



Searching for God Almighty
A Devotional Through Habakkuk

Before You Begin

My intention behind this devotional is for it to be a tool for you to engage with God in intimate conversation as you walk through the book of Habakkuk. These devotions were written to allow for you, the reader, to interact with the words of the Lord given through the prophet Habakkuk in a multitude of different ways. My prayer for you as you engage with this devotional is that the words of God will be active and alive as you hear them again and again. There will be four days of devotions that correspond with each passage from Habakkuk. Knowing that at times in our week, there are both expected and unexpected circumstances that may make it difficult to carve out quality time to sit with the Lord, I have built in a few days each week to provide room for these moments.

As you work through this devotional, you will be re-reading the passage multiple times throughout the week. Please take time to carefully read each time like it was the first time. Savor every word for each word is the voice of the Lord speaking to your heart. Allow time for the Holy Spirit to shape your heart as you engage with this devotional. I truly believe that most fruitful part of each devotion is the time that you will spend in the Word of God. My words are designed to just be an aid in engaging with the words of truth.

In addition to this devotional booklet, there are also resources that correspond with specific days available on our website, www.newhopenorth.org. You can access these resources by clicking on the Habakkuk Devotional Tab on our website and then clicking on the corresponding resource. The devotional days where additional resources are provided will clearly state it in the devotional reading.

Finally, this devotion is designed to be more than just one more thing to add to your daily life. This is intended to be a coveted time sitting and conversing with God Almighty. I pray this devotional draws you into closer relationship with the One who has been pursuing you since before time began. I know that the Lord will be faithful to His promise as you take time with this devotion. As you seek Him, you will find Him. God bless your journey!

- Paul Allen

Week 1:2 • Habakkuk 1:1-4

Opening Lines of Communication

Before you begin today, take a moment to prepare your heart to meet with the Lord. Remember, this time of devotion is designed to be an intimate time between you and the Lord. Carve out the time in your schedule before you start to make sure that you can spend this time without distraction. Set yourself up to gain the most from these few minutes with your Heavenly Father.

Begin today's devotion opening your Bible once again to the start of the book of Habakkuk, and take a few moments to read through Habakkuk 1:1-4. As you read, seek to take notice of Habakkuk's heart. What was Habakkuk's concern? What led him to stop and seek out the highest authority in the land, God Himself?

Habakkuk was a prophet of the Lord during the time before the Southern Kingdom of Israel would be taken into captivity by the Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE. In the decades leading up to the captivity of the Southern Kingdom of Israel, the nation's kings fail to fulfill God's calling in their lives. The last thirty plus years of the reign of the kings in Israel is marked by one king after another "doing evil in the eyes of the Lord (2 Kings 23:37). The old adage was proven true as well that where the leader leads, the people will follow. Habakkuk looks at his fellow brethren, and he is overwhelmed by the evil atrocities that they were committing against one another. Everything he sees shakes him to his very core because it so stands against the core values upon which the nation was built.

So in response, Habakkuk turns to the One who instilled those values into the foundation of the nation. He turns to the Lord and cries out, "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" Habakkuk opens a line of communication to the Lord Almighty to speak about what he sees and how he is currently failing to see the Lord respond. Habakkuk is confronted with monumental brokenness and His heart continues to be dismayed because the all-powerful God, in whom he trusts, appears to be doing nothing to address the destruction, violence and injustice.

Pause for a moment. Can you identify with Habakkuk? When you look at the nation in which we live, do you see destruction, violence and injustice occurring around us? Do you see the unjust committing atrocities against their fellow man without consequence? How about within your own family or friend circle? Are there individuals who are living in accordance with values that stand in opposition to the values by which they were raised?

In response to the brokenness around you, do you throw your hands up in the air and give up or do you turn to the all-powerful God to seek why is this being allowed to happen? When I look at Habakkuk's cry to the Lord, my spirit is checked by the accusative words of the prophet toward Almighty God, but at the same time, I see the authenticity of Habakkuk's response. God desires real and open lines of communication with His people. When was the last time that you had a real conversation with God, full of emotion, about what you experience during your day? Let today be the day that you have a real, authentic conversation with God.

Try this. Grab an empty chair and place it across from you. Close our eyes and picture the Lord coming in a sitting across from you. Now, open your eyes and begin your conversation with the Lord. Do not just talk the whole time. When it would be natural for the Lord to respond to what you have said, pause and allow Him to respond. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks. Afterwards, take time to reflect on your conversation. Record your thoughts below.

Week 2:1 • Habakkuk 1:5-11

God Will Respond

As you prepare to sit this week with the Lord, it may be beneficial to listen to the sermon that corresponds with this week's passage. If you were unable to hear the sermon live, a recording of the message is available on our website, www.newhopenorth.org, by clicking on Sermons under the Resource tab at the top of the webpage. Before you begin reading the devotion for today, take some time to read Habakkuk 1:1-11. Hear the cry of Habakkuk and the response of the Lord together.

When I was a child, I remember having to stay overnight in the hospital. In the middle of the night, I was awoken by shots of pain. I remember being told by the nurse and my parents that if I needed anything all I had to do was call for the nurse and they would be there to see what I needed. I remember calling out and waiting for someone to respond. I called out multiple times to no avail. No one heard my cry. There was an immediate wave of panic and fear that took hold. My heart felt in the moment abandoned and alone. Of course in my stubbornness, I shook off those feelings and got out of bed to go find someone, but it did not change the truth that when we feel as though we are unheard, it results in feelings of isolation and abandonment.

Habakkuk opens his book with the cry to the Lord asking if He is even listening. How often do we cry out to the Lord and wonder if He is even listening? Scripture is clear though that when we cry out to God, He is faithful to hear our cry. Habakkuk conveys this same truth as the Lord responds to Habakkuk's cry. Before we move on to how the Lord responds, I want us to pause and just take in the truth that the Lord will always respond to our cries.

Pause. Close your eyes and picture the Lord in heaven sitting on His throne. The angels surround Him singing, "Holy, Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty." There is a tremendous cloud of witnesses that are worshipping the Lord God as He sits on His throne. Jesus sits regally at the right hand of the throne of the Almighty. Everything is picture perfect. And yet, as you cry out, God hears your cry and He responds. King David pictured this exact scene as he wrote Psalm 8:4:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

King David stood in awe of all that the Lord has done, and he is overwhelmed when he grasps that this same God who placed the very stars in the sky cared intimately about him. The God of the Universe who is holding together the very fabric of the universe cares enough for you that He knows the number of hairs on your head and each word that you will say before it is even on the tip of your tongue. This is the proof in our daily lives that God will always hear our cries and be faithful to respond.

In this very moment, I want to challenge you to cry out to the Lord. Whatever is weighing down your heart, give it to the Lord right now. Have that conversation with Him. If you need to yell, then yell. If you need to weep, weep. Just cry out to Him. This is what the Lord desires because He wants to be glorified through His response. If needed, use the space below to begin the conversation.

Week 2:2 • Habakkuk 1:5-11

The Unbelievable

Before you jump into today's devotion, take a moment to reflect on the conversation that you had with the Lord at the conclusion of the last devotion. Did you hold back at all? If so, take the time at the start of this devotion to finish that conversation with the Lord. As you conclude, take a few moments to reread Habakkuk 1:5-11. Take careful notice of the plan that the Lord is going to unfurl in response to Habakkuk's cry.

I had been traveling in the car for over an hour cruising down a long stretch of switchback highway weaving through the hillside of the northeastern portion of the island of Maui along the Road to Hana. The lead vehicle in our party pulls over to the shoulder of the road and the passengers proceed to exit the vehicle. Along the shoulder of the road, there is nothing but dense jungle forest. Our guide informs us that the best waterfall hike begins right here. Questioning in my mind whether any waterfall was worth having to navigate this dense jungle, I put on a brave face for the rest of my team as I encourage them to start following the guide as he hacks his way into the jungle. We quickly spot a narrow path and begin journeying deeper into the trees.

We approach an opening in the jungle canopy and before us, rushing down the face of the rock is a waterfall twenty-five feet high. It is a beautiful sight that causes us all to pause in wonder. Our gaze is broken as our guide yells from the front to keep pressing on. According to him, there was nothing to see here.

