We've been walking through a series of messages on the miracles of Jesus, at least 6 of the 36 or 37 that Jesus performed. I want to talk about one of my favorites today, a story that if you have never heard it or read it directly for yourself, you have at least seen and heard lots of references to it, whether it's depictions of it in movies from Hollywood or just phrases. As I was preparing for this message, I kept thinking... I couldn't get it out of my head, that line from Tombstone where Doc Holliday... Someone says, "Where's Wyatt?" And he goes, "Down by the creek walking on water."

It's like we've heard about this walking on water thing, but I think sometimes we don't catch the full significance of the story. So I want to talk today about how Jesus walked on water. I want to talk about what that looks like, what that means for him to have done that. But I also want to address one of the aspects of the story that we sometimes miss because, a lot of times, what we do is we read looking at the basic, ultra-simple truth on top. And we go, "Okay. Jesus can walk on water." But I don't think that's a surprise when you look at the rest of the gospels. I don't think that's something new that we didn't really realize before. If you know any of the miracles of Jesus, if you embrace who Jesus is as God on Earth, then it's no surprise that Jesus could walk on water.

But I think there's something more to the story. It's recorded in three out of the four gospels. In only one of those gospels, only in the book of Matthew, do we get the record of Peter's interaction with Jesus while Jesus is walking on water. The other two authors that address it don't include that part. So I just want to zero in for a second on this interesting relationship between Jesus and Peter, and I really want to focus on it because I think there's a lot of parallels between the relationship with Jesus and me, Jesus and you, and where we live life every day.

I want to just jump right in and read the passage and then bring some significance out of it, Matthew 14, verse 22. Let me read this to you. If you've got a phone or a Bible, you can read along with me. Bible says, "Immediately, Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side." Let me just clarify. This is right after the story of the feeding of the 5,000, which Pastor [Sean 00:03:18] talked about. So keep that in your mind. These disciples just watched Jesus take those loaves of bread and feed 5,000 people with them. They have just beheld an awesome and amazing miracle that's going to impress them and blow their minds and shape their beliefs. They've encountered the son of God doing miraculous things.

So they get into the boat. "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. And when the evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary." I like saying "contrary" because my grandmother used to call me that when I was a kid. "You're being contrary." So the wind was contrary. "Now, on the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went to them, walking on the sea." Walking on the sea. "And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It's a ghost,' and they cried out for fear. But, immediately, Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid.'

"Peter answered him and said, 'Lord, if it's You, command me to come to you on the water.' So he said, 'Come,' and Peter had come down out of the boat. He walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous..." No one's ever called me that, but I prefer that over "contrary." "When he saw the wind was boisterous, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me.' And, immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said, 'Oh you of little faith,
why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly, you are the son of God.'"

Now, we love this story. There's so much about it to learn from. We can zero in on the fact that Jesus leaves the crowds and goes and talks to God by Himself. I think there's a whole message just in that, that we sometimes take Christianity or we take life or we think of success or all that stuff as relating to the crowds. And Jesus makes it very clear, very plain: if you're going to have life from the inside out, you got to get alone with God. You got to spend time with Jesus. So there's a lot to focus on in that part of the passage.

Then you've also got just the miracle of Jesus coming to them on the sea, not just on the sea walking on water like Morgan Freeman in that one movie, but no, the sea stormy, the sea as it's being tossed, as the waves... If you've ever been out on something like Lake Michigan in the middle of a storm, then you know it can be extremely dangerous. We're not talking about just a little creek or a little stream. This is the Sea of Galilee. And so this big boat's being tossed all over the place, and Jesus is walking on that.

I just sort of imagine it that it looks like Jesus stepping up and down over these little mountains of water that keep raising up and down. He's not just strolling out on the flat sea. It is boisterous. The wind is blowing everywhere. So there's the miracle of that, the son of God walking on water in the middle of a storm. That's a big part of the story. You can focus in on and just kind of have your mind blown again by the ability of God and the miraculous potential of what Jesus could do as His son. But what I want to focus on is the conversation that happens between Jesus and Peter.

I want to challenge us, if you've heard this story before, to shift your focus this morning and to hear it with fresh ears, to see this moment with fresh eyes, because a lot of times what we'll focus on is the disappointment that Jesus must have had in Peter over his little faith. That's where a lot of us camp out. We read this passage filtered through some of our own self-evaluation, our beliefs about who we are. We think about it in terms of our shortcomings. We think about it in terms of who we think God is. And I think we kind of miss some of the biggest points about it.

