

Introduction

If you have a Bible, and I hope that you do, I want to invite you at this time to open it up with me to the Book of Revelation chapter 4. If you don't have a Bible, there is a Bible right there in the tray in the seat in front of you, or you can always use whatever device you may happen to have handy, if you have the Bible on that, and you can use that as well. In case you don't know it, I do still work here. (Laughter) I'm glad to be here. I haven't preached in a few weeks; I'm grateful to be with you today. I'm rested. I'm still a vegan, for those of you that are asking. I know; it's not my favorite. The good news is that my pants fit looser these days, so that's good. Also, I have a lot of things that are in my heart and on my mind today... things I've been praying about... things I'm looking forward to sharing with you. I think I can squeeze it in in about an hour and a half. (Laughter) I'm looking forward to it... just being with you and sharing what God has put on my heart. I just want to ask that we go before the Lord and that we ask Him to bless our time together and that He would speak to us and that He would guide us.

"God, we want to hear from You today... not from Steve. We want to hear from You. We want to hear the heart that You have for this church, so Lord I pray that You would guide us and show us that. We ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen."

So today is called "Vision Sunday." About twice a year I'll stand up in front of our congregation, and I will say, "These are the things that I've been praying about and thinking about, and this is where we're headed together as a church." Today is a big Vision Sunday for us because we have a lot of big shifts that we are announcing today. Some of you may already know about some of these. We've been talking about them in various meetings and venues. But today is the day that we go public with all of these things. We say, "This is where we're headed together as a Church." If you are a guest with us, typically what I would do on a Sunday morning is I would take a passage of Scripture, and I would walk through that. I would demonstrate what it has to do with our lives and how it points back to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today is a little bit different day, so I would encourage you to come back another time to see what a typical Sunday would be like for us. But I am excited that you are with us today because you are going to hear about this church's heart to reach this city. We have a vision statement that we say a lot of times around here. This is what it is: "Making Houston more like heaven by helping Houstonians become more like Jesus." It's pretty simple and pretty straight forward. We want to help this city become more like heaven. If you're going to make this city become more like heaven, however, you have to know what heaven looks like.

That's why I want us to take a moment and look at Revelation chapter 4. Revelation chapter 4 is a picture, a glimpse, into the throne room of heaven. So would you begin reading with me in Revelation 4:6:

"And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

*'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!'"*

They say it over and over. "Hallelujah" is right. They say it over and over and over. Now there's a lot of different potential ways that you can interpret the Book of Revelation. We're not going to go into that today, but most biblical scholars would agree that these four creatures represent all of creation. And the declaration that is happening in the throne room of heaven is that all of creation, for all of eternity, cries

out about the holiness and the honor due unto our God, that all of eternity people are crying out, "Our God is amazing." After that, in verse 9:

"And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who is seated on the throne, Who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders..."

Now who are the twenty-four elders? The twenty-four elders, we think, represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. In other words, they represent the people who have led all of the people of God... those who came before Messiah Jesus and those who came after Messiah Jesus. So, in other words, the twenty-four elders, the people of God, all the people of God "...fall down before Him who is seated on the throne and worship Him Who lives forever and ever. They cast down their crowns..." They have crowns on that represent their ruling power, their ability, the things that God entrusted to them... "They cast their crowns before the throne..." They throw them down at the feet of Jesus. "...saying,

'Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things and by Your will they existed and were created.'"

So what happens in heaven? All of creation and all of the people of God worship and bring glory unto God forever. It's not always just through music; it's not always just through song. It could be through building, through creating, through writing... whatever... through acts of service. But over and over, all of creation, all of the people of God, are giving glory unto God.

(I'm going to pause for just a minute. I see some people coming in looking for a place to sit. If you could move in a little bit there on your row, that would really help, because I don't want folks to have to stand at the back. So would you guys be willing to do that? If I've got a deacon that could help some of these folks find a seat, I sure would appreciate that.)

