

Introduction

Good morning. If you have a Bible with you, I want to invite you at this time to go ahead and take it out. We are going to be in the Book of Acts, so you can go ahead and flip over there. If you don't have a Bible with you, don't worry. You can certainly use the one that's in the seat tray in front of you or use one on your tablet or Smart Phone. We just want to make sure that you understand what we believe regarding the Bible. We believe that the Bible is God's Word to us. It's important for us to read it because that's how God speaks to us and lets us know what it is that He has for us. We also want to give you a quick introduction to the Bible, if this is something new to you. The Bible is divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament gives us a record of God's chosen people Israel. It tells us about what it is that they did on their search to find out who God was. It tells us about their need for a Rescuer, a Redeemer, a Messiah. Now the New Testament tells us about who that Messiah is; His name is Jesus. So we read about Jesus in the New Testament. We read about His life, His birth, His ministry, His death, and His resurrection. We also read about those who followed after Jesus, known as the Church. Well, guess what? Today we are reading in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts picks up right after Jesus has been resurrected. It is the birth story of the Church. So today we will be reading along in Acts chapter 1 here in just a few minutes.

Now before we begin reading today, I want to tell you about our new series. Our new series is entitled "Release, The Kingdom At Hand." We began working on this series back three or four months ago. We are pretty excited about it. We have a booklet that we want to give every single person here at Houston Northwest that we've written. The way to get these booklets is to connect in a Life Group. So as you heard Karen say on the video, we typically have these really cool connection events... Coffee and Conversation... We have HNW Essentials. We have membership classes. We don't have any of that right now because we don't have access to our building. Consequently, we are having to be creative. So we think the best way for you to get connected here at HNW is to connect in a Life Group, and as you connect in that group, then you will find out more and more about what it means to be a part of this congregation. We have a table set up out here in the atrium. If you are not part of a Life Group, an easy thing that you can do is to take a step and go to that table today, and they will tell you where you can head to be part of a Life Group. If you don't have time to stop by the table today or it's too crowded or whatever, then you can let us know through the App or through that card that is there in the seat pocket. We will help you get connected to a group. But we are asking every single person at Houston Northwest to be part of a group for this series because this series is not just driven by my sermons but is driven by the lessons, the curriculum, that we have put together. We have packed a lot of great stuff in this book... not just lessons. We also shot some videos together in which we teach, but we have got some Scripture reading plans that we are inviting everyone to do together. We have also got some really neat tools that you can use to help your friends find out more about who Jesus is. So a lot of great resources in here, and you can get this whenever you connect to a Life Group. We want to invite you to do that. This series is going to be going over the next eight weeks; it is going to take us into the Advent season. We would really appreciate it if you would join us in joining into a group and finding out more about what is going to be happening in this series. We had this really great promotional plan that was going to take four or five weeks and lead us up to kick this off so that you would be, "Wow... this is going to be amazing." Our promotional plan kind of got scrapped so... "Yeah... we're starting." There you go... that's the promotion. Here we go.

I want to just share with you now, from the Book of Acts, the things that the Lord wants to teach us and, I think, how it is that God wants to use this text. You're going to be, I think, blown away at how what the Book of Acts teaches actually goes hand-in-glove with what our church personally is experiencing right

now. I am excited to teach this with you today. Let's pray and then we are going to jump into Acts chapter one.

"Father, we are so grateful for all of the things that You give us... all of the things that You teach us. Lord, it seems like the message that we have been given as a Church... maybe as a city... is that it's time for us to move. So Lord I pray that today You would show every person in this room how it is that they are called to move. May we be faithful in that and to that. Lord, we pray this and we ask it in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

Acts chapter 1, beginning in verse 1... *"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God. And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which He said, 'You heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'*

"So when they had come together, they asked Him, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.'

"Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers."

1. Jesus Begins To Work. (v. 1)

It's no doubt that God is up to something interesting at the start of the Book of Acts. He is moving now from being physically present to spiritually present. He is moving from actually showing them, in eyesight, what it is that they ought to do to now allowing them to take the legacy of the commands that had been given and to go and live them out directly. I want us to look at the Book of Acts. I want us to understand what it is that God is trying to teach us. Now this Book was written by Luke, the physician. Luke wrote the Gospel according to Luke and then this is the sequel. So if the Gospel tells us about the physical life of Jesus, the Book of Acts tells us about what happened after Jesus ascended into heaven. So in this transition period, it is important for us to notice though that Luke believes that Jesus is the One still working in this Book. It's not that the Church starts to do something. It's that Jesus is working in and through His Church.

