



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

HEROES FROM HEBREWS

Worth the Wait—Hebrews 11:39–40
Jon Culver | September 2, 2018



By nature, I am not the most patient person in the world. For those who know me the best, like my wife and kids, this comes as no surprise. The saying “Waiting is the hardest part” is true for me. I struggle to wait on someone or something. Now, by the grace of God and the faithfulness of my wife speaking truth into my life over many years, I am growing in this area. God has used the last few years and some challenges in my life—personally, emotionally, relationally, career-wise, financially—to help me grow in this way. But I’m not where I desire to be and I’m sure I’m not alone in this. I’m sure there are many of us here who struggle with waiting.

In light of this truth, I find myself fascinated by stories of men and women who evidence incredible moments of waiting—periods of time when they wait patiently or when they persevere through something.

It’s like Captain America, right? I know you were wondering where I would go today in my last chance to talk about heroes—who was I going to use. I’ve done Batman and Spider-Man. If you remember last time, it was Wonder Woman. Today, it’s the first Avenger himself—Captain America. I don’t have his real shield, but I have a fidget spinner that looks like it.

What is it about Captain America that makes me so enthralled with his ability to wait? Well, first of all, as a young man, he so badly wanted to fight. You know the story of Captain America. He wanted to be a part of representing the Americans, but he was too small and puny, until there was an opportunity for him to be injected that made him super-strong and become a propaganda tool of the United States military in World War II and to become a fighting machine against the Nazis.

But then he was shot down while flying a plane. He fell into the ocean and was frozen for 70 years, before being discovered floating to the surface, waking up and continuing to protect our world. That’s some incredible waiting! Granted, he was asleep most of that time and doesn’t remember it—but still, I marvel at waiting for 70 years.

Still, as much fun as I’ve had looking at different super heroes and tying them in to this series—and it will be sad to see that time go—I’m much more fascinated by a man who actually fought in World War II alongside, not Captain America, but the Allied Forces representing America. You may know of this man—Louis Zamperini.

I found out about Louis Zamperini through the book *Unbroken*, by Laura Hillenbrand. Some of you may have seen the movie by the same title. However, the book is infinitely better than the movie and has become one of my favorite books of all time. I couldn’t put it down, having been enraptured by it. I would encourage you to read it.

Louis was an Olympic athlete. In fact, he went to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and met Adolf Hitler. He was a candidate to break the four-minute mile record. He ended up being in a bombardier plane on a rescue mission when he and 11 other guys were shot down and stranded at sea. Three survived in a life boat, and for 47 days Louis and two other guys floated in a raft in the middle of the South Pacific (one of them only made it 33 days).

Now, that by itself is unbelievable to me. As you read the story, you hear some of the things he endured during that. They were shot at. The life boat got a hole in it that they had to patch. They were surviving on nothing. They faced shark attacks. It’s

unbelievable. You keep turning the pages, thinking, “That couldn’t have happened. That couldn’t have happened.” Yet he persevered. That life boat floated an astonishingly far distance—they say about 2,000 miles.

Can you imagine waiting that long, trying to keep your mind sharp, persevering through it all? Then to finally go on shore and find that they were on Japanese soil? After 47 days at sea, they were finally rescued, then they were thrown into prison camps. For two years he was moved around to several different camps, waiting to be released, persevering through some unbelievable conditions. One particular guard really had it out for him, a man they called “The Bird.” In fact, at one point, after being tortured by this guard daily in such obscene ways, The Bird was transferred to a different camp. Eventually, then, Louis was transferred—thinking he was finally being released—only to find that he was again going to encounter The Bird.

It’s such an unbelievable story. I won’t give everything away, but he comes back, deals with alcoholism, and through that process he comes to know Jesus and becomes an ambassador for God’s grace and forgiveness. What an incredible story of perseverance!

A few weeks ago I talked about Moses being an example of “godly grit.” Now, Louis didn’t know Jesus in those early stages, but he endured with patience and it finally led him to a relationship with Christ. I find that to be so remarkable.