So what's happening in that is that we've got people in creation, and we've got all of creation that is giving God glory over and over and over and over. They are taking off their crown and they are setting them before Him. I want you to hear this: The way that you will receive the greatest amount of glory in life, in eternity, is actually taking all of the glory off of yourself and giving it to God. Have you ever been in worship... man, for me, we're singing that song "Jesus, Only Jesus" and I realize, "Man, it is not about Steve Bezner." I just sense that, I feel it; I'll close my eyes, and I picture Jesus Christ standing, arms raised, receiving glory, and I'll just stand up, and I'll raise my hands up to Him to give Him full worship and all praise. And do you know what's crazy? It's I feel more contentment in that moment than I will the rest of my week. (Clapping) Why is that? ...Because we were created to not bring glory to ourselves but to give glory back to Jesus. That's what you were created for. That's why you can be in worship and you can sense that. You can go, "Why do I feel so good when I'm giving all glory back to God?" because God made you for that reason. Now here's the thing: If we're going to make Houston more like heaven, we need as many people taking off their crown and throwing it before Jesus Christ as entirely possible. It starts with us, but it moves forward when people right now that are far from God take off their crowns. So I want to stop for just a second, and I want to say this. If you are here today and you would say, "Steve, I have never had that sort of a feeling, that I have found more contentment giving glory to someone other than myself." What does that mean? This is what it means: A loving God made you exactly the way you are. I don't care what your flaws are. I don't care what your faults are. I don't care what you've done. He made you. He loves you and I don't care if you were yesterday breaking all ten of the Commandments at the same time. Today, He loves you and He receives you. And this is what: He sent His Son Jesus Christ for you. The punishment

that you should have received for breaking all of those commandments... His Son Jesus Christ bore them on a cross; He died for you so that you wouldn't have to die. That Son Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and He did that to conquer death so that you could have an eternal relationship with Jesus. Today, if you put your faith in Him, you can know Him, and you too can join us at the foot of the throne, casting your crown into eternity. So I share that with you because I want you to understand this: "That's what we call the Gospel. That's the Good News... that no matter what you've done, no matter who you are, you can spend eternity with God. You can have relationship with God." So today, I want you to understand that this is the thing that drives us as a church: That we want everyone to know that God loves them and has sent His Son Jesus to save them. In addition to that, I want you to know that that's not just what drives this church today. That's what has driven this church since day one.



You may not know this... This church was started in 1973 as a bus ministry... a bus ministry. What happened? A group of people that were a little bit crazy for Jesus, drove to Tennessee and picked up a group of school buses. I've heard somewhere between eleven and fourteen; I don't know what the actual number was. They started driving them back. One of them broke down, and they left it on the side of the road. (Laughter) These were high-quality school buses. They came back here and do you know what they did? They painted them and they put "Northwest Houston Memorial Baptist Church." You can't fit that on a softball jersey, right? They put that on the side of that bus, and they started driving around. Do you know what they did? They started knocking on doors, and they starting telling people, "On Sunday morning, we're going to be at this intersection at this time, and we will pick up any person in your house that wants to come and learn more about Jesus Christ." What would make people do that? ...Because they believed that this city needs to look more like heaven because they believed that people need to know Jesus Christ.

I want you to know that I do not take it lightly that I have been entrusted with the leadership of this church today. The same thing that drove that church in 1973 needs to drive this church today. Let me tell you the problem with that. The problem with that is that we're losing. Our city is more lost than it's ever been. More people are far from God than they've ever been. Here's the other thing. It's that a lot of those people are really, really nice. You know those people. You've got these coworkers and these neighbors. They're super nice; you like them a lot. They're really kind but they're going to hell. You know, what's funny is that we don't say that a whole lot, do we? We don't stand up and say, "Hey guys, we believe A) that there is a hell, B) that there are people in it, and C) that some of the people we know right now are headed there if we don't intervene on behalf of Jesus Christ." That's what God has done. He has given us the Good News of the Gospel to prevent people from having to spend an eternity apart from Him.

So here's the thing: We don't only want people to cast their crowns before Jesus. We want to stop people from spending an eternity separated from Him. So what do we have to do? Today, I want to say, "We have to recapture the same spirit that drove this church in 1973. We have to, metaphorically speaking, get in a bus and go take the Gospel to the people. That's what we have to do today.

Now, bus ministry isn't going to work today, in 2016. Right? If I show up at a corner and say, "I'll pick up your kids and take them to church for you," they would be like, "You're creepy; get away." That's not going to work anymore. But it used to. Do you know what? We want to do what will work today to reach people for the Gospel and the Good News of Jesus Christ. The problem is that, I think, we have, in a manner of speaking, become defensively minded rather than offensively minded.

I'm a life-long Texan, and one of our greatest State symbols of pride is the Alamo.



