

# Presence Embodied

*By Pastor Jake Wilkinson*

I want us to practice something together. Let's close our eyes. I want us to take a deep breath in. Holy Spirit, come into this place, as you already have. Remind us of the newness of life that comes along with your Spirit when spring and the green things start coming alive. Thank you that winter is over and we know these are the life cycles of life, Lord, but we just ask you to come be in our presence, in our midst, in our hearts right now individually and as a church right now. Help us to see your face.

Thank you for the cross, Jesus. Lord, whatever is on our heart, whatever is heavy with us, we just give that over to you right now. Take it because we can't even give it right now, Lord. The things that hold us down, the things that weigh us down, we just ask you to take those from us. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Thank you all for being here today. Thank you on live stream, too. I know I'm going to shout out to Camp Myvin—I know they are watching right now as well. It's good that you're with us today.

In 1741, there was a British warship called the Wager. Has anybody read this book? It's on the New York bestsellers; it's out everywhere. Anybody read this book? Great, I'm the only one. Cool. I actually listened to it anyway, so it doesn't really count.

This warship, a British warship named the Wager, had a mission and that was to attack Spanish forces off the south coast of America, and their purpose was to disrupt the Spanish trade. When the storm struck near Cape Horn, the ship was blown off course and smashed against the rocks of this island and the impact destroyed its rudder. It left the crew stranded and without a way to actually navigate their course.

I didn't really like this story that much because chaos and mutiny—every time you thought things were going to get better, they just ended up getting worse, and pretty much everybody dies. You're welcome if you're going to read this book. But without a way of guiding their direction, people gave up, they turned on each other, and only a couple of the guys ended up surviving by the end of the book. It was actually a really sad book. I hated the ending, I hated the middle and the beginning of it. But I still listened to the whole thing.

This book was a good example of what happens to a ship that doesn't have the ability to steer itself and loses its direction. In 1915, there was another ship called the Endurance. Has anybody read this book? Okay, I just found out it is a book. I was hoping nobody raised their hand.

They had a mission, and their mission was to actually get to Antarctica and do the first land travel across Antarctica. It was like 1,800 miles or something like this. And it got trapped in the Antarctic ice, and as the pressure from the ice mounted around the boat, the hull splintered and the rudder snapped off. Their purpose of going across land on Antarctica was completely destroyed. It was lost, and their mission shifted. Now it became survival.

They completed their mission, their secondary mission. But their initial vision of making it across the Atlantic actually never came true—for them, anyway. They had no way to steer their ship, and they had no way to find their way home, and for months they were at the mercy of the wind and the ocean, and they drifted along.

The captain, Shackleton, never lost hope. He kept his people alive through staunch leadership and daily encouragement. Many people were saved through his leadership, even though their purpose in crossing Antarctica was lost.

There's a third ship. Now, who's ever heard of the Mayflower before? I'm sure there are many books over the Mayflower. But this, going back further in time in 1620, the Mayflower was crossing the Atlantic when a fierce storm cracked the main beam and damaged their steering gear and actually kind of destroyed their rudder in the process.

The crew faced a critical choice at this moment: we can either keep going and press ahead or we can turn back. For those of you that know what the Mayflower is about, they were escaping the oppression and they were wanting freedom in a new world and a new land. They wanted freedom to worship God and go from biblical principles without England oppressing them.

Against all odds, they braced the beam with a massive iron screw—it was brought for building houses, actually. And they ended up repairing the rudder and they kept sailing west. You and I are actually here because someone had a vision and someone had a mission, and they said, "We're going to see this through no matter what." That improvised fix didn't just save the voyage. That's why we're sitting here. They arrived pretty battered and beat up, but they were united by a resolute purpose, and that was freedom.

While we don't exactly face the same oppression like the people escaping England on the Mayflower, I think you and I face another type of oppression altogether. Everybody's got one in their pocket. Most of us willingly fall into this oppression. Actually, almost all of us do.

We get sucked into a world that's plagued by distraction. It's plagued by addictions and entertainment. We are entertaining ourselves to death in our culture, and we love it. But what we're finding is there's such a lack of purpose in so many people's lives and such a lack of vision of what we could be that we're just killing ourselves.

I think vision in itself is a destination. It's a hope and dream. If you could look into the future and see something, a vision is what you're seeing there. A purpose is how you play those things out. A purpose is like our rudder. Last week, we divulged this. This is our vision and our purpose.

Our vision is: People of Presence. We're looking into the future. We're seeing: what does that actually look like? That's pretty vague, but I think it sends a message to us, particularly in our culture that struggles with addiction to distraction. Doesn't it?

Our purpose is to be present with God, present with each other, and present in our community. Summit has had a history of actually having a very strong mission, strong purpose. And that has really been to reach out to people that have been hurt, particularly by our own denomination, and have a home for you. We want to keep that going, by the way. That is not going to change. But what is our next step? This is it.

