

The Journey
Leaving Your Land
August 23, 2009
Pastor David Brown

The great adventures starting, the journey is beginning, exciting things are going on. There is just an excitement in the air and I'm not sure if it's excitement over the journey beginning or you're just really glad your kids are going back to school. I see that excitement and people are pumped up about the kids going back to school and I understand that, listen, we're not going to judge you today. We understand you're tired of those little monsters being in your house and you're ready to get rid of them. Thursday night I went to meet the teacher night at an elementary school. I'm telling you it was like an old fashion revival service. I walked in there and the parents are smiling ear to ear and they're walking around clapping hands and telling the teachers, this is your problem now. They're counting down the days, and now you're all pumped because tomorrow morning, they're gone. Freedom, finally just a little bit of sanity and that's okay, we're not going to judge you. Around here we have promotion day and that used to be easy when we had twenty or thirty kids and we took them from class to class and said here's your new teacher and now we have three hundred kids and it's pretty wild and so there is a lot of excitement going on and we have an opportunity to have a new staff member. Connections is one of the biggest areas in our church that we need to address because we're having no trouble getting the crowd in and no trouble getting people baptized but getting them into groups and helping them fully develop into the spiritual maturity they need to develop in is the problem. We have an opportunity to bring someone on that has a passion for our church and already understands our vision. There's no learning curve, he's excited about it, but the most exciting thing about Jason and Jennifer, as you're going to quickly find out, is not how much they love The Avenue Church, how much they love Jesus himself. You're going to see that in their lives and just what an incredible blessing to have them come and be part of it. Next week is the official ground breaking. Can you imagine that? All these years we've been looking forward to this and now we are actually going to go out there at 7 o'clock. Bring your lawn chair and your umbrella; it's a big day. Things are going to be going on all over the place and I want you to be a part of it. I want you to be excited about it. Last week we voted and I mean everyone voted yes on the construction company, we had one person vote no on borrowing the money, but they wrote on there, I believe God is going to provide all the money before we move in. Halleluiah, Amen! That's fine, we can do that, we're excited about that. Now, I want to warn you, if you're the guy that did that and you're a prophet, it better happen because the Old Testament is real clear if you say it's going to happen, but if you spoke wrong, we've got to take you out and kill you. It's in the bible, if you speak for God and you speak wrong, you're dead so just be ready for that. You're going to be stoned and not the way you'd like to be, it's going to be a totally different stoning, it's going to be rough so you're going to have to hang in there. You better hope that 6 million dollars comes in between now and next year when we start school.

For those of you who haven't heard, I want to let you in on how we got to this place and some of you have heard the story and if you've heard the story that's fine just hang in. This

story is for those of you that don't know why we are making this move, why we are doing the things that we're about to do in the next few weeks. I want to go back just very quickly and touch on some things that led us to do this. In 1990, when God brought me to the church I was 26 years old. The church was a great church, it had done some wonderful things and it ran about 150 people, which in those days was a good size church, bigger than most churches so it was a great church, it had done some great things but we began to pray at that time, God, give us a vision for something that we can't take credit for. Give us a vision for something happening so incredible that we have give you all the glory, give you all the praise and when people drive by and see it they go, wow, God is a great God. So we began to pray for that vision to happen and remember we were sitting on an acre of land with a building that holds about 200 people and so we began praying that through and we begin asking God to do incredible things and in the next few years he just blows the place up and we see all kinds of things happen. We open up this building in 2000 and the first Sunday it's packed and we go to two services almost immediately. About 2004 we're as crowded as we can be, we're running about 450 people, we've doubled in size in about 4 years and we've just got kids everywhere, we don't know what to do, we bought a building next to us and we started remodeling it, we're bringing a trailer in to put your kids in, we're doing everything we can to continue to let God bless us and our hope and our goal was that we could reach 800 people a week in the life of Waxahachie. In 2004 we started noticing that not just Waxahachie is coming to church. In fact people were coming from Midlothian, Red Oak and Ennis and all of these places around us and we started wondering about that going, God, we're no longer a Waxahachie church. We're sorry we did green carpet. I know that's very offensive to many of you. When we did the green carpet we only had Waxahachie people I promise. We would have never put maroon in but if we had put blue in we'd been stuck. Maybe beige, I don't know, but we starting realizing God wanted us to do more because in 2004, we went to a conference in California and we were sitting out there and we had just voted on building a 1.7 million building to connect the two buildings you see where all the grass and the trailer is. It was going to be a beautiful building, it was going to have a commons area and a big check in area, it was going to be a great building, we just voted to build that building and I have a problem and I know this. Anytime the church starts growing, I start looking ahead to what's next. To be honest with you I've already starting thinking about what happens when we fill the new building up twice, when's our third service going to be. I'm already picturing the new building after the new building. I have a sickness I know, I'm getting counseling. Anyway, back in 2004 I was doing the same thing. Alright God we're going to put this building together and we're going to be able to reach this many people, we should grow to 800 and God what do you want next? It was very clear to me during that time that God began to break in to my life and he said, David, more. 800, it sounds like a God size thing, but we're running 450, 800, we had almost a thousand two weeks ago, I can do more, I want to do more with you. He led us to the chapter in Genesis, chapter 12 where he is talking to Abraham and he looks at Abraham and says this is what I want you to do, I want you to leave your land and I want you to leave your father's house and I want you to go to a place that I will show you. I want you to know at that point Abraham was 75 years old. I mean, he was settled. He had servants; he had a wife, his father's houses, land, and cattle. He had it all. He should have been looking toward retirement. God broke into his life and said listen Abraham, I have a deal for you, I can make you into a nation, all the world will be blessed through you if you will step out

