



ATAPAT-Part 2
Our Struggle to Say “Any Time”
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Now, perhaps you know this, but if you don't, let me tell you that my wife loves golf. She loves the game of golf. I know that's a dream come true for most husbands, I suppose, but I'm just not that into it. You know, she's so into golf, she actually watches it on television. You've tried that, haven't you? You've seen it. I mean, most people would rather watch paint dry than watch that. It's four hours of video of men walking, really, is what's happening. It's not something I would ever choose to do.

But she loves her golf, and she loves to watch it. And of course our lives are so busy, particularly on the weekends, it just ramps up, gets so crazy, that she is forced, right—I use that word “forced”—to TiVo the golf that she can't watch live so that she can watch it all at the end of the weekend. See, now that's when I come home at the end of the weekend and I find her watching golf that's not even live golf. It's recorded golf. And, you know, she's gotten her boys into this. So, you know, my two sons are there, and they're watching golf when I come home.

Now, the weird thing about this is I'm always the last one to get home on Sunday, and I often listen to the news on the way from the office to the house, and I often, because people think I care about this, they often report on who wins the golf tournament. So I know who wins when I get into the house, and they're there biting their nails over every putt. They're so stressed out about it, the leader is in the trap, and then a guy shanked one out of bounds, and I just can't get into it. I'm just like, “Whatever,” you know, and I want to spend family time because I haven't seen my family all week. So, you know, as long as there's a box of Cheez-Its nearby, I'll sit down with them.

But I'm not into it, right? I'm just not. I'm not into it. I don't feel the drama over every putt. I don't stress when they're on the tee box. I don't feel all of that because I know how it ends.

Now, here's the sad thing about us as Christians: we begin to start to read the Bible the way I watch TiVoed golf. There's this sense in which we kind of know how it goes and we know how it ends, and we begin to read the Bible like we're watching a movie that we've seen 10 times. We don't get into the real feeling of what's going on in the text. We just read it and we know what's going to happen.

And I don't just mean that in a macro sense. We do know where it all goes in the book of Revelation, and we know that God's people win and all of that. I'm talking about even within the narratives of people in the Bible. We will read about things in the text there that should really evoke

a response of empathy and sympathy and concern. We ought to feel the drama of these narratives, and often we don't.

I've written on this before. Maybe you've read some of what I've written on just in terms of we read the Scripture without really feeling the time markers of the text. And what I mean by that is we may see it, but we don't feel it. Because, you know, we will read that God, say, promises that David will become the king. I mean, here's Samuel in one chapter anointing David with oil, and we flip a few pages, and even when we see that, we know how this is going to work out, and then we picture David, and sure enough, on page, you know, three or four pages later, he's got a crown on his head and he's sitting on a throne in Jerusalem. We go, "Oh, see there, God's faithful."

And we neglect to note that there are fifteen years between the anointing of David, where he sees clearly what the will of God is for his life, and the fruition of that when he's actually sitting on a throne in Jerusalem. Fifteen years, excruciating years, as a fugitive running for his life from the political elite of his day. We just don't feel the drama anymore the way we ought to when we read that.

Or maybe it's reading of Abraham and Sarah, who are told they're going to have this child, "Great nation out of you." We read that back there in Genesis, and we don't recognize the real drama in the story, because we turn a couple pages, and sure enough, there's little baby Isaac in his bassinet, and we say, "Well, see there, God's faithful." And we miss the fact that there is a 25-year interval between God clearly revealing the will of God for Abraham's life and the fruition of it all. There was a lot—I mean, if they went out and bought bassinets right away, I mean, they're totally outdated by the time Isaac comes along. This is an excruciatingly long wait.

It's not only the time markers that we miss and we don't feel in terms of God making people wait. Often we don't feel the time markers in the text when we see how God often seems to rush people into his will. You notice that? There are certain situations we read about—we studied one not too long ago in Luke chapter 1—where God chooses Mary to bear the Son of God. And, you know, we can't get around the fact that she's a young, betrothed, you know, fiancé here of Joseph. And we read the text. We understand the history. We know how ancient Near Eastern marriages work. And we recognize that she was probably, even on a conservative side, 14 or 15 years old, right? Look up any commentary and check out anybody who's studied this setting. We know we're talking about a young teenage girl here.

I mean, you don't want your 14-year-old babysitting after a certain hour at night, and here we've got a girl that is going to nurse and raise and train the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man that Daniel talked about. This is a giant responsibility at a very early age. She can't even get her driver's

license yet, you know what I'm saying? And God is entrusting her with this. Maybe we don't feel the drama of unpreparedness that she felt. She said it.

Jeremiah says the same thing: "I'm not ready." In Jeremiah chapter 1, the Hebrew text describes him as a *na'ar*. A *na'ar* in Hebrew is someone who is still living at home, dependent on mommy and daddy. Jeremiah is now called as someone who's still climbing up in the top bunk at night, down the hall from mom. Think about this. And God says, "You are going to go and bear a very, very unpleasant message to the political elite of the day. You're going to stand before kings and rebuke them for the direction of this country." And you're still, you know, drinking milk out of the refrigerator from your parents. I know that's all anachronistic, but I want you to feel it. Think about that. That's big.

We miss the time markers, I argue, because I know that when God makes us wait, we start to freak out. When God rushes us into something, we start to say, "Oh, this is crazy. I can't believe it." God makes David wait 15 years. If we're made to wait 15 weeks after God makes it clear, "This is God's will for you," we start thinking something's wrong. Something's majorly wrong.

Maybe we don't feel the time markers because we haven't read the text as we ought to. If we read the text as we should, you'll start to recognize this pattern. And there is, in almost every narrative of the Bible, a time element embedded in that story that is going to stretch the faith of those characters. Look for it. You'll see it everywhere. Either in making that person wait, oftentimes an excruciatingly long period of time, or rushing them to do something now for God when they say, "I can't. Not now. I can't do that."

