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Faithfulness, Part 2

Galatians 5:22-23

Prayer: *Father God, we do thank you and praise you that you are king of all kings indeed. Father, we thank you that we can come every week, we can worship you in spirit and song and spoken word and we can worship you by opening up your book. Father, we're at that part of the service where we're doing just that, and we want to open your book, we want to learn, we want to grow, we want the power of your Holy Spirit to help us do that because we know we can't without your Spirit. And so we pray that you would guide us into all truth and that you would enable this truth to become a permanent part of our lives, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Galatians 5:22 says: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Now we've been looking at the fruit of the Spirit that he we call faithfulness. And I said last time as we started looking at

faithfulness that it's such a large subject that we would not be able to cover it in just one message. And last time out we asked three questions about faithfulness, the same general questions we ask about each fruit, and that is, what is it, how do we get it, and how do we grow it. And last time out we only got as far as the definition. We saw that a faithful servant delights in exercising the talents that God has given him whether it's five, or whether it's two, or whether it's one talent as the story goes.

Faithfulness, we said, is the great equalizer. It doesn't matter to God whether or not you are president or pauper. What matters is how faithful a president or pauper you are. See, faithfulness is about vision. It is about seeing. A faithful servant sees through his master's eyes. He understands that God left heaven itself and that he took on flesh and that he lived out his life flawlessly so that he could lay down that life as payment for my sin. So by faith, he participates in the great exchange, the flawless perfection of Jesus' life offered in payment for your sin and mine. By faith in that payment, he now stands guilt free before God. Because he's been given the gift of faith, he is now a faithful servant. And because he's a faithful servant, he sees faithfully, he thinks faithfully, and he understands faithfully.

Well today we want to look at how we get that faithfulness and how

we grow it. And by now I should be sounding somewhat like a broken record when I say that you don't get the fruits of the Spirit by pursuing them directly. You do not get patience by pursuing patience. You do get love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and all the rest by pursuing Christ, by abiding in Christ. I've said it many, many times, the more often you hang around Christ, the more often he's going to rub off on you.

But we ask, okay, how does that process happen? I mean, how do we abide in Christ specifically to grow the fruit of faithfulness? Historically how has God grown fruit, that fruit in his people? Well, Hebrews 11 gives us some insight. Most of you know Hebrews 11 is really the hallmark, the faithfulness hall of fame. 16 times in that chapter we read of the faith exploits of Old Testament saints. We read about Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Jacob and Isaac and Joseph and Moses, Rahab and others. We have this huge list of saints. Some are royalty, some are slaves, some lived wretched lives, and some lived lives of relative peace and comfort. But one thing stands out is that none of them started out as great men and women of faith. And God grew faithfulness in their lives just as he grows it in our lives. *Hebrews 11* says this: *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. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. Verse 8 says: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called out to go to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. Verse 17, it says: By faith Abraham, when he was tested offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave direction concerning his bones.

Now I just gave you a little bit of highlights of this chapter, but if you read the chapter, you see one phrase repeated over and over and over again, it is that two-word phrase "by faith." As I said, 16 times it's repeated as God catalogues these exploits of these

great saints. And so we ask, how did these particular saints get there? You know, you might think this is a listing of top notch people doing top notch things, but it's almost the opposite. These are real people not unlike you and me, and God doesn't hesitate to open up and expose lives that are good and bad and even ugly to his ultimate determination to grow in them the fruit of faithfulness. Joseph's life is good. Jacob's, you could say it's bad. Abraham's is sometimes just plain ugly.

Take a look at Joseph. Joseph lived a life of outstanding morality. But you know, even a life of moral excellence falls far short of the glory of God's perfection. And Joseph, as good as he was, like every one of us needed a savior as well. Joseph's story centers around this intense jealousy that his brothers had for him. His father sends him to check up on his brothers, and they begin to plot his murder. Genesis 37 said: *They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."*

Most of you know the story. He's thrown into an empty cistern, he's kidnapped, he's sold into slavery. God used Joseph's goodness to grow faithfulness in him.

We look at Jacob. Jacob is a story of a life gone bad. You see,

from the womb Jacob struggled with his brother Esau. And we knew that his primary weapon against his brother was deception. We know he famously stole his brother's birthright by trading him some stew for it. And many of the key events in Jacob's life centered around him deceiving someone or in fact being deceived by someone. Even the name "Jacob" means "deceiver." But we see that God used Jacob's badness to grow the fruit of faithfulness in his life.

