

SLIDE 1 Steve Jobs once said, “The journey is the reward.” What that means is: Steve Jobs never traveled with small children. Parents, can I get an amen? I have six kids, and any parent that’s gone on a journey with small children knows the journey is NOT the reward because the kids in the backseat are fussing and fighting, drawing lines down the middle of the seat. Dad, he’s touching me. Dad, she’s on my side. Dad, he’s breathing my airspace. They’re defending their little kingdoms, and Dad turns around because Dad believes the car is his kingdom, “Do you want me to come back there?” The kids are thinking, “Well, yeah, I’d like to see that-come back here while the car’s going 70 down the interstate.” So instead Dad sends Mr. Hand back there, and the kids scrunch up, each in their corners, where Dad can’t reach them, but John Ortberg says he knows how to get them out of that unreachable safety zone. He says, “A little tap on the brakes brings them right into play.” Thy kingdom come. Listen: the journey is not the reward! When you’re traveling with small children, the journey is filled with complaining and neediness: “I’m hungry. I’m thirsty. I have to go to the bathroom.” And of course, there is always one question you know you will hear. They will ask this question soon; they will ask it often. They will ask it in the most annoying way possible. They will ask it even if you warn them not to ask it. They will ask as if it’s their legal obligation as children to do so. You know what the question is: “Are we there yet?” No, we are not there yet. “Are we there yet?” No, not yet. “Are we there yet?” No, we still have a ways to go. “Are we there yet?” No. But soon. We’ll be there soon. “Are we there yet?” No. But hang in there. When we get there, it will be worth it. Now I get it: I know what Steve Jobs meant when he said, “The journey is the reward.” Of course there are rewards along the way. But if you’ve ever traveled with children, you know the greatest reward is getting there.

Here at the Creek, you’re in the middle of an 18-week series through the book of Exodus. Today we’re in Exodus 14, so if you have your Bible, turn to Exodus 14. You’re learning the story of Israel: bound in slavery in Egypt, 400 years of slavery, crying out for deliverance, and God sends a deliverer, Moses. And during what we now call the Passover, Israel is protected from God’s judgment by the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and the angel of death passes over. Then they escape their old life through the waters of the Red Sea and emerge on the other side to a brand new life, freedom. But that new life is not easy. In our chapter today, Israel begins a journey that will last 40 years, 40 years of happy times, yes, but also hardship, joy and pain, triumphs and trials. It’s not an easy journey, and again and again, as you read through Exodus, the children of Israel complain, “We’re hungry. We’re thirsty. Are we there yet?” And all through Exodus, you can hear the Father’s response, “No. We’re not there yet. When we get there, it will be worth it. The Promised Land I have waiting for you will be more beautiful than you can ever imagine, a land flowing with milk and honey. We’re not there yet. But hang in there. We’ll be there soon.” The book of Exodus is all about the journey, and as you read this book, what you’re going to discover is this is not just Israel’s story. This is our story. We were living a life of bondage, slaves to sin, but God sent a deliverer, Jesus. And we were protected from God’s judgment by the blood of the Lamb, the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, and then when we decided to follow Jesus, we escaped from our old life through the waters of baptism and we emerge on the other side in a brand new life, freedom. But we discover: this new life is

not easy. Our journey following Jesus for 20, 30, 40 years is filled with trials and struggles, but the good news: there is a Promised Land. At the end of this journey, heaven is waiting, and when we arrive, it will all be worth it. The Christian life is a journey, and yes, the journey itself has its rewards, but the greatest reward is getting there.

If you have your Bibles, let's look at Exodus 14 together, and let me remind you where we're at. Moses to Pharaoh, "Let my people go." NO! Ten plagues. The last: The death angel passing over, Pharaoh's son dies; finally he relents. "Out! Leave, Moses! Just go." Hurriedly the Israelites pack in the middle of the night, three million of them, and after 400 years of slavery, 400 years of oppression, bondage, death, now this mighty caravan finally walks out of Egypt. Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we are free at last. But now what? **SLIDE 2-3** Let's read what it says: *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them...So the Israelites did this. Exodus 14:1-4 (NIV)* If this Exodus story is our story, if the Christian life is a journey, then here's my question: what should I expect on this journey? What will this journey be like? What will it include? As we read Exodus 14-15, we should expect four things. Here's the first thing the journey will include: **SLIDE 4**

1. THERE IS ALWAYS A DIRECTION.

As soon as Israel's out of Egypt, God gives them directions because on this journey we call the Christian life, God doesn't leave us standing still, no map, no compass, no road before us. God is a leading God. He is a guiding God. He gives His people directions on what He wants them to do and where He wants them to go. As you read through Scripture, two things you discover about the direction God gives. The first thing: it will be hard. All through the Bible when God calls people to do things, He pretty much never calls them to do something easy. Somebody said God will never insult you by giving you an easy task. It will be hard, and second: it may not make much sense. The directions that God gives here in Exodus 14 to the Israelites are crazy. Look at this map. **SLIDE 5** They are leaving the land of Goshen in Egypt. Over here is the Promised Land, and God takes them in the opposite direction. In fact, God directs them to a place right here where they have mountains on one side, desert on the other side, the Red Sea in front of them, and Pharaoh coming up behind them. If they follow God's direction, they will literally walk into a trap. From a military point of view, this was the stupidest place they could've gone. It doesn't make sense, it's counterintuitive it doesn't seem logical. **SLIDE 6** But when God gives directions, that's the way it often works. "Joshua, Joshua." Yes, Lord? "I want you to attack that fortified city of Jericho." Okay, Lord, what's the plan? What are we gonna need—ladders, swords, spears? "No, I want you to walk around it and blow trumpets." Ha, that's pretty good, Lord. "No, I mean it." Lord, walk around it and blow...no way. "Yahweh." "Gideon, Gideon." Yes, Lord? "Do you see that Midianite army over there? 120,000 trained soldiers?" Yes, Lord. "I want you to take your 300 men and attack them...by blowing trumpets." Lord, what is it with you and trumpets? You want me to attack 120,000 soldiers with the junior high band. That makes no sense. Noah, I want you to build the world's biggest boat in the middle of dry land. Tiny little David, I want you to fight Goliath. Apostles, you backwater uneducated fishermen, I want you to be international ambassadors, telling the whole world about me. None of this makes sense.

But that's the way God works. God will ask you to do something hard and something that may not make sense. He may ask you to forgive someone who hurt you. That's hard, and from the world's standpoint, it doesn't make sense. He may ask you to witness to a friend. That's hard. He may ask you to give up that scholarship to the university and become a missionary or a minister or He may ask you to start a Bible study at your school or start a friendship with a difficult person in your workplace, or stay in a difficult marriage or start tithing your money or start giving more money above and beyond your tithe or break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend that is drawing you away from God or give up a hobby to get involved with a ministry here at church. I don't know what it will be, but I know this: God will point you toward something. There is always a direction.

I grew up in the 80's so one of my favorite movies of all time is *The Princess Bride*. Have you seen this movie? My kids love this movie. The Bible says to train up a child in the way he should go, and I have done so. And so if you were to hang out at my house, at some point, you'd hear movie quotes from the *Princess Bride*. If you've seen it, you know the movie has got some great lines. Can you finish this one? "Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father..." Here's one: "Inconceivable." "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." When my oldest son got married, I was performing the wedding, and right before the ceremony, my two youngest boys ages 12 and 14 said, "Dad, we will give you \$100 if you do it." Do what? "You know what. Mawwiage. Mawwiage is what brings us togever today. Mawwiage, that bwessed awwangement. That dweam wiffin a dweam. Come on, Dad. \$100." I did not do it, but I was sorely tempted.

But you know what the best line in the whole movie is? It's the line at the heart of the story. As the movie opens, we see the heroine whose name is Buttercup, going about doing her chores on a farm. And then we see a young man who works on the farm who answers to the name Farm Boy. Whenever Buttercup asks Farm Boy to do something for her, he always replies, "As you wish." Polish my saddle. Fill these buckets. That's all he ever says to her. As they grow up, Buttercup realizes that she is falling in love with Farm Boy, and one day as he is about to leave the room, she asks him to fetch her a pitcher, which is easily within her reach. But Farm Boy walks over, stares into her eyes, lifts the pitcher and whispers, "As you wish." And the narrator tells us that in that moment Buttercup realized that every time he has said, "As you wish" he was saying, "I love you." Do you know what the deepest desire of God's heart is? The desire of His heart is this: on this journey, when He gives you directions that may be hard, that may not make sense, He wants us to love him enough to say, "As you wish." In Exodus 14:4, after God gave them directions, the text says, "So the Israelites did this." There is always a direction, but here's the second thing you'll find on this journey. **SLIDE 7**

2. THERE IS ALWAYS A DILEMMA.

Now some people think that if you just follow God, "as you wish," then life ought to get easier—the health and wealth gospel. Now if you've been married very long, you know that marriage is not a Walt Disney fairy tale. Your husband is not always Prince Charming and your wife is not always kindhearted Cinderella, and saddest of all, there are no tiny forest animals who will clean your house for you. Oh, how I wish there were. But wait a minute: now I'm following Jesus. Every morning in my marriage, my wife and I should be happier, right? Every day, she ought to wake up and think I am wiser and handier and handsomer than I was the day before. And my children? I'm following God. My children should get good grades, have above average looks,

excel in sports and by golly, they should call me sir. “Yes, sir. No, sir. We love you, sir.” They should go through puberty with no acne, no emotional drama, get into a good college, marry someone better than themselves and raise for me the world’s smartest grandchildren. I’m following God, so my job should bring me passion and fulfillment. My performance reviews should be straight A’s. My co-workers should all work hard to make me look successful, and the coworkers I don’t like should quickly figure out they’re not a good fit and transfer themselves to another organization, preferably in Alaska. I’m following God, so every day when I wake up, the birds should be singing, the sun shining, the fish biting, my bank account climbing. Life with God ought to be happily ever after, right?

The Israelites follow God’s direction, and watch what happens in Exodus 14. **SLIDE 8-10** *When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him...The Egyptians—all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them... As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?” Exodus 14:5-11 (NIV)*

On this journey, there is always a dilemma. Your marriage and family and job won’t be perfect. You’ll give up that university scholarship to go to Bible college and be a missionary, and you’ll work for years in a foreign field without a convert. You’ll start tithing to church, and your car breaks down, \$600 repair. You’ll try to witness to that friend, and they’ll reject it and reject you. **SLIDE 11** 1 Peter 4:12 says, *“Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.”* The fact is: we are promised problems. **SLIDE 12** In John 16:33, Jesus says, *“In the world you will have trouble.”* **SLIDE 13** In Acts 14:22, Paul says, *“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”* **SLIDE 14** Some hardships come because God sends them to grow our faith. You can’t spell the word testimony without the word test. Some come from God, some hardships come just because we live in a fallen world of disasters and disease, and some hardships come because of our dumb and sinful choices, but sometimes hardship comes on because we have an Enemy. There is an opposing team on the field, and if you’re following God, the Enemy’s going to tackle you. Just like Pharaoh, Satan wants to drag you back into bondage, drag you back to his realm. He’ll try to lure you back, but if he can’t bait you, then he’ll just beat you.

About six years ago, my wife Katie went into the hospital for what we thought would be a routine procedure and when the doctor came back into the room, she said that dreaded word to my wife: “cancer.” Forty-four years old, six kids at home - that’s a gut punch. And in moments like that, like a weary kid in the backseat of the car, I can be tempted to complain, “Lord, why? We followed you. As you wish. Why is this happening?” But Katie, God bless her, she kept the faith. She did not lose hope. In fact, Katie decided to name her tumor. She named it Jezebel. And she asked people to pray that just as in the Bible, God struck Jezebel dead, he would strike this tumor dead. And so many people prayed and we were so grateful. Those prayers were life preservers for our family.

But in hard times, even people of strong faith can waver. And there was a moment, the night Katie came home from the hospital, back in our living room, a dark February night, when the adrenaline of the initial diagnosis had worn off and the reality of the battle ahead began to sink in, a bone-deep weariness, helplessness. And in that moment, our friend Paul came over to our living room with his guitar. And my son Luke sat at the piano, and my kids and I all gathered around Katie stuck there in her chair, and we sang. We sang “Amazing Grace” and “I’ll Fly Away” and we sang a song called “Blessed Be Your Name.” Do you know the words to that song? *Blessed be your name, in the land that is plentiful, where the streams of abundance flow, blessed be your name. And blessed be your name, when I’m found in the desert place, though I walk through the wilderness, blessed be your name. Every blessing you pour out I’ll turn back to praise, and when the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say: Blessed be the name of the Lord, Blessed be your name, when the sun’s shining down on me, when the world’s all as it should be, blessed be your name. And blessed be your name, on the road marked with suffering, though there’s pain in the offering, blessed be your name. You give and take away. You give and take away. My heart will choose to say, ‘Lord, blessed be your name.’* And as we sang those words in that living room on a dark February night, God came to us and reminded us: it’s the test that makes the testimony. There is always a dilemma. That’s why the next part of your journey is always this: **SLIDE 15**