If you've not been to the Alamo, you should work that in. A piece of advice, if you've never been to the Alamo... Don't plan your day around it. It's going to take you about four minutes to see the whole thing. (Laughter) Alright? There's a Fuddrucker's right across the street. But I just want you to know that whenever you go to visit the Alamo... it's this great symbol of pride, but do you know what's funny about the Alamo? We got creamed at the Alamo. Literally, every person that was in the Alamo died. It's kind of like we had to

turn it into a symbol of pride because if we didn't, we would never want to talk about it ever again because we got absolutely obliterated. Why? ...Because whenever you get surrounded and you take a defensive posture, that's when you lose. You see, the place where Texas won was at the Battle of San Jacinto, but we don't really talk about that a whole lot. We talk about this defensively minded thing. Can I tell you what? I think sometimes we get like that with the Church. We start saying, "Man, do you remember whenever we had this thing or whenever we did this thing... we kind of get in this mindset where what we want to do is we want to hunker down, we want to get together with people who think like us, talk like us, look like us... and we say, "Let's just stay here, and if we stay here maybe the Church can keep living." Guys... that's not what the Church was ever intended to do. Jesus Christ declares to His disciples, "I will build My Church and the gates of hell will not stand against it." Do you know that gates are not an offensive tool. Gates are defensive. Why? ...Because hell is scared of the Church. Hell is scared of the Church when the Church does what the Church is supposed to do, which is take the Holy Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ and go into the darkness. Right? That is what is supposed to frighten hell. You see, Jesus said that those gates cannot stand against the Gospel because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is more powerful than any sort of force that we will ever, ever come up against. The problem, however, is that for whatever reason we oftentimes think in terms of a defensive strategy: "How can we protect the Church?" ...when we ought to be saying, "How can we destroy the darkness?"

So I want us to talk today about how we might be able to destroy the darkness. Since April, I've been asking this question: "What would it look like for Houston Northwest to double her Kingdom influence? What would it look like for our church to double her Kingdom influence... to have twice the people, twice the baptisms, and twice the reach into the city? I want to be careful right now. You're saying, "Oh... well yeah; sure... you are just like every other preacher. You just want to grow your church." Listen to me. Sure, do I want our church to grow? Sure, of course. That means more people are coming to Jesus Christ. But this is not so that our church will grow. This is so that the Kingdom of God will spread. This is what we want. (Clapping) We want the Kingdom to spread. And the way that the Kingdom spreads is not that we fill up this room. It's that we get trained up and get sent out. That's the way that it works.

So today I want us to talk about what it would look like for our church to have double the Kingdom influence in the next five years. I want to talk to you today about a five-year plan for our church to move forward into the city to say, "We are now ready to go on the offensive for Jesus Christ. Now, we have a few obstacles.

1. We do not have a training delivery system for our church. People all the time are like, "I need to get trained. You want me to do these things; how am I going to get trained?"
2. We don't have a discipleship system than can multiply easily.
3. Our current physical space is not conducive for number 1 and number 2, as we are currently structured. And that's if we stay the same size. If we keep growing like we've been growing, it's going to be an even bigger problem.

So we are now at a point where we have to choose. This is what I'm choosing today, declaring before you as your pastor, that I have decided and your church leadership has decided, your elders have decided, your pastors have decided... this is what we've prayed and decided: We had a moment to choose... We could either say, "Let's just kind of be who we've always been, hunker down and just bide our time," or... "Let's go after the darkness." In case you don't know, we're a little bit crazy, so we chose to go after the

darkness. That's what we have picked today. (Clapping) So I want to share with you what that's going to look like. So here you go. Five goals that will be guiding Houston Northwest from now through 2021:

