



Ambitious Faith-Part 6
Boldly Following God's Path for My Life
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Well as you know, there's a lot of things in life that are simple but not easy. Know what I'm talking about? There not hard to understand, they're not complex, but they're incredibly difficult to do. Just think golf, right? Just take those sticks, hit the ball, put it in the hole. Sounds easy but its not. Its simple but its difficult. It's like you mountain climbers. I followed some guys up a mountain not too long ago, and explain it, walk to the top, its not hard. No, its not a hard concept, but its certainly hard to do. Like parents, I've got three kids and God's saying; just take care of them until they're all grown up. You know, simple concept, but not easy. It's a tough road. Well, at the top of the list of things that are simple but not easy has to be the Christian life. This thing we call the Christian life, its incredibly simple when you boil it down, it comes down to two words where Jesus calls us to simply follow him. He says; follow me, that's it, that's the essence of it. Its not hard to understand, its not complex, but it is incredibly demanding. Because where he leads us sometimes is into some unthinkable situations that demand an incredible amount of faith. Or, as we've been calling it in Hebrews 11, a real ambitious faith. It takes ambitious faith to follow Christ. The chapter that we've been studying in Hebrews 11 has illustrated that in a number of ways already. But when it comes down to the simplicity and the difficulty of the Christian life, no one illustrates that better then the next person on our list, which we find in verse number 8, the man Abraham of the Old Testament. Now, if we don't understand the simplicity and the difficulty of the Christian life, we're in for a big load of disappointment and disillusionment, which if you understand where we've been so far in the book of Hebrews, the recipients of this letter were right on the cusp of that. A lot of them were disillusioned. A lot of them thought well, if I follow Christ, then things will be okay, everything is going to work out. But they were incurring all this trouble, all this opposition. Some were even wondering if it was even the right thing to start with. And the writer of Hebrews keeps warning them, no, you got it, if it's a tough road, then you understand that this is the call of God on our lives to follow him wherever he leads us. And that is something that needed some reinforcement from Old Testament characters. And so he calls into employment here in verse number 8, the man Abraham who was called, it says, to go to a place where he would later receive his inheritance. He lived in the southern part of what is modern day Iraq, he was called from that place Ur of the Chaldees to go 900 miles over and across the desert to a place called Canaan. That was the call of God on his life, which really is the Christian equivalent of Jesus putting his finger in the disciples chest and simply saying, come and follow me. It says, in the next three words and they should be bracketed underlined and highlighted in your Bible, it's a very simple response, here it comes. Middle of verse 8; Abraham obeyed and went. It's that simple. God says, here this way, and he said, okay, I'm going. And he picked up stakes and he left, and he followed God. But it wasn't easy because the path that he was going to go on, took him through some valleys of uncertainty. Look at the next phrase in the bottom of verse 8. Even though he didn't know where he was going, he followed God but he didn't get the whole map. He didn't see the end gain. He had to take steps of faith not knowing exactly where this path was heading, but he was following God. And then you'd think, well if I'm on the path that God has for me, then it'll probably be a good path, because it's a good God, and I'm doing a good thing by doing what he tells me to do. But it ends up, when he gets there, verse number 9, he has to live in the promised land

like a stranger in a foreign country. That doesn't sound too good. Did he get a mansion, a palace, what did God prepare for him? Well, unfortunately he had to live in tents, and so did his son Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, who were heirs with him in the same promise. Then what's the deal, why such a hard road? Well, because really when it comes to the fulfillment of following God, it doesn't come here and now, it comes there and then. And it says in verse number 10, that they got that and they were looking beyond the threshold of this life toward a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. Big perspective. Abraham says, I'll follow you, and God leads him down a path that isn't as fulfilling as some people would think it might be if you're following a good God, doing a good thing, doing what you're supposed to do, and it ends up that his hope has to be deferred to a time of ultimate fulfillment beyond this life. Two verses about their infertility, lets take that up next week, but drop down to the commentary on his travels in verse 13. It says, all these people, including Sarah, who's mentioned in verse 11, Isaac and Jacob mentioned in verse number 9, they were still living by faith when they died. They didn't get it, they didn't receive the things promised. They didn't have this fabulous experience in the promised land. They only saw them, and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. That doesn't sound all that fulfilling. But people who say such things, that earth is not their home, that they are aliens and strangers here, they show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country that they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. But instead, they are longing for a better country. Now underscore this which flies in the face of a lot of preaching that was broadcast on national television this morning, its not an earthly country, it's a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed. What do you mean therefore? They're looking for something that is ultimately fulfilling in the next life because they're fixed on that hope. He says, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. Now that's a big and revolutionary concept. In a day where we're being told to follow Christ, God is going to give you all that your heart desires here and now. It'll fill stadiums, churches will bust at the seams, you can put that message out that if you follow God everything will be great, and you'll have people give their money to it, they'll come dressed in their fine clothes, and they're ready to celebrate that they're ready to receive all the blessings from God. Now when Abraham obeyed and went, he didn't receive all that, at least not here and now. He had to wait until then and there. And it didn't change much for the disciples either, did it? When Jesus says, leave your nets and follow me, did they do it? Yes. Was