

The Journey Begins
August 16, 2009
Pastor David Brown

During our capital fund drive we were seeing if our church would be committed enough and sacrifice enough that we could step out in faith with some reason before we started a new building. We came up with a number of one million dollars that we needed to raise in a three year period and we knew if we raised that amount of money we would have the green light to move in to this facility. When that day came we had 1.4 million dollars pledged which is twice as much as any time we've ever raised money in this church. So that was an exciting day for us. As that started in January, we are in August now and out of that 1.4 million, \$500,000 has been donated already in cash. I want you to hear; over a third of the money in a three year program has already come in during a time that they tell us that we're in the worst recession since the 1930's. Our budget is not hurting; we're about 8 to 10 percent over last year and I want you to understand something, that's a God thing, that's incredible. That doesn't happen unless God is in control and God is directing the steps of what we're doing next. But today as we begin the journey, it is real important for me to remind you that this is not about a project; this is not about a building; this is not even about relocating, this is about people. This is about the vision that God has given this church, it is about our life mission, it is about the purpose, it is about the very reason that we exist not only as a church, but as people. We find the commandment; the great commission, in Matthew 28 and that's what our church runs on, that's the biblical context of everything we do. We find Jesus talking to the church before he leaves and he says this, "God authorized me and commanded me to commission you. Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near in this way of life marking them by baptism in the three fold name father, son and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I've commanded you, I'll be with you as you do this day after day after day right up to the end of the age." That was Jesus commissioning us, telling us that our life's purpose, our church purpose is to go into the world and to tell them the good news to have them baptized and have them as part of God's family. In our church we talk about it this way. We want to take people out of the world and lead them to Christ and help them become fully devoted followers. What that looks like for us is we want to bring them in so they can know God. Then we want to connect them with people so they can grow together and then the final step in that process is that they begin to serve inside the church and in the world that we live in. That is what we do. That is all we're about. Those things are what we are trying to accomplish in this place. We want people to come in and know God. We do things on purpose so people will come in. We are doing everything in our power to break down boundaries that people have about coming to church. We do everything possible to help them be comfortable, walk into this setting so they can take the time for the

Holy Spirit to work in their life so they can find this great God that we serve. Why do we do that? God has been inviting people to be part of this family for his entire existence. He's wanted people to be a part of his family. You see, people have a tendency to reject him and so this is what God said, we find it in Luke. The servant came back and he reported this to his master. What he is reporting is they won't come. God, you've created them, you've invited them to this great party, invited them to be part of your family, and they won't come. So, the owner of the house becomes angry and he orders his servant go out quickly into the streets and into the alleys of town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Then the master told his servant, go out to the roads and to the country lanes and make them come in so that my house may be full. I use this translation because the word compel doesn't have quite the power that God is asking us. The word compel doesn't show as much as it means he says I want you to go into the world and make people come to church. I want you to go into the world and I want you to do everything possible to force them to come to church. Get them in church. That's your priority. Get to them to a place where they can become part of a family and so that my house will be full. That's the mission; that's the vision and that's what God has given us to do. Now here, we've decided to do it in a particular way. Here we've broken down a lot of the traditional barriers that people had about going to church. I used to have people tell me all the time, I don't have the clothes to go to church. That's fine, we break down that barrier. I don't like the music in church. That's fine; we'll break down that barrier. I don't like this, I don't like that. We've done whatever we can do because our goal is to make them come so they can know God. Make them get in the doors so they can know God. We do it this way because this is the way God told us to do it. There are a lot of people in this world and we get the idea that church needs to be done a particular way and there's a right way to do church and there's a wrong way to do church. But I want you to understand something, if all churches were alike, it would reach a small group of people. Let me give you a real life example. Today, if you come up to me and say we've got a group of people to our house and we'd really like to you to come, it's going to be great. We're going to serve lasagna and watch golf. I think I have a root canal this afternoon. I don't care what I have to do, I'm not going to your house to eat lasagna and watch golf because I can't stand lasagna and I can't stand watching golf. Now, if you're a good friend and you ask me over and over and over, finally you'll probably break me down and I'll come to your house because I like you and I want you to stop asking me. I'll pick at the lasagna and I'll go to sleep watching golf. I mean the sleep that drools's coming out. I'll drool on your couch because there's nothing interesting to me about it. Now, let me give you another picture, if in a couple of weeks you come up to me and say, David, I've got a sixty inch flat screen high definition TV and we're going to watch the Cowboy game and have hot wings, I'll end the sermon early to get to your house and I will eat hot wings like a refugee. I will be happy and every time you invite me, I will be there and I will be involved in that game and be excited about that game and I will tell everybody what's going on. Church is the same way. We

