

BEGINNINGS

AN EIGHT-WEEK SERMON SERIES

Based on the book

BEGINNINGS: THE FIRST SEVEN DAYS OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

BY STEVE WIENS

NAVPRESS 

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Beginnings: The First Seven Days of the Rest of Your Life

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Series Rationale: Using *Beginnings: The First Seven Days of the Rest of Your Life* (NavPress, 2016) as a guide, this eight-week series will help the people in your community to *identify* the new beginnings which God is inviting them into by *exploring* the days of creation as a process for spiritual transformation.

RESOURCES

Book: *Beginnings: The First Seven Days of the Rest of Your Life* (NavPress 2016). By signing up for this resource, you'll receive a free copy of *Beginnings*. Reading it before you preach the material will greatly enhance your ability to grasp the content and deliver it clearly and passionately to your community. Visit www.NavPress.com for bulk purchase discounts.

Structure: Every speaker finds their own rhythm and structure, and what works. We've provided a simple structure below, knowing that each speaker will adapt it to suit their own style and the specific culture of their own church. Having said that, each of the following outlines will be structured as follows:

Overview: *Here we describe the main emphasis of each week's message.*

Text: *We recommend that you read the text out loud to set up the rest of the message.*

Driving Question: *This is what we're asking our people, asking ourselves, and asking God as we hear the narrative in the text.*

Teaching: *We'll provide questions and reflections so you can prepare a message based on what drives you from the text and from the book.*

Reflections: *This is a place for personal application/reflection for each church. We'll provide questions to help you process what your community might need.*

Wrap Up: *This is a place to provide a time for response from your congregation and next steps.*

Facebook Page: A closed Facebook page will be created for all pastors who have committed to preaching through this series from March 27 to May 15, 2016. This group will be an opportunity for encouraging each other and sharing preaching ideas. Author Steve Wiens will be an active coach on the Facebook page, interacting with questions and giving helpful insight week-by-week.

One Last note: A lot of the work around Hebrew and Greek language is already in the book, so we won't duplicate it in the outlines below. We're assuming you will use the book as a study source.

WEEK ONE: RESURRECTION – EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS EPILOGUE: DAY EIGHT)

Pages 193-205

Overview: *In the resurrection, we see the tov of Jesus, a seed buried in the earth by God, which then bursts out of the ground, containing seeds of future life within him. Using the story of Saul, who met Jesus on the road to Damascus and experienced a radical new beginning, this message will help people see that new beginnings can burst out of any ground, no matter how deeply they are buried or how hard the ground is.*

Text: Acts 9:1-19

Driving Question: What is that thing in your life that you think will never change? Do you have the courage to name it? What would you need to believe that things could change? What does resurrection have to do with any of those things? What does the resurrection of Jesus mean for your actual life? Are new beginnings possible?

- Addiction
- Body Image
- Relational Conflict
- Fear/anxiety

Teaching:

Story of Paul in Acts 9:1-19

- Saul is convinced he's right; he loves God and he thinks he's doing the righteous thing.
- Saul is met by Jesus on the road to Damascus and is immediately blinded.
- Be a Christian for a moment: It's dangerous. Your people are being imprisoned and executed. How would you respond? What hope would you have for things to change?
- God appears to Ananias and asks him to do a very dangerous thing. What does it mean to trust God that change can happen in a person? What if Ananias had allowed fear to control him, and what if he hadn't gone to pray for Saul?
- Resurrection happens when someone dies and rises up changed. What dies in Saul? What rises up again in Saul? What dies in Ananias? What rises up in Ananias?
- Notice Saul stays blind for three days. Make sure to make the connection between his blindness for three days and Jesus saying in the tomb for three days.

Reflections:

- Remember the list of things you came up with during the driving question. Ask: What needs to die in you? What needs to be raised up again?
- Consider an invitation for people to respond to the desire of Jesus to resurrect and redeem all the broken parts of their lives.
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-10 – this is what Paul writes later in his life.