If you start looking for that, I think then the next time you read Isaiah 55, that great, very familiar passage that says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways"—remember God saying that to his people?—maybe you'll add in your own thinking, "And you know what? Certainly God's timetable is certainly not our timetable."

And if you're not nodding at that, at least internally—you non-expressive orange candy crowd—if you're not nodding at that, at least in your heart, see, then you haven't been a Christian very long. Because you know, as a Christian, there are situations where God is clearly involved. And you've got to go back to get the whole breadth of this series. We started with making sure that we understand how we determine that. We didn't spend a lot of time on it, but:

A mind saturated in the Word of God.



Looking for those providential open doors.

That godly, sanctified desire that confirms that.

And the godly counsel of others.

When all those things line up like a combination on a lock, and we know that's God's will for us, and when we get it and it's clear, and we say, "Okay, let's walk through the door," we know God so often says, "No, no, no, not now." It's almost cruel in the way God seems to set us up to wait. Or inversely, it's like something changes overnight and happens, and bam, the door opens, and it's like, "Well, I can't walk through this. I haven't made the prep. I'm not prepared. I'm not ready." We're fighting God on this front.

Our series, ATAPAT, is all about doing anything in any place at any time for the Lord Jesus Christ. And we need to take this last element and examine it this morning. Because God's timetable is not your timetable. And when it comes to the will of God for your life, you need to be flexible. Just like last week we said you need to be mobile, we need to be flexible in terms of our schedule. And we need to know that God's timetable will rarely line up with what we think is reasonable. And you need to say to God today, "Okay, God, when it comes to your will, any time. If it feels too soon, I'll do it. If it feels like it's never going to come, I'm still fine with that. I'll wait."

A great example for us, speaking of biblical narratives, would be the narrative regarding Moses. Turn there with me, if you would, this morning. Let's just camp in Exodus chapters 2, 3, and 4 to examine the life of Moses, because in that example, we see both. We see him being told to wait, and it was a painful closing of a door, and we see God then also opening a door, swinging it open overnight, and Moses is saying, "I can't do that." He's a great example of both.

And we need to empathetically read and study this text this morning, in a survey at least. We'll get through it quickly. But let's understand a bit of what's going on here. Take a look at this beginning in chapter 2, verse 11:

It says, "One day, when Moses had grown up..."

Now you can underline that and just see that as the understatement of the text. He'd grown up. This is not an heir like Jeremiah. He's not a little baby. He's not a teenager. He's not in his early 20s. If you know the story of Moses, at this particular juncture, he is 40 years old.

Now, I know it's not fair, by the way. You're going to say, "Well, didn't he live to be really old?" He did. He lived to be 120 years old. And as Stephen says in the divine commentary in Acts chapter 7, his life was broken down into three equal parts. He was from zero to 40, he lived in Pharaoh's court in Egypt. From 40 to 80, he was living there in the desert of Midian, which we'll see how that came to be right now. And then his last 40, he was wandering in the wilderness with the children of Israel.

That breakdown—you say 120 years, all grown up, 40—well, what's that like to us? Well, do the math. You math majors have already done it in your head. But what, for the American lifespan, for us, for your life and mine, it's like being somewhere between 25 and 30 years old. And when you were 25 or 30, done with your schooling, finished with all the prep, you felt mature and ready to face the world, clearly you thought, "Whatever God's going to do with my life, now's the time." Particularly if you were a Christian in that period of your life. You thought, "Okay, God, let's get going with life. I'm ready."

Moses was all grown up. He went out to his people. The text is very clear here in verse 11. The emphasis is on the fact that he felt solidarity with the children of Israel, with the Jews that were now enslaved in Egypt. He went out and he saw, and he looked on their burdens. He had empathy for the burdens of the people. And then he saw the Egyptian, the taskmaster here, beating a Hebrew, one of his people—the emphasis again. He's feeling that.

Now, I'm raised in Pharaoh's court. I am seeing, as a Jewish person, that my people are being subjected to slavery and beatings and injustice. And he said, "I'm going to do something about this."

Here's an interesting commentary. I mentioned the divine commentary as Stephen preaches on this in Acts 7. It's good to note that in your notes if you're taking notes, because there are some things that are filled in there that are very helpful to us. One of the things that Stephen said about Moses and what was going on in his mind was this: it says that when this particular thing happens, he sees the injustice and he goes out and he tries to help, he says this—he was supposing that the people would recognize that God was calling him, Moses, to deliver them. The assumption was, "I'm going to get you out of this mess. I'm living here. I have the connections. I have the power. I have the background. I can do what I can do to fix the problem." So he injects himself in the injustice of the day.

Now, is God concerned about the injustice? Injustice is injustice, and God is just. Of course he's concerned with the injustice. Moses has a thought. It's a God thought. It's a good thing. It's a

biblical goal. And he's like, "I'm going to do something about it." If you're his friend, you're going to say, "That's a good idea. You are in a unique position to be a deliverer." And he supposed that this was the time.

Well, he's got someone mercilessly beating a Jewish slave, which was already an unjust situation in Moses' mind and in God's. So he looked this way and that. Seeing no one, he thought, "I'm going to deal with this the way I'm going to deal with this." He struck down the Egyptian and he hid him in the sand. He killed him.

When he, verse 13, the next day, went out, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Hey, stop it. Why do you strike your companion?" And he answered him, verse 14, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" That's worth underlining. It's a great rhetorical question. It would be good for you to consider the answer to that question. Hmm. Who's made you a prince? Well, you might be tempted to say, "God did." But is that accurate? Not yet. Why? Because God's timing wasn't Moses's timing.

He assumed that people would recognize God was using him to get them free. He was acting as a prince and a judge over them. They said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" And the answer is—the biblical answer is—no one yet. He thought it was time to do this thing. He was ready to go. He was primed. They weren't ready.