Through meeting with everybody, as many people as we can from our church and our leadership team sitting through this, this is what came out of this. We believe that God has given us this vision and given us this purpose to move us forward to the next step. Vision is something we can look again into the future. It's bigger than a goal. It's a reality that exists there, and we just have to go get it. Do you want to be people of presence? I hope so.

Why do we have to do this anyway? Who likes vision and purpose statements? Like, loves them. This is really helpful today, guys. Thanks. I'll read a quote from another pastor. He says, "As a pastor, I hate to admit this, but people don't remember sermons or speeches. They don't even remember paragraphs. What people

remember are simple statements, slogans, and phrases, and they remember vision, and they remember purpose, if you make them memorable."

The whole purpose of a purpose or a statement is to keep us headed in the same direction. It is the very rudder that steers the ship. We've spent the better part of six months deciding that this is the direction that we're going. It defines who we are. It defines where we're going and everything that we do.

I explained this last week—and it may have been my only reference to Easter, on Easter—but God had a very clear vision of what He wants. What is it? For us to show up. Hey, somebody was listening last week. That's great. For us to show up where? In a new kingdom where we don't have to deal with the garbage that we deal with on a daily basis here, where we're actually together and the fighting stops and we get together and we worship Him all together. Sounds pretty good right now, doesn't it?

That's His vision. That's the thing He looks into the future and still sees here at Summit. And His purpose and how He saw that played out was to send His only child for the sake that you and I can do it. This is how it played out. I think there were moments of doubt and struggle, and even when Jesus was committed to seeing things through because He saw you and me in the future, He never actually wavered from this, not even in the garden. He says, "Not my will, but your will be done, Lord." And He saw through the most immeasurable pain because He saw you in the future.

We look in the Bible and we look for things that show our purpose after He sees this vision. I believe that this is actually one of the two main purposes of why Jesus came and the purpose of every single church that should be out there, by the way. It's this: "As Jesus replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and the greatest commandment. And a second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commands."

Is loving God and loving your neighbor—where did we forget that? Do you understand that sometimes we get lost in the weeds and sometimes we get lost? As a denomination, we have gotten very lost at times in things that aren't this, that don't actually point to this. They are important things, but they should all be held under these things.

We have five purposes of a church. This is from the book, *The Purpose Driven Church*. Love the Lord your God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. We heard that. Then we have another great commandment from Jesus right before He leaves this earth: go and make disciples—or we like to call them apprentices.

The reason I'm using this word is because it's not just about a cerebral teaching about the Bible. It's a way of living. It's like putting our lives together and we're actually knowing each other. I know that's very scary for some of us. But apprenticeship is like the next level. It's not just learning cognitively of things, but learning how to live and watching somebody else do it. That's what an apprentice is. Go and make apprentices, baptizing them, understanding what they're doing, making a commitment to go on this way in life, and then teaching them in spiritual maturity, emotional maturity, all of these things to continue walking on this.

Every single one of us still needs this, by the way. This never stops—this bottom one. We all got to grow up a little bit. We just don't want to.

If we look for a minute at our vision and our purpose statements, we recognize that everything that Jesus said in those two statements are actually under these things and they actually blend together. There's actually no way to separate loving God and loving your neighbor. There's no way to do these things without loving God and loving your neighbor. I believe that in our purpose and in our vision statements, God's great

commandments are fulfilled right here in being present. You cannot love God if you don't show up. You cannot love each other if you don't show up for each other and be present. It's impossible. And in a world that continues to not show up for each other and abandon each other at the earliest sight that "I don't agree with you," we're not going to do that here.

Why is this important? To some of us, it hit the spot, and to some it may be too ethereal or vague. Who thinks a vision and a purpose statement are far too corporate and I don't like it at all? No, David, you can't raise your hand—you were a part of this.

How many Seahawks fans do I have? I like that. Boo, keep it up. They have a little statement. They say: Mob Mentality. Mission Over Baloney. It's pretty incredible the fact that they all saw a mission. What was their mission? To win the Super Bowl particularly. And they ended up doing it with a terrible quarterback. The team wasn't good, to be honest with you guys. It's really bad. And they ended up winning the entire Super Bowl because they were all focused on one thing. They let the baloney step to the side. They said, "This actually isn't important. We're focused on one thing and we're going to do it together, even my own preferences get pushed to the side because we're focused on one thing together."

For those of us that feel like it's a corporate thing or is it stupid, it's not. It's a human thing. You need a vision in your own personal life. You need a purpose for waking up. Don't you wish you had that? A reason why we get up in the morning and say, "This is why I'm alive and I'm headed to go do it today." Don't you want that?

God has implanted this into our DNA. He put us in a garden to name things and to multiply. And I don't mean just having children, which is very fun. But it's this idea of replicating ourselves or making apprentices. That's another form of multiplying. This is the idea that you have this purpose in life and if you haven't found what your personal purpose is underneath this, I actually believe church is a part of that. I believe you're sitting here for a reason today. We need a vision, a personal vision, and this is true in our church. We need this thing that we look at and we shoot for and all the other baloney falls away.