Wrap Up: Set up for series: Use your own words to set up the next seven weeks. Something like: We're going to spend the next seven weeks talking about new beginnings, using the days of creation in Genesis 1 as a pattern, or process, to determine where you're at in your own process of becoming.

WEEK TWO: LIGHT – APRIL 3, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS DAY ONE: LIGHT)

Pages 1-25

Overview: *On Day One, God speaks the words, “Let there be light.” This isn’t the light of the sun; that comes on Day Four. So what is it? “I am the light of the world,” Jesus says. This light radiates into the dark places of our lives, showing us the way through them. Most of us feel frighteningly alone. We try so hard to make our lives meaningful, and then we give up, disillusioned and disappointed. Using the story of Moses and the burning bush, this message will help us to see that God meets us in the dark corners of our ordinary existence.*

Text: Read Genesis 1:1-5.

Driving Question: What is the light of Day One? The sun and stars are not created until Day Four, so whatever this light is, it isn’t the sun.

Teaching:

Explain *tohu va vohu*: the inky blackness, chaos, and emptiness before light shows up. We all feel it:

- When we are stuck and we don't know how to get unstuck
- When we're going through a divorce
- When we lose our jobs
- When experiencing loss of any kind
- At pretty much every stage of raising kids
- Share a time you were lost in *tohu va vohu*.

Story of Exodus 3:1-10

- How was Moses experiencing *tohu va vohu* in the wilderness?
- How is the burning bush a Day One moment for Moses, and for Israel?
- Consider teaching on the ninth plague – an example of light being drawn out of darkness and Israel experiencing a new beginning (*Beginnings*, pages 13-17).
- What pictures of God does your church have? Is rescuer one of them?
- What can you do with the phrase: “There you are, it’s time to go.”

Reflections:

- Where do you most long to hear from God these days?
- When do you sense God’s presence most?
- Where do you feel lost in *tohu va vohu* these days?

Wrap Up: Consider ending by reading Exodus 3:7-10 and painting a picture of a God who is always rescuing, always hearing the cries of desperate people, always longing to lead people into new beginnings.

WEEK THREE: EXPANSE – APRIL 10, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS DAY TWO: EXPANSE)

Pages 27-45

Overview: *On Day Two, an expanse is forged between the waters of the sky and the waters of the air; a space is made in which we can exist. The word expanse literally means to hammer out, like a skilled artisan using precious metals to cover an object. For a person to bring forth the good stuff that God has imbedded within them, they need to be expanded, so they can hold all that new life. Using the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his own brothers, this message will help people see how to partner with God to be expanded, so that good things can grow within them and bless the world.*

Text: Read Genesis 1:6-10 (Some translations use a word other than *expanse* to translate *raqiya*: *firmament*, or *dome*, etc. The ESV uses *expanse*.)

Driving Question: When you are being invited into a new beginning, and you've seen the burning bush light of Day One, what happens next?

Teaching:

- Spend some time teaching about *raqiya* – expanse. Root word *raqa*. (See *Beginnings*, pages 31-33).
- “On Day Two, you are invited into an expansion of character so that your life can support all that is growing inside of you. At times, Day Two can feel like being hammered out. It can make you want to stomp the earth with your foot like a four-year-old. Expansion requires adaptation” (page 32).
- Talk about a time in your own life when you were “hammered out” so that you could be expanded and enlarged by God.
- Tell the story of Joseph in your own words (pages 33-39).
- How was he expanded?
- What mission was God going to give Joseph?
- How did Joseph’s experiences expand him?
- What was the end result of Joseph submitting to being expanded (see Genesis 50:20)?
- What questions about God’s role in suffering does this text raise? Do you want to go there?

Reflections:

- What situations or relationships are inviting you to expand these days?
- What are some things you may need to let go of in order to expand?
- What do you need to receive from God and others so that you can expand?

Wrap up: Consider ending with leading your community through the spiritual practice listed on pages 42-44, or using Philippians 1:6 as a way to encourage your community.

