

January 8, 2023 | Message Transcription

How to Tell Yesterday Goodbye

Exodus 14

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As we gather today, every one of us is aware that all of the delights and the decor and the drama of the holidays are now behind us. And in every sense of the word, the sales are up, and we are now moving into the year known as 2023. And so, what I would say to you is that as we recognize this today, that life is a series of movements. We're always moving. We're moving through different ages and stages of life. We go through different events and experiences in life. We have some delights, and delightful moments. And then many times, fearful experiences that we face. We have expectations, we have outcomes. But in all of life ready or not, it's time to move.

Therefore because of the rhythmic movement of life, I thought that it might be good for us to begin this new year with a new series that would help us think in terms of movement and the fact that it's time to move. I've been prayerfully and carefully considering, "God, what would You have me to speak to Your people? And how would You have us as a teaching team on both this campus and Grovetown and Belvedere campuses to be leading the people forward in these days?"

Now, many of you are trying to get life in motion physically, right? Many of you are thinking, *it's time to move. I've been sitting at the table; I've been taking in a few too many things. And right now it's time to move.*

I passed one of the popular health clubs in our community this past week, and I am telling you, there was not one single space on the parking lot at that club. It was incredible. You would have thought it was the biggest event of the year—cars wrapped around everywhere. But I've lived long enough to know that you give it about 30 to 60 days, and the restaurant parking lots are going to be full and the health club parking lots are going to be well sparse. I'm not trying to discourage you. I'm just saying it's amazing how we all kind of get into this mode.

Physically, it's time to move and I need to do something. Hey, yeah, something is always better than nothing. If you can learn that one thing about fitness, that something is always better than nothing. Too many times we're thinking fitness means that, you know, we've got to be shaped. (You notice I'm doing that behind the podium up here.) We want to be shaped, we want to be sculpted, we want to look like we are,

you know, in competition. Don't do that! Just know that something is better than nothing and get started. Then if you want to pursue something else you can, but physically, it's time to move.

For many of us today, I would say that relationally and emotionally, we're struggling because we know that it's time to move. It's time to move on. We've been stuck. We keep rehearsing the same patterns of emotions in our lives. Many of us are allowing worry and anxiety, we're allowing anger and bitterness, we're allowing a spirit of envy and long-term injuries and grudges to sort of hold us captive. And in reality, there is no Happy New Year if you can't move on emotionally.

But above and beyond all of this, there's a need in every one of our lives to move spiritually, to move in accord with the work and the will of God in our lives. For all of us to be willing to say that *life is about so much more than just what I do (my existence); it is to be about God's purpose and ultimately being willing to trust Him and to follow His lead.*

In order to help us with our own movement and the prayer for God's movement in our lives, I want to invite you today to join me in Exodus 14. Now, if you follow me on Twitter, you know that yesterday I gave you a heads up and said that I wanted to encourage you to read Exodus 15. Now, I really intended that to be 14. But you know how when you're texting something, your fingers get in the way. And so I made a mistake.

If you're not following me on Twitter, let me just say at the beginning of the year, "Shame on you for not following your pastor." You need to be doing that so we can communicate. You may not agree with all of my views, but I hope that from time to time, I can give you some encouragement. But it is a great way to stay connected together. And if you did read Exodus 15, that's great because you read the exclamation point to what really is the storyline of what we're seeing in Exodus 14.

So now this is one of the most dramatic events in Scripture. It has to do with something that historically and significantly happened in the life of the nation of Israel. Before I begin to read the text, I need to read you into the storyline. The book of Genesis, chapter 12, God called a man by the name of Abraham. He told him that He was going to make him the father of a great nation, and that all of the nations of the earth would be blessed through him. Of course, Abraham is the father of the Jewish people. God had a plan in history whereby He would bring the Messiah through the Jew, and that through that, the entire world would know the salvation of God.

Even though God had given Abraham this promise, you remember there was a long road, even to the first born. He was well up in years, nearly 100 years old, when he and his wife, Sarah, conceived—pretty amazing miracle in and of itself. There was a descendant by the name of Isaac, and then there were the descendants of Abraham going all the way up to a young man by the name of Joseph.

