



Christians on Trial – Part 3

Grace, Patience, & Persistence

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You know sometimes the Bible states the obvious and it does so in Proverbs 23:24 where it speaks of parents and it says when you see your child be righteous that it brings you great joy. "The father of a wise son will be glad." And I don't think there's anybody who has been a parent who doesn't know, at least episodically, the experience of watching your children do the right thing and having it bring some great joy to your heart, even at the toddler stage. Right? You see that first act of real sacrificial generosity or something and you're like, wow. And you feel so proud, you feel so happy at watching your child do something right in grade school, standing up for what's right when it was going to cost them jeers or some kind of a response from people that were going to be hard for your children. Or junior high, high school standing on the right side of a decision or enduring a breakup or some kind of failure and doing it with grace and patience, you just think, wow, that's great.

Few things bring us joy more than that. And of course I say it states the obvious you think why would the Bible state the obvious? Because the next verse says, well, we ought to seek to be those kinds of people. And I guess in the immediate context that if we have grown parents watching our lives as grown-up people that we would bring joy to our parents. I mean, that's what Proverbs 23:25 says. You ought to seek to be that kind of person who brings joy to your parents. You'll be the righteous person, the wise person. Even as Christians, grown-up Christians, what we want to do is please our Heavenly Father, our creator. That's what we want. And it is a mind-boggling thing to think that we as Christians can affect the disposition of the creator of the universe. I mean, just think about that for a minute. That is true. That is the truth of the Bible. The Bible says that God sees our actions and some of our actions, like it says in First Timothy Chapter 2, there aren't only good things that we do but their good and well pleasing things to God. That's amazing. Right? To think that you could do something this week that would make God feel pleased.

And beyond that, to really get to an emotional response, you think about it in Philippians Chapter 4, when it speaks of the fact that the Philippians had done something in this case, a generous thing that they did. And Paul says that this was like a sweet-smelling aroma, "a fragrant sacrifice" that God just welcomed. I mean, it gets to that olfactory experience of us smelling things and we know what it's like. Some of that, it just touches in kind of an inexpressible part of like that's just a good, it's good. And you can think about God looking at something you and I do and it's good.

Now, sometimes we think it's hard to please God when times are hard, but that's probably the most opportune time we have to bring joy to God's heart, to have him look at us and say, attaboy. That's the way I want them to live. That's the way that I want them to do their Christian life. So I want you to just think as we start this morning that you have the ability to affect the Lord's heart in a positive way, that you can bring pleasure to God if you just do the things that are embedded in this passage that we will extract, put on the table and say here are three things, three virtues of the Christian life. And if you would purpose to make this your



ambition and actually accomplish a little bit of this this week, you can have God, so to speak, smile and feel like he just smelled this great thing and it's just a pleasing sweet sacrifice in his heart. That would be awesome, "That the father of the wise son will be glad."

I hope that as we look at this text in Acts 24, you will find it as an opportunity to please the Lord because certainly we will make some observations that I guarantee you would please the Lord because he says elsewhere that all of these things bring great pleasure to him. So let me read this for you from Acts Chapter 24 verses 22 through 27. Acts 24:22 through 27. I'll read it from the English Standard Version, as you remember that Paul is in fact in a hard time. He's unjustly imprisoned. He was brought to Caesarea there because he was going to stand trial, they hired an attorney there from Jerusalem, Tertullus, who came and made his case, Paul made his response the last time we were together. And now we're going to see what happens after the response. What's the judge going to say? What is Felix, the leader of Judea, going to say? This Roman appointed governor. What's he going to do? Is he going to let him out? Is he going to convict him? Is he going to get him some sentence? Let's see what happens.

Verse 22, "But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way." Remember, that's how we describe people who believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Of course, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father," this Jewish depicted God of the universe, "no one comes to the Father except through me." So if he's the way and he's really the culmination of all the messianic promises of the Old Testament, well, then that's a big claim. And there are some people who believe that, including Paul. And so here, Felix, has some accurate knowledge, he's learned some truthful things about Christianity, if we put it in our terms, but he's going to put them off. This is the sad thing. "He put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." So we're going to have to have the tribune come from Jerusalem who oversaw all this, arrested him and brought him with this guarded Roman cohort around him. We have to see him come down and then when he comes we'll decide your case. And like a lot of what happens in courtrooms here today, a lot of things are postponed. Postponed. Postponed. And if you're on trial you want this thing to be heard. And so this has got to be disappointing for Paul.

Verse 23, "Then he gave orders," that is Felix, the governor, "to the centurion," who was overseeing Paul, "that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty." What liberty did he get? "And that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs." So he's going to get a little special treatment here in this prison, perhaps because Felix knows he's not a bad guy. I mean, he's given his defense. Maybe he's believing the fact that he's really not, you know, stirring up the Jews against the Romans, that he's not a troublemaker, that he's not, you know, stirring up the tumult or some kind of insurrectionist. And so maybe he believes that, so I'm going to give you kind of celebrity prisoner treatment. He can't leave. Right? He's not going anywhere, but I'll let people come and visit you and, you know, if they want to bring you stuff and bring you scrolls and bring you ink for your quills, you write these letters, but I'll let them come and do all that because, you know, whatever. Because I'm in charge and I can tell you that you can have this. So he gets this leniency and yet he's still under arrest.

Verse 24, "After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish." So maybe one of the reasons, if his wife was a Jew, was that she was telling him about all the scuttle going on in Israel during the life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection of Christ. And maybe, you know, that's how he got his knowledge of the Way. "And he sent for Paul." And what do you think happens? Well, he hears from Paul what he's always doing. "He's preaching about faith in Christ Jesus." You need to put your trust in the Messiah, this man, Jesus, who is also God, who forgives our sins, you need to trust in him. "And as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, 'Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.' At the same time he hoped that money would be given to him by Paul." Why would he think that? Remember, he comes and one of his defensive lines is, I didn't come here as an insurrectionist or a troublemaker. "I came bringing alms to Jerusalem." And of course, we know that from Second Corinthians Chapter 8, that these were gifts that were taken from the churches in Asia Minor and in Achaia and Macedonia, where they got money given by Christians there where there was no famine, to go to Jerusalem where there was a famine. And he was bringing money and relief primarily to the Church of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

So Felix is thinking, wow, this guy has fundraising capacity. This guy has friends in high places. This guy's got an ability to have a lot of cash in his hand. He came here with some and who knows how much of it was put into evidence when he was arrested. Maybe he'd already given it to the church, but he's got potential for a lot of money. And of course, Felix is corrupt like many leaders are, certainly in the ancient world. And he thinks maybe he can get a bribe. He can be bribed. Grease my palm maybe I'll let you out or give you more freedoms. Felix was hoping some kind of deal would be made. He could enrich his own pocketbook through Paul. "So he sent for him often." That word "so" is important. That's why he sent for him often. And he "conversed with him," even though he's alarmed by some of the things that Paul is saying he's going to talk to him.

