

Just Show Up

By Pastor Jake Wilkinson

Don't you just hate that? I hate it when they're supposed to be somewhere at a certain place at a certain time and they just didn't show up. We all know what it's like to be ghosted or abandoned or not have somebody be in the place that they're supposed to be when they're supposed to be there.

We live in a world that is full of hurry. In fact, we almost use it like a badge—a busy life. When you ask somebody how they are, it's "I'm busy," and I'm proud of it, right? We live in such a busy world that it becomes a habit for us. Distraction is actually a lifestyle, and our lives are so full that showing up to one more thing or the next thing actually feels like it's the thing that's going to put us over the edge.

I don't think people need perfect answers. What they really need is someone who will simply show up when they say they're supposed to show up. Often we are so busy, we are so distracted, and we live in another place at another time—whether it's emotionally or physically—that we forget and neglect the most important things in life.

When I first came into the conference and started working here, we had something called New in Ministry, where all the young pastors would get together. I remember one of the pastors on his way out said something that stuck with me that I didn't believe. He says, "You know what, 80% of pastoring, of ministry, is just showing up." I kind of rolled my eyes and I go, "Whatever, there's way more to it than that."

Then I remember my conversion experience. I was pastoring in Ellensburg and we had a really important meeting that afternoon. I had a phone call the previous day from my cousin and his dad was dying. They were in the hospital up in Wenatchee and I remember sitting in this meeting where I had to be. I remember sitting there and just feeling completely like, "What are you doing sitting here in this important meeting? You need to go be with your cousin."

I remember stepping up from that and I said, "I'm sorry, you guys, I have to go." I got in my truck and I drove an hour and a half. When I got there, they wouldn't let me in the hospital room. They said there's only one person allowed to visit the patient. So you know what I did? I pulled the pastor card. "I'm his pastor." I didn't tell him that I was also his nephew. They kind of looked at me sideways like, "You're the pastor? Okay, yeah, whatever." I said, "I have the ministerial credentials if you'd like to see them." I pulled it out, but they didn't even look at it. They're like, "We'll let you in."

I come into this room and here's my cousin and his face is in his hands. I remember it like it was yesterday. He had tears coming down and he looks up and he sees me and he just bursts out into tears. His dad is sitting there dying on the bed. You know what I said to him? Nothing. We sat together and we cried for an hour together.

I will tell you what, all of serving somebody and loving somebody that day was showing up. The only words out of his mouth for the whole hour were, "Why are you doing this for me?" I cared for somebody because I showed up.

I think that's true for us in a world that continually doesn't show up for each other, where we are absent from ourselves and absent from the most important things of life. We can't provide any service to anyone without

first showing up. I think presence—whether that's physically, emotionally, or spiritually—is the first act of love that we can do for anyone, including God and including ourselves.

Now, shifting gears, I know I'm the minority here when I say this, but I have struggled with authority in the past. I know the particular church I am speaking to when I say this. Seriously, we've struggled. Especially when we don't agree with that authority, right? Or when that authority becomes controlling over us. We don't like that.

I know a little bit of the history of this church and we became something because we said we see God's vision for us and we're going to seek after that with all of our hearts. I am proud that we've fought hard to make Summit what it is today. I'm very proud of this church. Something that is relevant, contemporary, and able to speak into people's lives. That's the hope anyway. There's just a certain mold that we weren't going to fit and that we aren't going to fit, and we're going to stick to that.

I'm also proud that we didn't do another thing. I think when things get tough and authority is over somebody that we don't like, and they're trying to make us fit a mold, what do we tend to do? We tend to completely walk away from it. We are still a Seventh-day Adventist church because while we chose to fight against certain things and fight for the freedom that we have, we are still within a conference, a greater conference. I love that.

I'm proud because I've actually had several opportunities to search out greener grass—seemingly greener grass. Not while being here, don't worry. I haven't had any opportunities since here. But there's been moments being hired by this conference where I got an opportunity to go back home. They were wanting to pay off our conference and everything and go back home. It seemed like the right thing, the perfect opportunity. "God, let's go." And the door shut.

