



Next Step

Part 1 – Everyone Has a Next Step to Take

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Wasn't Easter such a great weekend? We're excited. For the 50 of you that were baptized, we say welcome. That was a next step for you. For the next two months, we are going to be looking at the next step that all of us can take. Everyone in here has a next step to take in life.

I was trying to think of how to come out of Easter and what to start with. A church member sent me a story and it goes like this: A guy goes into a bar and, again, welcome to Woodland Hills. This is from one of our pagan guests. The guy orders three beers. The bartender sets the three beers down in front of him and he drinks one at a time. The next week, he comes back and orders three more beers.

The bartender says, "This doesn't seem right; why don't I just bring you one at a time so you can drink them cold?"

The guy says, "No, you don't understand. My two brothers are serving over in Afghanistan. This is how we drink together. I'm doing this in honor of them."

The next week, the guy comes back and only orders two beers. The bartender says, "I'm so sorry to hear."

The guy says, "Oh, no, my wife and I joined the Baptist church last week and we can't drink anymore. But it doesn't affect my brothers."

What a great offering joke as I watch the offering buckets come around.

The Catholics are going "I don't get it. What's the big deal? Why are they laughing about this?"

If you're here visiting from a Baptist church, we say "Cheers. We're glad that you're here."

We have two big goals for this series for April and May. Goal number one is personal. We want you to personalize this series. We know that everyone has a next step to take, so we want you to identify and take your next step toward Christ. You may come into a church and see someone who has been here for a while. I look at the Huesteds back there. Could the Huesteds stand up for just a second. On Tuesday, this couple will celebrate 69 years of marriage. They told me out in the lobby that they are making it to 70. So, I put my hand on his heart for about 15 seconds. He's got a shot. That's all I'm going to say. Thank you, guys. Congratulations on that big day.

But you look at seasoned, mature believers around a church and you think *Wow, I'm nowhere close to where that person is.* We want you to understand that you don't come and join a church or join a family and next week it's like you're there. They're at 69 years. Amy and I hit 20 this year. I've got 50 more years to go. Because of them, we sing a lot about heaven. We're just preparing you. That's all we're doing.

We want you to think about your next step, one step, not 20 steps down the road or where you're going to be in 10 or 15 years. Our culture is obsessed with the five-year plan, the ten-year plan, and the life plan. You turn on television and the commercials are all about your future. Are you planning enough for your future? Have you bought enough gold? Does anybody here have enough gold at home to make it when you're in your 60s and 70s? You hear all these commercials like the guy with the big dominoes tipping and you walk away thinking you're not prepared.

The next couple of months, we want you to think about your next step. It's different than the person sitting next to you, just like your shoes. Your next step is different than the person sitting behind you or in front of you. We want you to figure out what your next step is and then, over the next two months, take that next step.

Then there is another goal. This is kind of the ministry goal, the outreach goal that you would identify a friend's next step and invite them to take it. That God would use you to talk to a family member or a friend and say "I know you feel stuck, you've been in this for a while..." This is all ministry is. It's seeing where someone is at or even where they want to be but maybe they are afraid to take that next step. Again, this isn't so that we start judging people and starting walking around town, not taking our steps, but telling someone else they should really do something. That's not the goal. The goal is that I would identify my next step. Every single person in here has a next step to take.

There are a lot of reasons why people will not take the next step. Let's look at those quickly this morning. Some won't take the next step because **they would rather sit and dream about running.** Have you met this person? How many of you watch the show Shark Tank. I love that show. Half of the ideas on that show are mine. Raise your hand if you've watched Shark Tank and said, "I came up with that. They should give me a cut of whatever they're going to get." But, there is a difference between the person standing there presenting it and me. That difference is I did nothing with my idea. I had it, but I took no steps beyond the idea. Some of you think about it, but you're going to wait for the day you can run.

I've seen it in I don't know how many movies. A guy is being interviewed for a job. They offer him a position, but he responds with "I think I'll hold out for management. I'm not starting as a cashier. Do you know who I am? Do you know what I've got to offer? When is your CEO resigning?" No, no, no, there may be a next step into a company that you're thinking you could do so much better than the guy who has been there for 30 years. Don't you love having those people at work that are so much smarter? I love the fact... I know minimum wage is a big conversation right now, but I'm grateful for the minimum wage. I remember when I was 12 years old I was making \$4.25 at the Fox Bend Golf Club and the Naperville Country Club, caddying and all of that. I'm grateful for that, but I didn't plan on doing that for the rest of my life. I didn't walk in thinking *I really should be running the golf club. I'm just going to sit*

here and do nothing until that position become available. So for some of you, take the next step. It may not be CEO.

