

The Week After Christmas

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Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the whole story. Lord, thank you that the prophecies foretold that you would come, you came just as they said. Thank you that you arrived, you lived, you endured and resisted all temptation and ultimately were willing to give or yourself for the sins of us all. Lord, today as we come and gather around your word the day after that great celebration, help us to see where we go and how we get there from here. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open to probably a pretty familiar passage of scripture this season, Luke 2. Luke 2 is the section in scripture where we typically refer to it as the Christmas story but today we're actually going to pick up the story in verse 21 after the angels have gone back into heaven, after the shepherds have visited the Christ child, after the manger scene has made its way through the evening. Today on our calendars is the day after Christmas and I think we'd all confess that this day is not nearly as exciting as yesterday was. We all look forward to Christmas, in fact, we plan well in advance and you know that Christmas is near when all the Hallmark movies start playing in July. I mean, we know that Christmas is coming, we decorate sometimes even before Thanksgiving. There are radio stations that start Christmas music 6-8 weeks in advance. It is a day that we prepare greatly for in advance. It's a day that we go to extreme measures to get all of our travel plans right, get all the food right, get everybody in the right place, and then there's today. We woke up realizing how much we've got to put up. We woke up realizing that all the stuff has to be dealt with. The day after Christmas is not that exciting of a day, is it, because reality sets in, reality that for all the festivities, all the music, all the decorating, today is one of those days that it begins this process of "getting back into the grind."

I want you to think about the day after the first Christmas. I mean, Christmas day was a pretty exciting day. I mean, Mary and Joseph had made a very long journey, they didn't have a place in the inn, they found a place, that famous manger scene, the night sky lights up with the angelic host, the shepherds show up, according to the song a drummer boy comes by and plays a solo. I mean, all kinds of things happen and then the next morning you have a young couple who's never reared a child before, who now all of a sudden has to figure out diapers, feeding, sleeping schedules, and all that stuff that's just not fun. All

of a sudden you've got a young man who's not in his hometown who's got to find a way to pay the bills. All of a sudden the crowd that gathered the night before is gone this day and reality sinks in real quick. Here's the problem with the day after Christmas is the day after wouldn't have been much different. There still would have been diapers. There still would have been feeding. There still would have been sleeping schedules. And yes, there still would have been a need to somehow provide for and have sustenance for this family that was not up in Nazareth but down in Bethlehem.

Today in Luke 2, I want to talk about the week after Christmas. It's one of those sections in scripture that we don't know a whole lot about. In fact, in a moment, we're going to read about an interaction that Mary and Joseph have not only at the temple but with Simeon and with Anna, and we have this event and then right after that we have this portion where Jesus is 12 years of age, he comes to the temple, he confounds the doctors and the theologians of the day; he's asking questions they can't answer and he's answering questions they didn't know there were answers to. But other than that, for 30 years we got nothing. The biblical record, there's nothing about the first week, there's nothing about the next 12 years, and there's nothing about the next 18. One of the great theological quandaries, one of the great Bible studies is for people to get around a table and question and wonder what happened, could it have been this, did it look like that. That's a dangerous thing to do, by the way. But you know that the last chapter of the gospel of John verse 31 says this, "If everything that Jesus Christ had ever done or said had been written down, all the volumes of all the books in all the libraries could not have contained them, but that which was given to us was given to us so that we might believe."

Today, we're going to deal with one of those subject matters that probably stretches our belief more than anything, being faithful when you don't see anything happening, being faithful when you don't hear a voice speaking to you. You know, it's not hard to be faithful when the angels are singing, it's hard to be faithful when you're changing a diaper and you wish they'd come back for an encore. Today, we're going to talk about those times where we don't hear a whole lot, we don't see a whole lot, and how does God move even if we don't see or hear him. The week after Christmas was a pretty quiet week compared to the night of.