Joseph was a young man whose life went through a lot of twists and turns, but who ultimately became the second most powerful man in the world when he became the favored man at the right hand of Pharaoh in Egypt. There was a day when there was a famine in the land, and that famine was so great that people from all over the earth came to Egypt seeking help. Because of the wisdom of Joseph and the preparation and the planning, there was something called *Joseph's Storehouse* where he was able to provide a way to take care of many people. So Egypt prospered, and people survived. It was an amazing story.

His own family, the Jews, came there. As they remained in that place, there came a day when there was a pharaoh who did not know Joseph. The result was that ultimately, the people began to be scorned. The people began to be oppressed. The people began to be devalued. For 400 years...did you hear how long I said? 400 years the people of Israel were enslaved to the Egyptians. But God still had a plan, and God had made His promise. Therefore, God raised up a man by the name of Moses, and Moses would be the one God would use to deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt, and to take them to the fulfillment of the promise and the promised land that he had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and their descendants.

Moses, by the amazing work of God, leads the people out of Egypt. God works on their behalf to perform miracles—ten plagues—and ultimately, Pharaoh said, "Get them out of here!" And they did. But then Pharaoh had regret and remorse. That's where we're going to pick up the story today. They're out of slavery. They're out of Egypt. They're being led towards God's next promise and purpose. But they're in a 'tween time. That's kind of where we are right now, isn't it? We're in a little bit of a 'tween time—a time between last year and the year and the years to come. As we're in this 'tween time, there are some things that we need to know and to see. But the first and the biggest of those is for me to say to you as I am in this message today, "It's time to tell yesterday, goodbye."

Let me begin reading in Exodus 14:1. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea'" [Exodus 14:1-2].

That's God's command—this is where I want them to be. "For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in'" [Exodus 14:3].

I think that's funny. Pharaoh thought they were wandering. Now you and I know (if we know our Bible) that there comes a day where they do spend some time wandering. But at this point, they weren't wandering. They were right in the will of God. They were specifically where they were planned and purposed to be. And why was that? Look at verse four. "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I" [Exodus 14:4]... want you to say out loud the next two words with me? "'...and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.'" And they did so" [Exodus 14:4b]

As we read that passage, we realize that a plot is unfolding, that some events and experiences are happening in real time—some things that would ultimately surely produce some sense of uncertainty and anxiety. They weren't sure what would happen next. Just as today, we stand in a 'tween time, looking at the future. We all know that no matter what we plan, no matter what we purpose, no matter what we resolve, there's a significant amount of uncertainty about what lies in front of us. If there's anything the last few years have taught us, it is that you can plan plans, but they're often going to get canceled.

You can have good intentions and make great resolutions, but things that happen beyond your control in life can divert and redirect everything in your life. And as we have seen and learned that all of us together, today what we want to do and what we want to give our attention to is that while we do not know where we will go in the days to come, we can learn how God works when it's time to move. We don't always know where we're going to go, but we can learn how God works when it's time to move, and how God would teach us to tell yesterday goodbye.

I have five basic principles I want to share with you this morning. And I would just ask that maybe you take some notes and write this down, or maybe you pull up the note page there that's available from the QR scan and the code in the auditorium here. But I just want to walk you through some things that I think we learn as we begin to make our way through this magnificent instructional storyline.

The first is simply this:

1. Remember, God's Agenda is Always Bigger (and better) Than Ours

We don't have to wonder what God's agenda is or was, do we? It tells us in [Exodus 14:4]: "I will get glory." God is always consumed and concerned with His glory. Everything that exists, exists for the glory of God. Even in the midst of all that is unfolding here, God's plan and God's purpose was to act and to move and to work in the lives of His people—but ultimately, for His glory.

I think far too many times we underestimate the significance of the work of God and the will of God in our lives. We have a tendency in life to think that the will of God is going to be something hard, something small, something that's going to diminish us. But the reality is, even when the will of God and the work of God in our life is through difficult things, we begin to discover the glory of God and the grace of God in the midst of the struggles and the uncertainties that we face.