of your comfort zone, if you will walk with me, if you will believe my promise you have an opportunity to live a life bigger than anything you can imagine, do you want to? At that point Abraham had a choice. He very easily could have said, I'm good and God would have loved him and this is the amazing thing, God would have loved him just the same. If Abraham would have said, you know what, I want to stay here, I'm comfortable here, God would have said that's fine and he would have moved to someone else and we would have had a different name in the word of God. But, Abraham said, yes, I'm willing to leave everything I know, I'm willing to leave my land, my buildings, my comfort, my security, I'm going to go to a place that you're going to show me God because I want to live beyond myself. As I began to read that I realized God we can do more. 800 people in this community is not very many. God, we need a God sized thing. Remember the original prayer; we want you to do something that can't be explained. So, we came back to the leadership of our church and we met in this room and I began to lay out for them that God had a bigger vision for our church. That we were aiming way too small. Instead of 800, you know what; we can reach 8000 for God. 8000 people we believe is an easy number for God to accomplish in our midst and I was ready because remember we just voted for a 1.7 million dollar building, we were settled. It took us a long time to get this land, it took a long time to get these buildings, and we had a beautiful sanctuary four years old. The leadership stood up and said, you know what, we've been praying the same thing and we believe that God is leading us out. Within three months, we had bought 76 acres of land. Within three months we bought land and let me tell you something, we bought 76 acres of land for \$900,000. The day after that we put a bid on the land a company offered them 1.8 million dollars. They took our bid because they had integrity. We bought the land for \$900,000, a year later we sold 5 acres of land for 1.6 million dollars. Hey man, that's God isn't it? I'm like God could you do that for my house, that would be great if you could do that in my personal life. That's incredible. God had a plan for us and he took us when we had the faith to step out and we had the faith to believe that God wanted more and the church as a whole said we are ready to step out on faith and let God do beyond anything we could imagine. We had a choice. Ferris Avenue Baptist Church would have been fine if we had of stayed where we were. We would have been fine if we would have stayed in the old building, we could have run 200 for the rest of our lives and that would have been fine. I had somebody tell me, you wouldn't have been the pastor. Yeah, I would have been the pastor; I was called here whether we were a big church, little church, dysfunctional church or whatever. God wanted me here and I know that I was willing to do whatever God called us to do, but I'm so overjoyed that like Abraham, the church said, we're ready. We're on the threshold of that today and I want to challenge you in that, which as the church is the church it's made up of individuals. I believe today God is speaking to many of your hearts and he is offering you the same deal. He is saying to you, you can live like your living, you're fine if you've accepted me as your savior, I'm going to take you to heaven and we're going to rejoice forever but if you want something more, if you want to take it to another level, if you want to live this abundant, exciting life, then I have a choice for you to make and if you will choose this, if you will choose me, if you will leave your comfort, if you will leave your security, if you will leave the things that you know and will step out in faith and believe me I will show you great and mighty things and I will blow you away. That's your invitation. Many of you today, that's what God is saying in your life. For you to live that abundant life though there are two things that God is going to have to get you to let go of. Our church had to let go of the land,

we had to let go of these buildings, we had to let go of our traditions, we had to let go of a lot of things to step out. Abraham had to leave everything he knew.