A lot of people won't take a next step for **fear of the unknown**. "I'm not going to take this step until I know what the next few steps are. I will not take my first leap until I have all of the rest planned out." This is every single one of us watching Shark Tank. I never took the first step. I never took the idea or the concept to a prototype because that costs money. And I didn't want to spend the money for fear that I wouldn't be able to set up the website, I wouldn't be able to sell it. I didn't know what all that would be, so I didn't take the next step. Some will wait to take the first step until they have all that figured out and we're going to tell you don't wait until all of that is figured out; take the next step you need to take.

Some won't take it for **fear of criticism**. Beth Moore... I have to throw her name out there, because when I say Beth Moore, all the ladies pay attention. You know we believe around here that if Beth Moore said it, Jesus believes it. She wrote a book called *Get Out of the Pit*. The whole premise of the book is brilliant. She talks about how all of us need to climb out of the pit that we are in. When you go to climb out of the pit, what do the people in the pit want to do? They want to grab you by the ankles and drag you back down. You'll be ready to take the next step and some will be like "Oh, come on! Teacher pet!" "The kiss up of the company!" People will start criticizing you for wanting to take a step.

Last June... I was so excited to go to this and I had such a fun time there. I went to the Christian Comedy Association Conference in Atlanta. There were about 300 comedians gathered there. You had all these seasoned veteran comedians that have been doing it for 20 or 30 years and then over here, you had all these rookies and all the comedians that were hoping to become comedians. A lot of people made the decision the week before to leave their job and become a comedian. We would have main session together, but then we would break out into these breakout sessions. The breakout sessions were led by veterans. Here's what the breakout sessions were. They were very intimidating. Every person who wanted to could sign up. They got three minutes to stand on stage and deliver their best comedy. And before they would introduce the next comedian, the entire room would critique that three minutes. I refused to do it. I already have enough critics back in Branson; I don't need Atlanta critics.

The first lady gets up. She had made the decision to become a comedian. I don't know if you know this about comedy, but comedy is tragedy resurrected. Most comedians I know are very dark people. I don't want to say that, but it's true. So, this lady gets up. It's her first time to do comedy on stage. Her three minutes... This is tragic and I'm not making light of what happened to her, but I am going to make light of what she was doing. Her whole three-minute bit was on her failed suicide attempt.

As she shared, we were all just sitting there. She was sharing details and we were thinking *That's not funny at all*. She's trying and she's digging deeper. My friend Mark who was sitting next to me leans over to me and goes, "I feel like I should go give her a hug." It was bad. She steps down and now we are supposed to critique. Where do you start? "Don't do that anymore." That's what I wanted to say. I love what my friend John, who was leading that breakout, did. He started by saying "Can we all thank her and appreciate the fact that she got up here?"

That was huge. We could all applaud her actually getting on the stage and trying. About five of the people that were signed up to do it after that decided not to do it.

It's one thing for your mother to tell you that you have a good voice. Right? It's another thing to go on American Idol. For a lot of my illustrations, I'm sitting in a recliner, so I don't know what this means, but I sit in the recliner and I judge all the people on television, but I have to be reminded at least they are there. They took the bold steps to do that. They took the risk. For some of you, you're dad told you that you were an awesome athlete and then you met a coach... And the coach told you the truth. But let me tell you something. We are going to applaud you for getting up there. And that leads from criticism to the final fear a lot of us have.

A lot of us have the **fear of failure**. "I'm not going to take this step because what happens if I take it and I don't do well." We are going to encourage you to take the step. No matter what criticism you're afraid of... Fear of failing? Let me tell you something. If you go on line and look up famous failure quotes, you will have enough posters to read for the rest of your life. I think it was Winston Churchill who said, "*Success is moving from one failure to the next with undiminished enthusiasm.*" I love that. "I took this step and it didn't work so well. I took this step and it didn't work so well. Maybe by the third or fourth step, I have to realize I shouldn't be singing on stage."