I know I certainly am reminded of that in this January because I remember so well standing in this platform behind this desk in January of 2020, laying out for you from my heart what I believe to be the big picture of the next decade of our ministry—how we would go from 2020 to 2030. At that time, I gave everybody that was present that day a little card that looked like this. We called it *Apps* to focus on 2030.

The idea was these would be the applications, these would be the focal points of our ministry over the next decade. In that, I included the possibility of other locations. We had established our Grovetown campus and we talked about other multi-site opportunities. We talked about national partnerships that would allow us to be able to have impact in states and cities around the country.

We talked about launching a Residency Ministry, whereby each year we would seek to identify and to train ten future leaders for the church. The goal of our ministry going forward would not just be to see how large we could grow locally, but how far we could reach into the future by having generations. I pray for 100 young adults who will become missional leaders and pastors and teachers in the years to come, and we talked about that.

We talked about some other discipleship objectives. We talked about getting free of debt as a church. We had born debt for so many years. Although we have been able to make those payments, we wanted to be debt free totally as a church.

We talked about maybe one day having an online campus where people could anywhere, anytime go back and watch our ministry, but also that on Sundays—even for those who had come through this city and been trained and sent anywhere in the world—they could join us in worship. I had no idea on that Sunday, that literally within about five to six weeks—March the 13th, that fatal Friday, the 13th, and March of 2020 would land—the entire world would shut down. You remember it? You remember what that was like? What do you think I felt like having just cast this vision for the next ten years?... and the whole church shut down!

Guess what became number one on the list? An online campus—the thing I thought would be last became first and with it, we had to do some major technology upgrades. Because you had been generous, we were able to do that. We were able to go online and we pivoted. For the next almost 12 weeks, we did not meet as a church, including Easter Sunday. Never in my lifetime had I ever dreamed that there would not be one church anywhere in America meeting together on Easter Sunday. But that happened. And then, because I knew that we needed to resolve that we would come back together, we ended up starting some outdoor services. We set up a tent and we had tent meetings on Sunday mornings. How many of you attended one of our tent services? Okay, thank you, many of you. I'm grateful for that.

We knew that if we could stay outside, we could avoid many of the concerns and many of the issues related to the disease. All that was going on, and so we started doing that. We didn't have tent meeting revival meetings, but we had Sunday morning tent meetings as a church. God was moving and God was working.

What I could have never imagined is that while the online campus became the first thing that happened, that literally within 12 months, we became debt free as a church. Within the next year, God provided an opportunity to take and to adopt the church in Belvedere, South Carolina, and to launch our third campus. God would give us the ability—right now, this year—to have eight young adults who are a part of our first class of Ministry Residency who are being trained and developed for the future that is to come. God, in the process of all of this, would not only allow this, but He would give us a national partnership whereby we have now adopted the state of Maine. Currently, just since October, we are involved in supporting and helping to see four churches flourish because of the new work that God is doing there.

Then we had something we didn't even put on the list in those original eight Apps—Hope Women's Center. Just a few days ago, I received this note from Serse, our client advocate at Hope Women's Center, that said, "A beautiful way to end 2022 at Hope. We had an abortion-minded woman who chose life in the ultrasound room. She left happy and excited about her precious baby. Just wanted to share the way God ended the year at Hope."

What I'm trying to say to you is that what we all went through as a crisis became, ultimately, the catalyst of an open door of a fresh work of God in the life and the ministry of our church. The new horizons that we have seen and enjoyed in the last couple of years have been bigger and broader and bolder than I could have ever imagined. And God gets the glory for all that He has done in and through our lives together. While we do not know today what lies ahead, we have a promise of God's grace, of His guidance, of His goodness as we go forward. He will lead us and He will provide for us.

What I'm trying to say to you is very simply this God's ways are not our ways. Sometimes God uses tight spaces and hard places to teach us—listen to me carefully—to teach us that while His work and will includes us, it's not about us. God includes us in what He's doing, but His plan is always bigger for His glory. While He includes us, it's not all about us. That's why today, we celebrate where we stand, and the yesterdays God has given to us. We look back at yesterday, and we look back at times past where God has moved and work. But remember this: Today, it's time to tell yesterday goodbye because by faith, we've got to go forward.

That takes me to the second principle that I want you to understand today—not only to *(1) Remember, God's Agenda is Always Bigger (and better) Than Ours*, but we have to...