have all these different churches that are supposed to do it different ways so we can compel everyone from the town, from the alley, from the country side; we're to compel everyone to come in so we all do it differently. So we don't think here at The Avenue that the way we do church is the only way to do church. It's not, it's just the way we are called to do it and we're called to reach a certain group of people. Now there are some people who love putting on a suit and tie and going to church. There are some people that love to put on their Sunday best to go to church. We call them Presbyterians. That's fine and that works if that is what you want, if that is how you feel close to God. If that is how you worship, more power to you. On the other end of the spectrum, we got people that like to listen to bad country music and ride horses and ride bulls at church. That doesn't make a lot of sense to me. I mean that is not something that would attract me. If the Cowboy church, which is doing an incredible job of reaching people for Jesus, if that was the only church, I would struggle because I don't like country music, I heard it enough growing up and I don't like stepping in stuff. That's not for me but it works for them. It's not our job to sit and critique what other churches do; it's our job to reach the people that God has called us to reach. I believe there is a large portion of the population that is looking for what we have. In fact, last week we had over 900 people in this place. For the record we can't hold 900 people in this place, the fire marshal wouldn't like it at all. We had 300 nursery through 6th grade, no place to park, it was incredible. When we move, all of that space is going to be a tool to keep doing what God has called us to do. To make them come in, to compel them to come in, to attract them to the style of worship we do and we do it for one reason so that they can know God. But that's only the first step. Once they get in and find Jesus as their savior, we want to help them grow. You see, for us it's not about having a church that's a mile wide and an inch deep, it's not about us bringing us a big crowd to entertain, it's about changing people's life for eternity and it's about helping people become that fully devoted follower and the only way to do that is for you to grow in your knowledge of God, grow in your relationship with each other and to build that fellowship that has someone there in your life that has your back. One of the greatest joys of the small church is that you came to church and everyone knew who you were and when there was a baby shower everyone came to it. When you were in the hospital everybody prayed for you and a lot of people like that small church because of that so we understand as our church grows larger and larger more of an emphasis has to be put on our LIFE Groups and that's where we pledged to and sold out to years ago to say our life groups are where people are going to grow together. That's where they are going to bond together, that's where they're going to connect together and find out who Jesus is on a personal level and those are the people that are going to be there for them and have their back and know when they miss. I have people say, did you not notice I wasn't in church in the past two weeks? I'm like, I've got 900 faces, I didn't notice and they are offended. It's not about whether the pastor knows if you're here or not, it's about whether the group of people you do life together knows you're here. So we sold out to that model of us growing

together because God wants to have a church full but he also wants to have people deep, he wants people to grow in relationships and to be different than they were last year. In fact in September we are going to do something we've never done before, we're going to have an online survey that's completely anonymous and we're going to ask you where you are spiritually. You can be completely honest because no one will know your name, no one will know who you are because we want to see where church is and what we can do in programming and ministry to help you be different next year than you are today. You are going to be part of that and you're going to hear more about it starting in September but it is going to be an incredible tool for us to see because our goal is not just to bring them in but to raise them up and then send them out and that's the final step in this journey. To send them out, for you to serve in your church and in your community. That is the key piece of this puzzle. You need to be serving. See we have a culture of serve us and a lot of churches cater to that culture. People come into the church for what it can bring them and you hear people say, well I'm looking for a church that will do this for me. I'm looking for a church that will do this for my kids. I'm looking for a church that does this in the sermon, I'm looking for a church that does this with music and you have a shopping list for a church and listen, when you don't know Jesus, that's fine but when you know Jesus, there's more to it than what we can do for you. You're supposed to be here to serve Him. That's why you come into this place and so I ask the question are you serving your church body? Is there an area of your life where you're volunteering, because there needs to be; there has to be and are you serving outside the church with a mission to compel them to come in? That's the final step so we know you're a spiritual devotee deep person. So today you have to ask yourself where am I. You're in a church that has some things that you need to know about it.

The first thing you need to know about The Avenue Church is everyone is welcome. Now, the last time I preached a sermon about everyone being welcome, we had a guy come down the middle aisle in a hoodie with a backpack and he sat right here in the front and he started taking his clothes off and standing real close to the stage. Now, he'd been here a couple Wednesday nights before and we discovered that he was an angel that God had sent and his job was to take the crowns from the pastors. Which, that's cool, I would give him my crown, I don't have a clue about that except the only way he could get the crowns from the pastors is to decapitate them, which, I'd kind of like to hold on to my head for a little bit longer and so he's sitting here and I know that his goal is to actually cut my head off and I'm thinking everybody's welcome except him. You're going to have to get out of here! So we had some men escort him out and I want you to know he's hit all the churches in town and all of the churches have had to do the same thing. He's mentally disturbed and he needs help and I hope he gets help. The police officers talked to him, interviewed him and he did say one thing that I took as a compliment; he said the only place that he feared for his life was at The Avenue Church. I'm thinking, thank you, you protected me well. That's just the kind of church we are, you hit us at

a softball game with a bat, we get in a brawl, you come in and you want to kill the pastor, you're scared and you get run out. That's alright, that's the kind of church we are. Everyone is welcome. When you say everyone is welcome though, it changes the complexion of your church. All of a sudden you get people in church that haven't been raised in church and they don't get that Christian stuff yet and they don't understand all the rules that we know to follow and so they come into the church and look a lot like the world. A lot of times they're real spiritual Christian people who will look at them and go, they need to get their life right. Yeah, they do and so do you. There is nobody in here that doesn't have failings. There's nobody in here that doesn't need the grace of God to get up every morning, is that right? I mean have we all made it, has anybody in here succeeded yet? Because if so you need to take my place for sure; in fact you may need to take Jesus' place after church we'll crucify you in back and we'll see if you can come back from the dead and then we'll know that you've perfected it. But let me tell you when you welcome everybody the church takes on a different look and we're okay with that.

Along with that you need to know everybody is needed and as the church grows larger you feel like you've lost your place and you're really not really needed. You're needed. The bigger we get the more we need volunteers. I can't tell you how many volunteers it takes every week to make this happen. There are very few people that are paid at this church. There are very few people who do what they do because their paid. Most, all of the people you see on Sunday, except for your staff are volunteers and they give hours of their life to make this happen and they need help, they need your strength and your gift. The bible says you are all gifted to do things and God needs you to serve in this place and as you serve, guess what, everyone who comes in these doors are changed and that's our goal. I've told you before and I'll tell you again, this is not a safe place to be and if you come looking for a church where you can relax; if you come looking for a church where you can hide; if you come looking for a church that you can just sit back and enjoy; this isn't it. We're a dangerous place to be. Lives here are changed and we do things all the time to shake things up because we have one goal; to compel them to come in. To get them connected to God and to each other so they will know God, so they will grow together and they will serve the world. This is not a safe church. A safe church strives to keep members happy. That's what a safe church does. A safe churches goal is to make sure the membership, the people that are coming; the people that are tithing; a safe church wants to make sure those people are happy. I want you to understand something; at The Avenue Church that is not our number one priority. It is not about whether you're happy or not; whether you like the songs we sing or not. You may leave today and go, I didn't like the music at all; that's okay, it was really for God so not a problem that you didn't like it. Well, I really didn't like that sermon today; that's alright, it's okay, I didn't like it either. We're not going to strive to keep people happy and let me tell you that is a much easier roll to play as a pastor. I wish that I had found myself in that role. Just do what the members like and keep