So, what does that have to do with what we’re talking about today? We’re at the end of a series we’ve called “Heroes from Hebrews.” Back in May, we started by talking about what faith is. Maybe you remember the umbrella I held as an illustration of a girl jumping off a roof, thinking, “If I believe it, it will hold me.” We said, “That’s not what faith is.” Faith is not putting our hope in something that’s temporal and man-made. Rather, it’s a gift from God that allows us to receive God’s Word, then to live it by trusting and believing that God will keep His Word. Faith’s object is God, not ourselves.

Today we’re finishing Hebrews 11, which we’ve been working through for the last three months. Next week Pastor Tim will be launching our fall season, in which we’ll look at the first three verses of Hebrews 12 as we fix our eyes on Jesus. We’ve taken all this time to look at these heroes, so now we will look to the ultimate Hero, Jesus Christ. You won’t want to miss that.

There’s something about heroes that we long for as people. I do. I want to be rescued. I want to be safe. I want somebody to meet my deepest longings, to rescue me from myself, to provide me a better future and a hope, to protect me. That’s why I think there’s such a fascination with super heroes in our culture—because we all long for that ultimate Hero. And the only One Who can ultimately satisfy is Jesus. We’ll look forward to that next week.

But today we finish Hebrews 11. If you’ve been here for any time during this series, you know a little about the context of this series. But if you haven’t been here, let me just give you a quick review. We don’t know exactly who wrote the book of Hebrews. For various reasons, some think it was Paul or Apollos or Barnabas. But the author’s name is not given, as it is in the other New Testament epistles. Still, we have faith that God has included this book to challenge us.

The author of Hebrews is talking to first-century Christians. They knew about His birth, death and resurrection, either from personal contact or having heard about it from someone who had been there, who had personally followed Jesus. Yet as we see throughout this book, the believers are now in a place where their faith is being challenged. This is true for many of us as well in our walk with Jesus. Perhaps we got saved, then life seemed to get harder.

These people in the first century were dealing with persecution, either personally or knowing of those around them going through it. They were having their possessions taken from them; they were being thrown into prison and sometimes they even dealt with physical abuse. The author of Hebrews knew this, so he wrote what he did to encourage them to not give up but to keep the faith. He told them to be patient, because it was worth the wait.

What strikes me about what he wrote is he doesn’t just say, “Don’t give up.” He also says, “There’s something better coming.” We’ll see that in the verses we read today. He knows our tendency is to look back and think, “If we could only go back to what we had, it would be better.” His response is, “No. Jesus is better. He’s better than the angels, better than Moses. He’s a better High Priest. He’s a better sacrifice. Don’t look back—look forward.”

Hebrews 11 is then a long narrative that walks through the lives of different men and women. Their lives, like the life of Louis Zamperini, demonstrate great patience—although for them, they had their faith in God to sustain them. We’ve taken time to see what we can learn from Abel, Noah, Enoch, Moses, Rahab and many others who, at various times, showed strong evidence of faith in God that involved waiting.

Waiting is the component that really struck me as I’ve enjoyed preaching or listening through this series. I’ve realized that faith is about waiting. It’s not the only thing faith is, but a huge component of faith is our willingness to trust God and wait. If we go to the first two verses of Hebrews 11, we can review the definition of faith we’re given there. The author of Hebrews says in verses one

and two, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.”* The very essence of faith is looking forward to something you don't have. You don't know exactly how it's going to end, but you trust with faith because you're trusting in the One Who has given this promise to us. Our faith is in God and it involves waiting.

All of us have been through, are in, or are about to go into some period of waiting. Life is full of waiting, and much of the Christian journey includes seasons of waiting. In my life at least, and I'm guessing I'm not alone, I've found I would far rather be doing something proactive, something for God, than waiting on God. Yet much of what we see in God's Word is God saying, *“Trust Me. I will show you the way. I will do it for you.”* Not that there isn't some participation required on our part, but we also need to learn to wait and trust.

We're finishing the last two verses of Hebrews 11 this morning, and we're going to be looking at three things I think faith helps us do that can be found here. These three things also summarize in a sense what we've looked at in the previous 38 verses. Through those verses, the author is saying to his readers, *“I know you're struggling, but hold on. I know it's hard but let me give you the stories of some men and women—your ancestors whom you know about who had deep faith, who waited and trusted and looked forward—so you can be inspired by them to not give up.”*

If you were here last week, we looked at verses 35–38, which also included some nameless heroes. We spent a lot of time talking about the people we know, like Enoch and Abel. But then the author provides a list of people we can't really identify but who suffered some unbelievable trials for the sake of Christ and did not give up their faith.