2. Realize God Sees and Knows Where You Are Today

Listen again to [Exodus] 14:1. God tells Moses where to take the people and to setup camp. Then it says down in verse [Exodus 14:9] of that same passage that "The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon." You know exactly where that is, don't you? Sounds like some of the country roads in Georgia, doesn't it? I don't have a clue where that is, but can I tell you what was important? God knew exactly where they were, and what Pharaoh thought was his

ability to pursue was nothing more and nothing less than God's GPS accuracy of specific direction to get them to a place where they would be a part of His work for glory and of His grace at work in their lives.

You see, your whole perspective and life changes when you realize God is watching over you. God knows where you are. God is working in the places and the spaces that you're in right now. You may think that God has forgotten you. You may think that somehow you're lost, but listen to me. If you are pursuing the Lord, day by day, you are not wandering in a wilderness. You're being directed by His guidance, and He will work and He is working.

Recently, I went back and re-read a book that I had and read a number of years ago. It's a book called, *The Red Sea Rules*, by Dr. Robert Morgan. It is a fantastic short devotional, and yet, instructional piece that I highly recommend to you. It's really something that sparked in my heart the initiative to lead us through this series of messages called, *It's Time to Move*.

As I was reading that book, I found a quote in that book from A.W. Tozer that simply says this: "To the child of God, there is no such thing as an accident. He travels an appointed way... Accidents may indeed appear to befall him and misfortune stalk his way; but these evils will be so in appearance only and will seem evils only because we cannot read the secret script of God's hidden providence."

I don't know where you're going and I don't know where I'm going this year. I don't know what will befall us, but I want to remind you today that God sees and God knows and God cares. God is with you wherever you may be today. Therefore, I want to be sure that even if you're struggling, that you lean into this truth that you ultimately realize that God sees and knows where you are today.

That brings me to the third point that I want to make and to share with you.

3. Resist the Pull of the Comfortable and Predictable

If there's one thing that is true of human beings, whenever we begin to feel compromised, whenever we begin to feel challenged, whenever we begin to have to deal with change, we always look for the minor adjustment, not the major redirection. Yet to walk with God, to trust God, is to be willing to let God move us from the comfortable and the predictable.

There is a part of the story that, frankly, is just crazy. It's just incomprehensible to think that this is included in the story. But let me pick you up again in [Exodus 14:10] and following, and let's see what happens here. "When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly." They had a meltdown. "And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?... Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness'" [Exodus 14: 11a, 12].

Could that be true? Living in slavery, living in bondage, being beaten and wept, having no opportunity for a future? That's better? But do you know how many times I talk to people in the chair where I sit, where they are willing to rehearse again and again and again the damage and the emotions and the issues and the injuries? They are more comfortable with their injury than they are with being willing to let God intervene and change their lives.

Israel is looking in the rearview mirror. They're looking in the rearview mirror and trying to say, "Well, you know, life wasn't all that bad in Egypt." Yes, it was. It was horrible. But how many times are we like this ourselves when we need to tell yesterday goodbye? All we can think about is yesterday, and we keep talking about yesterday. We prefer minor adjustments to hard decisions that maintain the status quo, but make sure that instead of change, we just live in the same sad bondage.

God had done a miracle—ten of them to be exact—to get them out of Egypt. God sent ten plagues on the people of Egypt and upon Pharaoh to get him to a place where he did the unthinkable. He said, "Tell these people to go get him out of here." They had God's undivided attention, and God could not get over their divided hearts.

Some of you today, you have every intention of changing your life this year. But let me just tell you, you will go nowhere as long as you live with a divided heart in your affection and your devotion to God. It's so important that you understand this and that you see that even the hardship of the change and the courage and the issues that are involved are a vital part of how God is going to work to shape you and change you and make you fit for His purpose.

C.H. McIntosh said this: "If we could only look upon a difficult crisis as an occasion of bringing out, on our behalf, the sufficiency of divine grace, it would enable us to preserve the balance of our souls and to glorify God, even in the deepest waters."