1. Baptize 1250 people. Let that sit on you for just a second. The first question I'm always asked whenever I present this: "How did you come up with that number?" I'll tell you. Kind of our best years in baptism, if you go back and look at records, is about 125 people. If we're going to double our influence, I multiplied that by 2: that's 250... then I multiplied it by 5, for 5 years... that's 1250 people. So there you go. I can do basic math, so that's how I came up with that number. That isn't like I spent a lot of time in prayer, seeking out that number. Here's the truth. I think that Jesus Christ wants to absolutely obliterate 1250, but it's where we are going to start. Now how does that happen? It doesn't happen because I get better at preaching. Do you know that studies will show that the average Christian, 99% of Christians, this year will share the Gospel with zero people. I would ask, "What if we just moved from zero to one?" Wow, that would move the needle a ton. What if you went from saying, "I didn't share the Gospel with anybody..." this year to saying, "I'll share it with at least one person a month." What would happen if the hundreds of people who come to our church every week said, "I'm going to get serious about sharing the Gospel as often as I can." What would then begin to happen? You see, the broader that we sow the Gospel seed, the more people that come to faith in Christ. The more people that come to faith in Christ, the more people that we can then see come to know Him and be baptized. We are going to now do this. We are going to strategically align our sermons, our ministries, and our activities so that every single person in our church can actively find ways to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that we can see twice as many people hear the Gospel, twice as many people say "Yes" to the Gospel, and twice as many people baptized. Anybody excited about that? (Clapping) That's good. Some of you are going, "I really don't want to do that." And the reason that you don't want to do that is you are saying, "I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to share the Gospel." That's what goal #2 is.
2. We're going to train 1000 people in this church to engage their domain... whatever that domain might be. I want to ask that everybody open up their worship guide. You should have received one of these as you came in today. Open up your worship guide and pull out this insert with me. It says "Equipping Classes" at the top. People say to me, "Steve, I want to share the Gospel; I do not know how. I want to be trained." If you look on this, we are going to undergo a significant shift in the way that we are structured. So I want to stand before you right now. I am going to do my part. I am going to say, "I messed up." Wow... when was the last time... Typically, I have people saying, "I did this wrong." So here we go. This is what we have not done well. We have not provided opportunities for people to be trained, so we are going to fix that. Starting next Sunday, we are going to have equipping classes available for you. Now, some of these are different. Some of these are engaged to things like parenting and marriage. That's because that's the domain that right now you need the most help with. Others of these are like, "How to share your faith," "How to multiply disciples"... that kind of stuff. You need those sorts of things. Other things are, "How to study your Bible" ...how to be able to understand that. We are providing these so that you can grow, so that you can understand these things and grow faithfully in your application and understanding of the Gospel ... so that you might be able

to live on mission. So you can read the list there. I'm not going to read through all of those. I do want you to know this. You can go online and register for those. I think the registration links will go live at the end of the day. But here's the thing: Even if you go home and you're like, "I forgot to register... I guess I can't go." No... false. We need you. You have to get trained. Listen. If you keep coming every week and you're like, "I'm never going to get trained; I'm never going to do that." That makes me very angry. You should not do that because God has called you, not only to come and sit but also to get trained for battle. This is the thing that we need to do together, and it's going to take every single one of us. Next Sunday, I want to challenge you... Pick one of these places where you need to get trained, if you need to be trained, and go and get trained. ...Because if you go and you do that, then we can begin to get equipped so that we can go and engage this city well. You can read more about this online at hnw.org/equip, but this is what we're going to do. We're going to get trained so that we can take the Gospel into whatever domain we find ourself... our office, our neighborhood, our family... whatever.

3. We are going to have twice as many people in our Life Groups and twice as many people serving in ministry. Why does this matter? Currently, our Life Groups meet on campus. I want you to know... I love our Life Groups. I have the honor of being invited to many of their social gatherings and getting to know the people. We have incredible people that populate our Life Groups that are doing incredible things, loving one another; they are exhibiting biblical community. It is amazing. But this is the truth that we began to realize: As we gather here on campus, what we are doing unintentionally is we are communicating that the church's job is to always gather together and not to go out. The other thing that we began to recognize that we were doing is that we were turning those Life Groups, again, unintentionally, into a place where we would invite people in but we were not ratcheting them up to say, "Go be a Kingdom stick of dynamite out in your neighborhood, out in your office, out at Whataburger" ...whatever.

So the reason that I bring this up is we're going to undergo two big shifts. Shift number one is next Sunday you can get trained in whatever hour and in whatever class you want to go to and then come to worship the other hour. The other big shift is that a lot of our Life Groups, starting next week, are going to begin moving from on-campus to off-campus. That means that a lot of them that have really, really large groups are breaking into multiple smaller groups that are meeting in homes or meeting in offices. Wherever they are going to meet, they're doing those things because they want to not only experience biblical community... which you need to grow. Right? You don't just need to get head knowledge, but you also need to grow in your experience of community. The Bible is clear that the earliest church met in the temple courts and house-to-house. You need people to know you, to pray for you... you need to confess your sin to other believers. You need to bear one another's burdens. You need to serve with them. You need to do all of those things. But you also need to pray for the lost together. You also need to find ways that you can carry the Gospel out into your community. And here's the thing: The beautiful thing about a Life Group that meets in a home is that it's not dependent upon the church to provide a space for it to meet. So whenever you reach a certain point where you say, "There are enough people here that now we can move into two different groups." Boom... You can do that. You can pick whatever time works for you during the week... you can find a place that works for you to meet, and you just go and you do it. It doesn't require us to say, "Well, we have to turn the air conditioner on in this room at this time." You just go and you do it. This is the truth; this is what we know. If we want to see the Gospel begin to move, our church facility cannot be