In verse one... *"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach..."* The implication is that Jesus began working in the Gospel, but now He is going to continue working as He moves forward. So as Jesus continues working, He has something that He wants to do. So what is that? He wants to begin working now, not physically present, but through His Church. Those of us who are here

today are actually the spiritual inheritors of those who heard the Gospel preached and presented for the first time in the Book of Acts. You are here today because someone in this Book that you are about to read heard the Gospel and somehow got it to someone in your life down the line 2000 years ago. I mean... that's incredible; to think about the fact that God has someone, your spiritual forefather, is recorded here in this Book. That is incredible. So here, what we need to do is to understand that even the disciples themselves were confused about what Jesus was trying to do in this moment because they start saying, "Now Lord, are You about to go ahead and get the Kingdom going here in Israel?" He said, "No, no, no... you don't need to know about any of that. I'm about to leave." Now I'm sure that they were confused. In fact, I'm certain that they were actually puzzled about the entire thing. If you notice in verse 3, Jesus had just been resurrected, and the first thing that He does in verse 3 is He actually has to keep presenting Himself alive to them, after His suffering, by many proofs. Why? Well, if you saw someone who you had seen die a violent death just days before and they appeared to you suddenly in your bedroom, you probably would think, "You know, I probably need to not eat pepperoni pizza right before I go to bed at night. It's starting to give me some kind of weird hallucinations and dreams." So the apostles probably think they are having a hallucination... probably think that they are having a dream. Whatever it is that they think, Jesus continues to appear to them over this period of forty days, and not only appear but also teach. And in doing so, He is demonstrating to them, "I am truly who I said that I was." Now who was it that Jesus had said? Just days earlier, in John chapter 14, Jesus had attempted to explain to the apostles that He was indeed God in the flesh. So if you want to, you can flip there; it's just a few pages back to the left, or you can just listen along. John chapter 14 is an incredible passage for us to understand the relationship between Jesus... God the Son... and God the Father. Here are just a few of the things that Jesus says in John chapter 14... John 14:8... *"Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father."* So if you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. John 14:10... *"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works."* John 14:11... *"Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."*

Whenever Jesus said these things originally... before He had been crucified, before He had been resurrected... the disciples probably thought that Jesus was a little bit wacky... at the worst, heretical... because as Jews, the disciples would know that there is only one God. In fact, in the Book of Deuteronomy, there is a central teaching called the Shema, and this is what it says... Deuteronomy 6, starting in verse 4... *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."* So if Jesus had said that He and the Father were One... to the initial casual listener, it might appear that Jesus was saying that He was another God. But actually later, once the apostles understood what Jesus had said, they began to realize, Jesus was not a separate God but Jesus was God the Father then sent in the person... in the body of Jesus Christ. Jesus is part of the doctrine, the godhead known as the Trinity. So it's God in three persons but only one God. So whenever Jesus appears, there is still only one God; but in that place, God's full presence dwelt within the person of Jesus Christ so that everyone might see who God was. So this is a pretty important doctrine for Christians... that Jesus was indeed God.

Yesterday, I was invited to speak on a panel at a local synagogue for Yom Kippur services... the Day of Atonement... the highest holy day in all of the Jewish calendar. I was there with one of my friends Rabbi Steve Gross, and we got the opportunity to explain our theological beliefs to his congregation. So I shared

that really the central piece that is the big disagreement between us and our Jewish friends is that we believe that there already has been a Messiah and that Messiah is Jesus and that Jesus is God in the flesh. The Incarnation of God is a central doctrine for the Church. So whenever Jesus told His apostles that He and the Father were one, He was saying to them something that was incredibly significant. But then He also told them that even though He and the Father were one, that one day they would do greater things than Him. Crazy. Listen to this. John chapter 14 again... verse 12... *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."*

So listen to the things that Jesus has said in John 14:

- I and the Father are one... so I am God.
- I am now leaving but don't worry; after I go away, you guys are going to do greater things than I did.

