

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. Come on, let's just welcome all our campuses together. Come on, you can do better than that. Come on, we are so glad that you are here with us. And last week we started a new series talking about timeless truths called Follow the Cloud. Follow the Cloud is how we live our lives, it's how we lead our church, it's how we got from where we were to where we are, it's how we'll get from where we are to where we're going, and it's really the core of who we are as a family on mission. And it's exactly what we need at this season of time.

And so what is Follow the Cloud? Well, after 400 years of Egyptian slavery, God looks upon his people and he says, "I've seen their misery, I've heard their cry, I'm concerned of their sufferings, so I have come," because the heart of God is always drawn to the cries of men. And he raises up a deliverer named Moses. And Moses goes and confronts Pharaoh, the most powerful man on the face of the earth, a picture of the king of the kingdom of darkness. And through 10 of the most significant miracles that have ever happened on the face of the earth, in just a matter of a few short days, Pharaoh and all of Egypt is completely defeated, the people are set free and God is going to bring them into the Promised Land.

And out of all the ways that God could choose to lead his people, he chooses to do it through a cloud, an ever-present and intimately personal cloud. And from within this giant cloud, he speaks with the gentleness of a whisper, "Follow me one next step at a time. When I move, you move. When I stop, you stop. Where I go, you go. Keep your eyes on me and I will lead you to discover who you are, who I am, and what you were created to do." But how do you get a million people across the Red Sea, through the wilderness, through the desert, defeat nations and kingdoms? One next step at a time. A whole lot simpler than we tend to make it.

God led them little by little because God leads us in small steps, not in giant leaps. I love what it says, "Little by little I will drive them out before you until you have increased enough to take possession of the land." Little by little, step by step, not leap by leap. Small steps, not giant leaps. And every small step God asked them to take was an invitation to live free. Like here's my question for you. Like how did you get here? Do you ever think about this for a second? Like how did you get here? And I know some of you, this is what you're thinking, you're thinking, "Well, my alarm went off this morning and so I went into the kitchen and made a cup of coffee and we got dressed and then we got in the car and we came into the parking lot and then we walked in the building and came in the worship center. And someone was sitting in my seat, so I had to sit in a different seat."

Okay, no. That's not what I'm asking you. Like how did you get here at this place in your life? Maybe when you were a kid and you'd go visit your grandma, she would pray for you and tell you about Jesus. Some seeds were planted. Maybe when you were in high school a friend invited you to a student ministry thing at their church and you went and you heard a little bit more about this guy named Jesus. And then maybe when you were in college there was this one person and you were so inspired by them. You saw them, there was something different

about their life and you wanted to be more like them but not enough to actually go and pursue it. And then maybe you got your first job and a coworker was constantly inviting you to church but you weren't interested in that but they didn't give up, and year after year, kept inviting you. And then, one season when your life was falling apart, you took them up on that invitation, came to an Easter service and you met Jesus and got saved. And you got baptized and it was the greatest thing ever and you started following him, but life happened.

And you wandered and got off the trail and went back into the things of this world. And then maybe over these last two years you've gone farther into the world than you even cared to go. But all the while, there's this movement, there's this drawing, there's this grace, there's this calling. And then maybe you kind of picked up your Bible again and you decided to come back to church and you got in a Circle and you started praying. And little by little by little, all of a sudden you turned around and you can't believe how far you've come with God.

Come on, look at this verse. This is a promise, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you and watch over you." Do you know this is true whether you're choosing to follow God or choosing to walk in the ways of the world? He is always instructing you, teaching you, counseling you and watching over you. You are never stuck with Jesus. There is always a way out. There is always a way forward and by grace, he's calling, he's drawing little by little by little. Like how'd you get here? I'll challenge you to think about that this week and just look back on the journey and see the good -- the very fact that you're here today or listening to this somewhere in the world shows you that God is instructing you, teaching you, counseling you and watching over you to bring you to this place.

Come on, it's the same with me. Like I never thought I'd be here. I never thought I'd be doing this with you in Texas. Like remember, I'm from Buffalo, right? And my dream was to be a police officer. That's what I wanted to do. I had my life mapped out. I had it all planned and knew what I was going to do, how I was going to do it. And then the week I graduated from college, the girl I thought I was going to marry broke up with me out of the clear blue, broke my heart and kind of started a tailspin season for me. A few weeks after that, I was on two brand new jet skis and t-boned my best friend, totaled both jet skis and put him in the hospital.