"When two years had elapsed." Think about that. Two years. If you were arrested today on trumped-up charges. You're put in the county jail and you were made to wait for a trial and that trial kept getting put off, but they wouldn't release you. You couldn't post the bail, but you're stuck in jail for two years, right? This is an amazing passage. And if you put yourself in Paul's sandals, you think this is rough. Really rough. "After two years elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. And then we'll see you in the next chapter Festus drags his feet as well until finally Paul appears before King Agrippa. And we have all of this just dragging on and on and on and on. So this is a hard situation. It's not fun. It's difficult and is not what Paul wanted. He's a traveling missionary. He wants to go preach in the synagogues. He wants to preach in the marketplace. He'd like to preach in Athens again. He'd like to preach in Jerusalem. And yet he's stuck here in accessory. In jail. He gets visitors, he gets supplies brought to him, but he's stuck. He has no freedom to do the thing he thinks he's called to do for years. Try to pin this together with a timeline of what we figured out and where we can put points and pegs in terms of the timeline, it was probably three, if not four years before he was out from this



custody and put on a ship heading to Rome. So this is more than just a month or a day or a week.

For whatever reason that Paul is given this special celebrity treatment it is important to note that he got this celebrity treatment. He got liberty, some liberty, and he got his friends coming and going. Did he get that in the jail at Philippi? No. Did he get any freedom? No. His feet were in stocks. He couldn't move. He couldn't walk around. So this is a kind of lax incarceration, we might call it, you know, today like a, you know, a minimum-security prison. But he's getting latitude in that sense this is a bright spot. It's a silver lining. They tried to paint the clouds as dark enough for you to see that this is a bad situation. But here's one thing that's good. And all I'm saying is you need to realize, Paul, this could be worse. You could be in stocks. And it's not beyond the Romans to do that to you even in Caesarea. You could be conscripted to hard labor every day but you're not. You don't get to preach. You don't get to travel. You don't get to see these churches you care so much about. But you get some freedom. Now that's a bright spot. That's something that's hard for us when we're going through hard times to see.

But sometimes we just need to stop and see it. We need to recognize, let's put it this way, number one, "Be Grateful It's Not Worse." And I don't know why you're going through the present trial that you are or what your next trial will be all about. But perhaps the trial will align just with the Apostle Paul, in the sense that you will be paying a price in your life because you stood faithfully with Christ. And if that's the case, it's Christianity on trial. Because you're a Christian, you didn't get the promotion, because you're a Christian and you stood up for what's right you lost the job, because you're a Christian you've been, you know, ostracized from your family, your extended family, your friends. Maybe something because of your faithfulness to Christ has been the cause, but maybe it's just something else, maybe not related at all to your Christianity. Things happened in the market and you've lost your job. Or maybe it is that you found yourself diagnosed with an illness and you think, wow, I don't even know if I'm going to get better. This could be terminal and you're stuck. You're in a trial and all Christians have these. We're not exempt from these.

And in the middle of all this, I just need you to see that the Bible would remind us, just like in Lamentations Chapter 3, when everything is going wrong, what did Jeremiah say, right? Every morning there are new mercies, and we should be able to look for those new mercies and see them as mercies. Mercies describing something good, the silver lining as a mercy, is connecting it to God who is mercifully giving you this in the midst of a bad time. And that means you've got to notice it, you've got to connect it to God, because "Every good and perfect gift comes from God." Anything good is from God. And yet this is going to be tremendously hard for you to do.

It was just a couple of days before Christmas, just this last Christmas. I'm driving my really cool, gray-painted VW Atlas. And not just an Atlas like a mom Atlas, this was like the cross-sport. This was cool. Bigger rims, really nice. Got the little, you know, the little subscription to get it washed, you know, as much as I want every month, it's just that nice looking car in. I even put a little Armor All on the tires. And before Christmas, I'm driving down La Paz going



eastbound, about to go underneath the I-5 freeway. And if you know the area, you know the southbound I-5 has an off-ramp there. And coming down that hill there's a light. Unfortunately, the guy who was going through that light didn't see that it was red. And I'm driving and he T-Bones me. I'm going whatever the speed limit is, whatever the speed limit is, that's what I was going. And he T-Bones me and instantly I'm thinking about where I'm going, what I'm doing, blah blah, blah, blah. And all the airbags go off and then I'm on the teacups at Disneyland. I just started spinning around in this intersection.

It was that night just before Christmas where it rains, so rainy, and it was one of the first rains for a while so you know how that is. It was just like I was on the teacups. I don't know how many times I spun around with the bags blowing. I've never been in a car accident where the airbags have gone off. Some of you have. So you know what this is like. It's like SURPRISE, right? And you don't know what's going on. Violently thrown around. Things go everywhere, right? It got a nice little magnet where my phone is. And yet it didn't stick with the jolt. Things fly around, bags come down, can't see anything, and it's dark, it's nighttime, it's raining and it's a mess. I mean, absolutely a mess. The way he hit me just right at the side of my door, the passenger door and my rear wheel tire blew out. Everything was twisted and a mess and I came to a stop and I realized that I couldn't see anything. The drape that comes down the bag next to you which is really cool because it cushioned my head instead of flying through the side windshield, it was amazing except I couldn't see. I heard someone come up to me within seconds and start knocking on the window to see if I was alive or dead and I couldn't open the door. I wanted to tell him I was okay but the door wouldn't open. And I took my pocket knife out and I cut that bag and I could look at him. I could yell through the little tiny crack now that was in my door. Hey. I'm okay. I'm alive I think, everything's cool. And in the middle of all that, as my insurance company later said, and I knew at the moment it happened, my car was totaled.

But here's what I noticed. There were several things in my car that still worked. That little visor mirror when you open that little cover, the light still comes on. It was hard to start the car but I could see how my hair was after the crash. (audience laughing) I had a lot of little things that still worked. I mean, everything was all over the interior of my car. But, you know, the radio was still on. Cool. I wasn't interested in listening at that point but the radio still worked. And I thought, as I checked myself with the guy saying are you okay? I thought, well, I think so. I don't think anything's broken. I realized I was still alive. You have that moment thinking am I still alive? How long do you linger down here for your spirit? Like I don't know. Yeah. I'm here. I'm alive. I think. I was doing this with my hand. I'm alive.

