



Ambitious Faith-Part 7
Trusting God When Hope Seems Lost
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Well this week with little league playoffs all wrapped up, at least for our kids, and Awana on summer hiatus, my family and I had the opportunity to sprawl out one night on the living room floor to play a board game. I was hoping for something, escapist, something easy, something relaxing; boys went to the closet and came back with the Game of Life. So before I knew it, I was having to decide whether to go into debt to pay for college, how much insurance to buy. Hint, this is not the ideal game for dads; I just want to tell you. I did choose, by the way, to go into debt for college, and then I proceeded to pull the lowest paying salary card in the deck. Then I kept drawing those little life cards that kept messing up my life. I bought insurance I never needed; I invested in stocks that never paid off. Then I got to that little square on the board where you get to buy a house and I looked at my money, which I didn't have, I just had debt cards, and I couldn't afford one. At that point, the game was all too real for me. You know I didn't have the best game, as a matter of fact, I came in dead last, I was broke basically at the end of the game, and yet I had a good time. I had a good time, I had fun, in part because at the beginning of the game, my 4 year old daughter who doesn't technically play, she scooted up next to me and she said, I'm on Daddy's team. Even at the lowest point, even when I was completely out of money, I was having a pretty good time, it was kind of fun. Even when hope seemed lost on the board, I was okay. I didn't get depressed, I didn't cry, I didn't whine, I didn't moan, in part because I knew in 20 minutes we'd be sitting on the sofa eating ice cream, so I was okay. So, I came in last, it was a terrible game for me, but I maintained a grasp on reality. I had an accurate perspective; I enjoyed who I had on my team. Do you see where I'm going with any of this yet? Yeah, Mike that's really cute, but that's a board game, when stuff happens like that in real life, that's different, that's devastating. Is it really all that different, really? Isn't the goal to keep our hope fixed on ultimate realities, not temporal ones? Does it really matter who's on our team, isn't that more important than how much salary I'm bringing home? Doesn't it really all hinge on an accurate and biblical perspective? Isn't that what makes the difference? I don't mean to minimize the pain or the disappointment, or the seeming hopelessness, I know that it hurts when life is not going the way we would have hoped. I get the pain, I know its real, I've had my own share and I know that sometimes when you think this is the way it ought to be and life takes you down a completely different path, I recognize the disappointment there, and I know it hurts. I don't mean to minimize the pain, but I do recognize that there are some overarching realities that kind of put all that into perspective. And I also recognize that when I open up my Bible, I seem to find that people in the Bible have not been immune to this disappointment either. Because I know part of the struggle we have is that we as Christians have this extra layer of discouragement that is added to the whole game of life because we're supposed to be special. I mean we're supposed to be loved by God, chosen, set apart. We're supposed to be the focus of God's best intentions, and then we draw a card from the deck so to speak and it just reads "pain" and we think, what's going on here? I thought that God loved me, I thought he had his best in mind for me, and what's with this? Why this, why isn't it working out the right way? Well I find in the scripture too, when we open up the Bible, there are some that seem to be at the pinnacle of those that God loves and honors and their at the top of his list, and not only are they not immune from disappointment and pain and hopelessness, but sometimes

they seem to be their masters of it. I mean their life seems to be punctuated with some of the most acute kind of pain and disappointment. Take Abraham for instance. We started working on him last week as we're studying through the 11th chapter of Hebrews, and if you want to talk about a hero of faith, someone with ambitious and strong faith, I mean Abraham's the guy. He's called the father of faith, and yet when we read about him, it's not just some wonderful story about a life that's well lived and where everything works out. As a matter of fact, we find out in the verses in Hebrews 11 about Abraham that his life was filled with disappointment. As a matter of fact, when we were studying this last week, we kind of took two verses in the middle of this discussion on Abraham and set them aside, we said we'll deal with those next week, because they just set up for a later discussion about another season of Abraham's life. Both of these are acute pain, they're disappointment, and they hurt. And when we look at Abraham's life, we've got to remember he may be honored, he may be special, he may be loved by God, he may have the, God may have the best intentions for him, but he has to experience some difficulties, some deprivation. He knows the pain of having God say; hey you're going to have to wait on that. He knows what it is to be sick in his heart. Proverbs 13:12 says, hope that is deferred makes the heart sick. Longing fulfilled, the next phrase says, that's the tree of life, I mean that's just great gratification and fulfillment, but when your hope is there and it's put off, that hurts inside. Abraham did he ever deal with that? Actually he did as a matter of fact; there was a lot of hope deferred in his life. Look at those verses we skipped over last week in Hebrews chapter 11, the two verses that I'm thinking of are verses 11 and 12. And we said let's hold those for next week; well next week is here so let's examine this little season of disappointment. And if I say little, it's only because it only happens in two verses here, but it was a long season of disappointment for Abraham. Now, it works out, it seems, in the end, but let's put ourselves in the sandals of Abraham and his wife Sarah and recognize that the longing and hope that they had, God kept saying, month after month, season after season, and year after year, and even decade after decade, hey Abraham and Sarah, I know that's what you want but not now, no, not now. Has God ever had you wait on something you really wanted? Something that you think is right and it's good and God has confirmed this as the right plan for your life and God says, oh not now though. Well that was the reality for Abraham. I mean it ends well, by his faith he finally realizes his longing, but he was made to wait. Take a look at the text. Hebrews 11:11, it says, by faith, Abraham, even though he was past age, which is another question I'm going to ask, how come this guy that we meet who's named Abram when we meet him in the scriptures, which, by the way means great father, and he's nothing but a big irony because when you meet him, you say, hey, great father, oh that's right, you've got no kids. I mean here's a guy in the Bible, we meet at age 75 with no children, and his wife at 65, no kids, they've kind of given up on Babies R us, right? They've been to so many baby showers, but they've never had one for themselves, and they've kind of thought, well I guess life is passing us by there. Loving the concept of following a righteous God, and when God calls him, he proves I'm there, I'm for you, I'm going to follow you. He leaves this southern area of modern day Iraq, and he goes up through the Mesopotamian valley and he finds his way over to Canaan, and he's there doing God's will, and God says, hey, great father, I'm going to make you a father of a great nation. And you know when God kind of gives you a sense of something good in your life, and he says, hey, I'm going to do this for you, and there's that fulfillment in your heart that you have knowing that God is going to take you down this path, and you have wise counsel and you have God's principles, and you have that sense of Godly longing, and then God says, well not now though. That hurts. For Abraham and Sarah that's how it