I then watched a lady crash her car and ran up to it and held her in my arms as she took her last breaths and died. I got shot in the leg with a nail gun, had to have surgery to get it removed. I was using a utility knife, it popped and went right into my wrist. I thought I was literally going to bleed out and die. It was like one thing after another. My whole life was falling apart. And so finally, in desperation, and in anger, and in confusion, I cried out to the Lord and I said, "Here's the deal. You're either real or you're not. And I'm going to spend the next six months seeking you and if you're real, you can have the rest of my life. But if you're not, I'm done with all of it." Pause.

That is not the greatest way to go about talking to God. Let's just be real clear upfront. I wouldn't recommend it, but it's where I was. And so I would go to work and I would come home and for six months, I would read. And I would read the Bible and I would read books and I would go to every small group I'd go to. And I'd get around every wise person that walked with God I could and I would ask questions. I would listen to cassette tapes of messages. Remember those? The long "zzz zzz zzz". Because that's all it was available. I mean, are you guys kidding me? Now the stuff we can give you on social media and technology, it's just like "boop boop boop". I'm like, fast-forward "zzz zzz zzzz". Right?

And so for six months, that's what I did. And I was asking all the why questions and the how questions, why this, how that. And then finally, one day, I was reading the Bible, Deuteronomy 29:29, it says, "The secret things belong to the Lord but the things revealed belong to us." And I felt the Lord speak to me and I felt like he said to me, "John, you're asking about all the secrets and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. What I want you to focus on is the things that I've already revealed to you and his name is Jesus." And I don't know how to explain it to you but that was my salvation moment. That's when I knew that Jesus was real, that Jesus was alive, and I was like, "Okay, that's it. I'm in. You got the rest of my life."

A few weeks go by and I get two calls on the same day from police departments offering me the job. And so I hung up the phone, I'm so excited, I'm trying to figure out which one am I going to do. And this is probably the -- this is the second time I've ever heard the voice of God really in my life and I felt like the Lord said to me, "The door is open. You can go through it if you want to but you've seen how life goes when you do things your way. I have something else for you." Um, okay. Do you want to tell me what it is so we can decide if we're going to make this choice? Phhhht, nothing. Just an invitation from the Lord.

And so I wrestled all week, picked up the phone, called both police departments, said, "Thank you but no thank you," hang up the phone, said out loud to God, "Okay, now what?" Nothing. And maybe a week later, all of a sudden he drops in my heart that I'm supposed to do this. I had never had this thought once in my life. I never wanted it, I never was interested in it. I had terrible perspectives of it. I didn't want anything to do with it. But I knew it's what God was asking me to do.

And so I moved to Colorado to go to grad school. I met Colleen, we got married, a couple years later had the opportunity to come and be on staff at the small little church in this place called Flower Mound, Texas that we had never heard of or been to, called Valley Creek Church. And little by little by little, here we are. That's how God leads us.

And listen, here's what I've discovered. In his heart, a man plans his course but the Lord determines his steps. God's steps are better than our plans. And there is a way that seems right to a man but in the end, it leads to death. There's a way that looks good to you but it's actually a way of destruction. But then there's a way that seems right to God and it leads to

life. See, God leads us in small steps, not giant leaps. And next steps aren't expectations to fulfill, they're discoveries to be made. At the heart of every next step that God asks you to take is a revelation of more of Jesus. And the more clearly you see Jesus, the more clearly you see everything else.

Every next step God asks you to take is an invitation to become free of the greatest bondage of all which is our selves. Yes, we've been set free but it's every step we take that teaches us how to live free in Jesus' name. This is not about going somewhere or doing something. It's about becoming someone. And if God is good, then every step he asks you to take is good. And if God is love, then every step he asks you to take is loving. And if God is life, then every step he asks you to take is life-giving.