And I thought at that moment, even though it was hard to think, it could be worse. And though the insurance company said your car is totaled and I got the letter, your car is totaled, I recognized that with the insurance company that's not really an absolute statement. Because when it comes down to it, you start reading all the details when you realize how your insurance actually works. And the other guy thankfully had his insurance, and we started looking at all the paperwork. You realize that when it comes to the payment that's given to pay off the guy, because I was leasing this car, to the leaseholder you realize the car wasn't like exactly totally totaled. Because they sell this. I mean, someone's got that visor with that little



light that's working. That's sold to someone. I mean, the radio, apparently, the head unit still works. Well, I mean, they're going to piece this car out. I don't know how it all works. You're going to tell me afterwards. We're not super interested. But the idea is these parts of the parts of the car that did work, here's something, the front right wheel was still perfect. It was still shiny, Armor All. I mean, that wheel costs a lot of money. And so when they did the accounting on my car, it wasn't total totaled, but it was totaled because I had to get a new car.

And I recognized it was really hard for me to get excited about a visor mirror light that worked, or that my radio was still on, or that my phone after it smashed around in the car like a pachinko ball and I picked it up it and it still worked, my phone still worked. So it was hard for me to rejoice in what still worked because I was now like a couple of days before Christmas with a lot to do. There was a lot going on at the church. We have, of course, all the Christmas Eve services and the weekend services. It was just like, is this the week, God, really you want to take my car away from me? It was just like a bad time. So I wasn't really rejoicing on how much of the car was still marketable to the junk dealers or however it works. And yet that's exactly what God would have us do.

"Count your blessings," the old hymn said, "Name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God has done." Because anything good in the midst of your trial, even if it's a terrible cancer you've been diagnosed with, or you've lost your job or your relationship at home is falling apart. Whatever is bad you need to recognize this truth, and it is true, it could be worse. And I know your brain says it couldn't be worse, it couldn't be worse. I've totaled my car just a couple of days before Christmas. It couldn't be worse. Well, it could be worse. It could be a lot worse. I mean, I walked away from it. I was able to make a phone call. I was able to deal with the things in my life and I didn't skip a beat. I had to preach the next morning. I did preach the day after. I did preach the weekend upcoming. No one even knew. I mean, I got through it and God gave me what I needed to get through this little crisis compared to being arrested and in jail for 3 or 4 years. And God provided.

And Paul could say, and I know he would be grateful because he taught us this simple principle in First Thessalonians Chapter 5. "You ought to be thankful in all circumstances," thankful in ALL circumstances. And here's what I would say to Paul exactly what he said to us. You should be thankful, Paul, in the circumstance of being incarcerated in Caesarea. And here's one thing on his list: I was given some liberty. People could come and visit me. I wasn't in stocks. They weren't beating me. I could do ministry at least one-on-one with people when they came to see me. And he was able, I'm sure, to itemize what he tells us to itemize and that is what are the good things that God is doing in the midst of this? What has God left you with? What do you still have? When your life is totaled and you think it's totaled just remember, it's not totaled. It's not totaled.

Psalm 103. Would you look at this passage with me? You need to purposefully tell yourself you must give thanks when it is difficult, when it is hard, when you are struggling, what are the good pictures of God's mercy that he is still providing for you? And if you would train yourself to do what this passage says it begins to take you out of the quagmire of saying life is terrible, this is awful, my life is over, what do I have left to live for? Stop it! You need to do exactly



what David did. Do you think David had any trials? He had all kinds of trials. He had dead children. Have you been doing the Daily Bible Reading with us on the Compass schedule here at Compass Bible Church? Did you read about all that stuff with the Ahithophel? Did you read about Absalom's betrayal? Did you read about David, the King, who was finally put ensconced in the throne room of Jerusalem, who is now leaving as Shimei is throwing rocks at him as he's leaving town, and Absalom has taken over, and they're taking his wives and having sex with them on the top of the palace so that everyone could see it.

David has had some hard times. He knows what it is to struggle. And he also knows, like the Apostle Paul, you better stop and take an assessment of what is still left. Can you itemize the good that is still in place? And once you do, you need to say what he says in Psalm 103 verse 1. Look at it. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me," he's talking to himself, "bless his holy name." Give thanks to him. Kneel down to him. That's what the word, the Hebrew word "Bārak," it means to kneel and give thanks and give homage to the Lord. "Bless the Lord," verse 2, "O my soul." And here is the key. "Forget not all his benefits." Now, when David is running from Saul as a fugitive, when his face is on posters at the post office and he's wanted and he has to hide or like we've just read in our Daily Bible Reading this last week, he's having to feigned his craziness just to survive. He has to go live with the Philistines. When things are bad for David he's teaching us here, as God uses him to teach all of us, that we need to not forget his benefits.

And you know what? Here at the top of the list, verse 3, here's the thing that you ought to be grateful for the most if you sit here today as a Christian, if you know that you've put your trust in Christ, if the thing that Paul preaches about in Caesarea to Felix and Drusilla, if that is true of you, that you have your faith in Jesus Christ, then here's the thing: God has taken your sins and he's forgiven them. You are not spiritually dead before God. You were dead in your transgressions, but now he's made you alive, Ephesians 2, in Christ because "by faith you're saved... not by works." You put your trust in Christ. You know the good thing that I had in my mind that day is that I'm still alive in the detritus interior of my Atlas. I'm still alive. In a way I was thinking I still got to preach tomorrow. It was like, I got stuff I got to do and I'm going to still be able to do it, I think. I may need to take an Uber to get there but I'm still functioning. And I'm alive. And if your marriage is falling apart, your job is falling apart, your health is falling apart, if you are a Christian here's one thing that you will never have to fear. No condemnation from God. "There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." If that doesn't start to lift a little bit of your mind to say it's not a total loss, my life is not a total loss, it could be worse. I could be a non-Christian headed to hell and hearing from God "Depart from me. I never knew you." That's not my reality. No matter how bad it gets, that's not my reality. And it's not your reality either if you're a Christian.

By the way, this is what he elaborates on later in this passage. Look what he says in Psalms 103 verse 8. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." He won't always chide. He won't keep his anger forever. Even if the pain in your life is the discipline of the Lord. "He doesn't deal with us," ultimately, "according to our sins. He doesn't repay us according to our iniquities." Verse 11, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him." If you're thinking of a



PowerPoint presentation on the various levels of love and commitment, you got God's and it goes off the chart, off the screen, out of the conference room and it goes all the way up to the heavens. That's how much his love is for you. And he says in this passage, look at that. And if you want to talk about his forgiveness, verse 12, "As far as the east is from the west," which is infinite. They never touch. There's no proximity to east and west. They're in radically different directions. "So far does he remove our transgressions from us." Why? Because he's a father and he looks at us with compassion. And he's forgiven us because we've responded. We fear him. We trust him. We put our trust in his Son. He shows compassion for those who fear him.