was. Sarah was barren, and yet in the end, he was able to become a father, because the whole time he had to wait, look at his faith, his resilient, ambitious, strong, sterling faith, he considered him faithful who'd made the promise. This is the right thing, this is God's path for my life, and God may be saying wait, but its going to happen. And so it did, verse 12, so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendents and numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. But I'm telling you, if it's a board game, everybody is lapping him three or four times. I mean he is really behind in this. You know it wasn't the next year after the promise, which would have been hard enough, every month going hey, is God fulfilling his promise yet? It wasn't even the next two years. Abraham was 75 when God made the promise that he would be a great father of a great nation. Five years, seven, seventeen, do you know how many years it was until God finally fulfilled the promise for Abraham? 25; 25 years of waiting. God's made you wait for a few things I'm sure. Desires that he's put in your heart. Maybe it's a desire for a relationship. You know, when's God going to bring that perfect person into my life? When is that soul mate, my partner, and God's got that longing in your heart, there's that sense of yes, God's going to, and you wait. 25 years can you imagine? That's a long time from the sense of, yes, God's going to do this to the realization of it all. Or maybe its parenting, my wife and I have been through that in our lives, we know what it is to wait and long for something that God, we're praying and saying God, we want this to happen, and seeing everyone around us have all their kids. It was 10 years before we had our first, longing and our heart's breaking, especially those last 4 or 5 years, it was like, God, what's going on here? We know what its like to wait. Maybe it's the fruition of your ministry plan. Maybe its that sense of where your job was supposed to take you. Maybe it was the fulfillment and usefulness of your life in the body. I don't know what it is, but God has made you wait, that's painful, it's a painful pause in your life. Well, eventually it happened, and he had that child, but it was after a long period of disappointment. Hope deferred, it makes the heart sick, you know that those 25 years were filled with some heart sickness. Well, he had his child and you'd think, well, everything was great from that point on, but it really wasn't. There was another crisis in Abraham's life, and we stopped in verse 16 last week, but let's pick it up in verse 17. Here's the other episode that Abraham is remembered for when it comes to pain and kind of the head scratching season of his life. Well it was the day that he heard from God after having this child, now he's over 100 years old, he's got the pride and joy of his life, Isaac, who's name is laughter, that's what it means, and rightfully so. A guy who could be his great grandfather is there parenting this young boy, and you could imagine how his chest would swell when he would walk around with the final fruition of God's plan for his life, here's the one. I mean he had hoped, and tried to shortcut God's plan with Ishmael and Hagar and all those other things, but now Isaac is here. And you'd think, wow, that's great, everything is going to work out, and they lived happily ever after. But that's not what happened, there was this thing described here as a test from God. That's how Genesis 22 describes it too, God came and tested Abraham. By faith, Abraham when tested, look what he was asked and actually did, because he was willing to follow God even down a path that didn't make much sense. He was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Can you imagine that? Some of you don't have to imagine that, because God has done that to you. He's taken the thing that you think this is God's path for my life, this is God's plan for me, and then God took that plan, that dream, that hope, and he said, okay, now we're just going to take it away. I mean you talk about the depravation and pain of waiting for God to do something, but you know what its like, don't you when God takes something away, that's hard. I mean that's the crisis of life. There are those

painful pauses, but there's also those difficult detours, and Abraham knew what that was like. I mean the path should go from here to there, and all of a sudden God says, now take Isaac up this hill called Moriah, and I want you to go sacrifice him as a burnt offering. Wow, that didn't make any sense. The pains in our life of having God say, wait, the struggle in our life of having God say this thing that you love, I'm going to take it away from you, those are hard. How do we deal with that? How do we manage that? How did Abraham manage that? Well, part of it is found in the context, the context of the whole list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Look back up to verse number 6, we dealt with this in week one. You might remember this verse; it really is the foundation for this chapter, verses 1 and 2 and verse 6. Verse 6 said, without faith, without trusting in God, its impossible to please God. I mean you cant please God without faith. And then he delineates two things, you've got to believe that he is, that he exists. God, by definition, is perfect when this good one, and you must believe or trust in the fact that he is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek him. Do you see that there in verse 6? There is that predicated knowledge that I am confident in the fact that there is a good God, and that God is good to those who seek him. Now, Abraham, was he seeking God? Oh yeah, so much so that when God said, leave your home and go to this place I'm going to tell you about, and I'm not going to give you a lot of information, but just take the next step here and trust me on this one. Abraham said, fine, I'm with you, I'm there, I'm going. He was following and seeking after God. And the bottom line assumption is that the faith that Abraham had to have every year that God said, I'm going to make you wait another year, I'm going to make you wait a little bit more, that longing in your heart, I'm not going to fulfill it right now. The bottom line