Or maybe like I did. I tried out for the freshman football team. And when I realized that my mom would never have to clean my uniform, I decided to do something else. I took a step. The coach said, "I don't know if this is going to work for you; you're going to get hurt a lot and you're timid..." I went to the meeting. I got the uniform and by the fourth step, I was on the cross-country team. Don't let criticism and failure keep you...

Let me talk to my older friends. I'm talking about the really old people in the room – those of you over the age of 40. You've had enough criticism and failure in your life and it's keeping you from taking any more steps. You're done trying. We hope this series energizes you to take some steps that you need to take.

Here's what we know and here's where we are going today. My walk with Jesus is one step at a time. My faith journey is one step at a time. I love this illustration from the scripture and I want to use it today. This is my Coleman lantern. I want you to picture it as an oil lamp today and not this California light bulb they put in them now. Ancient travelers would use an oil lamp. Picture this as an oil lamp.

As they would walk down the road at night, it would light up just enough of the path that they could see their next couple of steps. If you study this, it's fascinating. Ancient travelers even had high beams. Do you know what the high beams were for ancient travelers? It was swinging the lamp back and forth from side to side. They would walk down the path and swing the lamp back and forth. So they would be able to see any deer in the ditch that were about to hit them. It would tell them anything on the side of the road or on the road, but, again, they would only be able to see a few feet out in front. This illustration is the primary illustration we have in scripture about the word of God.

It's in Psalm 119 and it says this. ***Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*** Following Jesus is one step at a time. We take this step. I want to be in tune with the word of God. That's why I read it. That's why I listen to it driving down the road. That's why I study it. That's why I memorize it. That's why I meditate on it. I want to know good choices for next steps. We talk about God's will all the time as this mystical, can't quite figure it out, where am I going to be in ten years... The reality is if you knew where you were going to be in ten years, it would probably terrify you. You wouldn't take the next step if you could see, with the high beam, way down the road.

This is a sign that has saved my life I can't tell you how many times. This is actually called a chevron sign. I want you ladies to know that the chevron pattern comes from a road sign. I was three hours driving through North Carolina last week from about 10:00 pm to 1:00 am. I was starting to do that thing at about 11:00 to 11:30. You know, that one-eyed thing where you're closing one eye at a time and it's helping you stay awake. Or you roll down the window and stick your head out the window as you drive down the road. So, I called Amy and told her I was getting tired and had two hours to go. What I didn't tell her is I am on the windiest road in the United States of America in the Appalachian Mountains. I'm winding back and forth and up and down. I probably saw 5,000 chevron signs.

Sometimes there were three of them together. Sometimes there were ten of them together as I would just kind of wind down the hill. I was going fast enough... I wasn't going 50 or 60 miles per hour; I was going 20 or 30 miles per hour. I have this real problem with Google maps where I like to set it on my leg as I drive. But looking down at your leg is a bad way to drive through North Carolina. I like Google Maps because it tells you up ahead a little ways. You can adjust the size of what you're seeing. I told I Amy I was only going to look when it beeps and tells me I'm going to turn right 32 miles ahead. I'm just going to pay attention to these signs. I'm going to slow down when I see the first one and I'm going to go as far as it takes me that way and then I'll end up going back this way. I did this for three hours. To be honest with you, it was kind of exhausting.

Some of us are running at such a pace that the reason we're going off the road or the reason we are in a rut is because we're not paying attention to lighting ourselves daily in the Lord, knowing what his word says, so we are able to make wise decisions about the next step. Not 100 steps down the road, but the next step.

Richard Strauss puts it this way and I love how he says it. *"God does not promise a brilliant blaze of light to illuminate the road for miles ahead."* A lot of the Christian books we read want to give us that promise or the way to do it. We are going to see in a second that planning is good. Go ahead and make plans, but understand the purposes of God will always trump your plans. It's okay to plan. We need to plan. This is driving the planner personalities in the room insane right now. Our companies are built with the five-year plan or the ten-year plan and we start to take this American idea and try to push it on us when it comes to our faith and our walk with Jesus, when we need to get back to this daily walk. A member came up to me after the first service and said "Pick up your cross and follow Jesus. The part we always leave out? Daily." *"We're not promised this brilliant blaze to see the future for years and years down the road. He promises us a lamp to our feet, enough light for the next step."*