That's one thing that you would say if everything else was wrong, if it was truly totaled, if I still walked out of that and I was still alive physically in a temporal sense, that's an illustration that reminds you no matter how bad your life is, if you're a Christian, you're still spiritually alive in Christ. No one can take that from me. Felix couldn't take that from Paul. It's at the top of the list. And guess what? David as he's running from Saul or whenever he wrote this in his history here's this, he heals all your diseases. Go back to verse 3. Second half of verse 3, "He heals all your diseases." The thing that David was dealing with was not a terminal illness on his deathbed. He didn't write this then. He's writing it when he's out perhaps running from Saul and he knows this. I may be hunted down but at least I still got my legs, right? I'm still running. I'm still able to hide. I still have my eyesight. I mean, anything I had in terms of a fever that made me feel like dying a year ago, two years ago, I'm healthy now. I've gotten through it all. I'm not dying right this minute. And when I've been back down, verse 4, the alley, and I thought I'm going to get mugged and this is over, my life, "You've redeemed my life from the pit, you've crowned me."

Now look at these categories, with "Hesed" the Hebrew word, "steadfast or faithful loyal love." You have love that has not been removed from me. That is a positive thing. That's the concept of grace. He gives us grace, favor that we don't deserve, steadfast, covenant, loyal love to his people. And then it says, "and mercy." That means you didn't get all that you deserved. Because if I really looked at my sin, if I looked at my sin honestly, I should have been dying in a fiery car accident and I should be "thrown into outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth." But if that doesn't happen then I know he's been merciful to me. I can look at my life and say not only is God graciously loving, he's also mercifully withholding. That's exactly what Jeremiah says as a remnant of people sat there watching the Temple of Solomon burned to the ground and having all those pillars knocked over by the soldiers and all the horses and the ropes that were put on top of things and they toppled down because Nebuchadnezzar's army in Babylon was tearing it all down. He sat back and he said, yes, it's horrible. And yet "his mercies are new every morning." Every day we have something to give thanks to God for.

Steadfast love, mercy. Here's our third category, verse 5, and "satisfies you with good." Even in the midst of running from Saul there were days that David sat back, killing some gazelle, roasting it for dinner, laying back, getting a good night's sleep, waking up in the morning still on the run, still in the trial. Still stuck by God in a place where he's having to be persecuted, on trial. And yet there were times that, you know, you woke up refreshed. You got God's love, the grace of God. You got his mercy, withholds the judgment that we should have. He doesn't



reward us according to our iniquities. Not at least fully the way they should be. He may discipline us but he does not bring us condemnation for our sins. And then every now and then he just keeps popping these good gifts into our lives.

There's plenty for us in our trial to thank God for. And even if it's just that the only blessing Paul has is I get some liberties, I get some. I don't get liberty, but I get some liberty. I get people to come and visit me. I get to talk one-on-one and disciple people here. I don't know how long they're going to let him stay but I get people bringing me provisions, giving me some things I need, some things I want. It's not as bad as it could be. And you should be grateful in your life right now. It is not as bad as it could be. It could be worse. You should be grateful and start counting the positives that make it not as bad as it could be. See them, connect them to God, and give thanks to God.

Back to our passage 24:24. Acts 24 verse 24, "After some days Felix came with Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul." My wife's arrived and Paul, come on over. We want to talk to you. And we know in verse 26 the ultimate motive, the recurring motive is at the same time calling to see what's this guy all about. Give me your story. You know about the Way, my wife knows about the Way. Really "he hoped that money would be given to him." He wanted a bribe. "So he sent for him often," he wanted a bribe. And he conversed with him." For two years this went on. And "Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison." He's thinking, I don't want the Sanhedrin against me. If I let this guy out there are so many keyed-up people in the Sanhedrin, they're going to be mad. So to play politics with the Jewish residents of Jerusalem and Judea, he makes this decision to leave Paul in prison. Not because he's seeking justice, not because he wants to do the right thing, not because it is the right thing. The total injustice of this: keep you in prison to see if I can get money out of you because you seem to be a good fundraiser. And I'll do this because politically this works well for the people in Judea. They kind of like me, the Jews do, when I keep you in prison. This is bad. Really bad.

And when I start looking at the time indicators in verse 27, two years had elapsed and then he keeps him in prison. And in Acts Chapter 25 we get after many days, after many days, after many days. We know this extends for a long time. I'm saying this: what you're going to need the Apostle Paul is to keep up an attitude that I'm assuming is there because you've taught us elsewhere how to do it, to give thanks to God for the silver lining in all the trials that you're having, you're going to need a lot of patience. And we're going to have to have that patience and the only way to get that patience is to look to the one who has an absolutely perfect attribute, carries that and has it. God is the patient God. He is the patient God that the Bible says he can make a promise and he can wait a thousand years to fulfill it and it's like I made the promise yesterday. He has no problem waiting. In Psalm 90, older than the hills. "God who was, who is, who is to come." He is eternal in every generation. He's this refuge you can go to. God is not at all affected by time and he is not someone rattling his fingers on his desk saying how long is this going to take. God does not think that way. He doesn't feel that way. He never has that. And God says, I'd like to give that to people who are willing to ask me for it and trust in me for it. He's willing to give you patience.

So much in the Bible is about him granting you the attributes that are of his nature communicable, we say in theology, that they can be shared by his creatures. A lot of things I can't be, I can't be omnipresent, I just can't. I can't be the creator. But I can have some communicable attributes. The Bible says, if you would cooperate with God, if you would draw near to God, if you would, as John 15 says, abide in the vine, then you as a branch can start to bear the fruits of God's communicable attributes. That's why that list in Galatians Chapter 5, all those things are things that God is. God is love, joy, peace. What's the fourth one? Patience, right? And God says, I would like to give you that. We need to start seeking that because the world is filled with injustice. Your job is filled with injustice, right? There are things in our culture that you're just going to hate. And you're going to say, how long, O Lord, how long? You need patience. And I would say, number two, you need to "Pray to be Patient with this World." And the expressions of this world might be in his case, it was the governor. In your case, it's the governor. In your case, it's your boss. In your case, it may be a family member. And you say I'm stuck here.