This was a long introduction, but it gives us the context for these last two verses in Hebrews 11. The author writes, *“And all these,”* referring to the saints, the heroes of the faith, whom he's just described, *“In all of these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”*

In order to understand what he means when he says, *“...though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,”* we need to go back to Hebrews 11:13 where we find a similar statement. There he says, *“These all died in faith,”*—he's mentioned a few of the saints at that point, but not all of them—*“not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”*

When I first read those verses, part of me was thinking, *“Man, what a bummer.”* These men and women, who evidenced really tremendous, outrageous, bold and tenacious faith, looking forward to what God had promised, didn't even get to receive what God had promised to them. That's not how I thought the story would go. I would have expected them to get something as a reward for their faith. What happened?

What they got was a lot of waiting, a lot of leaving their homeland, a lot of wandering. Remember some of the numbers. Even though Enoch was one who ended up going straight to heaven, he spent 300 years walking with God and warning others about the judgment that was coming. It took Noah a hundred years to build the ark. That's a lot of waiting. Abraham waited 25 years for that son that was promised to him. Moses waited 40 years in the wilderness, only to spend 40 more years leading an obstinate, difficult, rebellious people through another wilderness. Yet through these intense periods of waiting, their faith was fixed on God, believing that what God said was true, trusting and obeying that He would bring His promises to fruition in their lives.

The author of Hebrews looks back at these people, realizing how hard it must have been for them to wait. Even for us today, who are part of the audience of this passage, he brings the same message: *“I know it's tough.”* Even though I don't know all your stories, I know some of you are going through difficult things right now. It could be relational issues, seasons of waiting for a career, or with a child or spouse, or waiting through some other circumstance in your life.

You're crying out to God, saying, *“I'm struggling. I'm feeling panic and fear. I want my faith to be strong, but right now it's hard. What do I do? How do I know You're going to come through? How do I know You'll do what You've said You would do for those saints of old?”* The author of Hebrews is appealing to his audience in the same way. *“Trust God.”* In the stories he tells, all of the characters ultimately trusted and obeyed God so we can see that in His sovereign timing and purpose, it will be worth the wait.

There are three things I think we can glean from these verses. First, they didn't get what they had been promised, but as Hebrews 11:40 says, *“God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”* What does that mean—apart from us? Why did the saints need those original Jewish readers this author was speaking to? Why do they need us? Why do we all need to be in this together to receive the complete fulfillment of what Jesus has promised? That's what we'll unpack this morning.

Faith helps us look to the promise.

The first thing I see is that faith helps the first-century Jewish believers—and us today—look to God’s promise. We so easily forget the promise God has given us. In the middle of waiting and in seasons of struggles, trials and tribulations, it’s easy to take our eyes off what God has promised.

What did God promise us? He promised us Himself—a Messiah, a Savior. Back in Genesis 3, when sin entered the world, God declared that the serpent would bruise Satan’s heel, but his head would be crushed by an Anointed One—a Savior—Who would come. The saints of old held to that promise, believing there would be an Anointed One—a Messiah—Who would come. At that point they didn’t know it was going to be Jesus or when He would come, but they knew God would send One to live among us and to be the Savior of the world—and they looked to that promise.

These first-century believers had realized the promise. At that point, Jesus had come. What the Old Testament saints looked forward to—so much so that they were willing to die for that—the first-century Christians actually saw for themselves. They knew Jesus had come. Emanuel, God with us, had been born, lived, died, rose again and ascended into heaven. The promise had been fulfilled. Yet they were still struggling.

It’s easy for me to be kind of hard on them, thinking, “Seriously? Jesus had just been there. You saw Him or at least heard about Him. There were eye-witness accounts and you’re still struggling?” Yet today—having the whole counsel of God, knowing how the story has played out in the past and present and how it will in the future—I still struggle to hold fast to the promise, to wait and trust that God will do what He says He will do.

Remarkably, even some of these first-century Christians were starting to believe they could still have faith even if they abandoned Christ. Part of their thinking was, “If we don’t follow Christ, if we follow the religion of the Old Testament saints, wouldn’t that be better? Wouldn’t it be better if we went back to the way things used to be, to that ‘old time’ faith, back to the sacrificial system? Wouldn’t that be superior? We want to be like those heroes, right?”