Turn to Numbers 9. It's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. What we are going to see there is that the children of Israel were led the exact same way. They were led on this day-to-day basis. They were led by a cloud by day and fire by night. When the cloud was over them, they encamped, they stayed. When the cloud lifted, they were to pack up the tents and follow the cloud. If the cloud stayed there for a day, then they stayed for a day in camp. If it stayed there for a month, they stayed in camp for a month. If it stayed for a year, they stayed for a year. But when the cloud moved, so did they. I always picture this passage in Numbers 9 as a small kid getting out of his tent every morning and looking to see what they were going to do that day. What a great response for all of us to wake up in the morning and say "Lord, what is the plan today? Who am I going to meet today? What conversation am I going to have today? What is your plan and purpose for me today? I want to walk in that today; I want to take a step towards that.

15 On the day the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning, the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. So, it was a cloud by day and a fire by night. 16 That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night, it looked like fire. 17 Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. 18 At the Lord's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp.

19 When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the Lord's order and did not set out. 20 Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the Lord's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. 21 Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning... This is all of you who go camping for only one night. After you set it all up, you're thinking you should probably stay a few days. But they obeyed the guidance of God, their shepherd. ***...and when it lifted in the morning, they set out.*** God did this the whole way to the Promised Land. They were being guided there, but they didn't know when. They didn't know exactly when it was going to happen.

Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. They were trusting the perfect guidance of God. ***22 Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. 23 At the Lord's command, they encamped, and at the Lord's command, they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.*** This is how they were led and this is still how we are led by the Lord today. It's a day at a time and it's a step at a time.

The Psalms puts it this way. ***The Lord is good and glad to teach the proper path to all who go astray...*** For all of you who have stopped for fear of failure, for all of you who have stopped when you've been criticized, for all of you who have made enough mistakes and you go "I know what my parents taught me and I know what the church taught me. I've been walking with the Lord for years, but then I took this direction with my marriage, this direction with my family, this direction with my drinking, this addition took me here..." And you're off the path and you don't know what to do. Here's what we're saying: just take the next step. "I've come so far off the path." ***The Lord is good and glad to teach the proper path to all who go astray.*** To all who have gone way off, he will guide you; ***he will teach the ways that are right and best to those who humbly turn to him.***

It's what we call repentance. It's turning from our sin. It's turning from what took us off the path. My first step is just to turn around, start over, and I'm going to start taking the next step toward Christ.

Scripture goes on to say in Proverbs 16. ***9 In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.*** How do you teach this? It's simple and teach it to your kids. Let's make plans, but understand that the purposes of the Lord will always trump our plans. I'm a planner. Let's see the planners in the house that are hating every moment of this message. I plan my day in the shower. I have the whole day mapped out in the shower and then I step out and realize that Amy has a plan too. And, thus, our day begins with my plan hitting her plan.

My plan has been interrupted the last few days because we have a mouse issue in our home. I wish I could say mouse; it's mice. It's a pretty big issue. Right now, we have a big debate. Personally, I don't think... I've killed 13 mice. Personally, I don't call 13 mice an infestation. How many of you think 13 mice is an infestation? No, it is not! Can I tell you the difference between our 9:00 am and 11:00 am services? I feel more at one with 9:00 am. They're with me.

We started with these traps that catch them alive so I can release them down the road. Again, traps made in California. But, if you don't get to them fast enough, they chew through them. I had four of these mousetraps set up and they chewed through them and got out. I told Carson that I wanted the death traps. I want the old fashioned wooden spring that when it hits, they flip in the air as they meet their death. I bought eight of them and put them in one room. Again, we don't have an infestation; I'm just over doing it a little bit. My days have been consumed with catching these mice, but she's my wife and she doesn't want the mice in the house. I'm doing everything I can.

It's interesting. I make all these plans. You make all these plans. You step foot out of the bedroom and it's all gone. You get to work and it's all downhill from there. Humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps. Follower of Jesus, you have to get a clear grasp of this over the next two months.