And if you start reading the Bible and thinking about it in terms of a time frame, if you really put yourself in the sandals of the people who are described in the Bible you'll start to see, "God, you're making these people wait like crazy all the time." I mean, think about it. These people are languishing in slavery in Egypt, and God starts to work this out to hear their cries and respond. He has Moses grow up for 40 years in Egypt preparing him to lead the people, and then Moses kills the Egyptian and then runs into the wilderness to meet his future father-in-law and work for Jethro and that's another 40-year period. What? Think about the 40 years of hardship of all the slaves, the Jewish slaves, with the taskmasters bearing down on them in Egypt. That is a long time, 40 years. If you had a problem and you were incarcerated for 40 years and that's exactly what it felt like if you were a Jew living in Egypt in the 15th century B.C. You're waiting for Moses to get over his guilt of killing an Egyptian. Come on man. Wait, wait. God prolongs the difficulty and the trial of those in Egypt.

Then he gets them out of Egypt. Because they go to Kadesh-Barnea. they send in 12 spies. Ten come back and say we don't like it. Two said, yeah, we can do it. God says, ahh.. we're going to put this on pause. He puts it on pause for another 40 years. 40 years. You finally get out of slavery and you're waiting to go into the Promised Land. And all you do is eat manna every day and circle around in the Sinai Peninsula. This is incredibly crazy. God, get them to where you said you're going to take them. I'm going to make you wait. I'm going to prolong your wait, I'm going to keep you in this trial. Then they get into the Promised Land and Joshua is all about that. And it covers a short period of time in the conquest of Israel. And do you know the next book that follows Joshua? What's the next book that came in the Bible after Joshua? Judges. Do you know anything about the book of Judges? They got a short period of the conquest, and then Judges comes in and this was long, this was like 300 years of history. And all it is are the failures of Israel. And then God raised up in some cases, seems like absolutely incompetent leaders to bring them out of their problems and to lead some kind of revolt against the oppressors on the bordering nations, and then to bring them back to peacetime and then that just stays for a few years and then we're back. You have a cycle of judges that goes 12, 13, 14 times by the time we get to First Samuel of failure, failure, failure.



The nation languished. And you know what they needed? Leadership. That's why in the book of Judges it keeps saying there was no king in Israel and "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes." There was no enforcement of righteousness. There were no leaders, no good shepherds. Well, bring David on, would you? Can you do that within like 12 years seeing the problem of them wandering around in the society of Israel? Can't we just get David here, the man after your own heart to shepherd the people of God? Nope. Not going to be for a long time. Even when it's time to get a king in Israel, right? God looks at them, pandering for someone like all the geopolitical leaders. And we want a big, strong, tall, successful person. Let's get him in here. And we choose the worldly man, not the spiritual man. And God says, here's the man you want, and we're going to go through his reign, and it's going to take decades. I want to get on to the right. And God makes them wait. God makes them wait.

And we finally get the kingdom established. David rises to the throne and we have a kingdom. And then it splits in half and then it deteriorates in the north, it deteriorates in the south, and it languishes for centuries, I mean, 600 years and God is just extending that period of time. Then we have 400 years from the promises about the Messiah. They're all wrapped up. There are 400 years of inter-testamental silence. And as it says in the New Testament, as Peter writes, that God uses Peter to write this, even the angels were longing to look when all this was going to happen, when this is all going to take place. Bring the Messiah. And the Messiah comes and he says, okay, you build the kingdom, you witness, you tell people about me, you get a spiritual community together. We'll call it the Church. I'm going to go. And he's been gone for 2,000 years. He's always protracting these periods of time. And he says, in this world you'll have fun. No, "In this world you have tribulation." He's left the Church in a turbulent world now for 2,000 years. It's like, this is the way it works. It's the macrocosm of the timeline of Scripture is that God has no problem protracting and prolonging the trials of his people. Then don't think that when something goes wrong for you and you pray that God's going to just snap his fingers and make it right. Part of his tool in making you who he wants you to be is to make you wait.

And when you wait here's what you need to do. You need to wait well, and that equals patience. Do you know what patience is? Waiting well. Did you wait well? Did Jesus wait well? He waited well, even though he said things like this. Jot it down. This is how Jesus responds when things are hard. The reality of him in Matthew 17:17 and he says it again in Luke 9 verse 41, he says, "O this faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" How long... This is what my dad would say, how long do I have to put up with you, right? That's what he's saying, "Bear with you." How long am I to put up with you? How long? If Jesus, the perfect God-man felt that, then you're going to feel it, even though responding to it without sin is patience. You're going to feel like when is this going to be over?

If you were put in jail, as I said at the outset of this message, and you couldn't even go to trial to figure out whether you're going to go to the penitentiary or whether you're going to be released and it went on for years. Let's just say three years. Hey, parents, think about you. If you're raising young children right now, you are now extracted, and yeah, let's just say there are visiting hours and your kids can come visit. Do you want to visit your kids through



Plexiglas for the next three years of their life? How would you feel? You would defer to things like this: the Bible says I'm supposed to be a mother. The Bible says I'm supposed to be a father. The Bible says I'm supposed to raise my kids in the instruction and the admonition of the Lord, and I'm stuck behind Plexiglas, and they won't even take this case to trial. You'd say, God, this doesn't make any sense.

You know Paul is a missionary. He went around in the first missionary journey planting churches. When he planted them he sat there, it didn't take long for him to say to Barnabas, we got to figure out how they're doing. We got to go back to all the churches and we've got to see how they're doing. We got to make sure that they're growing. We got to make sure they found the right leaders. We got to make sure that they're thriving and that false doctrine isn't encroaching on them. We got to get there. We got to go. And so we have missionary journey number two. And then we have missionary journey number three. And we have all of these concerns about going back to deal with his churches. In Second Corinthians Chapter 11 he says, every day there is the burden, the daily burden, that's the adverb, the daily burden of anxiety on me for all the churches. He saw them, just like he saw Timothy and Titus, as his children. He says that in First Corinthians you are my children. "I become a father to you by the gospel."

Paul is in a jail. There's a nice little Mediterranean breeze coming through the window. He gets to see visitors, but he cannot go face-to-face and check in on these churches. He wanted a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh missionary journey. He didn't get those because he's in jail. I just want you to think how hard that must be as every single day Paul testifies to, he's feeling the pressure of knowing how his children churches are doing, his daughter churches. That's hard. And he had to wait. He had to wait well. You need God to give you that kind of patience. It won't be easy.

Turn to Ephesians Chapter 3. Here's what it's going to take. And I said it this way, but you may not have caught it. God prolongs the trials of his people. God did. And if God prolongs your trial and you think how long am I going to be stuck with this husband? How long am I going to be stuck with this job? How long will I be stuck with whatever? You're a kid, your parents. And you keep saying that. You think about it that way. I just want you to know that you are not in this situation because of human beings. Because if I ask Paul, I go visit him one day in Caesarea. They say, Paul, I'm so glad I got in to see you. I just want to know exactly what's going on because I've heard stories. But who has imprisoned you here? He could say, and he'd be kind of nuanced with this. He can say, well, you know what? It was really all about the Jews and the Jews there in Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin in particular, and all the high priests, they are really concerned about the gospel. And so they were the ones who manipulated the Romans and that's why I'm here sitting in a Roman cell.