Come on, think about Peter. The first thing that Jesus really says to Peter is "Come follow me." And one of the last things he says to Peter is "Follow me." All throughout their journey together, "Follow me." It was this sense of come, keep taking next steps and watch what I will do. If anyone, does that include you, would choose to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and say it with me, "Follow me." For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

How do you follow someone? One step at a time. You see, being a disciple is really just following the cloud. It's just living a lifestyle of next steps, one after another, moving with God. If Jesus is Lord, then I give up the right to determine the direction of my life. I'm going to have to deny myself and pick up a cross and go to some places that maybe I wouldn't choose to go. Like if you're really going to follow Jesus, you're going to have to go when you want to stay. You're going to have to stay when you want to go. You're going to have to forgive when you want an apology. You're going to have to give when you want to receive. You're going to have to receive when you want to give. You're going to have to do a whole bunch of things that you wouldn't choose to do. But there is a way that seems right to a man, in the end it leads to death. But there is a way that seems right to God and in the end, it leads to life.

What I love is that no matter who you are, or where you've come from, or how long you've known God, we all always have a next step because we have not been fully formed into the image and likeness of Jesus yet. Are you with me on this? Come on, no one leaps from where they are to where God is inviting them to go. Think of David for a second. David didn't leap from being a shepherd boy to being the king of Israel. The first thing he did was just went out into the pasture when his dad said, "Go take care of the sheep." We say that's not a very spiritual step. Oh, contraire. That was the most spiritual thing David could do. Honor your father and mother go do the little thing that's right in front of you. Are you willing to start there? Because there's nothing else to talk about if we're not willing to start there. But he does.

And then, while in the pasture, what does he do? He cultivates a relationship with God. Then he kills a bear. Then he kills a lion. Then one day his dad tells him to take cheese to his brothers on the frontline. If I'm David, I'm like, "I've killed a bear and a lion. They should be bringing me some cheeses." But he takes cheese to his brothers. And then he realized no one's willing to fight Goliath, so I'll fight Goliath. Then he takes that step and he kills Goliath. Then he becomes part of Saul's army. Then he serves Saul. Then Saul wants to kill him so he has to run for 10 years. And then Saul dies and he grieves it and he mourns it and then he becomes the king of Israel because David inquired of the Lord, it says over and over and over again. Are you with me on that? He didn't leap. There was a lot of steps there.

How about Moses? Moses didn't leap from being a shepherd to being the great deliverer. You know the first thing he did? Was just turn to the side when he saw the bush on fire and thought, "That's a strange sight. I will go over and look at it." If you're reading the Bible plan with us, you just read that and you're like, "That -- that -- you're genius, Mo." So he sees it and then he hears from God about what he's supposed to do. Do you know what he does? Then he goes and he asks his father-in-law for permission. God has just told you from a burning bush to set people free. You know what the next step was? Go ask your father-in-law for permission. Why? Because that's the little step right there in front of you. Then go get Aaron, then go confront Pharaoh. And again and again and again, 10 times, 10 little steps, and then it happens and it moves. And all of a sudden, you wake up one day and you're at the edge of the Promised Land and you're like, "How did we get here?" Little by little. One step at a time. And the same is true with you.

Come on, you remember the kids' connect the dots thing? A bunch of dots on a piece of paper with numbers and it's scattered all over the place and it makes no sense. But if you will just be humble enough to actually follow the order, no matter how confusing it seems, as you start connecting them in the order, all of a sudden you're like, "Oh, it's a unicorn. Oh, it's a spaceship." Whatever it is, as you connect the dots, the whole thing comes to life. And the best possible picture emerges. And the same is true with us. If we will just connect the little dots that God puts in front of us all the time, the best possible picture of our life will emerge.

Come on. We don't understand and then obey. We obey and then we understand. We don't understand and then obey. We don't get all of the picture, all of the insight, all of the full "here's what's going to happen next". No, no, no. We obey and as we obey, we begin to understand. This is why it says, "By faith, we understand." It doesn't say we understand and then we have faith. No, no. We have faith, we obey, we move forward even if it doesn't make any sense to us because the understanding unfolds in the experience. We have to release what can only be discovered by faith. Like this logical explanation that we need to logically understand, we have to release that because it can only be discovered by faith one simple step at a time. Today's obedience is setting up tomorrow's breakthrough. Whatever God is asking you to do now is setting up what he wants to do later. Are you with me on this?