So we turn to chapter 2, beginning in verse 21. Let me remind you that God entrusted himself into the hands of a young couple who had never raised a child before, he entrusted himself to be pronounced to a group of shepherds that the world had never listened to before, and today he's going to entrust his faithfulness to each and every one of our respective lives. Beginning in verse 21 of chapter 2, it says,

21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; 23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is

said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. 25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. 33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. 34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; 35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. 36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37 And she was a widow of about 84 years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Ladies and gentlemen, outside of this event at 12 years of age, that's all we've got, that's all scripture gives us until that day where he reveals himself at about 30 years of age to his public ministry. Yet allow me to share with you, I believe in these three stories, Mary and Joseph coming to the temple, of Simeon there holding the Christ child, and even Anna waiting for as long as she did, we have all we need to have to believe that God understands what it's like to wait on his faithfulness. Three things that we're going to see are in our lives demonstrated: it's a faithfulness to the law of scripture, a faithfulness to the Spirit of God speaking into our lives, and then probably the hardest thing is the faithfulness when it comes to time.

So let's deal with the faithfulness to the law. We pick up the story in verse 21 eight days after his birth and Mary and Joseph make another journey, not back to Nazareth, that will be several years down the road, they're going to make a journey unto Jerusalem because as it's spoken of in Leviticus 12, just in case you were curious, all young men on the eighth day were to experience this procedure in their life and the parents of the young child were to come and to bring an offering and a sacrifice unto the Lord. Everything that takes place in this passage at the hands of Mary and Joseph they didn't just come up with and say, "You know, it would be really nice if we did this." It was actually written long before in the book of Leviticus and so today as we talk about what it means to be faithful to scripture, I think we need to remind ourselves what's the purpose of scripture.

Now I know that sounds like a pretty elementary Sunday school question and somewhat rhetorical to ask, but what is the purpose of the Bible in our lives? It's really as simple as the question is. The Bible gives us as humanity the specific instructions and directions that God has for our life. That's what its purpose is. Its purpose is to let us know what does God say about how to organize our family, what does God say about how to handle our finances. You might be shocked that there are more verses in the Bible about money than there is salvation because most of us struggle harder to balance our checkbook than we do to get saved. There's a lot of instruction in the Bible about every subject matter known to man. The purpose of scripture is to help us know how to navigate life.

You know, as you unpeel the scripture, particularly in Leviticus 12 which is played out in this passage, do you know what we discover about scripture? Every time we turn around it is lovingly corrective. Here's what I mean by that. When's the last time, and this is going to sound somewhat arbitrary but when's the last time you've just opened up the Bible, read a passage and said, "Well, I guess I'm good, God"? It doesn't happen often, does it? More often than not, when you open scripture you discover your shortcomings, you discover your failures, you discover that you've got a sin problem and so do I.

Some years ago, I was teaching a men's Bible study and it was one of those where there was very little commentary and bantering going back but at one point an elderly man raised his hand and he said, "Pastor, can I say something?" And it was right on target. I said, "What is it, sir?" He said, "The last few weeks I've been reading the book of Judges and Joshua and I've been thinking to myself how foolish these Israelites were. I mean, every time they get right with God, they fall right back into sin and I'm thinking to myself these guys, they're real foolish. And do you know what happened last night? God hit me and said I'm an Israelite. I do the exact same thing."

You see, one of the reasons that the enemy wants scripture out of every formal entity we've got in our culture is because if you don't have scripture in your life, you don't know where you err in life, you don't know where you struggle in life, and the problem is we've got a lot of people in our culture today that think they do no wrong because their only standard is who likes their post on social media. When you open the Bible, you discover its purpose is God giving us instruction how to navigate life and oftentimes we fall way short.