Or he could say, you know what? I had a chance to talk to Felix, and I did, both in public and in private. And I told him my case, and he put the key to my jail cell back in his pocket and he's not letting me out. I'm a prisoner of Felix the governor. Or he could say I'm a prisoner of the political maneuvering of the Roman Empire, or I'm a prisoner of the Jewish zealots. He could have a lot of answers to that. But would you look at verse 1 when he says, I'm a



prisoner? Who does he say he's a prisoner of? This is a later imprisonment when he's in Rome, but he's the prisoner of who in this passage? Do you think of yourself that way when you're stuck in a body that is chronically ill? You're not a prisoner of cancer. You're not a prisoner of lupus. You're not a prisoner of some kind of disease. You're "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" because he is the one who is sovereign over all circumstances. You're not a prisoner in that marriage, right? You're a prisoner not of the law. You're not the prisoner of the dictates and principles of Scripture. You're not a prisoner of whatever you might think you're a prisoner of. You're ultimately a prisoner of Christ. That should, I hope, at least mitigate or at least somehow push you in the direction of saying, I'm going to have to wait well because God has me here. God has me here.

Speaking of the slaves in the Old Testament of Israel under the Egyptians and the New Testament there are a lot of slaves in Greco-Roman culture. And Paul said, if you get your opportunity for freedom, take it. But he says you ought to be content in the state in which you are. Can you at least know that if God's got you as a slave or a prisoner or you're single or whatever, can you just at least know God's got you in that? That you're his prisoner in those circumstances. You've got to see this as a God thing. And once you start seeing it as a God thing and you're the prisoner of Christ, you can say, okay, I can learn to wait well. I'm going to wait. I'm learning to wait well, and that's hard to do.

Go with me to one last psalm on this topic, Psalm 13. I want you to look at the last line of Psalm 13 in verse 6. Have you found it? Look at the last 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 words. "Because he has dealt bountifully with me." That may sound like a hymn of praise. "He's dealt bountifully with me." La, la, la laaa... This is great, he's a happy psalmist right here. No, it is the psalmist of Psalm 103 when I gave you kind of an overshadowing context to think of it in. And then I took you back to the times in David's life when he was being persecuted and he was on trial in one way or another. And I said he had to tell his soul to bless the Lord for all of his benefits. This is just like that. It ends there but that's not where it started. He says, "He has dealt bountifully with me." Well he ain't dealing bountifully with me right now. Well, look at verse 1, "How long, O Lord?" Look at verse 1. "How long will you forget me forever." That doesn't sound like God's being bountiful with you. "How long will you hide your face from me?" I'm praying and you're not answering. This is a psalm of David.

There is no telling where he was in his life when this was given. But the idea of him being in trouble and having God not answer. I mean, this was happening if you really read the Bible carefully in First Samuel and Second Samuel, you'll see there were periods of time that sometimes were translated, if you knew the time markers, into years where the simple things you would think as you turn the page, "Oh, finally he's on the throne in Jerusalem." Even from the time that Saul died until the time David was on the throne in Jerusalem over the north and the south, all the tribes of Israel, it took years. This never happens fast. And God's timetable, the patient God, who is very patient to work out his plan. But when you're in the middle of it you're saying how long is this going to last? "How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my own soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" Whether it's Absalom, whether it's Saul, whether who knows what David's thinking of in this particular passage. But when he's losing, like Paul



would say, I'm a missionary, I'm losing right now. You've got to recognize that he's going to get to the place where he says all I can do is pray and count my blessings.

Verse 3, "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God." I'm going to pray. "Light up my eyes," please, in the middle of this, "lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemies say, 'I have prevailed over him', lest my foes rejoice because I'm shaken." I just want to stand strong. I'm going to draw near to you. I'm going to pray and I'm going to remind myself, "I have trusted in your steadfast love." I have trusted that you love me. Your love is set upon me, which the most obvious expression of that is acceptance, not rejection. I've forgiven you your iniquities, you're mine. "My heart shall rejoice in your salvation." Now, I've seen salvation in the past, circumstantially, temporally. I've seen you deliver me in the past. And I'm going to rejoice even in the salvation in the future. Because right now I'm waiting for it. "I will sing to the Lord," just like Paul did in the dungeon there in Philippi, "because he has dealt bountifully with me." Here's a guy who counts his blessing and says I'll be patient.

I'll say, how long? Just like Jesus said, how long am I supposed to put up with this? You feel that, but patience is turning around and saying, God is good. God has been good. There's a silver lining here. There's a blessing there. There's mercy there. And I'm going to be patient and wait for God to get me out of this situation. Who knows when it will be, but God is going to be glorified as Paul said when he wrote his prison epistle from the Roman prison. He said whether by life or by death, whether it ends with my execution here or whether I get released. Paul shows his indomitable and his tenacious resolve in our passage, if you look at it again in Acts 24:24, by saying things to Felix and Drusilla that I'm not sure you or I would say. You get a chance to talk to the guy who carries the key to your prison cell, you know he has the power to lift a pinky in that room and have someone come and unshackle the door and let you out, give you your stuff and go. He's got all that power. And Felix and Drusilla come and you got a chance. What are you going to talk about? Well, here's what he talked about. Look at it. Middle of verse 24. "He heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus." Do you think you want to really share the gospel with the guy?

I want to go back up to verses 2 and 3. Go back up to verse 2. I think Tertullus has the right idea. "Since we enjoy much peace," Felix, "and since by your foresight," you're so smart, you're excellent, "most excellent Felix, and reforms are being made for this nation." Look what you've done. Verse 3, "In every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude." Thank you for the freedom. Thanks for the liberty I've had. You have been so kind to me to put in Paul's words, right? And in verse 4, hey, we don't want to make this a long meeting. "We don't detain you any further, I beg you in your kindness just hear us briefly." And then Paul could say "Well, you know, I found this incarceration to really not be fulfilling for me. If you would just please just think about my career. I'm a traveling missionary. If you just reconsider my case and Tertullus' case was never proven. And the prefect never came down from Jerusalem. And all the people from Ephesus who thought I was a bad guy bringing the Gentile they're not even here. Please let me out. You're so great. You look good today, by the way, Felix." That's called flattery, and Paul did not engage in it. As a matter of fact, when he had an opportunity to talk to this man in power he's going to talk to them about becoming a



Christian. You need to put your "faith in Christ Jesus." And then he leans in with this. "And he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment."

