



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# GOD'S TIMING: LEARNING TO TRUST GOD'S PLAN



ALEX HAMMOND

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LEARNING TO  
TRUST GOD'S  
PLAN**



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# 1

## YOU HAVE A TRUST PROBLEM

“But I want it now!” The child’s impatience was blossoming into a full-blown tantrum. No matter how logically his mother put it, she could not get her son to understand that the cake wasn’t done, and even after it had finished cooking, it would need to cool before she could ice it. She knows that an underbaked cake is not ideal and the cake—with its sprinkles and frosting and candles—would be well worth the wait. But in her son’s eyes, an eternity lay between now and eating cake, and the person keeping him from dessert is the one who supposedly knows best. So, in order to get his way, the little boy grabs his spoon and prepares to throw it across the room, because this is, of of course, the way to get what he wants.

“But I want it now!” When was the last time those words escaped your lips? Or, rather, when was the last time you uttered them in your heart? When was the last time you were utterly convinced that what was best was for you to get what you wanted when you wanted it?

I probably don’t know you, and we’ll likely never meet on this side of glory, yet I am certain you struggle with patience and trust God’s timing. Maybe not in every area of your life, but I suspect that if you took a moment, you could quickly think of areas of life where you know you’re impatient: waiting for a cake to finish baking; waiting for a table at the restaurant; waiting for the car in front of you to go because doesn’t he see the light is green?

And not every struggle with patience or trust is as silly as these. How long have you been praying for that unsaved family member? How many pages in your prayer journal are stained by teardrops as you plead with God for a child? How often have you wondered when the Lord would finally take

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away the pain in your body so you can return to a normal life? You are stuck waiting for God's timing, and it hurts.

To be clear, not every longing for change is an example of distrust. Sometimes "How long, O LORD?" is the cry of a trusting, yet hurting, heart. But our complaints are rarely offered entirely in trust, and often even requests for good things can provoke distrust in our hearts. This is especially the case when we feel no closer to receiving the thing we desire. There's a reason that Solomon wrote, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (Prov 13:12 ESV). This is a crucial Bible verse about patience and God's timing to keep in mind. Waiting hurts and hurting people don't always act rationally.

So why do we struggle with patience? Why is God's timing difficult to submit to? It boils down to one unassailable truth: we are sinners.

### ***Your Sin Problem***

Wait! If you're anything like me, you might be tempted to skip this section because you've heard it before. Please keep reading. I'm convinced that part of the reason we fail to grow in trusting God's timing is we underestimate the impact of sin on our relationship with him.

You were born with a spiritual predisposition to distrust the God who made you. It wasn't always like this, though. When God first made Adam and Eve, they had no sin nature. When God gave them instructions, they had no reason to doubt his goodness or his perfect timing. It was glorious.

But unfortunately, it didn't stay that way. Genesis 3 happened, and our first parents fell. The very first sin committed by the human race was a distrust of God and his character, as the man and the woman believed Satan's lie that God was withholding good from them. They saw, took, and ate, and with that, sin entered the world. And because God is holy, he cannot have fellowship with darkness. Adam and Eve were expelled from God's presence, and the consequence of their sin was physical and spiritual death.

Ever since that fateful day in Eden, every human is born sharing the sin nature they inherited from Adam. None of us is born unstained by sin with an unblemished relationship with God. We are brought into this world as

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children of wrath, deserving of God's righteous judgment because of our sin against him. Praise God that he provided a timely intervention and a way to escape the judgment that we earned by sending the Lord Jesus to live the obedient life we should have lived and to die in our place on the cross. Then three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and now he lives and offers forgiveness of sins to everyone who would turn from their sin and put their faith in him for salvation. If you don't know if you're forgiven by God for your sins, talk to a Christian friend and ask them about it. Nothing is more important for you today than to be made right with God in his timing.

Not only does our sin threaten us with eternal separation from the God of life who made us, but it also shattered our relationship with God. Before they sinned, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect fellowship with the Lord, but as a result of their rebellion against God, their relationships with him, with each other, and with the world were broken. This is the situation for every one of their descendants, including you and me. Each one of us is born with the spiritual disposition to distrust God.