WEEK FOUR: SEEDS – APRIL 17, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS DAY THREE: SEEDS)

Pages 47-77

Overview: *On Day Three, vegetation sprouts up, bearing seeds within them that will become plants in the future, creating an endless cycle of creative activity from generation to generation. The truest parts of who we really are contain the potential for future life within them; they become actualized when we give them away. When we think of our favorite teachers, coaches, and mentors, they gave something to us that emerged from somewhere deep inside of them, and caused something deep inside of us to spring to life. Most of us stop short of giving away what's really true about us, because we're afraid of something that potent. What if no one sees it as good? What if I'm not the real deal? Using the story of Jesus reinstating Peter after his denial, this message will flesh out what it means to name & honor what is truest about you, and then give it away.*

Text: Read Genesis 1:11-13

Driving Question: So maybe you can name how God has rescued you with the light of a Day One new beginning. And you can see how some of the struggle and pain of Day Two in your life has actually expanded you. Well, what's that all *for*?

Teaching:

- Spend some time explaining the concept of *tov*, especially using seeds as a metaphor. Go back to the introduction to get a full picture of it if you need to (pages xvii – xx).
- Ask people if they've ever noticed any seeds of life planted in them by God and if they would have the courage to share those names in their small groups or with a close friend.
- Maybe it's the ability to sit with people in pain and give comfort
- Maybe it's the ability to take initiative and get things done
- Maybe it's the ability to listen
- Tell a story of a person or two in your congregation who has allowed their *tov* to come out and how it has blessed other people.
- Tell the story of Peter and Jesus on the beach (John 21:15-19), paying special attention to how Jesus uses his own *tov* to resurrect Peter, but also how he calls Peter's *tov* out of him with a question.

Reflections:

- What is Jesus calling out of you these days, so that "his sheep can be fed?"
- Where do you feel a sense of passion about something that needs to be done in the world to bring healing, justice, and restoration?
- In what ways have you assumed that serving God automatically has to include suffering?
- In what ways have you perhaps stuffed your *tov* down inside of you because you didn't think you were supposed to feel joy related to serving Jesus?

Wrap Up: Encourage people to talk to others who know them well, asking them the question: What do you think God has wired me up to do? What have you seen me do that helps others? How has my presence in your life been a gift?

WEEK FIVE: SEASONS – APRIL 24, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS DAY FOUR: SEASONS)

Pages 79-109

Overview: *On Day Four, the sun, moon, stars, and seasons are created, giving structure and rhythms to our lives. The very identity of the Children of Israel was anchored into these seasons. They celebrated feasts and festivals because they helped them to remember who they were and what time it was in their lives. The four seasons we need to regularly submit to are waiting, hope, abundance, and loss. Using the story of Hannah and her painful infertility, this message will help people identify what season they are in, asking God to help them be present to it without wishing it away.*

Text: Read Genesis 1:14-19

Driving Question: On Day One, God rescues us, and on Day Two, we are expanded. On Day Three, we discover our *tov*, and we join God's work of healing and restoring the world by letting our *tov* "burst forth." So, what is Day Four all about?

Teaching:

- On Day Four, *time* is created (the sun and moon and stars are how we mark time).
- If we are going to walk all the way into our new beginnings, we're going to have to learn how to embrace the unique seasons in which we find ourselves, without wishing them away. We generally find ourselves either in the season of waiting, or hope, or abundance, or loss.
- "Day Four invites us to recognize and respond to *all* the seasons of life. Though we want endless spring and summer, fall and winter eventually come -- sometimes far too soon. Day four invites us to embrace each season as it comes, without wishing it away or trying to hold on too long" (page 82).
- Explain in your own words, using your own stories, and the stories of your own community, the seasons of waiting, hope, abundance, and loss (pages 83-97).
- Explain the story of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1-28) in your own words, highlighting the parts that you find especially suitable to explaining the different seasons, noting how *honest* Hannah was, how brave she was, and how she showed us how to embrace each season.

