**Turn the Page Week 11 – From Endings to Beginnings**

**Message Big Idea**: “Turn the Page” by letting every aspect of your life reflect the Jesus mission.

**Scripture:** John 11:25, Acts 1:8-11, Acts 2

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**Endings and Beginnings**

*(Series Graphics)* Wow, it has been an amazing 11-week journey. Who has been here for all 11 weeks of this **Turn the Page** series? Man, we should give you a prize for perfect attendance! I wish I had brought some gold stars with me. Give yourself a pat on the back for making it through this incredible journey.

I have to say… I’m a little sad to see this series end, but I guess all good things must come to an end. Yet, the truth is endings can also be beginnings. There are certain things in life that are both an ending and a beginning at the same time.

* A wedding is both an ending and a beginning.
* A graduation is both an ending and a beginning.
* And New Year’s Eve is both an ending and a beginning.

Tomorrow will mark the end of 2018. When the clock strikes midnight, the year will be over.

* Who here is ready to say goodbye to 2018? Yes, some of us are grateful that this year is soon to be in the books. Good riddance, 2018, right?
* Who here is sad to see 2018 go? Yes, for some of us 2018 has been a fantastic year! Maybe it’s been the year of fun or the year of gratitude or the year of new adventures! If you’ve had a year like that, I’m thrilled for you!

However, as the calendar year ends, it also marks a new beginning. It’s the start of 2019. Does anyone have audacious plans to go to the gym 37 times a week starting Tuesday?

No matter how you’ve felt about 2018, I have some good news for you today about 2019… As we end this year and begin the next one, a whole New Year full of great possibilities lies ahead of us!

Life is all about endings and beginnings. Life has seasons, stages, and phases. Without these changes, life would grow stagnant; but with them, there are new opportunities.

So as we turn the *last* page of this series, my hope is that today will not just be an ending, but also a beginning. My hope is that we will integrate all we have experienced and discovered over the past 11-weeks into a new season of our lives.

* Maybe you’ve formed **a new habit of reading and reflecting on Scripture** during this series that you can continue into the New Year.
* Maybe you’ve **learned something new about God** that can transform the way you relate to him.
* Maybe you’ve been challenged to **take a step of faith** that you can live out during this coming season.

The series is ending, but the adventure God has for us is just beginning!

**Recap of Jesus’ Story**

The final section of the Bible we’re covering today describes both an ending and a beginning. *(Graphic-Acts and the Letters)* It includes the book of **Acts** and the bulk of the books in the New Testament known as **“The Letters.”** But before we turn the page to this section of the Bible, let me remind you where we left off the story.

For the past three weeks, we’ve been in the first four books of the New Testament learning about the life of Jesus. Jesus turned the world upside down! He is God, who came in the flesh, and lived among us. Everywhere he went his miracles, his teaching, and the goodness of his love drew people to him.

Yet, not everyone believed in him. The religious leaders saw him as a threat and handed him over to the Roman government to be crucified. There, on a hill outside of Jerusalem, Jesus died on a cross. Many saw this as an end to the story, but the truth is, it was just the beginning.

Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is the **climax** of the epic story of the Bible. Through his resurrection, Jesus claimed victory, not just over corruption and evil, but over death itself. Evil, sin, violence, and death threw its best punch at Jesus, and he was able to exhaust its force completely!

**“I am the resurrection and the life.** Jesus declared. **The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” –John 11:25**

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus proved he had the power to back that statement up. Now everyone who puts their faith in him can receive eternal life, a kind of life meant to be lived now and forever in a personal relationship with God.

So as we turn the page from the Gospels to the book of Acts, we come across another ending that is also a beginning. The passages we’re going to look at today set the stage not just for the rest of the Bible, but for the continuing story of God and his people.

As the book of Acts begins, Jesus’ time on earth is coming to an end. *(Acts 1:8 NLT)* He commissions his followers to continue his work of helping people find their way back to God. The word “commission” literally means “to entrust with mission.” Jesus is handing over the keys to the mission to his followers.

But before they do anything, Jesus tells them to wait…just wait… Can you imagine being told to “wait” after all they had just seen?! I mean, your friend is resurrected from the dead – something he himself predicted would happen! Waiting would be the last thing I’d want to do!