foundational assertion of Abraham's faith had to be that God is still a good God, even when I'm hurting. There had to be that affirmation. And that would be a good place for us to start when God makes you wait with a painful pause, or a difficult detour. Lets start with this, number 1 on your outline; we need to reaffirm God's goodness, that's really where it starts. I need to be able to say, I might be hurting, God may be making me wait, there may be disappointment, a dream may be shattered in my life, things that should have worked out aren't working out, and I'm sitting here drawing life cards that are like ooooh, why this now, I don't believe this is happening to me. And you know what? It starts with this, if you want a godly perspective, if you want ambitious biblical faith that's going to let you navigate through that, you've got to be able to say, God is still good, God is good. Asaph, we've quoted him a few times in this series, his song in the Psalter, in Psalms, Psalm 73 has been very helpful for us. I want to go back to this because what Asaph does in this little Psalm is exactly what needs to happen in our lives when we're feeling the pain or the injustice or the heartsickness that we all go through now and here on earth, we've got to have this resolve of Asaph. Asaph is feeling it, he's thinking, God, I don't get it, I'm following you, I'm trusting you, I'm seeking you, and look at my life, its hurting, there's pain. Well, he shows that he is going to specifically affirm the goodness of God. Let's at least feel his pain a little bit, look at verse number 3. He's looking around and hes seeing people that unlike him are having a pretty good time in life, so much so that he's envying those people. Now they're not godly, their not doing the right thing, he's envying arrogant people, which is an odd thing for someone who's godly to do, but he's doing it because he's seeing their prosperity. I saw the prosperity of the wicked, I don't get it man, my youngest kid doesn't go to college and he pulls the highest paying salary card that he can have you know? That aint fair, I'm carrying those little white debt cards around, and I'm an college educated artist making \$12,000 a year. That was my arrangement. And my kid skips it, and he's out there prospering. What's with you, wicked kid?

Right? How did that work? It's not fair, I'm trying to teach you a lesson, go to college, this isn't right, it's unfair. And he says, it's not fair sometimes. Sometimes it seems that people cut corners and don't do the righteous things. Its like verse 4, they don't have struggles. Look at them, their bodies are healthy and strong. You ever feel that way when the doctor says you're sick? You got some chronic problem, something goes wrong in your body, and you look across the street at mister tanned, toned pagan across the way? That guy's never sick, come on, what's with me God, I don't get it, how come their life is better than mine? I'm trying to follow you; I'm trying to do the right thing. He feels that pain, because it seems that those people, they're free from the burdens that are common to man. Verse 5, they're not plagued with human ills like I am. I mean he's got a beef with God here. Well he ends this chapter, and this is a psalm, its poetry, and that's why it starts with the conclusion. Look up at verse number 1; he's going to end this psalm after thinking through it all, and he's going to get to this affirmation. Verse number 1, look what he says; surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure at heart. Now that's a weird way to start this description of his frustration of the injustice of life, but that's where he's going to end up. He's got to step back and say, even when I'm hurting, God is good, he's good to Israel, his chosen people, he's good to those that are pure at heart, I know that God is still good. He specifically speaks of God's character. Put some sub-points here, this would be a good one to start with, God is good. I mean if we're talking about his goodness, let's start with his attributes, his character. He is a good God. He's not torturing us, he's not with a magnifying glass trying to hurt us, he doesn't have malicious intent in his heart just because he's saying no to our desires. Just because he puts us on a difficult detour, he's not a mean God, he's not a bad God. The affirmation of this is important because for him, look at how this ends, verse number 27. He recognizes, he stands back and actually says he's got to go to church, so to speak, he's got to go to the house of God to get this perspective and he realizes that those who are far from you will perish. Oh they may be toned and tan now but, you know what? They're in trouble with God. You are ultimately going to destroy all who are unfaithful to you, but as for me, he's not having a good day, it is good to be near God. I've made the sovereign Lord my refuge, I will tell of all your deeds. Those are the good deeds, not the apparent unjust deeds that he's inflicted with. Which I know he's feeling, right? He's just written all about it. But he's saying, I've got to step back and say, God is good. The goodness of God, and I start with his character, God is a good God. And in the end, and you see how he starts to look forward here? That's the second important part of this. We've got to look forward and recognize that while there's injustice, it's all temporary because God will overcome evil. Even if in my life I'm doing the right thing and I have to go through pain, I need to get the big perspective. And the big perspective is soon I'll be on the couch eating ice cream, right? All the injustice of this dumb board game is going to be over. God is doing this and allowing this in his grace, according to 2 Peter 3, because he wants people to come to repentance, he wants to pluck people out from the punishment of their sin, but in the meantime, I'm going to have to go through some injustice. There will be some pain, it doesn't mean God is not good, and it doesn't mean that God won't one day right all the wrongs. As a matter of fact, go back to Hebrews 11 and you'll see that, we already looked at that in the discussion about Abraham. Abraham is following God, he is supposed to inherit this great land, but when he goes there, what happens? He's living in tents. And you're thinking, wow, that's not such a great thing. He had to look at a distance and welcome these promises from a distance, knowing that one day they would be a reality, that's what verse 13 said. Drop down to verse 16 and he says, when we do the same thing, when the board game for us, so to