Today God is asking to lose some things if you're going to have an abundant life. The first thing he's asking you to give us is your image. He's asking you to let go of your image today because, let me tell you image is important to us. Every person in this room, we have created an image of who people think we are and that is a big deal to us. We want people to look at us, we want them to respect us, and we want them to think that we are smart; we want them to think we are good looking; we want them to think all kinds of things. We create an image and we put on a front and we put on a mask and we pretend to be something most of the time so other people will respect us. God says listen, if you want to follow me, if you want to have an abundant life, I don't care about your image, and I don't care about what people think about you. I care about what I think about you and this is what I want you to do. That's our God. Today he is calling to many of you and he's saying listen, you've got the outside polished up and you look good, but inside your full of garbage. Inside there are things in your life that are not godly and Jesus for some reason always comes after the heart. He never goes, man you have a good reputation, and you look good on the outside. He never comes and says you're very talented, creative person, thank you for that. He never comes to you for that. He comes straight to your heart and he says this is an area in your life that I want. Let go. Well, you know what, you know, it's not a big deal God, I can handle this and so you make deals with God. Have you ever done that? God, I'll just read the bible more. God says really? You're going to read the bible more about obeying me but you're not going to let me have the garbage in your life? You're not going to let me have the sin in your life? We say, God look at this, I'm going to volunteer more at the church and God look how good I look. Look at the outside don't look at the inside. God says I don't care about the outside, I don't care about who people think you are. I want your heart, I'm coming down to the heart and I want you to get rid of the garbage in your life. Why does he care about the garbage in your life? Because he knows it will destroy you and it doesn't matter what the outside looks like, it doesn't matter what people think of you, it doesn't matter what your reputation is, God says I want the whole heart and if I can get the heart you can have this abundant life, but if I'm going to get the heart, you've got to let go of some things in your life. You've got to not worry about what your neighbor thinks, you've got to not worry about what your spouse thinks, you've got to be honest before me and say God I'm giving you this. I give it over to you completely, it's yours. Some of you've got garbage in your life right now and you know it. God is looking at you and saying, listen, I need that. Some of you think your keeping a secret. Some of you think you've got it all figured out and God I'm going to read the bible and give more and volunteer more but I'm going to hold on to this sin in my life God because this brings me comfort, I can handle this. I want you to know something, you're whole world is about to fall apart. I don't know who it is and I don't know if you're in this group or the groups before but your whole life is going to fall apart because God will not be mocked. What you reap, you sow, so today I don't care what you look like on the outside, I don't care what people think about you today, if you want that abundant life, you don't need to worry about your image, you need to worry about your heart and make sure it's fully devoted to God, that he has every part of it because the outside could be shiny and new and beautiful but if it's filled with trash, it's filled with trash and many of us today need to get the trash out of our life. This morning we need to get the trash out of our life. There's a beautiful group in the bible that