We continue down twisting trails filled with hand over hand climbs and rocky descents. After about almost two hours of trekking through the trees, our group is abruptly halted by a canyon edge cut by the river that lay ten feet below where we were standing. Our guide informs us that to get to the waterfall we desired to see, we would have to jump into the river and swim upstream before having to ascend another waterfall at the river's end. There was no way that this waterfall would be worth everything that we had already endured and now we were to jump into a river and ascend a waterfall to get where we wanted to go. I could not imagine how this trip would not end with disappointment.

As my hands reached the top of the waterfall ascent, my eyes sparkled in disbelief. The beauty of what laid in front of me was indescribable. The water flowed in perfect descent from a cliff nearly a hundred feet in the air. The pool at the base of the waterfall was so perfectly still even though the waterfall was raging at its edge. I immediately forgot about the journey through the jungle and the multiple hand over hand climbs.

God responds to Habakkuk's cry with this plan, "Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed." The Lord to whom Habakkuk cried out is the same Lord who created the beauty of the sunrise and sunset. He carefully placed each waterfall, mountain top, and body of water in place. His creation screams of the wonder of His hand. God is in the business of accomplishing the unbelievable. The Lord alone is capable of doing that which you "would not believe even if you were told."

If this is the hand of God at work, why do we struggle to make known to Him that which we struggle with? We place our trust in the work of our hands and yet, does not that work pale in comparison to the work of His hands? God desires to shift our perspective to see and trust in what He can accomplish over what we can accomplish on our own. This is a difficult shift that requires our hearts to constantly be reminded of.

Today, I want to challenge you to intentionally remind your heart of the unbelievable work of God's hand. Intentionally carve out time today to spend in God's creation. Make plans to find a quiet place to see the sunset or take a drive to take in the wonder of the beauty of God's creation. As you are soaking in the unbelievable wonder of God's handiwork, describe what you are seeing and feeling to the Lord. Share the moment with the Lord. In the space below, write where you went as a reminder of where you saw God's hand to work.

Week 2:3 • Habakkuk 1:5-11

God's Judgment

As you sit to spend time with our Father above in devotion today, open your time in prayer, praising the Lord for the evidence of His handiwork that surrounds you. At the conclusion of your time in prayer, take a few moments to read Habakkuk 1:1-11. Take notice of the judgment that the Lord lines out in verses 5-11 compared to the concerns of Habakkuk in verses 1-4. For more on today's devotion see the video on our website, www.newhopenorth.org.

When I was preparing to enter the seventh grade, my father received orders to Stuttgart, Germany. That summer, my family and I packed everything we owned and prepared for the move across the Atlantic Ocean. As we settled in our new home, I was preparing myself to start a new school year at a new school.

Sadly, on the very first day, I started on the wrong foot with a couple of boys in my grade. These boys would follow me home from school everyday mocking me and calling me names. Full of frustration and not knowing how to handle these boys, I sat with my mother at the dining room table and asked for help. My mother kindly told me to turn the other cheek. As she arose from the table to go back to finish dinner preparations, she closed our discussion with one final comment that I will never forget. "If those boys do not respond to your patience and they continue mocking you, you may have to give them exactly what they are asking for."

In my household, what my mother had just said had profound meaning. We were raised to have compassion and to treat others as we desired to be treated. But, my parents also taught me that I must have respect for myself and when others continually seek to tear others down even in the face of clear expectations to stop, then I had the right to defend myself.

I remember very clearly the day that everything came to a head between myself and these boys. Once again, they followed me home from school. I turned multiple times and told them to ride away and leave me alone. As I walked across the field before my neighborhood, the boys rode in front of me and stopped. As they confronted me, I dropped my backpack and prepared myself to do whatever was necessary to stand up for myself.

Habakkuk cries out to the Lord rebuking Him for not responding to the brokenness, violence and injustice that was so evident in Israel. The Lord though is faithful to respond to Habakkuk's cry. God's response to the brokenness, violence and injustice seen amongst His people has been in the works long before Habakkuk cried out. The Lord has allowed Babylon to rise to power. He has allowed them to be positioned to come and discipline His people. Through Babylon, the Lord will show His people how fruitless their pursuits have been. All the money, property and position those in power have obtained at the cost of their people will be worth nothing as the Babylonians conquer the nation. The judgment of the Lord is most often allowing us to experience the very thing that we are crying out against. In the nation of Israel's case, Habakkuk cried out against the brokenness that the Israelites were causing to one another. Those in power were taking the land and wealth of those that were less fortunate. God's judgment saw the Babylonians take the very same things from those who were in power.

Have you ever felt like you were experiencing God's judgment? How did your experience impact your relationship with God? What did you learn from that experience with God? Take some time to write about your experience below.

Week 2:4 • Habakkuk 1:5-11

God Above All Else

As you close out this week in Habakkuk, take a few moments to re-read Habakkuk 1:5-11. Take notice of the lengthy description of the might of the nation of Babylon.

When I was an AWANA commander, our AWANA club would always open the evening's activities by singing a few songs. The favorite song of the AWANA students was "My God is so Big." The verse of the song states, "Our God is so strong and so mighty there is nothing our God cannot do." It is such a simple line, but the impact of this line is profound. Our God is so strong and so mighty that there is nothing that is impossible for Him to do.

As the Lord replies to Habakkuk's cry, He directs Habakkuk to see the might of the enemy that the Lord has allowed to rise up against the Israelites. The Lord scribes them as "a ruthless and impetuous people." They are a conquering army that will sweep across the land. They are "feared and dreaded" by every nation that surrounds them. Their horses are compared to wild animals and horsemen descend upon their enemies like vultures scavenging upon their prey. The Babylonian army destroys kings and kingdoms, no matter how mighty the king might believe that he is.

The Lord paints this picture of the mighty army of Babylon that would make any man wonder how they could stand against them. Remember though what the Lord said to Habakkuk at the opening of His response, "I am raising up the Babylonians." This mighty army that laid before the Israelites was raised up by the Lord. In the Lord's description of the Babylonians, the Lord stated that they were a law unto themselves for they did not see any might as great as their own, but it is God who is ultimately in control of them. It was the Lord that allowed them to rise for the specific purpose of disciplining His people.

So often, our circumstances appear to us to be so great, daunting and insurmountable. Our hearts become wrapped up in the appearance of what lies in front of us, we fail to see beyond our circumstances to the One who is ultimately in control. God, the One who is above all else, is sovereign over all things. No matter how great or daunting what lies in front of us may seem, it does not change the foundational truth that not only is God greater than our circumstances but that God is ultimately in control of our circumstances. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul states this truth in this way:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

Paul calls into check our perspective of what we face each day. Every situation a nod circumstance is nothing more than what is common to man. How does this challenge your view of what you face? Are you giving your circumstances more power, control and credit than it deserves? Paul also states that every situation we face is within our ability to bear with the Lord. Even the Babylonians that swooped down on Israel were within their ability to bear with God. The key to facing the difficult situations that arise each day is to face them with the Lord. We all too often seek to face them alone and then cry out to the Lord when we stumble. God though is continually preaching to our hearts of our need for Him. Do you need to "yoke" yourself to the Lord to face what is in front of you? Take some time to have this discussion with the Lord. Write your thoughts below.

Week 3:1 • Habakkuk 1:12-17

When Anger Burns

Today, as you prepare your heart to sit with the Lord, take some time to carefully read Habakkuk 1:12-17. Take careful notice of the emotion behind the words of Habakkuk as he responds to the Lord's judgment.

Have you ever been angry with the Lord? Have you ever been so overwhelmed by your circumstances or the situation that you find yourself in that your anger just begins to burn against the Lord for not rescuing you or for putting you in this position in the first place? Have you been angry with the Lord for the people that He has put in your life? Anger is a powerful and natural emotion. For many of us, anger is our initial response to sin, brokenness, injustice and contempt around us. I know for myself, anger is my knee-jerk response to anything and everything that I do not desire in the moment. I have spent many years having to expand my “emotional toolbar” to include more appropriate emotional responses to life’s situations.

Habakkuk hears the response of the Lord to address the brokenness, violence and injustice being committed amongst his brethren. The Lord has raised up the brutal Babylonians to come and give the Israelites exactly what they are giving to one another. Habakkuk’s response to the Lord’s action is continued anger. He sees the wickedness of the Babylonians and his mind immediately begins to imagine the worst case scenario. His people will be wiped out by the might and power of the Babylonians. Their ruthless reputation precedes them and, Habakkuk’s anger burns against the Lord for allowing these ruthless, godless people to come and conquer God’s chosen.