3. THERE IS ALWAYS A DECISION.

You can hear it in Moses’ words. When the children of Israel cry out, “We’re gonna die. Why did you bring us out here? We’re all going to die.” Listen to what Moses says: **SLIDE 16** *Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Exodus 14:13-14 (NIV)* In the midst of every dilemma, the decision you face is this: will I trust God? “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Do I really trust that God can get me through?

About three years ago, my wife Katie and I and my daughter Lydia went down to Florida for a conference, and this conference was at a very nice hotel right on the beach, and it turned out there was actually a movie filming on that beach and in that hotel while we were there. I haven’t seen this movie, and I’m not recommending you see it, but it was the movie “Baywatch,” that came out a year ago. And this movie starred Zac Efron and Dwayne The Rock Johnson. So we saw them. **SLIDE 17** Check out this picture. One night after the conference session had ended we went down to sit by the pool with several friends, and they had the pool all roped off because they were filming a night scene, and we got to watch. I’m sitting right on the rope. There’s a couple of guys in black t-shirts and walkie talkies, the crew, standing guard at the rope. But Zac Efron is standing about 15-20 feet from where I’m sitting, and my 20-year-old daughter Lydia is sitting right beside me, looking at Zac Efron and fanning herself and saying “Thank you, Jesus. Lord, good job on that one.” And right past him is The Rock. And can I just say, look at this next picture, **SLIDE 18**, the man is massive. He is a huge human chunk of granite. And in this scene, The Rock is mad at Zac Efron’s character, and he shoves him, boom!, into the pool. We watched them shoot this scene 6-7 times. The Rock was actually shoving Zac’s stunt double. And while we’re sitting there, all of sudden, these two guys with walkie talkies come over to me and they say, “Sir, we’re going to need you to come with us.” I said, “What’s going on? Is there some mistake?” “No sir, no mistake, just come with us.” Apparently, what happened was those

two guys thought I was the Rock's body double. No, I'm kidding! That didn't happen. I did see the Rock, but nobody has ever mistaken me for the Rock.

I'm not that big of a guy. I'm not buff, jacked, fearsome. And I have been in a dangerous place or two in my life. I've been in neighborhoods in third world countries that were so crime-ridden that they were patrolled by soldiers in helicopters with AKs. On the streets of New York City at 2 a.m. when a group of guys suddenly comes out, and a bar fight starts brewing right there on the sidewalk. When I'm walking down those kind of streets, I don't strike terror in anyone's heart. I did not have a class in Bible college on Breaking Up Barfights. This is not my spiritual gift. I mean, I'm a Children's Church teacher. What am I going to say? "Alright, guys, cut it out! I'm serious." That doesn't even work in Children's Church. In those situations, my heart starts to beat faster, my palms start to sweat, I can feel the fear. But here was the thought that came to me that night in Florida: What if? What if I had the Rock with me? I mean look at these pictures: **SLIDE 19** The Rock is huge; the Rock is powerful. If you've watched any of his movies at all, you know the Rock is pretty much the baddest man on the planet. **SLIDE 20** He drinks jet fuel and eats machine gun bullets for breakfast. What if the Rock was my friend, my partner, my constant companion? What if I always had the Rock with me, muscles ripped, guns strapped? I would walk down any street with confidence. If I had the Rock with me, I could be free from anxiety and fear. If I had the Rock with me, I could move forward in life with courage. If I had the Rock with me, the middle of a barroom brawl would be a perfectly safe place for me to be. **SLIDE 21**

Listen to me, church, I do. I have The Very Rock of Ages with me. He is my Rock and my Refuge, the Alpha and Omega, the Lion of Judah, the King of the Universe and the Champion of Heaven. He is the Creator of the Cosmos, the Conqueror on the Cross, the Slayer of Sin, the Destroyer of Death, and the Subjugator of Satan himself. He is the Sustainer of Galaxies, the Ordainer of Life and Death. He is Revelation's Righteous Warrior on a White Warhorse. He is the Rock that will never be broken, the Rock that will never be shaken. He is the Rock of Ages and it does not matter what problem you face, you have a great big Jesus who is with you. And on that dark February night in my living room, my wife Katie just home from the hospital battling cancer, as we sat around the piano and sang, we decided: we would trust in Him. In the midst of your dilemma, what choice will you make? "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." There is always a decision. Here's the last part of the journey. **SLIDE 22**

