

Faith Under Fire, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: When God Says Wait: Trusting His Timing

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson addresses one of the hardest forms of suffering: the long wait, the season when God says “wait” and the deliverance does not come. Habakkuk’s journey, from honest wrestling over God’s timing and methods to a triumphant declaration of trust, models the formation of a faith that can wait. The doctrinal heart is that the believer’s joy and strength are anchored in God Himself and in “the God of my salvation,” not in circumstances; this allows joy to survive even total loss. Your aim is to teach students to trust God’s timing when they cannot trace His hand, building on the lament of Lesson 4 (Habakkuk too begins with “how long”) and carrying it through to the settled trust on the far side of the wrestling.

Keep two things in view. First, Habakkuk’s faith is the fruit of honest struggle, not a denial of it; he argues with God for two chapters before he sings. This guards against a false piety that rushes to triumph without honesty, and it keeps the lesson consistent with the study’s repeated permission to bring God our real questions. Second, Habakkuk’s hope rests on “the God of my salvation” even while the threatened disaster still looms; his confidence is in God’s ultimate salvation, not in a guaranteed change of present circumstances. This keeps the comfort grounded where the whole study grounds it, in God’s character and saving purpose rather than in the promise of present relief, and it points forward to the eternal hope that anchors Lesson 12.

Formationally, this lesson aims to teach students to rejoice in God before their circumstances change, and to draw their strength to endure from God Himself rather than manufacturing it from within. Habakkuk’s closing image, God making his feet like a deer’s to tread the heights, locates the believer’s sure-footedness in God’s enabling, not in human grit. Aim to send your students home able to wait on God’s timing without bitterness, with a joy planted in the God who never fails and a strength that is His gift, not their own achievement.

Question 1

Student Question:

Habakkuk reaches his triumphant faith only after chapters of honest wrestling with God over His timing and methods. Why is it significant that his trust is the fruit of struggle rather than a denial of it, and what does this teach about how genuine faith in God’s timing is formed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by setting the closing song in the context of the whole book. Habakkuk does not arrive at his triumphant trust by skipping the hard questions; he arrives through them. Chapters 1 and 2 are a sustained wrestling match with God over the injustice he sees and the disturbing answer God gives.

Stress that the trust of chapter 3 is the fruit of that struggle, not a denial of it. Habakkuk's faith is hard-won. He did not suppress his questions or pretend they did not matter; he brought them to God, listened for God's answer, and was changed in the wrestling. The song at the end is earned in the argument at the beginning.

Explain what this teaches about how faith in God's timing is formed. It is not formed by avoiding the struggle but by bringing the struggle to God and staying in the conversation until trust emerges. The honest wrestler who keeps engaging God often arrives at a deeper trust than the one who never let the questions surface.

Apply this against two errors: the false piety that rushes to triumph without honesty, and the despair that wrestles but walks away. Habakkuk models the third way, honest wrestling that does not let go of God and is finally brought through to worship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Habakkuk's triumphant trust is the fruit of honest struggle, not a denial of it (Habakkuk 1-2)
- Faith in God's timing is formed by bringing the struggle to God, not by avoiding it
- The honest wrestler who stays in the conversation often reaches deeper trust
- This guards against both false piety that skips honesty and despair that wrestles but walks away

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Habakkuk's trust comes through wrestling rather than around it?
- What does this teach about how genuine faith in God's timing is formed?
- What is the difference between wrestling that lets go of God and wrestling that holds on?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think about a season when you wrestled with God over His timing. Did you try to rush past the questions to a tidy resolution, or did you bring your honest struggle to God? How might Habakkuk's example free you to wrestle honestly while still moving toward trust?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks how students handle their own wrestling with God's timing. Some rush past the questions to a tidy resolution, afraid that honest struggle is unfaithful; others bring God the real struggle and stay engaged.

Help students see that rushing past the questions often produces a brittle faith that has never been tested, while honest wrestling, brought to God, produces a faith that can stand. Habakkuk's example legitimizes the struggle as a path toward trust, not a detour from it.

Address the fear that wrestling with God is irreverent. Habakkuk argued with God and is held up as a prophet and a model of faith. Bringing our hard questions to God is not rebellion; it is a way of staying in relationship with Him through the confusion.

Invite a concrete practice: bringing an honest question about God's timing to Him this week rather than suppressing it, and staying in the conversation, as Habakkuk did, until trust begins to form.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rushing past hard questions can produce a brittle, untested faith
- Honest wrestling brought to God produces a faith that can stand
- Wrestling with God over His timing is not irreverence but staying in relationship through confusion
- Bringing honest questions to God as a path toward trust, not a detour from it

Discussion Prompts

- In a season of waiting, do you rush past your questions or bring them honestly to God?
- How does Habakkuk free you to wrestle honestly while still moving toward trust?
- What honest question about God's timing could you bring to Him this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Habakkuk lists a complete collapse, no figs, no grapes, no olives, no crops, no flock, no herd (v. 17), and yet he does not end in despair. Why does he name the worst-case scenario so specifically, and what does it accomplish to face the full reality of potential loss before declaring his trust?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 17 is a catalogue of total collapse: no fig blossoms, no grapes, no olives, no crops, no flock, no herd. In an agrarian economy this is the failure of every source of food, income, and security at once. Habakkuk spares no detail in naming the worst.

Ask why he names it so specifically. He is not indulging morbid fear; he is facing the full reality of potential loss honestly before he declares his trust. His faith is not built on denial or on assuming the worst will not happen; it is built to stand even if the worst does happen.

Explain what this accomplishes. A trust that has looked the worst-case scenario full in the face and still says “yet I will rejoice” is far sturdier than a trust that depends on the disaster being averted. Habakkuk’s faith is disaster-proof precisely because he has reckoned honestly with the disaster.

Apply this to how we handle our fears. We often try to manage fear by refusing to name it, as if not looking will keep it away. Habakkuk does the opposite, and finds that facing the feared loss honestly, in God’s presence, is the path to a trust that no longer depends on the loss being prevented.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Habakkuk names total collapse in unflinching detail (Habakkuk 3:17)
- He faces the full reality of potential loss honestly before declaring his trust
- A faith that has faced the worst and still rejoices is sturdier than one that depends on disaster being averted
- Facing a feared loss honestly in God’s presence is the path to disaster-proof trust

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Habakkuk name the worst-case scenario so specifically?
- What does it accomplish to face the full reality of loss before declaring trust?
- How might honestly facing a feared loss clear the way for a deeper trust in God?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to manage your fears by refusing to look at them, hoping that not naming the worst will keep it at bay? How might honestly facing a feared loss, as Habakkuk does, actually clear the way for a deeper trust in God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question addresses the strategy of fear-avoidance. Many of us manage anxiety by refusing to look at what we dread, believing, half-consciously, that naming the worst might summon it, or simply that not looking will spare us the pain of it.

Help students see why this strategy fails. Unnamed fears do not disappear; they operate underground, draining peace and energy while never being brought to God. The thing we will not look at rules us precisely because we will not look at it.

Offer Habakkuk’s alternative. By naming the feared loss honestly, he brings it into the light of God’s presence, where it can be met by trust. Faith that has named the worst and entrusted it to God is freer than faith that lives in the shadow of an unspoken dread.

Invite a concrete act: naming a feared loss honestly before God this week, and then, like Habakkuk, deliberately declaring trust in Him even in the face of it, so that the fear no longer rules from the dark.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Managing fear by refusing to look at it, hoping not naming the worst keeps it away
- Unnamed fears operate underground, draining peace while never brought to God
- What we will not look at rules us precisely because we will not look at it
- Naming a feared loss before God brings it into the light where trust can meet it

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you managing a fear by refusing to look at it?
- How might the unnamed fear be ruling you from the dark?
- What feared loss could you name honestly before God this week, and then entrust to Him?

Question 5

Student Question:

The hinge of the passage is the word “yet”: “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord” (v. 18). What is the difference between joy that depends on the fig tree blossoming and joy planted in “the God of my salvation,” and why can the second kind survive when the first cannot?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 18 turns on the most defiant “yet” in Scripture: “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” Habakkuk’s joy does not depend on the fig tree blossoming; it is planted in the Lord Himself.

Draw the crucial distinction, which echoes the joy of Lesson 7. Joy tied to the fig tree rises and falls with the harvest; when the harvest fails, the joy fails with it. Joy planted in God survives the failure of every harvest, because its root is not in the circumstances but in the unchanging God.

Explain why the second kind can survive when the first cannot. Circumstances are by nature unstable; to root joy there is to guarantee its collapse the moment they turn. God does not change, does not fail, cannot be taken away; joy rooted in Him shares His stability. Habakkuk has moved his joy to the one place loss cannot reach.