But let's talk about its parameters. It was very specific in what Mary and Joseph were to do, the baby being circumcised, the offerings, but the parameters of scripture, how broad, how wide does scripture go because we live in a culture today where oftentimes people will make statements similar to this, "You know, it's just a different day than it was in the Bible. You know, cultures have changed, we, as humanity, have evolved, so to speak. We have technology they didn't have back then. We have knowledge they didn't have back then." So sometimes we question the validity of scripture into the specifics of our life. Can I remind you what Jesus Christ said in Matthew 5? He said "heaven and earth will pass away but my word will never pass away." One of the greatest tools of deception that the enemy uses in our life is we read something in the Bible that goes against whatever the latest fad or whatever popular in culture is and the deception is to go, "Well, that was

Bible days. It's a new day today. Things have changed. We've evolved." No, we haven't. We're no different than every character in scripture, it's only the location has changed and so have the names.

The parameters of scripture are timeless. It doesn't matter when we live, it doesn't matter where we live, it doesn't matter how much technology we do or we don't have, it doesn't matter how much education we do or we don't have, thus saith the Lord is still true. You realize that everything in Mary and Joseph's life had changed. They were holding the Christ child and they didn't say, "Well, now that he's in my arms, we can get rid of Leviticus 12, we don't need it anymore. He's here." No. Just because their entire world environment had changed didn't change the word of God but the provision of scripture, notice what it says here toward the end of their story in verse 24, it says, "to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." Now I'm not here to cast stones nor am I here to make judgment but I'm just willing to say that most likely the majority of us have not read Leviticus 12 lately, okay? Leviticus 12 isn't something that comes up in our life on a regular basis because it's the Old Testament law and how to handle your body and other people's bodies after a child has been born. But did you know what Leviticus 12 says to do? This is the provision of God.

You see, when we talk about the Bible being true irrespective of culture, oftentimes people say, "Oh, you're so rigid. You know, can't you just have a little bit of flexibility?" You realize that God has a whole lot of flexibility within his word? Do you know what the Lord said to bring as a sacrifice when a young male had been born in the family? A lamb. Isn't it funny that she was actually holding the Lamb, but that's a whole other sermon for a whole other day. But you know, if you were poor, if you were displaced, if you were down on your luck or maybe you'd been struggling, you may not have access to or the financial resources to get a lamb so in Leviticus 12 it says if you cannot provide a lamb, bring two turtledoves or two pigeons. Isn't that incredible, the provision that the word of God gives us? You know, oftentimes we say, "Oh, so rigid and such a hard line it draws." Oh, it does draw a hard line in what God expects of us but when it comes to what we bring to him, look at that provision, look at that grace that is there. Can you imagine if God said, "Well, you know what? If you can't get enough money for it, too bad, you're just not right with me." God said, "You know, I understand. Sometimes your hard times are happening, sometimes things are difficult. If you can't get a lamb, two turtledoves," which by the way could have been affordable by anybody in that culture in that day.

So what do we see in Mary and Joseph? There was this faithfulness to the law, there's this faithfulness to scripture. What an inspiration to us that when times get tough, when times get difficult, when things change in the world around us, the word of God hasn't changed, it's just our world that needs to adapt to it. Then we have Simeon. He's a picture for us of the faithfulness to the Spirit of God. Notice all throughout this passage it says there in verse 26, "And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Verse 27, "And he came by the Spirit." You know, when we talk about the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, we have to ask ourselves what's the purpose? If the Bible is to give us instruction, if the Bible is to give us the lay of the land,

what is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives? Did you know you'll find nowhere in the Old Testament where it tells elderly men when the Christ child is born to go to Jerusalem and wait for him. That's not contained in the Old Testament. The Spirit of God spoke directly to him and said, "This is the role. Here's what I have for you." In fact, later in his ministry Jesus in John 12 and 16 literally hours before his crucifixion referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, the comforter, the one who leads us into truth.