You don't have to be taught to think that God is holding out on you. You aren't born squeaky clean and are then dirtied up by the world. You're born with a sin nature that sets you at odds with the God who made you. Distrust of God is endemic to the fallen human condition. And even those of us who are in Christ, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, must wrestle with the flesh and its desires (Romans 7). But thankfully, we can fight sin's temptations to doubt our Heavenly Father by the power of the Holy Spirit (more on that later).

We must understand that our struggle to trust the Lord is fundamentally a spiritual timing issue, not a psychological or emotional issue. We struggle to trust him because our hearts are hardwired by a sinful nature to not trust him, and it is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to grow our trust in him. Any hope for lasting change must start with the recognition that our impatience is actually slander against God and his character.

While there are surely numerous ways that our sin nature reveals itself in our failure to trust God, I think one deserves special mention: we forget that we're not God.

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### ***You're Not God***

You're not the God who created the heavens and the earth. Shocking, I know. But stop and think about it—how often is your impatience toward God's plan and timing the fruit of thinking that you could do things better if you were in charge? "If I were God, I'd do it *this* way, and things would turn out so much better!" Sometimes our impatience comes from our forgetfulness that we're not God, that we're created beings. We want to control our timing in life as if it were up to us.

When you think of someone waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises, one of the first biblical examples you'll come up with is Abram. In Genesis 15, the Lord graciously enters into a covenant with Abram, promising him, among other things, that his descendants would outnumber the stars. Of course, there's a problem: his wife, Sarai, was barren. . . and super old. Year after year, Abram and Sarai waited for God's promise to come true, and year after year, no child came. This is a profound example of God's timing in relationships being tested.

That is, until Sarai hatches a plan to get a child by any means necessary: "And Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen 16:2). Sarai and Abram's usurpation of God's divine prerogative is clear; the Lord did not give them what they wanted, so they took matters into their own hands. Instead of believing that God's timing is perfect, they sinfully set themselves above God and showed him how they thought it should be done.

Note that the thing desired in this case—a child—was not an inherently bad desire. God had promised to give them a child. And it's not hard to see how years and years of waiting, of disappointment, of shame would weigh this couple down. And yet, it is clear in their example that Abram and Sarai forgot that they are not God. They thought that they could do better than the Creator of the universe. They operated on human logic rather than divine timing. Impatience caused their trust in the Lord's provision to erode to the point that Sarai would ask her husband to sleep with her servant if only it would yield her a child.

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Do you ever wonder if you could do it better than God? Of course, you might not say it out loud. But reflect on your prayers from the last time you had to wait—can you sense a prideful judgmentalism there? Do you find yourself daydreaming about how you could fix the situation if only you had God's divine power and were understanding God's timing better than He does?

One reason we struggle to trust God's timing is because we forget the Creator-creature distinction. We assume that we know all the facts. We mistakenly think that if God could only see things our way that he would surely agree, confusing our own schedule with Divine timing.

But this is a lie from Satan. Our sin clouds our minds and our judgment regarding understanding God's timing. We forget that there is often so much that we don't know. We don't know the future, and we don't know all the facts. There may be a good reason that the Lord has refrained from giving us a gift because God's timing is perfect, but in our pride, we assume that he is ignorant, incompetent, or not committed to our good.

If sin is the foundation for our failure to trust God and his timing, then what can we do? We must ask: what does the Bible say about God's timing? How can we grow in our trust in him and learn how to trust God's timing?

Any hope for growth must begin with who God is.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. What are some examples of times in my life when I've struggled with waiting on God's perfect timing?
2. How have I made excuses for my impatience instead of addressing it as sin?
3. What lies have I believed about God because I felt he wasn't acting in his timing?

## 2

# A GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST

In the previous section, we considered why we fail to trust God's timing. We saw that our sin is the biggest impediment to trusting God and his timing, and our first step must begin with a fresh vision of who God is as he's revealed himself in his Word.

There are two aspects of our understanding of God at play here. First, there's the objective reality of the character of God. From Genesis to Revelation, God graciously reveals his own glorious character by both showing and telling. Sometimes he directly reveals his own character, like when he passed before Moses in Exodus 34:5-7, as we hear the Lord explain what he thinks we need to know about himself—a passage often cited alongside verses on God's timing:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

And then there are places in Scripture where, instead of explicitly describing himself, God shows what he's like. I think of Jesus' powerful ministry in Mark 5. In this chapter, we don't see many direct claims about the Lord's power; instead, we observe the Lord Jesus' power and authority displayed alongside his tenderness and mercy toward those who come to him for help, offering a timely intervention.