So I want to give you a really big point today. I shared this with one of my kids the other day. I said, "Hey, do you know how it's actually possible for human beings to walk on water? There's only one way to do it. What is it?" "What is it, Dad?" So I said, "You got to get out of the boat." It seems so simple, right? You can't walk on water in the boat; you got to step out. Sometimes I think we miss that portion of the story. We miss the idea that Peter takes this gigantic, scary, fear-filled step. So the big point that I want to make to you today is, if you want to live life walking on water with Jesus, that is, experiencing the supernatural divine life that God has for you, the only way to do that is to step away from that which seems solid and natural and trustworthy to you now.

The only way to experience the divine supernatural working of Jesus in your life is to step away from what you think is solid and take a big, big step of faith into the very hands, the very safety, the protection, the guidance, into the instruction of God. It is to take a step to obey. Back in 2013, there was a carnival cruise ship that was stranded in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. You remember that story, 2013? It was the carnival ship called the Triumph. The Triumph had just sailed back from the Yucatán Peninsula, and they got stranded 150 miles off of that shore. It had a fire in the engine room, which took out most of the ship's power.
They were only able to move at about eight miles per hour. That's a long way back from Yucatán to Houston, and they just weren't moving at all. As that ship just kind of floated there without power, without electricity, the ship uses all kinds of systems of pumps and whatnot to deal with all of its plumbing issues. So the ship basically had 1,000 toilets that didn't work. The refrigerators didn't work. The food in the refrigerators began to put off this pungent odor. People began to sleep up on the decks. One lady, one passenger who was interviewed, described it as sewage flowing down the hallways. How many of you are like, "Sign me up. Always wanted to go on a cruise"?

Now, they finally got rescued and got off that ship. But what I look back on that's intriguing to me is, two weeks earlier, me and my pregnant wife were on that boat, that very... We were on the Triumph just two weeks earlier. And we enjoyed ourselves. It's like floating paradise plus a smoky casino. So you're floating along. We were hanging out with friends. We were spending time in the karaoke area. I want to say karaoke bar from the stage, but technically there was a bar nearby in the same room. But I was just there to sing and launch my career. That didn't go so well.

But we were in that floating Petri dish, and we thought we were safe. Now, it might be a little fearful to look out when there's that moment when you're so far away from the harbor that you look back, and all you see is water that way and all you see is water that way. But I'm safe here in the boat, right? Or at least there's the illusion of safety in the boat. I fear that, for a lot of us, we enjoy the illusion of safety in the boat a little too much, that we get so used to trusting and believing that what I think is here underneath me, what I think I'm in, is safe and normal that I don't want to step out. I don't want to take a risk. I don't want to get outside of this because this is comfortable. This is familiar. I know this.

Even if it's mediocre, I know this. Even if I'm in a position of walking through abuse, at least I know this. Even if I'm continually getting hurt, at least I know this. Even if I'm not stretching my wings... I'm not experiencing real, dynamic life from the inside out. Even if there's no adventure in my life, at least I think I know that where I'm at is safe. So, out of the disciples who were on that boat that day... And what's really intriguing is, as Brian pointed out in his message a few weeks ago, that these disciples are like... As they're wrestling with the boat, they're having to kick against the baskets of leftover bread from the miracle they've just seen, and they're terrified.

They see Jesus and they're like, "It's a ghost." They don't understand. So Jesus comes walking, and these disciples see him. And 1 of the 12, Peter, calls out to Jesus and says, "Can I come to you? Just call me and I'll come. I want to experience this, too." The other 11 stayed safe. Now, I have a theory, and this is not based on scripture. It's just based on my own observation and my knowledge of me and just about everyone I know... that if there were 1,000 disciples on the boat that day, I think you would've only found one or two, maybe three, that would've invited themselves out on the water.

In other words, I think for us as humanity, it's just extremely rare to see someone look at either mediocrity or comfort or a lack of faith, a lack of adventure, a lack of mission... It's very rare for a human being to look at that sort of comfort zone and go, "I am tired enough of that and desperate enough for more that I am willing to take this radical step." I think it's just rare. And I want it to be less rare because I think, for a lot of us, we define the norm, the normal Christian life, as, "I go to church and I probably read my Bible some. I try to be a good person. I try to do the best I can. I try to give a little money. I try to do those things that are good."
But in terms of putting it all on the line every morning, waking up every day and going, "God, you have my life. Anything you want from me today, I'll do it no matter how radical, no matter how crazy," we see that as the extreme. But I think, for Peter, and what Jesus wanted the disciples to see, was that the normal Christian life should actually look a lot more like what we see as radical. Does that make sense? Like someone who's really... They're discontent with apathy, that they want to get over their complacency. They really want to break out of the box. They really want to stretch their wings. They really want to take steps of faith forward in their relationship with God.

We see those people as the special ones. In the church I grew up in, that's who we'd nominate as a deacon. They speak up a lot. They pray out loud. They're special. They're different. They're radical. Let's pick them for some special job. But the reality is that following Jesus was never meant to be boring. It was never meant to be routine. Following Jesus is absolutely a step of faith into a mission that's bigger than us. It's scary and it's huge, and we can't do it on our own. There's something about living life in a way that says, "I can't do this on my own, and therefore, I need to embrace this because I think there's something there. I think there's something I haven't experienced yet, I haven't seen yet, that's well worth my time. It's well worth my time."

I want to share some realities with you I would call realities for water walkers. I've been reading a book about raising kids because the next series we're doing in August is on parenting, or it's really on influencing kids, because I wanted it to be for parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles, too. So I want it to be about how you pour into the next generation. I'm reading a book right now about raising giant killers, in other words, desiring that our kids grow up to be giant slayers like David, who will go down and say, "This guy's..." Everyone else might say he's too big to kill, and I want my kids to go, "He's too big to miss. So let's go for it." And in the middle of that, it's great. I also want my kids to grow up to be water walkers. That is, I want them as they get near adulthood to step out.

I don't want my kids to go, "All right. I'm 18. What is the most comfortable way I can live my life?" because I know that conventional wisdom says try your best to get a good education and a good job and be stable and have a pension and make it to retirement and survive until death, and that is the best that you can do. Where in the middle of that is our sense of mission, like desiring that our children lay it all down so that the gospel spreads further? To take their very lives and risk everything for Jesus so that they see Him use them in a significant way for His kingdom purposes for their lives, that if we stretch our vision to my life, if I stretch my vision of my kids' lives, if I stretch my vision of what we as a church can do when we step out of the boat, then we can start to walk with Jesus. Okay?

Let me just give you some realities, and the first big reality is simply that: you'll only walk on water if you step out of the boat. You'll never experience all that God has for you. You'll never experience the adventure, the mission that God wants for you unless you step out of the boat, unless you take that step. In other words, let me put it a little more simple way. Faith is what unlocks supernatural power in your life. Faith is what unlocks supernatural power in your life. Now, here's what I mean by that. We all live on the same planet created by God. We all live under the same rules, the same economy, that's governed by God. We all live in a system that God created to begin with.

Now, obviously, humanity and Satan, our enemy, have gotten involved and have created corruption within that system, and we're called out of that. But we all live sort of under the same kingship, eternally speaking. There are people who follow Jesus and people who don't follow Jesus. There are people who believe in Him and people who don't. There are Christians and there are non-Christians. All of us...
together can make good decisions and bad decisions because we live on a planet where we're guided by conscience, and we have certain things around us. So all of us basically are living in the boat to begin with. We all naturally can navigate life, some better than others, but we can make it if we just stay in the boat, or at least there's the illusion of being able to make it if we just stay in the boat.

But when I have faith, when I start to believe that things I've not yet seen, I've not yet experienced, I've not touched with my hands, I have not tasted, I have not bumped into physically speaking... When I start to believe that there is actually an invisible, all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present creator who is sovereign over all things and is able to do anything He wishes to do and that He answers prayer and that He uses our witness, I can start to understand how when someone doesn't know Jesus and yet they're lost on the inside, that when the gospel is presented, when the good news about Jesus is presented to them, that even if I fumble my way through that presentation, even if I'm nervous and I say things wrong and I get it wrong, I can start to believe that the Holy Spirit of God will be working inside of them, doing things I can't even see, and He will break through the hardness of their hearts and let the light of the gospel dawn on them and awaken them from death to life and transform them into a brand-new creature.

Isn't that amazing? It's amazing. But faith is required to experience that supernatural working of God. In other words, if you don't want something supernatural, if you don't want something beyond, then just coast. Just do what you can do, and maybe you'll do okay. Maybe you won't. But there is a supernatural, beyond-nature kind of life that awaits anybody that has faith enough to step out of the boat. So faith is what unlocks God's supernatural work. I receive it by grace through faith, and He changes me from the inside out. I'm regenerated. I'm refreshed. I'm revived. I'm born again. I grow. I am matured because of faith, because of faith.

The New Testament is very clear. You don't become spiritually mature by keeping more rules. You don't become spiritually mature by doing more of your "Christian duty." You become spiritually mature by grace through faith, and as His grace is activated in your life while you receive it by faith, all of a sudden you see the outworking of grace changing your thinking, changing your behavior, changing the way you make decisions. Suddenly, you're guided by the unseen force that sustains all life. Suddenly, you're moved by this supernatural power and presence of Jesus in your life. So faith is what activates the supernatural.

Here's a second big reality: fear is the enemy. Fear is your enemy. Fear is the enemy of faith. Fear is what keeps me in the boat. Now, I want to be careful as I walk through this not to read into the text something that's not there. When the Bible says that Peter steps out of the boat, starts walking to Jesus, I sort of get the picture that he takes a few steps and then begins to sink. I don't know if he plunged into the water all at once. I don't know if he just went lower. I don't know. The Bible doesn't spell that out. I remember hearing lots of sermons about this that would say, "Now, don't take your eyes off Jesus like Peter does." Well, the Bible doesn't actually say he took his eyes off Jesus. It doesn't say that. So if the text doesn't spell that out, I don't want to read that into it.

This is not a message about taking your eyes off Jesus. It is, however, important for us to understand, even when you think you're focused on Jesus, there's a tug-of-war in our soul between fear and the need for comfort and security, and faith and the need for adventure. It's funny. There's a very well known and highly popular, highly paid, secular, positive-thinking guru. That was a lot of description. I like the guy. Just trust me. He's smart but doesn't necessarily come from a Christian perspective, but he
often lists out these six basic human needs. They've become very popular in the world of psychology and whatnot. The first two needs he talks about is all of us need stability, and all of us need instability.

We all need security, and we need adventure. I need life to be predictable, and I need life to be unpredictable. Do you understand what I'm saying? I think all of us in the room who have a soul understand what that means. I don't like my life to be out of control, but sometimes I need for my life to be out of control. I need security, and I need variety. I need stability, and I need adventure at the same time. I believe that it's because of how God wired us, how He wired us, that there's an aspect of me that I need to live my life to provide stability and security for people around me by staying faithful to Jesus. He gives me guardrails for my life, and I don't need to step outside those guardrails.

At the same time, I need to step out of the boat, and fear is what will keep me addicted to security, addicted to stability, addicted to comfort, addicted to where I am in my faith right now, and addicted to not being challenged. Fear is the enemy of growth in my faith. Fear is the enemy. So when I see Peter step out of the boat and start walking toward Jesus, the Bible says he noticed the wind was boisterous. Now, you can do that with your eyes still on Jesus, but one way or another, his mind is distracted in that moment from the security he believed in just a moment before, and now, suddenly, he's very insecure. He begins to sink, and then Jesus grabs his hand.

Now, here's a moment that I think tells us a lot about our upbringing and about how we think about God and about how I perceive myself as God's child. Most of us when we read this passage are automatically thinking, "Jesus seems really disappointed with him. He started to sink, and He reaches in and says, 'You of little faith.'" And we read that, and we naturally think of it in kind of a scolding tone. "Peter, come on. When are you going to grow up? Peter, when are you going to start to live up? When are you finally going to measure up in this moment?" That's how we read it because that's how we sometimes relate to God.

I don't think that that's the way Jesus said it, though. I base that on looking at different things Jesus said throughout his life, that Jesus often spoke in somewhat extreme terms, and He would do so because, in His day and age, it was a form of humor. It was ancient Hebrew humor. So he would say things that were extreme, and He was actually trying to make a point using a little bit of comic relief, so to speak, to really grab our attention and drive something home. I think when He reaches out to Peter, I just... I think we can grow up in our faith a bit and understand who God is. When you look at all the story of Jesus, I just don't see Jesus often coming to believers who are moving toward him and shaming them for it.

Instead, what I think is Jesus is probably going, "Whoa. Peter, you stepped out of the boat. You've got a little faith." Now, again, we look at it and we focus on "little." Right? "You've got a little faith." And we go, "He must have been disappointed in the lack in faith in Peter." But I think "little" is positive. It's positive. It's like I may not feel like I've made all the progress I want to feel, but I've made some progress. I'll never forget this empowering statement from my pastor, Rick Warren, once. He was talking about memorizing scripture and he said, "We talk about memorizing scripture, and everybody gets intimidated, like, "Oh man. I got to memorize a verse a day. I got to know the New Testament by age 30. I got to be able to quote the book of Ephesians to somebody.""

He said, "Listen. Why don't you start... If it scares you, memorize a phrase from a verse because memorizing a phrase from a verse is better than memorizing nothing." And that just stuck with me, like, "Yes." And when I gain confidence by memorizing a phrase, then I feel more confident about

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memorizing a verse, and then a bunch of verses, and so forth and so on. We're so hard on ourselves. We look at "little faith" and we go, "Man, he could have done so much better." And most of us live life there: "I'm not going to step out of the boat because I think I'll fail because I'm one of those guys with little faith."

But, in reality, Peter had more faith than anyone else on planet Earth in that moment. He was the one willing to step out. I think Jesus is picking him up. They're locking arms and He's pulling him up out of the water going, "Peter, you had a little bit of faith. You can't even imagine what you're going to experience when your faith grows. But you've got this starting place." So I want us to be careful how we look at that, how we walk through that, because fear is the enemy. And here's another truth: focus is your friend.

If fear is what distracts you and draws your eyes to the threat, then focus, and particularly I mean focus on Jesus, is what draws you forward and grows you, that when your life is focused on achieving or earning or getting to a place of stability or comfort or pleasure, when that is your focus, it's always going to lead you in an unhealthy direction, good or bad. If you're focused on something that's obviously evil, like illegal drugs, then that will destroy your life. But focusing on good things can distract you from maturity as well.

"I'm going to be a provider for my family, so I'm going to work 90 hours a week and have no relationships." It's not a bad focus to want to provide for your family, but it's not the right focus for a member of God's kingdom. Jesus spelled it out and said, "Seek my kingdom first, and I will help you take care of all these other things. I'll help you take care of all these other things." Fear is the enemy. Focus is your friend. And so you just got to step out of the boat. Here's another big truth. This one is longer. So far, it's like, "Focus is your friend." That's easy. Here's one that's harder to remember because it's a lengthy sentence: you're always better off out on the water with Jesus than you are in the boat without Him. You're always better off out on the water with Jesus than you are in the boat without Him.

In other words, as a Christian standing here on the stage, my testimony is that my life is different and better and more amazing not because my circumstances are all good, not because there's nothing to fear in my life physically or literally speaking, but because, by faith, fear doesn't hold me back. By faith, fear doesn't keep me down. By faith, I'm able to experience things. By stepping out and going with Jesus and letting go and releasing my grip on things that are comfortable and easy to grab on to, by letting go of all of that and stepping out in faith, I am always better off than I was back in the boat without Jesus, than I was back where everybody's hanging out among the breadcrumbs from the miracle that we've somehow forgotten.

It's always better off to be out there than it is to be in a place of security and safety. And, again, humanity tells us... Not a bad message. It's not a bad message to tell your kids to grow up and get a good education and get a stable job. That's not a bad message. In fact, don't leave here and go, "Pastor Brandon says our kids should not go to college and not get a job." I don't believe that at all. I think jobs are good, okay? Eating, I happen to enjoy that. So having a job is great. Getting an education is fantastic. But if that's all there is to life, if it's just... Hey, you're probably, on average, going to make it into your 70s, maybe your 80s, if you're really blessed your 90s. I saw my 98-year-old grandmother the other week, and she's just alive and with it, and I love that.
So maybe you make it to 98 and you're still enjoying life. That's great. But there's more to life than just survive till then, than just make sure you got enough money till then. Try to keep the retirement till then. Again, nothing wrong with all those things that you collect, that you do in this life. But there's more. There's more to it. So when I step away from the security that's found in all those things, when sometimes I choose mission over money, when I choose a life of walking with Jesus over a life of doing just what I want to do, when I choose to walk with Jesus even when it costs me greatly, that is always a radically better life than staying in the boat where I thought I was safe.

We're floating on that carnival cruise line. We obviously just have the illusion of safety because the next group of people on it had engine failure, and it just became a horrible situation for two or three weeks at a time. So I can live right now in the illusion that I've got it all together, and then the economy changes. A relationship fails apart. Something happens in my health that I didn't predict. And I thought I had plenty of money. I thought I had plenty of time. I thought I had plenty of friends. I thought I had plenty of everything, and I was comfortable. Then, all of a sudden, the dynamics change and the circumstances shift, and I start running out of those things.

When the pain point comes, what do I have in terms of my relationship with God? What do I have in terms of living on purpose and embracing the mission? When I have lived life outside the boat, when I have stepped out in faith and journeyed with Jesus and said, "You know what? Whatever you want for my life, that's what I'll do. I'll take this radical next step for you," that's always better. It's always better than staying in the boat where it's comfortable and you have the illusion of safety. Does that make sense?

I think I want to learn from Peter here. I don't want to learn everything from Peter. Peter would go on to be somewhat impetuous. He would go on to be impulsive. I think this is, maybe, impulsive. It's a good impulse: "I want to journey with Jesus." The next impulse you read about in Peter's life, just a couple years after this, is the impulse to deny Jesus at the cross. So Jesus... Or excuse me. Peter himself experiences a shakiness in his faith. It's not like he did this, and then it was just all uphill and growth from there. No, Peter had setbacks throughout his life.

But I want to learn in this moment from Peter the ability from a place of immature faith in me, of something that still needs to grow up, of a me that still has a long way to go to get really close to Jesus in my life, I right now, with my limited knowledge and my limited experience, I want to go ahead and, from day one, start to really believe great things about God and really start to trust Him in radical ways. And I want that to become the norm in my life. I want to believe Him big. I want to believe Him big.

I fear that sometimes when someone comes to faith in Christ, they put their life into the hands of the one who went to the cross and died and rose again, when they journey with Him, when they start that journey, we begin to tell them things like, "That's awesome. Now let's take it easy. First, you should be baptized," and we believe that. It's the first step of obedience for any believer in Christ. Yes, be baptized. Then you need to attend church a lot, so do that. Maybe get into a small group, a Bible study. We believe in the importance of that. You need relationships. You need your circle of friends.

When you've gone to church a lot and you've gotten in a small group, then maybe, someday down the road, start serving people. I mean, that's a really big step. And then, when you're serving people, maybe even go all the way and go on a mission trip. Now, that's probably years away. Let's start small and go slow. You just attend for a while. What are we thinking? Jesus calls these disciples. It's kind of a brand-
new movement. And Peter's stepping out of the boat very early in the process, still early in their relationship.

I'd say, when somebody comes to know Jesus and they're on fire and they're annoying the rest of us... Right? Let's be really honest for a second. One of those brand-new believers who's all like, "God, let's be on fire. Let's read our Bibles more." And we're going, "Just calm down. You'll understand soon how mediocre this can be." No. Let's tap into the enthusiasm and the radical faith of someone who's just been rescued from hell forever by a savior who went to the cross and gave it all to forgive all of their sins and cleaned them up.

Let's look at that kind of faith and go, "I want that back. I want to go back to the day I met Jesus and was redeemed and rescued forever. I want to go back to that moment where I knew my life is doomed, and now the light has shined. I'm born again. I'm brand new. I want to take on the world. I want all that God has to offer." When you've been a Christian 30 years, sometimes you forget what it is to think that way. But I wanted you to think that way today. As I close out this message, I want you to ask yourself, "What is the big step Jesus wants me to take, and why do I hesitate? What step is that in my life?"

I am a firm believer there's always a next step, always. Our church talks about how, as a church body, we create a pathway for people that always has a next step. Step one is always trusting Jesus. Step two, right after that, is declaring that faith through baptism. Step three is getting involved in the church. It's becoming a member. It's joining the family. Step four is growing in my faith. Step five is beginning to discover my gifts and to serve. We have all those steps, but I don't think you go through the church's eight steps and then you're good.