You know, 1 John 4:1 says to test the spirits to see if they are of God or not. You see, the purpose of the Holy Spirit isn't just to communicate to us, there are some parameters involved. Do you see anywhere in Simeon's story where anything he did or said was contrary to what the prophets spoke about the coming Messiah? No. And why is this important? Because one of the things that, you know, we use this phrase in our culture, just makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck, if you want the hair on the back of my neck to stand up, all you've got to do is use the God card with me. You say, "What's the God card?" It's when you want to do something you know you shouldn't do but you want to do and you say, "Well, God told me to." You know, it's hard to argue with that, right? But can I give you the parameters of the Holy Spirit in your life? The Spirit of God will never ever tell you to do something contrary to the word of God. Never. I've seen it a thousand times, people will say, "Well, I've prayed about it and God told me I can do this." And I open up the scripture and I say, "But the Bible says that." They say, "It doesn't matter. God told me this." I've got news for you: you didn't hear from God. You heard from somebody else and something else but when you talk about the parameters of the Spirit, it always conforms to the word of God. And listen to the second part of the parameters: it never goes beyond what scripture allows. In other words, when the Holy Spirit speaks into our life, when we're walking through decisions in life, not only will it not go against scripture, it will not go beyond. In other words, we don't have the privilege of just navigating our own road, our own journey as we so wish just because that's what we want in our lives.

When Simeon sees the child, he refers to him as the one that was prophesied. He is the one to redeem Israel. I mean, that's the summary of all the prophets in one simple statement. The Holy Spirit confirmed by scripture and he didn't go beyond it. But let me show you the provision of the Holy Spirit. Notice what it says in verse 32 that the Holy Spirit said unto Simeon that Jesus Christ would be "a light to the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel." Go down to verse 34, it says, "And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against." Interesting that Simeon says that he will be a light to the Gentiles but he will be a sign to the Jews. Now respectively if you see humanity from God's perspective, those are the categories by which he labels humanity. In 1 Corinthians 1 it says that Jews require a sign but the Gentiles, that's most of us, we seek wisdom. Why is this critical? Why is there this provision there? Because the Spirit of God will never tell you anything contrary to scripture or, shall we say, more than scripture, but the Spirit of God is so personal in our lives that he may speak to you a little bit differently than he does to me. He speaks to the Jews through signs. He speaks to the Gentiles through wisdom.

If you've ever had the privilege of having children or grandchildren in your home, you know this to be true because sometimes you have to share the exact same information multiple different ways because people hear differently, they respond differently, and if you're here today and you're a schoolteacher, you really get this because when you're doing mathematics, okay, $2+2$ is 4, we don't have the privilege of raising our hand and saying, "I'm sorry, teacher, God told me it's 5." You don't have that ability, however, of those 20+ students based on their background, based on their family situation, based on their intelligence quotient, whatever it may be, as an educator you may have to go about communicating that information in different ways but it doesn't change what the answer to the problem is.

If you want a real good example the "day after Christmas," there was an analogy developed years ago. I know many of you are familiar with it, it involved men and women particularly what we know as marriage, and it said that women were spaghetti and men were waffles. For those of you who have never heard the analogy, allow me to sum it up briefly. Women are like spaghetti because you don't know where it begins and you don't know where it ends. It's all just there and it's all connected to everything. It doesn't matter what happens, it impacts something else in their life. Men, we're waffles. We compartmentalize everything. We've got our wife box, kid 1 box, kid 2 box, kid 3 box, the dog box, the job box, the car box. Ladies, I know you don't believe me, we've got a box for nothing. You see, you're spaghetti. When you ask your husband, "What are you thinking about?" He says, "Nothing." You think he's lying because you can't do it but we can and it's a beautiful place. It's beautiful. The reason you're laughing is because if you want to share a piece of information that is factual and true, you communicate differently to women than you do men. You communicate to adults different than you do children. You communicate to boys different than you do girls, etc. etc. Isn't it great that when we talk about the faithfulness of the Spirit of God, he never violates scripture but he may speak to you a little bit differently than he does to me, never violating the principles or precepts of scripture.

