Well, good morning everyone. It's good to see some new faces, some old face— not old, familiar faces. There are a few old faces here, let's just be honest. Mine is one of them. It's been about 2 weeks since fall break.

It seems like forever. Like, who remembers fall break if you're a Remember those days, that glorious week where you just slept in and you didn't set the alarm and the kids sort of woke up when they wanted to wake up. And that was all right because it's great when they sleep and you got a little time to have a cup of coffee. I loved it. We ate out.

If we didn't eat out, we brought food in. It was amazing. The week only lasts a week though. Monday came, we plowed into it. And it was Tuesday morning that my alarm went off and I hauled my feet, put them on the floor, already awake because I've psychologically psyched myself up for another day of the same routine.

Get up. If I say any of these and you go, yes, yes, I'm there with you. Just say amen. Get up, start the coffee, empty the dishwasher. Anyone do that in the morning?

Yeah. Wake the boys up, do my reading, go wake the boys up again, make my bed, start some laundry, yell up the stairs for the boys once again. Finally, get them out the door, get myself out the door, get to the office. Start in checking the email, checking the texts, starting in on the tasks, trying to finish the tasks that are assigned for the day, maybe breaking for lunch, then back to the tasks, then back home to meet one of the boys as he gets off the bus from school, finish that load of laundry that got started in the morning, figure out what you're going to have for dinner. Anyone?

Make dinner. Or spend money somewhere providing provisions for children, then clean up whatever that dinner was, start the dishwasher, sit down in the recliner, fall asleep. Amen. Fall asleep, wake up enough to crawl to bed, and then the alarm goes off the next morning and you do it again for what seems like the rest of your life. Yeah, anyone in that boat?

Like, this is mine, this is my life. I love it, I love my life, but it's like, whoo, a little break would be nice. I find myself in a boring routine of daily, pretty predictable steps, but there are moments where I'm reminded that those small steps are moving me and the people in my life forward. Kids are being fed, they're growing, they need to be fed. And look what, what's happening— they're actually getting fed, they're being clothed, we're buying tennis shoes.

For a while, we bought tennis shoes about every 2 weeks, new shoes. We're not there anymore, thankfully. We're going to school, we're graduating, we're paying bills, we're saving a little bit. Next year,

we're going to be 1 year older. Another year wiser, maybe a little bit more in our savings and retirement accounts, and people moving into the next chapters of their lives.

This is life— little steps, little faithful steps that keep us moving forward. In one of the devotional times this past month, I read this: the curse of discipline is that every day looks the same. But the curse of indiscipline is that every year does. And we don't want every year to look the same. We want our years to get better and better and move forward into what God has for us.

I was talking to Brian Wimuller. They're getting ready to go on a vacation to Florida. I was talking to the boys on the way here where Robert's going to graduate, and we're thinking, what can we do? I want to take these boys on a trip. Take them someplace fun that they'll maybe not get a chance to do until they're older and have a lot more money.

Let's do it now. I love a good vacation. I don't love the daily grind. Anyone with me?

But vacations, as necessary and as important and as valuable as they are in our lives, they don't really move us forward in our lives. They merely give us a break from our lives. Instead, intentionally embracing the daily grind moves us forward small step by small step so that next year is better than last year. And those small steps are the process that growth and change are built on. Someone put it this way: I have one decision to make each day— get up when the alarm goes off.

If I do that, then I'll make a great cup of coffee. If I do that, then I'll read 4 to 8 chapters of the Bible. And if I do that, then I'll get through the Bible again in 300 days. Boring daily steps, routine monotonous steps. But where he is today is further along than he was a year ago, and I love that.

Those little everyday steps are leading him into a better and deeper life. Today, we're going to be asking the question, what are our next steps? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we open your word this morning, just remind us of, of your church, the, the, this creation that you have invested everything into. We are you in this world that we live in.

Help us to live that in a way that brings honor and glory to you, taking those faithful steps that you call us to every day. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So the church began in Acts, and for several weeks we've been exploring God's design for the church. We've, we've talked about the church isn't a physical— we call this a church, but, but a church is a building, and the church are people, living people, that Jesus continues to build his life in and through and around.

And every time we meet with Jesus, every encounter with Jesus always includes this invitation to respond to him and move forward into the next thing that he's calling us into. Jesus is still building his church. Matthew 16:18 says, I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. We have said that time and time again in this series. Allen first brought it to us, to our attention, when he took us to where Jesus spoke those words, and they were in a town called Caesarea Philippi up in the north of Israel.