He is establishing your steps, but how does that work? Look at what Psalm 37. ***23 The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him.*** So every day, "What's the plan today? I'm delighting myself in you, I want to walk with you, I want you to guide me. I want you to direct me. I want to know about that conversation that actually wasn't in my plan and may take 45 minutes. I may have to stop and help this person..."

What are the purposes? The scripture goes on to say this in Proverbs 19. ***21 Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*** He establishes your steps as you delight in him. We make plans, but ultimately his purpose will trump my plans every time. What are the purposes? God has purposes for your life.

He has a purpose that you worship him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. He has a purpose for you that you would fellowship with other believers, that you would connect with other believers for the purpose of growing in the Lord. He has a discipleship purpose for you. He wants you to grow and become more like him. He has a ministry purpose for you. He wants you to serve other people in his name. He has an evangelism purpose for you. He wants you to share the good news of

Jesus with family and friends and co-workers and those around you. That is what it means to take those purposes. I take those purposes of the Lord throughout my day and in my steps. I'm going to take the next step when I know it is in front of me and I need to take it.

Our church is going on 14 years old next month. Our desire is to help people take the next step. Our desire is to help you take your next step wherever you are. I don't care what your age is or if you've placed faith in Jesus. Wherever you find yourself today in your life and in your walk, we want you to think through your next step.

We do it with this really technical term called concentric circles, but just call them the circles. Think about the **community**. Last week was a big week for us. We had 2,905 people on campus. We had a lot of people from the community. Community would be Stone and Taney Counties. It would be Green County. We know we have people from Christian County. We have people from the county of Arkansas.

I heard this at the Young Life the other day. It was a great joke. The guy said, "We're going to build a huge wall around Branson and make Hollister pay for it." But we're not that church. Our desire is to invite people from all over the community. The ones that are frustrated with church, the ones who are done with church, the ones who left church and have avoided church and they're never stepping foot back in church. That's one of my favorite expressions to hear from people. "I never thought I would darken the doors of a church again." "I haven't stepped foot in church." Last week was the next step for many. This week is a next step for many. We want to make sure we help people come from the community to the **crowd**. Each one of these is going to be a message in this series.

In two weeks, we are going to talk about moving from the community to the crowd. We are going to look at reasons why people leave church, avoid church, and go to church. We are going to talk about drawing a crowd. Jesus drew large crowds and here's what I love: Jesus is still drawing large crowds today. We should still be excited about large crowds. You may be here and you prefer the smaller church. Get excited about large crowds that Jesus is moving in. Jesus drew large crowds; he still draws large crowds today. As you go through these sermons... I love it. You see it all throughout the gospels. Jesus drew large crowds, he taught to these large crowds, he ministered, fed, healed to these large crowds. But then he also withdrew from these large crowds and hung out with a smaller group. There were times he even withdrew from the smaller group to get by himself and pray.

Here's what we know. A crowd is not a church. This is important and we hope to really express this and teach it in a way that makes sense over the next couple of weeks. A gathering of people doesn't mean this is the church. Everyone gathered here today. We want to move people from Branson and Reeds Spring and Kimberling City and Hollister and Blue Eye and Lampe. We want them to come from the community to the crowd and become an attender at our church. The crowd are attenders.

We want people to move from just being an attender to becoming part of the **congregation** to where they say, "I believe in what this church is doing and I want to join them, be on mission with them." This is important because the crowd... It's great that we have a lot of people here. We want you to take the next step from the crowd if you've been attending for a while. Again, there is nothing wrong with the crowd, but the crowd is not a church.

We want you to become a member. I'm always thinking about these two circles when I get an email or a letter or someone comes up to me and says, "I followed one of your members into your church parking lot on Sunday. They cut me off on 265 and then... So your church must..." They start blaming the church.

I'm like "Wait a second, know the difference. On Sunday morning, we have people who are just here as part of our crowd. If he gave you the finger, this is the church to be at. If he's smoking pot, we want him here."

Then I hear, "If he goes to your church, he better stop smoking pot and he better stop drinking and get his act together." The first step for him was coming from a place of devastation and brokenness and just coming to see what this crowd is about. So, if you're here today and you've got a little whiff of something going on, we believe we're doing the right thing. If you're here today and hung over... I didn't say this in the first service because... Anyway, it's typically the second service. I'm kidding; we have mostly entertainers who worked hard last night. But people just driving around assume if they pull into a church parking lot, they must be part of the congregation and that's just not true. We are inviting people from the community to the crowd and then from the crowd to our congregation. Become a part of what we're doing. Place faith in Jesus. Take the next step of baptism as 50 people did last week in our two services at Easter. Become part of what God is doing. Join what we're doing here.