Abraham is the father of the faithful, I mean his sacrifice of Isaac represents the high water mark of what genuine faith is all about. But Abraham had a number of incidents in his faith journey that could only be described as ugly, and yet God used those ugly incidents to grow the fruit of faithfulness in his life. You see, all three of them are part of the faith narrative that's in Hebrews 11. Joseph, Jacob, and Abraham are just three of the saints that God puts on display to show us how he grows faithfulness, and it is not an easy task. It involves a certain level of discomfort and pain not unlike the pain that we feel when we try to get into shape. You know, if there was a medicine that I could take that would instantly increase my lung capacity, I'd be happy to take it. But as it stands, we all know if you want to increase your lung's capacity to take in oxygen, you've got to force those lungs to grow more capillaries, and if you want to do that, you're going to have to repeatedly push those lungs out of their comfort zone to the

point where they begin to adapt to this new demand for air. So in order to do that. I have to experience the discomfort of gasping for air. Faithfulness grows in almost the same way. There is only one way we are going to grow in our capacity to trust God's will for our lives. We have to be repeatedly pushed out of our comfort zone when it comes to trusting in God's faithfulness. Often times that leaves us spiritually gasping for air. And we all know that's not pleasant. Truth be told, we spend a lot of time wondering why a loving God would subject us to such a discipline. I mean, can you imagine getting to heaven and sharing with God all of your disappointments only to find God telling you how sorry he was? Only to find God saying, "You know, I forgot. I got tired. I got fed up. I was just too busy." We know that's impossible. You know, if that kind of a response is impossible to imagine standing face to face with God, why is it so easy to imagine behind his back as it were. God is absolutely faithful. It is we who forget. It is we who get tired and fed up and busy. It is our faithlessness that makes us doubt God's faithfulness, because our God is way too small.

You know, most of us know *Romans 8:28* by heart: *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.* We just have a hard time living this out. You know, if God causes all things to work

together for good, then absolutely everything in my life is ultimately under his care, including the times of disappointment, pain, and bewilderment. And so God brings us into the lives of saints like Joseph, Jacob, and Abraham to show us things really do work together for good precisely because all things are under his care. *Psalm 139* says: *You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

Joseph is kidnapped and imprisoned. Jacob is deceived for years by his Uncle Laban. Abraham has his wife Sarah taken by two different kings. These were not accidents. God was not tied up or fed up or busy when these events took place. In fact, they were all part of the faith narrative that God was working in their lives. You see, good lives, bad lives, and ugly lives, it didn't matter, they all started out needing to grow faith and each one ended up being a hero of the faith.

So we ask, how does that happen? Well, the answer is simple. God was about the business of growing faith in their lives. You see, Joseph's kidnapping and imprisonment took place in spite of the fact that *Genesis 39* says: *The LORD was with Joseph.* God demonstrated that even a good life, a life well lived would still contain trials and struggles in growing faith. It is Joseph who

gives the lie to the idea that as long as we keep our noses clean, as long as we play by the rules, well then God's going to ensure that everything works out just the way we think it should work out. But Jesus didn't offer himself to us as the solution to life's problems. In fact, he invited us to join him in taking up his cross and that promises, it promises a life guaranteed to include suffering. *1 Peter 4:12 says: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes to you to test had you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

You won't live a better or more moral life than Joseph lived, and yet he repeatedly suffered injustices that were patently outrageous. After being betrayed by his own brother, he gets sold into slavery, and as a slave, he brings nothing but success to his owner Potiphar. Potiphar leaves Joseph in charge of all his affairs, and while he's away, his wife attempts to seduce him. Joseph responds in *Genesis 39: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* So he flees, leaving his coat behind. And you all know the story, the rest is history. He's falsely accused of rape and he's thrown into prison. This is Joseph's reward for exemplary behavior. Was God absent in this? Was he missing? Was he fed up? Was he busy? Absolutely not.

Genesis 39 says: *And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.* You see, whenever you're tempted to think that your good behavior somehow entitles you to a trouble-free life, consider the exemplary behavior of Joseph. And consider its results. And consider that it was all part of God's plan. You see, when all is said and done, we see Joseph's role was played out in such a way that prison was merely a stepping stone to his eventually controlling all of Egypt. But the imprisonment provided much more than just a stepping stone. It was a means that God chose to grow faith in Joseph. For two years, Joseph sat in a dank dungeon even though he was completely innocent and yet we know in that dank dungeon God was present with Joseph and that he was growing in him right there faithfulness.