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A second aspect of our understanding of God that we should consider here is our subjective experience of God's character. It's not enough to merely intellectually assent to theological truth about God; we must consider what this truth means to us and how it affects how we relate to God. This is crucial for understanding God's timing. Different people will respond to the same truth in different ways. A child raised in an abusive home may step back when his father raises his hand, expecting a slap, but a child raised in a loving home may step forward when his father raises his hand, expecting an embrace.

Simply put, it's not enough to answer the question "Who is God?" We must also answer "Who is God to you?" Our subjective understanding of God must always flow from how he has objectively revealed himself in his Word. We are not free to mold and fashion who we think God is based on our own expectations and desires. At the same time, we are not robots; we do not respond to theological truth with cold logic. Our understanding of God passes through both our minds and our hearts as we consider how our theology impacts how we live.

We must both understand the truth of who God is and apply it to our hearts and lives. A clearer vision of God's character will enable us to be patient while waiting for God's timing for his plans to come to fruition. I trust that God's people will spend millennia after millennia in the new heavens and the new earth exploring and delighting in the bottomless depths of the character of God. There is no way we can do his glorious person justice here. My intention in this section is to help you rebuild, repair, or strengthen your heart's perception of who God is. We'll do that by considering three parts of God's character: his knowledge, his power, and his goodness. As we'll see, a proper understanding of these parts of God's character is vital to growing in trusting God's timing.

### ***God's Knowledge***

One of God's defining characteristics is his omniscience, his complete knowledge of all things. The extent of God's knowledge boggles the mind; the more you think about it, the more amazing it appears.

Let's go small. Imagine your favorite flower (mine is a tulip). Beautiful, right? God knows everything about that flower: what it needs, how long it'll live,

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where it came from. Now zoom in on the petals. God knows how those petals formed. He knows what nutrients were converted into which colors. Zoom in farther. God knows how each particle of light will bounce off the petals and be captured by the eyes of a person or a bee or a cow, and he knows exactly what affect the sight of this flower will have on each observer. Will the flower be picked, pollinated, or eaten? God knows. God knows the path of every photon reflecting off of every petal of every flower in every field on the earth. Nothing is too small for God to know.

Or let's go big. In your mind's eye, imagine you're outside in a storm. Now imagine that storm is a hurricane. Hurricanes are large enough to be seen from space. Intense, right? Now imagine a storm that is not just visible from space, but is larger than our entire planet. That's what's going on right now in the Red Spot on Jupiter, a storm whose diameter is larger than Earth. God is just as familiar with each gust of wind in the Caribbean as he is of the storms raging on Jupiter or some distant planet we've never heard of. Nothing is too big for God to know. This isn't some vague notion of universe timing; this is the personal knowledge of the Creator.

Isaiah records this astounding self-description from the Lord: "... for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done..." (Isaiah 46:9-10). God knows how every story will end before you get to the title page. Nothing is outside the scope of his knowledge. Nothing is hidden from him.

How does God's omniscience help us to trust God's timing? Unlike us, God does not make decisions out of ignorance. I might go to the grocery store not knowing that we're out of eggs, only to find out when I cook breakfast that I should have picked up eggs. God is not like us. Every decision he makes is informed by his perfect knowledge of all things. He does not need to wait to gather more information. Every decision he makes to give or to withhold is done knowing all possible information. We can trust that God's timing is perfect because his knowledge of the situation infinitely outstrips our own. Ultimately, faith in God includes faith in his timing.

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### **God's Power**

One of my favorite animated movies is *The Incredibles*, a witty and touching take on the superhero genre with an amazing soundtrack by Michael Giacchino. During the movie, Mr. Incredible, a superhero with super strength, confesses to his wife that he can't bear the thought of losing her because, as he tearfully puts it, "I'm not strong enough." It's a sweet scene in a great movie.