Those are the two easy ones, God has been faithful in his word, God is faithful in communicating through his Spirit in our lives, it's this last one that's tough and I struggle with it as much as anybody, faithfulness over time. Notice the story about Anna in verse 36. There's this woman, she's called a prophetess that is roughly around 100 years or more of age. She's been a widow for 84 years and so it begs us to ask the question: what's the purpose of time? What's the purpose of God having us wait on something? You realize what her purpose was is the Christ child. 84 years she waited for that little baby to arrive in Jerusalem.

So what's the purpose of time? What's the purpose in the delay? What is the purpose of those issues in our life? Well, according to what we just read, the purpose for God having us wait on him is so that we won't mess it up. Can you imagine if she'd just grabbed some random kid and said, "I think you're the guy." It would have messed everything up. In fact, the Bible says in Proverbs 19:2, "He who makes haste with his feet sinneth often." Most of us get in trouble not because we're behind God but we're ahead of him. We want to do it in our time and in our way, and I'm as guilty as anybody. But what do we see in

this, the purpose? That she was willing to wait for God's plan and not mess it up with her own.

Some years ago, Tracy and our family, we served in another state. There was a young lady in our church. At the time of this story, she was 101 years of age. Her name was Miss Mayo. Miss Mayo was being interviewed by a public broadcasting service because of her age and the experiences that she'd gone through in life, and as she was being interviewed, here is this 101 year old lady, as you can imagine her stature wasn't quite what it used to be and she was kind of all gathered up with blankets and hats and such. There was a young lady that was interviewing her on her own tv. She was in her mid 20s, right out of college, journalism major. I mean, she had the world ahead of her, dreams, aspirations. As she began to interview her, one of the things she discovered was that Miss Mayo had been a widow since her early 40s, 60 years she'd been a widow.

Well, this struck this young lady as somewhat odd because obviously here she is on the opposite side of the spectrum and the conversation I'm about to share with you is one of the funniest things I've ever heard in my life. This young lady asked her, she said, "Now, ma'am, do I have this right that for 60+ years you've been a widow?" She said, "Yes." She said, "Over the last 60 years, was there anybody special?" She said, "No." Did you ever have a boyfriend? "No." Did you ever go out on a date? "No." Did you ever have anybody that was just a special friend? "No." She was, I mean, she was marveling at this. I mean, she's in her 20s. She goes, "You mean for 60 years you didn't have anybody special, you didn't go on a date, not even a dinner?" She said, "I don't understand it." To which she replied, "Well, I just never found one worth wasting my time on."

You know, the wrong man is worse than no man. You know, the wrong thing to do is always worse than having nothing to do. And here's Anna, 84 years God is preparing her. Here's the parameters when it comes to time. I have to tell myself this on a regular basis. When it comes to time and God, did you know that in the history of all the creation, God has never been late? Did you know he's never been late? He's not Baptist. Some of y'all got that. God's never been late but, you know, he's never been early, and do you know what my problem is and I bet it's yours too: you want him early because you don't want to wait. In fact, one of the things that is so difficult for our culture today is what we call delayed gratification. We don't want to wait on anything or anybody.

In recent days, our family went and watched a movie. It's called "America's Underdog." I don't mind the shameless plug, for lack of better terms. The story is no secret. I'm not going to spoil anything because it's the true life story of an NFL Hall of Famer, one who played his rookie year seven years after he graduated college. Everybody had written him off. Everybody had given up on him. Everybody said, "He's way past his prime." There's a scene in the movie, I'm not spoiling it, I promise, because you know how it ends, he's in the Hall of Fame. There's a scene in the movie where his offensive coordinator brings him in his office and he asks him this question, he said, "We are an \$800 million organization. Why should I turn over the most complex offense in the history of the NFL to a man of your age who's never taken a snap? Why should I do that?" Can I summarize his response? He says, "Because based on my experience and the things that I've gone

through, I'm ready. I wasn't ready seven years ago but I am ready now." And he not only started that game but he won the Super Bowl and the MVP his rookie season because if he had done it earlier, he hadn't have been ready. How many times is it the hardships of regret that teach us that lesson?