speaking, isn't working out, we have to long for a better country, a heavenly one. I mean that's the ultimate reality, the big picture here. Therefore God's not ashamed to call them their God, because, it says, he has prepared a city for them. You know that's how the book ends, right? The book of Revelation ends with the fact that all the injustices and pains of this world will be set aside, the old order of things will be done. And I love the way Revelation 11 puts it, and Handel was so good, in Handel's Messiah, we hear it at Christmas, where he puts together the words from Revelation 11, with those great words from the end of the prophecy of Isaiah, and he blends these together in Isaiah he says, every crooked way is going to be made straight, every rough place is going to be made plain, all that's wrong is going to be made right, and then he just enlists those words from Revelation 11 where the angels cry out and say, now the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever. And I love the next verse, and it's not in that song, but it says, he has taken his power and he has begun to reign. He's going to correct everything that's wrong. So when it comes to me saying, you know what, life's hurting right now for me God, I've got desires that aren't fulfilled, I've got a plan that seemed right and good, and now all of the sudden you put me on some weird detour, and it hurts. I've got to step back and say, wait a minute, like Asaph, I've got to say, God is good. And like Abraham, I've got to say in the end it's going to be made perfect and right, because you will overcome all evil. And at the end of the book in Revelation 21 and 22, what does it say? Every pain, wipe it away, wipe away every tear, death, mourning, pain, the first order of things, gone. And God is going to correct everything. In the meantime, it's just an opportunity for God's saving grace. That's a whole other sermon, but it lets me say, okay God, I'm hurting, but it doesn't mean you are not good. You are good as a person, and you will overcome evil in the end. But thirdly, I want you to be more specific about it. Third sub-point here, you need to recognize this is not just some ethereal eschatological big perspective picture, and I guess in the end, I'll be on the couch eating ice cream with God, it will be okay. You need to be more specific than that. And unfortunately as I read Hebrews 11 and look at Abraham, sometimes I'm kind of detached and dispassionate about that, that's Abraham. I mean Abraham had Genesis 12 and Genesis 15 where God comes down and specifically says through you Abraham, I've got a plan for you, I'm going to make you a great nation, and all the families of the world will be blessed through you, and that's Abraham. Abraham's got the finger of God right on his chest saying, you are chosen, you are special, I'm going to do good things with your life. But you know, he hasn't said that to me, I'm just kind of you know a no name Christian in the 21st century in some weird place called Orange County and I'm not like that, I mean God doesn't have some good plan for me. And then I start thinking, well wait a minute, what does the New Testament say? Is there any verse, is there any concept, a discerning principle that includes me in some specific plan about the actual game, and the way it's played and the moves on the board, and maybe why I pulled that low salary card, and maybe why I stopped there and not be able to afford the house on the house square, maybe there is a plan that is specific to my life. And there is, and sometimes I know it gets thrown at us on a dayspring card when we're hurting and you just kind of brush it away in your pain, but maybe in the quietness of a church service, it would be good to look at that verse again, and recognize it's not just a dayspring card, this is the truth of God's word about every day new covenant Christians like you and me. It's found in Romans chapter 8, let's turn there, this is an important verse, and you need to see yourself in this text if you meet the criteria, there is a definition here, just make sure you meet the definition. If the definition applies to you then you can scroll your name right here in

this verse, and say this is talking about me, and its specific about my life. Romans chapter 8 verse 28, take a look at this verse, take a look at it with fresh eyes. Here's what the Bible says, the Bible is very clear, it says; we know, now look at it carefully, this is important; we know that in most things, underline the word most there, do you see it? I got the new version here, what's the old version say? Oh that's right, all things. In all things, that's pretty inclusive. That means when everybody has lapped me on the board, that means when I get that life card that messes up my life, in all things, in every single spin. You know they punish you for spinning the dial wrong? Have you played this game with your kids lately? What kind of masochistic game is that? I don't understand that. I just accidentally spun it wrong and ooooh, pay up Dad. Have you played the game of life lately? I've got to write Milton Bradley or something, something is wrong with that, sorry, penalize you for spinning the dial wrong, that's a different message. In most things, is that what it says? In all things, God works for the good of those who, now here's the definition, do you meet it? Those who love him, do you love God? And who have been called according to his purpose, very specific, you are a Christian, you've been called by God to follow Christ. Two things, do you love God, and are you called according to his purpose? If so then read that phrase again. All things, every single episode of your life is designed specifically to work for the good of God's plan for you. He's got a plan for you. That's the third thing you can jot down; God is working good in your life. Even when he says to you, here, here is a painful pause, or a difficult detour. Either one, God is trying to work something good in your life. There is a good that he is working out. And you may not see it this side of Heaven, but you might if you read the next verse because maybe this will help you a little bit, because one of his specific purposes for you is bound up in the words of verse 29. For those he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. Okay, are you catching that? Who's his son? Jesus. How did Jesus live? Well, pretty well, perfectly. He was perfect, okay. Now, he wants to conform you to that image, he wants you to be like his Son. Have you arrived there yet? Let me know. No, you haven't gotten there yet. You're not quite like Jesus quite yet, right? So that means, that the next spin of the dial, or the next draw of the card of the deck, that God may be through that trying to work out his perfect plan in your life which in part is to conform you to the image of his Son. And as C.S. Lewis rightly said, he may whisper to us in our pleasures, but he seems to shout to us in our pain. And if it's a painful pause or a difficult detour, it might be that God is trying to arrest your attention so that he can change you to be a little bit more like his Son. So maybe the wait has that purpose. Maybe its got some other purpose, I don't know. Maybe it's a purpose you wont know about until you get to Heaven and maybe when you get to Heaven he wont even tell you then, I don't know. But the bottom line is, there's a reason for it. And according to this text, if you love God, and you're called according to his purpose, it's a good reason. And that's and important thing, that's affirming the importance of God. Now you may still hurt just as bad, it may hurt, you may say, God, I don't like this painful pause, or I don't like this difficult detour, but at least I can stand back and say Asaph and Abraham, and I can say with Paul, that he's working all things to good in my life, he's working all things to good in the world, and you know what? He's good in his heart, God is a good God. Despite my pain, even though I'm hurting, even though he's making me wait, even though my heart is sick. Let's start with that, lets reaffirm the goodness of God; that would be a good place to start. But how do we deal with these two things? And they are very different kinds of pain and they both hurt. The first one, lets look at it again, Hebrews 11 verses 11 and 12. Abraham was made to wait. If you've been through that kind of pain, it may not be infertility, it could be the depravation of

some other godly desire that you have. And I know sometimes its easy to shake our fist at God, and think, God, why are you doing this? Why did you put this desire, this ambition in my life, and then you said no to me, you shut the doors on me? Whatever it is, that's a kind of heartsickness, a difficult pain, a difficulty that all of us experience as Christians. And as we do, we need to know how to deal with this. How do we deal with the fact that God may lead us to some kind of godly desire, and then make us wait? And we don't like to wait, right? If it's a good and godly thing, when do you want it to happen? Now would be good right? I'm all for now, right? I don't want to wait a year; I don't want to wait two years. I certainly don't want to wait 25 years for something, if it's a good thing, I want it now. And God doesn't work that way, he's got a whole other time table. Now what we need to learn is what Abraham had to learn, and we've already had it spelled out for us in chapter 6 of Hebrews, so real quick turn back a few chapters to chapter 6. Do you remember five chapters ago when we were studying this text, we were looking at the promises God made to Abraham? And God makes this promise and he swears on oath, and he wants Abraham to trust him, just based on the promise. And his then responsibility was to do what it says here in verse number 15, underline it. So after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Part of the godliness that God wants to create in our lives, part of the virtue that he wants to build into you, underline it right there, is to be able to wait patiently. We are not born that way are we? Right, are your kids born that way? Oh they love to wait patiently. They hate it. And Dad doesn't like it much better either. When it comes to being a faith filled person, who has the kind of ambitious faith to trust God when he's making me wait, I need to learn to be patient with God's time table. That would be a good thing to jot down in number 2. We need to learn to be patient with God's timetable. Because God's timetable is not your timetable, have you figured that one out? It aint the same. I'm looking at my life going, here's how I would map it out, and God goes, this is not how I would do it. And God in his sovereignty has me waiting for things that I don't want to wait for. So I need to learn to wait patiently. And that's tough. But thankfully, the Bible addresses this quite oftenly. One classic passage that we would be remiss not to look at would be James chapter 5. James chapter 5 is very helpful for us because it gives lots of good examples about how we can at least understand that this is no bizarre thing, this is not just an uncommon thing and God is being unique with you, making you wait, and everybody else gets everything when they want it, no we all have to wait. As a matter of fact, the patterns of having to learn to wait with a virtuous patience, that's part of just living on the planet. Verse 7, be patient then brothers until the coming of the Lord. And if you want to know when every longing will be fulfilled, well, ultimately it's at the coming of the Lord. If hope differed makes the heart sick, that was Proverbs 13:12, then longing fulfilled is the tree of life. When ultimately do we experience that? Its interesting that even in Revelation 21 and 22, its there, the tree of life, the fulfillment of all things will be then when we're on the couch eating ice cream in this perfect place, okay? So then we know everything, every longing will be fulfilled. And sometimes we may have to wait until then. When it came to him living in his land as the leader of this country so to speak, Abraham didn't get that until he sat on the couch in God's presence. That was the coming of the Lord so to speak. But you know what? There's all kinds of waiting that goes on in our daily life. And in their lives he says, look, you agrarian society, look how the farmer has to wait for the land to yield its valuable crop, you don't throw a seed on the ground and then it pops out. I know that's not how it works for us, so it's not going to work for them. They've even got to be patient waiting for the autumn and the spring rains. And for us its different as it relates to food, you've got to wait

for tomorrow, you've got to wait for your paycheck; you've got to wait for your vacation. There's all kinds of things we've got to wait for, it's built into life. So you too be patient, but here's the virtuous part of it, if you want to talk about real biblical patience, it's the kind that comes with these two words, and stand firm. It's a kind of strength, a sterling resolve to be able to say God's not giving me what I want, he's not giving it to me now, but I'm going to be able to stand firm. I'm not going to whine, I'm not going to break down, I'm not going to be depressed, I'm not going to... Look at verse number 9, here's another temptation we have, we start grumbling, you never do that, but people you know do that sometimes right? Oh you do that too. See because when we don't get what we want when we want it, we start to become pretty difficult people. And the Bible says, don't do that, stand firm and know that God at any time could break through the barrier. That's what verse 8 said, be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. So don't start grumbling, don't be an irritable person. Because you know what? You're going to have to be accountable for that; you're going to be judged for that. And the judge, by the way, could walk through the door at any time. I mean think about some of the periods of depravation in my wife's life and in my life when we were waiting for children, I mean that was a tough season in our life. And I remember my wife and I used to talk about these things specifically, we do not want to look back on this, when God fulfills this, whether when were on the couch in the kingdom, or whether he fulfills it in this life, we don't want to look at this period of depravation and say, man we were sure irritable and ugly people during this time. That was our living out of this passage, we didn't always do a good job of it, but our goal was to say, we don't want to be like that. To be able to have the biblical virtue of patience, was to try and still have that inner resolve of trust in God. God is still good, we don't have what we want; we think it's the right desire, God seems to confirm the desire, but God's making us wait. But you know what? We're not going to be irritable awful people, ugly people to be around. We want to still rejoice in God, and affirm his goodness. Here's some examples. Think about the prophets for instance, verse 10; take the example in the face of suffering. Think