The fourth principle that I want you to see today... not only do we need to (1) *Remember God's Agenda is Always Bigger (and better) Than Ours* and not only do we need as to (2) *Realize God Sees and Knows Where You Are Today* and that we need to (3) *Resist the Pull of the Comfortable and Predictable*, but we need to...

4. Respond with Action = Move!

We need to what? We need to move! We need to take a step. Listen to [Exodus 40:13]. "And Moses said to the people, 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.' The Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward'" [Exodus 14:13-15].

Quit looking backward; go forward! Quit living in fear; choose faith. Quit deciding that you know the future when you don't have a clue. Trust in the God who holds every day of the future, and in the midst of that, you begin to move with God.

Now no one could deny the reality that the enemy was pursuing. No one could overcome the fact that visually, they could see the dust of the chariots and hear the clanging of the swords and the instruments of war that were coming against them. That was a reality. All around us, we've got the clutter of war, but God says to you and to me as He said to Israel, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord and then go forward."

I can tell you this after four decades of ministry and local churches, that without hesitation, the greatest issue that we have in the church is that we have far too many people sitting on the premises wanting to debate religious issues than we have people who are willing to stand on promises, and to take ground for God. So many people are happy to be in the environment of the discussion, but sadly, for far too many of them, it's always about yesterday. We are where we are today by the will of God and we look forward to the future, knowing that our God has called us to action. Therefore, it is time for us to move with God!

Here's what I've learned and am continuing to learn: when you move with God, when you take the next step in front of you, that's when you begin to discover the ways and the will of God in your life. You don't discover the will of God sitting still—*God, tell me what you want me to do and then I'll go do something*. No. You take the next step of

obedience with God and God begins to unfold the plan. Just as it's hard to get a car that is sitting still and doesn't have power steering to move or to turn, even if it's rolling, once you get a car moving, then you can steer it. God wants to move in our lives.

It was Isabelle Kuhn who said, "How it pays to take one step at a time with God!"

Sometimes we just have to take the next step. I've given you a challenge. Those of you who have heard my message from last week, I've given you a challenge—this year as a church to memorize 52 verses of Scripture. This year, I've taken this little card called, *Fighter Verses*. We've produced it for you, and we've provided it for you in order that it might be something you can put in your Bible or tape to a mirror— somewhere that you frequent throughout the day. It's available online and we've put it out on social media, but I am challenging you, as you're a pastor, that if you want to change your life, you get the Word of God in your mind and heart. I'm telling you, God's Word will change you because God's Word will speak to you in a time of need. Memorize Scripture. Meditate on Scripture.

I'm grateful for all of you who are trying and have adapted some reading programs in the Bible this year, but I have so many times seen people start out with the great ambition and intention that they're going to read through the Bible. Then they get a few days in and they get off schedule, and they get frustrated. Then they live in the guilt of quitting and saying, "I'll do it again someday." Listen to me. I don't know what you're trying to do. If you can read through the Bible, great! Please do. I want you to know it completely. But I want to challenge you to memorize and meditate on the Word of God, and at the end of this year, you can know 52 verses of Scripture that will change your life.

I want to challenge you and encourage you to commit to engage in the church of God. If you're here and you've been attending Warren, I am grateful for your attendance, but our goal is not to have attenders. Our goal is to have Christ-followers—people who honor Jesus and who love His bride, the church, and who engage with, and commit to, and serve in, and sacrifice and support the work of the church. May I be so brazen as to say that as glad as I am to have you attend Warren, if you can't do that here, go somewhere and do it because I want you to be faithful in following Jesus Christ. We want to have a core of people who are committed to the church of Jesus Christ.

Another step you can take in your life is to choose to commit your life to some of the midweek opportunities for growth in the life of our church. If you go to our church

website, and you go to the homepage, there's something that has Sunday, and then something that has midweek ministry. I want to encourage you to go and click on that midweek link. If you do that, you're going to find that, contrary to the idea that the pastor works on Sunday and goofs off the other five days a week, you're going to find that there is something happening on this campus every single day of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.

But, of course, the thick of that happens midweek on Wednesday. We have a dinner available for you to help you. We have child care, but not childcare. We have Clubhouse for kids. We have the opportunity of mission melodies where we teach, even preschoolers, how to memorize Scripture in song. We have D-Kids where we train and have an engaging time—a fun time—for kids to come together. But then we get them to memorize Scripture together.