I'm 41 years old, been walking with Jesus really since I was in my late teens. I was saved before that, but I really didn't understand what a consistent Christian walk looked like. So I was about 18 years old, and so have been walking with Jesus for 23 years. It seems like, all the time, I'm looking at the next step in my life. It seems like, all the time, I know there's something else I got to do. Last week, I had a tough conversation about the subject of empathy and how I think I'm okay with that. I think I'm good at that. But then situations had arisen that highlighted my lack of empathy.

So I'm like, you know what? My next step is... I got a book about empathy written by a pastor, and I want to read about this. I want to read about how to hurt with people better. I'm 41. I've been a pastor for 20-plus years. I got a next step I need to take. You know what? When I have taken that, when I've learned that, developed that in my life, there's going to be another one. There's always a next step. So don't for a second go, "All right. I can shut down. This one's the basics for the new believers." No. This is for you. God's always calling you out of the boat, always. There's always more adventure out there than there is where you are right now, always.

You say to Jesus, "Tell me what to do," and Jesus is going to say, "Come closer." Then it's up to us to step beyond the whole of the boat and move toward Him, to break away from what I think is security, what I think is normal, what I think is comfortable, and to grow, to challenge myself, to die to myself more, to live for Him more, to give up one more thing that prevents me from being spiritually mature, to adopt one more habit or to have another conversation or to enter into and develop a new relationship with someone that needs me to mentor them. There's always a next step for me in my growth, and there will be until I die.
I mentioned my 98-year-old grandmother earlier. She's so sweet. I walked into her room. I hadn't seen her in over a year, but I went back to Kentucky where she's at. So I go into the room where she's at in her assisted living and I say, "Hey." I'm smiling, and she's smiling back. She goes, "Hey." I walk over to her. For just a second, I thought, "She doesn't seem all that surprised," because I didn't tell her I was coming or anything. I just dropped in on her. I get over to her, and she's smiling and looking up at me, and I'm smiling at her.

So I get right up to her, and then she goes, "Brandon," like her... I didn't realize her sight... really gone. She didn't know who this stranger was, but she's happy to see me. And then, throughout the conversation, she eventually said, "I don't know why God leaves me here." She said, "Every day, I let Him know I'm ready. Every day, I let Him know I'm ready. But He's got me here for some reason." So I just talked to her about, "You're in a nursing home full of people that are discouraged. Maybe God's got a step for you to take to encourage them at the age of 98."

I want us to think that way. You're not too old. You're not mature enough to be done with growth. You haven't arrived. We're on a journey, and we got to step out of the boat. Okay? Let's bow our heads. Father, I ask right now that Your Holy Spirit... I can't do this. Nobody else should do this... Your Holy Spirit would show each and every individual in this room, what is my next step?

If you are sitting here listening to me pray, your next step might be meeting Jesus. If it is, you do that in a very simple way. You tell Him, "I admit that I have sinned. I'm a sinner. I believe Jesus died for my sins and rose again. I receive You as my savior. I believe Jesus rose again, and I want to live for You, King Jesus, the rest of my eternity. I want to follow you forever."

When you declare that with faith to Him, you are saved and born again and changed by the grace of God forever. Maybe your next step is declaring your faith through baptism or taking a step more into this church family or whatever church family God puts you in, committing to a small group, hosting a small group, going on a mission trip, or maybe it's none of the things you can do through the church. Maybe it's that neighbor that needs a gospel witness. Maybe it's that person that you work with that needs encouragement. It's that person you've not committed to do life with, and yet you know it's time. God's calling you out. He's always calling us out. What is next for you? What is next for me? Just pray, "Jesus, I want to take the next step. I don't want to stand in one spot. I don't want to stay in the place of the illusion of comfort. God, I want to love on You. I want to get close to You. I want to move towards You. God, I commit to this next step. I will pick up a book on my problem, and I'll work through it. I will get counseling or coaching or discipleship, or I will talk to someone more mature than me in a certain area.

"I'll take a next step, God. I'll deal with my hardness of heart. I'll deal with my complacency. I'll deal with my apathy. If I'm not giving, I'll deal with my lack of generosity. If I'm not doing life with people, I'll deal with why I avoid relationships. I will take a next step of faith for You, and I'll grow this week. I'll get out of the boat. I want to come to You." Lord, we love You. We praise You. In Jesus's name, amen.