Can I share with you the provision of time because we've all gotten ahead of God and some of you are rare and you've gotten behind God but it does happen. Here's the provision of time. At the end of Matthew 28, Jesus makes this incredible statement, he says, "Lo, I am with you to the end of the age." And some of you today say, "Man, I've been waiting five years on God. I've been waiting 15 years on God." Any of you willing to say you've been waiting 84 like Anna? Luis Palau, the great South American evangelist who just recently went to be with the Lord, made this statement years ago. I'll never forget it. He said most Christians give up on God within two years of him doing what they were waiting on him to do and they go form their own plan.

Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you to the end of the age." Maybe today you've gotten ahead of God. He says, "That's okay, I'm still with you." Maybe you're behind and he says, "I'm still with you." Maybe you say, "God, I've been waiting 15 years and I'm just about to give up." He says, "Lo, I am with you to the end of the age." The day after Christmas, the week after Christmas, three decades after Christmas, no parties, no celebrations, no angels, and no lighting up the night sky but you see a faithfulness to the word of God, a faithfulness to the Spirit of God, and a faithfulness that even though the time frame doesn't make sense, God knows what he's doing. What a challenge to us this day after Christmas.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. As we come to this time of the service, you know, it sounds somewhat rhetorical but, you know, you can't be faithful to that which you don't have faith in, and maybe today you're that individual whether here in person or maybe that individual who's listening to the radio driving around town or are watching online this day or maybe even another day, and maybe the Spirit of God got ahold of the word of God in your life and you realize that doing it on your own, doing it in your own strength, doing it in your own ability and power, it hasn't worked yet and you don't see it working anytime in the near future. Maybe today is that day where you fulfill Romans 10 that says just whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe all those trials, all those struggles, all those difficulties have brought you to this place, this day, to where you're at a place where you would yield yourself and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're there today, would you just do what Romans 10 says, just call out to him? It's not about repeating a certain set of phrases or words, it's not about checking off a box, it's not about getting religious or doing this or stopping that, it's about just calling on him to be your Savior and your Lord.

If that's who you are this morning, maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to confess to you what you already know. I've tried. I've tried to do it on my own. I've tried to figure things out. And God, I've got an entire life as a testimony of the failure of my own ingenuity but, God, today I believe, I believe that at the root of my issues I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. So God, today I

believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. And God, today I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live in a sinless life on my behalf. And God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that when he allowed himself to go to the cross and have his hands and his feet pierced and to have his entire being mocked and made fun of, he was bearing the price and the punishment of my sin and my rebellion. And God, today I believe that the story didn't end there, that three days later Jesus Christ rose from the grave and because of that he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven, he made it feasible for my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the problems of life but I do know I have a sin problem that I can't solve myself that only Jesus can. So the best way I know, I'm asking you to save me, I'm asking you to forgive me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today that the day after Christmas, Christmas became a reality in your life. In a moment, I'm going to pray and we're going to stand and sing, we just want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a whole team of individuals, folks that would just love to hear your story, pray with you, pray for you. But maybe today as we stand and sing in a moment it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe it's about walking out of here saying, "I don't like the time frame but I'm not going to give up." Maybe it's about walking out of here saying, "I don't like the hardship but it means I'm not ready yet." Maybe it means walking out of here going, "God, I don't like the way this is playing out but I'm going to trust you even if I can't see you or hear you." The hardest decision today may not be stepping out and stepping forward, it may be stepping out here trusting God with whatever you struggled with when you came.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, we confess we have trust issues. God, we confess we live in a world that tells us that if we just put all the right pieces together at the right time we can do anything and be anything we want but, God, we've got a whole mess behind us. God, help us to trust, help us to believe, help us to obey, help us to respond to you today the way you've asked us to and not according to our own will and desires. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.