I remember another one where all my friends got hired by another conference and the leadership was healthy and everything was going well over there. They said, "Come over here. We got a church for you." And it was like, "Okay, Lord, let's go over there." And the door shut on that. Not one of those friends is still a pastor. Good things come to those who trust in the Lord's voice, and good things come to those who continue on the path that He's set them on.

I strongly believe in that. I want to be a little bit careful when I say that, but I haven't always bought into the conference's vision here. That's why other places looked a little better. I want to tell you that has completely changed for me. I had pulls that were almost irresistible and I'm thankful now to be in a place where I actually agree with the vision and the mission of what we're doing.

I was pulled to Alaska and then another conference—the Dakotas—called and asked if I wanted to go over there. That wasn't really a temptation. My response was, "Yes, I'll come back to the Midwest in a long wooden box, but that's the only way I'm coming back to the Midwest." All the other ones seemed like such a strong pull, and I'm thankful because you can see the reward of it.

I don't know if you've ever been to our conference webpage, but I'm actually happy with it. Our conference has a vision and a mission to "Serve One More." I'm hearing stories about churches that I would never be involved with necessarily, but I'm hearing them make an impact in the community. Houses are being restored. Schools are being helped. People are being helped in the community, and we are making a difference as a conference.

Even in our little church in Ellensburg, we started to make a difference in our community because of the help that Serve One More did for us. They funded us so that we could actually come together as a community and we helped the school buy new equipment. They had this outdoor nature center and we put new bridges in there. We did new things because of a mission that the church conference actually had.

This isn't something I've been a part of before. It's usually like the conference has its own thing and we're going to do our own thing over here. I'm with you on that, right? Until they start doing something that I'm like, "Oh, well, maybe we'll want to take a little part in that." Showing up in our communities and making a difference.

I had this old teacher. This man taught my wife's mom and he also taught me. His eyebrows would actually move as he talked. It's not really relevant, but he would always say something that stuck with me. He goes, "Class, theology divides and mission unites."

He would say it over and over again. We can sit here and argue about who God is and what He wants us to do or what this Bible verse means. But you know what no one's going to argue with? Going and doing work like Mother Teresa did in the streets. Who's going to argue with going and serving people and helping them and giving your life to something far bigger than yourself?

If people are going to argue with that, go for it. I'm not going to argue. I'm too busy doing the work that God has called me to do. What if we were that as a church? What if we took part in our own way and in our own DNA of serving one more person?

I believe every organization and every person needs a vision for their life. You need to look into the future and see an ideal that you want to shoot for. You want purpose? Find a vision for your life. What comes after that is the purpose. Some people call it a mission statement. It's how you're going to fulfill that vision.

Did Jesus have a vision? Did He have a mission? There was thing after thing that tried to distract Him from it, but what was His vision? It was you and Him and us being together. He looked into the future and saw a thing where we are together and there isn't these things that continually tear us down.

He says, "What do we have to do to get to that? I'm going to send my Son on this earth." This is what we're celebrating this weekend, this Easter weekend. We are celebrating Jesus coming down into our mess. It's this image of us setting up our little tents or our houses, and God came in the middle of us and set up His tent in our community. He came to live with us in our mess.

There's a verse in Galatians that says at just the right time, God sent His Son. In other words, God showed up at just the right time for you and me. It feels like it's delayed, and Peter talks about how His second coming is coming, I promise. He's coming back and He will show up again.

Last night, we imagined what it would have been like to have been watching Jesus beaten and murdered before our eyes and feeling the emptiness of being completely lost. We sat in that for a moment, and then we asked, "What if He showed up afterwards?" And every single piece of us that had fears and doubts and the failure that we felt when we watched Him die all of a sudden vanished.

What would you feel like? Part of understanding what Easter weekend is about is feeling that pain of loss and hopelessness and realizing that there is hope.

Now, I've been teasing this for a few weeks. We as a church have been on a journey over the last six months. One of the first things that we decided was that we needed a vision and a purpose statement. We interviewed many of you and got a lot of information. Our leadership came together a couple weekends ago and we created something.

I know what most of us think—we think we need this huge paragraph and this groundbreaking statement. It's not. It's actually very simple. Here's our vision: we are People of Presence. How we're going to do that is if we are present with God, present with one another, and present with our community.