And this was an area that was known for sort of its pagan worship. And the place where Jesus is standing with his disciples is this place associated with spiritual darkness. And in the imagination of the people that are listening to him, the people that are milling around him, the people that are actually worshiping at this place, this is the realm, this is the entry point to the realm of the dead. And it's in that setting, in that place of darkness and oppressiveness and weirdness, Jesus says the gates of hell are not going to prevail against what I am building, the church. And that promise lands with force, especially in that setting.

But death and darkness will not defeat the church he is building. We talked about that last week. When times get discouraging, when you feel like giving up, and when you feel like there's no use, Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I'm building my church. And no matter what's happening out in the world around us, whether, as Alan said, you're elated or whether you're very discouraged, No matter, Jesus is building his church, and what's happening out there will not defeat what he's building in us and through us and among us.

So we've been talking— rather than recoiling in fear at these dark places, Jesus instead speaks aggressively to us. Don't fear the forces of death and darkness because they're powerless against the church, the— what Jesus is building, his church. You are the church he is building. Ephesians 2:19–22 says, consequently, now you are no longer foreigners and strangers. You are fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

And catch this, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. Jesus is the builder, Jesus is the owner, Jesus is the architect, and Jesus is the foundation of the church. But we are the building blocks that he builds it with. It's not the programs we do. It's not the structures that we build.

It's not playgrounds or shelter houses or bigger parking lots. That's not the church. The church is you and me, people who have said yes to Jesus. And if you have said yes to Jesus, then Jesus says, I want you to keep moving. Don't give up.

Don't stall. Don't say this is boring. I've not encountered Jesus for a while. I don't think I've got— I don't think I got God anymore. I'm just going to give up.

One of our biggest challenges at our house, maybe at yours too, is starting the day. Sleep is a beautiful thing. Sleep is a gift from the Lord. Can I say— can you say amen to that? Sleep is— and as the older you get, the more you realize that you're You're wasting your life on sleep, but you almost don't care.

It's so wonderful. We love sleep. Our bodies need sleep, but our bodies also need action. They're designed to get up. They're designed to move.

We are created for reason and for purpose, and, and those aren't discovered while we're sleeping or just laying around. They're discovered while we're taking those daily steps of obedience, doing what Jesus calls us to do every day. So just like getting up with the alarm and putting on your slippers and following Jesus into the kitchen to start your day with a cup of coffee, every step that Jesus calls us to begins with that decision: I'm going to say yes to it, or I'm going to say no to it. And if we say yes to it, then that decision is followed by the opportunity to make another decision. Each step of obedience is very quickly followed by another invitation to take another step of obedience.

And there are seasons where this can feel very monotonous and very boring and almost discouraging. In our Saturday morning Bible study, we've been going through Genesis, and yesterday we were in Genesis chapter 7. Now, all through this time, God has been making some promises to a man named Abraham. If you know who Abraham is, You sort of know some of his story. God promised Abraham a son, and this son was going to become just the fulfillment of he and his wife's dreams.

And, and, and through his son, Abraham would become the father of many. So Abraham's living with this promise from God, and, and yet, ah, day after day after day after day after day after day after day, Nothing seems to really be happening. No dramatic moments. His wife's little belly remains little. She's not gonna have a baby.

And so they decide to take matters into their own hands and say, well, you know what, if God's made the promise, maybe he expects us to help him with that promise. And so they devise a scheme. It's a bad scheme. It's a bad idea. A bad idea.

But God doesn't give up on him. God sticks with him. And, and when that bad idea born. This little baby's name is Ishmael. God says, this is not the son I promised you.

There's still one coming, but I'm not going to give up on you. And so

from that moment where Ishmael's born to the time where he finally gets the baby that God promised him is 13 years. 13 years of just getting up every morning and Putting your feet in his slippers, going in, getting the water, putting it over the fire, getting that coffee going, going, is this the day where God's going to show up and do something amazing? No. 13 years, daily obedience from Abraham, daily decisions.

This is what Jesus calls us to. He tells the disciples, listen, I want you to leave your nets. I want you to follow me. That first step of obedience. And they did it.

They took the first step. And then, and then as they followed him, he had, he had more steps of obedience. They couldn't lean on back there. Remember Jesus, when we gave up our nets and followed you? No.

Every day was another opportunity to say, hey, I'm in this to win it with you, Jesus. I'm sticking with you. Paul tells us that we need to forget what lies behind, not that it didn't matter, but that, but in one sense, what's happening today is what matters most. Forgetting what lies behind, we strain towards what is ahead. We get up every morning, we put our feet in our slippers, we go make the coffee, we sit down with the word of God, we read there, we hear God speak to us, and we do the thing that God calls us to do.