Come on, let me say it to you like this. And some of you have heard me teach this before but it's like God speaks in sentences, not in paragraphs. Why? Because you can only obey one sentence at a time. Do you remember the story in Luke Chapter 5 when Jesus comes to Peter? It's like one of the first times he comes to Peter and he starts and he just says, "Hey, Peter, can I borrow your boat?" That's it. "Um, okay." Jesus gets in Peter's boat, they push offshore a little bit and then Jesus sits there and he teaches the crowd amazing things like he always does about the kingdom, all this great stuff.

And when Jesus is done, he looks at Peter and he says, "Now, Peter, row your boat out in the deeper water." "Um, okay." He rows his boat out in the deeper water. "Now, Peter, throw your nets over the right side of the boat." "Jesus, we fished all night, we haven't caught any fish. Like we've cleaned everything up. Please don't --" "Just throw your nets over the right side of the boat." He does. And as he hauls it in, there's so much fish, the boat begins to sink, Peter hits his knees because he realizes who Jesus is and what he has done. He says he's afraid, I'm a sinner, away from me. And Jesus just looks right at him and he says, "Peter, don't be afraid. From now on you won't fish for fish, you're going to fish for men." All started with "Can I borrow your boat?" One sentence.

Now imagine if it was a paragraph. Jesus comes walking down the shore and he looks at Peter. "Hey, Peter, can I borrow your boat? Because here's what I want to do. I want to get in it, we'll push off, I'll do a little bit of teaching. And then I'm going to ask you to put it out into water and as you go out in the deep water, I'll tell you to take those nets that you've cleaned all up, throw them over the boat. And when you do this, there's going to be so many fish and the net's going to begin to break and the boat's going to begin to sink. And on the greatest fishing day of your entire life, the pinnacle of your business career, I'm going to ask you to leave it all and come follow me because you'll no longer fish for fish, you'll come fish for men. But it's not going to go all that well for you, Peter. I mean, you're going to make lots of mistakes. You're going to look pretty foolish. You're going to embarrass yourself. In fact, the rest of human history, they will remember you for your failures. And then after three years, we're going to become like best friends but then I'm going to be arrested, crucified, buried, and you're going to think I'm gone and you're going to deny me three times to a servant girl. A servant girl, Peter. But it's alright. You're going to think it's over and I'm going to come find you, restore you, then the Holy Spirit will be poured out on you and you will preach the gospel for the first time and 3,000 people will get saved. So what do you say, Peter, can I borrow your boat?"

"No, you cannot borrow my boat." Come on, a sentence at a time because we can't handle the paragraph. Look at this. I love this. This is what Jesus says. "I have so much more to say to you, more than you can now bear, but when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." Jesus says, "You can't handle the paragraph, so I'll give you a sentence at a time. But I'll give you the Holy Spirit and when he comes, he will be your guide. He will show

you every step to take. He will tell you what you need to know, exactly when you need to know it."

And I want you to think about this. Every time you take a next step that God asks you to take, you are moving with the Holy Spirit. Every step you take, you've just aligned yourself with God. You've just agreed with God. And if you can catch this, every step God asks you to take, you literally just accomplished God's will on this earth in that moment. If we're supposed to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done," then every time he shows us a step and we take it, we just fulfilled his will on this earth and we just brought the kingdom into that moment, that situation, that circumstance, that relationship, that family, that house. Whatever it is, you just literally established God's will and released his kingdom.

Wouldn't that change our thinking about next steps if we started thinking about it like that? That every step, I just fulfilled God's will in this moment. I just established God's kingdom in this space. One step at a time. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. A lamp to my feet, he'll show me my next step. And a light to my path, he'll show me the direction that I'm going. And that's about it. God usually gives you a vision for your life and the very next step you're supposed to take. And this is where we get super confused. Because he gives us the light to our path, okay, we're going that way, and then a lamp to my feet, and he says, "Okay, step here." You go, "Okay, I got it." "Alright, step here." "Okay, alright, I got it. I got this thing. Okay, this is me and God. I like this." "Step here." "Okay, I got it."

And then he says, "Step here." "But we're going that --" "Yeah, I know but I want you to step here." "But I -- but I thought --" "I know. Just step here." "Okay." "And then we step here." And then he says, "Now step here." "But Lord, we were going that way." "I know but just --" "But Lord, we're going --" "Just step here." "Okay." And then we start getting confused because now he says, "Step this way," and we're like, "But I thought we were going that way." "Yeah, I know but I want you to step --" "Okay, but I thought we were going that way." And then he says, "Step here." "But --" "Here." "Because you say so, Lord, I will do it."