Habakkuk’s anger against the Lord burns because he disagrees with the course of judgment that the Lord has decided to take. Yes, Habakkuk was crying out to God for the injustice being carried out by the Israelites toward one another but, Habakkuk never wanted the Lord’s people to suffer to this extent. He had other plans in mind. It was the summer before my seventh grade school year. I was so excited for school to begin because I was going to be reunited with my friends. My parents had enrolled me the year before in a small private school. I never really felt liked I fit in and had a hard time making friends. The next year was going to be all I hoped it would be. As the midpoint of summer approached, my excitement continued to build until my father came home one July night and informed us that he had been given orders by the army. We would be stationed in Stuttgart, Germany the next month. I was so angry. How could my father do this to me? Did he not understand that he was taking me from my friends yet again?

I am not sure if I ever really moved past my frustration and anger toward my parents. All I could think about was what they had cost me by their decision. Now, looking back, I realize that my father had very little choice in the decision. I also realize that the move was for the good of our family and our future. What was sacrificed was worth what was gained.

Take some time to look back upon the moments where your anger has burned against the Lord. What came out of your situation? How was the hand of the Lord evident? Did good come from your hardship and pain? Did growth and maturity take place? What would be your emotional response be now that you see what God has accomplished through your difficult season? Write your response to the Lord now in the space provided.

Week 3:2 • Habakkuk 1:12-17

Dangerous Comparison

As you sit in conversation with the Lord, take some time to re-read Habakkuk 1:12-17. Take special notice of the description of the Babylonians and the Israelites given by Habakkuk.

My wife has this saying that has become the calling card for our family. “It takes the whole family to make this family run.” In other words, it takes every member of our family doing their part to make this family successful each day. To live this out, every member of our family has chores that are designed to help contribute to the overall success of the family. My daughter has been assigned dishes. This chore used to belong to her older brother. The other day, I walked into the kitchen to get a glass of water. I was appalled at the state of the kitchen sink. There was a thin film of scum that encircled the entire sink. The faucet was filthy with multiple layers of gunk building up around the base. I called my daughter into the kitchen to point out the state of the kitchen so that she could address the issues. Upon showing her all of the dirt and grime, my daughter responds with, “At least it is not as bad as it was when my brother was doing dishes!”

How often have you heard a similar response from others concerning the job before them? How often have you compared your poor decision to that of another individual’s in order to make your decision appear better? The act of justifying our sin by comparing it to the sin of another is a dangerous position to find ourselves in.

Habakkuk’s response to the Lord’s judgment against the nation is the justification of sin by comparison. In verse 13, Habakkuk makes note that the Lord’s eyes are pure and cannot tolerate wrong, but in the very same breath, he justifies the sin of the Israelites, which he was crying out to the Lord about earlier, by comparing their sin to the sin of the Babylonians. Habakkuk’s position is that since the Babylonians are worse sinners than the Israelites, God should not punish the Israelites sin by using worse sinners against them. In other words, Habakkuk did not agree with the severity of the judgment of the Lord against his people so Habakkuk decides to try to paint the Israelites in a better light by emphasizing the wickedness of the Babylonians to shift the Lord’s judgment away from Israel.

Comparing our mistakes and sins to those of others does nothing more than show that mistakes and sins have been committed. Your sin is not made right by comparing it to the sin of another. This comparison is dangerous to our very souls for the intent of the comparison is to make our sin righteous by comparing it to a sin that is worse. Once again, the only truth shown in these moments is that sin abounds.

Have you ever tried to justify your sin to the Lord by comparing it to the sin of another? Have you justified your sin by saying, “well my vice is small compared to what the neighbors are doing?” God never compares our sins to those of another to determine the righteousness of our actions. Sin is sin before the Lord because the standard by which He judges sin is His righteousness. God is righteous and, He will be faithful to judge all sin. He knows our hearts and knows our sin. His desire is that we would repent of our sin that our sin would not become a stumbling block in our relationship with Him.

Take some time today to reflect on your sin and the Lord. Do you need to repent of your sin, even your sin of comparison? The Lord says that as we confess our sin, He is faithful to forgive us. Feel the Lord’s forgiveness today as you spend these moments with Him. Write about your experience in the space below.

Week 3:3 • Habakkuk 1:12-17

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

As you prepare for your moments with God today, take some time to pray to the Lord. Ask Him to prepare your heart to hear from the Holy Spirit as you engage with His Word today. Take time once again to read Habakkuk 1:12-17. For more thoughts on today's devotion, tune into a short video on our website, www.newhopenorth.org.

It was the phone call that no one wants to receive. A classmate of mine had been involved in a horrible accident and did not survive the crash. Suddenly, in that moment, death became real. In this moment, my outlook on the world was forever changed. Mourning began to set in. My mourning was not just for my friend, but I mourned for myself. I would never again hear his voice, see his smile, or share in a friendly word of encouragement. I mourned all of the possibilities that were lost in this tragic moment.

As I mourned, I was forced to turn to the Lord for comfort and answers. I cried out to Him, "Why? Why was his life cut short? How? How could You let this happen?" My heart was conflicted. This Lord that I loved so much and believed could do anything had allowed my friend to die. Why did God not step in and do the miraculous? The newspaper is filled with stories of people less deserving experiencing the miraculous. Where was my friend's miracle?

At the core of what I was experiencing laid this foundational question to my faith, "Why does God allow suffering?" This question is rooted in our understanding of the character of God Himself. We hold to the truth of these two statements:

God is good. Everything about God is by nature good.

God is all-powerful. He is capable of anything.

These statements on their own make perfect sense and many of us live our lives in perfect harmony clinging to the truth of these statements until something catastrophic occurs that forces a new true statement into the mix. When sin and brokenness invade our lives, it forces us to add this statement to our truths:

Evil exists. People suffer at the hands of evil.

How can the Lord who is good and capable of accomplishing allow evil to invoke suffering, pain and sorrow upon His creation? The addition of this new statement which finds truth in the experiences of our everyday life seems to stand in opposition to the harmony shared by the truths of the character of God. For many of us, especially when trying to wrestle with this in the midst of our own suffering, these opposing statements lead us to more questions. Is God truly good since evil exists? Is God unable to do anything about evil? If God can not do anything about evil, then is evil greater than God? Does God enjoy watching the suffering of His creation? If He does not, why has He failed to eradicate evil from His creation? These questions lead to more heartache, pain and confusion. Some of us have even just swept these issues "under the rug" in order to still hold to our previous harmony of God being in control.

It is a misperception to see these three statement in opposition with one another. The truth is that all three statements are absolutely true. God is good and all-powerful and, evil does exist. While these statements are all true, they are not in opposition with one another. Instead, a slight shift in our perspective would allow us to see how the addition of the third statement, evil exists, strengthens the impact of the first two statements.

God is present in our suffering. He tells us that He will never leave us or forsake us, which means in our darkest hour, when evil seems to reign, God is present with us. Romans 8:28 states:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

God is present in our suffering to work our suffering into something for our good. Through the pain and mourning I experienced after the loss of my friend, I learned about compassion and empathy. Take some time today to look back at some of the most difficult moments of your life. What good has the Lord worked from your suffering? Thank the Lord for His faithfulness to be with you in your suffering. Record your thoughts in the space provided.



Week 3:4 • Habakkuk 1:12-17

Authentic Relationship

As you prepare to close out this week of conversations with the Lord, I want to encourage you to engage in an in-depth conversation with God today. Carve out a little extra time to sit with the Lord. Place an empty chair across from you if that will help. As you begin, read Habakkuk 1:12-17 and hear carefully the heart of Habakkuk as he responds to God.

The summer after my senior year in high school started with such promise. Every aspect of this pivotal transition in my life seemed to be falling into place. My heart was set on pursuing a career to be a youth pastor. I was going to follow in the footsteps of my youth pastor who had been so instrumental in my life. I made plans to attend the same school that he attended. Plans were made to intern under the leadership of my youth pastor to gain experience as I went to school to gain knowledge. If this was not perfect enough, my high school sweetheart and I were in love and were planning a future together. Everything seemed too good to be true... it seemed too good because it was.

In one day, my entire plan blew up before my very eyes. I came home after work one summer evening and my father was waiting for me on our back deck. We shared in a long conversation concerning their ability to financially support my plans. Long story short, I was going to alter my plans of attending the university I had desired. I remained undeterred though. Tonight was youth group and God was going to cover me. At youth group, my youth pastor made an announcement that he was moving to Fairbanks, Alaska. My plans to intern under him quickly fell apart. Devastated but still holding out hope, I called my high school sweetheart for comfort, but on the other end of the line, I was met with questions about how our relationship was going to continue through so many changes. Everything that I had placed my hope in disintegrated in less than a day.