them happy and love them and them love me back and everything just be smooth and wonderful and there are a lot of pastors that that's their primary goal is to keep the people in their church happy...but that's not my goal. A lot of you know that. You're like, you better believe it, you've accomplished that, check that one off the list. I want to be honest with you when we changed the name of the church it caused me more pain than any other pain we made. Let me tell you why...I knew God wanted it and 80% of the church knew it was supposed to happen but that 20% were the people who had supported me, I'm going to say since I was a child. There are the people who supported me the first day I was here. They had my back and were the people that loved me and took care of my family; they're the people who were surrogate grandparents to my children. They mean everything to me and they weren't happy. It hurt them. You see we can't strive to make people happy because we have a God that we are serving that has a higher calling than happiness. Now, we all want to be liked, it's just not our number one goal. We're not a safe place. A safe church also avoids controversy issues. They don't want to talk about it. They just talk about God is love, God is great, God is good, let us thank us for this food. They just go through the simple things. They want to keep it where everybody's happy and they don't want to stir things up. Listen, here we are going to stir things up. We're going to talk about things that we need to talk about. If we need to talk about politics, we're going to talk about politics. You say, oh no, you're going to lose your tax deduction; you're going to lose your tax free base. In the New Testament they lost their life. We can handle that. We'll talk about politics if we have to talk about politics. We'll talk about morals. We'll tell you that abortion is murder and is wrong, but then we're going to love the person who had the abortion. We're going to tell you that homosexuality is an abomination to God, that it's sin. But we're going to love the person that is trapped in that sin. When it comes to issues from the pulpit we're going to talk about the real issues. We're going to talk about sex from the pulpit. I wish you'd had seen the first time I had ever decided that we talk about sex from the pulpit I realized in church nobody ever has sex, but in the world apparently many people are and so we thought we would talk about it in church. I had people have a heart attack and boycott the church that Sunday because it wasn't appropriate. Listen, if it's happening in your life and its happening in the word of God, it's appropriate to talk about in this pulpit and I will. It's not a safe place to be. I'm going to say things and you can ask the second service because I really put my foot in my mouth. I'm not going to repeat it; I want to make one mistake a day. I made a big one. I'm always going to say things that are going to offend you. I promise. You stay here long enough and you're going to be offended. It may be on purpose, it may be accidental but it is going to happen. So if you're sitting out there today and you want to respect and admire your pastor, you better find another place because I'm just as real as you are and that's where I'm going to be in this pulpit. So I'm going to offend you because we're going to talk about the things that have to be talked about.

A safe church remains cautious. They have a fear so they hold on to things. I've been in churches and every step they take makes perfect sense. They could run a business and the church is a business and the church does wonderful as a business and they have their flow charts and they have their organizational plans and everything they do is business like and they make decisions just like the bank in town does. We don't do that. We live by faith. I'm going to tell you something, it doesn't make sense for a church our size to borrow 6 million dollars. That's actually nuts. They're partnering with us because they believe in what God is doing here but I want you to understand if God does not come through, if God does not bring the increase, if God does not provide the finances, The Avenue church will cease to exist. I'll be down at Whataburger flipping burgers. Some of you will be at the Cowboy church, some of you at First Baptist. I don't see any Presbyterians in here, no ties. You'll just have to find another church to go to if God doesn't come through. But let me tell you, I'd rather live on that edge of faith believing that God gave us that God size task then live with the status quo the rest of my life and never be what God has chosen us to be.

A safe church guards the status quo. We shake things up all the time. Constantly shaking things up; the things we have are good and we're always striving to make it better. We are striving to do it better and better. We want to be excellent in every area and we are never satisfied with the status quo. There is always something we can change. There is always something we can do better for God's glory and we are going to continue to do that and sometimes it's going to go against what you want and go against what you like and go against what you think best, but we're going to constantly push that envelope. I was down in Florida after we changed the name of the church and I saw one of the former pastors. There are only two that are living, but I saw one of them and his wife came up to me and I don't know if many of you know him, but it was Ed and Janna Wright and Janna has this real bubbly personality that's real outgoing and she saw me at the conference and she ran up to me and she said man, I've heard so much about the church and it's so exciting. Let me see the name, the logo and she's looking at it and she said when are moving out to the new building and she's as pumped as she can be. I'm talking to her and I'm like you know it was really hard to change the name. I really riled up a bunch of people and Ed Wright is standing beside her and he kind of says in a low tone well David you've been riling those people up for twenty years and I thought yeah, you're right because we can't keep the status quo because God has given us a vision and that is to bring people in to connect to God and become fully devoted followers. He wants to do something in this ordinary place that's extraordinary and he wants to use you to do it. Are you part of the Journey? Today, if I scared you off, that's okay. If this isn't the place for you, that are okay because we want you sold out, we're not looking for consumers. We're not looking for people to come because they enjoy the church, we are looking for contributors. People who want to join us on this journey. Are you one of those people today because we're beginning the Journey? August 30th at 7:00 we break ground, the next day, God willing they

start moving dirt and in a matter of a year we will have a new tool to use to bring them in. Remember, it's not about the building, it's about changed lives. Do you want to be part of it? It's a great adventure. We're starting this month; I hope you'll join us.