Do you realize our world is dying for this? For people who not only show up, but are present. I remember talking to one of our leaders right after we came up with this and they said, "I've been thinking all week about how to be more present in my life." That's what we want. That is going to be our compass.

We live in a world where Christians are constantly fighting each other. We're putting our energies into making other people look bad. We have to do away with our enemies. Instead, what if we took our energies and actually became something God was trying to make us into?

What if we are present with Him in an artificial world where we talk a lot about following Jesus? A lot of us—I would even preach to myself—don't really actually know Him as well as we want to. I don't know how to talk with Him and have an actual relationship.

I was talking with someone this week who had confronted somebody else about, "Do you actually know Jesus, or do we just talk about Him?" Can we actually hear the voice of the Holy Spirit? Is it just a theory in us? The first thing about being present with God is how we come together and actually know Him as a people.

Then, how do we know each other? That's been the biggest cry of coming here: that we go to church with people we have no idea who they are. I want to know them.

Then, having an impact in the community. In a world where people feel forgotten and in an age of emotional exhaustion, showing up or being present is often what Jesus would actually look like in the world today. Showing up in a world that is individualistic and doesn't really care about other people—we can make the biggest impact in that.

I want to stop for a moment and recognize that we're already doing this. Whether you're online or you're here in person, you showed up today. You could be anywhere else in the world, and yet you're here searching for something. We're all searching for community with God, community with each other, and living for something bigger than ourselves. I'm glad you're present.

Now, I don't think this is going to be without trouble. Every time God has a plan for His people, there's an enemy out there trying to stop it. I have felt that a lot this week. God had a prophet named Isaiah who lived in a time of intense political turmoil—sound relatable?—and intense moral decay.

God's people were at risk of being destroyed. While our mission may be different than Isaiah's, our response can be the same. God continued to ask, "Who will go out for me? Who shall I send?" He's looking around and there's nobody even willing to raise their hand. You remember Isaiah's response? "Here I am, right here. Send me, God."

When the Lord asks us to show up and serve somewhere, it's going to be uncomfortable. It may seem impossible, but remember that Jesus left His comfort and His home to come down here into our mess in order for the vision to be completed. The enemy will send things in our way and divisions will come up, but if we keep our eyes on our compass, I believe God will bring us to what we actually are seeking.

To become a people of presence, I think the first thing that needs to happen probably isn't adding anything to our busy lives. It's probably going to be taking something away. When pressure mounts and things come up—the soccer game, the basketball game, the birthday party—y'all feel it?

We had a class this morning on boundaries. When you say yes to one thing, you actually have to say no to basically everything else. That's what it means to be present: to choose one thing and to make it the priority of your life. This is what we've done as a church. This is going to be the thing that pushes us forward.

This came from you guys, by the way. We're going to spend the next couple months divulging how we came about getting this vision and our purpose statements. But for now, this is a simple call to question ourselves: what does it mean to be present in a world of absence? To be holistically present—mentally, spiritually, and physically.

I want us to take a moment and write down: what is one thing—don't do more than two—what is one area where I can be more present in life? Most of us think showing up to something physically, and that's good, but it could be for your family, at your job, or with God. For me, it's being more present in my spiritual life on a daily basis.

Write this one thing down. I want you to put it somewhere where you're going to regularly see it—in your phone case, in your Bible, or in your wallet. I want this to be a continual reminder of an area where we can be more present because we live in a world where there's a lack of presence and a lack of intentional awareness.

We're on this journey. I'm excited to start it. This is another beginning of something the Lord has us on, and I believe He's going to take us beautiful places. Thank you all for your patience as we've done this.

Jesus, thank you. Thank you so much for giving us vision personally and also for our church. I thank You for being present in our lives, both through Jesus coming down to this earth and the Holy Spirit. Lord, I just pray that we become people of presence. I pray that we are first and foremost present with You. May we find healing spiritually and emotionally in Your presence. May that love translate to a community where we build each other up. And I pray that translates into going into the community and being a part of the healing already going on. Help us to just join Your work. We thank You. We love You. Be with us now on this special weekend. In Jesus' name, amen.