I was so angry with God as I sat alone in my room that evening. How could God allow these things to happen? I had been a faithful follower. My whole life was dedicated to Him and to serving His people. Why was God so unwilling to bless me? Why was God's response to my plan pain, sorrow and sadness? I cried myself to sleep trying to make sense of it all.

Have you ever been really angry with the Lord over your circumstances? Have you ever questioned the Lord for His decisions in how things were progressing in your life? Have you ever yelled at God for the outcome of situation? If you have, well done. Yes, well done. This is exactly what God desires from and for His people.

Since the very dawn of time, God has been pursuing His creation to share in an authentic relationship. God wants and cares about all of who we are. In Psalm 139, David writes about the relationship that God desires with His creation. David describes God as One who cares about every aspect of our lives. He knows our thoughts before we do. He knows our next word before we say it. He cares for us enough that He places His hand upon us. His love for us knows no bounds, even when we run from Him, God is faithful to follow. God cares about every aspect, big and small, of our lives, especially when we are angry, mourning, confused, and hopeless. He is our heavenly father who desires to embrace us in our darkest moments.

When was the last time that you shared with the Lord what happened during your day? You share such things with your family, why would sharing it with God be different? When was the last time that you spoke with God about your sorrows, disappointments, frustrations? Our relationship with God is incomplete if we are unwilling to share our whole self with Him? Today, spend some time in conversation with God. Tell Him about your day, your frustrations, your hope. Keep talking until you run out of things to share. Take note of the condition of your heart and your relationship with God after you share.

Authentic relationship is the desire of the Lord.

Week 4:1 · Habakkuk 2:1-5

Patient Indignation

Today, as you prepare to sit with the Lord, take a few moments to reflect over the past three weeks. How has your relationship with God changed or evolved? What are you looking forward to in regards to your relationship with God in the weeks to come? Take time to share these things with the Lord. Before reading today's devotion, please take time to read Habakkuk 2:1-5.

Anyone who has siblings can tell you of moments where they have placed their ear up to the door or the wall while their sibling was in discipline talks with their parents. This picture becomes especially true when the discipline talk comes after the sibling did something to harm the one listening at the door. There is something in each of us that desires to witness “justice be served” to those who have done wrong.

As the second chapter of Habakkuk opens, we find the prophet positioning himself at “the door” awaiting God’s judgment upon the Babylonians. At the close of the first chapter, Habakkuk argued against the Lord’s use of Babylon to judge the sins of Israel. Habakkuk, convinced that the Lord would see Babylon as he had, awaits on watch to see the Lord move in swift judgment against this evil nation. Habakkuk is sitting and waiting in patient indignation for the Lord to fulfill Habakkuk’s wishes. This is a scary position that the prophet of the Lord has placed himself in. He is awaiting the Lord to do what he desires.

God is not a genie in a bottle waiting idly by to fulfill the desires of His people. God is an active, sovereign being that is above all else. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. There is a tremendous arrogance that all of us are guilty of from time to time where we deceive ourselves into believing that we can and should be exalted above God. We walk through life demanding that the Lord bless our efforts and supernaturally supports our plans. It is out of our ignorance and naivety that we desire such a response from God.

There are great consequences from having a low view of the Lord. When we see God as being subservient to our wants and demands, we remove the possibility of our growth and maturity. Our growth and maturity in the Lord comes most often in times of trial and tribulation where we are faced with difficult decisions that are larger than ourselves. No one asks to be put in situations where we are reminded of how truly small we are, but more often than not, it is these moments that lead to the great strides in our growth and maturity as our perspective and understanding of who God is in comparison to us shifts and changes. There is great comfort and life changing power in the knowledge that our Heavenly Father is bigger, greater and stronger than we are. Sometimes, we need to be placed in situations that make these truths all the more real.

How has your heart been relating to the Lord lately? Have you been viewing God more as a genie in a bottle during this season of life? Or maybe, you find yourself in a season of feeling very small and helpless? What needs to shift in your perspective of who God is for you to grow and mature through this season? God promises to be patient and to meet us where we are at for the sake of our growth and maturity.

Today, spend time in prayer. Describe to the Lord the whole gambit of emotions that you are experiencing in regard to your relationship with Him. Take time for some honest self-reflection. Identify one key area that you need to shift your perspective of the Lord. Write it down in the space below and then write a specific plan about how you are intentionally going to work on shifting your perspective.

Week 4:2 • Habakkuk 2:6-14

Knowing the End of the Story

As you prepare for your time with God today, take some moments to re-read Habakkuk 2:1-5. Pay careful attention to the Lord's response to Habakkuk. Hear the words as if the Lord was speaking to you. Think about what your response would be as your heard these words being spoken. Think about how the response of the Lord would impact your perspective on the world.

Football has been an important part of my life since I was a child. My mother was a huge San Francisco 49ers fan. I remember very vividly watching Joe Montana, Jerry Rice and Roger Craig score touchdown after touchdown on Sunday afternoons after church.

In my household though, the experience of watching the games was different than most households. My mother would never watch the game with us. Instead, she would tape the games and, while the game was being played live, she would find odd projects by which to busy herself to keep her from sneaking a peek. She jokingly believed that her presence in watching her team play might have a dramatic impact on the players ability to win. So, she would wait until the game ended and ask who had been the victor. If the 49ers had successfully won the game, my mother would take her place on the couch and watch how the victory had been accomplished.

As a child, I believed that this was just one of the strange quirks that made my mother who she was, but now, looking back, I realize what was happening. My mother felt a real emotional connection with her team. She desired for them to win with such fervor that watching them play each down brought anxiety and stress. Every play held with it the ability to create tremendous anxiety or to bring great relief. All of this build up and stress became emotionally draining. My mother would feel like she had run a marathon after each game because of the emotional roller coaster that she would put herself on as she rooted for her team. All of this stress and anxiety changed though when she knew the outcome of the game. When she knew that her team would be victorious in the end, the interception thrown at the close of the third quarter now becomes a story of overcoming instead of a crushing blow of defeat. Her anxiety changed to joyous anticipation as she watched knowing that no matter how greatly disparaging the scoreboard appeared, the end of the game would result in victory.

The Lord responds to Habakkuk's despair by telling him the end of the story. Habakkuk was in despair because of his fear of what would happen to his people at the hands of the Babylonians. God meets Habakkuk's fear by revealing to him the end of the story. "The righteous will live by his faith." The Lord reminds Habakkuk that He is not going to abandon His people. Rather, their time in Babylon will be for their growth, an effort to turn them back to their faith. God will deal with Babylon. They will be judged for their faithlessness and horrible actions, but for the time being, God desires to use them for the good of His people. Though their judgment will linger, take heart because you know the end of the story.

Pause. Take a moment of reflection. Have you been overwhelmed by anxiety, stress and despair as a result of the brokenness, sin, and atrocities that you see in the world? Are you overcome by the delay in relief from the cries of sorrow and pain in your life? Have you questioned the Lord as to when will it all end? Record your thoughts.

Pause. Now reflect on the end of the story. God is victorious. He will restore righteousness, love and compassion. He will judge the sinful and wicked. He will restore order. How does this impact your response? Record your thoughts. Praise the Lord for revealing to us the end of the story.

Week 4:4 · Habakkuk 2:1-5

The Patience of the Lord

In preparation for your time with the Lord today, spend some time in prayer with the Lord. Converse with Him your thoughts over the last few days. Sit patiently and listen for His response. Listen intently for the voice of the Holy Spirit. After you close in prayer, take time to read the entire book of Habakkuk (it is only three chapters, you can do it). Listen carefully for the voice of God throughout the book.

In ancient warfare, the armies of each nation would meet outside of the cities, in fields and on hillsides, in order to face one another without destroying the cities which were the spoils of the war. The battles were rarely swift. Armies would make camp for weeks or months at a time before a victor prevailed.

For the citizens in the cities, there was great anticipation, anxiety, stress and worry. Would their army be victorious and bring back the spoils of war? Or would the enemy prevail and be on the march to take the city and its citizens captive? You can imagine the emotional rollercoaster that the citizens would experience as they waited for news from the battlefield.