the bottleneck. If the Church is going to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ move, we have to have a delivery system that can multiply quickly, that can be nimble, that can be adapted, and that can move into whatever circumstances and whatever situations are around. We're seeing this happen in parts of the world that don't have the luxury of having a large church building. Now here's the thing. They would love to have a building like this to get together and gather for worship. But, where they're seeing the Gospel move forward is they're saying, "We're filling up this house... it's kind of big; we're going to send this person out now, and they're going to take a few people and they're going to go start another one." They're moving that forward. They are always looking for ways to reach out and to see the Gospel spread.

So here's the thing: I want to begin to challenge you today, not only to get trained but to begin looking for, to begin praying about, how you might join a Life Group. We have about 400 of our adults currently in Life Groups. On a typical garden-variety Sunday morning, we will have 1400-1500 adults in worship. Again, I'm not the best at math, but that is 1000-1100 adults that are not in a Life Group every week. And I just told you, "You need biblical community to be able to experience and understand the power of the Gospel in your life, to be able to pray, but to also go on mission together. This is what I want to challenge you to do. Will you not only get equipped and trained, but would you also join a group?"



We are going to start a series on Sunday, September 11th. That series is going to be entitled, "Life Together." We have written a curriculum about it. We've got a sermon series that's based on the Book of Ephesians. It's about how the Gospel changes lives and how the Gospel creates the Church. I'm super excited about it. It's going to be awesome. You're going to want to be here for every single one of those sermons. But in addition to that, we are going to ask every person... every person in our church... to join a Life Group for ten weeks, through that series. This is what I think. I think you'll get to the end of that series and you'll say, "You know what? These people, they are not sacrificing chickens in their front room. I mean, it's pretty normal. I'm okay with this. I'm going to keep hanging out with them." But I want you to begin saying, right now, "How could I join in? How could I be part of a Life Group?" We'll be talking to you more about that as we move toward September 11th. That is what I want you to begin thinking about.

But wait... it's not just about getting equipped and going into a Life Group. Here's the truth: Some of us today, right now, you don't need any more training. I mean, I know that's crazy. But you've been studying the Bible since before you could read. People have been reading you Bible stories. You have had more theological training than many pastors on the other side of the globe. That's actually true. There are so many pastors right now that don't even have their own copy of God's Word, let alone any kind of books or commentaries. They have never heard of Lifeway; they have never heard of any these kinds of things. That would absolutely blow their mind to be able to have access like that. Some of us right now... let's just be honest... we don't need to be trained any more. I need you to be honest in your assessment. If that's you and you say, "You know what? I've probably got enough training." I would like to challenge you to grow in a different way, starting next Sunday. Next Sunday is "Promotion Sunday"... Super Sunday in our children's ministry. We need people all over this campus to help serve so that we can see our church become the sort of church that is always providing a positive first impression for our city. So, in other words, we need people that will stand in the parking lot; we need people that will greet at the doors; we need people who will work in the Connection Center. We need people who will greet; we need people who will usher. We need people who will do all of those kinds of things. Outside of this room, we also need tons of people to invest in our kids. If you are in this room right now, I bet that there's a pretty high probability that whenever you were a kid, you went to church and someone invested in you. They taught you the Scriptures. They taught you about what it meant to follow Jesus Christ. I would challenge you, if you're hearing that and you go, "Wow... that was me." And you actually are nice to children... (Laughter) ...then I would challenge you to go and to serve in our children's ministry. And I would say to you, do you know what you ought to do next week? You ought to start teaching second graders the Scripture. Why? ...Because somebody did it for you, and it changes the spiritual destiny of a child and oftentimes of a family. Did you know how many adults come to faith in Jesus because their kids like coming to church? ...Tons. Our student ministry could use tons of volunteers to help make disciples, to lead a table group, to greet kids at the door, to just mentor them, to be beside them. Over and over and over we see that. We need people on Sunday morning in pretty much every single ministry. Here's the thing: Many of us right now, the reason that we're not serving is that we've not been asked. Well, today... I'm asking. Please. Please. Next Sunday come and worship in one hour... 10:45 or 9:00... and then in the other hour, I want to challenge you... get trained or get to serving... because we need you to do this.