And yet, Jesus tells them to wait. They are to wait until the Holy Spirit comes upon them giving them power to carry out his mission not just where they are in Jerusalem, but to the ends of the earth! And then…

**“After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him.” –Acts 1:9 NLT**

I can’t even begin to imagine what his followers were thinking at this moment! Their heads had to be spinning in bewildered amazement. I’m guessing they knew they were facing an ending, but it also had to feel like a beginning. And so they did what Jesus told them to do…they sat tight and waited.

**The Holy Spirit Breaks Through**

As we turn the page to Acts chapter 2, the disciples are gathered together in one place when something amazing happens…the Spirit of God breaks through!

**“On the day of Pentecostall the believers were meeting together in one place.Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.” –Acts 2:1-4**

Anyone who thinks the Bible is boring has never imagined what it would have been like to live in these scenes! Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit and the Spirit comes upon them like a rushing wind! They see what look like tongues of fire that come and settle on each of them, and immediately they start speaking in different languages. What a trip that must’ve been!

Now, maybe you’re thinking, “I could have used that Spirit back in my high school French class,” but understand, this whole “other languages” thing wasn’t just a cool party trick. Remember, Jesus had said that the Spirit would empower his followers to carry out his mission. Well, this is a remarkable example of exactly that! Immediately upon receiving the Holy Spirit, these Christ-followers are empowered beyond their natural ability with a supernatural ability to speak in other languages.

(Acts 2:5-8) Why is this important? Well, at that time there were people from all over the world living in Jerusalem. As they hear the commotion, the people come running to see what is happening, and they listen in amazement as they hear the disciples declaring the wonders of God in their own languages! It was all so strange!

(Acts 2:13) Some of them even thought the disciples were drunk! You don’t often here this verse preached in church, do you? But they weren’t drunk! The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and as a result people literally from “the ends of the earth” are now hearing the good news about Jesus for the first time in their own language. (Acts 2:12) They were amazed! They were perplexed!

Jesus’ resurrection is the **climax** of the story of God and his people, but the coming of the Holy Spirit is the **catalyst** for everything that happens next. God is once again breaking into the world! You see, once God breaks in through the Holy Spirit, he immediately begins to use his Spirit-filled people to break through to the world.

**The Church is Born**

As a large crowd begins to gather, one of the disciples, Peter, stands up and begins to share the good news about Jesus. (Acts 2:37 NLT) As the people listen to his words, they are cut to the heart and ask the disciples, “What should we do?”

**“Peter replied, ‘Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.’” –Acts 2:38-39**

God works powerfully through Peter’s words and (Acts 2:41 NLT) 3000 people find their way back to God and become Christ-followers that day! This day marks the beginning of a radical new community, the *new* people of God. This community is entrusted with carrying the mission of Jesus forward. And while there probably wasn’t any cake or candles, this day marks the birthday of what we often refer to it as **“The Church.”** *(with Acts 2:42-47 NLT)*

The Church is first described in the closing verses of Acts chapter 2.

* It is a community that is **devoted to the teachings of Jesus**.
* A people who embody a new way of life by regularly **celebrating** God, **connecting** with one another, and **contributing** to move the mission forward.
* A community of Christ-followers that is always including, ever expanding to **help more and more people find their way back to God.**

The Church is God’s plan for carrying his mission forward. It is the hope of the world. The Church is the *new* people of God.

**We are the Church**

And, friends, this is the place where the story of the Bible becomes our story. This is where the baton of God’s mission to restore his dream for the world gets passed to you and me.

We are the Church.

We have been entrusted with the mission.

And the Holy Spirit will empower us to carry it out…if we will let him.

So this is where we find ourselves. The story has brought us to the close of 2018.

It may be that 2018 was a difficult year for you or you may have had a great year. Maybe your year has been somewhere in between. No matter what 2018 looked like in each of our lives, I believe one thing is true for all of our lives… God has a new beginning for us in 2019. And I believe God wants to do something big in us and through us!

For a while now, the leadership of our church has sensed that God is preparing us for something big.

* We have sensed it in **a deepening reliance on and commitment to prayer**. You may have noticed the growth in our prayer teams!
* We have seen it in the way God has been at work in our **students**. Students, you are not just the church of the future – you are helping lead the way for our church today!
* We have felt him leading us to a deeper experience of worship through the songs of **COMMUNITY Music**. These are songs that God is giving us; but they are now being sung around the world!
* We have seen God do the **miraculous** and we sense that it’s just the beginning!