4. THERE IS ALWAYS A DELIVERANCE.

The Israelites cry out, "We're going to die," Moses tells them to be still and watch the Lord's deliverance. At the moment, a pillar of fire hurtles down from the heavens and blocks the Egyptian army's path and suddenly, a great east wind begins to blow. It opens up the Israelites' path—right through the heart of the Red Sea itself. The water heaps up on either side and a highway through the sea on dry ground opens up. The Israelites pass through, the pillar of fire raises, but then the Egyptian army begins to charge through on the dry path through the sea. It looks like they'll catch the Israelites anyway, but then it happens. God sends the winds to blow the other way. Seawater comes crashing back in, the Pharaoh's army is deluged, all the horses and soldiers drown, the army is destroyed, the Israelites are saved. Glory, hallelujah! They are saved! There is always a deliverance.

And if you're going through a difficult time right now, hear me: This is not the time to give up. This is not the time to quit. This is not the time to turn away. Keep trusting God, keep following God, keep putting one foot in front of the other, because God will come through. Ken Ulmer is a pastor in LA who tells the story of two men who went to an art museum and see a painting of a chess game. On one side of the chess board is a man; on the other side the devil. They are playing a game of chess for the man's soul. The man's face is downcast, and the devil's face is full of glee, because on the board, the man is down to his last piece. The title of the painting: Checkmate. These two men visiting the art gallery look at the painting. One of the men was a national chess champion. Something about the painting intrigued him. He said to his friend, "You go on. I want to stand and study this a while." When the friend came back, the chess master excitedly said, "We must find the man who painted this picture. We must tell him he must either change the painting or change the title." His friend said, "What do you mean?" The chess champion said, "I've been studying it, and there's something wrong with the painting. Look: the painting is entitled Checkmate, but that's not true. Look at the board, at the man's last piece. The king still has one more move."

In Exodus 14, Moses and the Israelites face an enemy, the most powerful man, the most powerful army on earth. They're standing on the shore, the Red Sea in front of them, the Egyptian army thundering down behind them. Trapped. It looked like checkmate. But the king still had one more move. A little boy named David faced an enemy, a giant named Goliath, bigger, stronger, more experienced at battle. It looks like checkmate. But the king still has one more move. A man named Daniel faces his enemies and is thrown into a den of lions. The lions are hungry. Daniel looks like supper, and the situation looks like checkmate. But the king still has one more move. A man named Jesus goes to Jerusalem. He knows He is going to die, and on that last night, Thursday night, in the Garden of Gethsemane, in great agony, he cries out to the Father, "If there is any way this cup can pass from me, let it be. Yet not as I wish, but AS YOU WISH." He is arrested, and he's whipped, beaten, mocked, a crown of thorns is placed on his head, he is hung on a cross to die and then thrown into a tomb. The stone slammed shut, sealing him in darkness and the Pharisees and Sadducees and Romans all dusted off their hands and thought that's that. It's over. Checkmate. And Jesus lay there dead Friday night, and Jesus lay there dead Saturday morning, and he lay there dead Saturday night. But the king still has one more move. On Sunday morning, he rose up from the dead! He came back to life. He was victorious over Satan and sin and death itself. There is always a deliverance. When you choose this journey of faith, God always comes through! The God who brought Moses out of the Red Sea and Jesus out of the tomb can bring you out of whatever hardship you face. Can I tell you about our good news? Not long ago, my wife Katie passed the five-year mark, five years cancer free. Jezebel is dead and buried. She is no more.

Of course, that's not the end of our journey. We've faced other hardships since then, and we will face more. Moses knows that, even after the Red Sea miracle, they still have a long journey ahead, a hard journey, and at some point, just like kids in the backseat of the car, the children of Israel will grow weary, "Are we there yet?" Listen to the reminder Moses gives them. **SLIDE 23** He says, "*Your people whom you purchased... You will bring them in and plant them on your mountain, Your own homeland, Lord—the sanctuary you made for them to live in.*" **Exodus 15:16-17 (TLB)** Moses knows the journey is not the reward. The greatest reward is getting there, and our real deliverance will be when God brings us safely into the Promised Land.