You're not much of a leader, by the way, if no one's following you. Have you noticed that? No one was interested in following Moses. They said, "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Oh, man. You could feel the chill up his spine. "You saw that? Word's out on that? Wow, I thought no one saw that." Then Moses was afraid, middle of verse 14, and he thought, "Surely this thing is known." And it was.

And when Pharaoh heard of it, and he did, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh, and he stayed in the land of Midian—and another telling, descriptive phrase—and he sat down by a well. That sounds a lot like when Elijah went out, defeated and demoralized, and sat down under the broom tree. Just, you can just feel the letdown here. Why? Because the door slams shut.

Number one on your outline, if you're taking notes, let's try and identify with Moses here and just think through: when God says, "Wait"—and there's going to be a point, if he hasn't done it this week, where sometime in the near future, you're going to line up in your heart, "This is the right thing. It's a biblical thing. It's the right thing for me to do. We should make this step, take this

step,” and God’s going to slam the door. And he’s going to say, “That may be a good thing to do, but not now. Nope. Wait.” That’s demoralizing. It was demoralizing to Moses.

Two things we can observe, and then we’ll summarize in the third sub-point here. Let’s just think through, maybe, what’s God doing in all of this?

Here’s the problem with all of us, including Moses: you can’t see the end from the beginning. You should nod at that. “Yes, well, that’s true. I can’t.” Where are you going to be in 20 years? You don’t know. You have no idea—unless you’re on death’s door, then you know you’ll be dead. But if you’re not on death’s door, you’re thinking, “I don’t know where I’ll be. I don’t know where I’ll be in 20 minutes, really. I don’t have a real solid view of that. I don’t know what tomorrow holds.” And the Bible says I ought to understand that, and that ought to be the foundation of my thinking about the will of God. I don’t know what tomorrow holds.

God knows. And God knows what’s going to happen with Moses. Now, I’ve already laid out for you what happens to Moses, and this is part of our disadvantage, I assume, of TiVo Bible reading. We know what’s going to happen. We recognize the reality of Moses spending the last 40 years of his life where? Running around in the desert. As a what? As a leader of the people.

He wanted to deliver the Egyptians and bring them out of slavery in Egypt and take them where? Not to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. That was not his plan. He wanted to be a deliverer and take them to their own land. That would be the idea. The land that was promised to Abraham. That would be great.

Think this through, though. God knew exactly what was going to happen at Kadesh Barnea. He knew exactly what was going to happen as they wandered in the desert. He knew that Moses needed to be a leader who would wander in the wilderness, taking care of, encouraging, feeding, correcting, guiding the people of Israel for 40 years in the desert. So look what God does.

Chapter 3, verse 1. He’s in Midian. “Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro.” He didn’t even have his own flock. Think about that. Working for your father-in-law. Your sheep that you’re watching now in this middle period of your life, they’re not even yours. You are entrusted with these sheep that you don’t even own. Does that sound like something he would be doing for the last third of his life? Absolutely. These are not your people. God reminded him of that often. “These are my people. You’re shepherding my people.”

Not only that, you're keeping a flock, not of sheep, but of people. By the way, his father-in-law was a spiritual man, a priest in Midian. A lot of connections there. "And he led his flock to the west side of"—now here's a good word to underline—"the wilderness." Now, where was he raised? In all the well-swept hallways of the palaces of Egypt. God says, "What I want you to do for the next 40 years is go out into the wilderness, and I want you to lead the sheep that are not yours. And I want you to get that experience of trying to deal with the unruly mob of sheep. And I want you to care for them as though they were your own, knowing that they're not. And I want you to do it in the blazing heat of the desert."

This was great training for Moses. And Moses didn't know it because Moses couldn't see the future.

Letter A, God makes you wait. You might want to consider this: maybe you're not ready. That's the first thing we ought to acknowledge. Okay, if God is making me wait on the will of God in my life, then I need to know this: there's something in my life, in terms of preparation, that needs to take place. Therefore, this period of waiting for the door to swing back open is going to be time in which I look at my circumstances and I glean all that I can from those circumstances, because it's not just idle time. I'm not going to be passive. I'm going to be learning. I'm going to be preparing. I'm going to get my heart ready for something. I don't even know what's beyond the doorway. It's there, though. God sees it, and I know he's not wasting any time with my life. So the waiting period is a training period.

Chapter 2, look up a paragraph or so, and you'll see there's some other things that God did that I can only imagine prepared Moses to do this work. First of all, he gets a wife, verse 21, chapter 2, a gal named Zipporah, who was a handful. There are some things we learn about her later—different sermon. Gershom—he gets a son. You don't think marriage and family did something to prepare him to lead these people as the pastor? That's, by the way, what the word "shepherd" means. The shepherd, the pastor of the people. You don't think that helped get him ready? I'm sure it did.

Not to mention, look at the next verse, verse 22. He was seen here and perceived and learned what it meant to be a foreigner and a sojourner. Now, why in the world would he need any practice with that if he was just going to take the people out of Egypt and into the promised land in one fell swoop? All you've got to know how to do is travel from point A to point B. But that wasn't going to be his ministry. His ministry was going to be a sojourner and a foreigner, living in places that weren't his, guiding people in the hot, blazing desert that now he would be accustomed to because God was getting him ready.

I think it's important for us just to consider that. Some of us are so frustrated that God does not deliver on what seems to be obviously his will for our lives, and we get mad. Just know that every

hour, every day, every week, every year of you not getting what you can see as a godly, good thing that you should be doing or should be involved in is all a part of your training, which may be something that will help you wait with a kind of patience that maybe you don't have when you think God should be working on your timetable. God's got a timetable, and it's filled with wisdom. He knows what he's doing with your life.