"I'm not strong enough." Those are words you'll never hear the God of the Bible say. Not only is God omniscient; he is also omnipotent, or all-powerful. Just as there are no limits to God's knowledge, there are no limits to God's strength or his ability to cause his will to come to pass.

When was the last time you wanted to do something, but you simply didn't have the strength to do it? On a recent vacation, my wife and I were exercising together in the resort gym. I was finishing the workout with pushups, and after a certain number (I will never say how many), my arms simply gave out, and I collapsed onto the floor. It did not matter how much I wanted to complete the set; my arms were completely out of strength and felt like pasta that just passed al dente.

God is not like us. He does not get tired. God does not say to himself, "I'd like to do that, but first I need to take a nap to get my strength back." God's power knows no limits. The prophet Jeremiah puts it like this: "Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer 32:17). Ferocious suns, steadfast mountains, and crashing oceans all display merely a fraction of God's power.

Why does God's omnipotence matter to you? Because God is never constrained by a lack of power. There is never a situation in which the Almighty God wishes he could do the right thing if only he was a little stronger. No, God is all-powerful. He cannot be bound. We can trust his timing because we can know that when God decides to act, nothing will stop him from accomplishing his will in his timing.

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### ***God's Goodness***

I suspect that most Christians who spend time waiting for God's timing don't doubt his knowledge or his power. Those characteristics are so fundamental to our understanding of God that they're mostly assumed. No, I would guess that, in seasons of waiting, this final quality of God is the most likely to be ignored, downplayed, or doubted: God's goodness.

What do I mean by God's goodness? Here I'm referring to God's commitment to act in covenant faithfulness for the glory of his name and the well-being of those whom he loves. In his providence, everything God does maximizes his glory and our good. He sovereignly intends to bless his people, giving them what they need precisely when they need it—a testament to divine timing.

It is not difficult to imagine someone struggling with God's goodness in a season of waiting. Your loved one is sick. You know God can heal. And yet he doesn't. Soon, it isn't God's omniscience or his omnipotence that's in question. It's his goodness. How many times have these words been cried by broken hearts: "God, if you are good, how can you let this happen?"

In my time as a pastor, I've told our church members that there are certain verses that you rest your soul on—foundational verses on God's timing and character—that are so densely packed with glorious truth that they are well worth memorizing. One of those verses can be found nestled near the middle of Psalm 119 in verse 68, where the psalmist writes, "You are good and do good; teach me your statutes."

Blink and you'll miss it. "You are good and do good." Six words in English, but I am convinced that these six words can save your life.

Throughout Psalm 119, the psalmist meditates on the value of God's Word, often through tears. He remembers times when he suffered because of his own sin and foolishness, and he recalls the sting of his enemies. And through it all, Psalm 119:68 is still true: "You are good and do good." Regardless of his external circumstances, the psalmist has bound himself to the bedrock truth of God's goodness.

Why do we struggle to trust God's goodness? Because we forget that God is not like us. We know ourselves to be untrustworthy, because we hear

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our own thoughts. Even when we do the right thing, we know the conflict in our hearts, the hesitation. We are not as good as we want to be, though with the Spirit's help, we are growing. It is easy to doubt God's goodness because we treat him like one of us. But he's not one of us. He's better. He's good.

Because God is good, we can trust God's timing. Though it may feel like we are being strung along, because God is good, we can trust that God's timing is perfect and his plans are always for our good. Think about that for a moment. There will never be a time when the Lord sacrifices his people's good on the altar of his own glory. And likewise, there will never be a time when he fails to pursue his own glory because it conflicts with his people's good. The two are wed together in God's good plans, showcasing the wisdom of divine timing.

God knows all, is all-powerful, and is good. So what does it look like to trust him and his timing? It starts with the conviction that faith in God includes faith in his timing. Before we consider what it looks like in our own lives, we have one more stop to take regarding the importance of waiting on God's timing. We need to consider the example of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. Which of these characteristics do you find most difficult to remember in times of waiting for God's timing?
2. What other examples from Scripture can you recall that display God's knowledge, power, or goodness, perhaps serving as verses on God's timing?
3. How have you seen a failure to grasp these qualities impact your ability to trust God and his spiritual timing?