it easy for them? What did he say? In this world you'll have tribulation, trouble, but take heart; do you see the big picture? I have overcome the world, something on the other side, there's something there. Then and there that will ultimately be the fruition of your faith. Faith is going to be required to walk the path because as Jesus strategically described it, the path is narrow, and it won't always be easy. Is it going to be drudgery? No. As a matter of fact, God says he'll guide us through it himself and we can have joy in the journey. But the bottom line is, it's going to be a tough road. So you need to know where your expectations should be fixed. There are few things that are more damaging to the Christian movement or the gospel than unmet expectations. And it's our fault when we pitch the gospel in a way that's not biblical. We need to get back to what the Bible says. And the Bible says our job is to follow Christ. And if you think that's just a call for the patriarchs of the Old Testament, or the apostles of the New Testament, I want you to turn to Luke chapter 9, and I want you to recognize that this call to follow Christ extends to us. And its not just believe a certain set of things, its all about where is your life heading. Luke chapter 9, what a great passage that underscores this in a

dramatic and poignant way. Luke chapter 9; and if you think this is an exclusive call, which again, if you want to talk about the distortion of Christianity, here's how its done today... if you really are going to be serious about God, that's kind of second level Christianity. A lot of people make a distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple. That is a false and an unbiblical dichotomy. They are one in the same, and I'll prove it to you right here in verse number 23. Jesus said to them all, everybody, this is an inclusive statement. Luke 9:23; if anyone, were talking about anyone now, would come after me, where is he going? He's going to heaven; he's got this place prepared. If were going to go after Christ, if we're going to be a part of his benefit, then here's what we must do, we must deny ourselves, we must take up our cross daily, and here comes, two words, the simplicity and the difficulty of the Christian life, we must follow him. Follow me he says. That's what you've got to do. It's that simple. And if you say, well, I don't know, I kind of want to do what I want to do, and I want to go where I want to go, and I want to do it on my timetable. Then he says, that would be a problem. As a matter of fact, if you try to guide your life, if you try to save your life, you'll end up losing it. But whoever loses his life for me, which means I'm tossing him the keys and the leadership of my life, whoever is willing to do that, he will save his life. For what good is it for a man to gain the whole world, he follows his own path, he gets what he wants, where he wants it, and when he wants it. What would that be if in the end he forfeits his very self, if he forfeits his soul? That doesn't sound very smart. So Jesus says you've got to be willing to follow me. Which means you do what I say, which is the essence of the gospel. Some people have made a false dichotomy, you can become a Christian and later you can make him your Lord if you want to. That doesn't work. Jesus says, if you come to me, you've got to follow me. Jesus said to the disciples, why do you call me Lord and not do what I say? You cant have God without a basic commitment to give him the leadership of your life. That's what 2 Corinthians 5:15 is all about and we quote it all the time. But the Bible says that we, who are the recipients of God's love, should be those who no longer live for ourselves, but we live for him who died for us and rose again. Have you heard that verse quoted a few times from my mouth? He who died for us and rose again should be the whole purpose of my life, that I'm giving him the leadership, lordship, call it that if you'd like, being the leader, being the boss, being whatever. But it's a resolve to not doing what I want anymore; it's doing what he wants. As a matter of fact, if you want to put it real simply, here's a good way to put it. We need to be telling God from day one, and he will require of us that we remember this, and rekindle this commitment. Number 1 on your outline, we need to tell him this. It's anything, anyplace, anytime, that's what it comes down to. Number 1 on your outline: its anyplace, its not my little geographical preferences, and its anytime, its not my schedule, its yours. That's what it means to let someone else lead. That you're signing the blank check, you're sliding it across the table and you're saying okay God, you've got the leadership of my life. Now did Abraham illustrate that? Absolutely. He didn't even know where he was going, talk about a blank check. All he knew is he was supposed to leave and go to a place called Canaan, which was 900 miles away. That was a big journey, and it took a lot of faith to say, okay, I'll follow you, especially when God didn't map it all out for him. Talk about a blank check, here was a guy who says, I'll follow you wherever you lead me. And so it is in the Christian life, that Abraham is a great illustration of New Testament theology, because that's exactly what it is for us. That we are to say you're the leader. The problem is we like to put stipulations on that and Jesus makes that clear at the bottom of Luke 9. Starting in verse 57, Luke 9:57. Here's the problem, we often want to say, sure, I'll do whatever you want, but we really have stipulations and

we've got limits on that. Verse 57 says, they were walking along the road and a man said to Christ, I will follow you wherever you go. Now that sounds open ended, that sounds like I'll do anything, I'll go anywhere, whatever you want. And he looks right through the cranium of this guy, and he knows there's limitations and he knows what those limitations are, and he spells them out in his response. He says, listen, Jesus says, verse 58, foxes have holes, that's where they hang out, birds of the air have nests, that's where they live, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head, I don't even own a house. Here was a guy who apparently, we can read between the lines here, we understand that he comes and says, I'll follow you wherever you go, but you know what? There are some limits to this, I at least need a place to stay, I need a home, I need a decent income here. And Jesus looks at that and says, you don't seem to understand, if you're going to sign up to follow me, there's no guarantees that these things will be provided for you. Verse 59, he says to another man, follow me... there's the simple call of Christ in verse 59. The problem with the second man is he replied that he's got a timetable that's important to him and he's got some things he's got to do first. Lord, first, underline that, let me go and bury my