The fastest way to get where you want to go in life is to take every step he gives you in the order that he gives them to you. And hear me, you can't bypass the steps you don't like. We can try but he will bring us back around to them again. So in a lot of ways, you're either missing the opportunity or delaying the inevitable. And I think the reason we don't take steps that make a lot of sense to us is because of fear. But God will lead you into your fears to set you free in his love. And what I want you to see is it says, "A lamp and a light," remember, pillar of cloud by day, pillar of fire by night. Fire, which means no matter how black, how confusing, how disoriented you are in life, he promises that his light will always show you the next step and the direction that you're going. That is the goodness of God.

And that's how Jesus lived his life. I tell you the truth. The Son does nothing by himself. He can only do what he sees his Father doing because whatever the Father does, the Son also

does for the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. This is how Jesus lived his life. How did Jesus know what cities to go and what to preach, what disciples to choose? Because he took whatever step the Father gave him. I only go where I see the Father going, I only say what I see the Father saying, I only do what I see the Father doing. And the same is true for you and me. And because the Father loves you, beloved son, beloved daughter, he shows you all he is doing. He is watching, counseling, teaching and instructing, no matter what. Are you with me on this?

Now, some of you are probably like, "Okay, this whole next step language, I like it. What's the next step?" Let me define it for you to make it really easy. A next step is any belief or behavior that moves you forward on your journey with Jesus. Any belief, any behavior that moves you forward on your journey with Jesus. Beliefs change our thinking, behaviors change our actions. And at the heart of any next step God asks you to take is either repentance or faith. I want you to think about this with me. Any next step God asks you to take, at the heart of them is either repentance or faith.

Look at this. Repentance from dead works and of faith towards God. What is repentance? Repentance is changing our thinking. It's changing our mind. It's we stop going this way and we start going this way, but most importantly in our mind and in our beliefs. And when we repent, what we're doing is we're agreeing with God. We're aligning with him. We're moving towards him. So repentance, a next step of belief would be choosing to believe that you're a beloved son or daughter regardless of how you feel about yourself. That's a next step. That's repentance.

It would be choosing to believe that you are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus even when you are fully aware of your own sin. That's repentance. It's actually a next step. It's choosing to believe that God is good no matter how much the world stinks right now. It's choosing to believe there's always hope no matter how hard your situations or circumstances are. That's repentance. That's beliefs. Those are actually next steps on your journey with Jesus. Make sense?

So it's either repentance or it's faith for we walk by faith, not by sight. What is faith? Faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see. Faith is moving forward with God regardless of how we feel. Faith is choosing to tithe even though I want to hold on to my money. Faith is choosing to forgive even though I want the apology. Faith is choosing to serve even though I want to be served. Faith is moving forward regardless of how we feel because without works, faith is dead. So at the heartbeat of any next step is repentance and faith.

Now catch this. Repentance is how we learn to think like God, faith is how we learn to see like God. So as I live a life of repentance and faith, I'm learning how to think like God and see the world like God which eventually will bring me to this place where I don't have to get super



consumed or confused about what step to take. I start naturally and effortlessly moving through life because I'm learning how to think like God and see like God, so next steps just start unfolding in front of me little by little and I'm not even conscious or aware of them, I'm just moving with God. Does that make sense to you?

That's kind of like the deep water piece for some of you that can grab that out. It's repentance and faith, how we think like God, how we see the world like God. And here's where a lot of us get stuck. We get so stuck on what's the step? Is it this step or this step? I don't know. Should I do this or should I do that? Do you ever feel like this or know somebody like that? Is it this, is it this? Is it this, is it this? Is it this, is it this? Stop. Stop.

How does a toddler learn to walk? Not by looking down. By looking at their father who starts backing up and the baby starts going, "Haah." But the moment the toddler looks down, boom. Right? How did Peter walk on water? When he looked at Jesus. How did he sink? He looked at his feet. Aaah, boom. Don't be next step conscious, be Jesus-focused and you'll be naturally and effortlessly starting to move forward on this. Are you with me on this?