Something else is happening in this text that we need to note. Look at the next verse in verse 23 of Exodus chapter 2. All these days of him living as a sojourner—this is Exodus 2:23—it says, “During those many days, the king of Egypt died,” the Pharaoh died, “and the people of Israel groaned.” Now, I'm sure they did a lot of groaning under the heavy hand of the taskmasters of the Egyptians, but something happened after many days. “Because of their slavery, they groaned, and they cried out for help.” Underline that. They cried out for help. “And their cry for rescue”—that's another way to put it, “God save us”—“it came up to God.”

There's something about God sending a deliverer before the people are ready to be delivered. It's a problem. God doesn't do that. Study the book of Judges. How often the people got in massive trouble. He was going to raise up 13 or 14 deliverers in the book of Judges, but he would never do it in the book of Judges until they cried for help. He would never do it until they sought the Lord for rescue. That's when God delivered the deliverer.

Moses supposed that God would give them clarity that he was the deliverer for the Egyptians. God wasn't going to let that happen. It wasn't the right time. And it could be—and certainly it's true in his case—that he wasn't ready. But it might be, beyond that, letter B, that they're not ready. Okay, let's think of “they're not ready,” those people in Moses' life, and then let's maybe think about the people in your life.

It's very clear that God was waiting for the people to see the groaning and complaining as something that would drive them to look to the Lord, because he brings his salvation, whether it's with a small “s” in slavery—deliverance in the book of Exodus, or big “S” in terms of the book of Romans that says it's those who cry out to the Lord, who call upon the Lord, that will be saved. God's waiting for the people to be prepped for the—to put it in the week's terminology—the chess master to bring in the right piece in the right place.

In other words, maybe God hasn't given you that job yet that you know is what you were trained for, what God has called you to, you have the desire for, it should be something that God gives you. Maybe it's not even that it's not all about you not being ready, maybe they're not ready. Your client base is not ready, the boss is not ready, the industry is not ready. I don't know, the market's not ready. But God's got a reason. He hasn't granted you that yet. And it may be beyond just your preparation. It may be their preparation.

There's a lot of things, if you start thinking about it, that relate to that. I know we counsel young single people in the church. They have a desire to get married. They read 1 Corinthians 7. It says right there that desire is indicative of God's will for their lives. They're saying, "I desire it. I want it. I pray for it." And God's saying, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait." And we always turn to them and say, "Well, maybe God's preparing you." And that's a great answer. We've just looked at it. But there's another side to it as well. Maybe God's not prepared your fiancé yet to be ready. And you need to consider that. You're not just treading water. This is not just passive time. Yes, you should glean for your preparation, but you should be praying for their preparation.

It could be, like we had on stage here, the Thompsons today. Your desire to go and serve God in a place. And maybe you've said, "God, I have the desire. I see it. Counsel has confirmed it. I see it as a biblical thing. God, I think this is your will for my life." And God shuts the door and says, "Wait." Maybe it's not just your preparation that's not ready. Maybe the mission field quite is not ready. Maybe you're not in that church because the group is not ready. The congregation's not ready. Maybe you're not teaching that class right now, not because the leaders are just shutting you out. Maybe the people that you're eventually going to teach, they're not ready.

We've got to think beyond ourselves. And in this text, we have enough. Not only that, if you want to cross-reference that, in chapter 3, verse 9, you want the time indicator, here it is. It says in verse 9 of Exodus 3, "And now," God says to Moses, "and now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me. I've seen their oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them, and now I'm going to deliver it." Why? Because now is the time. They're ready. Moses, you were ready. They weren't ready. And in reality, we learn, as we said in point one, now he wasn't even fully ready.

We can't possibly trace out all the intricacies of what God is doing. We don't know his mind perfectly in everything, obviously. But if he's making you wait, I guess what I'm saying, letter C on your outline here—put this down. Here's what I want you to see: that the detours, they aren't—what? The detours aren't—detours aren't what? The detours aren't detours. They never are.

Detours aren't detours. We feel like they're detours. "I see the will of God. It's right there. Let me walk through that door, God." And God says, "No, wait." And what you need to realize is the wait is always a part of his sovereign plan. And while that's been tossed around as a glib statement, while people have tried to give you a quick platitude from the Word of God, or at least that's how it's heard when you're hurting and you're struggling and you're having to wait and they say something like this, "Hey, you know what? God works everything out for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose."

Now, you know where that's found. We learn that as little kids in Awana, do we not? This is a good and important verse. If that sounds glib in your mind, it's really not. It's profound. Maybe one of the verses we often miss that would be very helpful for us to catch is the verse that precedes it. You know the reference, right, Sunday school graduates? Where's that verse found that I just quoted? Romans 8:28.

Let's look at 8:27 real quick. Keep your finger here in Exodus. We'll be right back to it. But turn with me to Romans chapter 8. Glance at verse 28. Those are the familiar words. As the ESV puts it, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, even the detours, quote—unquote, yeah, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Now, here's the thing. I think about waiting in my own life. I mean, to make this personal—it's not about me, but just for sake of illustration—my wife and I got married, and we were unable to have children for 10 years. And if you've been through that in your family, you know the pain of infertility is—I mean, that's a chronic, recurring, habitual, irregular pain you never forget about. Ten years of infertility. We're looking at our own lives, we're saying, "God, we feel ready to be parents. God, we desire to be parents. God, it seems like a biblical thing. It seems like the right time. I mean, come on, give us a child." And God says, "No, wait. No, wait. No, wait."

This is an encouraging verse, especially when you understand verse 27. Look at this: "And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit." Stop right there. He who searches hearts. Now, the context of this is about people groaning, groaning for the big macro things, and I think even groaning, in part, for the circumstantial things. No one knows the groaning, for instance, in our case, of an infertile couple like God. He knows our hearts. He knows the pain of thinking and understanding, "This is the will of God," and God's making us wait. The groaning for that, waiting in eager expectation.