father. Apparently his father had died, a period of grieving and mourning, he had some things to do, and he's got to tie all this up, and I'd like to go, and I'd like to do your will, and I'd like to preach the things you want me to preach, but I've got stuff to do first. And Jesus' response, verse 60, let the dead bury their own dead, let those who don't care about my kingdom or want to live for me, let them take care of your dad's dead body, but as for you, go proclaim the kingdom of God. It's not about your timing, God says, its about mine. Still another, verse 69, says, I'll follow you Lord, but first I've got some priorities that have to take precedence in my life, and that is for me, my family, and I've got to tie things up with my family, and I'm really concerned about all that, and I know they're a big issue and a priority for me, and so you know, you've just got to understand that my family's always going to be this big priority for me. And Jesus says this; no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. That sounds really complete, that sounds really broad. That sounds like a blank check. That sounds like Jesus is saying to people, it needs to be for you, anything, anyplace, anytime. And unfortunately, we like to put stipulations on that. So let's just ask that question, just let that resonate for a minute. When you came to Christ, we were coming with that, at least that's what God called us to come to him with, and the question is, if it's been 2 years, 5 years, 15 years, or 50 years, are you still able to say that to God this morning? I will do anything, I will go anyplace, and I will do it anytime. Really? What is it that you do everyday? Think about that. Now, if God said, I'm going to change that, and I'm going to send you to another place. I want you to go and do this other job, and I want you to go now. Think about that. Are you ready to say, okay, God, you got it? That's what it means for God to be in charge. That's what it means to say, I'm going to say that you're the leader, and I'll take up my cross if its painful, its okay, because I'm committed to following you. Are you really ready to do whatever he says? If he wants you to open your mouth Tuesday afternoon and speak up for him at the lunchroom and say that you are a Christian, are you willing to do that, if that's God's will for your life? If he wants you to move geographically, to go to another state, another country, are you ready to say, you know what, I'm a servant of Christ, you are in charge, sure I'll do that? And if he says, you know, I know you've got a lot of things that you want on your timetable, but if I want to change your timetable around here, are you willing to do exactly what I say, when I tell you to do it? And again, if you think, well that's just so harsh, that's so tough. You remember this; God is looking from heaven at us and saying, I know what's best for your life. I know how to lead you; I want to maximize your

future as it relates to the glory of God. And just like Abraham, God had a plan for Abraham. And what ultimately benefit the entire world. That's what Genesis 12 is all about. Through you all the families of the earth are going to be blessed. And God's just looking for people that say, I'll follow you, I'm here to do what you say. Now a lot of you say, well that's great, but Abraham had this audible voice apparently, Abraham when called to go to a place he'd later receive as an inheritance, he obeyed and he went. And the disciples had Jesus physically present saying, hey, leave your nets and follow me. Well I don't have the audible voice of God coming out of heaven and telling me what to do and I don't have Jesus here with his finger pointing at me and telling me what to leave, or where to go, or what to do, or the timetable to do it on. So, how can I really respond to that question, how would I even know? It's a great question, I'm so glad you brought it up. Let's answer that. Four things, if we're going to respond to the call of God, we need to know what that call looks like, how that works. Because that call, it's going to have to be crystal clear in your mind that this is a God thing. How do we know that? Four things, let's look this passage up first, Psalm 119. Biggest book in the Bible, biggest chapter of the book, you can find this one, Psalm 119. If you want to know the answers to the question, if you're telling God, hey, I'm willing to do anything, anyplace, anytime, how am I going to know what he tells me to do? How do I figure out God's call? Well, we start with saying we're willing to do whatever he wants us to do, but then we need some direction, where do we get that? Psalm 119; look at verse 104, in this acrostic poem, the end of the Hebrew character Mem. You're probably familiar with verse 105, but let's first look at verse 104. I gain understanding from your precepts. What are those? The written word of God. For David it was looking back on everything the prophets had written and all that Moses had recorded in the Pentateuch and he says, those are your precepts, those are your rules, I gain understanding from those precepts, therefore, I hate every wrong path. And I understand that's a negative, but let's start with that. You'll know the roads you're not supposed to go down, according to this verse, if you are familiar with God's precepts. If you're getting his word into your brain. If the Bible is a daily part of your life, you'll start to say, that's the wrong path, you'll begin to see it, he will enlighten that for you. And not only will you see the wrong path, and learn to despise the wrong path, look at verse 105, the Bible will also become for you a light to know the right path. Your word is a lamp to my feet, and it's a light for my path. He may not, like he didn't do this with Abraham either, give you the whole road map, he will certainly show you what the next step is. And the light and illumination of understanding God's word will make his path clear to you. But again, verse 106, it starts with a resolve. This anything, anyplace, anytime, resolve. He says, I've taken an oath, and I've confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws. I want to do what you say, I want to go where you want me to go, I want to live on your timetable. But it begins with, let's put it down this way, letter A: Biblical directives. We've got to get the biblical directives as the posts, as the guide of my life, and I've got to say, I've got to get in the Word. Don't think you're going to know God's will for your life, number one, if you're not willing to do it, no matter what it is. And number two, if you're not in his word, understanding his biblical directives. It starts with that. You're not going to know his word if you're not picking up the only thing that's going to shed clear light on the path for your life. And you're saying, well it's not specific for me. I understand that, but the principles and the precepts begin to show you the wrong paths, and enlighten the right paths. Got to be more than that? There is. Turn with me to the New Testament, 1 Corinthians chapter 16. How am I supposed to know God's call, how do I figure out what God wants me to do? Does he want me to stay here, does he want me to move, does he want