Jacob's story is almost the opposite. But even in that story God shows that even the bad choices in a life lived badly were being used to grow faith in Jacob. Look at Jacob, he's the deceiver, he was himself deceived for years and years by his own Uncle Laban who used him terribly to grow his own flocks. For seven years he worked for Laban in order to earn the right to marry his daughter Rachel. After the seven years are up, on the very morning after

his wedding, he finds out that he's the victim of deception, he's the victim of a bait and switch when his uncle substitutes his other daughter Leah for Rachel. *Genesis 29* says: *In the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this that you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?"* Well, it took seven more years of labor for Jacob to earn the right to marry Rachel. And again the question is, well, where was God? Was God absent for those 14 years? Was he too busy? Was he fed up? Did he just not care? One chapter before that God says this to Jacob in *Genesis 28*, he says: *"Behold, I am with you and will keep you whenever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."* You see, God was painfully growing faithfulness in Jacob.

The same was true for Abraham. I mean, when Abraham entered Egypt, he told his wife Sarah to say that she was his sister. You know, he thought if he told the Egyptians that she was really his wife, they would kill him in order to take her because she was beautiful. So he asked Sarah to say that she's only his sister. I would call that an ugly half truth 'cause in fact she was his half sister. It was an ugly half truth and it backfired badly. Pharaoh sees her and he sees that she's beautiful and to Abraham's horror, he takes her into his household. In spite of the ugliness of the incident

and the fact that it happened not once but twice with another king, God protects Abraham and his wife from Pharaoh's advances. Again Genesis 12 says this: *But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great affliction because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go."* And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

Here we see Abraham disgraced and deported but also defended and delivered by a God who was determined to grow faithfulness in Abraham. The good, the bad, and the ugly, they all had their faith narratives shaped and molded by a God who oversaw every single aspect of their lives.

Now it's one thing to imagine that these events, well, they all take place due to happenstance or chance or bad decisions. It's another thing entirely to understand that without violating their free will, God was still orchestrating every event to the end of producing faith in his chosen ones. How God does this, I have no idea. I don't think anybody does. Paul says this in *Romans 11:33*, he says: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his*

counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Here's what our problem is. We don't begin to comprehend the height, the depth, the width, the breadth, and the love, and the power of God actually impacting our lives. You see, by the time God had finished his work in each of these lives, their faith had grown from a mustard seed to that of a fully grown tree. We see Joseph taking a spectacular risk by putting all of Egypt under a seven-year famine plan while they're in the midst of plenty. Jacob wrestles with God himself and he ends up giving his beloved Benjamin as a ransom payment for the rest of the family, and at the end of his long and difficult life, he moves his entire family out of their comfort zone to an entirely new and different land in Egypt. Abraham offers his only son, believing that God could return him from the dead.

And you know what leaps out of these stories? God leaps out of these stories. God was orchestrating each of their faith narratives right from the start. Right from the start God sent Joseph a dream that his brothers would one day all bow down to him. We all know that after all was said and done, that's exactly what happened. God told Jacob's mother Rebecca in *Genesis 25*: "Two

nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger." And again after all is said and done, that's exactly what happened. We see God tell a lone stranger from Ur of the Chaldees that his offspring will one day become a great nation, and the entire nation of Israel has indeed come from that one man Abraham. Here we are thousands of years later watching that nation at war with Hamas today even as we speak. Good lives, bad lives, and even ugly lives, all with one thing in common from start to finish, God was directing each of them in their faith narratives. From start to finish, God was at work growing their faith.

So what do these stories have to do with us? These are thousands of years old. This is ancient history. Well, this is the place where things begin to get personal. This is the way faithfulness grows, and this is how faithfulness grows. It grows by knowing that if you are his child, your faith narrative is being written in the exact same way right here and right now. You see, we can look across the span of thousands and thousands of years and Joseph and Jacob and Abraham stories appear as if it was clear and obvious, well, God's clearly at work. The fact is it wasn't clear and obvious to them. Just ask Joseph as he's sitting for two years in a jail cell. Ask Jacob as he sees his life flash before him as his own brother is pursuing him for his deception. Ask Abraham in the

24th year of the 25 years that it took God to answer his promise of having a son. Ask Abraham as he's trudging up Mount Moriah preparing to sacrifice his only son how obvious it was to him that God was merely building him up in his faith?