This is important. James tells us in James chapter 1, verse 22, we can't just listen to God's word and think that's good enough. I heard a sermon today. It was really thought-provoking. I want to ponder that.

I took notes. All good. But James says, listen, don't deceive yourselves with that. Don't deceive yourselves with that. Those notes are beautiful.

I love all the colored pens you used. You even did some drawings in the side and some stickers. That's a nice touch. But listen, that's, that's not obedience. That's note-taking.

Obedience is doing what it says.

Spiritual maturity— that's what we're striving for— is not standing still. It's responding to what Jesus asks us to do next. We're getting ready to go into a very important season in our church, and we're going to call it Next. You'll hear more about that next week. I want all of you here next week.

In fact, I want all of you and those people that you know need to be here— call them. Get them here next week. We're going to unpack a lot of good steps and good things that God is going to call us to. But today we asked the question early on, what is the next step that God

is calling you to make? Some of you have been attending Sherwood Oaks for quite a while.

You, you come, you take great notes, you, you might even serve in some places, but you've never taken a step of obedience towards baptism. You said, I love Jesus, I love his word, but I've never really— I've not done that. I see other people do it, and I know I probably need to. I certainly know Jesus would want me to, but I have not done it yet. That step of baptism could be the step that God's calling you to make today.

It could be, hey, we've been coming to Sherwood Oaks for a while. I'm a Christian, I've been baptized, I was at another church, and I've been coming here. I really love this church, but But I, I, I, I, I'm not sure I've actually ever joined. I might have even went to that class Tim was at. He gave me some papers, but I don't know that I ever did anything with it.

I was never introduced to the congregation as a member of Sherwood Oaks Christian Church. Today, that may be the step you need to take, to come forward and say, I, I want to be part of this congregation. Baptism joining the church, maybe joining a small group or a serve team. You're like, listen, I've been showing up here. I want to get— I want to, I want to use my gifts.

I want God to use me in some capacity. I want to be useful to the kingdom in some way. Maybe I, I've got some skills, or I don't have any skills, but other people do, and they can help me. They can use what little I bring and do something good with it. I can pick up a box and put it in the back of someone's car for the food drive.

I can purchase a couple of pumpkin pies for the men's warming shelter for their Thanksgiving dinner. I even know how to bake a turkey. I could do that. I could bake a turkey and take it down there. Things that— next steps obedience that take us out of the observational stage of showing up at church and move us into the participation place where we are the church.

My next step may be different than yours, but none of us get a pass. On obedience. Jesus has given you a part to play. Early on in the series, we, we watched an orchestra perform. I love that.

I love that illustration because it, it, it just speaks to this idea that each of us have a part to play in creating this beautiful symphony. Each musician has a different instrument, and, and they even have a different part, but no part is meaningless, and together they combine And, and the music comes alive when each person listens to their part, contributes what they're supposed to contribute, and follows the conductor. And in the same way, Jesus gives every believer a part to play in the church. So if you come here and you're like, I

like this church, I like the music, Tim seems nice, Alan's great, everyone's good, the coffee's amazing, I've never had sour communion juice, it seems like a great church. But I've never really taken the next step to say, hey, I want to be the church, not just show up at church.

Today could be the day that you take your next step. Jesus has a part for every person to play in his mission.

In Acts 1:8, you might remember this scripture, the promise that Jesus gives to his disciples: you will receive power when when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And they said yes to that. He did what they asked him to do. They did what he asked them to do. And in the next chapter, lo and behold, they receive this power that Jesus spoke about. And lo and behold, they find themselves being witnesses exactly as Jesus said they would.

The Holy Spirit continues to gift his church for that purpose. 1 Corinthians 12, every believer belongs to the body, every believer has a part to play. And as we grow, as we serve, as we give, as we gather, as we witness together, God is building his church and moving us forward into the next thing he has.

Whatever your next step is— membership, baptism, joining a serve team, starting a small group— whatever that is, Jesus is calling us to move from attending church to being the church. So what's your next step? Whatever it is, whatever God is impressing on you today, the challenge is simply this: take it. Pull your feet out from underneath the sheets, put them on the floor, stand up, start moving. Start moving.