# 3

## TRUSTING LIKE JESUS

So far, we've considered how, because of our sin, we each have a trust problem. Because of our flesh, we fail to trust God as we should. Then we saw how the best remedy for our trust problem is a fresh and fuller vision of God, a God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good.

But what does it look like to trust God's timing? Thankfully, God gives us the best possible example in the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the most Spirit-filled human to ever live.

### ***Who Is Jesus?***

I was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, and I can assure you as a native-born Memphian that one of the most important things about a person is what they think about BBQ. To be clear, BBQ should only be used to describe meats that are smoked over long periods of time. Think pork, brisket, chicken, and turkey. Burgers and hot dogs do not qualify as BBQ. I will die on this hill.

When people move to the Memphis area, I like to warn them that they will have an important decision to make: which BBQ restaurant to be loyal to. There's Rendezvous, Central, Corky's, Commissary, and countless other smaller BBQ joints to choose from (for the record, I'm a fan of Captain John's). If you ask a random passerby in Memphis about where the best BBQ in town is, you'll get one of a hundred different answers.

I think you'll get the same kind of varied responses if you ask people who Jesus is.

Some people call Jesus a good teacher, while others call him a revolutionary. Homophobe. Hero. Like BBQ choices in Memphis, it seems

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there are no limits to popular ideas of Jesus' identity. Unlike Memphis BBQ, however, there are eternal consequences to your position on Jesus. We need to clarify who we believe Jesus to be because Jesus' identity has everything to do with how he trusted God and how he serves as our example for understanding God's timing.

Scripture teaches us that Jesus is utterly unique from every other human who has walked the earth. Jesus is no mere man; he is God himself, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:1-14). Having both a human nature and a divine nature, Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father during his life on earth, never failing once.

Jesus can be our example because his life is unmixed goodness. Unlike us, who have our good and bad days, Jesus never had an off day. Every single interaction, conversation, and action recorded in the pages of Scripture is a record of what perfect obedience looks like. Do you want to know what it looks like to grieve the lostness of the world? Look to Jesus. Do you want to know what it looks like to obey God through suffering? Look to Jesus. Do you want to know what it looks like to trust God's timing? Look to Jesus.

### ***How Did Jesus Trust God?***

If Jesus is not only our Lord but also our great example, where can we look in his life for help in trusting God's timing?

First, we can see that Jesus' whole life was devoted to loving and serving his Father. We begin with the earliest account of Jesus' life after his birth: Luke's account of Jesus as a child in the temple (Luke 2:41-52). Here we see Mary, the worried mother of our Lord, anxiously searching for her firstborn son after they left Jerusalem. She eventually found him in the temple, deep in conversation with the teachers. Mary scolds her son for treating his parents in such a way, to which Jesus replies, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).

From his earliest years, Jesus was committed to learning about his Heavenly Father. Luke concludes this section of his gospel like this: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man"

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(Luke 2:52). While we must leave room for the mystery of the Incarnation, it is clear from Scripture that Jesus was devoted to faithfully serving his Father. He knew it was his highest joy to be involved in his Father's work. And he was committed to not being satisfied with where he was; Jesus grew over time, embracing divine timing in his own development.

My friend, I pray you never get over the wonder of the Incarnation. Jesus, though fully God, in his humanity "increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." Not even Jesus was born without the need to grow and learn. Of course, according to his divine nature, Jesus continued to "uphold the universe by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3) with perfect knowledge and power. But here we see that Jesus exemplifies a commitment to growing in his knowledge of and trust in his Heavenly Father and His perfect timing.

And Jesus did not merely grow by learning axiomatic truths about God. The author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that, "Although [Jesus] was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb 5:8). There were aspects of obedience that the Lord Jesus could only learn by humbling himself and suffering in this fallen world. By perfectly submitting himself to the Father, Jesus used even his suffering to equip him to grow in his obedience and to further qualify himself to be the savior that we needed.

Jesus serves as our example by showing what it looks like to know and love God, even through suffering. He also shows us what trust in God's timing means.

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. In his threefold assault on the Son of God, Satan repeatedly challenged Jesus with the poison-laced barb "If you are the Son of God," directly challenging the Father's proclamation at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:17). In Matthew's account, Satan culminates his attack by offering Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world, saying "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (Matt 4:9).