Now I don't know about you, but if I was one of the apostles, I would probably say, "I don't think so, Jesus. You know... You're Jesus. That's kind of the way it works. You do bigger stuff than we could ever do." So how would it ever be possible? We know that Jesus doesn't lie because whenever He says, "I am going to be with the Father"... guess what? We look here in Acts 1:9, what does He do? He goes to be with the Father... *"...when He had said these things as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight."* Jesus literally... this is not a figurative statement... He literally began to rise off the ground and then float up so high that eventually He disappeared into the clouds. So Jesus keeps His promises: "I'm going to be with the Father. I am going to go a different way than you probably thought. Check this out..." Whoop... and then He goes up. Once He does that, He then says, "Now, since I keep My promises; when I tell you that you will do even greater things than Me..." He keeps His promises. So how in the world is that going to happen?

You see, if Jesus doesn't lie, He has to have a way for us to be able to keep the promise that He made. If Jesus doesn't lie and He says that we will do greater things than He ever did, then it must be that that will come to pass. But how can it be that we, just ordinary folks, will actually do greater things than Jesus ever did? It's important for us to see that what Jesus was saying was not just that the apostles would do greater things but that Houston Northwest Church would be doing greater things than Jesus Himself... greater things.

2. Through His Spirit. (v. 5, v. 8)

How? Well, we see in verse 5... *"You heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* Then again, verse 8... *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* You see, the way that Jesus keeps working, even though He is no longer physically present with us, is that He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who have placed their faith in Him. So as the disciples were wondering, and as we are wondering, how is it that Jesus can keep working if He is no longer physically present? The answer is, "I am going to give you the Holy Spirit... My very presence in this place will now be inside of you." Guess what? Jesus promised that He would give this Spirit, and He promised it in John chapter 14... starting in verse 16... *"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in*

you. "God gives the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised, to live within us so those who have claimed faith in Jesus now have this very presence of God within them. Just as important, Jesus says, if you notice there in verses 16 and 17 of John chapter 14... that *"the world cannot receive the Spirit..."* So the only people who can have the presence of God in their lives in this way... in this full way... are people who have placed their faith in Jesus. In other words, the Church... Those who have yet to say that they have placed their faith in Jesus do not have the Spirit yet.

Now, sometimes you will hear the Spirit referred to as The Holy Ghost, The Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of Jesus... whatever name is given to it, it is still the same thing: It is the very presence of God living within us. I don't have time today to go into the full doctrine of the Trinity, but this is the atomic bomb of truth that you need to hear today... that whenever Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father, He made a promise that changed our lives... that we now have the full presence of God within each and every one of us. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in all believers at all times. In other words, the Holy Spirit right now is not only in me and then once Church ends, it will go to somebody else and then after that go to someone else. No; the Holy Spirit is present in all of us all the time. This is that idea of omnipresence. Psalm 139, starting in verse 7 says this... *"Where shall I go to flee from Your Spirit? Where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."* So we have no problem believing, whenever we read Psalm 139, that God can be everywhere. But in the Old Testament, the way that the Spirit of the Lord was made manifest was that the Spirit of the Lord would fall in one place at a time. But now, in the New Testament, we read that the Holy Spirit is no longer hyper-localized in one individual or one geographic location. But as we will see with the coming of the Holy Spirit next week, in Acts chapter 2, once the Holy Spirit comes, He is everywhere... in the hearts and lives of every person who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ, at the same time. So Jesus can tell His apostles, "You will do greater things than Me because you now have [verse 8] power." I don't know about you but I'm someone who grew up reading comic books; I loved super heros... all that kind of stuff, so power seems like this sort of weird magic-type thing that is on us. But that's not what's happening here. This is the presence of a Holy God that is within us. This isn't some sort of voodoo. This isn't some sort of trick. This isn't a magic trick. This is the presence of God in your life.

So the Greek word there for "power" is "dunamis." It's where we get our word "dynamite". The idea is that the power of God will be so great in those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ that they will be able to explode things that God wants exploded, through the power that He places in them. So we get the wherewithal, the ability now to pray for things, to do things, to address things because God is within us. Now, again, let's go back to that question because you're wondering, "Okay... I'm not Jesus, so how in the world can I do greater things than Jesus?" I think the simple answer is "volume." This is what I mean by "volume." The Spirit of God was fully and completely making His residence in the person of Jesus in the days of the Incarnation, but now the Spirit of Jesus is in every believer, everywhere, all around this planet. That means that right now God could be using billions of people to do His work at the same time simultaneously. Volume is on our side.

You may have heard Rick Warren say that a snowflake by itself is very fragile, but if you stick enough of them together, they can stop traffic. Volume became something that was very personal to each of us as Harvey hovered over our city for three days, dumping 27 trillion gallons of water on our city. I bring this up because I saw a headline in "The Atlantic" that said this: "The Houston flooding pushed the earth's crust

down two centimeters." The water that fell on the city of Houston was so heavy that literally it made an impression on the face of the earth. The truth there is that volume can do great things. Listen to me... volume of believers can change a city. Volume of believers can change our world. Whenever the Holy Spirit takes up residence inside each and every one of us and we are released from this place today, we are carrying the full presence of God with us. We can go anywhere in this city, anywhere in this country, anywhere in this world, and we have access to God the Father, and we can be God's ambassadors in this place because God has called us to do so.

Whenever I heard the word about our building, I'm not going to lie to you. It was something that kind of took me back. I was a little bit stunned, but after I'd had just a couple of minutes to process it, I looked at the title of the sermon series coming up: "Release." I thought, "Lord, You know what You're doing, don't You? You know exactly what it is that You're doing." Might it be that the Lord Himself would say that it would be good for a season for Houston Northwest to lose our buildings so that we would, like the apostles, be forced to intentionally scatter. You see, whenever I look at the apostles in the Gospels, what are they doing? They're always following Jesus around, which is a beautiful thing to do. But then there came a moment where Jesus said, "Alright, guys... I'm out of here." And whenever He left, they then were forced to scatter. It was time for them then to go on. The best way for the Church, for the Gospel, to spread was for Jesus to actually leave because if He stayed, they would all cluster together. I think it might actually be true for us... that right now, not having the full capacity of our facilities will force us to be more intentional in our scattering through our city. I've seen... as Hurricane Harvey has fast-forwarded this idea of scattering within our congregation... we are gathering together for worship but then we'll scatter throughout our city in Life Groups. I have noticed that a lot of our women's studies are gathering in all kinds of homes and locations. I've seen that our Equipping classes are meeting in different restaurants and homes as well. I would actually say that this is a good thing because whenever you're sitting at Luby's studying God's Word, guess what? Other people see it. Don't hate on Luby's; I heard you guys out there. Whenever you are doing that, people see you studying God's Word and that actually, believe it or not, plants a seed. Every time that we carry the Kingdom into a work place, into a park... wherever we are... God uses that. It allows Jesus to be broadcast in the darkest corners and the furthest reaches of our city. God uses the scattered Church to release the Kingdom. That's what He wants that to do.

3. And Our Obedience (v. 8 and v. 11)

And the way that He does that is the third point today... through our obedience. Verse 11... Two angels appear and say, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?*" Is that the dumbest question you've ever read in your entire life? I think that the angels have to be joking right here and right now. Literally, Jesus just floated up into the sky and disappeared behind a cloud. Then the angels... "Hey, guys... why are you looking upstairs? [angels laughing] Just kidding!" We know why it is that they are looking up there. But that's not all they say. They keep going. "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.*" What's the point? The point is, "Hey guys, I'm glad that you saw that, but don't just stand there looking; now let's go and get to work." I like the fact that the angels gave them a second to look. I mean, I appreciate that. I wonder if the angels actually appeared the second that Jesus began to ascend. Would you notice it if two angels appeared, if Jesus Himself was ascending in front of you? ...Probably not. I think they're kind of standing over there to the side... Jesus ascends into heaven. The cloud moves in front of them, and the disciples are just standing there doing this... [Gazing to the ceiling] (Laughter) They're just looking. And then finally the angels say, "Hey guys... that was great. I'm glad that

you looked, but it's time now to actually go and do something." You see, the angels allowed the apostles to look because Jesus is worthy of the look.

In fact, that word in your Bible "behold"... that is just the Greek word for "look" but it is used in a certain way... almost as a command. And that particular voice that is saying, "Look at this... Behold this..." That is the moment when Jesus is being lifted up that you would want to behold. You would say, "Wow... look at that... never seen anything like that before. That's big; I want to take a big look at that." So it's good for us to take those moments to behold. This is what we often need to do. ...But... there then came a moment where the angels realized that the apostles would probably be tempted to only look. They would just keep looking.

Did you know, if it had been left up to the apostles, what they would have done? They would have just built their houses right there. They would move their families out there. Every morning they would get their cup of coffee, they'd go outside... "Seen Him yet?" "Nope." "He's going to be coming back." And they would just hang out there for a while... because that's our tendency. Our tendency... our proclivity is to be individuals who like to sit still. We like to just keep hanging out there. I know this because Peter wanted to do this on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:3. After Jesus is transfigured in all of His glory, Peter says, *'Hey, Lord; it's good that we're here. If You wish, I will make three tents, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah.'* And Jesus replies by turning back into His normal self and saying, "Let's go back down the mountain." Here's the thing. Think about the journey of the Israelites as they go through the wilderness in the Book of Exodus. What happens? They set up camp because the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire lead them to that particular place and then what? The cloud moves and the fire moves... what does that mean? "It's time to pack up; we're going on somewhere else."

The thing that I notice about our God in the pages of Scripture is He is always on the move. And the thing that I notice about my heart and about people is that we really like to just sit still. An object at rest tends to stay at rest. We are, by nature, people who prefer to sit still while following a God that is always on the move, always prodding us along saying, "Don't stop... but come. Follow Me." Church... could it be that right now we have a unique opportunity, that the Lord would say, "It's good that you behold Me. It's good that you are here Sunday morning. It's good that you are here worshipping." But we now have a time where we have a unique opportunity to also be on the move... to go... to be scattered in our city in a way unlike any other season in the life of this church over the last 44 years. In Acts 1:8 the Lord says, *"...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

The word "witness" there is the Greek word "marturion" which is where we get our word "martyr." So most of us have, for whatever reason, always taken that word "martyr" to only associate it with the idea of dying for one's faith, which certainly that's what it is. But that's the word "witness" in Acts 1:8. What does a witness do? A witness is someone who is called into a courtroom to say what it is that they saw, what it is that they heard, and what it is that they experienced. That's what witnesses do. Do you know why that word became associated with martyr in our language? ...Because these people would go and witness to the things that they had seen, heard, and felt, and as they did so, people would say, "Stop saying that or we are going to kill you. Stop testifying about what you've seen, what you've heard, and what you've felt or we are going to take your life." We've all heard stories of people who have been in various situations where they have been asked to stop testifying, and they keep doing it anyway. This is what has happened now. The idea here is that we now need to be the witnesses who speak. You see it's like the angels allowed the apostles... "Okay, we'll give you time to look, but then it's time to go and to get to work." So we gather on

Sunday morning. What do we do? We "behold" who Jesus is... look at His glory, look at His grace, look at the things that He has done, look at the people He is working in, look at the things that He is doing, look at all this healing that's happening. Jesus is incredible. We "behold" whenever we gather on Sunday mornings. But the angels are clear that we must move from "behold" to then "go now and be bold." Move from just taking a look at what it is that God is doing and now go and witness to it, testify of it... wherever it is that the Lord has placed you.

Two Sundays ago, immediately after I finished preaching, I got in the car and I began driving to Dallas because, as many of you know, my wife's mother had fallen and hit her head and had a brain bleed. When I was on my way to Dallas, she passed away. I loved that woman very, very much. She loved the Lord very, very much. She had lots of things that she taught me and taught Joy and things that she had implanted in her heart. And those things we are now attempting to pass down to our sons and to hopefully one day our grandchildren.

I share those things with you because that is a similar mindset that we must have when it comes to the teachings of Jesus. ...Because Jesus has said now, "Take these things and give them to others." Let us be obedient to the thing that He has said. What does Jesus tell the apostles to do? Wait in the city until you get the Spirit. What do they do? They go back to the upper room in Jerusalem and they wait, and they pray and they wait... not because they are super-holy people but because they are ordinary people doing what Jesus told them to do. And what has Jesus told us to do today? Take a step, be bold. Church... this is the question that we must grapple with as we conclude today. What is the step of boldness that the Lord would have us to do? Once you have had your time to "behold" who Jesus is, what is the thing that He would now tell you, "You now, be bold"?