Reflections:

- Which season do you find yourself in these days?
- What do you need from God in order to embrace your season instead of running from it?
- Do you know how to *endure* during the season of waiting?
- Do you know how to *recognize* the season of hope?
- Do you know how to *enjoy* the season of abundance?
- Do you know how to *grieve* during the season of loss?

Wrap Up: Consider closing with the two questions listed as the practice at the end of the chapter (pages 108-109): How are you doing right now, really? What are you grateful for right now, really? Encourage people to journal their answers, talk with a trusted friend, or pray about it.

WEEK SIX: MONSTERS – MAY 1, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS DAY FIVE: MONSTERS)

Pages 111-134

Overview: *Day five speaks to the monsters that we encounter in our lives. We will be tempted to face these monsters by wearing ill-fitting armor – either given to us by others, or created by ourselves. We need to face these monsters naked and vulnerably, using only what God gives us. Using the story of David and Goliath, this message helps people to face the fears with God's strength behind us.*

Text: Read Genesis 1:20-23

For this week, do a little teaching right away.

Tanniyn: a powerful creature to be feared (page 116)

This word is used in various locations in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures:

- “The monster of the deep” – Job 7:12
- “Only the Lord can kill it” – Isaiah 5:19
- Moses uses this word to describe a dangerous snake with poisonous venom which could kill you – Deuteronomy 32:33.

Driving Question: We've seen God show up on Day One and rescue us, we've been expanded on Day Two to hold all the life God wants to create in us, we've learned how to name our seeds of life and share them with others on Day Three, we've learned to inhabit the unique season we're in on Day Four. On Day Five, we're going to learn to face our monsters. Have you ever had to face a monster? What did it look like? What did it take to face it without getting taken out?

Teaching:

- Tell the story of David (1 Samuel 17:31-40) in your own words, making sure to mention:
- David was seen as the *qatan* – the young, insignificant, unimportant one (page 120).
- David was not even brought out by his father when Samuel came to anoint a new king.
- David was not sent to fight with his brothers; He was sent to bring bread and cheese! (page 123).
- When David finally went and volunteered to fight Goliath, first his older brother shamed him (page 124-125). The king also shamed him (p 128), then tried to get him to wear his armor.
- David chose instead to go into battle without any armor at all. He defeats the monster.
- What does it mean to face your monster naked and vulnerable, armed only with God's strength and the gifts that God has given you (five stones and a sling).
- This might be a good time to share a story from your own life where you had to face a monster and you were afraid.

Reflections:

- We all have monsters and someday we need to face them. What are yours?
- Insecurity, relational conflicts, our parent's words which wounded us, abuse, failure.
- What armor have you tried to wear and how has it felt to wear it?
- What would you need from God in order to face your monster naked and vulnerably?

Wrap Up: Consider ending by reading some verses of how God shows up to help (Psalm 18:16-19; 37:7; 94:18-19; 121:3; Zephaniah 3:17).

WEEK SEVEN: US – MAY 8, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS DAY SIX: US)

Pages 135-163

On Day Six, human beings are created in the image of God. We spend a lot of our lives running away from this reality, however, and we end up feeling isolated. When we stop running, we turn and find Someone calling for us to return to who we are. We then see the names we've used to cover up the innocent and beautiful name that has been ours since before the beginning of time. Using the story of Hagar and her flight to the wilderness, this message will help people to identify the false names they've been given, and re-capture their real name given to them by God.

Text: Read Genesis 1:26-27

Driving Question: We've seen God show up on Day One and rescue us, we've been expanded on Day Two to hold all the life God wants to create in us, we've learned how to name our seeds of life and share them with others on Day Three, we've learned to inhabit the unique season we're in on Day Four. On Day Five, we learned how to face our monsters naked and vulnerably. On Day Six, we ask: What is your picture of God? What does it mean that you are created in *that* image? And why did God create human beings in God's image?