We’re not exactly sure how God wants to break through in the year ahead, but we want to be spiritually prepared for what is next so we’ve decided to end this year and begin the next with two specific church-wide challenges.

**Challenge Part 1: Explore God - 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting**

Here is challenge #1: We want to invite you to join us for (Graphic) 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. We believe God is calling us to enter into this next season with a church-wide focus on prayer and fasting. *(Hold up card)* This card that you received when you came in explains more about this challenge. From **January 7 through January 27**, we are going to invite God to break into our lives in new ways by exploring to new depths who he is…together.

To take part in this challenge, use this card as a guide to decide how you want to participate in the fast. The goal of fasting is to draw nearer to God. Biblical fasting always has to do with eliminating distractions for a spiritual purpose; it hits the reset button of our soul and renews us from the inside out. Fasting allows us to create space in our minds and hearts for more of God’s presence. This card explains more about fasting and gives you some options for how you can participate. *(Share how you will participate.)*

Then, if you’re not already signed up for our Community Bible Reading plan, go to our COMMUNITY app or to our website to sign up for daily emails that will guide you through the prayer portion of the challenge. During these 21 days, we will explore God’s holiness, his mercy, his justice, and so on. 21 days of exploring God. We’ve even created a church-wide Facebook group where each day you can hear reflections from a COMMUNITY staff member and participate by sharing what God reveals to you.

And, if you are a parent, Kids’ City has this special Family Prayer Guide you can use with your kids during this 21 day challenge. Pick one of these up in Kids’ City today!

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So join us in these 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting as we invite God to do something new in our church.

**Challenge Part 2-Invite others to Explore God**

And I have a second challenge for you today…to invite others to Explore God. If we go back to the end of Acts 2 we read:

**“And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.” –Acts 2:47**

Did you catch that? Every single day people were being added to the community of God. There are so many people in our neighborhoods, in our offices and schools, perhaps even in our own homes who God longs to find their way back to him.

*(Explore God Series Graphic)* In two weeks, on January 13, we will be participating in a citywide outreach initiative called **Explore God**. Maybe you’ve seen billboards for Explore God as you’ve driven on the interstate or had ads for the initiative pop up in your social media feeds. Over 800 churches across the Chicagoland area are joining together to invite people to a 7-week series where we will explore many of the biggest questions people have about God and faith. Questions like:

* Does life have a purpose?
* Is Jesus really God?
* How could God allow pain and suffering?

Each week of this 7-week series, we’ll explore one of these questions. There are also discussion groups springing up all across the city and suburbs where people can go to discuss these 7 questions in a relaxed, open atmosphere.

So here is the challenge… Who will you invite to Explore God? Who do you know who could benefit from this series? We want to challenge everyone to show up on January 13 and the weeks that follow with a guest on your arm.

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**Conclusion**

So here we are… at the end of the Turn the Page series. You have made it through the longest series in COMMUNITY’s history! Go ahead and give yourself a hand… *(initiate clapping)* In fact, hi-five the person next to you and say, “We made it!”

Before we wrap this up, we have one last overview video…

**Overview: Acts and The Letters**

*(Happy New Year! graphic)* We are living in the story of God and his people. A new chapter begins in just another day. I can’t wait to see what God will do in our lives and in our church in 2019!

Endings are also beginnings. Until Jesus returns to usher in the beginning that will never end…

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And the Holy Spirit will empower us to carry it out.

**Communion Idea**

In John 19:30 we read that Jesus said

**“It is finished!” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” –John 19:30**

I can only imagine what Jesus’s followers really thought when the witnessed this ending. I imagine they thought, this is the real end. It’s over, like really over! Not just finished, but a final ending. An ending that had no new beginning. No hope.

But that was not the case. As Jesus hung on the cross he screamed out “It is finished!” as a victory cry for ALL of humanity. From the very beginning God has been working to restore his dream for his creation to live in Shalom with him and now through the finished work of the cross his dream is available to all. This was not a final ending it was the start of a new beginning.

Communion reminds us that this necessary ending of Jesus’s death on a cross opens up the door to a new beginning of resurrection. There are things in your life that need to end, there are things in your life that need to die. But the work of the cross reminds us that these endings give way to new beginnings. As you receive these elements may you experience a new beginning, a new hope, a new spirit, a new page, a new story.