

Lower Your Expectations, Raise Your Commitment

By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

Hab. 3:17-19

COMMITMENT

Axioms Sermon Series

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Habakkuk 3:17-19 is seldom a Mother's Day text, but it is also rare to hear a Mother's Day sermon on one of my favorite axioms. *Lower Your Expectations, Raise Your Commitment* has been the one piece of advice I share with couples getting married. This does not mean to lower our STANDARDS, just our expectations. Some expectations are legitimate and appropriate. However, the reality is that people often do not meet (or exceed) our expectations and that can cause conflict. Furthermore, if someone meets my expectation (which may be lofty and unrealistic); they do not get kudos—they are only doing what I think they should do. Ironically, our lofty expectations can crush gratitude. As an Oral Roberts University graduate (two degrees, one wife), I always feel a bit chagrined when I use this axiom. The motto of ORU was "Expect A Miracle." Miracles are a positive aspect of our faith. While miracles happen, that is what they are—miraculous. They are rare. If we expect them to happen or feel entitled to them, we may set ourselves up for extreme disappointment. Many people are angry with God because life did not turn out as they expected. A friend in my ORU Doctor of Ministry class, Dr. Thomas Mathew, preached, "*What Happens in Between Miracles?*" I think Habakkuk 3:17-19 expresses it so well—I am committed to the Lord and joyful in Him regardless of whether things go my way or not. Moms, the truth of the matter is your kids will not always make "straight As" or have straight teeth. They will misbehave, make bad choices, and may break your heart. Being a mom is one of the most difficult roles in all of life. Please know this: you do not have to be perfect. Your kids do not have to be perfect. You may not always be the perfect Proverbs 31

woman. We know you want your kids to succeed, but your identity is more than their performance. Being committed means to celebrate your wins, to learn from your mistakes, to grow and love together. Being committed means to stay calm, stay connected, stay the course, and above all else, to stay in Christ.

APPLICATION: Our theme this week is about **COMMITMENT**. Let us give thanks for the women who have loved and nurtured us in many ways. Think of your mom, stepmom, mother-in-law, spouse, other women in your family, teachers, co-workers, fellow Asbury members, etc. How can you show appreciation and affection in ways that would bless them? We also know that some moms have not been sources of affection and strength. Could this be a day you forgive them and release any toxic emotions? Remember to let God's grace empower you on your journey of faith.

Intro: Habakkuk (huh-BAK-uhk) is not a happy book. It begins: 1:2-4 ***O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So, the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted.*** He sees all kinds of problems and God isn't helping. Why?

3 dynamics:

1.) The **BABYLONIANS** were ruthless savages who were about to destroy Jerusalem. Unlike the Ukrainians, the Jewish people did not have other nations who would help them – they were at the mercy of their enemy. The people of Jerusalem were **terrified**. In fact, **JEREMIAH** watched as Babylonian soldiers entered, looted, and burned the Most Holy Place to the ground. He wandered the streets of Jerusalem in a state of shock, like

a survivor of 9/11 staggering through the rubble. Their king was blinded, bound in chains, his sons slaughtered, and others carted off in disgrace into exile in Babylon. How could a good God let this happen and use such an evil nation to punish His chosen people?

2.) The **FALSE PROPHETS** had **confused** people with their happy messages. Since the people were raised on “success & prosperity” stories of Egyptians drowning in the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho falling, Samson knocking off Philistines, David rocking Goliath’s world, their expectations were for triumph, but they were getting tragedy. What was wrong?

3.) The **PEOPLE** were asking – “Where is **GOD**? Why wasn’t He helping them. They had high expectations that God would protect them from all harm. **Why** were these things happening? How could God use a wicked nation like Babylon to judge a “less wicked” one in Judah? *Where is God in the midst of evil and suffering? Why do godless people prosper? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Where is God in the midst of disease, disappointment, and death? Why do bad things happen? Why is God silent? Why have You forgotten and forsaken us? Why isn’t there a miracle?* When things go wrong, we want to blame someone – and God is often the one we feel is responsible. **THEODICY**: “Theodicy” is from two Greek words “theos” (God) + “dike” (righteous). The question is, why would a good God allow evil to happen? The Bible tells of people who question God's goodness with angry indictments. The Bible “contains no comprehensive theodicy.” We have to figure things out and sometimes there are no logical explanations.

Mountains, Valleys & Cave – Habakkuk is a “cave” book. A cave is where we go when depressed, disturbed, or dying. Live long enough – we go into a cave. We must have a “Theology of Suffering.” There are no exceptions. Mortality is 100%. We must deal with these issues in the lives of those we love.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail & the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold & there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.