As the battle would reach its close, the victorious army would send a messenger or herald to announce the good news or euangelion (oo-on-gay-lee-on) to the citizens of the city. This good news came with, not only the report of victory from the battlefield, the promise of prosperity and growth as a result of the victory that had been won. The city would soon experience growth as a result of the coming spoils of war. The citizens now just needed to wait patiently as their king returned from the battlefield with the spoils in tote.

The Lord responds to Habakkuk's cry with an euangelion. He tells Habakkuk to write down the good news in such a way that a herald could take it to the people. The good news that Habakkuk was to give to the people was of the victory that the Lord had already won over their enemies. Not only was the good news of the victory, but the Lord also sent the promise of the spoils of war to be given to those who lived by faith.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, how can the Lord be informing of a victory when the people were preparing to go into captivity at the hands of their enemies? The nation of Israel would be taken into Babylonian captivity shortly after the writing of Habakkuk, but the Babylonians were never the real enemy of the nation of Israel. The true enemy that the Lord had won victory over for His people was against their unfaithfulness. The nation had given itself over to the worship of false gods and had forgotten about the one true God over Israel. The Lord had won the victory over their unfaithfulness by using the Babylonian captivity to bring His people back into focus. The people of Israel would experience the spill of war as they were released from captivity to inhabit the land once again. The Lord would be their God and they would experience salvation and a renewed relationship with the Lord, their King. For now, they would have to hold onto the promise and wait to experience the fullness of the Lord's victory.

Today, God has given us an euangelion proclaiming His victory over sin and death. While it does not yet feel like sin and death has been conquered, the Lord calls for our patience as we await His return. Upon His coming, we will receive the spoils of war. Death and sin will lay vanquished at our feet. The patience of the Lord does not deny the truth of His victory. Instead, His lingering gives the good news the opportunity to be spread to every ear that all may place their faith in the Victorious One.

How are you doing holding onto the promise of the Lord in the midst of your circumstances? Does it feel at times like the battle is still raging? How does the patience of the Lord effect your faith and your ability to remain steadfast? Write your response to God's victory in the space below.

Week 5:1 • Habakkuk 2:6-14

Who Sits on Your Throne

In preparation for your time with God this week, I want to encourage you to take time to listen to the corresponding message to Habakkuk 2:6-14 by clicking on the Sermon tab on our website, www.newhopenorth.org. As you prepare for your time with the Lord, please take time to read Habakkuk 2:6-14.

Disney's animated classic, *The Sword in the Stone*, opens with a song sung by Fred Darian. The song tells the background for which the story of King Arthur would be built. As the song goes:

*The good king had died
And no one could decide
Who was rightful heir to the throne*

The song continues describing the war that took place by factions seeking to take the throne. Hope was not found in the land until a mysterious stone appeared in London Town with a sword held captive in its grasp. Inscribed upon the sword was the phrase, "Whoso pulleth this sword from this stone and anvil is rightwise king born of England".

Accordingly, warring ceased in the land as each faction sent men of strength to pull the sword from the stone. Sadly, no one was found who could pull the sword free so the throne remained empty. On the other hand, the warring between the factions continued to cease because there was a standard presented for who should be the king, the one who pulled the sword.

Our lives often resemble the picture of England before the stone and the sword appeared. Our hearts are battlefields for all of the priorities, desires and responsibilities that are continually warring for control and dominance in our lives. At times, it may feel like everything and everyone is clawing to take the throne of our lives. How do you feel in these moments? What is your response to the constant battle for control? What priority or desire usually "wins" out in the end?

Jesus describes this exact scenario in Matthew 6:19-24. This passage is found in the middle of the sermon on the mount as Jesus teaches the crowd that had gathered along the mountainside. Jesus presents this battle for the dominance of our hearts by repeatedly presenting two opposing positions seeking control. First, there are the opposing views of where our treasure lies, here on earth or in heaven. Jesus is pointing us to our priorities. Are our priorities centered on earthly comfort and pursuit or are they centered on godly and eternal things? Next, Jesus makes reference to the eye. Are our eyes set on things that are good or are our eyes continually drawn toward dark and bad things? Finally, Jesus makes reference to the masters that seek dominance in our life. Are we being mastered by God or by money, for we can not be mastered by both. In all of this, Jesus makes it clear that whatever is dominant will hold our heart and therefore, rule our life.

Where does your treasure lie? Are you storing up earthly things to bring you joy, happiness and contentment tomorrow? Are you giving away earthly things in order to glorify the Lord? Is your hope for tomorrow centered on the Lord? Is your hope centered on the outcome of the political race, the economy, or some other physical outcome? Is the Lord the master, king and ruler of your life and heart? What is the evidence in your life that He is on the throne? What desire, priority or responsibility seems to most often rival God for dominance of your heart? Use the space below to record your reflection on these thoughts. Over the next few days, we will examine the specific influences spoken by the Lord in Habakkuk that seek the throne of our lives.

Week 5:2 • Habakkuk 2:6-14

The Master of Physical Wealth

As you prepare for your time with God today, spend some time in prayerful conversation with God about your reflection on the masters that seek control of your heart in the previous devotion. Afterwards, take some time to read Habakkuk 2:6-14. Pay close attention to verse 6-8 as the Lord speaks about the pursuit of physical wealth.

There is an old story of a bank robber who had stolen money from several banks and never been caught. The bank robber never told anyone what he had done and he had been very careful to not draw any extra attention to himself. In his later years of life, the bank robber let his secret slip to his wife. Upon hearing of his robberies, the wife begins to question her husband about what he had done with all of the money because she had never known any luxury in her life. The bank robber takes his wife up to the corner of the attic where four large duffel bags sat collecting dust. Inside the four bags was every dollar from his heists. When questioned as to why he stored the money in the attic, the bank robber responded, "This way when I die in my sleep, I can grab the bags on my way up to heaven."

While it may seem silly and not well thought out, the response of the bank robber truly does mirror the response by which most of us live our lives. Our priorities and efforts every day are most often centered on the accumulation of things that we can not take with us when we die. Often, this is done without much thought because this is the priority by which the very fabric of our society is woven. The American Dream is the pursuit of a lifestyle that can not be taken with us when we die.

In Habakkuk 2:6, the Lord is responding to Habakkuk's questioning of God's use of the wicked nation of Babylon to discipline God's people for their unfaithfulness. God draws Habakkuk's attention to the faulty hope upon which the nation of Babylon has built its foundation.

The nation of Babylon, like every other nation who seeks to rule the world, pursued wealth to fuel their war machine. The Babylonians plundered and took every resource possible from the people that they conquered. They amassed wealth by whatever means necessary. The words that the Lord is using to describe the Babylonians are the same words used to describe Israel's sins by other prophets prophesying in the same era. The elite of Israel were guilty of injustices to one another for the sake of financial gain. In fact it was as a result of this injustices that Habakkuk cried out to the Lord in the first chapter of this book. The Lord is intentionally using the same language to show that just as the sin of Israel would be judged by God using the Babylonians, the Babylonians too would face a similar judgment.

Just as the Israelites had deceived themselves into believing that the amassing of physical wealth could protect them during times of trouble, the Babylonians would learn the same lesson at the hand of the Lord. In verse 8, God reminds Habakkuk of an age old truth, there is always a stronger man. There is always someone or something that is greater than the protection and security physical wealth can purchase. We see this truth lived out every year in our nation. We spend billions and billions of dollars on research and development of greater structural designs to help our buildings, roads and other parts of our infrastructure withstand all that nature has to throw at us. Every year though, nature reminds us that it is stronger than the work of our hands as earthquakes cause buildings to fall, hurricanes cause levies to burst and continually fluctuating extremes of temperature crack roads until they are left in pieces.

There is great hopelessness found when our hope is founded in physical wealth. Physical wealth is fleeting, and its worth ebbs and flows with the stock market, ruling authority and economic climate of the moment. God though is steadfast, an unchanging rock in the midst of life's storms. Where does your hope reside? Is your decision evident in the way you live your life and in the things that you pursue? If not, what needs to change?

Week 5:3 • Habakkuk 2:6-14

The Master of Earthly Security

Today, as you get ready for your time with the Lord, take a few moments to re-read Habakkuk 2:6-14. Take careful notice of verse 9-11. Notice what the Lord says concerning earthly security. For more thoughts on today's devotion, please take time to watch the short video that corresponds to today's devotion on our website, www.newhopenorth.org.

I remember as a young adult dreaming about what my life would be like when I grew up. I desired my little piece of the American Dream. My heart was set on the nice house with the white picket fence, a wonderful wife, 2.5 well-behaved children and a faithful dog. Now that I am an adult, I am learning more and more about the faults in this dream.

In August 2011, my wife and I bought our first home. We poured all of who we were into this house to make it the sanctuary that we desired it to be. We repaired what was broken, updated what was falling apart, and made new that which was missing. In short order, our home was everything that we hoped it would be. Sadly though, our lesson had just begun.

Shortly after owning our home, our compressor went out on our central air system. This was followed in the next season with a heater coil needing to be repaired. These two repairs were supposed to make our 10 year old heating and air system work as good as new. This is never our luck. Almost the day after the warranty for these repairs ran out, the heating unit quit working and the compressor went out again a few months later. This spelled the end for the heating and air system and meant a very large bill for us.

It was so hard at this moment to not feel like Tom Hanks in the movie, *Money Pit*. It felt like no matter the amount of work, money and maintenance that I poured into my house, there was always more that needed to be done. Every time I got caught up on maintenance and could start planning and saving for projects that I wanted to do, something I had not planned on broke and needed repair. For many of you who are homeowners, I am preaching to the choir. My inability to get ahead taught me of the futility of preventing decay. No matter how hard I worked, I can not prevent decay, the best I could hope for is delaying it.

When our hope is placed in earthly security, we become very aware of how little we have control over. The Lord says in Habakkuk 2:9, "Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin." God makes evident the folly of earthly things. No matter how hard we work or how much money we spend to preserve our earthly things, time, the elements and decay eat away at what we have. Everything that is built from the earth is in the process of decay. Every coat of paint peels away. Every coat of lacquer dissolves. Every beam of wood eventually rots. When our hope is in earthly things, our security is constantly under attack by decay and rot.

Has your security been placed in earthly things? Does your life, in this moment, feel consumed by the objects in it? Are you feeling cluttered and smothered? Are you wrapped up with the what instead of the who? Are you feeling like you are spinning your wheels without making any progress?

These are all signs of our hope being placed in temporary or earthly things that will decay. What is one thing that we can change tomorrow to place more emphasis on that which is eternal? What change can we make to place more importance on our walk with the Lord? Be specific with what needs to change. As a point of accountability, write your change down in the space provided and check back tomorrow to see how you have done.

Week 5:4 • Habakkuk 2:6-14

The Master of Civil Authority

Today, begin your time by reviewing your response to the previous devotion. Reflect on how successful you have been in making a real change in your relationship with the Lord. Spend some time talking to the Lord about your change. Listen to His response to your change. Re-read Habakkuk 2:6-14. Take time to carefully consider what is being said in verses 12-14.

In Habakkuk 2:12, the Lord depicts a city that is building itself up toward prosperity. In order to obtain the prosperity that the city desires, compromises have to be made. The authorities of the city used bloodshed, injustice and crimes against its own people as catalysts in the city's progression toward prosperity. The hope was that when the city reached this level of prosperity it will have made all of the blood, sweat, tears and compromises worthwhile.

The people of the city placed their hope and trust that those in power and authority over them had a clear understanding of what needed to be done and had carefully weighed the consequences before proceeding forward.

As the Lord points out in the following verse, the hope and trust of the people was misplaced for all of their work would be for nothing. Every compromise that they had made to achieve their goal had actually been the very fuel that sealed their fate. The city and its people will have exhausted themselves for nothing.

In this passage (Habakkuk 2:6-14), the Lord has been making clear the futility of placing our hope in temporary and ever-changing things. The very nature of these things, being temporary and ever-changing, prevents them from being steadfast and able to make good on the trust that has been placed in them.

I believe that we as human beings are designed to place our hope and trust in something beyond ourselves. We recognize that we are temporary and will one day not be able to do what we are able to do today. Our response to our limitation and our temporariness is to align ourselves with something or someone greater than us. In the culture that we live in today, many of us turn to our civil authorities to place our hope and our trust in. We look to our civil authorities because they hold a position that often represents something greater than themselves. The President of the United States not only represents the man but also the nation to which he is the spokesperson. The greater, stronger and longer lasting the power the civil authority represents, the easier it is for us to place our hope and trust in them.

The flaw in this though resides in our perspective of greater, stronger and longer lasting. Our great nation was established in 1776, 244 years ago. In Europe, there are governmental building being used everyday that are older than our nation. The words greater and stronger imply that there exists currently or will exist one that is greater or stronger because if this were not so, the words used to describe the nation would be greatest and strongest. There is no civil authority that is the greatest, strongest or eternal. Every civil authority is temporary for these civil authorities are created by men and women who are themselves temporary.

So let us pause for a moment. Where are you placing your faith, hope and trust? In what or whom are relying upon for tomorrow? Is what or who you are trusting capable of holding your faith, hope and trust? Write your thoughts in the space below.

In Habakkuk 2:14, the Lord points the hearts of the hearers to a central truth that has rang true since the dawn of creation. Everything and everyone is secondary to the greatness, strength and eternity of the Lord. All civil authorities will bow and give glory to the Lord no matter what.

Week 6:1 • Habakkuk 2:15-20

Delusional Coping

Today, as you prepare to sit with the Lord, take a few moments to reflect over the past five weeks. How has your relationship with God changed or evolved? What has the Lord revealed to you about yourself? Share with the Lord how this devotional has impacted your life. Before reading today's devotion, please take time to read Habakkuk 2:15-20.

How do you cope with sin, sorrow, loss and pain in your life? I know. This is a very straight forward question and I offered no intro or lead into such a personal and vulnerable question. I believe though that is the issue that we face with answering this question honestly. Upon thinking about this questions, I am immediately hit with feelings of awkwardness, vulnerability and at this very moment, my feet are turning so I can run out of the room at a moments notice. We desire and even need the lead in and careful tiptoe around questions like this so that we can prepare ourselves to answer and to justify our answer. Today, let us approach this differently. Let us face this head on.

Once again honestly, how do you cope with sin, sorrow, loss and pain in your life? Take the time right to answer this question honestly and completely. Just answer the question, do not justify your answer. Now take a few moments to just sit and think about your answer. Does the way that you cope help you deal with your sin, sorrow, loss and pain constructively? Does your coping mechanism lead to maturity and growth or to self-destructive tendencies? Be honest in your reflection. Remember, this is between you and God and I pray that you both want what is best for you.

In many areas of our life, especially the area of coping, we are our own worst enemies. When we experience pain and difficult subject matter, our first tendency is rarely to face it head on. More often than not, our desire is to just move past it suffering the least amount of damage and discomfort. This approach though does not actually allow us to deal with our pain and difficult circumstances and it definitely keeps the Lord from working good from these things.

Over the rest of this week, let us take a closer look at how we cope with brokenness, pain and distress in our lives. To begin this examination of our coping skills, we need to start with a foundational commitment between you and the Lord. Commit to being authentic, honest and true.

In today's passage, the Lord confronts the people of Babylon and the hearer with the ways in which we delude ourselves as we seek to cope with the consequences of our sin. We are drawn to the unhealthy coping mechanisms of manipulation, violence and idolatry. The reason that we are drawn to these coping mechanisms is because they do not actually require us to cope at all. Each of these mechanisms are instruments of control and not coping, maturing and growing. We delude ourselves into believing that we can control our sin, sorrow, loss and pain. How has that worked out for you? Did your control change the sin, sorrow, loss and pain?

Developing healthy and positive coping mechanisms begin by giving up control. The reason that it is called coping mechanisms is because what you are facing is beyond your control. The word "cope" is defined as the capability of an individual to reach a state of acceptance or reconciliation with a difficult matter. In other words, the aim of coping is to reach a state where you can accept your sin, sorrow, loss and pain. Let us begin to accept these difficult things today.

Take the next few minutes to write down the difficult things that are on your heart right now. Be exhaustive. When you finish, pray over each one, giving them over to the Lord, asking for His strength to accept them.

Week 6:2 • Habakkuk 2:15-20

Manipulation

Today, take the first few moments of your time with the Lord to go back and re-read your response to the last devotion. Take time again to pray over each one. How has your emotional response to each one changed from the previous day to today? Take time to re-read Habakkuk 2:15-20.

I was wandering the streets of Coney Island on a muggy summer day in New York City. My destination was the sideshow theater. I have always been fascinated with this subculture of New York. As the sideshow commenced, my favorite act was that of Leo, the Human Gumby. Leo was a human contortionist. He could manipulate the limbs of his body in ways that are unnatural to the human body. He could shift his joints so that his whole body could pass through the un-netted tennis racket in his hand. It was a truly amazing feat to watch.

After the show, I stood back to hear Leo's story about how he got started with the sideshow. Leo shared about how his desire to perform in the sideshow had led him to learn so many different acts, but he was always drawn to the contortionists. He explained that his ability to manipulate his body as he does was not a natural talent. For years he has committed himself to stretching, pulling and manipulating his body to fall under his control. There has been much pain and perseverance necessary to hone his craft. After years of training, tears, and trial, his body now moves and shifts on command. Leo is a master physical manipulator.

Manipulation though is not relegated to only the physical realm. Every aspect of the human condition has and continues to be manipulated for the sake of personal and corporate gain.

In Habakkuk 2:15-16, the Lord confronts the destructive coping mechanism of manipulation. As we spoke about in the previous devotion, manipulation is a coping mechanism that we utilize as we face difficult and painful circumstances in a desire to obtain control. Our ability to control and manipulate the difficult and painful circumstances deceives our hearts into believing that we are coping because we are now able to control the way that we will allow ourselves to experience the difficult feelings. Our manipulation does not lead to the desired outcome of acceptance and reconciliation. Instead, our manipulation leads us to deflect responsibility and dodge consequences. This is seen as the Lord describes how the Babylonians would manipulate their hearts to believe that their sin was for their good and not their destruction. Just as the picture painted by the Lord is of a man who uses wine and the inhibitions of another to get them drunk and then to take physical advantage of them, all of us are guilty of manipulating difficult circumstances to deflect our responsibility and deceive our circumstances into giving us what we want and desire. Have you ever brought up in an argument all of the sacrifices that you have had to make for your spouse or for the other person in hopes of guilt-tripping them into ending the argument? Have you been trying to keep a tight budget and an emergency expense arises so you throw in the towel and go blow all of your money because "why does it matter anyway?" This is the deception that takes place through manipulation. Manipulation does not change the sin, sorrow, loss and pain that we experience throughout life. It just deceives our heart into believing that it is for our good to stuff these things to the side.

God's desire though is to work through our sin, sorrow, loss and pain to reveal to our hearts that God is more than enough. As we surrender our sin and pain to the Lord, our hearts are afforded the opportunity to experience the miraculous, God working good from our sorrow. Today, take some time to confess the ways that you have used manipulation to deflect your sin. Surrender these things to the Lord. Write your thoughts below.

Week 6:3 • Habakkuk 2:15-20

Violence

As you prepare for your moments with God today, take some time to pray to the Lord. Ask Him to prepare your heart to hear from the Holy Spirit as you engage with His Word today. Take time once again to read Habakkuk 2:15-20. For more thoughts on today's devotion, tune into a short video on our website, www.newhopenorth.org.

When I was young, I was a scrapper. There was a season of my elementary years where it felt like I was engaging in a fight on the playground every couple of weeks. Most of the fights resulted from my response to the same trigger. If anyone said anything about my mother, we went to blows, no questions asked. I am not sure what it was about a classmate insulting my mother that boiled my blood so rapidly, but my anger always led to someone getting socked in the nose.

What makes your blood boil? Do you have any triggers in your life that leads you to lash out against others in anger? Have you been on the receiving end of the anger of another? How do you feel after you lash out in anger? Write down your feelings in the space provided.

Anger, frustration, fear, and rage are often the human response to difficult and painful circumstances. These emotions also trigger unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with difficult and painful circumstances. When anger, frustration, fear and rage drive our ability to cope, the mechanism that is often employed to gain control of the moment is violence. From raising our voice to diminishing others to engaging in physical acts of aggression, the coping mechanism of violence keeps us from achieving healthy ways to cope with what we are facing. In fact, violence only compounds the difficult and painful circumstances by creating new painful and difficult circumstance resulting from our aggression.

At the root of the unhealthy coping mechanism of violence is the striving for control. Just like with the manipulation coping mechanism, violence deceives our hearts into believing that we need to control the people in the difficult situation. Through intimidation, fear and aggression, the coping mechanism of violence seeks to gain control of the situation through physical manipulation and the threat of bodily harm. This coping mechanism compounds the brokenness by creating more issues that have to be resolved and more relationships need to be reconciled before you are even able to address the original concern.

Violence also inhibits the creation of an environment or space where acceptance of sin, sorrow, loss and pain can take place. Through the use of violence, the potential for a safe space by which to begin the very vulnerable and humbling process of coping and accepting becomes impossible. As the Lord describes it in Habakkuk 2:17, the violence that is done will only overwhelm the situation and the parties involved. In other words, the focus of each individual shifts from the sin, sorrow, loss and pain to the act of aggression and violence. Violence only results in fear, more anger, guilt and scars.

Do you struggle with responding to difficult and painful situations with violence and aggression? Does your anger and frustration often overshadow the original concern? Do those around you feel safe to be vulnerable in your presence?

These are hard questions to answer, but there is hope for change. Overcoming the unhealthy coping mechanism of violence begins with recognizing that it is an issue and change is needed. The shift from unhealthy to healthy coping mechanisms always begins with a choice. Seek help. Be vulnerable and ask someone to come alongside you as you make new choices. See a counselor. Engaging with a professional to help you identify triggers and begin new choices is a mighty step of maturity and growth.

Week 7:1 • Habakkuk 3:1-15

It is All About God

As you prepare for this week's time with the Lord, take some time to pause and reflect on the last six weeks. How have you seen the Lord move in your heart? Have you seen a change in your relationship with God? Have you seen change in your relationship with yourself? Talk to God about what you have experienced over the last six weeks. Take some time to read Habakkuk 3:1-15.

The last two weeks of devotions have been full of much self-reflection upon difficult subject matter. It is never easy to honestly self-reflect. There is much emotional drain that occurs as we see how we have deceived ourselves and the ways that we have settled for lesser things than what the Lord has desired for us.

Habakkuk 3:1-15 is broken up by three pauses marked by the word, *Selah*. The exact meaning of the word is unknown, but it is found in Scripture only in the book of Psalms and in this chapter of Habakkuk. Traditionally, the understanding of *Selah* has been to pause and reflect on what has just been said. Habakkuk, in the first two chapters of his book, challenges the Lord. In the opening, he rebukes the Lord for seemingly not responding to the injustice and violence occurring amongst His people. After receiving the response of God's judgment, Habakkuk once again challenges the Lord on the fairness of His judgment against the Israelites. The Lord once again responds to the complaint of Habakkuk by reminding Habakkuk that He is sovereign and working all things out in accordance with His perfect plan. It is in light of this that Habakkuk writes these first fifteen verses of chapter three. His heart has moved from looking at his circumstances to now looking at the God over his circumstances. Where the brokenness of his circumstances moved him to anger, frustration and tears, the God over his circumstances moves Habakkuk to pause and reflect.

Pause. Where is your sight right now? Are you focused on your circumstances? Have you paused to shift your focus to the God over your circumstances?

Every circumstance that we face, no matter how broken, desperate, or painful, God reigns over. When our eyes shift from our circumstances to the Lord over our circumstances, our hearts find their steadfast footing. The truth of creation is that every aspect of it was carefully fashioned by the hands of the Lord. He is in control over all things, even those things that seemingly stand against who He is. Scripture describes it this way, "Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess." It has and always will be all about the Lord.

When our perspective shifts to this truth, our sin, sorrow, loss and pain are put into their proper place, instruments allowed by the Lord to reveal our self-deception and to draw us back to the Lord. Our circumstances of injustice, brokenness, and violence become moments where the Lord shows His power, grace and mercy. The overwhelming weight of all of this is now seen as light as we see that the mighty Lord bears the burden of our most desperate moments.

Today, stop, pause, breathe and shift your eyes upward. See the hand of God at work in the big and the small. Feel the weight shift from your shoulders into the very capable hands of the Lord. Give all of it over to Him. Allow Him to take it all from you. Stop, pause, and breathe again. Does this process need to be repeated? Did you hold some back? Repeat if you need to until you have given everything to Him. Use the space below to record how you feel now. Record what was most difficult for you to give over to the Lord. Close your time in a conversation of thanks with the Lord.

Week 7:3 • Habakkuk 3:1-15

Past Victories

Today, open your time with the Lord in prayer. Ask Him to prepare your heart to hear from the Holy Spirit as you engage with His Word today. Take time once again to read Habakkuk 3:1-15. For more thoughts on today's devotion, tune into a short video on our website, www.newhopenorth.org.

When I graduated from high school, I started playing basketball at an open gym program. I was horrendous on the court. My shots bounced off the backboard and landed at half court. There was no finesse in my game. My lack of skill did not discourage me. I worked harder and harder. Twice a week, I was at open gym. I began a men's basketball open gym at my church on Sunday nights and enrolled in a basketball class at the local community college. At the end of six months of dedication, my game had transformed from abysmal to mediocre. Mediocre was not the way that I saw the transformation in my game though. I believed that I had reached a level to play with the big dogs so I gathered my friends and we joined the local Hoop league to play in a tournament with players of all levels of skill.

As I took the court with my team for the first game, all that I could focus on was the win. In preparation for this tournament, my friends and I had taken on another church in a friendly but very competitive scrimmage. My team rose to the occasion and pulled out the W with ease. This victory served as the foundation for the faith that we had that a bunch of pickup players could defeat the other teams in this tournament and win in the end.

There is much to be said of looking back and building on the victories of our past. Often, our greatest hurdle to trying to achieve our hopes and dreams is our own insecurities. Our insecurities paralyze us and keep us from stepping out and taking the risk. Our past victories can serve as motivation to take a risk because we have evidence that we have overcome before.

Habakkuk pauses and reflects, not on his own victories, on the past victories of the Lord. When the people of Israel were at their time of greatest need, as slaves in Egypt, God delivered His people from their captivity in spectacular fashion. Plagues poured forth onto the land with such overwhelming strength that it brought the greatest national power the known world had seen to this point in history to its knees. Egypt was decimated so completely that the people begged the Israelites to leave their land so that the God of the Israelites might have mercy on them. The Egyptians even loaded down the Israelites with gold and silver to encourage them to go.

Now, as the nation of Israel faced a new superpower, the nation of Babylon to whom Habakkuk had feared in chapter two, Habakkuk is strengthened as he looks back and is reminded that God was victorious over the previous great enemies that had threatened His people. The Old Testament is truly one story after another of God's victories. No matter how great the enemy appears to be, God is greater than them. God has never failed, so what would make the Babylonians any different?

Have you experienced victory in your life at the hand of God? The great encouragement of Scripture is that you and I are a part of God's people. Our faith in Christ has moved us from being enemies of God to being children of God. God is on our side and ready to fight for our victory. The Great Deliverer who set free His people by overcoming an entire nation is the same One who stands by our side. What stands in the way of you allowing God to fight your battles? What does God's past victories teach you about your future struggles? Have a conversation with God about His place in your battles. Write your thoughts in the space below.

Week 7:4 • Habakkuk 3:1-15

Defeat is Not an Option

As you close out this week of devotions, take time to reflect on how your view of God has changed as a result of intentionally standing in awe of who He is. Share with the Lord how your view of Him has changed. Take time to read all of Habakkuk 3 today.

In the little town of Franklin, Tennessee, a brutal battle took place toward the close of the Civil War that was instrumental in sealing the close of the war for the Southern states.

In 1864, the Union had made great strides in the war against the South. In a last ditch effort to gain ground and turn the momentum of the war back to the South, General Hood marched his troops to Nashville, the first Southern capital taken by the Union in the war. If Hood could retake Nashville, the South might be able to persuade France to aid them in the fight. As Hood marched toward Nashville, General Schofield of the Union army was deployed with his men to reinforce the regiment holding the capital of Tennessee. General Hood and General Schofield engaged in a few small scrimmages as they jockeyed for position in their march toward Nashville. General Hood had the stronger force as a result of his heavy artillery units. Seeing that there was little hope of victory on his own, Schofield maneuvers his men under the cover of darkness to flank the Confederate army and move into a position between General Hood and Nashville. The next morning, General Hood is outraged that the Union forces were able to move past them in the night. He makes the decision to abandon his heavy artillery and try to overtake Schofield's forces before they arrive in Nashville.

In the small town of Franklin, Tennessee, the two armies collide. The Union line had dug in, ready for the fight. They just needed to hold back the Confederates until they could rebuild the broken bridge across the river that stood between them and Nashville. The weak point of the Union line was at the road that ran through Franklin. The Union soldiers could not dig a trench across the hard rock of the road.

As the Confederates approached, General Hood saw the road and knew the Union line would be most susceptible to breaking by a focused attack at that point. True to his plan, General Hood's forces broke through the Union line at the road. The Union forces were now endangered of being flanked and overrun. The only hope for the North was a battalion of rookie soldiers posted right behind the front line along the road. This battalion had to retake the road and close the line. The task should have been too great for this battalion of inexperienced soldiers, but in a miraculous push, this rookie battalion fought back Hood's experienced infantry to retake and hold the line. After five hours, the battle relented and Hood was forced to retreat. Defeat was not an option for the Union forces and victory was clinched that day.

This is the resolve that the Lord desires to instill in His people. Defeat is never an option for the Lord, nor should it be an option for His people. God is focused on receiving His glory and praise. He moves mountains to give way to His praise. To this aim, God strongly supports His people to obtain victory each day that their hearts would know who He is and praise Him. We so often settle for lesser things and fail to give the Lord the opportunity to show us the victory that He had in mind all of the time.

Have you ever settled for defeat, struggle and brokenness because the path to victory seemed too daunting? What obstacles have stood between you and the victory that seemed too great for the Lord to overcome? When we grasp who God really is, our hearts can then hold to the truth that nothing can stand against the Lord. Take some time to share with the Lord the obstacles that loom in your life. Write these obstacles below and then write who God is compared to these obstacles next to them.

Week 8:1 • Habakkuk 3:16-19

Dismal Outlook

Here it is, the final week of our devotion through Habakkuk. In preparation for this final week, take some time to talk to God about what is going to happen after this devotion comes to a close. Is there a new devotion that you should start? Are there things that you have learned and experienced through this devotion that should be adopted in your life? Share your thoughts with God. Take time to read Habakkuk 3:16-19.

My first pastorate was at a small church that did not have a budget for the youth ministry that they had given me charge over. Everything that I planned in ministry had to be done creatively and with little to no money. After the first year, I partnered with a local fireworks company to sell fireworks over the summer to raise the funds needed to pursue the vision God had placed on my heart for the ministry in the coming year. My desire was to take the students on a retreat for a weekend in the winter to draw away and spend seeking God.

The fireworks fundraiser provided above and beyond and the winter retreat was planned. I spent months in preparation for the first retreat that I would be overseeing. I planned out every minute, every activity and every lesson. I was so excited to see how the weekend would unfold and how my students would be eternally transformed by the Lord as a result of what they learned and experienced this weekend. As the final preparations for the weekend were coming together, I paused to look at the weather report. Rain, snow, sleet, and freezing temperatures filled everyday of the weekend. How could this happen? I had prayed and planned for months and now the weather would ruin all of my activities. It rarely snows on the Oregon Coast, but here it was on the very weekend that I had worked tirelessly to create this amazing experience. The rain and snow would ruin the bonfire that was planned where the students would gather for an emotional presentation of the love of God that I had been planning for months. Every outdoor activity would have to be scratched from the schedule.

I remember sitting in a meeting with my volunteers who were helping to plan this weekend just deflated and defeated. What could we do? Maybe we should just cancel the weekend.

Has despair and dismay ever set in and ruined your plans? Have you felt like your best laid plans were destroyed by circumstances that were outside your control? Have you ever cursed God for not intervening and following your expectations?

Habakkuk cried out to the Lord at the start of his book with a plan for how the Lord would fix what he saw was broken. As the Lord responded to Habakkuk's cry, Habakkuk saw very quickly that the Lord would ruin Habakkuk's carefully thought out plans. Habakkuk 3:16 reveals the shift that occurs in Habakkuk's heart as his dismay for his ruined plans recedes as a result of God's better plan taking hold. Habakkuk would trust that the Lord would work everything out for His glory and the good of His people. Even though the momentary circumstances seemed dismal as Israel would be given to captivity, the promise of the judgment of Babylon and the return of the Israelites stronger and more faithful fueled Habakkuk to wait patiently.

Is the Lord calling you to wait patiently for His plan to unfurl? Can you trust in the faithfulness of the Lord to work through your obstacles to bring about your good? Does your heart believe that the storm you currently find yourself in will subside eventually and bring forth better things on the other side? Take some time to have a conversation with God about where your hope is in the middle of calamity. Write your thoughts below.