Well, the one who knows our pain, knows our hearts. He searches our hearts. He knows what is the mind of the Spirit. The third person of the Godhead, he knows the mind of the Spirit. What does he know about the Spirit's mind? Because the Spirit intercedes for the saints—that's us—in this case, groaning saints, according to the will of God. Underline that. Highlight it. "According to the will of God."

Think this through now. God knows our hurt when we're made to wait. He also knows the mind of the Spirit. The mind of the Spirit is the Spirit of God who dwells in me, and that mind of the Spirit is praying, interceding, standing between me and my prayers and the throne of the Father. He's interceding, and you know what he's interceding? He's interceding in things that are according to the will of God.

See, when an infertile couple, Christian couple, committed to Christ, wanting the will of God in their lives, prays for a baby month after month after month after month, that's what we're praying because we think, "God, now is the time." Standing between my prayers, my short-sighted prayers about my timetable, and the eternal God, the sovereign God, is the Holy Spirit. And the Father who knows my groaning also knows the mind of the Spirit. And the mind of the Spirit, that knows what's best for me—and he knows what's best, period—he's interceding while I'm praying the wrong things, at least in this case, for the wrong timetable. The Spirit of God is praying for the right one.

That's comforting, because I recognize this: that the detour is not a detour. One of the reasons this seems glib for us, one of the reasons this seems like a platitude that falls on—shallow, it comes off shallow in our ears, is because when we read the next verse in verse 28, that all things work together for good, we often want to make that about us, right? We think in terms of, "Well, it's good for us." And I even said it in the description of my own illustration, "good for us." And while that may be true, that's not the entirety of the purpose of God.

Think this through now. I'm called according to his purpose, and his purpose isn't just about me being satisfied or fulfilled or happy. Here's another verse we often toss around in situations like this, when things don't go the way we want, or God's making us wait, or there's a "detour." It's found in Genesis chapter 50. You don't need to turn there, you know it. It's when Joseph, after this long detour, if you will, in quotes, of his life, finally stands before his brothers, who are now hat in hand, really ashamed that they did all that they did, which was because of jealousy. They left him for dead, then decided to sell him into slavery. All the jealousy and envy between brothers, then separated them for years. He then gets sold into slavery. He then gets falsely accused. He then gets sent to prison. Then he gets out by God's providence, becomes a high-ranking official, and ends up, by God's revelation to him, foreseeing the famine, saving this grain for these years. And then he's able to, because of that saving of the grain, save his own family as they come back to ask for grain, ask for food.

Here's what he says: "You guys meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Now, that's usually where we put the period, but that's not a period in the text. He explains it. Let me read it to you: "He meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are."

You've seen it play out. Question: the good purpose of God in Joseph's detour was good for who? For a lot of people. For many people. It's back to my illustration—for what it's worth. Look at the infertility: ten years, Christian couple praying for a child. God says, "No. Wait." Think about this now: the good—I can't give you a long list of why it was good for *me*. I can give you a short list. Why it might be good for our family, I can give you a short list. But I can give you a much longer



list of how that has been good in ministry for others. How that's been something that has been helpful in the lives of other people.

I need to recognize this: detours are not, when God makes you wait, you have to believe in the sovereign oversight of a God who sees the end from the beginning. Let me just say it as strongly as I can: if you don't learn to wait well in the Christian life, you haven't learned the fundamental virtue of the Christian life. It is all about waiting on so many levels.

Until you learn to wait well, until you learn to see, with faith, that God is in charge of a time frame in your life that makes perfect sense to him, you will be bitter, you'll be angry, you'll be temperamental, you'll be frustrated, you'll be depressed, you'll be down. All of those things are not indicative of the Christian life, where Paul, even in prison, can say things like this as he writes letters: "I count it all joy." I'm ready to see that God has a plan, and he's working it out. We need to see that.

Which makes me say, when I stand before Christ in my own prayer time, "Hey, you know what? Any time you want to make me wait, I'm ready to wait. And I'm ready to wait well. I'm ready to look at how it might prepare me. I'm ready to look at how it might be something that you need to do in the lives of people—that's why the door is still closed. Whatever the reason is, you're working out your purpose in my life."

When God says, "Wait," maybe you're not ready, maybe they're not ready, certainly detours are not detours.

Back to Exodus. Interesting, after 40 years of practicing his collection of a wayward group of physical sheep, God now steps up and says, "Now's the time. They're crying out. You're completely ready as far as I'm concerned. Let's go."

Exodus 3, drop down, if you would, to verse number 10: "Come," he says, "I will send you to Pharaoh," this is God now speaking to Moses, "that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Verse 11: "And Moses said, 'Great, happy to do it. Let's go.'" Highlight that. Is that what he says? Oh, man. That would have been good.

Moses says to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out?" Why? "Why me? How come me? Who am I to do that?" Look across the page, chapter 4. Chapter

4, verse 10, when he speaks about his role in going before Pharaoh and asking for this, Moses says, “Oh, my Lord, I’m not eloquent, either in the past or since you’ve spoken to your servant, I’m slow of speech, I’m slow of tongue. I don’t have that power. I mean, maybe when I was 40 and I had all the connections in the palace and I felt like I was positioned to do it. Now I’m going to come in as a foreigner, dressed in shepherd’s clothes, and I’m going to stand before the Pharaoh of Egypt, and I’m going to have to use my voice to convince him? I can’t use any of the... I don’t even know this Pharaoh. The old one’s died. I’m not Winston Churchill. I can’t persuade a nation’s political elite to do something.” You can see him now going, “I’m not the guy for this.”

Number two on your outline, let’s put it down this way: it may not be God saying, “Wait.” You may be struggling with a timetable because you’re saying to God, “I’m not ready. I’m not ready. I can’t do this. Not now. I’m going to have to get a whole new wardrobe. I have to go to Toastmasters, learn how to speak well. I’ve got to figure... I can’t go now. I’m not prepped.”