What is Satan up to here? As the Messiah and as the Son of God, Jesus was already promised the kingdoms of the earth as his inheritance (Psalm 2:8). Satan was not offering Jesus something new. No, instead, Satan was

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offering Jesus a way to get his reward without obediently suffering. Satan offered Jesus the crown without the cross. It was a rejection of God's plan and timing.

It's no wonder, then, why Jesus responds so strongly to Peter in Matthew 16. Jesus tells his disciples that he will suffer and die, and Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus replies (Matt 16:23). Why such strong language? Because behind the words of his friend, Jesus detects the same whispers of the Enemy—an offer to avoid the difficult road of obedience. Jesus' successful rejection of Satan's efforts was a commitment to trusting God's timing, even in the face of intense temptation.

Lastly, not only is Jesus our example in growing in trusting the Father, even in suffering and temptation, but he also shows us what it looks like to hope in God's character and God's promises.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, mere hours before his death, the Lord Jesus shows us what the faithful human life looks like when circumstances are at their darkest. Three times our beloved Savior asks the Father if the cup of suffering might pass from him, and three times Jesus commits himself to the Father's will (Matt 26:44). Here, staring betrayal, torture, death, and separation from the Father directly in the face, Jesus throws himself on his trust in the Father, knowing that all in his timing would be accomplished. Here at the final, pivotal moment, Jesus commits himself to trust the Father's will because he knows that the Father's will is right, no matter the personal cost.

What could compel such obedience from Jesus? Scripture tells us to look to Jesus, "the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Heb 12:2). Jesus went to the cross because joy was waiting for him on the other side of obedience. The joy of fellowship with the Father and Spirit. The joy of hearing "Well done." The joy of rescuing his Bride, the church. In short, Jesus obeyed because he believed that God's promises were true and that the Father would not fail to reward his obedience as he had promised. This is the ultimate example of waiting on God's perfect timing.

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### ***Where Did Jesus' Trust Take Him?***

I fear there will be some who read this guide and will erroneously conclude that submission to God's timing will unlock God's blessings in their life, as if obedience automatically and always results in immediate physical blessing. This is not what does the Bible say about God's timing. Lies like these are told by the false teachers of the prosperity gospel every day as they promise health or wealth in return for loyalty or financial gifts.

Before we move on to our last section, it is important that we consider where Jesus' trust in God's timing led him. You may say that you want to grow in your trust in God's timing, but before you commit to a lifetime of trusting God and his timing, I encourage you to consider Jesus's example from another angle.

As we've already considered, obedience for Jesus meant submission to God's plan and timing for Jesus to live a hard life. He had no place to lay his head, and Jesus was constantly challenged and misunderstood. He was betrayed by one of his closest followers, and when the rest of his disciples had the opportunity to stand by Jesus' side like they promised, they all abandoned him. He was convicted in a sham trial, beaten, humiliated, and crucified.

All according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23).

When we consider the example of Jesus, we see that trusting God's timing means that we submit ourselves to God's will for our lives, whatever that means. We don't get veto power over God's will for what is best for us. If you commit to following Jesus as long as you get the right house in the right neighborhood with the right car, the right spouse, and the right number of kids, then I would submit to you that you don't really want to trust God and his timing.

Now, who knows? Maybe it's the Lord's will that you get what you want when you want it, enjoying perfect timing in your own eyes. But let me ask you—what if it's not? What if his will is for you to wait... and wait... and wait? Will you still want to trust the Lord then?

There's one more thing I want us to see about the example of the Lord Jesus, and that is what is on the other side of suffering. You see, in Jesus'

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life, just like elsewhere in Scripture, we see a pattern: suffering, then glory. This is a central theme when discussing patience and timing in a biblical context.

Where did Jesus' trust in the Father's timing lead him? To the cross and to the grave. But that's not all. Jesus' trust in the Father's timing also led him to resurrection life, as God would not "let [his] holy one see corruption" (Ps 16:10). We must be clear-eyed regarding the prospect of suffering in this world as we trust in the Father's timing. After all, this is a world at war. But even as we recognize that waiting for God's timing may entail our suffering, we must also see that this suffering will never be for forever if we are in Christ. Suffering will one day give way to glory.