Did I mention that Felix was a governor who had come from a life of being enslaved in the Roman society? He was known in history as the freedman governor. He was freed from his past as a slave. He was kind of this rags-to-riches story and he becomes this leader and given power. And the people who wrote about him like Tacitus in the first century, he writes as a Roman historian about this particular Roman governor and he says this about him.

"Antonius Felix is the kind that indulges in every sort of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of a king with the instincts of a slave." Right? I mean, you could take the man out of the gang, right? But you can't take the gang out of the man is what the historians say. This guy's like a street fighter. Oh, but now he has the sword and an army of centurions around him. This guy's a bad leader. And he was, by the way, the reason Festus shows up is because Rome called Felix back because it wasn't going so well. Not because of Paul but because of his general oversight. He wasn't looked up to as a very successful governor. And one of the things the historian said is that he was just kind of a man of the streets, and he indulges in every kind of cruelty and every kind of lust.

Guess what he didn't have? That Christian virtue of self-control. The fruit of the Spirit. So Paul is going to talk to him about righteousness, that's the standard, and self-control. Not to mention speaking of his sexual self-control which the historians noted he was a man of lust, lots of different kinds of lust but sexual lust in particular. He was willing to take this wife, this wife who was sitting next to him, the Jewish woman. She was 16 years old when she married her first husband. Felix lured her away to marry her. That's the third wife that he had had. And so he's sitting here with this very young Jewess as he sits there and has the keys to his prison cell. And there's one thing you don't want to bring up, the sense that your standards that you're coming from the Bible, are making you feel bad about having no self-control and not measuring up to the standard of righteousness. And even if you were going to point it out, "We know, you know, your marital life hadn't been that smooth, O Felix."

Here's one thing you wouldn't say, right? You wouldn't say and the next thing I'd like to talk to you about is "the coming judgment." I mean, maybe there's a better sermon title like, hey, clean up your life, be more self-controlled, have a happier life. Things will go better for you. Don't you want a happier life? Wouldn't it be great if you exercised self-control? You didn't just do whatever you wanted. If you weren't impulsive, God would love to bless with a better South Orange County life. It would be great. He doesn't say that. He's talking about the gospel, the standard of righteousness, Holy Spirit was sent to convict people of sin and righteousness, and judgment. And guess what Paul's talking about? Sin and the standard of righteousness. You fall short. And if you do not repent and put your trust in Christ there's judgment.

How did Felix respond to that? Look at the text. What's the word in the English Standard Version? Alarmed. He was alarmed. That's the word to be terrified. To be afraid, to be fearful, to be frightened. So this sermon was working. But it's not the kind of sermon you want to give to the guy who has the power to fire you. You were not thinking this is what you want. I want to be sent to the executioner's room, which Felix could have done. Paul seemed to be more



faithful to his job than he was to trying to get himself out of the jam that he could have rationalized. I don't really need to share the gospel with these two guys. Not only do they have the power to get me out, but I don't even think these guys are ever going to become Christians. I know their past. They're just notoriously bad. Why would I share the gospel with them? God, I know they're past any point of repentance so I'm not going to say that. Why? It is not going to help. I don't want to make the guy mad who could let me out. And, you know, after all, I am called to be a traveling missionary. I really should be back in Ephesus and in Thessalonica and Berea. I should go there. So I'm just going to play this really nice and I'm not going to bring up anything that might offend him.

Paul did not think that way. He knew he was a messenger of the gospel. He knew he was called to be a witness of Christ. He knew that the witness of Christ was always going to call people to recognize their sin and know that if they don't repent, there's judgment to come. You need to realize this, that if you share the gospel properly, which is your job to be witnesses in this world, salt and light, to call them to the standard of righteousness and knowing they fall short, to confess their sins and repent.

And if they don't, to say there is a price to be paid, it's judgment. If you do that you should expect some people to be alarmed. And Felix was alarmed. We try to shade this and make this in some way opaque so you can't see the meat of the gospel. And we try to say things like, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. It would be so nice if you just follow us at our church. Right? It would be great. We have a coffee bar. Great coffee. You'll have a better life. You'll get friendships in a small group, right? You'll be just better as a person. Just come and get right with Christ. It will be fun." I know it's so distasteful in our mind, the turn-or-burn sermon that Paul brings. This scorching singeing sermon about you know how notoriously wicked you are. You know how impulsive you are. You know how lustful you are. You know what? All of that leads to judgment. You got to put your trust in Christ. Felix was alarmed, but by God's grace it didn't kill him. He says, "When I get opportunity, I'll summon you."

Paul never stopped doing what he was called to do, and that was to be good and give the message faithfully. You need to see your life that way. You need to, number three, "Resolve to Never Stop Doing Right." It gets hard. It is hard for you to double down on doing what's right. You get called into the office because of your views on the world, on Christianity, on what they're, you know, saying in your DEI seminars. If you think, well, now's not the time to double down, because I need this job, because I got to feed my family. Now's not the time to really deal with my brother-in-law's sin. Because, you know, in reality, it's just going to make things hard at Thanksgiving. You just need to realize that at the end you have to answer to God who's going to say have you been a faithful steward? And when it comes to what we are supposed to say to our lost world, you have a message to give that you don't get to create, nor do you get to sort it out.

You don't want your mailman as he's about to put mail in your mailbox sitting there sorting through it saying, "this right here is a bill, it looks overdue, I'm going to throw that back in the truck. Oh, here. Oh, look at this. This is. I know they have an adult kid. This is a kid probably



asking for money. He hasn't been doing very good. I don't want them to read that. That will make them sad. Here's a Porky's pizza, 25% off, let's put that in, that's good. They'll like that." I mean, you don't want your mailman sorting out your mail. And so when it comes to what Paul was given and entrusted with, a message that exposes the standard of righteousness, that says that we fall short whatever our sins might be, which certainly includes probably at some level the lack of self-control, and that all of that is going to lead to the coming judgment unless we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what needs to be said. We cannot contextualize that for people's preferences. Resolve to never stop doing right.

My best friend when I was a kid was named Paul. We grew up together from the first grade, best friends, walked to school together. He lived around the corner. And one thing we would do after school sometimes we'd go to his house, I remember when this all started, and we would go into the garage and get his father's golf clubs. My dad was a cop. His dad worked at Cal State Long Beach. We live right across the street from Cal State in Long Beach. And so we would take his clubs out, try to keep an eye on the driveway because we didn't want him catching us with his golf clubs, but we would go in his backyard. He had some planters, little tools, little shovel, hand shovel and Paul and I would go around the backyard. We'd dig holes in the backyard and then we'd get his golf balls out and we'd just play, like, miniature golf in his backyard. We enjoyed that a lot.