I'm going to tell a story when that doesn't happen. I'm going to totally make this story up, totally random. But if you were in high school and you and your fellow classmates had to play a bunch of old guys and, let's say, their pastor at intramural basketball. What's your purpose? It's to win the game, isn't it? Well, what happens when you lose sight of that purpose? Let's say you're 15 points up and you start to relax and you think, "Oh, we've made it and we've realized our purpose and it's already over." You start to relax and you take your eyes off our goal.

Let's just say that your pastor's team comes back to tie it on a buzzer beater and go into overtime and wins a game 107 to 103, something like that. Just hypothetically. I don't know if I could sleep at night. I don't know if I would show my face in public. And I definitely wouldn't come back to church with a smile on my face. When we lose sight of our purpose, when we lose sight of our goal, we get distracted by other things. Without vision, the people perish—they die. If the church loses sight of its purposes, they'll go around making the church sick. And you wonder how we got, historically as a denomination, how we got to where we're at. We let the little things become big things, or as one of my friends used to say, we majored in the minors.

If we look back at our original stories, the story of the three boats, we had the Wager who lost its rudder, lost its mission, and ultimately most people lost their lives. There was chaos, division, destruction. Then there's the Endurance who lost its rudder. It changed its mission just to survive, and it made it through. And let me just tell you that I think that that's where most churches end up. And I'm tired of it. I'm tired of just surviving in life, you guys. I want more.

Then we look at the Mayflower, where they had a damaged rudder. They repaired the rudder. They repaired the mission, and the vision was worth suffering for. It was worth sacrificing for. And the destiny was reached

because they refused to turn back. They got freedom because they refused to let anything stop them from the mission that was before them.

Things don't happen without these. There's a little book called *The Prince and the Pauper* and there's a quote that says: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea. The ship will build itself." Do we understand that? We spend so much energy trying to motivate ourselves, but if we had a little vision of what it actually looked like—to be present in a world that is not present? To be with Jesus, to be with each other, to actually know each other and love each other and love our community. Could you see it? Do you want it? Let's go get it.

I will say, I think that this very thing is actually happening. I get multiple calls a week of, "Pastor, we have to do this." In fact, Yvonne—the reason we're doing a group for our retired members is because she heard that the young adults were up to so much, and she said, "We need to actually take a part in that, too. We're a little jealous that so much is going on for our young adults." There's a vision that is cast that we actually see what's happening here. We want to make that happen here.

That's what our church actually needs to be to our community. When there is healing here, when there is connection here, when there is love that is shared here, that can happen in our community as well. And guess what? We don't have to create it. It's already happening out there in different pockets. We have to go find it because the Holy Spirit is already at work in this community. So many times we treat our community like a project and it's not. They can actually help heal us in the process, too.

Our vision: being a people of presence. Our purpose: to be present with God, present with each other, present in our community. We've built our rudder. We have a ship. We're figuring out what needs to be repaired so that we can set sail.

The best thing we can do right now—there are things coming that you can be involved with as far as the community within this church, but we're still building some of that structure—the best thing we can do is look into our own lives and ask ourselves: what can I do to be a person of presence? We did that last week. Now, I know all of you brought your papers back. You're amazing. Thank you.

Last week, I asked you to write down: what would one area of your life look like if you were to become a person of presence? If you didn't write that down, I want you to think about that right now. What we're going to do is we're going to write something underneath that. I want you to write one small step, and I need it to be a positive step, meaning we're not taking anything away. We're putting something into our lives that would help us achieve whatever it is that you need to become more of a person of presence. One small step.

Next week we'll probably talk about *Atomic Habits*, a book that was super helpful to me. When we take really tiny steps and we do it over and over again, our minds are going to be blown how far we will get and how far we will get together. That's our goal right now. It's not to change overnight. Becoming people of presence does not happen overnight when we've had a lack of that pretty much through our whole lives. Those of us that are young enough that have gone through the ages of not knowing what it's like to not have a smartphone will probably struggle with this more than most. But we're going to do it. We are going to find purpose, and we're going to find meaning, and ultimately, my hope is that we find Jesus and we find that healing together.

Let's pray together. Jesus, we're here because you've called us. That is purpose enough in itself. And yet, Lord, we want more. We want a clear direction, not just for our lives, but for our spiritual lives, for our social lives, for our families, Lord. Thank you for giving that to this church. Help us to continue to reveal—please reveal to us continually what this means on a deeper level. A lot of us are probably sitting here thinking: what

does that actually look like to be present? What does it look like to not be present? Show us, Lord. Help us to show up just with you, just this week.

And Lord, help us to take that step, that next step, whatever it's going to take to become that very thing that we look into the future and we see and we want so desperately: to be a whole healed person that can be present in every situation. Thank you for our church, Lord. Lead us. Amen.