Okay. Now, if you can grab all that to this point, let me give you these two stories and contrast them together because these I think are the two ways we live our lives. One is King Saul and one is the Apostle Paul. King Saul is the current king of Israel. He's been told by Samuel the Prophet, the messenger of God, to wait seven days for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice so they can go and fight the Philistines in battle. You can read all about this in 1 Samuel. The context doesn't matter as much but I want you to catch the concept. He knows what his next step is and he decides not to do it.

When I saw that the men were scattering and that you did not come at the time set, and that the Philistines were assembling, I thought now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal and I have not sought the Lord's favor, so I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering. I saw, I thought, so I felt compelled. That's all you got to catch in this. I saw, I thought, so I felt compelled. And Samuel shows up and he says, "You just rebelled against the Lord." And the consequences are devastating. He loses the kingship because he did it his way. Because there is a way that seems right to the man, but in the end it leads to death.

Now compare that to the Apostle Paul who has the thorn in his flesh and is crying out to God for it to be removed. Three times I asked the Lord to take it away from me but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness, therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me." Ready? I asked, he said, therefore I will. Don't worry about the rest of it. I asked, he said, therefore I will.

So here's the question. Which of these two ways do you live your life? I asked, he says, therefore I or I saw, I thought, so I felt compelled. I saw, I thought, so I felt compelled. Hear

me. Here's what the world is doing right now. The world is telling you to connect the dots in any order you want, to color outside the lines. Do what feels good for you when it feels good. It's about you, your happiness, your contentment, your freedom. What do you want to do, that's what you should do. And the Bible tells us that in the last days, we will surround ourselves with people who teach us and say things what we want to hear. Not truth. What we want to hear.

So can I ask you a question? Who do you surround yourselves with? What kind of podcasts are you listening to? What kind of music are you listening to? What kind of social media feeds are you putting in here? What kind of friends do you have? Are they things that are telling you grace and truth or things that are telling you what already want to hear? And if God leads us in small steps, not giant leaps, then we have to understand so does the world. No one leaps from where they are back to Egypt. It's a series of little steps that we're not even aware of that take us back to bondage. Nobody leaps from a good marriage to jumping in bed with a strange person. Let's be real clear on that. That's not a leap. When it's discovered, we think it's "Whoa". It's not a leap, it's a thousand little steps.

No one leaps from where they are to having this massive addiction. No one leaps into have a hard heart. No one leaps into losing their faith. No one leaps into getting out of church. No one leaps into blowing up their home. No one leaps into having really significant mental health challenges. No, no. It's a thousand little steps. It's the compromise. It's the look at this, it's the hang out here, it's the not do the thing God asked me to do. And we're not even aware of it and these little worldly steps, little by little by little, we make this really slow, gradual U turn and we're not even aware that it's happening. And then all of a sudden, one day, we wake up and we're in Egypt.

How did I get to Egypt? And then we're mad at everyone else. We want to like stone Moses for it. It's like Moses ain't there, bro. He's in the Promised Land. Actually, he didn't make it because he got mad at you for turning around. That's really funny if you know your Bible stuff there. It's little by little, isn't it?

And here's what we think. "Well, I'm not going to Egypt, I'm just not moving a lot right now." Hear me. If God tells you a step and you don't take it, you're actually moving towards Egypt. Every step God asks you to take and you say no, it's actually a step back to bondage. You're either moving forward to freedom with God or you're moving back to bondage with the world.

Come on. I saw, I thought, so I felt compelled. Can I just tell you? This is how I think a lot of people lived the last two years. Really good people who loved Jesus before the pandemic and who were walking with God and then everything started happening. And what did they do? They surrounded themselves with people who were teaching them things they wanted to hear. So they saw, they thought, they felt compelled as opposed to I asked, he said, therefore I will. Come on, what's the last step that God asked you to take? Did you take it?

The world leads in vague, generalities. God leads in specific steps. And if you tell me that you're really into health, then I should just be able to look at you and say, "Tell me the last time you worked out or the last healthy meal you ate." And if you really are into health, you'd be able to tell me that answer like that. If you tell me you're a really generous person, then I look at you and say, "Then tell me the last time you really blessed somebody," you'd be able to answer that question like that. If you tell me you're humble, I should be able to look at you and say, "Then tell me the last person you apologized to and why," you'd be able to tell me like that.