Again, just becoming a member... "Okay, I became a member so now I have my card and my life insurance and I'm just going to sit in a pew." We don't want you to just sit there saying, "I believe and I've joined the membership of this church." We want you to move from the congregation to the **committed**. After you have been a part of this church for a while... Where this gets a little tricky is there are some of you who have been part of the crowd here. You've never joined our church, but you've been a part of the crowd for five or six years. We just want you to know that if you've been here for five or six years... And this comes from the heart of a pastor who loves you. We don't consider you a guest anymore. The visitor parking is reserved for people who are kind of new to our church.

If you've been here for five or six years and you haven't placed faith in Jesus and you're still flipping people off in the parking lot, we're okay with that. We're not a behavior modification church. We're not trying to fix your behavior; we're trying to introduce you to the man Jesus Christ who gave his life for you. That's our goal, not to get you to stop giving people the bird. That'll be a next step. Your next step is placing faith in Jesus.

Don't just sit and say, "I've signed the membership covenant and I'm now just going to enjoy the benefits of membership." We want you to move to the committed. The committed are the ones who are serving, the volunteers. This is tricky because some of you went from the crowd and you've never become a member, and you're serving already. We think that's great and we're glad you're doing that, but we just want you, over the next few weeks, to think about next steps.

Then from the committed, some of you are going to move out of volunteer positions and you're going to become part of the **core**. You're going to become leaders in the church. Don't be intimidated if you're here today, moving from the community to the crowd, and you look around and you see someone who

has been doing church for 30 or 40 years. We're not going to ask you to place faith in Jesus this week and be an elder next month. That's not your next step.

Here's how we help people at our church. We help people take the next step from the community to the crowd by creating a warm and friendly Sunday morning experience and environment. Can I say, Woodland Hills, you do that so well.

Susan sent me this letter last week after being baptized. I want to just say thank you to the congregation of Woodland Hills for this.

I have attended church all my life and raised my family going to church. I was baptized as a baby. We've been attending Woodland Hills Church for one year. My daughter wanted to attend with her family and encouraged us to come with her. What a year it has been. Our hearts are filled and my soul is full of the Holy Spirit. Once we started attending, my sister and her family started attending. My sister and I both decided we wanted to be baptized. Sunday was such an emotional experience for me and I know God was with me. I rate my baptism right up there with marriage and the birth of my children. I feel so blessed to have Jesus Christ as my savior and to be part of this church. I'm looking forward now to attending church and I have also started volunteering.

Then this is for all of you.

Thanks for all of your time and effort in creating such a welcoming worship experience and feeding my soul.

That's why we do it. In two weeks, we are going to talk about the environment and experience at Woodland Hills and why we do what we do. Our desire is still to allow Jesus to draw large crowds as he did throughout his whole ministry upon this earth. We are never going to be a church that is concerned with getting too big. Jesus said, "If I am lifted up, I will draw all people unto myself." So, we will just continue to lift up the name of Jesus.

We also help people take the next step from the crowd to the congregation through Starting Point. If you go to our website woodhills.org, you can fill out the form there and you can look at what a membership covenant looks like in that class. It's next month and we are going to serve you a nice meal. Lauren Spencer has been brought on as our hospitality director. She makes all the food for everything that happens around here and it's incredible. That's because it's made with love. It's good stuff and we want you to be a part of that. Make it a goal to sign up for Starting Point.

For some of you right now... This is so offensive to some people and I don't want it to be. You're like, "We've been a part of the crowd for five years and you're telling us we're not a part of this church?" That's not our heart. We just want you to take the next step and know what that means. As we're trying to minister to such a large crowd, there are systems in place.

We help people take the next step from the congregation to the committed through home groups and serving. This is what I love about our church. Some of you start serving the moment you show up here.

Last year, Dan Cathy, the CEO of Chick-Fil-A, told me that he was now going to Louie Giglio's church, Passion City Church in Atlanta. When he showed up... He's the CEO of Chick-Fil-A and he is a humble guy. I love Dan and I love his heart for ministry.