I wish you could have seen the end of that in the fall when all the kids took all the bucks they'd gotten, that they took, and went to a store and were able to redeem them for rewards for memorizing Scripture. Yes, there's a reward in memorizing Scripture. We're just teaching kids to learn the value of Scripture.

We have ministry for students. We have discipleship groups for adults. We have specialized Bible study focuses throughout the week. We have Support Group Ministries, and then every Wednesday night midweek, we have an open class that's available in Simmons Hall. It'll start back a week from this week. And as a result, Brett Legg, our Teaching Pastor, is there and he's going to be doing a new series, five weeks in length, called, *A Survival Guide for the New Year*.

We don't just perpetually try to keep you in something all the time, but we start and we stop—five weeks here, five weeks there, ten weeks here, eight weeks there, twelve weeks. It's all intended to give you a place to focus and grow—to go forward and just take one step and another step and another step. Before long you find that you've been walking with God.

Be willing to take the step of giving. Many of you have never done anything more than tip God. I mean, what you do is that you go to church, and if you're moved by what you see in the church service, you reach in and maybe you take out a few bucks, and you drop it in one of the boxes when you leave. Or maybe you just give a little here and a little there. But I'll tell you, many people just don't give at all. But I'm challenging you to look at your finances, to look at God's Word, and to set up a plan and begin to give week after week after week, systematically, generously, sacrificially. I'm here to tell

you that as you learn to get on God's economy, you will be amazed what God does in your life and your family.

Honor Him. Follow the Lord in baptism. I was so proud of this couple today that I had the wonderful joy of baptizing. Even though they had come from another church background and tradition, they came today, being Christ-followers and saying, "We want to be a part of Warren and we want people to know with a public testimony of the surrender of our lives to Jesus." Now faith in Christ must precede faithfulness to Christ. Baptism is a step of faithfulness, a step of surrender and obedience. I want to encourage you to consider that.

I want to encourage you this year to pray to find someone and pray for that person and to start a gospel conversation. Let me ask you this: How much would Warren's ministry have grown in reaching new people for Christ last year if it had been dependent upon your conversations, and your witness? I want you to make that personal. That's a burden that every one of us bears. We are living out the mission of God in our lives, and none of us can ignore the mission of being witnesses for Jesus Christ, of fishing for men (and women, of course). We are to be a part of a gospel conversation that is ongoing in the world because we are living out the gospel mission one step at a time.

Let me give you another step, and I'm speaking this specifically to a group of young men. Propose! Yes, you heard me correctly—propose! We are living in a day where the triviality of marriage and family is all out in our culture. Everybody wants an arrangement and everybody wants an agreement. But God's plan is a marriage covenant and a commitment between one man and one woman to live out their faith for a lifetime for the glory of God. Who are you to take God's plan and to water it down to what you want your arrangement and your experience to be? Listen to me today. Some of you men need to step up or better yet, you need to kneel down, and you need to ask that girl to marry you... and ladies, you can always say no, okay? Let me just make that real clear. Just because he had the guts to do it doesn't mean that you have to go through with it, okay? I'm just keeping it real. But I'm serious. I'm so tired of all this *boys will be boys* until they're boys in their adulthood. Gotta step up and man up and take on some responsibility for your life and your family. Build a family for the glory of God. I believe you're called to do that—most of you.

Pursue childbirth. Pursue adoption. Pursue foster care. Just take that next step. Just because you go and fill out an adoption application doesn't automatically mean that you will adopt, but it does mean, "God, I'm willing to take the step and to see where

You're gonna take me." Just be willing to do that. Give God your career, your future, your availability.

All it took for Israel was to be willing to take one more step from the land into the water, and God turned the Red Sea into a red carpet. That was it—from the Red Sea to a red-carpet moment. I just absolutely love the way that unfolds here. As we look at it, go down to Exodus 14:21. It says, "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land." How about that? Dry land. "And the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground" [Exodus 14:21b-22a]. Again, it says it was on dry ground. "The waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" [Exodus 14:22b].