I don't know if you've ever used a sponge to wash your car or whatever. If you get one of those big industrial sponges, and you plunge it into the water... it can only soak up so much. Eventually, it won't take any more water on. You pull it out and then you have a couple of options... Right? You can use it at that moment, or you can just drop it back into the bucket. Have you ever had the unfortunate incident of leaving a sponge in a bucket and forgetting about it for about a week? Yeah... It smells ripe; it sours. Sponges that soak up and then sit always sour. The truth is the same as it applies to Christians. I know a lot of Christians that have been sitting and soaking, and they have turned sour. Do you know the best way to become unsour is to actually start using that water that you've soaked up and start putting it to work, and then you plunge back into the Word and soak up again and get out there. Next week, you need to decide, is it time for me to go and to soak so that I can be equipped, or is it time for me to get to work so that I don't sour? But we need you to do one of those, starting next week. So if we do this, then there will be a way for you to get plugged in.

We have a woman on staff. You met her at the beginning of the service. Her name is Karen Stamps. Her picture, hopefully, is up behind me right now. Karen's email is karens@hnw.org



Her job is to help anybody who wants to get connected into ministry. If you're sitting here right now and you go, "You know what? I could get connected into ministry." You need to talk to her. She'll be at our Connection Center whenever the service is over. You can take your Info Tab and write on there, "I want to serve in a ministry." You can email her. Get in touch with her. She will get you connected so that you can begin serving. So if we reorganize like this, then we will begin to do this. We will come into worship, we will gather, and we will hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed because that is what we need to hear for our own hearts. Then we will grow in the Gospel in one of two ways: We'll either go and get equipped, or we'll go and serve in one of those ministries, and then during the week we'll join a Life Group and we will go with the Gospel. Our Life Groups are not going to be cul-de-sacs of Christian friendships, but our Life Groups are going to be express highways lined with dynamite of the Kingdom of God, blowing open doors that were previously closed to the spiritual power of Jesus Christ.

So here's the thing that I want you to understand: Those things will change the strategy that we currently have. Right now, our basic strategy is "to come," but our new strategy is going to be "to go." We are going to get trained up and sent out. Why? I don't know about you guys, but I don't want to be part of an average church. Right? The average church does this: "We want as many people to come as possible; we're going to fill up this room as many times as possible." That would be great; don't get me wrong. I would love it if we had five services packed to the rafters. That would be awesome. But here's the other thing: If we do that, we're really not any different. What's different? What's different is when we decide that people in this city are not going to go to hell on our watch. We put a stake in the ground and we say, "God, put this church in this part of the city for this time, and if they go to hell, it's going to be because they rejected Jesus... not because we didn't tell them about Him." That's what we have to decide. Here's the thing: I don't want to be part of an average church. Right? You say, "Man... How's your church?" "Average." Why would you even be here? Maybe you already think it is a little bit above-average. But I don't know about you... I don't want average... I don't want above-average. I want Holy Spirit, supernatural, blow-the-doors-off-this-place kind of church. Right? (Clapping) And if that's what you want, then this is what it's going to take: That we pray, we get on our face, and we say, "Lord, guide us," but then we go.

These next two goals are pretty straight-forward and pretty simple:

4. We know that we are going to need to build additional children's space, and we want to do it and be debt-free in five years. The first thing that we've got to do is finish paying off the current debt that we have. We'll talk more about this. I'm not going to dwell on this a long time today, but you'll be hearing more about this. Our children's ministry is growing. We want to have a great space for them so that whenever people show up and they're hearing the Gospel for the first time that they will be ready to be able to be trained, to hear the Gospel, and that we can give the best service possible to those kids so that their spiritual destiny can be changed. We believe, if we do that and if we pay off our debt then, that we will have this accomplished. This room here, our auditorium will match up the availability of education space that we'll have where people will be getting equipped and where our children will be, so that we can fill both areas at the same time. And here's the thing, if we do that and if we pay that debt off, we will then have financial resources that no longer have to primarily and first be poured in here, but they can be directed toward multiplication in all sorts of great areas throughout our city. Which leads me to goal number 5:
5. We plant three homegrown churches out of Houston Northwest. Last week, I loved hearing from Rafael. I know that many of you...(Clapping) Yeah... he was great. We should clap for him. We've had a great time partnering with the Houston Church Planting Network. We've had Max Clark. We've had Justin Moore. I had Rafael Paez. All incredible guys; I love them... but here's the thing. I don't want us to have to keep outsourcing our multiplication. None of those men were members of this church. They were people that were sent to us. We helped coach up, we helped work with, and they're going out. I'm glad that we're starting churches, but true multiplication will happen when the people that God has brought to this church will stand up and say, "Train me; I want to go into my neighborhood, and I want to start a church." I'm beginning to have those sorts of conversations with people, but what I'm praying and asking is that God will raise up those people so that then we can not only train them but then also we can have other people that will be in this room that will stand up and say, "I will go with them." ...Because it's time for us to not only say, "I just want to be here with other believers" but "I'm ready to go" because we want to go, and we want to see this city changed.

