

Hard Truths – Week 1 – Right Choices, Hard Roads – Bible Study Helps

Title: Right Choices, Hard Roads: Trusting God Through Life's Afflictions

Sermon Summary: This sermon addresses a fundamental truth that every mature believer eventually learns: obedience to God does not guarantee a life free from hardship. The sermon challenges the common misconception that right living plus prayer plus good decisions equals smooth sailing. Through examination of Psalm 34:19, the book of Habakkuk, and Job's story, the message reveals that many afflictions come to the righteous—not as punishment, but as part of God's larger purposes. The sermon emphasizes that spiritual maturity means learning to trust God's character when we cannot see His plan, and that our circumstances do not determine God's approval or our faithfulness. Like putting together a puzzle without seeing the picture, we must trust that God holds the complete image of our lives, even when individual pieces don't make sense.

Key Points:

- The Bible does not teach that obedience is without pain; many afflictions come to the righteous
- Affliction is not evidence of disobedience; it often occurs while living and doing right
- Hard seasons are not always for discipline; sometimes God allows difficulty for purposes beyond our understanding
- Spiritual maturity is learning to trust God's character when you can't see His plan
- The just shall live by faith, not by understanding every circumstance
- We should not interpret hardship as God's displeasure or lack of approval
- God's purposes are often larger than our personal comfort
- Older, seasoned believers have a responsibility to share their testimonies with younger believers
- We must learn to separate faithfulness from life outcomes
- Joy and trust in God should not depend on visible blessings or favorable circumstances

Scripture Reference:

- Psalm 34:19 (primary text): "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivereth him out of them all"
- Habakkuk 1-3 (extended study)
- Habakkuk 2:4: "The just shall live by his faith"
- Habakkuk 3:17-18: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom...yet I will rejoice in the Lord"
- Job 1-2 (extended study)

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- Job 13:15: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"
- 2 Timothy 3:12: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"
- Isaiah 55:8: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways"
- Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"
- Psalm 37:1-2: "Fret not thyself because of evildoers"

Stories:

- The puzzle analogy: Attempting to complete a 1,000-piece puzzle without the picture represents trying to understand life without knowing God's complete plan
- Habakkuk's dialogue with God: The prophet questioned why God would use wicked nations to accomplish His purposes, yet concluded with trust and praise despite not understanding
- Job's catastrophic losses: A righteous man who lost wealth, children, and health in one day, yet maintained his trust in God without ever fully knowing why
- The personal testimony: a daughter's seizure at age four, resulting in paralysis and three months in the hospital, teaching him to trust God without needing all the answers
- The West Coast pastor's story: A minister and his wife caring for a severely disabled daughter 24/7 for over 20 years, illustrating long-term hardship in faithful believers' lives
- The toilet paper shortage of 2000: A humorous illustration about being unprepared for unexpected difficulties
- Pilgrim's Progress reference: Christian's journey to the Celestial City despite numerous obstacles and hardships along the way

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Discipleship Questions

How does the equation 'obedience plus prayer plus right decisions equals life goes well' break down in your own experience, and what hard truths have you learned through that breakdown?

Habakkuk asked God honest questions about why He tolerates evil and uses wicked people to accomplish His purposes. How comfortable are you bringing your doubts and confusion to God rather than just your requests?

The sermon emphasizes that 'the just shall live by faith' was God's answer to Habakkuk's many questions. In what current situation are you struggling to live by faith rather than demanding answers first?

Job lost everything while being described as perfect, upright, and God-fearing. How does Job's story challenge the assumption that suffering is always evidence of sin or disobedience?

The sermon said that spiritual maturity is learning to trust God's character when you can't see His plan. What specific aspect of God's character are you clinging to in a current trial where His plan is unclear?

Habakkuk declared he would rejoice in God even if all visible blessings were removed. What would your honest response be if God allowed everything you value to be stripped away?

How can older, seasoned believers in your church community better share their testimonies of trusting God through unexplained hardships with younger Christians who still have 'rose-colored glasses'?

The sermon warns against interpreting hardship as God's displeasure or lack of approval. How do you currently discern whether difficulty in your life is divine discipline for sin or simply part of following Christ faithfully?

Job said 'though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' What would it practically look like for you to maintain this level of trust in your most feared scenario?

The message suggests we should ask 'what do You want me to learn?' rather than 'why is this happening?' How might changing that question transform your perspective on current difficulties you're facing?