Dear friend, each one of us must ask ourselves if we are going to trust God and his timing. And as we'll see in our final section this will not be a one-time decision. We must agree to trust him again and again. But Jesus' glorious example reminds us that we may walk through the valley of the shadow of death while we wait, if we belong to Christ, we are guaranteed to make it through to the green pastures on the other side.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. What parts of Jesus' experience are most helpful to you as you consider waiting on God's timing?
2. Where do you find yourself most challenged to trust the Lord's timing? How might considering the example of Jesus help you to wait in faith and believe that God's timing is perfect?
3. Do you find yourself reflecting more on present suffering or on coming glory? How might you adjust your reflections to be more in line with Scripture and divine timing?

# 4

## HOW TO GROW IN TRUST

So far, we've considered the trust problem plagues every human born since the Fall. We then thought about how a right understanding of God is the best remedy for a failure to trust him and his perfect timing, and we examined Jesus Christ as the preeminent example of trusting God's timing. Now in this final section, we will consider practical steps to grow in our trust in God and his timing.

Why wasn't this the first section of this guide? Because our failure to trust God is fundamentally a spiritual timing issue. To jump straight to practical tips on how to trust God's timing without doing the heart work first is like painting a rotting apple. You might have some short-term success, but it will quickly fail. All of the recommendations offered in this section are made with the previous three sections in mind.

How can we grow in our trust in God and in his timing?

### ***Rely on God in Prayer***

I don't know about you, but I'm a phenomenally stubborn individual. I don't necessarily mean that you can't convince me I'm wrong (check with my wife to see how accurate that statement is). I mean that my flesh is always at work trying to convince me that I don't need God to effect the change I want to see in my life, or that I can manage the timing in life on my own.

One of the benefits of journaling your prayers—a practice I recommend—is the ability to see patterns in what you pray for. And after years of journaling my prayers, I can tell you that one of my most-confessed sins is the failure to rely on the Spirit for growth. I sometimes think I can force myself into Godliness by sheer will. I can be so foolish!

## GOD'S TIMING

If you want to grow in your trust in God and in his timing, you must start with prayer. Maybe even right now. Consider stopping for a moment to ask that the Lord would begin to work in your heart to help you trust God's timing more.

What should we pray for? Here are some suggestions:

- Confess your past failures to trust the Lord. Confess the lies that led to your distrust, like a failure to trust his goodness or an overestimation of your own importance while waiting for God's timing.
- Ask the Lord to align your will with his will. Tell him that you want to trust his divine timing, which involves wanting the same things he wants. If the Lord can turn the heart of the king whichever way he pleases (Prov 21:1), then surely he can turn your heart.
- Ask God to bring Christian brothers and sisters into your life, particularly through your local church, who can hold you accountable and who can help you trust the Lord. This is crucial for God's timing in relationships.
- Confess your daily need for strength to continue trusting the Lord. There's a reason the Lord provided manna each day for Israel in the wilderness—a timely intervention—and Jesus taught us to pray for daily bread: we are reminded that we are constantly reliant on the Lord for the strength only he can provide.

I'm sure there are many other wonderful things to pray for, but this should get you started. "Pray without ceasing," Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. The Christian who trusts is a Christian who relies on the Lord and communes with him regularly and honestly through prayer, knowing that faith in God includes faith in his timing.

### ***Feast on God's Word***

As a pastor, one of my greatest desires for my congregation is that we would grow in our desire for and delight in the Word of God. I am convinced that many of our individual and corporate struggles, including understanding God's timing, would be helped if we had a better understanding of God's Word.

## FIELD GUIDE

The Bible is unlike any other book in the world. The Scriptures alone contain the inerrant, infallible words of the Almighty God. Have you ever wanted to hear God speak? Have you ever wondered what does the Bible say about God's timing in a particular situation? You don't have to wonder! All you have to do is pull your Bible off the shelf and read it.

When you open the Bible, what thoughts go through your head? Are you already planning for what you are doing afterward? Do you dread reading familiar stories or confusing sections? My friend, think about the gift that you hold in your hands. God, the one who made the heavens and the earth, the holy, triune, and majestic King of all creation, has not remained silent. He has spoken and revealed himself in the holy Scriptures.