Three things. One of them is found in the setting in which this takes place. Exodus 3, verse 2. God is going to say, the punchline is in verse 10, “Come, I’m going to send you to Pharaoh.” How is this set up?

Verse 2: “It’s not a dream. It’s not the cloud spelling out, ‘Here’s what you should do.’ It’s not a feeling in his heart. This is the angel of the Lord,” Exodus 3:2, “appearing to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.” What? By the way, I even said it because the text says it. This is God speaking to Moses—Yahweh, first person. Even asks him, “Who shall I say is sending me?” Yahweh says, “The I Am,” which is the root, by the way, in Hebrew of the verb “to be,” which is where we get the word *Yahweh* from. “The I Am, the ever-existing one, is sending you.”

Now, all that’s in the first person, but verse 2 identifies who is speaking to him. And it doesn’t say here, “The Father who dwells in the throne room of heaven.” It’s the messenger, the angel of the Lord. If you were with us in our angelology study on Thursday nights—if not, you can catch it all online and podcast the thing—but we dealt with it for a week, just the whole issue of the angel of the Lord. What in the world is this? Speaking in first person.

Now, the preponderance of evidence, I think, in passages like this, lead us at least to the curious conjecture that perhaps it’s true that this is the second person of the Godhead, the pre-incarnate Christ—which, by the way, is so relevant to our series. What are we talking about? Saying to Jesus, “Anything, any place, any time,” who, by the way, should not be pictured as some guy with his, you know, robes of light blue, with a butterfly on his shoulder, high cheekbones, long hair, “Oh, please follow me.” That’s not the Jesus who now exists in heaven calling you to do this or that.



If you want that picture, you need to get to the place where you see flames of fire, because in Revelation chapter 1, that's how John, the beloved disciple, saw him now. His face was like peering into the sun. His eyes were like flames of fire. Even his feet were like burnished bronze. It was like his whole body was just flames. Out of his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword.

Here's the thing, letter A on your outline here: when it comes to you saying, "Not ready, I'm not ready," you need to remember who's calling. And it isn't just some suggestion from an itinerant rabbi from Galilee. This is the King of the world, the Lord.

Isn't that where we started this series? Remember back there when Peter was struggling to say "Any thing"? And Jesus was referred to by Peter three times as the Lord, which brought us to reminisce about that great phrase there, the rhetorical question in Luke 6:46: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I say?" How ironic that we would dare say to the Lord, when he clearly puts those pieces together where the will of God is before us and he says, "Now," and you balk and say, "I'm not ready." You're saying that to the Lord of the universe who speaks not only with intelligence but with authority, not only with wisdom but with power.

If he wants you to walk across the cul-de-sac this afternoon and share the gospel with your neighbor, who are you to balk at that? If he's opened up the door for you to get a new job or to move across the world to do something for him, or even just step up in the lunchroom this week when the conversation turns to Christ and you know it is the will of God for you to speak up—if he says, "Now," and you say, "Well, I'm just in the introduction of that book on evangelism I've been reading. I'll get to this next week when I finish the book"—you remember who's calling. You remember it is the Lord Jesus Christ who has all power and authority.

There's another little thing that happens here, if you look at the text in verse number 4. When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see this and God called out, "Moses, Moses," he said, "Here am I." It says in verse 5 that he says, "Don't come near. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you're standing is holy ground."

Commentators struggle and debate, "What in the world's going on with this?" It is an unusual statement. And as I was thinking about this and preparing for this, and I've been traveling, you know, a lot of places, as some of you know, the last couple of weeks, I went through TSA many, many times, having to take my stinking shoes off—literally and figuratively—and I hated it, right? I hate it. I've had my shoes on for hours. I do not want to take my shoes off. I don't like taking my shoes off. It's humiliating to take my shoes off. I don't like watching other people take their shoes off. Please let me keep my shoes on.

Now, you've got to be over like 70 and they'll let you keep your shoes on now, I've heard. Whatever. I want to keep my shoes on. I don't like it. It's interesting, even just the feeling of that, kind of the vulnerability of taking my shoes off, walking through the line in my socks. You know, I don't like it.

In the ancient Near East, at least some commentators I think are on to something with this: the servant always served barefoot. They were the servants. The master sat with his sandals on, depending on the era, with nice covered feet, cleaned feet. The servants were the ones marching around barefoot.

Here's something very clear, at least in terms of the feeling I think Moses would have as he stands barefoot before the burning authority of heaven who says, "Now": he needs to see who he is. He needs to see who God is. He needs to recognize he's got no right to balk at the timetable of God. Neither do you.

He didn't feel like he was the one to do this, and I get that. Maybe even his maturity helped him say that. But the whole point of the New Testament in reminding us of our calling, as Paul elaborates on it in 2 Corinthians 4, is that all of this—not just assignment, but the calling to dispense and discharge that assignment—is invested in jars of clay, vessels of clay. Why? So that the surpassing power can be seen to be from God and not from us.

I know you don't feel ready for this or that. It may be, I don't know, it's the opposite of infertility. It could be God surprised you with a baby in your marriage, you know. Whatever. God says, "Now." You don't balk. You recognize who's called you to this, whether it's an open door to a ministry, an open door to a new phase of life, whatever that is. When you say, "Not ready," remember who's calling.

In chapter 4, we already quoted it in verse 10: he says, "Man, I can't speak. I'm not good at it. Could have relied on other things maybe when I was 40, but now that I'm in terms of equivalence 50–55 years old, I'm not the guy with the connections to do this. I can't speak. I can't rely on this ability that I just don't have."

What was God's response? Verse 11: "The Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth?'" You're concerned about a lack of ability in an area of life that you need to recognize: I'm the Lord over that as well. "I made man's mouth. Not only that, I can shut a man's mouth up. I can make a man mute. I can make him deaf. I can make a person seeing. I can make a person blind. Is it not I, the Lord? I have that authority. I have that power. I do that thing. Now, therefore, go." Underline

this now. Highlight it. “I will be with your mouth. I’m going to teach you what you should speak. I’ll be with you.”