He goes to Louie and says, "How can I help? What do you need?"

Louie Giglio said "You have to start in this church like every single person in this church starts. You have to be a door holder. You don't start in any ministry in this church until you have held open a door for people for a period of time."

I don't know if you've been to Chick-Fil-A. For the CEO of Chick-Fil-A, that wasn't too hard. He was able to do that. I love that idea that if you want to get started and you want to take the next step, for many of you, it's just serving. Some of you may not think you're ready. We're just going to ask you to smile, wear a shirt, shake a hand, and pass out the Lord's Supper elements.

Then we help people take the next step from the committed to the core by asking them to lead. Once you've been serving and you've taken these steps, we're asking you to invite people to join you and then ultimately asking people to replace you. That's leadership. That's one of the things I love about the teaching team here. It doesn't need to be a one-guy show. That you've embraced Adam, Shay, and Joe... We have so many leaders in this church and for some of you the next step is leadership. The problem is you don't come from the crowd to the congregation and after being here a few weeks become an elder. We need you to hold open a door. "Well, that's kind of beneath me." "Do you know what I did in my last church?" Yeah, that's why you need to hold open a door. I don't want to remind you, but you ain't at your last church anymore.

I'm really intrigued by succession plans. I talk to a lot of pastors and I'm shocked by the number of leading national pastors in our country, in their 70s and 80s, that will not talk about succession. One of them I know jokes about it. He says, "So long as I'm making sense, leave me alone."

I get that, but we don't want the church to go into a tailspin with your heart attack. Think about somebody replacing you. That's part of being the core. That's part of becoming a leader to say, "I am going to bring other people around me. It's what I loved about Gary Smalley in his last years of life. He gathered other people around him and just started preparing other people to do what he did.

Some of you may be here from Young Christian's Weekend and you saw Joe White. I think he's been doing that for 35 years. He's led people to Christ at Young Christian's Weekend who have gone off, gotten married, and brought their 12 year olds back years later. If you go there, you're going to see Adam, Shay, and others that are there alongside of him. That's because he's part of leading and part of leading is preparing other people to take your place.

When you become part of the core of a church, you're saying, "It's not just about me making decisions and being in charge. It's about you coming along alongside me and doing this with me, ultimately to replace me." That's our desire for you.

What is your next step? College student in here going, "I'm graduating. Where am I going? What am I doing?" Don't think 20 years right now. You're like "I can't take this job. What if I get stuck in the wrong career?" Take the next step and employment is always a good next step. Don't hold out for management. Start somewhere. Get a job. You have a degree? Get a job. You don't have to stay stuck in that job for the rest of your life, but take a step. All of us need to be processing and asking the Holy Spirit, over the next couple of weeks and the next two months, to give us wisdom in identifying the next step and then taking it.

God has a plan for your life; he is involved and wants to be involved. He is directing the very small details of your everyday, ordinary life as you take that step with him.

Would you pray with me? As we bow, as we begin to pray, we are going to enter into a time of taking the Lord's Supper. I want to encourage you not to leave. Continue to worship with us as we take the bread and drink of the cup, remembering the death of our Lord and Savior. As the worship team leads us in that, begin preparing your hearts now. For some, you've never taken the Lord's Supper because you're not a believer and we would not have you to drink judgment on yourself, but maybe your next step today is professing faith in Jesus, confessing with your mouth and believing in your heart.

For the rest, I pray that we would just begin to examine ourselves. We would not want to take the Lord's Supper with unexamined hearts. I will pray for us as we enter into that time.

Father, each and every one of us in here has a next step to take. For some, they took it today just coming here and entering a church is a big deal for them. We are grateful that they are here as they process through the next step, why they took it, and what the next step is they need to take. I pray for many over the next few weeks and the next two months that they would begin to allow the Holy Spirit to call them by name and that they would bow before you, professing Jesus as their savior.

For many who have been a part of this church for quite some time, but they know there is a next step here of serving, of leading, of being a part of fellowship, I pray that they would just have an open heart to you through this time.

We're grateful for the work that you continue to do here. We're grateful for those who took a next step last week with the Lord's baptism. We're grateful for that and the time we have now to take the Lord's Supper together as a family.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.