Have you ever been near a lake that had receded or a river that had receded and you get down near the edge and you realize there's just a lot of mud and muck down there? Not here. Literally, in a moment, God moved the sea and God made a place for them to go through. God made a waterway, a gateway, allowing His presence to surround them, and then He covered them from behind so that Pharaoh and his armies could not overtake them.

There's a visual and historical illustration of the verse that I've encouraged you don't memorize first this year. What does it say? Can you say it? "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" [Joshua 1:9]. Where do we find it? That's the address. You always want to learn the address, okay, so that you can find it again.

That's the word of God to us. Most of us want to analyze the muscle of faith; God wants us to exercise the muscle of faith. Which brings me to the last and the fifth of these and that is...

5. Rest Assured Providence Awaits

When you take that next step with God, rest assured that providence awaits—something you didn't expect, something you didn't know, something you couldn't make out, something you couldn't reason. God moved because He's God. And God begins to demonstrate His power.

The word, *providence*, our word, *providence*, comes from two Greek words: *pro* which means *go* or *before*, and *video* which literally means *to see*. Because I can't see, I have to trust God. When I do trust God, I find out that He was already looking ahead and taking care of things in advance. God moved His people to the other side, and that's the beautiful outcome of this. In [Exodus 14:13], God had told Moses to say to the people, the nation of Israel, that what "you see today, you will never see again" [Exodus 14:13b]. And then down in [Exodus 14:30], it tells us, "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore." Yesterday is over. Yesterday would be no more. Why? Because God had already prepared and planned the next step of tomorrow.

That's where we have to live also, assured of providence that awaits for us. And you know, what's beautiful is that if you step into chapter 15, that chapter 15 opens with Moses and the people of Israel singing. "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" [Exodus 15:1b-2a].

In a day, in a moment, God saves. God saved Israel on that day. God provided a way of salvation on the day that His Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross taking our place. Jesus stepped into the dark waters of human sin. But then, though He was taken under and it would be as though Jesus was dead and gone. He rose from those waters, able to walk above that water to give life to all who would believe on His name. When we come to a place in our life that we are willing to surrender ourselves and all that we are as sinners to Christ and His power to save, that day becomes a day of salvation.

Some of you need to be saved today. Some of you need to have the bondage broken today. Some of you need to know what it is to see the power of God and the presence of God released in your life today. I mentioned the book, *The Red Sea Rules*, earlier. This little book was a tremendous gift of grace to my heart through some deep waters and long days in the past year. As I went back and as God used this book, I was just so thankful for Robert Morgan and the insights God gave him. I'm glad to tell you, the author of this book—over half a million in print—is going to be with us at our Man to Man Conference. He's also going to stay over on the second Sunday in March and be a guest here at our campus. I'm looking forward to having him come. Let me read you some of the closing reflections of his book. He wrote a poem, and while I don't know how much you're into poetry, I pray that the power of these words will speak to your heart today.

*When the children of Israel were trapped and afraid
Twix forbidding tides and Pharaoh's tirade,
Jehovah commanded, and Moses obeyed.
As pitiful prayers filled an impossible place,
As Moses gazed at Jehovah's dread face,
As the people of God needed infinite grace,
The mighty winds howled; violent waves dashed.
The seawater quivered and the lightnings flashed.
The thunders boomed and the breakers crashed.
And when the sun arose on that terrible day
The children of Israel, through the misty spray,
Discovered their God had made a way.
And many Christians in the years that have passed
Though troubled by fears, though tired and harassed,
Have found the same God strong, sure and steadfast.*

—Robert Morgan, The Red Sea Rules

Lord, today, how I pray that You would meet us, hemmed in, pinned down, trapped, unsure, afraid, worried, feeling overwhelmed, knowing we have no ability to deliver ourselves, and that today, we would hear and know that You have saved, that You save. I pray that if there's a man or a woman, a child today who has never come to You to put their faith in Jesus, that this moment would be the moment of understanding, that just as You used Moses to deliver Israel through Your mighty power, that even more importantly, You have used Your Son to be our Deliverer, to become one of us and to give us life through His death, burial, and resurrection. Father, I pray these next few moments would be a response to Your word into Your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.