Small Group Guide: Right Choices, Hard Roads

Based on Psalm 34:19 - "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivereth him out of them all."

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when you tried to put together a puzzle. How did having (or not having) the picture on the box affect your experience?

This connects to the sermon's illustration about life being like a puzzle where God has the picture, but we often don't.

Key Scripture Passages (5 minutes)

Have different group members read these passages aloud:

- Psalm 34:19
- Habakkuk 3:17-18
- Job 1:1, 20-22
- Job 13:15

Discussion Questions (40-45 minutes)

Understanding the Message

1. **The sermon stated:** "You can do everything right and still walk a hard road." How does this truth challenge the common belief that obedience + prayer + right decisions = smooth sailing?
2. **Habakkuk's Questions:** In Habakkuk 1-2, the prophet asked God honest questions about why He allows evil and suffering. What's the difference between "asking questions TO God" versus "questioning God"? Why is one acceptable and the other not?
3. **Job's Example:** Job lost everything in a single day while being described as "perfect and upright." What does Job's story teach us about the connection (or lack thereof) between our faithfulness and our circumstances?

Personal Reflection

4. **The Puzzle Illustration:** Think about a difficult season in your life. How does knowing that "God has the picture" help you trust Him when you can't see how the pieces fit together?
5. **Habakkuk 2:4 says "the just shall live by faith."** Share about a time when you had to trust God without understanding why something was happening. What did that experience teach you?
6. **The sermon mentioned several false assumptions we make:**
 - If I do right, God will protect me from all hardship
 - If I suffer, I must have failed
 - If life is hard, God must be distant

Which of these have you struggled with? How can we combat these lies with biblical truth?

Generational Wisdom

7. **For older/more seasoned believers:** What's a testimony you could share about a time when you didn't understand what God was doing, but He proved faithful? How can you intentionally share these stories with younger believers?
8. **For younger believers:** What questions do you have about walking through difficult seasons while trying to remain faithful? Who in this group or church could you learn from?

Key Takeaways (10 minutes)

Have group members identify which of these truths resonates most with them:

- ✓ **The Bible does not teach that obedience is without pain** (2 Timothy 3:12; Psalm 34:19)
- ✓ **Affliction is not evidence of disobedience** - it often occurs while living and doing right
- ✓ **Hard seasons are not always for discipline** - God trusted Job completely
- ✓ **Spiritual maturity is learning to trust God's character when you can't see His plan**
- ✓ **Right living does not prevent hard roads** - but God's purposes are often larger than our personal comfort

Practical Applications (15 minutes)

Individual Commitments

Choose 1-2 of these to work on this week:

1. **Stop interpreting hardship as God's displeasure.** Memorize Romans 8:1 - "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."
2. **Decide in advance how you will respond to difficulties.** Write out a personal response plan based on Habakkuk 3:17-18: "Although _____ happens, yet I will rejoice in the Lord."
3. **Separate faithfulness from life outcomes.** Make a list of areas where you've been faithful to God, regardless of the results. Thank Him for the privilege of obedience.
4. **Ask "What?" instead of "Why?"** When facing difficulties, shift from "Why is this happening?" to "Lord, what do You want me to learn?" and "How can I use this to help others?"
5. **Connect with a seasoned believer.** Schedule time this week to sit down with an older Christian and ask about their experiences trusting God through hard times.
6. **Journal your testimony.** Write down a difficult season you've walked through and how God proved faithful, even if you didn't understand everything. Be ready to share it with someone who needs encouragement.

Group Challenge

Intergenerational Connections: Pair up someone who has walked with the Lord for many years with someone newer in their faith. Commit to meeting once in the next two weeks to share testimonies and wisdom.

Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Read together Job 13:15: *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."*

Reflection Questions:

- What would it look like for you to trust God at this level?
- What current situation requires this kind of radical trust?