So those are the five things that we're going to work toward for the next five years. Those are the big five buckets that, from now to 2021, we are going to be working toward. And here's the thing. I want to ask that every single person in our church join us. It's going to take a lot of commitment; it's going to take a lot of sacrifice; it's going to take a lot of time. Hey, let's be honest. It's going to take financial resources. One of the things that Dan Worrell, our Minister of Operations, shared up here a few weeks ago was that right now, as a church, we're behind budget about \$400,000. What does that mean? It means that we have brought in \$400,000 less than we planned to bring in at this point. So what does that mean? Well... We adjust our spending so that way we're not being irresponsible. It just means that we had \$400,000 worth of ministry in our city and around the world that we planned to do that we have not been able to do yet. That's what it means. We know that there's an oil-downturned economy. A lot of people have been laid off... a lot of people have lost their jobs. We understand that. But do you know what else we also know? We know that there are a lot of people sitting here in this room right now that love coming to this church who have yet to decide to give. I would just challenge you today. If you're here and you've not made the

decision to give... this is not manipulation... this is not guilt... this is just, "Hey... the Lord says that if you're His people then you are supposed to give." And you give so that you don't rob Him, and I would ask that you give so that you fund the mission of this church. I would ask that today you begin saying, "Lord, how can I change my lifestyle or my budget or whatever I need to change so that I can begin giving?"

But before any of that... before giving, before sacrifice, before commitment... the first thing that we have to do is we've got to pray. Here's the thing. Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers build in vain. This is not the Steve Bezner Show, and I hope that that's pretty apparent at this point. Our goal is not so that you'll go, "Man... I love going to hear Steve preach" or "Man... the music there on Sunday mornings is great." I mean, I hope that whenever I stand up, I am faithful in teaching the Word of God to you. I also hope that whenever you come in here on a Sunday morning that we are faithful in bringing excellent worship for you, so that you can encounter and know God. But here's the thing: Our goal is not that you love this gathering more than you love the mission and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our goal is that you say, "I want Jesus Christ to be so supreme that I will do whatever it takes to carry the Gospel out into this city and around the world. The way that that thing is powered is absolutely our activity, absolutely our working, but first and foremost by saying, "God, we want You to be part of this." So I want to ask you... Would you commit to pray for me, for your pastors, for your elders, for this church, and to begin saying, "Lord, we want to see this church do something outrageous, something different, and something big."

Next Sunday, we call it Promotion Sunday. All of our kids go into their new classes. We're kicking off all of these equipping classes. We're planning that we're going to have a big crowd here next week. We're kicking off a new sermon series. All kinds of great stuff is going to be happening next week. But listen... if it's only about the show... we have failed. It's got to be about Jesus, Jesus alone, and us getting ready to be on mission for Him. Come and hear, listen, bring Him glory and then we go out.

On August 24th, a Wednesday night, we're going to have a prayer service for the things I have just talked about. You may remember our friends from Crossover Bible Fellowship... Pastor Blake Wilson... Pastor Artis. They came and they led worship for us on May 1st. We had our baptismal service on that day. If you were here that day, you know that it was incredible as they helped us lead worship. They are going to come that Wednesday night, and together we are going to pray, as two congregations, that God would help us see movement in this city. We're going to pray for Gospel movement; we're going to pray that God would begin to save people. We're going to pray that people will come and know the Lord, that people would be baptized. On top of that, we're going to eat brisket. That's going to be great. So at 5:30, dinner is going to



start. After that, it's going to be worship and prayer. We want you, right now, even if you don't normally come on a Wednesday night, to mark that down... August 24th. You're going to be here, you're going to eat with us, you're going to pray with us, and we are going to see God move forward in this place.