me to take a new job, does he want me to stay put, what does he want me to do, what is God's direction? Well first, you need to immerse your mind in the biblical directives of scripture. You learn to despise the wrong path, you'll learn to see and have enlightenment about the right path, but in 1 Corinthians 16, there's another layer and element of God's permissive, directive, will for your life. Look at verse number 7. He says I don't want to see you now; Paul is talking to the Corinthian church, because I'd only make a passing visit. I don't just want to run through town and see you briefly. I hope to spend some time with you. Now underline these four words, if the Lord permits. Now that's an interesting phrase. Apparently there's going to be a way for Paul to figure out whether or not this is God's will for his life, whether this is the right thing to do. He says, but I'll stay on in Ephesus, this city in Asia Minor, until the feast of Pentecost, this Jewish feast of Pentecost, because, now look at the terminology here, underline this, a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. Now that's an interesting discussion. He says, I'm going to do this, if I'm permitted to do this, and I'm going to stay here and do that, because the "door" has opened up to me. Now this is what we call, jot this one down, letter B: providential circumstances. Here is, in Paul's mind, circumstances that would "close" the door, and other circumstances that would "open" the door. Now if you think the open door, by the way, is that you have absolutely no opposition to the decision, then you don't understand. Look again at the last phrase. And there are many in this open door that oppose me. There is no decision you're going to make as a Christian that is God's will for your life where everybody in the world is going to do this to you. You're always going to have people going nope, I don't think so. Just remember, it's not that I've got to make sure everybody, everywhere, in every corner of my life is giving me the thumbs-up on this. It doesn't work that way, you've experienced this right? To do the right thing, there's often people that oppose you. But you will see through providential circumstances doors that are opening, and doors that are closing. That's God's providence. We believe that God is sovereign and that in his will, he opens and closes doors. Circumstances are made available to me, and circumstances are shut to me. Now, let's put the two in combination. If my mind is being bathed in the principles and precepts of God's word, I start to see which open doors are right, and I start to see which open doors are wrong. But I need the combination of the two. Now there's another element in this. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 2. There are four things, here comes the third. If I'm going to know what it is to follow God, for Abraham he knew he was to leave Ur of the Chaldees, and go to the land of Canaan, okay? He knew that before the written word, because God was speaking to him. How does God speak to us? Well he speaks to us through the Word, biblical directives. He speaks to us through providential circumstances; open and closed doors. Thirdly, 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 12. He says now, when I went to Troas to teach the gospel of Christ, and found that the Lord had, here it is again, opened a door for me. See he's putting something in these circumstances here, God is working in circumstances. He said, I still had no peace of mind, because I didn't find my brother Titus there, so I said goodbye to them and I went on to Macedonia. Do you see what we just read? Here's an open door, and he says, hmm, not having peace of mind about this, I'm not walking through it. And therefore, I'm going to leave and I'm going to go to Macedonia. Here's an interesting thing, the door is open, the circumstance seems inviting, it seems like this might be God's will. But because his mind is bathed in the scriptures and the principles of the precepts of the Bible, he has to look at circumstances and confirm those providential circumstances with something that's going on inside of his heart. Literally the phrase is, rest in my spirit, I had no rest in my spirit. The Bible is

clear that the Holy Spirit is working with our spirit and confirming things. I know this is a subjective element to this, and this is where a lot of people get off the track, and I recognize that our emotions and our feelings can be misleading and sometimes their unreliable, I get it. But if my mind is bathed in the precepts of the Bible, I'm picking it up, I'm in it everyday, I'm looking at doors opening, and doors closing, I'm going to have the confirmation, according to passages like this, that will give me rest in my spirit, that this is the right decision. Even though there are people that might oppose the decision, right? Doors open, many oppose me. In this case, door is open; I don't think I should go through it. I know there is an opportunity there, but I'm not going to do it because I don't find that rest in my spirit which was based on some circumstances, in his case, Titus wasn't there, so he was going to move on. So, that's the third one, let's call this a spiritual resolve. Can you spiritually resolve to do it with a clear conscience? Is my mind, or as literally as it is put here, is my spirit at rest about this? Does it mean there's no opposition? No, there's going to be opposition to every decision you make. The unique choice you make to follow God's will, you're going to have opposition, but are the biblical directives not only allowing it, but giving me illumination about the path? Are the circumstances there open and available to me? And thirdly, do I have that spiritual resolve without inner conflict? Now sometimes Paul knows it's the right thing and still feels some anxiety, you know that, right? He comes to Corinth and he preaches with trembling, right? But, he's got, in his heart of hearts, the confidence and resolve that this is the right thing to do. Biblical directives, providential circumstances, spiritual resolve. There's one more and its very important okay, very important. Turn with me to Proverbs chapter 15. You can't get the full picture without this one. If I'm saying to God, I'll go anywhere, I'll do anything, and I'll go at anytime, whatever you want me to do, I'm your servant, I'm here to follow you, how do I know who's leading? Get your mind in the scriptures, look at situations with God's providence, you're going to see his hands and his fingerprints on your circumstances, and then look for that spiritual confirmation, that resolve in your heart, but there's one more thing that helps make all of this a bit more objective. Proverbs 15:21; Folly, foolish things, dumb things, delight a man who lacks judgment. He goes down all kinds of crazy paths. But a man of understanding keeps a straight course. He stays on the right path. Ready? How does he do that? Verse 22, here's another key element, it's the fourth thing. Plans fail for lack of council, but with many advisors, they succeed. Lets put it this way, letter D: its wise council. There's got to be that confirmation that I've got Godly people in my life that are saying, this is the right thing. That helps the objective, or I should say, it helps the subjectivity of the third point, of letter C. The letter D here, the objective wise council of others, it helps confirm that the biblical directives, the providential circumstances are being read right, and my spirit gets even more confirmation and more rest when godly people in my life are saying, yes, here, this is right, this is the right thing. Will every counselor in your life agree? No, probably not. But you should be looking to godly people with integrity that walk with Christ and are able to say, let me look at your circumstances, and yes, here's my godly council for you. If you put those four together, you'll have such a strong, clear indication of God's call and leadership, you wont ever mistake it. It'll be as though God is saying to you, like Abraham sitting in that place in Ur of the Chaldees, in southern Iraq, it would be as clear to you if you put these four things together today in our era, as though God were saying get out, you're going to Canaan. And those of you that have walked with God, and you've lived by these kinds of principles, biblical directives, providential circumstances, spiritual resolve, and wise council, you know that sometimes the call is undeniable. Even when some people don't

understand it. And it's happened to me in my life so many times, starting with my call to ministry, some of you know about that. I had no, there was no hint in my background or life that I would be a preacher, leading a church or being a pastor. That was God's prompting that came through these four concepts, these four elements, these four ingredients. And sometimes when God changes the path along the way, it becomes so crystal clear because these four things coalesced together to make the call of God so unmistakable that if I were to do anything else, I would be disobedient to the call of God. He makes his circumstances clear. And in one such very difficult adjustment in my life, I remember that old hymn written back in 1872, Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, some of you seasoned saints remember that old hymn? Verse number 2, I love it, because to me there are times in my life where the biblical precepts, where the providential circumstances, the spiritual resolve, the peace in my heart, and godly council all coalesced to where if I don't see it, I'm blind. I've got to see it as though Jesus were standing by the Sea of Galilee saying, come with me. Here's the second verse of that great old hymn; In simple trust, like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian Sea (the Sea of Galilee), the gracious calling of our Lord lead us, like them, without a word. No complaining, no fighting it, rise up and follow thee. In simple trust, like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian Sea, the gracious calling of our Lord led us, like them, without a word, rise up and follow thee. When you have those things come together in your life, and you start with a willingness to do his will, you will have the absolute confidence that you're walking right in the center of God's will. And that's where you want to be. Will it be easy? Well, what happened to Abraham? Let's go find out. Back to Hebrews chapter 11. Didn't turn so great for Abraham the first few steps were kind of painful. Actually, if you look at the text, in verse number 8, it started with uncertainty. He didn't even know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8, he didn't even know where he was going. And when he got there, verse number 9, he didn't have a palace set up for him, he was like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. Hmm, doesn't look good. Look at verse 13; he had to live by faith, he didn't even receive the things that he thought he was going to get, the things that were promised about the promised land. He never fully realized that he only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Isaac, that they were aliens and strangers on earth. That doesn't sound like a wonderful plan for your life, that doesn't sound like the path that is primrose and perfect and broad and wide, it sounds like we talked about earlier, a narrow road. As a matter of fact, if you know the story of Abraham, it would be good to look at. Turn with me to Genesis chapter 12 through 16, these are chapters where if you look at them and just kind of skim through them, you go, wow, this is cause for questioning the direction of God. And yet, Abraham was right in the center of God's will. Lets go to Genesis chapter 12, just for review, here's the call in context. Verse 1, Yahweh said to Abram, that was before God changed his name, leave your country, your people, your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I'm going to show you, just take the first step, get going. You don't know where we're going to end up. His simple response that led to a very difficult path started in verse 4. So Abram left as the Lord had told him...That's it. Follow me, he said okay. That's it, that's the simplicity of the Christian life, tied up in an Old Testament example. Now, how did it go for him? Well, drop down to verse number 10; he gets to the Promised Land and you have this word that starts with an "f", what is that? Hmm, that doesn't look good, that would make me wonder if I'm in the right place, right? God loves you, has a wonderful plan for your life, okay, I'm starting down the path, boom, famine. All he did, I mean verse number 7, he builds an altar, that's about all he's got time for, he goes to the

hills of Bethel, then all the sudden they run out of food. Now where does he have to go? Egypt. Drop down to verse number 14. Now you've got the Pharaohs officials start hitting on Abrams wife. Now this is bad, not only did I go to the promised land where you told me, as soon as I got there, we ran out of food, then I got shuffled down to Egypt, and now I'm in trouble with Pharaohs household, and now they're hitting on my wife. This is not looking good. And I bet at that point, Abraham might have been thinking, wow, is this really God's path for me? Do not be deceived, I understand it sells a lot of books in Christian bookstores, but do not be deceived about the path of God. He calls you on a path that he wants you to walk down, and it won't always be filled with wonderful feelings and a wonderful sense of affirmation, it will be filled, often times, with bumps and bruises and pain. And the Bible says, you just need to change your expectations about this. Because the goal is not here and now, its then and there. And that's the one fundamental problem we have when we think about Christianity as it's peddled on street corners for a few bucks to make pastor's rich. It does all about, hey get your blessing here and now, and it's not about that. It's about then and there. And the Bible says, when we walk down the path that God calls us for, it may be filled with some difficulty. As a matter of fact, look at the heading in chapter 13. What does your heading say? Abraham and Lot unified, is that what is says? Abram and Lot Separate. Oh, that doesn't sound good. Can't be a part of God's plan, can't be God's will here, huh? Yeah, this is part of the problem. God calls Abraham into this place, and all the sudden now, there's a rift, there's a split. And then Abram of course, because he's the good guy, following God's path, he gets the best of he land in chapter 13, right? Do you know the story? No, he doesn't. As a matter of fact, he gets the worst of the deal. And Lot gets to go out into the fertile valley of the Jordan, and now all of the sudden he's in the best spot. And Abraham now is able to just go on his merry way, and God rebuilds him and he's all fine. Well, not really, look at chapter 14, what does Abraham have to do now to his little sleazy nephew Lot? What does he have to do now? Go rescue him. I mean this wasn't just; I'm going to go pick you up at the airport because you don't have a ride home. He had to put together an army and go out in the Valley and fight these people. I mean he's putting his life at risk now, for the problems of other people. And then chapter 15. God now makes a clear and convincing covenant to Abram, and he says, you're going to be the father of a great nation. So in chapter 16 you see Abram's and Sarah's baby shower. Is that what you see there? No, you see two names that seem to be foreign to the context of God's plan. Hagar and Ishmael, what are you talking about? You Sunday school grad's know what this is all about, right? What's going on here? Now they can't even have a child. At this point you're saying, God, what are you doing? And the Bible says, here in this text, in Hebrews 11, that they had to look beyond the immediate, they had to look beyond the temporal, they had to look beyond the immediate path for their life to the ultimate fulfillment that wouldn't be found in the here in now, it would have to be found there, down the road, in the next life. As a matter of fact, its so crystal clear in this text, that he is a man who's walking right in the center of Gods will, but suffers some difficult consequences that what he needs is the patience that is spelled out for us throughout the whole book of Hebrews, but specifically in chapter 11. The faith that's able to say, I can wait on the fulfillment and gratification of God's promises. Number 2 on your outline; let's just jot it down that way. When it comes to the Christian life, and God's call for you, you need to patiently bear the difficulties, because the path he's called you to walk down will have them. There's no mistaking it, and you and I should not be surprised by them. Abraham, I'm sure, had his hard days thinking is this really the path for me? You will have them too, but do not lose heart, and do not be surprised;

the bumps mean you're on the right road. 1 Peter chapter 4; Peter like so many books of the New Testament, you've got a group of people; he's trying to manage their expectations about the Christian life. Remember what's going on in Peter's day, Nero's in charge, the church is being persecuted, there's a lot of suffering, I mean, these people are supposed to be the privileged children of God, and God is supposed to love them and have a great plan for their life, what's going on? Verse number 12; Dear friends, don't be surprised at the painful trials that you're suffering as though some strange thing were happening to you. Man, that's helpful right there, I've just got to know that when it's hard, it shouldn't be a surprise to me. If there's suffering or a painful trial, I shouldn't say, wow, what's going on God? I'm on the wrong path? No, rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ. Because here's the problem, when Christ walked the right path for his life, what kind of reception did he get? A good one or a bad one? Hmm, they crucified him. And then turned to his disciples and he said this, before he went to the cross he said, no servant is above his master, remember this? If they hated me, they're going to hate you. If they didn't accept my word, do you think they're going to accept your word? He said, no, the world would love its own, if you were still of the world, but I've chosen you out of the world so, you're going to have some trouble. And when you experience that trouble on the narrow path, just remember, you're participating in the sufferings of Christ. And if you participate and align yourself with that, and if you recognize this is what Christ's life was filled with, you can be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. Because for Christ, it was the cross before the crown, and for us it will be the same thing. And when I get there and finally get to see the fruition of our faith, and the fulfillment of our desires spiritually, the Bible says, much like Christ, we'll be able to throw our hats in the air and say, this is what it was all about, the cross before the crown. If you're insulted because of the name of Christ, verse 14, you're blessed. As a matter of fact, when you incur the trouble on the path God calls you to, you are not only blessed, but the spirit of glory and the spirit of God rests upon you. I'd much rather have that than I nice easy life. I'd rather have the support and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of glory resting on my life than to be able to say, yeah, I kind of led my own life, and my own path, and made sure I avoided all the suffering and trials of the Christian life. If you suffer it shouldn't be because you're a bad person, verse 15, not because you are murdering people or stealing stuff. But, verse 16, if you suffer as a Christian do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. If it wasn't an easy path for Christ, it won't be an easy path for us. It wasn't an easy path for Abraham, it won't be an easy path for us. So what do I do? Bottom of this whole section, verse number 19, 1Peter 4:19; So then, those of you who suffer according to God's will, which means you're on the right path, doing what God wants, and you're struggling, all you should do is commit yourself to your faithful creator and keep walking down the path, keep doing the good thing. Continue to do good. Christian life, as God has chosen for you, if you're willing to say, anything, anytime, anyplace, will take you down some roads that will get pretty narrow, there might be some thorns, there might be some scars, there might be some problems, but you and I ahead of time need to say, we're going to bear all of that patiently. Is it going to be this drudgery and oh, its terrible? No, as a matter of fact, you can bear it with joy, let me show you a strange juxtaposition of joy of trials, and it comes from a passage you usually only hear at funerals, so this will be refreshing because it's not a funeral. Turn to Psalm 23, okay? Here's David, who is not living a really favored life, when it comes to the people around him, right? Saul is trying to kill him, he's on the run half of his life, when he becomes the King, his life is plagued with all kinds of problems. You know David's life is tough. And yet in the midst of this, he