Stress that this is not denial or forced cheer. Habakkuk fully acknowledges the collapse; he just refuses to let it determine his joy. He grieves the loss honestly and rejoices in God deliberately, holding both, exactly the pattern of faithful suffering this whole study has traced.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Habakkuk's "yet" plants his joy in the Lord, not in the fig tree (Habakkuk 3:18)
- Joy tied to circumstances fails when they fail; joy planted in God survives every loss
- God does not change or fail, so joy rooted in Him shares His stability
- This is not denial; Habakkuk grieves the loss honestly and rejoices in God deliberately

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between joy that depends on the fig tree and joy planted in God?
- Why can joy rooted in God survive when joy rooted in circumstances cannot?
- How does Habakkuk hold honest grief and deliberate joy together?

Question 6

Student Question:

Be honest about what your joy is currently tied to. If the "fig trees" in your life failed, your finances, your health, your plans, would your joy collapse with them? What would it look like to begin rooting your joy in God Himself rather than in His gifts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to test where their joy is rooted. The diagnostic is simple and searching: if the fig trees in their life failed, their finances, health, plans, relationships, would their joy collapse with them?

Help students answer honestly. Most of us discover that our joy is more tied to our circumstances than we would like to admit; the swing of our mood with the swing of our fortunes reveals where our joy is actually planted.

This is not cause for shame but for transplanting. The work of the Christian life includes moving our joy, over time, from the gifts to the Giver, so that it becomes increasingly independent of the harvest and increasingly rooted in God.

Invite a concrete step in that direction: a practice of rejoicing in God Himself, in His character, His salvation, His presence, especially when a "fig tree" is failing, so that the root system of their joy grows down into God rather than into circumstances.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The diagnostic: would your joy collapse if the "fig trees" of your life failed?
- The swing of our mood with our fortunes reveals where our joy is actually planted
- The Christian life includes transplanting our joy from the gifts to the Giver
- Rejoicing in God Himself, especially when a fig tree fails, grows joy's roots into Him

Discussion Prompts

- If the fig trees in your life failed, would your joy collapse with them?
- What does the swing of your joy with your circumstances reveal about its root?
- What would it look like to begin rooting your joy in God rather than His gifts?

Question 7

Student Question:

Habakkuk calls God “the God of my salvation” even while the threatened disaster still looms (v. 18). Why does he anchor his rejoicing in God’s salvation rather than in a change of circumstances, and how does the certainty of God’s ultimate salvation steady us while we wait through trials that have not yet lifted?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question highlights the title Habakkuk gives God: “the God of my salvation,” spoken while the Babylonian disaster still looms. His rejoicing is anchored not in a change of circumstances but in God’s saving character and purpose.

Explain why this anchor holds. Circumstances may not change; the disaster may come. But God remains the God of salvation, committed to saving His people in the end, and that ultimate salvation is sure even when present deliverance is not. Habakkuk rejoices in a salvation that no Babylonian army can finally thwart.

Show how this steadies us while we wait. The believer who anchors hope in God’s ultimate salvation can endure long, unresolved trials, because their deepest hope was never pinned to the trial lifting. Even if the present trouble continues, the God of their salvation remains, and the final outcome is secure.

Connect this to the study’s consistent grounding. The comfort here is not a guarantee that the circumstances will improve but the certainty of God’s saving purpose. This points forward to the eternal hope of Lesson 12: our ultimate salvation is the anchor that holds when present deliverance tarries.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Habakkuk anchors his rejoicing in “the God of my salvation” while disaster still looms (Habakkuk 3:18)
- God’s ultimate salvation is sure even when present deliverance is not
- Anchoring hope in God’s saving purpose lets us endure long, unresolved trials
- The comfort is the certainty of God’s saving purpose, not a guarantee that circumstances will improve

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Habakkuk anchor his joy in God's salvation rather than a change of circumstances?
- How does the certainty of God's ultimate salvation steady you while you wait?
- What is the difference between hoping the trial lifts and hoping in the God of your salvation?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where are you waiting for circumstances to change before you will let yourself worship or rejoice? How does anchoring in "the God of my salvation" make it possible to rejoice now, in the middle of the unresolved waiting, rather than only after deliverance comes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the previous truth into the student's own waiting. Many of us postpone worship and joy until the situation resolves, living in a holding pattern, telling ourselves we will rejoice once the deliverance comes.

Habakkuk refuses this postponement. He rejoices now, in the God of his salvation, while the disaster still looms. His joy does not wait for the circumstances; it rests on a salvation already secure in God.

Help students locate their own postponement. What are they waiting to change before they will let themselves worship, the diagnosis, the reconciliation, the open door? Naming the condition exposes the way they have made their joy hostage to an outcome.

