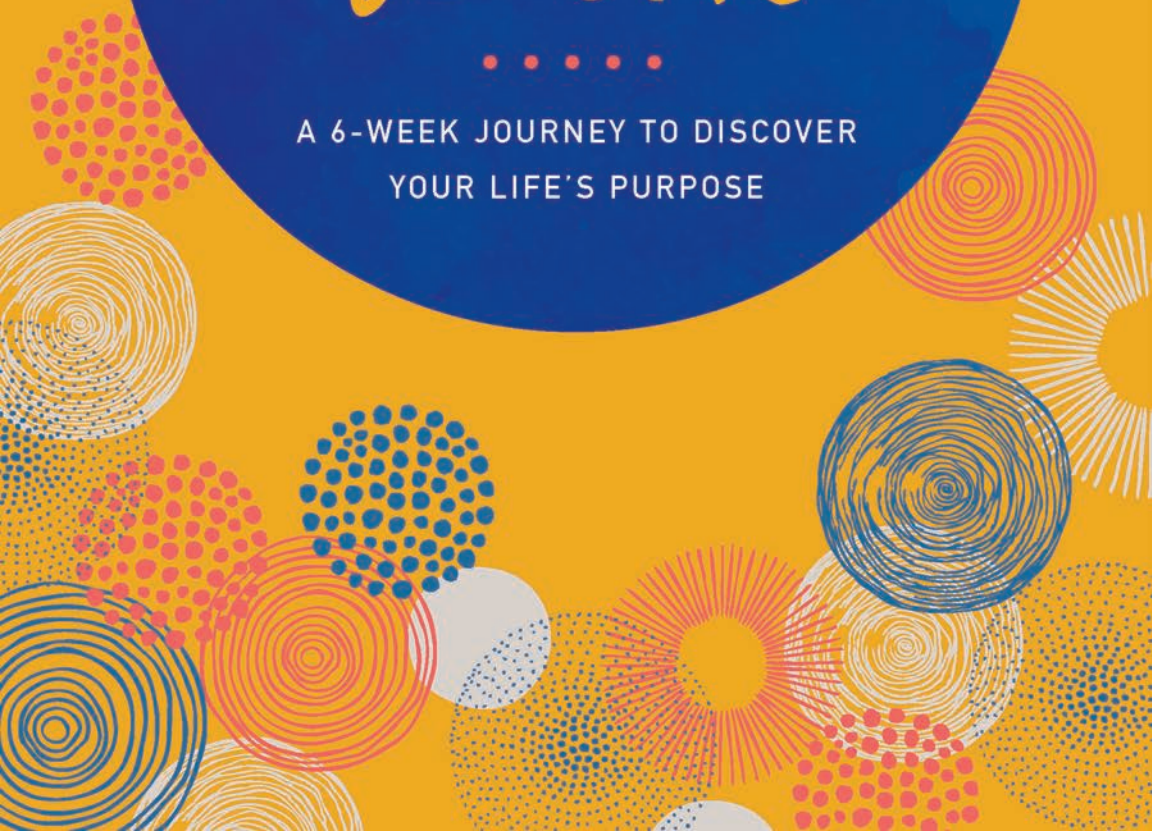


Rachel Anne Ridge

MADE TO BELONG



A 6-WEEK JOURNEY TO DISCOVER
YOUR LIFE'S PURPOSE



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Rachel Anne Ridge
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INTRODUCTION

IN MY PREVIOUS CAREER as a professional artist, the very hardest part of every painting was the perfectly terrifying moment of standing in front of a blank canvas, *before I'd even begun.*

Paintbrushes in hand, supplies at the ready, sketch neatly taped to a nearby wall.

A clock ticking loudly in my head.

“Hooo. Hooo-boy.”

After a big exhale, I'd close my eyes and try to pull my creative thoughts together.

Man, I'm thirsty! I'd leave to get a glass of water.

I'd walk by the computer. *Hmmm, I'd better check my e-mail.*

Finally, I'd step back in front of the canvas.

Okay.

Wait, why is this tag in my shirt so scratchy? I need to change my shirt.

Better. Back in the studio, back in position.

The white, intimidating expanse of stretched canvas would glare at me, silently taunting.

“You can't do this.”

“You don't know where to start.”

“You’re not qualified.”

“You will mess up.”

“You are too old for this.”

“Other artists could do a better job.”

“You have no talent.”

“You will fail.”