Letter B, when you are tempted to balk at the will of God in your life, and it may sound very humble in your own estimation—“Oh God, send somebody else, I’m not very good, I’m incapable”—you need to remember, letter B, who enables. When God calls you to do something, he will give you the wherewithal to get that done. He equips, he sustains, he empowers, he enables. He promises to give to his people whatever they need to get the job done that he calls you to. Who made the mouth? God did. “I’ll be with your mouth.”

Now, that, by the way, in some variation is what you find every time someone balks at the will of God. Test me on this. Just go through the Bible and watch this. When you see someone like Gideon saying to God, “I’m not capable. Why? You’re calling me to respond to the national crisis of these enemies against the nation, and you want a military leader to rise up and defend the nation, and I am from the weakest tribe, the smallest clan. I have no connections. I cannot recruit. I can’t put an army together. I’m not the guy. I’m too weak.” Response of God, Sunday school graduate: “I will be with you. I’ll be with you.” God plus one—majority. “Don’t worry about it. I will enable you.” And even when he got together an army that was bigger than he thought he could, and he thought it was too small, what did God make him do? Pare it down. “I want to make it really clear this is about my work through you.”

When Jeremiah—we’ve already talked about him—a dependent child, is asked to stand before kings and rebuke a nation for the direction of that nation, he says, “I can’t do it.” Answer, God says, “I will be with you.” Same thing. “I’ll be with you.”

When Solomon saw his father expand the kingdom borders of Israel to the golden age of Israel, the middle monarchy of Israel, 10th century B.C., Solomon looks as a kid that was really raised with a silver spoon in his mouth. His dad, the warrior, he’s thinking, “I can’t lead this nation. I’m too inexperienced.” That’s what he said. God’s response: “I will be with you. I’ll be with you.” God plus one, majority. “I can do this. I can enable you.”

When Paul, in essence basically—someone who looked at his life, a persecutor of the church, “I have no clout with these people. I can’t be accepted by these people. My background’s too messed up. I am too messed up.” What does God say to Saul, who was about to become Paul? “I will be with you. I’ll be with you.”



There's a lot of promises in the Bible we claim by inference. We see God make a promise to somebody and we have to kind of connect ourselves hermeneutically under the fact that, well, we're a follower of God too, and we find the claim on that promise, it's kind of secondarily—not that there's anything wrong with that. But if you want to look for direct promises that include you within the literary statement of the text, here's one for you: the Great Commission. Christ says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." And then it ends with this, after talking about the tasks that we're called to do: "And I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

You would expect that that statement was just made to those disciples, even if we could claim it by inference and connect the dots. He takes that far outside the lifespan of those eleven that stood there to hear him. He talks about us in that passage, does he not? "I'll be with you, you disciples, even to the end of the age." And we're not even to the end of the age yet, and we might be, but that promise was for us.

Here's one thing I know about the will of God for your life: when he opens the door and he calls you to walk through it, he will be with you.

Let's read the next verse. I don't want to end on a negative here, but I can't leave this one. Verse 13. You're still there in Exodus 4? By the way, if you think about Solomon, Gideon, David, you think about any of these people—Jeremiah—that said, "I can't do this. I'm not ready," and God said, "I'll be with you," all of them said what? "Okay then. Okay." And they stepped up and they did it.

I can't say the same for Moses. Verse 13: after God said, "I'll be with you," Moses said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." That's bad. It's bad. You know why it's bad? Verse 14, because you made God mad. That's why it's bad. Bad for you when God says, "I will be with you. I will teach you what to say," and you say, "I don't want to do it."

"The anger"—this is worth highlighting too—"the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses." The anger: one thing you don't want to do when God calls you to step up, letter C, is forget who disciplines. God disciplines.

I know we often think we live under some cardboard cutout of Christ, and Christ is there, and when God looks at us, all he ever sees is the smiling halo of Jesus. You do understand that in your day-to-day relationship with God, you can make him mad. You understand that, right? You don't want Dad—as I used to put it—you don't want Dad to get off the couch. You don't want him getting up angry because you pushed him too far. God got off the couch right here. Moses pushed God too far.

And here's the response: "Hey, there is a Toastmasters graduate that you know. His name is Aaron, the Levite. Hey, he can speak well. He's out there. He's going to meet you. You know what? Take him." That's not discipline. That seems like compassion. You feel, "Oh, Moses, you don't think you can do it? Ooh, we send you brother. He'll help you. Would that be okay, Moses?" That's not the passage. You've left out verse 14. "The anger of the Lord was kindled." "Here, take Aaron."

Doesn't sound so bad. Do you know the story? Did Aaron not prove to be more of a liability in Moses' life than an asset? You've read stuff about, like, the golden calf that made him so mad he ground it down and made everybody drink it, right? You remember that. Who is the head-honcho back at the camp, doing all this when Moses was getting the law on Mount Sinai? Oh, Aaron.

I mean, this was discipline. Let me just say—and I know this is all supposition—but had Moses in verse 13 said, "Okay, Lord"—if he said it like David and Solomon and all the rest of them said, "Okay, Lord. If you're going to be with me, I'll do it"—I don't think we would have this. This is all conjecture, I get that. And it would have gone much better for Moses had God not disciplined him in his anger by giving him Aaron. And that may be, I don't know, controversial in your hermeneutics, but he proved to be more of a liability.

And if that doesn't get you, how about this one? I know you can't argue with this one. It's clearly discipline. When Zechariah—sometimes we don't feel ready, like Zechariah in his old age, like, "I can't raise the forerunner of Christ, the Elijah that is to come"—and Gabriel said, "You will, Zechariah." Zechariah said, "No, I can't do that." Gabriel got mad. Just like God did. And Gabriel said what to Zechariah the priest? "Shut up then for the next nine months." Remember that? Struck him with muteness. Couldn't speak.