Come to God's Word expectantly. Mine for the treasures of God's Word. Reading a portion of Scripture is like digging up dirt. There might be a nugget of glory sitting on top. Praise the Lord! But if you want to get more out of your Bible reading, keep looking. Don't settle for what's on the surface. Pray. Ask the Lord to help you understand what you're reading and find a Bible verse about patience and God's timing that speaks to your heart. Ask questions of the text. Slow down and read it again.

If you desire to grow in your trust in God and his timing, I'd encourage you to find a helpful reading plan and commit to reading the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Each time you open the Scriptures, pray and ask the Lord to help you see how you can grow in this way. As you read, I trust you'll come across verses on God's timing and example after example of individuals and nations who both succeeded and failed in their trust of the Lord. Examples like:

- Women like Sarai, who yearned for the gift of children and struggled with waiting for God's timing
- Joseph, who waited for years in prison before being promoted in Egypt, trusting God's plan and timing
- King Saul, who failed to wait for the arrival of Samuel before a battle, ignoring divine timing
- Paul, who had to trust God's timing for the spread of his gospel

## GOD'S TIMING

There is so much glory to behold in the pages of the Scriptures, and I know that God desires you to grow in Godliness, including your trust in him. How do I know that? Because he says so in his Word: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess 4:3).

### ***Don't Waste the Waiting***

Lastly, I urge you to not waste the time you spend waiting on the Lord. I don't know what you are waiting on right now, and I know enough to know that not every season of waiting is the same. Still, understanding God's timing requires that you be diligent in this season to seek the Lord even as you wait.

Just as we discussed earlier with the example of Jesus, there are certain types of knowledge that you only get by experience. You can't know that a chair can hold you until you sit down and put all your weight on it. There are aspects of the Lord's kindness and care and provision that you will only experience in times of waiting. There may well be times when you feel like you'd rather have the thing that you're waiting for than a fuller picture of God and His perfect timing. Trust me, I've been there. But ultimately, we go back to our understanding of who God is. If he really does know everything, if he really is able, and if he really is good, then we can trust him, even in seasons of waiting.

How can we use this time of waiting well? Here are some examples:

- Pray for opportunities to share about your situation with fellow church members. They can help you bear that burden, and they may be encouraged to see your example. This is a beautiful aspect of God's timing in relationships.
- Look for ways the Lord might be using this season of waiting to grow you in your reliance on him, proving that faith in God includes faith in his timing.
- Consider how the Lord might be providing you opportunities to evangelize others or glorify him while you wait in his timing. If you're waiting for a disease to be cured, with whom do you come into regular contact at the doctor's office? If you're looking for a job, how can you display the gospel fruit of contentment even in a season of want?

## FIELD GUIDE

At the time of writing this guide, my wife and I have prayed for the gift of children for six years, and for six years, the Lord has withheld that gift from us. During that time, a verse that we have clung to is Psalm 84:11: “The LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.” This has become one of our anchor verses on God’s timing. I cannot tell you how many times my wife or I have quoted Psalm 84:11 to each other. God does not withhold good from his people. And since we believe God when he speaks, the only conclusion we can draw is that, in his divine wisdom, the Lord has decided that it is best for us that he withhold this gift from us. That’s hard. Oh, it’s hard. But God’s goodness is an anchor that we have lashed our souls to.

When the waves of sorrow crash around us, we cling tight to the promise that God does not withhold good from his people, and we look to the cross and see that, if God is willing to give up his Son, can we not be confident that he’ll do whatever it takes to secure our good? Or, as our brother Paul put it in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

Your ability to trust God amidst waiting rests not in your strength or your Godliness but in God. I pray you spend the rest of your life and into eternity growing in your delight and trust in the God who made you, who loves you, and who redeemed you in Christ, perfectly orchestrating the timing in life.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. Do you ever find it hard to pray to the Lord in a season of waiting? Why do you think that is?
2. What are more examples from Scripture of people waiting for the Lord (perhaps looking for a specific Bible verse about patience and God’s timing), and how can you apply their examples to your current season of waiting?
3. Where are you tempted to waste your season of waiting rather than trusting spiritual timing?



THE  
**MENTORING**  
PROJECT

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