The author of Hebrews very clearly wants to dispel that notion by saying, “No! We’re thankful for those who have gone before us. We’re thankful for the faith they exhibited and the models they are to us. But they all died without having realized what you now have access to: a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe, the Son of God Himself.” He’s saying, “What they had was not better. What’s better is what you have—Jesus.”

It hit me that things haven’t changed that much today. How often are we prone to look back and think, “Boy, if I could just go back. If things were the way they used to be, or how they were in that season of my life, or with that type of religion I used to have.” Whatever it may be, we’re constantly tempted to look back and settle for something far less than what God offers us today.

If the promise is Jesus, why is that better? They were looking forward to the promise and we today are still looking to the promise. But we’re hearing that we have that promise fulfilled in Jesus—why is that better? It’s because Jesus did away with the sacrificial system. He became the Sacrifice. No longer was there a need to enter the court of the temple to plead for forgiveness through the blood sacrifice of animals. At that point, once for all, Jesus became our Sacrifice.

Those saints longed to have their sins removed once and for all, and they looked toward that promise that we now have available to us. Some of you who have put your faith and trust in Jesus have understood that the promise God has given us in Jesus is worth giving your life for and making Him Lord of your life.

Others have not. Others are still struggling. Maybe it’s that you were raised in a different religion with a different set of rules. You say, “You know what? It would be easier if I just stayed in the box. Here I know the boundaries. It’s just simpler and cleaner that way.”

That’s really what a lot of these first-century Christians wanted to do. “Let’s just go back to the way it was, because maybe then they’ll stop persecuting us. Maybe the Jewish leaders will leave us alone and stop persecuting us for following Jesus.” Their faith is the same as the saints before us—maybe we can just go back to that, then things will be okay.

But the author of Hebrews is saying, “No. They didn’t get the reward. They didn’t see the fulfillment of the promise—but you do. So you can’t go back. There is no going back. There’s only going forward. There’s only the better offer of Jesus.” This is still true today, my friends. There is no other option. There is no other way to be reconciled to God except through Jesus Himself. There is no other sacrifice that can take away our sins and create a way for us to have a personal relationship with the Ruler of the world.

Not only is it better, it's the only way. The author of Hebrews is saying to us, "If the Old Testament saints didn't get what they were promised but were still looking forward, yet they were willing to die for their faith, how much more should you be willing who have God's Word—the whole counsel of God—who know how the story ends, who see how the promise is being fulfilled, who have a relationship with Jesus."

One of the applications that comes from this point of looking toward the promise is the idea that faith is ready to sacrifice present comfort for future reward with Christ. We've heard that theme throughout this series. We've seen men and women who are willing to sacrifice present comfort for future reward with Christ because they were looking to the promise. How much more for us today who know that Jesus is real, that He did come and that we have access to a relationship with Him?

I'm not saying that's easy. I'm the first to say I want to be comfortable and that I spend a lot of my life trying to create comfort in my world. We all do. We are creatures of comfort. And to a certain level, that's okay. There's a certain survival to that. It's kind of how we're wired.

But what we hear in these verses is, "Look forward, believing that it's worth sacrificing some of the comforts of this world for future reward, because it's far better." Even though we can look toward the promise, and we know that Jesus is the fulfillment of that, we still wait, don't we? We still wait.

We're in that season that theologians like to call "the already but not yet." Are you familiar with that phrase? It means we've already seen the perfection of Jesus Who gave us access to God by dying on the cross. We've seen the glorification of the Son and we can have a relationship with Him. Yet the ultimate fulfillment, the culmination of that, is yet to come. We live in a kind of tension between two worlds. We're aliens and exiles here on earth. Like Abraham, we're longing for a permanent home. We're longing for a foundation. Abraham didn't want to live in a tent anymore. He was looking forward to that heavenly dwelling where there would be no more tents, no more sand.

Can you imagine that? We have a full relationship with Jesus now—but we're still not there. We still live in a broken, fallen, sinful world that's deeply in need of God's grace and forgiveness on a daily basis. And the temptations are there to hold on to our comforts rather than looking toward the future.

Faith helps us live with patience.