of the prophets, they spoke in the name of the Lord. Now these were the guys, they were the heroes of the Old Testament, and you know how they were, they would go out and preach and everybody loved them, bake them bundt cakes, everybody put their arms around the prophets, a lot of hugs at the door, great sermon. Is that how they were? No, they picked up rocks to kill these guys. They threw them in wells, right? They took them before kings and they put them in prison. I mean these guys did the right thing and they always had bad stuff happening to them. Now think about how they had to persevere and be patient in the face of that kind of suffering. We don't call them losers, no, we call them heroes. We consider them blessed, verse 11, because they persevered. By the way, another example, bottom of verse 11, think about Job. Think about Job's perseverance. I mean he had it bad. But see what the Lord finally brought about for him. Now the prophets, they didn't get the warm reception until they sat on the celestial couch in God's Kingdom and at ice cream with God so to speak, and had the ultimate fulfillment of their lives where they really got high fives the way they needed to. But for Job, did he have to wait until Heaven? No, have you read Job 42? What happens at the end of Job's life? The Bible says the second half of his life was more blessed and prosperous than the first half, and if you know the Book of Job, he starts out as a pretty prosperous guy. But then there was those rotten little 41 chapters in between, I mean things got really bad there for Job. But remember he says, Job, remember the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Now it didn't look like that when Job was sitting there with sickness all over his body, with the loss of his children, that did not look like God

was full of mercy and compassion. But he says, remember how that all turned out? And I know we read over it, and its just a few verses at the end of Job 42, but the bottom line is, God broke through and talk about prosperity and joy and fulfillment, Job had it all. And he said you know what? God's going to break through, either here or there. So don't be nasty, don't be ugly, don't be a complainer, don't be a grumbler. You need patience, be patient with God's timetable. He's got one, he's sovereign, he loves you, he wants to do good in your life. But you're going to have to be patient; you're going to have to learn that. If you are going to be a Christian with ambitious faith, you are going to need patience. Patience unfortunately though is like a lot of Christian virtues, if you aim at it, its elusive, its hard to grab, you know? Its one of those things like joy or contentment, that if you aim at it, you're not going to get it. It comes through the means of something else, that's how patience is. And just a little side-bar here, lets just talk for two minutes about some of the things we should aim at if you want patience. You don't say, great, I'm going to work on being a patient person. You have to get it through the means of something else. Let me give you one example with two parts to it. Romans chapter 15, the difficult abstract, how do we achieve it? Well you've got to point at some things, and here's the prescription. Romans 15, and if you read it too fast, you'll miss it, so let's take a good look at what its saying to us here. Verse number 4; for everything that was written in the past, was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. Those are three big words, endurance, encouragement, hope; those are the ingredients that spell patience, standing firm. The virtue of biblical patience is a person who is enduring, encouraged, and hope filled, that's what it is. Now we see all those great words surrounding the means or mechanism and that is it comes through the scriptures, do you see that? Its all written there to teach us so that endurance and encouragement of scripture we can have hope. If you want to aim at something, to become a patient godly faith-filled person when God is making you wait, here it is, the first thing in this text verse number 4, you need to keep your nose in the book, you've got to be a person of the Bible, you've got to study the Bible, its there to teach us, its written for us to ingest. You cannot be patient; you cannot have the virtue of patience unless you are ingesting the book. You can't bring it to church once a week, read stories from the church service and go home and leave it on your shelf, and think you are going to be a patient Christian, you're not. You're going to be a grumpy, nasty, ugly, impatient person who grumbles all the time unless you're getting the source of biblical divine virtuous patience. And that comes from the encouragement, and the endurance and the hope that comes from ingesting the scripture. So you've got to keep your nose in the book. Satan will want to remove it, I mean in our impatience we don't even want to get into the Bible. That's the very thing you need, that's the focus you need to have. You need to get into that Bible study group, you need to start the partners program and get in the word in some systematic way. You need to take that class; you need to read that commentary, you need to get into God's word on a regular basis, that's the thing to point at. And then you'll start to say, wow, I'm becoming a more patient person. God is giving me endurance and strength and encouragement and hope. Secondly, look at the next verse, verse number 5; may the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as ya'll follow Christ Jesus. Are you seeing where we're going now? So with one heart and mouth, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another. Jesus Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God. This now becomes this group focus. Two things, if I want to build godly patience, I need to keep my nose in the book, and my car in the church parking lot, and your body in a church activity in the body of

Christ with other Christians making a group effort at growing in Christ as you (ya'll) follow Christ Jesus. And again, what is Satan's strategy when I'm not getting what I want? Its isolation. I see it all the time, as a pastor I see people that are not getting what they want, God's not fulfilling their longings and they start to isolate themselves, they start to put the Bible on the shelf all week. You need the Bible more than ever, you need fellowship more than ever. Keep an eye on that, you've got to make sure your nose is in the book and your car is in the parking lot, and your body is in the fellowship. And its not a once a week thing, you know church is not a once a week thing, you know that right? About 35% of you know that, because about 35% of us get involved in some other level of the church. Where is everybody else? Right, I guess your life's perfect right? No, probably not, you probably need to be a more patient person. You know we're working on it. The doors of the church aren't open just once a week, right? I mean you're going to find yourself in small group, you're going to find yourself in Bible study programs, you're going to find yourself in community service projects with the church, you're going to find yourself at even seemingly extra curricular and superfluous church summer picnics. You're going to find yourself at stuff like that going, you know what? This is what I need as we together find unity camaraderie, commonality, communion in our fellowship, unity as we all follow Christ together. If you focus on the fellowship and God's word, the Bible says, you're going to have these things called encouragement, endurance, hope, that's patience. And I love the benediction at the bottom of verse 13, don't skip that, we can look at all of the rest of it, but its redundant, saying the same things about together serving God, following God, nose in the book, understanding the scriptures, the prophesies of the Old Testament. Verse 13; may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace, that's the good kind of patience, as you trust in him, that's what its all about- ambitious faith, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And you're looking at someone there, who may be made to wait for their longings and desires, and it may be Heaven till they get it, it may be years until they get it, it may be months, it may be whatever the painful pause, and they are filled with hope, a joyful hope. That's what we need; we need that kind of patience. That word patience, I know it just kind of seems like a flat lined word, but it's filled with words like this and you and I need that if God's making you wait. Its painful, God is still good, you just need to be patient. Some direction on how to do that; Abraham had to wait, he had to wait, he had to sit there and have God say no to him week after week, month after month, year after year. But then he has his child, little laughter, Isaac shows up, hey you got your kid I can't believe it. Yup, got my kid, his chest would swell up, you could see him walking around, here he is, yup God's going to reckon my descendants through Isaac, this is the child of promise. And then one day, the Lord says to him in Genesis 22, take your son, your only son, the son that you love, just want to make clear we have the right son in mind here, Isaac, and I want you to go and kill him. Huh? I want you to take your son and kill him. Its called a sacrifice. You're going to put him on an altar, you're going to build an altar, you're going to put a fire there, you're going to take him, kill him, slit his throat, and I want you to burn his body there on a place called Mount Moriah, I'm going to show you where it is tomorrow. Uh uh.. no. I mean how do you respond to that? That doesn't make sense. I don't want to do that. That's called a test. That's when the plan that seems to be going so well, God says, okay, left turn, here it is. Remember those sermons I preached called, "when life takes a left turn"? God does that to us, he takes the detour. I know it looks like you should be going this direction, but I'm going to go here. Is your life not filled with those? I mean I could write a book on that. Every time I'm thinking, this is it God, this makes sense, here it is, lets map out the path, perfect now its working.

And God goes (crash sound), no, that door is now closed; I'd like you to go over here now. But, but, but, see? The crisis is just as painful as the deprivation of waiting. And God may be saying to you right now, wait, wait, wait, it may be painful, heartsickness, but maybe some of you hit the crisis, the door's closed. The hope the dream has just died. The relationship that should have worked out, its on the rocks. The job that was supposed to be perfect for your future, you were perfectly suited for that, oh sorry, here's the layoff notice, sorry we don't want you anymore. Maybe that's happened to you. Maybe the health, you know here I am, I'm going to go serve the Lord and the Dr. says, you're in big trouble, your health. How do we deal with that? What do we do? How do we respond to that? Well, Abraham had the test, and I know we go real quickly into Hebrews 11 to those words, and it just says well, he was asked to offer Isaac. And we become so immune maybe to the power of that, but don't forget the drama of this. This was huge. He who would receive, verse 17 says, the promises, was about to sacrifice his one and only son and that made no sense as verse 18 says, even though God had said it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. Now those two things don't equate. Kill your son and yeah you are going to have this great lineage through Isaac, oh go kill him by the way tomorrow, would you? Doesn't compute. There are things in your life God does that don't compute, right? His timetable, his template, not just the timing of it but the direction, the path of your life, it doesn't always make sense. Here's what you need. You need what Abraham had. It's a kind of ambitious sterling faith that has the flexibility to say, I had all my heart and mind going in this direction, and you shut the door, and now you're saying to go here, I don't understand it, it doesn't make sense, but I am flexible enough to go here. Because here's what most people do, I'm going to kick on this closed door until my toes fall off because I think this is where I should be going. And God says, no, clearly closed, I want you to go here now. Are you going to throw your heart into this as wholeheartedly as you were toward this plan? Are you willing to take a detour with God? Are you willing to say, I'll do it? That takes an incredible amount of flexibility. Number three on your outline, let's just jot it down that way. You and I need flexibility, be flexible with God detours because you've already had them and you are going to have some. There's more to come, because his plan is a little different than your plan. And I know its very hard for us to understand them and sometimes we're going to have to think way out of the box. Why is God doing this? Okay, maybe it's the Romans 8:28 thing; maybe he's trying to make me more Christ like, I don't know. I don't think that makes sense, but I don't know. Maybe like Abraham, you're going to have to think flexibly. Look at verse number 19; it says Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead. Now, he's not seen that, but he's thinking, I guess if you want me to kill him, I'll go kill him, I don't know how you're going to reckon my descendants through him, maybe I'm going to kill him and you're going to raise him to life. I don't know, but I'm going to do what you told me to do. He didn't hesitate to be flexible with plan B, that's what it looked like, plan B, he was willing to do it. He followed faithfully, even when it didn't make sense. He did the right thing, he didn't lose his passion, he didn't lose his heart, he didn't lose his ambition for God, he said I'm going to do it. The next morning, you know that's how it worked? Think about that, and a very sleepless night I'm sure. Abraham got up and he took the wood, and he went with his servants, he had the fire, he took his son, and they walked up to a place called Mount Moriah, which would later be sold to David, this old threshing floor, which would later be built on by his son, Solomon, which would later have this gold gilded altar on which they would sacrifice animals day and night, all through Israel's history. An amazing thing, it was the very place where God had asked Abraham to take his son and kill him. And Abraham said, it

doesn't make sense, maybe its going to be a spectacular resurrection, I don't know, but I'll do it. And so off he goes, up the mountain, and his son is going okay, got the wood, got the fire, don't see the lamb here.... Uh the Lord will provide. Can you imagine what's going through his mind right then and there? I don't know, I'm just doing what God says. He gets there, he lights the fire, he binds his son, he's ready to go, he takes the knife, he's getting ready to kill his son and you know the story.. the angel of the Lord says don't, stop, this was just a test, that's all it was, just a test. Here, here's a ram caught up on this bush, here, take the ram and kill the ram instead. Isn't that amazing, how bizarre. Even after it happened, do you think Abraham said, oh it totally makes sense now, I get it, ha ha. No way, you know all the way down the hill he and Isaac are going, what was that about? I don't know... I mean that was a weird day for them. Now they didn't understand it until Abraham walked into the presence of almighty God and got a little more insight with the mind of Christ to understand what would happen in the shadow of that mountain. And that would be the crucifixion of the Son of God, when the Heavenly Father would take his one and only Son, the son that he loved and would willingly go through with a crucifixion so that your sin and mine could be atoned for. And the symbolism that would be played out on that very mountain typified the ultimate sacrifice of the Son of God on that mountain and that was the thing that Abraham was testifying to for all biblical history and he had no clue, no clue. You may not understand the detours in your life. I will venture to say you probably wont this side of Heaven, understand half of the cards you pull in the deck of life, and you say, wow, why this? This doesn't make any sense. And God will say, I've got a plan, I'm working out my plan. You may not get it, as a matter of fact, don't even count on getting it. Isaiah 55, we memorized that when we were little kids. It said, my thoughts are higher than your thoughts, my ways are higher than your ways. And then God to just kind of put us in our place, lets just make it really clear, as high as the heavens are above the earth, you know, that's really how little you're going to understand my thoughts. They are like way up there man, and you may not understand them, but just keep following me, just keep being flexible would you? Follow Christ. If it doesn't make sense, don't whine, don't moan, don't complain, don't grumble, don't get uptight. Ambitious faith is the kind of faith that says, I know God's got a plan, I don't understand it, I'm just going to throw my whole heart into following Christ, wherever this path takes me. Are you willing to do that? That's what Abraham did. And you know what? Figuratively speaking, last phrase of verse 19, he did receive Isaac back from the dead, and unwittingly provided the most dramatic template of a father willing to kill his son in obedience to the law of God. That is an amazing thing, and it resonated throughout all biblical history that the father of faith gave us a picture of what it would take for us to be loved and redeemed and forgiven by a Holy God. Be flexible with God's detours, he's got a plan, you may not understand it, but he's working out good in your life. Sometimes he'll let you know. Remember Joseph? I bet there were a lot of years he's sitting there going, I don't get this, I'm just doing what God says, I'm just telling my brothers about this dream that I had and now they hate me, they envy me, they're jealous of me, they've thrown me in a pit, they've sold me to traveling marauders, I'm a slave. Then I get here, I get thrown in prison, I don't get it. Falsely accused, unjustly prosecuted, and it wasn't until the last chapter and he says, he finally meets up with his brothers and ends up saving the nation that would one day give rise to the Messiah. And he says, now I get it. And he says, you guys meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. God is good, he's got a good plan. And I love the next phrase. He says, not only is he in it for good, but he wanted to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives and Joseph didn't know the half of it, what God was doing through that.

But you know what? He just kept following, he just kept doing the right thing, he just kept trusting God. If you do that, I guarantee you the world's going to look at you, you're going to have non-Christians, you're going to have family members that say, I don't get you. You just pulled a really bad card in your life and it didn't seem to affect you. See because people are going to answer the question, how you doin', based upon how its going. And Christians don't answer those two the same. How you doin'? I'm doing great. If I'm faithfully following and trusting in Christ. How's it going? Oh that's a different question. For the world that's one in the same. For us, that's got to be a bit different. And I hope that you have that kind of peace, contentment and joy that transcends circumstances and people's understanding. One last passage, there are twelve little books in the Old Testament; they're called the Minor Prophets. Let's look at number 8, okay, the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk is an expansion of Asaph's concern, and that is Asaph says in Psalm 73, I don't get it, the injustice of this world, what are you doing God? And Habakkuk has the same complaint. But he after three rounds with God, he ends with the biblical perspective which is a head scratcher for people that are watching him. Last three verses of the 3rd chapter of Habakkuk. Here's how it ends. He says you know what? God, I've heard you, I've gotten a bigger perspective here, I know what you're calling me to do is to trust you, follow you, fine then. Even if it gets worse that it is now. Verse 17, Habakkuk 3:17; though the fig tree does not bud, though there's no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there's no sheep in the pens, or cattle in the stalls, and that's all farm talk, but you and I heath in the body, there's no money in the checking account, there's no house that I own, there's no 401k that I have, everything is going wrong, my relationships are bad, my job is collapsing. Whatever it might be, no matter what, even if that happens, here's the resolve of somebody who has ambitious faith, yet I will rejoice in Yahweh. I will be joyful in God my savior. The sovereign Lord is my strength, he's going to empower me, he's going to give me patience, he's giving me flexibility, he's going to make my feet like the feet of a deer, he's going to enable me to go on to the heights, I'm going to be okay. And you know what? Even if everything else goes wrong, that's where the world won't get it. How you doing? I'm doing great, praising God. How's it going? Oh, these have been terrible years, really bad days, but you know what? It doesn't matter. Because I've got ambitious faith, and like Abraham, if it's a painful pause or a difficult detour, I'm going to keep following, keep trusting, God is good. If you say that, if I say that, the world wont get it, but that is biblical Christianity fueled by ambitious faith.