I'm gonna, I'm gonna be honest with you, when we start moving, there will be moments where just it seems like the heavens open and everything just has a grand design and you can see it so clearly. But there, there are other times in serving Jesus where you are shuffling to the kitchen and making coffee one more time and you're like, what is this about? Jesus says, stay faithful. Keep doing the next right thing.

If your next step is baptism, after the service, I'm going to be here at the front. I believe the water is still— I'm not sure it's quite as warm as it was last week. It was amazing last week. Last week was the week to be baptized if you were going— yes, yeah, yeah, yeah. Serena says it was great, but it's still there.

We can do baptism. Come up afterwards and we will make baptism happen. Maybe it's just to become a church member. We call them partnerships here at Sherwood Oaks, and that's the same thing. As we're singing the last song, come up, talk to me, talk to Alan.

We will do the official thing of saying, hey, here is this person who desires to be part of Sherwood Oaks. We're We'll make that happen. We'll make it happen today. And then that is one step you do not have to take again. You're part of us now.

Perhaps you need to take a next step to join a serve team. Joining a serving group and serving in some capacity to help others is a spiritual, spiritual act. Not only do you get to serve others, but you get to serve alongside other people. And that combination there Allowing— allows God to build in you good things as you serve others and you serve alongside others. Maybe you need to begin a habit of generosity.

There are people here who give, are tremendously generous, but a lot of you give sporadically. You give when you can, and I get that. I get that. I live in a place where, where we're trusting God every week for his provision. I absolutely get this, but I also know because of the years I've lived giving faithfully to God that he always provides.

He always provides. So if you are struggling about generosity, about beginning to give faithfully and consistently, can I just encourage you? Just trust the Lord. Trust the Lord. Give him a month.

Give him a month to prove how faithful he is to you. Every Sunday, give a little bit. I don't even care what it is. I don't think God cares. Just give, give consistently, give something that, that hurts a little bit so that you really do test God and see if he doesn't prove his faithfulness to you.

That could be your next step. We talk here about generosity fueling the mission of God. It's not just about paying bills here. It is about propelling the gospel out and not just outward, but in you as well, because part of God's mission is you, making you the person he's designed you and created you to be. Maybe your first step, your next step is just to commit to being a witness, whether at work, at school, in your home, among your families.

We got family gatherings are going to start happening real quick here, and some of you are going to show up at your family gatherings and it's going to be hard. It's going to be hard to be a faithful witness amongst your family because Jesus says a prophet is without honor in his own country. And many of you who are believers know that's true of your families as well. It's hard to be a faithful believer amongst your own people, but do it. Commit to it.

Commit to being a faithful witness to Jesus in those hard places. Being intentional about our daily decisions, both the big ones and the small ones, That's how we ensure spiritual growth continues. We're going to share in communion here in just a moment, but before we do

that, I just want us to remind ourselves that before we take our next step of obedience, we come to the table, we come to this moment and remember that, that, that our response begins with Jesus, saying yes to Jesus, not just yes to a good thing But yes to Jesus. And it's perfect because Jesus, Jesus moved towards us long before we moved toward him. He didn't wait for us to find our way back to heaven, but he left heaven and came to us.

He entered our world. He walked faithfully among us. Every morning he slipped those sandals on and he got up and he did what his Father commanded him to do. He walked faithfully, even as those faithful steps led to the cross, and he ultimately gave his life for us. Paul will describe this moment this way.

He says, whenever we eat this cup and we drink— and we eat this bread and drink this cup, we remember Jesus. We remember how he lived his life. We remember what he did at the end of his life. And remember, we remember and rejoice in the fact that when He thought life— when we thought life was over, life had only really begun. Taking hard, small, faithful steps can seem like you're sort of giving up, but it's exactly the opposite.

It is moving and propelling you towards the best thing that God has for you. Stay faithful, stay faithful, stay faithful. Take the next step. Do the next thing that Jesus is calling you to do.

Father, this morning as we take communion, we're not, we're not taking next steps in order to earn your love. We're not doing that at all. We've received your love. We're doing and moving and growing and intentionally taking step after step of faithful obedience because you first loved us. So as we take the bread, as we take the cup, We remember the grace that we have received and give thanks for it.

We are mindful of those hesitations we have, those, those, those little niggling fears that keep us from the next step of obedience, and we submit them to you. We surrender them to you, and we pray for your courage. We pray for your power. We We pray for the Holy Spirit to help us be obedient to the next step of faithful obedience. We remind ourselves that we do nothing out of our own strength, but only through Jesus.

But with Jesus, all things are possible. So help us move this morning in your direction as we share in this moment together. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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