I’m not making this up. This is actually what blank canvases say. They sort of narrow their eyes and lean back on their easels, just *daring* you to throw a blob of paint on them. They’re very haughty that way.

Thankfully, this is where an *underpainting* comes in.

Underpainting, you ask?

Master artists will tell you that the underpainting is a light, loose layer of paint that roughs in the composition of what will later become the final painting. Often done with shades of one color, its purpose is to give the artist a chance to see the design on the canvas easily and quickly, without getting stuck in the details.

I call an underpainting a psychological kick in the pants to get started. You see, an underpainting isn’t supposed to be perfect. It isn’t supposed to be the final product. It isn’t even supposed to be pretty. It is simply a guide that will be corrected, covered up, and finessed, and will ultimately become a masterpiece.

An underpainting doesn’t worry about getting it right the first time.

Its purpose is to be built upon.

To give structure.

To be painted over.

To help the artist see where she could go, and what corrections she might need to make along the way.

Underpaintings often don’t even resemble the finished art piece, because somewhere in between the first broad strokes of loose color and the final layering of fine detail, the painting changes. It becomes

infused with excitement and color, and gradually comes alive as a vibrant work of art.

Underpaintings help the artist know where—and how—to begin.

In our six weeks together, we are going to be talking about a big subject: purpose.

The idea of finding your life purpose can be as intimidating as all get-out.

I mean, where do you even begin on that intimidating blank canvas in front of you?

Maybe you feel stuck where you are, and you don't know where to start to discover your purpose.

Maybe you have a sense that you are called to something important, something bigger than what you're doing, but you just don't know what that thing actually is.

Maybe you've got a spark of dream but don't know what to do with it.

Perhaps you already know your purpose, but it doesn't seem to have anything to do with what's happening in your life right now.

Maybe you've been waiting and waiting for circumstances to change so you can pursue your calling.

It could be that the voices in your head have been talking to the blank-canvas voices in my studio, and they're telling you, in their raspy little tones,

“You don't have a purpose.”

“You don't know where to start.”

“You're too old.”

“God can't use you.”

“You have no talent.”

“Your abilities are too small.”

“Your dream is silly.”

“You will fail.”

And you're standing there, gulping for air and hoping for inspiration.

Let me tell you:

*You're exactly where
you're supposed to be right now.*

I believe with all my heart that if you are reading this book, you are already knee-deep in the river of God's purpose for your life. It is no accident that this book is in your hands.

In this study, we'll spend some time in a small, little-known book of the Bible that will spark our imaginations. We'll ask questions, try some new things, and step out of our comfort zones. We'll even have a bit of fun while we're doing it, because there is *joy in discovery*. I believe that God takes delight in us, and it brings Him pleasure to watch us grow and become all that we can be.

Together, we will throw some paint on the canvas. Hand in hand, we will make small steps toward something great. We will create some structure and develop a composition that will put you on a path toward understanding your purpose and calling.

We aren't going to worry about creating a perfect masterpiece here.

We are going to call this our messy underpainting.

Because our job is simply to begin.

We'll leave the final brushstrokes to God.

What do you say? Are you with me?

Let's get started.



Week One

PURPOSED BY GOD



Purpose (n): the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.

GOOGLE DICTIONARY

MOST OF US HAVE A FEELING deep down inside that we were made for something more. At least, we hope there is a specific purpose for our lives! You know, some kind of grand design. Then we look at the activities that fill our days and wonder just what kind of specific purpose could be found in all of this.

Life seems to be filled to the brim with busyness. Between work, family obligations, raising kids, community involvement, and maintaining the “stuff” of life (like remembering to change the oil in your car and taking out the trash), it can feel more like a long list of tasks than a purpose-filled trajectory toward a big calling. But somewhere in the midst of the deadlines and car pools we sense a longing to know the reason we were created, the reason we are here.



*That desire for “something more”
is innately human and
unique to our consciousness.*

In the short chapters of this book, I'd like to suggest that the search for purpose must begin with the understanding that God has created us this way. He wants us to experience this longing! Rather than feeling sad about the longing, let's take a moment and savor the idea that the desire to know His purpose puts us squarely in God's sweet spot.

He is absolutely pleased with our search.

Have you ever thought about it this way? In Ecclesiastes—a book of collected wisdom from one of the wisest men in history—chapter 3, verse 11 says that God has placed eternity in our human hearts, and only the recognition of something much bigger than ourselves—something eternal—will satisfy us. He's wired each of us in unique ways, given us special hopes and dreams, and provided us with skills and abilities so that we can be part of His ongoing creation and work in this world.