So if I say to you or you say to me you're following Jesus, I should be able to look at you and say, "Then what's the last next step you took," and you should be able to answer it like that. Because they're specific and we know we're taking them and we're moving with God little by little. They don't have to be these big epic things. We moved our whole family across the country to whatever. No, just a little step which might literally have just been to come to church today, which might literally be to read the Bible plan yesterday, which might literally be to turn that TV show off because it's like filling my mind with garbage.

That. Are you with me on this? Listen to me. We are never stuck because God isn't moving. We get stuck because we aren't following. When God sets the people free, he brings them all the way to the Red Sea. Here's the Red Sea, Pharaoh and his army are coming in and they're kind of trapped in between. They panic, they freak out, they want to go back to Egypt, they cry out to Moses and Moses, in a very spiritual way, stands up before them all and says, "Don't be afraid." That's how I picture it. "Don't be afraid. Stand still for the Lord will fight on your behalf." Ready?

And then I think God, with a sense of humor, says, "The Lord says to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.'" God's like, "You're not stuck because I'm not moving. You're stuck because you're not following. I've already told you what to do and where to go, so move on." So move on. So move on.

Sometimes you got to go through a Red Sea and through a desert and through wilderness and through some giants, but hear me, your future is on the other side of your fear. Your future is on the other side of the inconvenience. It's on the other side of the discomfort. It's on the other side of the preference and the opinion and we've got to have a little bit more resiliency. Tell the Israelites to go through the sea. Some of you just need to hear this. Go through the obstacle. Go through the hardship. Move on. We're crying out to God like it's so hard, it's so bad, and he has so much compassion that he has already moved. And so just keep coming. Just keep coming. I know you're crying out and I'm leading you into freedom. Just keep coming.

Here's what we do, though. I think so many times we put our foot in like cold water, we're like, "Whoo, can't. Whoo. I know the step I need to take but it's like, yeah, God tells me to get in a Circle so I filled out the form but whoa, I'm going to ghost that person when they actually call me about getting in one. That's way too much." That hits way too hard for some of you as well, right? God tells me to forgive that person and then all of a sudden I see them out on the town, whoo, I can't do -- no, not today, not today, Lord. I could keep going.

Have some resiliency. Have some grit. Have some go through the sea. You're like, "But I'm so weary and worn out, I'm crying out to the Lord." He's like, "I know. Move on is the best thing that you can do." This is why we're in Next Steps Center, church. We're always focused on movement. Because when you move with God, you're free and you're healthy. And he's taking you somewhere you don't understand but in the end you'll be able to look back and say, "It's a unicorn." We stop after about dot four and say, "This is trash. Ain't nothing coming out of this." Is it? Or was it just, whoo, too much for us? Which really wasn't too much. That's exactly what we needed.

Come on. God sets you free in Jesus. And then he teaches you how to live free one next step at a time. This is what it means to be a disciple. This is what it means to follow the cloud. And it is the only way you get from where you are to where God is inviting you to go. So close your eyes with me.

Come on. What's the Holy Spirit saying to you today? What's he whispering, stirring up, challenging in your heart? Maybe you've been crying out to the Lord for so long and he's saying, "I know. I hear it, I see it, I'm moved by it, so I've come. It's time to move on." Maybe some of us, we just need to repent over this last season of doing what we saw, what we thought, and what we felt compelled to do. Maybe we need to acknowledge that we're surrounding ourselves and putting things in us that are saying what we need to hear instead of the -- or what we want to hear instead of the grace and truth that we need to hear.

Come on. Little by little, spiritual momentum starts with a single next step, so what's one little step -- what's the last -- I just -- let's just do that. What's the last thing God asked you to do, and are you doing it? And if you say, "I have no idea," it literally just might be just to come back to church. To come back to church next week, to read the Bible plan tomorrow, to get in a Circle, to forgive that person, to spend time with your kids. Whatever it might be, what is that thing that you know has been stirred up inside you you can't even connect it to a step, that's the step. Little by little, step by step, and God and his goodness and his grace is watching and counseling, instructing and leading you one next step at a time. So Jesus, help us follow you, the Good Shepherd, from where we are to where you're inviting us to go. Give us courage, Lord, to move on and start taking some next steps. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.