This is what I would like us to do. I want us to take 30 seconds and reflect on what that step would be. If you have a card there in the seat pocket in front of you, you can pull that out. If you want to use the App on your Smart Phone, you can do that. I want us to reflect for 30 seconds on what that would be. So let's all bow our heads and ask "Lord, how is it that You would have me take my step forward?" As you bow your head, I want you to just think how is it that God would have you respond. For some of us this is what we need to do. The way that we should be bold is that we should go public with our faith. Some of you have been following Jesus, maybe in your hearts and in your minds, but no one really knows that that's what it is that you're doing. And now it is time for you to go public. Or maybe today is the first time that you've actually considered it, and it's time for you to go public. So this is what we're going to ask you to do. If you're going to go public with your faith, check that box that says, "I'm ready to follow Jesus. I'm giving my life to Him today" ...on the App or on that card. Some of us need to go public with our faith today or take that next step by saying "It's time for me to be baptized. I've been following Jesus but for whatever reason I've never been baptized." Others of us need to take a step by saying, "I need a spiritual family. I need to be connected in the Life Group." And others of us need to say, "You know what? It's time for me to be bold with a friend or a family member or a neighbor or my children." Just carry that out, whatever that is. I don't know what it is that the Lord would have you do, but whatever it is, say "Yes" to Him right now.

"Lord Jesus, we have had great opportunity to behold You today at work, and now Father would we be bold in the step that You have given us today. We pray this and we ask it in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen and amen."

So whatever that thing is that you need to do... use that card in the seat pocket, indicate that and give us your contact info on your way out today. Give it to one of our ushers or deacons. If you're using the App on your Smart Phone, fill that information out, submit it electronically, and we will follow up with you this week. If today you want to visit with someone, you say, "I want to talk with someone about getting baptized, about going public in my faith" ...whatever that is, step right out these doors and go to the Connection Center. It's that glassed-in area right out there. If you need to find out information about a Life Group, we have a table set up out there. Whatever the decision is today, I want you not to leave until you've done that in this place.

We're going to be dismissed here in just a second, but we have a special recognition that we want to do before we're dismissed. I want to invite at this time Shawn and Kristi Myers to come up here and to join me. Danielle, if you can hear me... if you could bring mic 5 with you, that would be great. This is Shawn and Kristi Myers... (Clapping)... give them a round of applause. Shawn has been serving as Pastor of Worship here, and Kristi, because of being married to the Pastor of Worship, now gets to basically serve as Pastor of Worship as well, so we're grateful for that. This couple... they are incredibly gifted, incredibly talented musicians, vocalists, incredible heart and incredible spirit... but we want you to know that they are celebrating now 20 years of faithful service here at Houston Northwest. (Clapping) So we just want to take a moment and give... these are very small tokens of our appreciation. We are grateful to both of you, and thank you very much for what you have done. So Shawn, I just want to give you an opportunity, if you would like, to just speak, and then we'll wrap up today.

[Shawn Myers speaking]

Thank you, Pastor Steve. It's amazing. Yes... 20 years... incredible. I always like to think back. I've heard stories that the church was started in July of '73, and actually... I started in July of '73. I was born, actually, within days of the first service that this church had. I always like feeling connected. God had a place for us even before so many things began. We are just so blessed. Thank you. You are our family. We love you guys so much. You are a blessing. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for being patient with us, and for walking with us through so many things of life. We love you guys. Thank you so much.

[Pastor Steve]

Thank you, Shawn and Kristi. (Clapping) Be sure that you take an opportunity to thank them personally, as we conclude worship today.

Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and give you His peace... peace which comes through the great truth that when you receive Jesus Christ, the full presence of God is in you... that Holy Spirit. We grow in our knowledge of that Good News, that Gospel, and we go into the world declaring that there is one Name under heaven and on earth by which men with women might be saved... the glorious, powerful, matchless name of Jesus Christ. Amen and amen."

[Doxology sung]