That stirring in your soul? That's God's incredible invitation to participate.

WEEK ONE : PURPOSED

..... Day One

MADE IN AND THROUGH

.....

*“For as the waters fill the sea, the earth will be filled
with an awareness of the glory of God.”*

HABAKKUK 2:14

IN THE NEXT SIX WEEKS we'll explore the short Old Testament book of Habakkuk together. As we do, I want you to keep something in mind: God is a brilliant multitasker. At any given time, His purposes are always at work in your life, and they unfold in two distinct ways:

1. God's purpose for *every person*. This has to do with *who you are*: your character, your spiritual life, and your connectedness to others. It is all about your heart.

2. God's unique, overarching purpose for you in the ways your experiences, your personality, your gifts, and your unique wiring work together. This has to do with *what you do*: you could say it's all about your hands.

Now, it's tempting to leapfrog over number one (who you are) and go straight to number two (what you do), but you might miss



something big if you do. The fact of the matter is, *who you are is far more important to God than what you do*. As far as He is concerned, no grand purpose in the world can ever replace a heart that wants to know and love Him, and to that end He will always be working, through every circumstance, to help you find Him and experience His love. Simply put,

*God is working in you, so that
He can work through you.*

Even if you don't know what the "through you" part is going to look like, it's exciting to know that the "in you" part is already under way! As a person placed on this planet, you are loved beyond measure and treasured more than you can imagine. God is filling you with His character and grace, His mercy and wisdom, and His life and peace. He is empowering you to take on bold new dreams and to dare to believe that He has something more for you than a life filled with tasks and activities. His current work within your heart reveals that God is cooking up something good! He has a vision and a purpose for your life—not just for the future, but even for today.

God's purpose for your life is not an assignment to complete, but an invitation to participate.

This week, we'll park at purpose number one: God's purpose for everyone.

READ

God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. PHILIPPIANS 2:13

The Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. PHILIPPIANS 1:6

REFLECT

Take a moment to consider how God’s purpose is already at work in you. Think or meditate on the verses above, and thank Him for His power and love revealed in your life.

RESPOND

1. Name three positive characteristics your *present circumstances* are producing in your life: _____

2. What is one way you are becoming more mature in your thoughts or actions? _____

- Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Today, do one out-of-the-box activity that demonstrates one of these characteristics. Go ahead, make a bold statement with your actions!

Today, I will demonstrate _____ by

Here is what happened as a result of my “fruit of the Spirit”
action: _____

..... Day Two

MADE TO BE LOVED

.....

“O LORD my God, my Holy One . . .”

HABAKKUK 1:12

I REMEMBER THE FIRST women’s retreat I ever attended. I’d left a toddler and a barely weaned baby at home with my husband and was eager to make new friends with my cabinmates. The previous two years had brought a huge change in my “job description,” and I was struggling to find my footing as a stay-at-home mom. The other ladies, most of them older than I, lounged on their cots or sat cross-legged on sleeping bags as we began our small group time. One by one, each of them introduced herself to the group and told us about her life. They seemed so confident, so polished, so self-assured. They described their jobs, their car pools, their homeschooling, their hobbies. As my turn approached, I could feel tears welling up behind my eyes.

I could think of nothing interesting to say about myself.

After all, my days were spent nursing a baby, changing diapers,



and chasing a toddler. I barely ever got out of the house, and when I did I always had baby spit-up on my shoulders.

Finally, all eyes were upon me.

I sputtered, “My name is Rachel . . . and I make my bed every day.”

That was it.

That was all I could say that I accomplished on a regular basis. Much to my horror, a couple of those tears escaped and trickled down my cheek.

“Oh, honey!” The women encircled me. “You’re a *mama!*”

“Mothering little ones is hard work! It takes a lot of love and sacrifice.”

“You’re doing something really important.”

“I never managed to make my bed when my kids were little,” one of them said with a laugh, and suddenly I felt like I was Woman of the Year.

That day, the women in the circle showed me that “accomplishments” were not a true measure of my worth. They affirmed me in ways that went far deeper than how many stacks of clean clothes I’d put away or how perfect my home looked. They made me feel loved. They welcomed me into their lives without first doing a spot check to see if I met a list of standards. In a small way, they reflected what God does for each of us.

Hooray! God’s not checking my laundry baskets.

In all seriousness, God’s not holding up impossible standards for us to keep before He showers us with His love. There’s no prerequisite for His acceptance of us. There’s no checklist for us to do first. This is really important to know because sometimes we get a little confused about things, thinking we have to fulfill a grand purpose *in order for* Him to love us.

God's love is purely unconditional.

It’s not tied to our performance or our accomplishments. It does not rest on how well we do on some test. It is all based on His grace for us.

That's tough to accept in our modern, achievement-oriented world. We've been trained to work for the A+, for the promotions, for the attaboys . . . by trying harder and doing more. We are conditioned to believe in a merit system that says, "You must earn your way."

God's grace, by contrast, says, "You are enough."

"You are enough for Me to love, to sacrifice for, and to invite you to be with Me forever."

Just as you are.

READ

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. EPHESIANS 2:8-9

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 8:38-39

REFLECT

The honest truth, please:

Do you ever feel like you need to earn God's love or approval? ____

How does this affect the way you approach God? _____

How does this affect the way you think about your purpose? _____

RESPOND

Find a quiet place to spend a few moments alone. Think about the following:

1. What would it feel like to be completely known—every thought, every action, every mistake, every doubt, hope, fear, and dream—and *to be completely accepted*? _____

2. Imagine undergoing a complete scan of your mind and self—all the secrets inside revealed—and as each part of you was scanned, it was deemed precious, accepted, and worthy of love. How would you respond? _____

3. What if you felt no shame for anything in your past or anything in your present life, and felt no fear about the future? How would it affect your decisions? Your relationships? Your current situation? _____

This is what God's grace is: Total acceptance. Total love. Rest in that for a moment. In fact, rest in it all week.

How does it change the way you see yourself? _____

Write out the following verse and put it where you can see it every day.

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us

from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 8:38-39

..... Day Three

MADE TO BELONG

.....

*“God’s brilliant splendor fills the heavens, and the earth
is filled with his praise.”*

HABAKKUK 3:1

AS A CHILD, I loved our family Christmas traditions. Because we are descendants of Norwegian immigrants, our holiday activities had a distinctively Scandinavian flavor. Christmas Eve was our big event, beginning with a sumptuous candlelit dinner on the best china. There was always a selection of Norwegian goodies, like *lefse*, a tortilla-like flatbread made from potatoes, and cookies and sweets made from recipes handed down through the generations. Unfortunately, no Christmas dinner was complete without a plate of boiled codfish called *lutefisk*, which smelled just as awful as it tasted. How anyone actually liked it is still a huge mystery to me, but it was our ethnic tradition, and so we suffered on.

The family gift exchange could not take place until the dishes were done (which seemed to take forever) and after everyone settled in the



living room for a short program by the children, which included the reading of the Christmas story from the Bible. It was a near-magical night, something that was unique and special to us.

As a family, we belong to each other, and not just through shared traditions. We are marked by a shared history, shared responsibilities, shared privileges, and most of all, a shared love for one another. It's really no surprise that God uses the concept of family when describing the people who follow Him. When you choose to enter into a relationship with Jesus, the Bible says you are adopted into God's family, and you're given all the shared privileges and responsibilities of a daughter or son (Romans 8:15-17, 22-24). What an exceptional gift.

*It's within this context
of family that purpose begins
to take shape.*

There is a distinctiveness to being part of one big family. There is a belongingness, a shared history, a common ground. We are connected to each other, even when we are separated by physical miles.

Not only does God use the word *family* to describe us (Ephesians 2:19), but He also uses the word *body* (1 Corinthians 12:12). It's the idea that we are all important parts of one whole. Each one of us needs the others in order to fully function. Just as an eye can't say to a hand, "I don't need you," and the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you" (1 Corinthians 12:19-21), it's the same with this body of people who follow Jesus. We need one another. You and I are necessary for the health of the entire unit.

And here's the thing: as both a body and a family, we are marked not by human genetics, but by love for each other. God's love imprints on us, and it becomes the basis for all that we do. It's this love that

makes us different from the world. It's this love that motivates us to learn and grow, and to reach out to others. It's how we know God's Spirit is with us.

Love is the only thing that the Bible calls the "greatest" thing (1 Corinthians 13:13), and John 13:34-35 says, "Now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

READ

Now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. EPHESIANS 2:19

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! I JOHN 3:1

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. I JOHN 4:7-8

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. ROMANS 12:4-5

REFLECT

God chose to use the terms *family* and *body* for His followers. Do you feel a part of this family? _____

God's purpose for you starts within this family. He gives gifts and abilities to each person in order for the whole body to function. What gifts and abilities do you have, and what roles and responsibilities do you fill? _____

What rights and privileges do you think come with membership in this kind of family? _____

What does being part of a family mean to you? _____

RESPOND

1. If being part of a family is one of God's purposes for every person who follows Him, how is that reflected in your life? Are you connected to others in a deep relational way? Do you feel needed? Why or why not? _____

2. Describe your role (or what you'd like your role to be) in a family of people. This could be a local church, a group of friends, or even the study group using this workbook. _____

3. In what ways do you rely on others? _____

4. Being part of a family requires a level of unselfishness to make it work. Describe a time when you unselfishly served another person or group, and what it felt like. _____

5. As in every family, there may be things you would like to change but feel you can't (like our Norwegian *lutefisk*). Are you bound by other people's expectations to remain the same, or do you have freedom to make changes—in roles, traditions, beliefs, activities? Why or why not? _____

WEEK ONE : PURPOSED

..... Day Four

MADE TO GROW

.....

“Look and be amazed . . .”

HABAKKUK 1:5

WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE, one of my professors was known around campus for her extensive wardrobe. Every day she wore a different outfit to class, with perfectly matching accessories, and every day I sat in awe. I couldn't tear my eyes away from her. She was a fashion plate from head to toe, and it was mesmerizing.

Unfortunately, her wardrobe was from 1969 . . . and it was now the mid-1980s. Each outfit, from the plaid bell-bottom pantsuits, to the pleated skirts with knee socks and loafers, to the silky blouses tied at the waist, made her look as if she'd stepped off the pages of *Vogue*—fifteen years earlier. Walking into her classroom was like being in a time warp. I had to touch my eighties perm and adjust my shoulder pads to remember that I was in the right decade! Thankfully, I had a Rubik's Cube in my slouchy purse to keep me grounded.

My teacher's outdated fashion sense was the subject of a few snickers from the back of the room, although perhaps she showed more sense than the rest of us by not embracing the eighties. Nonetheless,



the memory reminds me how easy it is to get stuck in one place and never learn to embrace change or growth.

Getting stuck happens all the time, most often when we find something that seems to work well for a season. I mean, my college instructor's style was *darling*. But she didn't realize that she'd "aged out" of the outfits from her sorority days. When I looked closely, the seams were stretched a little tight, and the fabric was worn. And the clothes were simply out of date. For us, maybe it's a set of beliefs, or a way of dealing with problems, or a habit that provides relief to our stressed-out lives that is wearing thin. But our go-to strategy becomes so familiar and comfortable that we don't even realize when it's not working anymore. We miss the fact that it's time to move on, or make new choices, or grow up.

The thing is . . . we were made to grow.

If we aren't growing spiritually and emotionally, we're short-changing ourselves and others around us. We can't fulfill any purpose or reach our dreams at all. The great news is that flourishing in God's purpose for our lives means that we'll always be growing. It's that aspect of God working "in you" that we talked about in day one. It is present and ongoing because God is always working on our hearts. His work will never go out of style or be outgrown.

Remember the little book of Habakkuk I mentioned? It reads a bit like a journal, showing how the writer grows in understanding and maturity as time and events move along.

Habakkuk starts with a complaint.

But he ends by giving praise and thanks to God.

And in between? There are questions, and preparation, and change. There is learning, and there is growth. Within Habakkuk's lines, we see character qualities emerge that remind us that this is how God's purpose works in us as He is working through us.

READ

Habakkuk chapters 1–3

Today’s reading is an entire book of the Bible, but it’s a short read. I want you to get a flavor of what the book is about, since it provides the backdrop to our study.

REFLECT

As you read the chapters, look for the progression of growth that takes place in Habakkuk. Here is an outline to help you.

1. Habakkuk’s first complaint: 1:1-4
2. God’s first answer: 1:5-11
3. Habakkuk’s second complaint: 1:12–2:1
4. God’s second answer: 2:2-20
5. Habakkuk’s prayer-like song: 3:1-19

RESPOND

Like Habakkuk, we are called to grow—spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. Sometimes the most difficult situations we face bring about the most growth. What are some situations you’ve faced that have caused you to grow? _____

..... Day Five

MADE FOR AUTHENTICITY

.....

