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Back to School Sunday: Stepping Into the Unknown



August 23, 2026



Back to School Sunday: Stepping Into the Unknown
A Word for the Whole Family

If someone had told us yesterday that we would be worshipping outside today, we would not have believed it. But here we are. And as I look at your faces—students, teenagers, parents, grandparents, and little ones—I am reminded that this is exactly what we needed to hear today.

Life is full of unexpected disruptions. A fire. A diagnosis. A broken relationship. A school year that feels heavier than the last one. A teenager pulling away. A child struggling to make friends. A transition that makes you feel like you are standing on unstable ground. And that is what we are talking about today: transition and trusting God through uncertain seasons.

“God goes before us, God is with us, and God will not fail us.”

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NLT) *Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.*

Part 1: Faith Has Never Failed Before (Hebrews 11)

Before we get to the five lessons, we need to anchor ourselves in the history of God's faithfulness.

Hebrews 11:1 (NLT) *Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.*

Hebrews 11:20 (NLT) *It was by faith that Isaac promised blessings for the future to his sons, Jacob and Esau.*

Isaac blessed his children not because he knew exactly what their future held, but because he trusted the One who held their future.

Parents, that is your assignment today. You may not know what this school year holds for your children, but you know the God who goes before them.

Hebrews 11:23 (NLT) *It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months when he was born. They saw that God had given them an unusual child, and they were not afraid of the king's decree.*

Every child here is an unusual child. Set apart. Chosen. Destined for something only they can do. Parents, you may not see the full picture yet, but God does. Trust Him with your children.

Hebrews 11:24-25 (NLT) *It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin.*

There comes a moment when every child must outgrow their parents' faith and make it their own. That is not a rejection of you—it is a sign of growth. This is where Samuel's story meets ours.

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Part 2: Outgrowing the Covering (1 Samuel 2–3)

This part is personal to me, having had dropped my oldest son off at college last weekend.

1 Samuel 2:18-19 (NLT) *But Samuel, though he was only a boy, served the Lord. He wore a linen garment like that of a priest. Each year his mother made him a small robe and brought it to him when she came with her husband for the sacrifice.*

Hannah made Samuel a robe every year. That robe represented her covering—her prayers, her love, her influence. But eventually, Samuel had to wear it on his own. He had to step into his own relationship with God.

1 Samuel 3:10 (NLT) *And the Lord came and called as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel replied, 'Speak, your servant is listening.'*

The day came when Samuel outgrew his mother's “covering” and heard God for himself. Parents, this is the goal. Not for your children to stay under your covering forever, but for them to hear God's voice directly.

For the Kids: You are growing up, and that is good! Just like Samuel, God wants to talk to you—not just through your parents, but directly to your heart. You can hear Him too.

For the Teens: You are at that exact place Samuel was. You are figuring out who you are outside of your parents' shadow. It is okay to have questions. It is okay to wrestle. God is not afraid of your doubts. He is calling you by name.

For the Adults: Watching your child outgrow your covering is one of the hardest parts of parenting. It can feel like a loss. But it is actually a sign of success. Your job is not to keep them dependent on you; it is to launch them into their own destiny. Trust God with that transition.

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Part 3: Five Lessons from Joshua for an Uncertain Season

(Taken loosely from President Wilson's sermon on move in day for freshman at Oral Roberts University last Saturday)

When Joshua faced the unknown, taking over from Moses, leading a nation into a foreign land, God gave him clear instructions. These are the same lessons for every age and every stage.

- Lesson 1: Fear Is a Liar. Courage Is a Choice.

Deuteronomy 31:7-8 (NLT) *Then Moses called for Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you must lead this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them. You must take possession of it. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.'*

2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT) *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*

Fear always lies. It tells you that you are alone, that you are not enough, that the worst possible outcome is inevitable. But fear is a liar.

Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the decision to move forward anyway.

For the Kids: When you feel scared about a new class or a new teacher, remember that God goes ahead of you. You are not walking in alone. He is right there.

For the Teens: Fear shows up as anxiety about grades, social media comparison, or the pressure of your future. That voice that says you will not make it, you will not be accepted, you will not succeed... that is not God's voice. God gave you power, love, and a sound mind. Reject the anxiety. Choose courage.

For the Adults: Fear looks like worry over finances, career stability, or your children's safety. It keeps you up at night. But God says He goes before you. He is already in your tomorrow. You can release the anxiety because He holds the future.

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- Lesson 2: Roll Away the Shame. You Cannot Carry the Past into the Future.

Joshua 5:9 (NLT) *Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away the shame of your slavery in Egypt.' So that place has been called Gilgal to this day.*

Before Joshua could take one step into the Promised Land, God stopped the entire nation at Gilgal. The word Gilgal means “roll away.” God was saying, “I am rolling away the shame. The failure. The old identity. You are starting fresh.”

