

What's your 'why' question to God?
The book of Habakkuk
January 28, 2015

Bible, paper and pencil for everyone

Read Habakkuk 1:1-4

If you could stand before God and ask any "Why" question, what would it be?

Your question may be a personal one.

Your question may revolve around people you know.

Your question may involve the larger world.

Some of you may know immediately what your question is...you've been thinking about it for quite awhile. If you know, write it down on the slip of paper provided for you. For others, it may take awhile longer. For some of you, the question may come during this message...write it down. For others, it may come when you arrive home or later this week. And for a few, you just may not have any questions for God.

Can some of you share your question with the rest of us?

Habakkuk was a prophet who had some questions for God. In fact, the word "Why?" summarizes chapter one.

Why do you make me look at injustice?

Why do you tolerate wrong?

Why do the wicked prosper?

Why doesn't God do something?

Habakkuk was witnessing violence and wrong-doing in his own country of Judah (what was left of Israel). He wanted to know why God wasn't punishing His own people. Why was evil going unpunished (1:1-4)?

(By the way, Habakkuk's name means "to embrace" as in a wrestler's grip, and hanging on and twisting in the hopes of winning, of getting an answer out of God. Habakkuk is the prophet who wrestled with God).

Apparently, it is ok to question God. Habakkuk did it. Many people who trust in God can and do. The problem is this: God may answer your question, but what if you don't like the answer? What if you don't understand it?

That's what happened to Habakkuk. God answered Habakkuk (1:5-11), but God warns Habakkuk he won't believe it. Verse 5: "Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed. For I am doing something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told."

God informs Habakkuk that God is going to use evil people to conquer evil. God is going to send an even more violent country to conquer Judah. It doesn't make sense. At least to Habakkuk, it doesn't make sense. And Habakkuk doesn't mind telling God that it doesn't make sense (1:13).

Usually when we pray, we have in mind how we want God to answer our prayers. But God sometimes gives answers we are not expecting. When God does answer differently, we think God hasn't answered at all.

Well, when Habakkuk gets his answer, he lets God know that he doesn't like it at all. Then he stands back and says, "I am waiting God. I am waiting for your answer."

2:1 "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint."

I can just see Habakkuk with his hands on his hips waiting for an answer. Amazingly, God answers again. He tells Habakkuk to write it down. It is recorded in chapter 2. God says I have not lost control. The reins of the Cosmos have not slipped out of My holy hands. I am still on course, God says. You may not understand. You may not see the whole picture. You just have to trust me on this one.

There is only one way to live with a holy God that doesn't work the way we understand or would like. There is only one way to live with a God who accomplishes His purposes in ways we cannot anticipate. It is in 2:4:

“the righteous live by their faith”

I want you to write under your 'why' question “live by faith.”

So what does that mean – live by faith?

It means banking your hope on God no matter what.

It means having the confidence that things make sense to God even when they make no sense to us.

It is “the determination to believe when proof is not provided and questions are not answered.” (James Dobson)

Living by faith is central to our relationship with God.

“The fact of the matter is that there are times when we will see a world or a situation run amok and it will seem that God is visibly absent, or noticeably inconspicuous, and conspicuously unnoticeable. And what shall we do? The righteous will live by faith and why? Because there is simply no other way to live.” (Jerry Hillyer)

Well, Habakkuk finally gets it. He decides to trust God. He writes a song. It's recorded in chapter 3.

Habakkuk's faith is not blind. He remembers that God acted in the past. His mind goes to the greatness of God, and he surrenders his concern. Not that he understands. Not that pain is any less. But in the midst of the pain, he is counting on God to come through. That is living by faith.

So, this is what I want you to remember today: maybe it is best to change our 'why' questions to 'who' questions.

James Dobson: "We must never forget that He, after all, *is God*. He is accountable to no one. He is not a genie who pops out of the bottle to satisfy your whims. He is not our servant – we are his. Sometimes He performs mighty miracles on our behalf. Sometimes He chooses to explain His actions in our lives. But at other times when nothing makes sense – when what we are going through is 'not fair' – He simply says, [I AM.] Trust me."

So, look at your 'why' question.

Is there a way for you to answer it with a 'who' answer?

Or, rewrite it as a "who" question?

When you start asking the 'who' questions, you can get some pretty stunning answers. Just read chapter 3 of Habakkuk. Or the Psalms. Or Revelation.

Jim Conway is a pastor whose young daughter developed a cancerous tumor on her leg. He and his wife prayed and prayed but, in the end, the leg had to be amputated.

One of the church members came to Conway and said: "Pastor, I think God has allowed this to happen, because it has brought about a revival in our church."

Conway said, "So, what is God going to do when this revival passes? Chop off Becki's other leg? Then her arm and her other arm?"

He goes on, "when you start reaching for puny answers like that, it dehumanizes those who suffer and insults God. I couldn't explain why Becki had to lose her leg, but I knew the answers being given weren't right."

Jim Conway concluded: "I became deeply aware that there were only two choices that I could make. One was to continue in my anger at God and follow the path of despair I was on. The other choice was to let God be God and somehow say, 'I don't know how all of this fits together. I don't understand the reasons for it. I'm not even going to ask for the explanation. I've chosen to accept the fact that you are God and I'm the servant, not the other way around.'"

"It was in that choice," he writes, "that I came to cope with my situation. I frankly admit that after all these years, I still struggle with some things. But I have come

to recognize that God has a higher purpose and I just don't understand that purpose. I am prepared to wait until eternity to receive answers to my questions, if necessary...*It's either despair, or it's the acceptance of [God's] sovereignty.* Those are the alternatives ... there is nothing in between." .

Let's end with the closing words of Habakkuk:

Read verses 17-19.

I am going to reword this in more contemporary terms, since most of us do not measure our well-being in terms of figs, fruit, and flocks.

Though the Social Security fund is depleted,
Though the stock market crashes,
Though my insurance company goes bankrupt
and my IRA account vaporizes;
Though I lose my job or my business fails,
I will rejoice because of 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,
he enables me to go on the heights.

Amen.