

# Welcome

One of my all time favorite songs is Bruce Springsteen’s “Thunder Road”. It’s a song about change - how scary it is, how hard it is. In classic Springsteen fashion, the song is a story about the Boss rolling up to a young woman’s house in his ‘beat up Chevrolet’. As the song opens, he’s just pulled up to her house and Mary has come out to her front porch. She’s looking down at him, standing by his car, and he’s inviting her to come with him. He’s come to take Mary away from the dusty beach town she lives in - you sort of get the sense from the song that it’s a small town where no one really ever leaves. There’s nothing *there* for Mary, but Bruce knows she’s anxious about leaving.

He says, “My car’s out back if you’re ready to take that long walk from your front porch to my front seat. The door’s open but the ride it ain’t free.”

Friends, there have been several moments in my life where it feels like I’ve come to a crossroads and those lines have haunted me a little. Because the distance from the front porch of a house to the front seat of a car isn’t significant. We’re not talking a marathon here, or even a 5K. This is a distance measured in feet, not miles. Probably not even *yards*.

And yet the Boss calls it a “long walk”. Because for Mary to leave the porch means she’s leaving behind everything she calls home. She’s letting go of her friends, her family. She’s walking away from her history. We don’t know too much about Mary - whether her home is loving or cold. Whether she’s the homecoming queen or the class reject. What we do know is that she has a history, a story that’s written on the streets of this town, in the beams of this house. Like all of us, Mary knows what she knows. And the Boss’ offer here is both tantalizing and terrifying.

It’s hard to walk away, even when what you’re leaving isn’t good or healthy. It’s hard to do something different especially when it’s not clear what that different thing is. The Boss didn’t give Mary an itinerary. He’s inviting her to get in, to follow him into the night. He’s asking for an act of faith.

Friends, we’re on the cusp of a major change here, too as a church. And I know many of us are experiencing change at the personal level, too. So today, we’re going to explore how to navigate change through faith. We’re going to hear God’s call as one to trust, to take that long walk off our front porches and by faith into God’s front seat, trusting that the one who calls us is faithful to us.

## Message

For the next six weeks, we're in a series called New Leaf. Now, I know you're thinking that this feels like more of a spring series but to that I say two things: 1. I live in Texas, which quit having real seasons a few years ago. And second, this is a series about change. And change happens to us all the time, at every level. We experience personal change in the form of new relationships, the end of long-term relationships. We experience it in changing jobs. Having kids, kids growing up. Moving.

I've lived in Rowlett for almost 9 years now, and in that time, our population has ballooned. We moved here just after the DART Train station was built and the Bush Tollway was built. Those changes turned our little town into a suburb of Dallas, and we've quadrupled in size in the last generation. You know who doesn't like that? Yeah... all the people who moved here because it was a quiet small town. Now it's big, there's traffic and all kinds of city issues.

Our cities change, our country changes. And of course our church is changing. For almost 15 years, we've been a building-centric, locally focused congregation. But over the last few years, our circumstances have changed and we just voted on a new direction for our congregation. That's scary. I don't know very many people who love change, who seek it out. Most of us prefer predictability and stability, and one thing we know about change is that it's seldom predictable or stable.

So we're going to spend six weeks looking at some people in Scripture who had to face big changes - changes that felt as existential as the changes we're facing right now. We're going to explore the nature of the changes they faced, compare them to the changes facing us, and we're going to ask what we can learn about how to be faithful now from how they were faithful then.

We're beginning today with a pretty basic question: how do we move forward when the road ahead is unknown? That's a question that's always pertinent when it comes to change, and we're feeling it especially now as a congregation. After all, we're on the cusp of a major change, and the road ahead is uncertain. We're moving into a very different model of worship and being good news to the world than any of us has experienced before. We believe it's what God has called us to, but we have a calling, not a roadmap.

I'm anxious about what's ahead. I don't know if it's going to work. I have a lot more questions than I do answers.

And I know from my many conversations with y'all that I'm not the only one.

So... how are we supposed to do this?

Turn with us to [Genesis 12](#).

### 3 | New Leaf Week 1 – The Longest Walk

This is one of the major shifts in the Bible - 11 chapters in. The first chapters have been big, sweeping, universal prehistory - creation, the fall, flood, the beginnings of civilization. Everything has had global implications.

But now we're zooming way, way in on one family - Abram and his wife Sarai. When we meet Abram, he and his wife are in their 70s and have no children. They live in modern-day Iraq with Abram's father, Terah, and Abram's two brothers and their families. Terah decided to relocate them to Canaan - modern day Palestine. They followed a northern trade route through Turkey, and Terah decided to settle in a trading city there called Haran.

What surprises a lot of folks about Abram, especially because he becomes the famous Father Abraham, the patriarch of God's people, is that - as far as we can tell, before they moved to Haran, Abram didn't worship Yahweh. His family definitely didn't - Genesis tells us they worshiped other gods.