You cannot carry last year's weight into this year. You cannot carry past failures into this new season. You cannot carry shame into your future.

For the Kids: Maybe you made mistakes last year. Maybe you were unkind to someone. Maybe you struggled in a subject. God has a giant eraser for all of that. Today is a fresh start.

For the Teens: You carry a lot—social mistakes, academic failures, things you regret saying online, pressures you wish you could undo. God is saying, "I am rolling that away." You are not defined by your worst moment. Let it go.

For the Adults: The past is heavy—regrets in parenting, missed opportunities, failures in your career or marriage. You cannot drive forward while staring in the rearview mirror. God wants to roll it all away. Confess it. Release it. Receive His forgiveness. And move forward without the weight.

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- Lesson 3: Stop Asking God to Bless Your Plan. Ask Him for His Plan.

Joshua 5:13-15 (NLT) *When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and demanded, 'Are you friend or foe?' 'Neither one,' he replied. 'I am the commander of the Lord's army.'* At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. *'I am at your command,' Joshua said. 'What do you want your servant to do?'* Joshua had a strategy. He knew how to siege a city. But God showed up and said, "I am not on your side. You are on Mine." Joshua stopped strategizing and started surrendering. He asked, "What do You want me to do?"

For the Kids: Sometimes we want things really badly. We pray, "God, give me this!" But the best prayer is: "God, what do YOU want for me?"

For the Teens: You are making big decisions—classes, colleges, friendships. It is easy to ask God to bless the plan you already made. But what if He wants something different? What if He wants you to let go of something? Surrender is not weakness. Surrender is saying, "Your will, not mine."

For the Adults: We do this constantly. We make decisions and ask God to rubber-stamp them. But surrender means laying down your vision for your family, your career, your church... and asking, "What do You want, Lord?" That is where true breakthrough begins.

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- Lesson 4: The Presence of God Is Your Competitive Advantage.

Joshua could have rushed into battle. But he did not. He encountered the commander of the Lord's army. He fell on his face. He worshipped. He sought presence before he strategized.

For the Kids: Before you walk into school, whisper: "Jesus, hold my hand today." That is your superpower. He gives you peace when you are nervous and kindness when you are tempted to be mean.

For the Teens: You have so many distractions—screens, social media, parents, coaches, friends... But what sets you apart is not your GPA or your social status. It is the presence of God in your life. When you carry His presence, you carry peace that does not make sense, wisdom beyond your years, and discernment that sees what others miss.

For the Adults: We are busy. We are tired. We rush from one thing to the next. But if we do not prioritize His presence, we are running on fumes. Your family does not need a perfect parent; they need a parent who is filled with God's presence. Your work does not need a perfect employee; it needs someone who walks in divine wisdom.

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- Lesson 5: Do Not Just Survive—Possess What God Has Given You.

Joshua 1:3 (NLT) *I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you.'*

God gave Joshua the land. But Joshua had to take it. There is a difference between what God has given you and what you have actually taken possession of.

For the Kids: Your classroom is your land. Your playground is your land. Your lunch table is your land. You choose what happens there. Will you be kind? Will you reach out to someone who is lonely? Will you try your best? Thrive there.

For the Teens: Your school is your mission field. Your team is your platform. Your friend group is your influence. Do not just survive high school. Be the light. Be the one who stands up for what is right. Be the one who invites the outsider in. That is taking your territory.

For the Adults: Your workplace is your territory. Your home is your territory. Your neighborhood is your territory. God has placed you there for such a time as this. Do not just get through the day. Make an impact. Speak life. Show grace. Take what God has given you.

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Part 4: The Process (Why You Cannot Cheat Your Way Through)

James 1:2-4 (NLT) *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*

You could take shortcuts. You could cheat your way through. You could avoid the hard things. But the process is what gives you the tools to last. The difficult class is teaching you discipline. The challenging teacher is teaching you patience. The lonely season is teaching you to rely on God. The unexpected fire is teaching us to trust God in ways we never would have learned otherwise.

Success starts on Sunday. Right here. Right now. Not when the grades come in. Not when the season is over. Success starts when you choose to trust God with the unknown.

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Part 5: Family Interactive segment (For All Ages)

Every person here—children, teens, and adults—think of one thing from the past that is weighing you down. A failure. A fear. A regret. A grudge. A worry. Write it down on this paper or draw a symbol of it.

Prayer: Father, in the Name of Jesus, we roll away the shame. We roll away the fear. We roll away the failures of the past.

Families, repeat after me: We choose courage. We choose surrender. We pursue Your presence. We will possess what You have given us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Numbers 6:24-26 (NLT) *May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace.*

Go in peace. Trust God. Take the territory.

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