In order to do that, faith also helps us live with patience. Faith gives us the ability to receive God's Word, believe it's true, trusting and obeying that He will make it happen. To do that, we must wait. I'm guessing there are a whole lot of struggling waiters like me in this room, people who struggle to wait in any way—but especially to wait on God. Yet I can't get over the fact—as we've been studying Hebrews 11 and seen how God works—that God works through seasons of waiting. You see, we tend to be a people who are in a hurry.

Just drive anywhere in Chicago, right? We're in a hurry. It doesn't matter where we're going—we're just in a hurry. If we're in a line in the grocery store, we've got a systematic plan for figuring out which line will go the fastest. It doesn't matter where we are, we're constantly in a hurry.

Yet our God seems to be very unhurried in how He works. Have you noticed that? We act very rushed, but He never seems to be in a rush. I'm not saying He's unnecessarily slow or deliberate; He's slow in all the right ways. He knows there's a process to this journey, that our faith needs time to grow and develop. He uses seasons of waiting, as He did with the Old Testament saints, to grow and develop our faith. You cannot be a follower of Jesus and go through seasons of waiting and not understand the need to persevere through those.

This is how we gain what I like to call "godly grit"—a willingness to stick with it and say, "God, give me the faith to persevere. I don't have it in and of myself, but help me persevere like those Old Testament saints. Help me patiently trust that what You're doing won't be wasted." God didn't waste the waiting of those Old Testament saints. They were willing to give up their comforts and even to die—and it was worth the wait for them.

I'll admit that I struggle with this. I've shared some of my story during the last few times I've preached, about times when what God did didn't make sense to me. I was willing to wait a little while, but then I'd think, "Okay, now we're ready. Let's get going—what's the next step?" That's how we often operate. "How fast can I learn this and how soon can I move on?" God says, "I have so much for you. I don't need you to do anything. I need you to wait on Me. I need you to trust that My timing is perfect, that My ways are best, that I am sovereign over all things, even the things that don't make sense—especially the things that don't make sense."

A prime example for us that we've seen in this series and beyond are the Israelites. They are not a positive example most of the time, but more of a negative illustration of what it looks like not to wait on God. I'll be honest, I identify and resonate more often with the Israelites, rather than with the saints. I'm prone to complain. I'm prone to wander. I'm prone to think, "God, You brought us out into this wilderness just to let us die? It would be so much better if we could go back—at least we'd have food. Yeah, we'd be slaves and oppressed, but we'd have food." I find myself thinking this in my own journey. "God, You did all this just to lead me to this place?"

Just the other day I told my wife, "Man, I should not have done this thing this way." That's a lack of faith speaking. That's saying, "God, You really aren't able to follow through on the path You put me on." My faith is weak and I vacillate, like we all do. I have moments of peace and panic, of faith and fear—that's part of our journey with Jesus. But I long to be able to trust God and take Him at His word.

The Israelites had seen God do some amazing and miraculous things, hadn't they? Yet time and again, as we read through Exodus and the Psalms, their unbelief gets in the way. God provides for them by parting the waters, and they walk through the Red Sea, but not long after that they're worried about how they were going to eat, what they would wear, how they would make it. "Why did God lead us this way? Why isn't He providing? Why do we have to keep waiting?"

They complained and murmured, and their unbelief resulted in disobedience. Then what do we see? God continually came back and showed them grace. When they repented and sought forgiveness, God showed up and provided for them. He is slow to anger (Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15). He is patient with our disobedience. But we must persevere, and faith helps us live with patience.

One of the applications that comes to me through this process is that faith trusts and obeys God, leaving the results to His sovereignty. One theologian put it this way. "Some trust and obey God, and He grants spectacular results—like an Enoch or a Moses or a Noah. Others trust and obey the same mighty God, and He enables them to endure horrific trials in His strength. Like some of the nameless men and women in Hebrews 11 who were sawed in two, tortured, or put to death by the sword."

The difference is not in the people or in their faith, but in God's sovereign purpose in each situation. We know the same God these Old Testament saints knew and we have even more in that we know Christ personally. So we should trust Him as they did, whether He chooses to put us to death or deliver us from death for a while.