3 points in these 3 verses:

1.) **THOUGH** *the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls...* Look at all the “F’s” in this text: no **F**igs, no **F**ruit, **F**ailed olives, no **F**ood in the **F**ields, no **F**locks in the **F**old or herd/stalls. 7 “F’s” in this verse. This is a catastrophic failure. These are devastating circumstances. Why would God allow this to happen? This is terrible, tragic TROUBLE. We hear many of these very sad stories.

2.) ¹⁸ **YET I WILL rejoice** *in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.* EVEN IF... Even if the Babylonians destroy everything and he has nothing to eat, Habakkuk will live off the joy of the Lord. Outward circumstances may be terrible, but he will feed on his faith in God. Circumstances have not changed. Things still don’t make sense. His questions were not answered. Judgment is coming. His world was still troubled. Evil still exists. But he had a **CHOICE**. “I will” reflects his choice. He will do something – he will find joy. He has the opportunity. The Nazis stole everything from a Jew from another era, **Viktor FRANKL**. Unlike his wife, mother, & brother, he survived the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz. His experiences helped this psychiatrist make some conclusions about life. First and foremost, he always believed he had a

CHOICE. He wrote in his book, "Man's Search for Meaning" "***When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.***"

3.) ¹⁹ **GOD**, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. The source of joy is not positive thinking – Habakkuk trusts in the Lord because he knows God's character. God is trustworthy, even when the circumstances are not favorable. He begins his book with a complaint but ends with one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. By **trusting** in God, like the deer, he will be agile, adaptable, flexible, vigorous and strong in the midst of **trouble**.

So did **Job** (13:15) ***Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face.***

So did **David**: (Ps. 23) ***Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*** This literally happened to Jesus when He walked through the Kidron valley from Gethsemane to trial.

Is God silent, hidden, and unfair? Whatever case could be made for that in the Old Testament cannot be made by that in the NT because of Jesus. God acted. God came. God moved into our neighborhood. God became a human being. Born in a humble manger to poor parents, taught about God's kingdom, was a miracle worker, confronted evil in every form yet offered grace to those who would repent, was crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day, God raised Him from the dead. God made a commitment to us. God is not always going to make everything smooth sailing for us, but He has come and experienced firsthand the worst of the worst for us. There's nothing that we can go through that Because of Jesus we can lower our expectations that life will go swimmingly well, but we can also raise our commitment because of the character and nature of God. Even in the OT, they understood that, but how much more so when Jesus came.

The first novel I connected with was “**Great Expectations**” (Charles Dickens). A young orphan, “Pip,” thought he knew certain facts, only to grow up & find his presuppositions were completely wrong. His great expectations of how things were supposed to happen did not. The book contrasts love & rejection, poverty & wealth, & the eventual triumph of good over evil. I think “Great Expectations” is the story of life, too. We think we know how things should work out, but they rarely happen how we imagine.

“**The Only Plane in the Sky**” is an oral history of the tragedy of 9/11. Lyzabeth was the wife of one of the passengers who died on United flight 93. On the morning of Sept 12, she looked at their sleeping infant daughter. Lyz was crying when she thought Emerson would never know her father but would only grow up with a sad mom. Their dreams as a family crashed the previous day. Lyzabeth said something suddenly clicked in her head that morning. She thought, “**I have a choice. I will not ruin HER life. I will not ruin my OWN life, either.**” She lost her husband & Emerson lost her father because of evil, **yet** she chose to reframe her loss. She realized all of life is a choice. She could be stuck in anger, bitterness, & self-pity or she could grieve & move beyond it. She reminds us – our response is our responsibility.

We can apply Habakkuk’s message: “**Lower Your Expectations (not standards) & raise your commitment.**”

1) **TROUBLE**. Anticipate it. Things will not always go our way. Have a “theology of suffering.”

Life will not work out like you think it will. Sometimes it will exceed your expectations (“mountains”), most of the time it will be normal and routine (“valleys”), but you had better be prepared for the disappointments and confusions of life (“caves”) because everyone is a caveman or cavewoman if we live long enough. We never know when we will be elevated and when we fall off the cliff. Life is a series of unexpected events.

2) **TRUST.** In the midst of everything, I have the ability to choose. I need to make a commitment to persevere. In the midst of everything, there is one thing we can control: the ability to choose. And there is One who will help us. We stay aligned with him. Whether things go well or not, we must be committed to God, who is committed to us.

3) **TRIUMPH.** *I can do all things through him who strengthens me* (Phil 4:13) We will have cave times, but if we are in Christ, because of the Resurrection, we do not end up in a cave. Jesus died on the cross, but God raised Him from the dead. The Lord is our strength. We can do all things through Him. The Babylonians are coming...but God is Sovereign. Our end will be good. Keep the end in mind. *Lower Your Expectations...Raise Your Commitment to help others follow Jesus."*