4, "(W)e speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure."

🔔 Psalm 42:5, "Why are you in despair, my soul? And why are you restless within me? Wait for God, for I will again praise Him for the help of His presence, my God."

2 Corinthians 7:4-9, "(T)he extraordinary greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

- II. When we struggle with Habakkuk's perplexity and feel like screaming because God seems to have forgotten us, let us not surrender to Despair but remember 🔔 Psalm 34:

"I sought the Lord and He answered me, and rescued me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed. This wretched man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are toward their cry for help. The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to eliminate the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The afflictions of the righteous are many, but the Lord rescues him from them all."

- III. "It is impossible for that man to despair who remembers that his helper is Omnipotent." (Jeremy Taylor, Foster, #7985, 245).

🔔 Our Next Lesson: "God Never Sleeps!"