That really struck me, because I was preparing this week and I got the news of Dave Haidle. I don't know Dave as well as some of you, but in my time here at Village in the last year, Dave has been a tremendous source of encouragement to me. He was mostly out at our Shabbona/Indian Creek campus. I just loved my times with him. When I got the word that he had died, there was part of me that was thinking, "Man, that doesn't seem fair." I'll be honest. I was just taken aback. Here was a man who had devoted himself to serving men in prison, to caring for the widows, to serving as an elder, to preaching God's Word. At 69, God took him from this life.

I had to go back to this passage to be reminded that trusting and obeying means to trust in God's sovereign purposes, even—and especially—when it doesn't make sense. Just like those saints who had spectacular moments of faith, they still all died looking forward to the promise. Most of us will still die, unless the Lord returns, looking forward to the promise.

Faith helps us long for the perfect.

We look to the promise, we live with patience, and finally, faith helps us to long for the perfect. Four different times in the book of Hebrews the author uses the phrase "made perfect." We see it here in Hebrews 11:40, when he says, "...since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." This means they had to wait. They were waiting for Jesus, the Messiah. But we now have Jesus, and together, we will be made perfect in Christ. That refers to the glorification of God, the sanctification of the saints together for glory, in heaven and for all eternity.

The idea that the best is yet to come is a major theme that runs throughout here. Faith doesn't just let us look to the promise, although that's true. It doesn't just give us the strength to believe that God is sovereign in His purposes, although it does. It doesn't just cause us to live with patience. Ultimately, faith gives us the strength and ability to long for what's coming, when the perfect Christ will return.

Peter and Paul wrote extensively in different letters of this idea that on the Day of the Lord, He will come with a shout. He will return, then He will bring home all of those—past and present—who have received Him as Lord and Savior. In 2 Peter 3:8 Peter speaks of God's patience in waiting, and what's coming is far better than anything we've experienced: "But do not overlook this one

fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness." I like that phrase, because I sure think at times that He could speed things up. But He's not slow—for Him, a thousand years is like one day. *"But [He] is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* This is God's heart.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

God is patient. God is slow. God longs for every person in this room to know Him as Lord and Savior. He wants no one to perish. Rather, He wants to sanctify the believers—the saints of old, those in the first century and those of us here today. One day, for those of us who put our faith and trust in Jesus, our longings for heaven will be realized. We will be perfected and glorified, spending all eternity with all the saints, and most importantly, with Jesus. So it is good to long for that.

An application for this part is that faithfulness to Jesus Christ counts more than anything else, even life itself. Our first application was that we should be willing to set aside present comforts for the future reward. Second, we should trust and obey, believing that God is sovereign. Finally, faithfulness counts more than anything.

Friends, if you hear nothing else today or throughout this series, know that our faithfulness to God counts more than anything else. It's a gift that God empowers and grants to us. Our faithfulness in looking to that promise, our faithfulness in patience and perseverance and our faithfulness in longing for the perfect counts even more than life itself.

As Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:18). Do you know what that means, friends? It's a win-win. Do you like win-win scenarios? I like them. "If I do this, I win, or if I do this, I win." That's great. If I was a gambler—which I'm not—I'd only gamble if it was a win-win situation. That's what the Christian life is for those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior. It's a win-win.

If God keeps us here for ten years, 15 years, 69 years like Dave—win. God's using us. If He takes me home early in my life, the middle of my life, or like Louis Zamperini, at almost 100 years old—win. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Those old saints of the faith—they got that. They longed for heaven. How are your longings for heaven? No more sorrow, no more suffering, no more pain—perfect perfection in everything. Heaven will be far greater than anything we can imagine, yet our faith gives us the ability to long for what's coming.

I don't know about you, but for much of my life, I didn't do much longing for heaven. It might have been my age. I had a lot of life I wanted to live, things I was looking forward to. Yes, I couldn't wait for heaven in one sense, but I thought heaven could wait a little bit. I had other things I wanted to do. I wanted to have a wife and a family. I wanted to accomplish things. I wanted to be used for God. Heaven could wait. Some of those things are okay. Accomplishing things is not sinful. But over the last few years, through physical struggles and cancer and all kinds of other stuff, my longings for heaven have increased.