Invite the present turn: to anchor in the God of their salvation now and to rejoice in the middle of the unresolved waiting, rather than holding their worship in reserve until deliverance arrives. This is Habakkuk's defiant "yet" made personal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tendency to postpone worship and joy until the situation resolves
- Habakkuk rejoices now, while disaster still looms, anchored in a salvation already secure
- Naming the "once it changes" condition exposes joy held hostage to an outcome
- Anchoring in the God of our salvation makes present rejoicing possible amid unresolved waiting

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you waiting for circumstances to change before you will worship or rejoice?
- How does anchoring in "the God of my salvation" make rejoicing possible now?
- What would Habakkuk's defiant "yet" look like in your current season of waiting?

Question 9

Student Question:

Habakkuk ends, "God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places" (v. 19). Notice the strength is God Himself, and the sure-footedness is His gift. What does this teach about where the believer's strength to endure actually comes from, and how does this guard against the idea that we must summon endurance from within ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it locates the source of the believer's endurance. "God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places." The strength is God Himself, and the sure-footedness on the heights is His gift.

Stress the precise wording. Habakkuk does not say, "I have found strength within myself," or "I have summoned the willpower to endure." He says God is his strength. The capacity to wait, to rejoice in loss, to tread the dangerous heights, is not generated from within; it is supplied by God.

Explain why this guards against a subtle and exhausting error: the belief that we must manufacture our own endurance, dig deep, find the strength inside, white-knuckle our way through. Scripture locates our strength outside ourselves, in God, who supplies what we do not have. We do not endure by our own grit but by His enabling (compare Philippians 4:13; Isaiah 40:31).

Dwell on the image of the deer on the heights. The deer is sure-footed precisely where the ground is most treacherous, bounding confidently across cliffs that would terrify a person. God gives His people that kind of sure-footedness in the dangerous, high places of suffering, not by removing the heights but by enabling them to tread there. The strength to endure and the steadiness to walk the hard path are both His gifts.

Apply this as freedom. The believer worn out from trying to be strong can stop manufacturing endurance and start receiving it. Our part is not to generate strength but to lean on the God who is our strength, and to let Him make our feet sure on the heights He calls us to climb.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer's strength to endure is God Himself, not a resource summoned from within (Habakkuk 3:19)
- The sure-footedness to tread the heights is God's gift, not human grit
- This guards against the exhausting error of manufacturing our own endurance
- Scripture locates our strength outside ourselves, in God who supplies what we lack (Philippians 4:13; Isaiah 40:31)

- God gives sure-footedness in the dangerous high places of suffering without removing the heights

Discussion Prompts

- What does it teach that Habakkuk says God is his strength, rather than finding strength within?
- How does this guard against the idea that we must summon endurance from ourselves?
- What would change if you stopped manufacturing endurance and began receiving it from God?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Habakkuk 3:17-19 as a whole, the honest wrestling, the named losses, the defiant “yet,” and God as strength for the heights. Name one specific area where God is asking you to wait and trust His timing, and one truth about “the God of your salvation” you can plant your joy in while you wait.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the whole passage and turns it toward practice. Retrace Habakkuk’s journey: the honest wrestling that precedes the song, the unflinchingly named losses, the defiant “yet” that plants joy in God, and the closing confession of God as strength for the heights.

Invite students to name one specific area where God is asking them to wait and trust His timing. The formation is in the particular: a specific prayer not yet answered, a specific deliverance delayed, a specific season of waiting that tests their trust.

Then ask for one truth about “the God of their salvation” to plant their joy in while they wait. Habakkuk’s secret was a joy rooted in God rather than the harvest; students can name the specific truth about God that will hold their joy steady through the wait.

End on the defiant “yet.” Whatever fig trees fail, the believer can say, with Habakkuk, “yet I will rejoice in the Lord,” because the God of their salvation remains and is their strength for the heights. Send your students out able to wait on God’s timing without bitterness, with a joy planted in Him and a strength that is His gift.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Retracing Habakkuk’s journey: honest wrestling, named losses, the defiant “yet,” God as strength
- Naming a specific area where God asks for waiting and trust in His timing
- Planting joy in a specific truth about the God of our salvation while we wait

- Waiting without bitterness, with joy rooted in God and strength that is His gift

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific area is God asking you to wait and trust His timing?
- What truth about the God of your salvation can you plant your joy in while you wait?
- How does Habakkuk's defiant "yet" change the way you face your current season of waiting?