I'll close with this: **SLIDE 24** This picture is my wife's heart. My wife comes from a little village of 100 people called Irwin, Missouri. If you drove north out of Joplin, went up highway 71 like you're going to Kansas City, in about 30 minutes you'd hit Lamar and seven miles north, you'd get off and go east on Highway C for about half a mile. You'd go over the train tracks, and when you see the big hay barn on your left, you'd turn in. That's Bunton Farms. My wife is from a farming family. They've lived on that farm for I don't know, 60 years. Her three older brothers farm it now. This is one of the aerial shots. Katie's mom gave her this picture and in the corner she wrote a little note. This hangs in our bedroom. READ NOTE. "It's NOT art, but it's HOME to Bunton Farms, Inc., Irwin, MO (and to the Irwin 4-H Club) seven miles north of Lamar, Missouri. August 10, 1983, The camera didn't catch (but Mom's book shows): Katie bringing the rakes at the end of haying, Mike and Matt taking bale wagon load to a hay customer, Marty on three wheeler checking irrigation, Bunton Reunion company staying overnight (and Don actually inside visiting), Ruth picking blackberries beyond the oaks, and it was HOT that day." I could not begin to tell you how many family dinners we've right under that roof, how many family baseball games we've played right in that yard, how many arguments her brothers have had right there in that driveway. There are more memories here than you could shake a stick at. This is my wife's favorite place in the world. Her roots go so deep on that piece of land that her veins run with Barton County dirt. It's not art, but it's home. **SLIDE 25**

A few years ago my family went on an epic journey. We loaded up six kids in our big white 15 passenger van and we vacationed through the Western United States. And when I say epic journey, I mean that for the next 24 days, we lived out of that van. We drove 7000 miles, covered 14 states, hit eight national parks. We stood in wonder at the edge of the Grand Canyon, marveled at the Indian cliff ruins at Montezuma's castle, watched the sun set on the red rocks of Sedona. We ran in the surf at the Pacific Ocean. We took all our kids to Disneyland, spent the longest week of my life there that day, but that night when we watched the fireworks over the Disney castle, my kids' eyes were as big as saucers. We walked across the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, went to Pier 39 at Fisherman's Wharf to watch the sea lions, watched the cable cars up and down the hill. We white water rafted King's Canyon, the Smith River and the Merced River, rafted in Yosemite National Park, climbed to the top of Yosemite Falls, watched the moon rise over Half Dome, saw the mighty sequoias and went camping in the redwoods, went hiking and played hide and seek in huge stumps as big as a house. We saw the deepest lake, the clearest blue water in the world at Crater Lake in Oregon, explored lighthouses on the Oregon coast, saw a pod of whales playing out in the ocean, and waded in the tidepools on the shore looking at mussels and anemones and starfish. We camped in Yellowstone, watched Old Faithful explode, saw a bear, moose, elk, buffalo. We climbed to the bridge across Multnomah Falls in the Columbia River gorge and watched a rodeo in Cody Wyoming. In South Dakota, surrounded by 50,000 bikers in black leather there for the Sturgis Rally, we marveled at the faces on Mount Rushmore.

I'm telling you on our epic journey we saw some of the most amazing sights that you will ever see in this world—breathtaking beauty, and do you know the most beautiful place we saw was? I will tell you that, of wonder after natural wonder, the most beautiful we saw was when we were driving on 71 from Kansas City, **SLIDE 26** about seven miles north of Lamar, we went east on highway C, about a half mile, over the railroad tracks, turn in left at the big hay barn. Bunton

Farms. And as Granny walked out the door and invited us in for supper, my wife wept tears of joy. It's not art, but it's home. And hear me church: I know the journey is long. I know the journey is hard. But a day is coming at the end of our long journey, when we have arrived at the driveway of the Celestial City, the New Jerusalem, and Jesus will walk out the front door, smiling. And he will put his arm around us, pat us on the shoulder and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Then he will invite us in for supper, the wedding banquet of the Lamb, and we will sit down with him and eat and talk and laugh with the ones we love and with the One we love until the joy pierces our heart like a sword, and we will live happily ever after because we will be home. Are we there yet? Not yet. But hang in there. When we get there, it will be worth it.