help us and I want you to see it. I'm going to call you a bunch of Pharisees today, I hope you're offended. Anyway, Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and first of all you need to understand who the Pharisees are. Pharisees are a group of religious people. I mean they've got their stuff together; they even wear certain clothes that show their holiness. They have tassels and different things and they wear these clothes and say look at me, I'm holy and I know you're thinking man we've come a long way. Not really, did you grow up in church? Do you remember growing up in church? Who were the holy people? Suit and tie right? You show up in church with jeans and a t-shirt and guess what...you need Jesus. But you wear a tie, you can be cheating on your wife but you got a tie so you're a godly man. I was a youth minister, 22 year old wearing a three piece suit because I was real spiritual. I look back at pictures and think, what was I thinking. Because it was about how we appeared, it was about our looks, it was about what was on the outside and then the Pharisees they did some incredible things with the law of God, they'd take the law of God and add to it. Oh, we've come a long way haven't we? Have we? When I grew up and I was in church and started my family, I added a lot of rules. In my house you couldn't say dang, because that was way too close to the other word so I put that on the same level. You couldn't celebrate Halloween because it's hallo-ween, that's the devil day. So, it wasn't in the bible, but I added to it because I was godly and the outside had to be right. Pharisees added to the word, Pharisees worried about appearance and these are Jesus' words to them...listen to how hard he is on them...He says, Woe to you, you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites, you clean the outside of the cup and dish but inside their full of greed and self indulgence. He's calls them blind, first clean the inside of the cup and the dish and then the outside also will be clean. It is not about reading more of the bible, it's not about attending more bible studies, it's not about volunteering more, it is not about giving more, it is about what is on the inside of your heart. Does God have your heart because that's all he wants. He doesn't care how much you read the bible. He doesn't care how much you give or how much you volunteer he cares about your heart. If there's garbage in your life, he says I want it.

Second thing you've got to let go of with your image is your idols. I know you're thinking well we don't have idols today. None of us worship a little statue in our closet. I hope you don't, if you do you need some counseling and help. But you do have idols. You say, what do you mean? I'll tell you what an idol is. An idol is anything you love more than Jesus. Oh, I just love Jesus; there is nothing I love more than Jesus. Really? Let's think about that for a minute. There is not something in your life that you care more about than Jesus? There are not some people in your life that you really care more about than Jesus? There are not some things in your life that you'll put in front of Jesus? Anything you put in front of Jesus is considered an idol. It's an amazing thing to me because there are a lot of idols in our life and we always struggle with things that we put in front of God, but God has something that he wants you to know. He talks about when we come close to God, and let me tell you most of us come close to God when what? When we need something, your marriage is falling apart, you come close to God. You lose your job, you come close to God. You're having financial trouble or a problem with your children, you come close to God. It's kind of amazing when you look at us and you realize that many times the only time we come to God is when we need something from God but that's what we do. But God says this, if you're going to come to me for a word, if you're going to come to me for help, if you're going to come to me I'm going to take care of the idols

in your life. The first thing I'm going to do when you come to me is I'm going to work on the idol in your life. The thing that is most important to you because I've got to get that out of there before I can help you. In fact it says in Ezekiel, the leaders and the elders have idols in their lives and they're coming to Ezekiel to hear a word from the Lord. Ezekiel is a prophet and they're gathering together around him just like you gather on Sunday morning to hear a word from God. They're coming together and they're saying listen God, I need some help, I'm struggling and you show up in church so you can hear God speak to you. That's what's happening in the book of Ezekiel. This is what God says to Ezekiel, in 14 verse 4, Therefore speak to them and tell them this is what the sovereign Lord says, when any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face, then goes to a prophet, I the Lord will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry. I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel who have deserted me. This is what he promises. Let me break this down for you so you can see it. He says if you're trying to get near God, if you have problems in your life and your coming to God, the first thing God is going to do is come after your idolatry. He's going to come after your idol. He says they may come to the word, they may come to a Sunday school class, they may come to a bible study, they may go to a conference, they may come to a worship service but I'm going to speak to them because I want their hearts. Do you see what he says? I want to recapture their heart and so I'm going to take their idol and I'm going to smash it. That's why so many of you when you walk out the back of the church say, man how did you know what I was going through today? I didn't. Man, that was really what I needed today God. I didn't have a clue. Sometimes people come in the back of the church and said you talked about this today and I'm like, no I didn't because God says, if you come after him, he's coming after you. He's coming after your idol. He's coming after that thing in your life that you have set on his throne and he wants it off so if you come to church and all we talk about is money, huh, don't say that a lot because you're really not talking about the church, you're talking about your own life because we don't always talk about money but if that's what you hear when you walk in, if that's what your bible study is about, if that's what your Sunday school teacher talks about, if that's what your LIFE group talked about, if that's what your preacher talks about, you better look in your life because God's coming after your idol. We don't always talk about money; you may think we do because God is speaking directly to you to break down that idol in your life. Marriage, every week you talk about how to have a great relationship, we need a good relationship. No, I don't, that may be what you hear because you have an idol in your life that God wants you to take down. Sexual immorality that's all you talk about, all the time, I come to church, you're talking about sexual immorality, always talking about porn, porn this porn that. No we really don't. The problem is you have your clean little life and you've got it all and you've got your big bible and you're all dressed up and you're reading the bible and volunteering and God's going, porn, porn. You walk in to church and you hear music and God says porn. Preachers preaching, porn, that's all you hear because God is coming after your idol. I have people get mad at me when I preach on forgiveness. I don't understand that, why? Here's a good one, let me talk about your kids, do you get mad. I talk about sports and your children and you say that's all they talk about is sports up there. No, you're probably the parent that got the whole back windshield covered in those little baseballs and so you're all mad when I start talking about your kid. My kids going to play major league ball, no, he's playing right field in little league. Not going to make you a living playing baseball I promise. Oh you don't know my

son, you haven't seen my son. I've seen a bunch of sons play; I've seen a bunch of your kids play, not a Nolan Ryan in the place. Half of you aren't laughing that's what makes me laugh. A lot of you, I can't believe he's always talking about that. It's not a problem; I have it in the right place. I only spend \$8000 for select ball and my kid only plays 100 games a year. Got people leaving, oh well. God's going to come after your idol; he's going to break down anything in your life that is more important than him. He wants is out, why? God loves you and he cares for you and here's the thing, it just blows my mind and I want you to know that I don't have to choose it. I don't have to get the garbage out of my life, I don't have to knock down the idols and God loves me anyway. That doesn't make sense but God says if you want to have that abundant life and you want to live that promise, if you want me to touch the world through you, then this is what you need to do, get the garbage out of your life and break down the idols in your life. You have a choice today, will you do that? Some of you here today are like you know what, I come to church all the time and I don't ever feel guilty. God doesn't ever get on to me. That's the scariest thing I've ever heard in my life. If you can sit through sermon after sermon and it has no impact on you, if God never breaks your heart, God never shows you sin in your life let me tell you something, that's frightening because I'm a father and when I see my kids doing something wrong, I've got to tell them. I've got grown children, I see my kids doing something wrong, I have to tell them, when I'm a hundred years old and their eighty, I'm still going to be getting on to them because I love them and I'm their father. Let me tell you something, if you're not hearing from God sermon after sermon, there's a good reason, he's not your father. I just offended some of you and a lot of you are wondering if I'm going to apologize. I'm not because that's God. If you're convicted when you come under the Holy Spirit, it's because you're not part of him so today you do have a choice, just like Abraham decided years ago to leave his land and his family and to go to a new place and bless everybody. Do you realize Jesus came from Abraham? What a blessing. God himself was born in Abraham's family. The Avenue Church is leaving comfort, leaving its buildings, leaving its traditions to go and do a new thing. It's going to be incredible. But the church is made up of individuals and today each of you has a choice. Are you going to let God remove the garbage from your life? Are you going to give up your idols? Are you going to cast them down and let him be the Lord of your life? See the problem with church is right now you're getting it, I can always tell, God is getting through to you but then we're going to sing and you're going to grab your stuff and you're going to walk out and get your kids and it's going to be gone. It's kind of like hitting the snooze button. Yeah, God I need to deal with that, click, I'll deal with it later. Now the snooze button doesn't make a lot of sense to me because I'm a light sleeper. I don't think the alarm clock has woke me up in ten years. Any time I have to get up I wake up before that. I have a stupid dog that will bark, kids that get up. Something will always happen; I will wake up before the alarm. But I know people who have a mental illness that set their clocks thirty minutes earlier so they can intentionally hit the snooze button. Get some help! When it's time to get up, I've got a clue for you...get up! It's not that hard, but that's how we do with God. God speaks in our heart but then we walk out the door and hit the snooze button. In Hebrews there are three verses right together that really impressed me with this idea, it starts in Hebrews 3:7, so as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. In just a few verses later, as it has just been said, today if you hear his voice do not harden your heart. In the next chapter, 7 verses down, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. If the bible says something three times in a row

and that close, it must be important. So today hear me say, if the spirit is speaking to your heart, do not harden it. Let him get rid of the garbage, let him break down the idols and let's live this life of promise.