Well, how do these folks' ancient stories relate to my faith narrative? *Romans 8:28* connects them all. All things truly do work together for good to those who love God who are called according to his purpose. And his purpose is to grow the fruit of faithfulness in each of his children. So how do I get this fruit? How do I get this fruit of faithfulness? Well, I've said it a thousand times: We abide in Christ. Okay. How do I do that? I put myself in the center of my own faith narrative. I recognize that God is writing my story right now today. I grow faithfulness when I put myself in a position to see God's hand at work in me. It's a matter of attitude and perception. Do things just happen or is God sovereignly guiding them? I mean, just look at the people that God used in the lives of his saints. Joseph had all these jealous brothers. I mean, have you ever had jealous siblings? Ever had jealous relatives? Well, God was protecting Joseph. Would he not protect you? Joseph had to deal with Potiphar's wife who accused him of rape. Now, have you ever had to fight against vicious lies? Have you ever had to trust that God is your ultimate defender? Can he not move in the hearts of your accusers? Joseph

had to deal with Potiphar throwing him under the bus. Have you ever been the victim of expediency? Here's the point. If God is who he claims to be, you can never be the victim of expediency, because all things work together for good. Joseph had to deal with the cup bearer and the baker in prison. Have you ever been used and then forgotten? *Hebrews 13* says: *For he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Well, how about Jacob? Jacob's relationship with his uncle and his brother collapsed. Have you ever had a relationship turn sour? God says sometimes you're going to have to make hard choices. *Luke 14* says: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* And what about Abraham? Abraham had God's command to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. Have you ever faced the loss of someone or something that was absolutely precious to you? Well, again, God says in *Matthew 19*: *"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life."*

You see, all of us have our Potiphars. We all have our Labans, our cup bearers, and even our Isaacs, because all of our stories are being written right now. They're being written today. And faithfulness starts with that premise. There's nothing that occurs

by mistake or accident, because God is absolutely faithful, and he is determined to grow faithfulness in you. The prospect is daunting because the very nature of growing faithfulness is daunting. Growing faith is just like growing your lung capacity. It doesn't begin to grow until it's maxed out of his comfort zone. Joseph's comfort zone was his goodness. God moved him out of that comfort and into trust. Jacob's comfort zone was his cunning, it was his self-reliance, and God used the circumstances of his life to bring that to a complete standstill and move him in a completely different direction. Abraham's comfort zone was Ur of the Chaldees where he was born and where he was raised, and God physically directed him to come out of that zone by telling him to leave, to go, to strike out in a completely different direction and wait for instruction. Here's the point. Right now God is doing that in all of our lives, or I should say he's trying to do that in all of our lives. You see, all of us in some way or another are in some kind of comfort zone that God is in the process of moving us out of. Why? 'Cause that's how the fruit of faithfulness is grown. Have you ever noticed a brand new believer, how often times they have these incredible answers to prayer, miracles, God's hand clearly demonstrated in their lives? Have you ever also noticed that it doesn't last because it can't last? Because *2 Corinthians 5* says: *We walk by faith, and not by sight.* God grows faithfulness in us the same way he did in Joseph, Jacob, and Abraham, by orchestrating

our lives. *Philippians 2:13* says: *For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* God's good pleasure is that we desire faithfulness and that we work to grow it. And we grow faithfulness in ourselves, as I said in the beginning of this message, by putting ourselves in a position to make that happen, by exercising faith, by taking risks, socially, financially, physically, career wise, reputation wise.

Faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit and it grows just like a fruit. You know, if you've ever noticed a fruit tree, you'll notice that the best fruit grows out on the edge 'cause that's where the sunlight is. But it's also where the wind and the rain and the grazing animals and all the other dangers lurk. And if you want to grow your faith where it is safe, where it is shady, where it is protected, you're going to wind up with a safe and tame shriveled fruit that we call religion. It's not what you want.

Now, I've spoken many times about what I used to call the "celestial bank account." It's what happens when you take a faith risk and then you find to your amazement that God truly is faithful. That's God making a deposit in your account. But here's the key to growing that account. The more willing you are to take a faith risk, the more you're going to see God actively at work building faithfulness into your life. You see, we're no different than Joseph, Jacob, or Abraham. And God is still the same today,

tomorrow, and forever. There have been so many faith building events in my life, times -- times when God made these miraculous deposits in my bank account that perhaps my greatest regret is not keeping a detailed notebook so I could review all of the things that God has done. I was thinking about these things as I was preparing the message, and I was thinking of all the different miracles that I've shared that God has done in my life, and I was trying to come up with something appropriate to illustrate God's faithfulness, and I realize, I just came back from a vacation, and at the vacation we had seven of our kids along with their kids and we all gathered together as we do each year up in Canada. We had 14 adults and 16 children; 30 of us in one house. It was a wonderful week of cousins and chaos and re-connections with almost no Internet, television, almost no phone. It was just our family enjoying God's creation and each other's company. And you know, one of the great things about these family gatherings is you have these tremendous dinner conversations that often center about on what it's like growing up and of course the older kids are constantly tell the younger ones how rough they had it growing up and what a cake walk their life was and how easy they have it. Each night one of our kids led grace and reflected back on the blessings that God had given to us, and it gave me yet another opportunity to reflect on God's faithfulness and how he has always been growing that fruit in our lives. I mean the whole week just