You don't want to forget who disciplines. When God's will gets laid out before you, you say, "Yes, sir." You don't say, "Ah..." Because the one who just commissioned you, the one who promises to enable you, the one who promises to be with you, is also the one that, if you push him too far, will discipline you. It may not be popular, but it is so important.

Which, by the way, after, you know, depending on the chalkboard for nine months—you remember the story?—and everybody's sitting around trying to name the baby, and Elizabeth says, "Well, we're going to call him John, because that's what Gabriel said to call him." "No, no, we need to call him Zechariah Jr." And finally, he's writing on the chalkboard, and the first thing he says, what? "His name is John." "He's going to be John." Learned his lesson. Never going to doubt the will of God for my life again.

I know God's timetable may not be your timetable. I know he may make you wait for things that you know are the will of God in your life. Hey, let's understand those detours are not detours. I know he's going to rush you into things you don't feel prepared for. I get that. I can testify to both in my life, just like Moses can, just like I'm sure many of you in this room can. But we're going to trust him. We're going to obey him. We're going to say, in essence to him, "Any time. Any time. Sooner than I think, longer than I think. It doesn't matter."

I was just out in Chicago, privileged to preach at my alma mater this last week in Chicago, Moody Bible Institute. And I couldn't help but, as I was back there, thinking through all these great stories of Moody. And one of them you might remember, if you've heard the story: he was in England, he was preaching, and there was a man named Henry Varley there, 141 years ago. And he said something to Moody that became a bit of a famous rallying cry for him. He said this, "Hey, Moody," he said, "the world is yet to see what God can do with a heart that's fully consecrated to him."

Moody took that phrase and just stood on it for a year. He recognized the power of that. Now, it's a bit antiquated language, I suppose—"consecrated"—we don't use that word much. If you want to know the essence of consecration, certainly what Varley was communicating to Moody, and certainly what we are trying to understand in this short three-part series, is that we're saying to God, "I'll do anything you want me to do. I will do it in any place you want me to do it. And I'll do it at any time you want me to do it."

I think Varley was wrong, by the way. I think the world *has* seen what God does with people like that, because he's done it. He did it through Moody. He's doing it through a lot of other people. He's done it through people's lives in church history. And my whole point of this series is that he'll do it through your life and my life. Fully consecrated. What does that mean? Anything, any place, any time.

Moody got together with Varley a year later, and he said this about that statement—I love this. He said, "Those words that you gave me a year ago, they were words sent to my soul. They were sent through you, I get it, but they were from the living God. As I crossed the wide Atlantic, coming back to the States," he said, "the boards of the deck of the ship were engraved with those words. When I reached Chicago, the very paving stones on the sidewalk, they were marked with the words, 'Moody, the world is yet to see what God can do through someone's life that's fully consecrated to him.'"



As you know, as those words from God stirred in his heart—you’ve heard his biography, I trust—he said, “I determined to be that man.” And the reverberation of that one life—uneducated, not a lot of, you know, polish in his speech. I mean, you want to talk about feeling ill-equipped? He could have had a lot of excuses for not doing anything in any place at any time. But the reverberation of that one life that said, “Fine, I’ll do it, ATAPAT,” still reverberating in our culture today.

I trust that you can say to God, and he might do through our lives something we will not even be able to fully measure until we get to heaven, because of a short sermon series as words sent to your heart, that God takes your life because you’re willing to say, “I’m not going to be stuck on a certain thing. I’ll do anything. I’m not going to be stuck on a certain place. I’ll go anywhere. And I’m not going to be all frustrated with a certain timetable. I’ll go and do anything at any time.” You live that way. We’ll watch to see what God does through us.

Would you stand with me? Let us commit ourselves to this very simple but central response to the call of Christ. Pray with me.

God, we would be dishonest, I suppose, to not say that your will is daunting at times and scary. We can’t see the future. That’s part of what frightens us. We don’t know what it will mean when we sign that blank check. It feels like a loss—at least a loss of control. And yet, as we started this series, we know that to lose our lives for your sake and for the sake of the gospel is to find it. No life we’d rather live than a life that says, “I’m mobile, I’m flexible, I’ll do whatever you want me to do.”

God, the Word of God has got most of that laid out for us. We can study it with a mind saturated in it. Sometimes, as to the details of our stewardship of how to live life, where to live, what to do, God, you’ll give us the wisdom that we, if we ask for it, you’ll give it, and we will recognize clearly, as Paul did, the open doors that are provided by you. And then, God, as we are stirred in our hearts just in terms of godly, sanctified desires, we’ll step up to walk through those portals to do your will, having it confirmed with godly counsel.

And sometimes, as we’ve examined today, there’ll be some issues with timing that may tempt us to be frustrated. God, let us not be frustrated. Let us learn something of your sovereign plan for our lives that gives us a sense of contentment and joy, whether we feel rushed or whether we feel like we’re made to wait. We recognize that it’s true: the Spirit that dwells in us intercedes on behalf of our needs according to the will of God. So we’re confident that all things are going to work together for good.



God, for a few that may be here that don't know what I'm talking about because their Christianity has been cultural, it's been external, it's been some kind of church attendance, I pray today might be a day you break through to their hearts. Let them say to you, for the very first time, "Anything, any place, any time."

For the rest of us, make it the cry of our hearts to be that life fully consecrated to you. And use us, God, in whatever capacity you see fit. We want to be willing. We want to be obedient. So, God, we entrust ourselves to you as a congregation. Corporately, we entrust ourselves to you. We want to be the kind of church that fulfills a purpose in this world as you'd call us to fulfill. And we just pray we would be flexible, mobile, and obedient.

God, dismiss us now with a real sense of your guidance in our lives, with a real sense of confirmation that the best kind of life, the right kind of life to live, is the kind of life we give up—we lose it for your sake. Let us see the incomparable value of that, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.