So as we read [Genesis 12](#), keep that in mind: Abram is in his 70s, long past the age he can have children. His family has moved almost 800 miles (roughly the same as moving from Dallas to Indianapolis or Denver by packing all your stuff up onto mules and carts and walking). And now, after all that, a random god speaks to him:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. — [Genesis 12:1-5](#)

I am staggered by Abram's response here. Let's review all the unknowns:

Who is this god who is speaking to him? Is this god trustworthy? How is this god manifestly more reliable or better than the gods Abram's family have served for decades?

Where are they going? We know they're headed for Canaan (which is where Abram's dad was originally going), but Yahweh doesn't say that. They say, "go to the land I will show you." When are you showing me? Am I headed in the right direction?

This god is going to bless Abram, make him a great nation? But Abram has no descendents and isn't going to! He's too old! Surely if it was going to happen, it would have by now - again, we're talking probably fifty years of trying without results.

Honestly, Abram would be a fool to say yes. It makes no sense.

And yet he said, Yes.

This is faith.

I don't know why Abram said yes to God's invitation, but I'm grateful he did. And if you know the rest of Abram's story, you know he was far from perfect. He's going to make a lot of mistakes on the road ahead.

But in response to God's invitation, he offered a faith-filled Yes. And that changed the course of history.

Friends, this is the challenge of faith: will we trust? Will we put our confidence not in knowing what comes next but in the character of the one who is calling us?

## Song

When I look at the way the deck was stacked against Abram, I feel a kinship. After all, when you look at what's against us, it's hard not to feel like we might be crazy.

The model is dramatically different from anything most of us are familiar with as church. And we're launching it with limited funds, with a group of folks who are already tired, in a culture still recovering from the trauma of a global pandemic in an age when fewer people than ever are even interested in religion.

I get why folks want to say, "No thanks." To throw in the towel and stay in Haran where we know what to expect.

In "Thunder Road," the Boss knows that part of the reason we fear chance is because we're convinced if we just try hard enough, wait long enough, maybe things will get better. He tells Mary, "You can hide 'neath your covers and study your pain. Make crosses from your lovers, throw roses in the rain. Waste your summer praying in vain for a savior to rise from these streets."

He knows what we all know deep down - when it's time to change, we can resist it all we want. But the only thing waiting for us is death. We can spiritualize it all we want, study our pain and make explanations and excuses, as though understanding *why* will somehow keep change from happening. Bruce says what we all know: expecting Jesus to swoop in and save us from change is a lost cause.

Just like Mary, Abram couldn't stay in Haran. There was nothing for him there except the same old life he'd been living. The only way for him to embrace possibility was to leave, to follow God into the unknown.

The only hope Abram had was the promise of a God he barely knew. A promise that somehow, life could come from death. That even his lack of descendants couldn't stop this God from

making him into a mighty nation. He had to take a step in faith. Faith isn't about keeping things the same. Faith is about trusting that God is leading us through the change.

That's why the Boss pats his car and warns Mary: "All the redemption I can offer is beneath this dirty hood." The Boss says, "If there's hope for something better, we won't find it by staying where we are. We have to have the courage to take that long walk.

"Hey... what else can we do now except roll down the window and let the wind blow back your hair? We got one last chance to make it real - to trade in these wings for some wheels. Climb in back; heaven's waiting on down the tracks. We're riding out tonight to case the Promised Land."

With these words, the Boss rejects both the idea that salvation's found somewhere behind us, away from change, *and* the idea that it's somehow up in heaven, away from the realities of a changing world. No, he insists we're going to trade in our wings for some wheels and set out to explore the Promised Land.

He doesn't see this as something to fear, but a grand new adventure, one we undertake by faith.

But we can't go until we leave. Abram had to leave Haran. Leave his family, his security, everything that gave him a sense of comfort and home.

Mary had to take that long walk from the front porch to the front seat. From the house to the car. From the place we're comfortable to the place that will move us to change.

We can't move forward while we're stuck in the past. We can't drive away while we're still on the porch.

I wish I knew exactly what the future holds. I wish I could predict all the growing pains, all the successes and failures that are coming over the next years for us as we follow God into this new thing.

But friends, I gotta tell you: just because I'm the pastor doesn't mean I have extra knowledge. What I know is that God is calling us to something new.

We don't have to have a roadmap. That's God's job. God doesn't call us to know the road ahead. God calls us to trust, and to step out in faith.

## Communion + Examen

We follow Jesus to the Communion Table and into the world.

What excites me about the changes coming to our church family?

What fears and anxieties do I have about the changes coming to our church family?

What is the next thing God is calling me to as a part of this change?

How can I take those next steps by faith?

## Assignment + Blessing

What are your next right steps? What are *our* next right steps?