writes this passage, this psalm, because to him, this is the thing that gives him joy. This is the thing that gives him inner peace which surpasses all comprehension because for him, it's not about the external setting of his life, see? It's about something that he knows is going on in terms of the leadership of his life. And he says in verse number 1; Yahweh is my Shepherd, he is guiding me. The reasons you can bear this patiently and not only patiently, but with joy, even when it's hard, is because you're not walking this path alone. If you do the right thing, if you do what God wants you to do, the Bible says, you can be assured that the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Glory rests on you. Another way to put it, you're holding the hand of your Shepherd, and he will lead you down this path. And it will feel like this, bottom of verse 1, you won't be in want. Ultimately you'll say, you know what? If I've got this, I've got everything I need. I've got God's support, I've got God's leadership in my life, and its like, verse 2, he makes me lie down in green pastures. And it's like he's leading me beside still or quiet waters. He's restoring my soul; he guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. And some of you are throwing a flag on the play right now, now wait a minute that sounds pretty good, that sounds like a good life, that doesn't sound like what you've been teaching us. Keep reading. That's his experience, but here's the reality, verse number 4, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Even though I'm walking through that, I fear no evil. Why? Because you are my Shepherd, you are with me. Your rod and your staff, rod was the short stick they knock the sheep with to keep them in line, and you know the shepherd's staff right? Was the thing they used to keep the sheep in line, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. I know I'm on the right path, and when I start to step off, you correct me. You prepare a table before me, and I have this feast with you, I commune with you, in the presence of all my friends, is that what it says? In the presence of all my enemies. Do you see that the green pastures and the still waters is an internal experience of David, though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death. And that the table that God builds for him where he's able to be sustained and to grow, and to be fortified in his walk with God, is done in the presence of his enemies. Hmm, perspective? He says, you anoint my head with oil, you crown me ultimately, that was the sign of God's authorization for leadership in David's life. My cup it overflows, surely goodness, and that's not from his enemies, obviously they're trying to kill him, and love will follow me all the days of my life. Why? Because the Lord is my shepherd, it's a spiritual relationship with God that keeps him going. Patiently, joyfully, going. And the ultimate perspective is this, I'll dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That's the long term perspective. Is that the perspective of Abraham? Think about it. What was the perspective of Abraham? Well, its not real good, I got to the Promised Land and there was a famine, I got kicked out of the promised land, I had to go to Egypt, now I got in trouble with Pharaoh, now I'm back, all kinds of trouble, splits with Lot, hes got problems in warfare, he cant have a child, which was the whole point of him going there to populate this place. And the bottom line is, he's looking for something beyond this life. He never gets to live in the palace in Canaan, he ends up saying really, I guess my hope is in another place. And just like David, it may be through the valley of the shadow of death, it may be a table surrounded by enemies, but my ultimate hope is the fact that I am going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I know that's not a fully created, full orbbed understanding of the end times, but from a New Testament perspective, it becomes crystal clear. And that is the Bible says, he has prepared a place for us. Look at our text again; it's printed on your worksheet, Hebrews chapter 11. Abraham even had a sense of it in verse 10, looking forward to the city with foundations who's architect and builder is God. That's not found in Canaan, that's found in heaven, that's found in

another dimension. Verse 14; people who say such things, they know that their aliens and strangers here on earth, they're looking for a country of their own. They don't want to go back; they're not about the old place. Verse 16; they're longing for a better country; underline this, a heavenly one, therefore God's not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. Now I know some of you are starting to go, oh boy, Mike talks about this all the time, he always talks about the next life, the next world, the next... I wish he'd be more practical, talk about his life. You know what? The most practical thing I can do for your life now is to get your hopes pinned on the next life. That's the best thing I can do for you. The thing that's going to best organize and prioritize and structure your life here and now is for you to get your hope fixed on the next life. Because if you start thinking the Christian life is about building your kingdom here and now, you will be sorely disappointed. Isn't that what Jesus kept telling us? Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, right? Colossians chapter 3: 1-3; if you've been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above. Set your minds on things above, not on things of the earth. The most useful you can be, the most Godly, the most productive you can be on earth, only takes place when you're fully completely fixed in your hope in the next life. It's not about this life, it's about the next life, it's about being in that place that God will prepare for us that's going to come out of heaven. Remember that text? Revelation 21, like a bride adorned for her husband. Here comes a 1500 mile cube city called the New Jerusalem that's going to be dropped out of heaven for us. And if our hope had been pinned on the old earth, you're going to be sorely disappointed, because you're going to realize I put all my marbles in the old earth, and I really should have been focusing on this one. When our faith is realized, and here it comes, it says, like a bride adorned for her husband, we're going to stand there like blushing grooms at the end of the aisle as here comes God ultimate fulfillment and gratification of everything we ever wanted. And its not going to be found in Canaan, and its not going to be found in your job, and its not going to be found in your pleasures or your vacations, or whatever it is we aspire to here on earth, its going to be found there, in that next life. God has prepared a city for us, and if we would fix our hope there, bottom of verse 16 says, he's not going to be ashamed to call us his God. Number 3, if you haven't already written it down, you and I need to focus on our ultimate destination, which is not about a wonderful life here and now, its about a completed life, then and there. It's about when God says in Revelation 21, now the dwelling of God is among men. Oxford professor of lit, C.S. Lewis put it well when he said, if I find in myself a desire which no worldly experience can satisfy, then the most probably explanation is, I was made for another world. That's true of you as well. He goes on to say, I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find until after my death. I must never let it get snowed under, or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country, and to help others do the same. Is that the resolve of your life? Or is it all about this life? It's got to be, and I don't care how much you attain in this life, Lewis was a very successful, accomplished Oxford Don, this is what this is about. It's about me being so fixed on the next life that everybody who comes in contact with me is being pulled into a focus about eternity. And if our hope is not there, we will be sorely disappointed. The simplicity of the Christian life is "follow me", and the ultimate gratification and fulfillment of the Christian life is when our hope is realized, when the New Jerusalem comes out of heaven, and we get to live in the presence of God. Until then, we get our job done here and as 1 Peter says, we hasten the day of the Lord. I Peter chapter 1. I feel redundant in this. This has come up every week that I have preached in the last 10 - 15 times it seems. The focus of the Christian life, and this is the problem

in a prosperous nation like ours, is that we can start to think it's about now, it's not about now. Paul says that if we hope in Christ in this life only, we are of all men, to be pitied; you ought to feel sorry for us. It's about a hope in eternity. Verse 3; Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his mercy has given us new birth into a living hope, and that's about the future. Its based on and purchased by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And into an inheritance, that's not here, that can never perish, spoil or fade. Could Canaan perish, spoil, or fade? Yeah, and it did, many times over. But the kind we're looking for is kept in heaven for us and Abraham had enough sense to look beyond this life to say, that's where my hope ultimately is. And it's through faith, that's the key ingredient, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. We haven't realized it yet. In this you should greatly rejoice. You do greatly rejoice even though now for a little while you've had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. That's normative for the Christian life. These have come, why is all this trouble, why now, why is the road so narrow? So that your faith, this is about the future, the hope of the future, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by the fire, may be proved genuine. That's the point. We want to be proved genuine in our faith, that may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Takes faith, though you haven't seen him, you love him. Though you don't see him now, you believe in him, and you're filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy because you're receiving as the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Without stealing thunder from chapter 12 of Hebrews, just remember it's about following the pattern of Christ. And Christ had to go through the cross to get to the crown. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. Which means for me, I've got to say the same thing, I've got to go through the cross now, I've got to bear the cross now, I've got to follow Christ through some pretty narrow streets, but its about pinning my hope on the future, in the hope and the glory, and the inheritance that will be revealed in the last time. So for me, I can work real hard to make my experience on earth now nice and cozy, but if I do, and if I try to keep my life here, the Bible says I'm going to lose it. But if I'm willing to lose it and say, I will follow you, I will do anything, I will go anywhere, I will do it at anytime, the Bible says I'll not only find it, but I'll be able to go into this place that 1 Peter talks about, the inheritance of God, knowing that God is not ashamed to be called my God, because I have had my hope in the next life. And if you wonder why God sometimes kicks the stool out from underneath you here in this life, its because he wants you to get your focus off of the here and now, and he wants you to get it on the then and there. Are you focused on that? If you are, you wont be worried about what it will cost you to follow Christ. You'll say I'll do it, it doesn't matter what it costs me, anything, anyplace, anytime. What are your options? You want to fight God? You're going to lose, not a good idea. You want to run from God's will? Here's one word for you, Jonah. You don't want to do that. Just do what God wants. And I guarantee if you're going, well I have no idea what it is, then back to the four indicators. You're probably not in the word. You're probably not looking for God's providence in your circumstances. You're probably not checking in with the Holy Spirit in your life for confirmation, and you're probably not seeking wise council. But if you start doing those four things, and then boldly step out and follow his path, just know it may be tough, but it will be worth it. Because in the end, you'll see that your faith will be realized like Abraham, when you receive a rich welcome into the kingdom of God. Let's not be afraid to say to God this morning, anything, anyplace, anytime, I'm ready, I'll do your will. And watch what he'll do with a church full of people like that. He will turn the world upside down. Why? Because we're trying to fix the world? No, we're trying to get more people in the ark, so



that we can get our work done. Fill the church up and go home, that's what its all about. So let's get to the work, making sure we're ready to say God, anything, anyplace, anytime.