

Next Steps: *Gather*

Acts 2:41-47

September 13, 2026 am

HDBC

I am thrilled to kick off this three-part sermon series called **Next Steps**. And more than just kicking off a sermon series, we are introducing an **updated vision statement**, which outlines the steps to becoming a committed, maturing disciple of Jesus Christ. Both words in the title are important:

Steps. Becoming a committed maturing disciple of Jesus does not happen in one moment. **It happens by taking intentional steps.** There is a starting point; being born again, being saved, entering into a personal relationship with Jesus. But it must not end there. This is a beginning, a first step. To grow in your walk with Christ will require taking additional steps. In this series and in this new **vision statement** we want to outline **three important additional steps**. I'll get to those in a moment.

Next. Implies movement, progression, anticipation. It means we are never satisfied with our current spiritual condition, but are always looking ahead, seeking to move forward, to become more like Jesus. So, we will be asking you to develop the discipline of always looking for the **next step** in your spiritual journey. Starting today, we are asking **every member of HDBC to consider what your next step is, and then taking it.**

The New Testament calls us to **follow Christ**. But what does that really mean? 2,000 years ago when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Israel it was very clear. When he called Peter, James, John and others to **follow Him, He meant it literally. And they did, literally.** They left their jobs, homes and former lives to become full-time disciples of Jesus. For three years they lived with him, learned from him, and were commissioned by Him to carry on his work after his return to heaven. **But what does it mean today?**

For many years we have used a simple vision statement; **Love, Connect Serve**. It has served us well. However, the time is right to take what we see as the natural **Next Step** in our understanding of discipleship.

For many months a discipleship team led by Ben Neiser and many of HDBC members have prayed, studied the Scriptures and examined the current discipleship climate of HDBC. Coming out of their efforts we are initiating new language that we feel best communicates a Biblical discipleship process for the next season at HDBC. Three key words, in three key phrases. **Gather, Grow, Go.** Here is a summary of all three.

Gather as Believers – Worship services, small groups, fellowships. This will result in connections, relationships and shared experiences. Our two primary scheduled times to gather are Sundays and Wednesdays

Grow as Disciples – Involves serving in the church, giving to the church, and being intentional about going deeper in your faith. **Grow** groups will be designed just for this. Pray now about being part of one this year.

Go as Disciple-makers – Actions that are designed to make disciples of others. Mission trips, investing in unbelievers, personal evangelism, leading small groups, serving in critical leadership roles at HDBC.

The goal is to lead unbelievers to become followers of Christ through faith. The goal is to lead all believers (disciples) to become disciple-makers.

Over the next few weeks I want to walk us through those three steps. Gather, Grow, Go. Encourage you to assess where you currently are, and challenge you to take the next step in your movement toward being a disciple-maker. Today we start with the importance of **Gathering**.

It's one of the first things we note about the NT believers. They loved being together. They recognized that they needed each other and were more effective together than individually.

Of course God knew this, so He established the institution of the church. This became their primary gathering point. For 2,000 years every generation of believers have done the same. We do as well. But every generation of believers need to have a good Biblical understanding of the importance of

gathering. It may be more important in this AI, high-tech, social media generation than any of the ones that came before us. So, this morning let's look again at how & why the early church gathered.

Best place to start is Acts 2:41-47. **Note four things from this account.**

1. Clearly defined membership (41)

They are born again, baptized, and added. It went in that order and still does. Church membership is important. **Those who were saved joined up and jumped in.** Later as the NT letters were written, the nature, structure, leadership, and functions were brought into a greater focus. But at this point the important thing to note is that **they came together in a committed membership.** Church membership is still important.

For some of you, your **next step** could be to decide to **join up and jump in** with us. That means joining this church. I can assure you the Lord will be honored and you will experience a deeper walk with Jesus.

2. Passion to be together (42-47a)

Commitment to gathering on a regular basis.

Continually devoting themselves. They were all in. **Everything that follows in this text could only happen when they were together.** The underlying foundation of the success of that church was that they were together. They gathered. They understood the importance of being face-to-face. Notice in the text that they gathered in various ways: **large groups (at the temple) small groups (house to house), one on one (taking their meals together).** They just couldn't get enough of each other. They made it a priority because they loved each other.

3. Focus on strategic priorities (42b-47a)

These are introduced in verse 42 and reinforced throughout the passage. The common denominator with all five is that they could only be done effectively through face-to-face gatherings. The people had to be together.

That's why the writer of Hebrews would later write, *do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together*. He understood that some things cannot be effectively accomplished from a distance. Some things can only happen when you are in the room with other people. So, what are those five things that were a priority when they gathered?

Bible Study: *Apostles teaching*.

Cultivated spiritual growth through systematic Bible Study. They did this in large group worship with the entire church gathered, as well as in homes, which included families and smaller groups of families.

Fellowship: (Koinonia) Cultivated strong healthy relationships.

This happened during the large times of worship, during the small group Bible studies, but also as they visited with each other in homes and in the community. *House to house, taking meals together*. BTW, this is the kind of fellowship that led them to notice the needs of other believers and take drastic steps to meet those needs. See verse 45.

They knew they needed each other. They were facing temptations from within and persecutions from without. They needed people they could rely on as they walked the narrow road of following Christ. **Jesus walked His road alone. We don't have to.** We need a buddy to ride with us, walk with us, to stick by us.

I grew up watching the Lone Ranger and his trusty sidekick, Tonto. There was one time when **Tonto and the Lone Ranger were riding through a canyon together when all of a sudden both sides were filled with Indiana on horses, dressed for battle. The Lone Ranger turned to Tonto and asked, What are we going to do? Tonto replied, What you mean we, white man?**

I'm sure that never really happened. It was a story built around the **loyalty of two men who came from opposite camps**. Each one had the other one's back. That's what we find in the church. We come from all

kinds of backgrounds and experiences, but our relationships with Christ bring a loyalty to one another, as well. We really do need each other.

Worship: Group worship. Gathered in one place to worship together. Implied throughout this passage in NT letters. *Breaking of bread* (Lord's supper). *Praising God* (47), *In the temple* (46). Worship included proclamation of the Word of God, expressions of praise through music, corporate prayer, bringing of offerings.

Prayer: Personal and group prayer.

Joining voices, hearts and minds to seek the heart of God and to intercede on behalf of each other and those far away. They understood the invitation of God to come into His presence and converse with Him. In group prayer we learn from others, hear their passions, learn of their needs, and sharpen our own abilities to pray. I've learned so much from just listening to others as they pray.

Giving: They gave to one another. Offerings were collected to meet the needs of others. Later in the NT letters we learn that the church embraced and enhanced the OT principles of giving; give first, give the best, give consistently, give joyfully, give as an act of worship, and at times give sacrificially.

Those five things could only happen by gathering together. Never underestimate the importance of being in the room.

4. Witnessed the power of God

They felt the presence of God (43)

They saw evidence of the power of God. (43)

They witnessed the salvation of others (47)

Takeaways:

HDBC has two primary weekly times to gather. Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights. These are the times we gather. Four - Five hours each week. Less time than most spend at work, school, hobbies, ball games,

yard work, watching movies. You get my point. So, here is what we would like for you to do.

1. Do a self-assessment.

Take an honest look at where you are when it comes to the importance of gathering with the church. Are you all in? Are you sporadic? Are you worship only but nothing else? Do you come and sit but really don't participate or interact? Be honest with yourself.

2. Take the next step.

Refuse to be stagnant. Where there is life there is an expectation of growth. Consider what next step God might want to take. Here are some next step options.

Become a believer in Jesus. This is the most important first step.

Join the church. Is this your next step?

Make worship participation a Sunday morning priority.

Join a small group and stay active.

Participate on Wednesday nights.

There is nothing that can take the place of ***gathering*** together as believers. We are all strengthened when we do.

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. *What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?* asks Linus.

These five fingers, says Lucy. *Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold.*

Which channel do you want? asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, *Why can't you guys get organized like that?*

We are stronger, when we gather.

You are stronger, when you gather with us.