Prayer Time (10 minutes)

Prayer Focus:

1. **Confession:** Confess areas where you've doubted God's goodness because of difficult circumstances
2. **Trust:** Pray for grace to trust God's character even when you can't see His plan
3. **Specific Needs:** Share current struggles where you need faith to say "yet I will rejoice in the Lord"
4. **Thanksgiving:** Thank God that He is worthy of trust regardless of circumstances

Prayer Model from Habakkuk 3:17-19:

- Name what's difficult or missing in your life (verse 17)
- Declare "yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (verse 18)
- Affirm that "the Lord God is my strength" (verse 19)

For Next Week

- Read through the book of Habakkuk (only 3 chapters)
- Write down one question you have about suffering and bring it to the group
- Be prepared to share how you applied this week's lesson

Leader Notes

- Be sensitive that some in your group may be in the middle of unexplainable suffering right now
- Create space for honest questions without feeling pressure to have all the answers
- Emphasize that the goal is not to explain suffering but to trust God through it
- Consider having tissues available
- Don't rush the prayer time - this topic often brings deep needs to the surface

5-Day Devotional: Trusting God on Hard Roads

Day 1: Many Afflictions, One Deliverer

Reading: Psalm 34:15-22

Devotional: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivereth him out of them all." This profound truth shatters our comfortable equation that obedience plus prayer equals smooth sailing. The righteous—those walking faithfully with God—still face numerous trials. Job prayed for his children daily, yet buried them all in one devastating day. Habakkuk loved God deeply, yet watched injustice prevail. Notice the verse doesn't promise few afflictions or avoidable ones, but many. Yet here's the hope: deliverance comes not from our circumstances changing, but from God's faithful presence through them. The promise isn't exemption from hardship, but God's companionship within it. Today, identify one trial you're facing and consciously invite God's delivering presence into it, trusting Him not just for the outcome, but for His nearness now.

Day 2: The Just Shall Live by Faith

Reading: Habakkuk 2:1-4; 3:16-19

Devotional: Habakkuk stood confused, watching God's plan unfold in ways that made no sense. "Why would You use wicked people to accomplish Your purposes, Lord?" he questioned honestly. God's answer? "The just shall live by faith." When Habakkuk couldn't understand the picture God was creating, he was called to trust the Artist. By chapter three, though nothing changed externally—no crops, no livestock, no visible blessing—Habakkuk declared, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord." This wasn't toxic positivity; it was mature faith recognizing God's worthiness regardless of circumstances. Like working a puzzle without seeing the box cover, we often lack the full picture. God sees tomorrow; we're still navigating today. When answers don't come, faith must. Spend time today praising God not for what He's doing, but for who He is.

Day 3: God's Purposes Beyond Our Comfort

Reading: Job 1:1-22

Devotional: Job did everything right. He rose early to pray for each child by name, avoided evil meticulously, and walked blamelessly before God. Yet God Himself invited Satan to test Job, saying, "Have you considered my servant Job?" By evening, Job's children were dead, his wealth destroyed. He never knew about the heavenly conversation between God and Satan; he only knew devastating loss. Yet he worshiped: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job's story reveals a hard truth: God's purposes are often larger than our personal comfort. Sometimes He trusts us with suffering not as punishment, but as testimony

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to His sustaining grace. Hard seasons aren't always discipline—sometimes they're divine confidence in our faith. What trial might God be entrusting to you today as a witness to His faithfulness?

Day 4: Separating Faithfulness from Outcomes

Reading: Romans 8:28-39; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Devotional: We naturally interpret life through outcomes: smooth circumstances mean God's approval; difficulties signal His displeasure. But Romans 8:1 declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Your standing with God isn't determined by your circumstances but by Christ's finished work. Job wasn't suffering because of sin.

Habakkuk's nation faced judgment, but he remained righteous. Paul wrote of being "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair." Learn to separate faithfulness from life outcomes. Be faithful regardless of results. Trust God when the test results are bad, when the job ends, when prayers seem unanswered. Your obedience isn't validated by ease but by trust. God comforts us in tribulation not to remove it immediately, but so we can comfort others. What if your hardship is preparation for future ministry?

Day 5: Choosing Joy Before Relief

Reading: James 1:2-12; Philippians 4:4-13

Devotional: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," James writes—not after deliverance, but during trials. This seems impossible until we understand joy's source. Habakkuk chose joy before God's relief came: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom...yet I will rejoice in the Lord." Paul commanded, "Rejoice in the Lord always," even from prison. Their joy wasn't circumstantial happiness but deep confidence in God's character. When we worship God before the breakthrough, we testify that He—not His blessings—is our treasure. Decide in advance how you'll respond to difficulties. Will you trust His character when you can't see His plan? The older generation's testimony echoes: "I didn't always understand, but God was always faithful." Today, practice rejoicing in the Lord Himself—His goodness, faithfulness, and unchanging nature—regardless of what you're facing. This is spiritual maturity: trusting God's heart when you can't see His hand.