“How long, O LORD, must I call for help?”

HABAKKUK 1:2

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED someone for the first time and, without knowing anything about her, instantly liked her?

Maybe there was something in the woman’s voice that made you feel good, or you found her facial expression to be interesting or engaging. Perhaps there was something about her sense of style that made you take notice.

Or maybe you found yourselves in a shared situation, like experiencing terrible service in a restaurant, and you caught each other’s exasperated eyes from over your tables. You didn’t know anything about her background, her family, her story, or what was wrong with her order, but you connected immediately. And when you heard her ask to speak to the manager, you knew you were born to be soul sisters.

This is my kind of person, you think. Someone who speaks her mind.

Well, that’s just how I feel about the obscure man we met yesterday in the pages of the Bible’s Old Testament. The encounter is brief—just



three short chapters in the middle part of the Bible where the pages sometimes get stuck together and you can miss an entire book with a flip of a page clump. In this section there's a handful of books collectively known as the Minor Prophets because they are so short. The chapters in this particular book don't seem to be long enough for us to get to know the author well, but somehow he leaves an impression.

This is our kind of guy.

We know his name: Habakkuk. (I know, right? What was his mother thinking?) We also know his occupation: he was a prophet, and most scholars believe he was also a musician in the Temple, which is where he made his home. His job as a prophet was important to the people of his day, because Bibles didn't exist at that time. God used prophets like Habakkuk to communicate to them what was on His heart.

You might be familiar with Daniel (of the lions' den account), who was a contemporary of Habakkuk. But this man gets a lot less space in the Bible. We don't know a whole lot about him, but that's okay because we like him already.

He opens with revealing honesty. It's a complaint. And he's going straight to management with it: "How long, O LORD, must I call for help?"

Hey, he's just saying what everyone else is thinking.

How long, O Lord, are you going to wait to answer me?

Digging in with resolve, Habakkuk stands out among his fellow prophets, who delivered God's message without much commentary and certainly without direct complaint to the Almighty. Few people in that day had that kind of audacity. The honesty and humanity with which Habakkuk talks to God tells us something about him that we can relate to. He's exasperated, and he's not afraid to voice it.

But Habakkuk doesn't stop there, and this is why I admire him so much. In the verses that follow he reveals a heart that is open and a willingness to listen. He is authentic, through and through.

Habakkuk speaks his mind, then positions himself to hear and respond.

Like us, Habakkuk is waiting on a vision.

He knows he needs to hear from God. He needs a message that will give him direction and clarity. He is looking for an answer that will make a difference in the world around him.

This interaction between Habakkuk and God will provide the basis for the rest of our underpainting in this study. We will reference Habakkuk's story to help us discover God's purpose for our lives, finding ways to draw modern life principles for ourselves from this ancient conversation.

There is gold here, my friend.

So let's begin with authenticity, just as Habakkuk does.

READ

This is the message that the prophet Habakkuk received
in a vision.

How long, O LORD, must I call for help?

HABAKKUK 1:1-2

I am sick at heart.

How long, O LORD, until you restore me?

PSALM 6:3

In my distress I cried out to the LORD;
yes, I prayed to my God for help.

He heard me from his sanctuary;
my cry to him reached his ears.

PSALM 18:6

REFLECT

Be honest: Have you ever cried out, “How long, O Lord?” I sure have.

- How long will I have to wait?
- How long will I have to work at this job that seems to suck the life from me?
- How long until I understand my purpose and calling?
- How long will it take until I know what I’m “supposed to do” when I grow up?
- How long until I can go “pro” in my calling and really live fully?

Here’s the thing: God invites our honest, heartfelt cries. He doesn’t mind when we express our exasperation and frustration. In fact, He invites it. So we might as well get real. If you’re waiting on a vision or calling, wondering what your purpose is or how to get there, let Him know how you feel. Go ahead—He won’t mind.

RESPOND

What is your “How long, O Lord?” prayer today? What is it that you are waiting on? Write it on the following lines or use the prayer that I’ve included on the next page as a place to start. _____

Dear God, sometimes it feels like I'll never discover my purpose. It feels like it's taking forever for You to answer my prayer for guidance and help. I want to understand Your plan and find peace in the knowledge that You hear me. Take my discouragement and frustration and replace it with faith and joy. Help me to trust You with all my concerns and allow You to fill me with confidence that You are with me on this journey. Amen.