So much so that when we got a little bit older and this was old days, Long Beach, when people used to let kids do stuff, we would get on the bus like at fourth and fifth grade, we'd take the bus, put the \$0.35 in or whatever. We had a bus stop right in front of my house there on Bellflower Boulevard. Get on the bus and we take our way down and that particular bus that goes down Bellflower would take us right down Seventh Street to a golf course. We couldn't play at Recreation Park, Big Rec we called it, but we can play at Little Rec, which is this nine-hole golf course. Some of you locals know that little course there. And we could play that for, I think it was \$0.75 when we were little kids. Right? Back in 1705. (audience laughing) Some guy after the first service says, I played that course, it was \$0.35. I felt young. I said it cost us \$0.75 to play that course. So we would play golf and we both loved it. We enjoyed it. Whenever we get, you know, enough money which with our paper routes or whatever we did, we'd get on the bus, we go down there, other guys are getting on with their surfboards, you know. We were getting on with our golf clubs and we'd go down to Little Rec and we'd play golf.

Well, life happens, you know, we kind of went our separate ways. And what's interesting about my old friend Paul is that he and I got struck with the same arthritis in our hands. If you ever looked at me close my hands are all contorted because I have this degenerative osteoarthritis. It really hurts. It's hard. And so there came a time as I played golf through the years, I got to taught my wife how to play golf, my kids had to play golf. And so we always used to play golf together. It just got so increasingly difficult and hard and painful. I just finally one day said to my family, I'm not playing. It's just too hard. It hurts too much. Well, I was getting on a plane here in Orange County and I see my old friend Paul sitting in first class, of course, as I'm going back to economy, and I stopped for a second to talk. We've talked a few times and he's taking me lunch here, you know, down in Orange County. And he still lives up



there in Long Beach. He starts talking to me about his arthritis which is as bad as my arthritis. We just talked about how much pain it was.

But one thing about me when it came too painful to play golf, I laid up the clubs. I actually gave them away, done. He never laid up the clubs. And he kept going. And he played and he played and he played and he played. He played in high school. He played in college, he went on playing in the PGA tour. He went Bay Hill. He did some great PGA successes, championships. And now he plays on the Champions Tour, he played just recently here. I pulled the stats up this morning. The guy keeps on playing. Well I know this about Paul and about me. When we hold the club and swing the club, it hurts our hands. But the pain caused me to stop and he wasn't willing to stop out of his commitment and resolve to keep on playing golf. And I'd like to say the only difference between me and Paul is the persistence. Talent probably has something to do with it too. But persistence certainly was a key factor. And Paul becomes a professional golfer because he is not going to let pain get in the way.

You know there are four soils Jesus talked about. The first one none of us argue about. Satan comes and steals away. That is like what we see in our passage with Felix. Like done, I don't want to hear it, right? You may come back to keep talking about but he's not going to convert to Christianity. Soils two and three, they all seem to have a conversion experience, but the Bible's very clear to say that those soils when hard times come because of the Word, because there's no real faith there. It's just shallow. And the hard times, some of the difficulty, or sometimes even just the desire for other things, get in the way. They fall away. And you know when my hands got too painful to play golf I stopped. Done. It's not worth it. But it's only the fourth soil that perseveres and it continues and it never gives up. And it keeps on going and it bears fruit. Not everyone bears fruit the same. Some thirty, some sixty, some hundred-fold. And that faith perseveres and continues to bear fruit.

I know when you read Galatians 6, a very familiar passage, it says, "Don't grow weary in doing good." You might be thinking about, you know, just doing good works. Think about the good that Paul was doing when he was faithful which I'm sure he was but the text doesn't state it, to be thankful for the mercies of God. To be patient, not sin because of his impatience, but to patiently wait. And then most importantly, to never stop giving the truth, doing what is right. In that he never grew weary in doing good. But he kept on. And he says, you know, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. I don't know what your trial is, I don't know what your next trial is. But I want you to right now resolve in your mind, I want to continue to do what is right. I promise you, God, as a child of yours, that I will seek to be a child who draws from your Spirit all that I need: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. I will do that. I will continue to abide in the vine, that I might continue to walk faithfully with you no matter what the circumstances. When it gets hard, I will continue to do it. And the father of that righteous child will have great joy. And that's what I want for you, the wise, righteous son. Bring joy to God's heart this week just by putting these into practice and start right now.

You might have come in thinking I can't think of myself as a well pleasing child because you don't know what kind of week I had. There was a kid who had a really bad week. He thought he was beyond the love of his father. He was so rebellious he went and squandered all of his



father's resources and found himself in the most ugly, awful, perverse situation he could be in. He didn't even think he would be accepted by his dad, but he thought maybe his dad was compassionate enough. Maybe he could go back and work as some kind of servant on the compound. And you know the story, Luke 15. Jesus told us this story. The father was waiting at the door and while his son was still yet a long way off he was overcome with compassion. And you know this passage? Was there any joy in the father's heart with this very sinful son? Yeah. It says this: the father called out, "Quickly," quickly, quickly! "Get the best robe," get a ring and "put the ring on his finger, put shoes on his feet and bring the fattened calf and kill it," because we've got to "eat and we have to celebrate."

Do you want heaven to celebrate? Well, that's what the whole 15th chapter is about. Heaven celebrates no matter what kind of week you had. You can take these three things, simple things, right? Gratitude, patience, resolve in persistence in doing right. You can please the Lord. You can do it just by praying right now. God, I want to be persistent in doing what's right. But if you're non-Christian, it starts with you saying, I'm doing wrong. I got to stop, I repent. I confess that I've been out of step with my Father's will, and I'm going to today please the Lord. Not only will God rejoice, the Bible says the angels in heaven rejoice. Because my son was not wise, now he's wise in terms of Proverbs 23. He was lost, now he's found. He was dead, now he's alive. Come, let us rejoice. God will rejoice over you today. It's all about your response. The simple truth that's calling you to live for him this week. It starts with your confession and penance. Let's tell him we're willing to do it.

God, please. It's Christians who come in with all kinds of resumes from our week. Some I sure have had horrid weeks, I'm sure. Weeks they brought in a lot of guilt into the auditorium today. May you help us, please, to recognize it only takes a second for us to turn your heart from frustration, from even having a mindset of discipline on us as your children, to turn it into joy. You don't show reproach. You don't bear a grudge. Because of Christ and the payment of Christ on a cross, his fulfillment of righteousness in his life that you can with a simple confession forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Not only that, our resolve to sit here today and say that we'll be thankful and we're going to give thanks. We will be patient even when things aren't going our way, and we will resolve and persistently keep doing what is right. Just, God, I know that will bring joy to your heart today. So let that be the reality for us.

In Jesus name. Amen.