shouted to Janice and myself how faithful God has been to us. You know, we got to raise ten wonderful kids, and I don't think there was one single year in that whole time that we were doing that that I ever earned more than \$30,000. I'm told that's impossible. You know, my life first has been: *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.* And I could tell you without a moment's hesitation that God has proved that verse to Janice and me over and over and over again. And many times he did it miraculously. And now you've heard me, I've shared many of those miracles before how over and over and over again God demonstrated that he was faithful, and there were so many times when just the right amount of money or clothes or food just happened to show up at our doorstep at precisely the right time. Well, they were each a deposit in that bank account that I'm talking about. It's what enabled us to take another risk and then another and then another, because we saw God is faithful. It's really no different than what the children of God have always done. Joseph took a small personal risk at first, I mean, he's imprisoned and he interprets his dreams of his fellow prisoners. But in the end we see Joseph taking a huge risk. I mean, he places the whole nation of Egypt on a seven-year cycle of plenty and famine based only on what he's convinced that God is instructed him in. We see God growing faithfulness in Joseph one step at a time. That's what he's still doing in your life and mine.

Abraham, at first he risked only leaving his home base. In the end we see Abraham risk his only begotten son, the very heir of Israel's future. Jacob in the end risks Benjamin, his youngest son, taken as ransom by Joseph. And we see at the start of their faith narratives that none of them ever would have taken that risk. But by the time God was finished growing faithfulness in them, it had become second nature. That's exactly what God wants to do in your life and mine as well. But there's a catch. Here's the catch. You get to decide how much faithfulness grows in your life. You can play it safe and you can wind up with what we call "religion." You'll have a very nice safe God who really pops up only on Sunday mornings, and you'll never really know the joys of seeing the hand of God in your life or worse still, you might never know if your faith was ever real in the first place. See, right now in your faith narrative you, too, may have to confront a risk -- a real risk -- if you ever want to grow in faithfulness. And it might involve money or friends or conflicts, things at school, things at work, you all know what that's all about. It's really no different than Joseph, Jacob, and Abraham's.

So how do you grow through that? Well, let me suggest some critical resources. There is prayer, there is worship, there's Bible study, there's fellowship, most of which comes under the

heading of community. You see, it's what you get when you vitally connect yourself to a church. There are very few successful lone ranger Christians because God designed us to be part of a family. *1 Corinthians* says: *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.* One of the greatest helps you could ever have in developing the fruit of faithfulness is a small group. I've had one for years. I want that for all of us because I believe God is growing faithfulness in all of us. I believe God has a faith narrative for Grace Fellowship, and he has a faith narrative for you, if you are one of his. And the goal is to produce faithful servants, and faithful servants are those who have the same vision as their master. You know, in *John 17* Jesus said to his Father: *"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do."* That was his job then. That's our job now.

So to answer my original question, how do we get faithfulness? We get it the way we get all the fruits, we get it by abiding in Christ. As we draw closer to him, more and more of Christ rubs off on us, including his faithfulness. Secondly, we grow faithfulness by putting ourselves in a position to see God at work in us today. You know, physically we say no pain, no gain. Spiritually it's really no risk, no reward. So my question this morning is: Are

you willing to take a risk? Are you becoming sure of what you hope for, certain of what you can't see? Are you aware of your own faith narrative? Are you taking the steps and the risks necessary to grow faithfulness in your own life? Are you accountable to anyone for growing in faithfulness? Like I said, faith is the great equalizer and it puts presidents and paupers on the exact same footing. So the question remains: Have you been faithful? God wants nothing more than to grow faithfulness in you and me and he does it in good lives, in bad lives, and ugly lives as well. He can do it in ours. Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you for your incredible patience, your incredible love, your incredible power. Lord, we see you working out in the lives of Joseph and Jacob and Abraham a faith narrative that starts at the beginning and carries them all the way through. And Lord, I want each of us to recognize that you do that even now today in our lives. We are all in the middle of a faith narrative. We need to see ourselves in the center of it. We need to see your hand upon us. We need to see everything that is happening in our life as part of a bigger, grander plan designed to grow faithfulness in our lives so that we can bring glory to you. Give us the grace to do just that, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.