I think many of us don't long for heaven. Life is kind of good and we've gotten pretty comfortable. I listened to a country song on the radio a few weeks ago and was kind of intrigued with the words. Here's the chorus:

Everybody's talking about heaven like they just can't wait to go
Saying how it's going to be so good, so beautiful
Lying next to you in this bed with you, I ain't convinced
'Cause I don't know how heaven could be better than this.

[From "Heaven" by Kane Brown]

I've lived life like that. Maybe the circumstances are different, but life's pretty good right now. I've created a pretty comfortable life. Part of our longing for heaven means thinking, "Heaven is far greater than anything we can imagine." This world pales in comparison. We need to be wary when we find ourselves becoming too comfortable here. Our faith needs to be stretched and we need to grow in this.

This has been personally convicting to me. Over the last 18 months our family has experienced a fair amount of loss. We lost three grandparents. We had two miscarriages. Not as important, but in that time, we also lost three cats. In different ways, each of these hit our family and our kids in different spots. But through those seasons of loss, we found ourselves frequently longing for heaven.

Loss will do that for you, won't it? It will make you long for perfection. I can't wait for when there will be no more sin. I can't wait for when there will be no more sorrowful tears, no more suffering—for myself or for those I love. I can't wait to be with Jesus.

Randy Alcorn has written extensively on heaven and we read chunks of this booklet at night, especially at times when our kids were really struggling, feeling the loss of loved ones, because we wanted to focus on heaven. I think that's what God has for us in these moments. He wants us to think about those longings for what's to come.

The author of that country song says, "I can't imagine heaven being better." I want to argue that heaven is going to be far better. Listen to how Randy Alcorn describes heaven:

No death, no suffering. No funeral homes, abortion clinics or psychiatric wards. No rape, missing children or drug rehabilitation centers. No bigotry, no muggings or killings. No worry, depression or economic downturns. No wars, no unemployment. No anguish over failure and miscommunication. No con men. No locks. No death. No mourning. No pain. No boredom. No arthritis, no handicaps, no cancer, no taxes, no bills, no computer crashes, no weeds, no bombs, no drunkenness, no traffic jams and accidents, no septic-tank backups. No mental illness. No unwanted e-mails. Close friendships but no cliques, laughter but no put-downs. Intimacy, but no temptation to immorality. No hidden agendas, no backroom deals, no betrayals. Imagine mealtimes full of stories, laughter and joy, without fear of insensitivity, inappropriate behavior, anger, gossip, lust, jealousy, hurt feelings or anything that eclipses joy. That will be Heaven.

That is infinitely better than anything this world can offer or that motivates us to put aside the comforts of this world. We should not value any of those things over Jesus, being able to say, "I am willing to wait for that future reward." My friend, it will be worth the wait.

Just like the author of Hebrews wrote to these first-century Christians, my appeal, as we close out this series, is don't give up! Persevere. Have grit. Find your faith in Jesus. Make Him the object of your faith. Look to the promise, live with patience, long for the perfect.

We've spent time in this series looking at the saints, like Noah, Enoch and other incredible men and women of God. Yet as we turn to Hebrews 12 next week, which starts with, "Therefore, since we're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses..." I gain great encouragement from those saints of old. I also find great encouragement from those who are surrounding me here today. Some in this room who have struggled with infertility and are waiting on adoption. Some who are struggling through marriage issues, continuing to long and look for that promise and living with patience. Day by day, you're evidencing faith in God that makes no sense to the world around us.

I think of Shirley who will turn 90 next week. She faithfully cared for her husband for 70 years before he died. She spends most of her days reading the Bible and praying for her family, meeting with people, encouraging them and writing notes. She's longing for heaven. She happens to be my grandmother as well and she's one of my heroes.

I think of Jared and Carol, a young couple who want to reach the people in Papua New Guinea who don't know Jesus. They've spent 11½ years preparing for Jared to be a missionary pilot to take the good news of Jesus to places that have never heard of Him. After 11½ years, the last couple years of intense training on airplanes and studying the language, they found out that airplanes can no longer be used in the area they want to go to. Now they have to be trained on helicopters. It will cost \$75,000 in addition to what they were raising. Yet as disappointing as it is, they're looking toward the promise, they're living with patience, and they're longing for what's to come. They're willing to take another day, another step, another moment.

Those are just a few stories, right? We know so many more, even in this room. Surrounded by these witnesses, looking to Jesus—don't ever give up. It will be worth the wait.