Teaching:

- Start with a story from your own life, similar to my story on pages 155-159.
- Tell the story of Abram/Sarai/Hagar (Genesis 16:1-13) in your own words (found on pages 147-155).
- Hagar was the servant of Sarai and Abram. She was bought as a slave from Egypt. Her name means "flight." She was a refugee. Can you imagine her life?
- She was selected to be a surrogate for Sarai and Abram because they were infertile.
- She got pregnant and began to "hate" Sarai, so Sarai beat her and sent her out.
- When a slave girl runs to the wilderness, she's going to die.
- The Hebrew word for wilderness is *midbar* (root word *dabar*, which means to speak). **The wilderness is the place where God speaks** (page 153).
- God meets Hagar and asks her, "Where have you come from and where are you going?"
- Hagar responds, "You're the God who sees me!" (page 154) and is given the courage to go back to Abram and Sarai. (*Flight* returns home after seeing God. Wow!)
- Really seeing God, and hearing God, can change everything about how you see yourself, how you see God, and how you see your situation.

Reflections:

- What names have you taken on which have covered up your true identity?
- Being made in the image of God means that God sees you and has named you.
- Have you ever wondered what name God calls you?

Wrap up: Consider doing the exercise with the nametags described on pages 157-158, 162 with your congregation. Bless them and remind them they may or may not “hear” anything from God that day, but if they don’t, they can keep the name tags and keep praying. This is vulnerable stuff!

WEEK EIGHT: STOP: MAY 15, 2016

(BASED ON BEGINNINGS DAY SEVEN: STOP)

Pages 165-191

On Day Seven, God is finished with God’s work, and the Sabbath is created. Sabbath simply means to stop. This is the very first thing in Scripture that is called holy. Stopping is holy work. Finding rhythms in your life to shut down productivity, enjoy relationships, and nurture trust is an essential part of becoming who you are. This message will help people explore rich, meaningful ways to laugh, eat, and enjoy the life that has been given to them, and to receive what only God can give.

Text: Read Genesis 2:1-3

- What is the first thing that God calls holy? (*Sabbath*).
- What does Sabbath mean? (*To stop*).
- Today we’re going to talk about shutting down the production lines and finding out the sun will still come up tomorrow.

Driving Question: How are we as a culture at stopping? How are you as a person at stopping? When you are stuck in a line, how many of you pull out your phones? When you are stuck at a stoplight, how many of you pull out your phones? How many of you get anxious if you don’t have your phone with you? Do we have a problem?

Teaching:

- Tell a story about a time when you did stop, whether you wanted to or not (illness, vacation, etc.), and what it helped you to see about yourself, God, and your own pace.
- Share Ruth Haley Barton’s quote: *“The point of the Sabbath is to honor our need for a sane rhythm of work and rest . . .”* (read the rest on page 180).
- How did Jesus practice Sabbath?
- You can teach the passage in the book (pages 175-179) or the following:
- Mark 6:30-32: *“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”*
- Mark 1:35-39: Jesus goes out to a deserted place to be with God.
- How can we practice Sabbath?
- We need to decide **when** we will practice Sabbath (one day a week? An afternoon? An evening? Start somewhere).
- We need to decide what we will **stop** doing. (Lists? Social media? Cooking? Email?)
- We need to decide what we **will** do. (What delights you? What nourishes you? See page 184-188 for more ideas.)
- We need to intentionally make space to be present to God (share some ideas).

Reflections:

- Practicing Sabbath is meant to be enjoyed in community (family, friends, etc).
- Practicing Sabbath will probably feel awkward and forced at first. Stay with it!
- Practicing Sabbath will eventually be a welcome, restful time you look forward to!

Wrap Up: Review the Seven Days of creation (good, brief descriptions can be found on pages xxii – xxiv), inviting people to try to name what day they feel most accurately describes their life. You may invite them to stand after you describe it, or just sit while you pray a blessing over each group.