Now here's the thing. Everything that I've just said... I believe. I want you to know I have agonized over it. I've prayed over it, and I truly believe that this is what the Lord has for us as a church. There have been times when I've said, "Lord... this is pretty big. This is pretty radical. Are you sure?" And every time I've felt confirmation from the Holy Spirit. "Yes... this is where we're headed. Move forward." So I'm standing here before you saying, "This is where we're headed." I believe in it, and this is what we're going to do. But the next thing that I want to ask you is to then say, "Will you join me in this?" ...Because this is not going to happen if this is just me. This only happens if everybody says, "Count me in... I'm in." So this is your moment to decide if you're in. I want you to take out your worship guide at this time. Everybody take this out with me. Inside your worship guide there is an Info Tab. I want to ask you to tear that off. Now... if right now you are having a mild anxiety attack because you did not receive one of these as you came in... that will teach you. You better get one next time... I'm just kidding. (Laughter) What you need to do is grab one of those cards in the pocket there in front of you, and I want you to look at the options that are going to come up on the screen. Look at the side that says "Respond." The top two boxes say, "I would like to talk to someone about trusting Jesus as my Savior and Lord." If you say, I do not know what it means to follow Jesus. I've never made that decision. I want to understand it. Check that box and we'll talk to you. Number two: If you say, "Do you know what? I need to be baptized." Well... guess what? We have 1250 people we would like to baptize. We would love it if you would be number 1. (Laughter) So if you would go and do that. But then, after that... I want to ask you how you would be counted in. These are your options:

1. I'll join an off-campus Life Group. As I already talked about, a 10-week series kicks off on September 11th, "Life Together." If you say, "Do you know what? I'll do it. I'll take the leap. I'll do it. I'll jump in." Check that box.
2. If you say, "I will lead an off-campus Life Group." So what does that mean "to lead"? It means that you'll help facilitate discussion. We'll give you some discussion questions. You'll read the passage with people. You don't have to be a Bible scholar to do this. Don't freak out. You'll lead with the questions, and you're just there to help organize, pray, and that sort of thing. There is a training today for those leaders at 4 p.m. in room A103. If you say, "I am ready; I'm in" then I would invite you to come back for this training. If you've already been trained in part one... there's a part two today that will be available at 4 o'clock, so you can come to that.
3. "I will host a Life Group in my home." If you say, "Steve... I don't know if I could lead it, but I've got a house and I would open that up for people to come and meet here and I'll join in on that group." Then check box number 3.
4. "Participate in a Sunday morning Equipping Class." You say, "Alright... it's time for me to get trained... I'll do it." Check that one.
5. "I'll serve in a ministry." You say, "I don't need to be equipped. I'm ready to serve." Check that box right there.
6. Finally, some of us would say, "Do you know what? I have not committed to give. I'm ready to give. I'm going to take my next step to get financially ready." Or maybe you say,

"I've been giving but it's time for me to be a tither... it's time for me to give above and beyond." Then you check that box and you say, "You know what? I'm ready to give toward these things.

It's going to take every single one of us to do this. So what I'm going to do right now is I'm going to pray over us, and I'm just going to say, "Lord, show us how we ought to respond." Alright? ...Because this isn't something that is born from my heart. This is something that I believe is shown to us in Scripture over and over, gathering in the temple courts, gathering house-to-house, going out among the people, preaching the Gospel, praying to see that God will move. So we're going to pray and ask the Lord to show us how we ought to join in on that, and then we're going to worship Him. So would you join me in prayer?

"Lord Jesus, so many people in this city who are so nice and are so kind do not know You. And Your Word tells us that they will die an eternal death apart from You unless we intervene. God, I pray that we would be Your vessels, Your emissaries, and that we would go and that we would share Your Gospel faithfully. God, I pray right now that You would move in the hearts of this room and that You would show people how they ought to respond. If they need to get trained, that they'll sign up for that... If they need to be part of a Life Group, that You'll have them sign up for that. Lord, if they need to give, that they'll do that. But Lord, my prayer is that every person in this room today will decide that they will be a part... that they will be counted in. They will say, 'I'm ready to take my next step; I'm ready to do this. I don't want to be left behind. I want to be part of Your mission and Your plan here in this city.' Lord, show us... show us how we need to respond, and God, give us the opportunity to have the courage to step forward with Your Gospel. We love You, Lord. We praise You, and we thank You... in the Name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen."