

It's the Other

By Pastor Jake Wilkinson

The past few weeks we've been—we have launched our vision and our purpose statements. And our—our vision is being, okay, well, we'll work on it. All right, yeah. [Laughter] It's "People of Presence." But yes, this is the—this is the whole idea of it, is we're learning to be present in a world that is continually distracted, continually anxious and hurried and restless and tired and all. And if any of those things, you simply cannot be present. And if you cannot be present, then we struggle, not just struggle, we cannot follow the two basic commands that Jesus has given us in loving God supremely and loving each other.

I told you all last week, I berated you. In fact, I told you all and made sure you feel bad about sitting on an aircraft, on a plane, flying hundreds of miles an hour through the air, sitting on a seat, and you're complaining about the food. It's kind of pathetic. Or they don't have the right type of coffee or something like that. And I gotta be honest with you, I hope you were listening, but some of you were practicing actually what we were talking about, and you were sleeping through it and resting on the rest day of rest. So I just wanted to remind us of that.

And I wasn't really listening to my own voice, I think, because there I was Wednesday morning, about 5:30 in the morning. I'm sitting on an airplane. The airplane was relatively empty. I'm tired. I'm hoping to get some rest because I stayed up too late watching YouTube. You do it. And my flight, evidently—so I was sitting just outside—and evidently our flight got delayed significantly. Something, I don't know, something about ice in the wings or something. I don't care. Safety concerns. "Safety, it's for losers." [Laughter] It was some pathetic excuse. I'm in a hurry here. I have a 45-minute layover in Seattle, which means I have about 10 minutes to get off my plane and get to the next plane ride. So I'm in a hurry.

And I remember the plane was relatively empty but there was one child on board. They were sick. They let everybody know, over and over again, especially the person sitting in front of them. And I want to take—take a wild guess who you think that was. This kid would kick the back of my chair. He was coughing, he was sneezing. And I was going, "Why me, God?" And then I heard a voice. It was like an angel's voice. Very beautiful. It was my voice from last week! [Laughter] From a few days prior, talking about how ungrateful we are, sitting flying hundreds of miles an hour, sitting on a seat. You go to the bathroom and you're pretty much there. And I felt my heart sink for compassion for the people behind me—after I gave them a couple dirty looks just to know I was upset. [Laughter] You know, make sure you make eye contact.

And I was just so disappointed in myself. And I closed my eyes and I just started praying for them. And I said, God—I prayed—prayed for myself to actually have compassion. I don't know what it's like; we have dogs. And I started feeling compassion for the family, and I started to feel my heart soften. And right at that moment, that kid took both of his feet and slammed them into the back of my seat, enough to give me whiplash, actually, even today. [Laughter] At that moment, I grabbed my bag, got up, and found another seat far away from the snot-blowing kid behind me! [Laughter] I'm kidding. I didn't find another seat, but I did put on my noise-canceling headphones and turn it up too loud, and actually the flight wasn't that bad, and I'm exaggerating quite a bit.

But here's the thing, is I caught myself. I caught myself in my own little world. I'm going to be late for my flight. I'm too worried about missing—which actually really wasn't really going to affect anything at all. I'm going to be late for my flight, I'm going to miss my connecting flight, and then I'm going to be late getting there. And I really wanted to sit in that airport and drink the airport coffee. But because I was tired, I was stressed, I was anxious,

and I was in a hurry. And I paid good money for this leadership conference—somebody paid good money for this leadership conference. [Laughter] But it's what we've been talking about lately. And I will say this, is a lot of you have come up to me and said, "I love your vision statement." This is not my vision statement. This is a vision statement that this church has come up with, that God has put on our hearts. And I will say this, that it speaks to my own soul too because I struggle with the same stuff. This is the world that we live in. It's going to take work and patience and perseverance and self-reflection to notice when we are out of tune with our God, with the people around us, and we're too busy looking in our own little world and life has become about that and not the other.

Since we've been discussing such difficult things—okay, can we take a breath and just like, chill out for a second? Okay. [Laughter] We've been talking about some really difficult things in church and it's a bit—a little personal attack, I'm sure, from some of you, especially when we talk about our phones and our usage on them. So I thought I'd give us a break and talking—talk about something light-hearted today. Not awkward at all to talk about in church. Let's talk about money! [Laughter] Enter the Steve Carell: "No, God! Please, no! Anything but this!"

You know, talking about money in church is almost like trying to talk to Jesus or talk to somebody about Jesus who doesn't really want to hear about it outside. You know what I'm talking about? You like—you want to bring, "Well, there's this guy," and they're like, "Oh, please, save us from this, right?" But don't worry, we're not sending around the offering plates like we used to. You know, I thought about that. We could use the kids and look up at you and be like... [Laughter] And we don't even carry cash anymore, so what are you going to do is just throw your credit card in there. That will actually work pretty well. That works really good. Manipulation is how we want to give here in this church.

But here's the thing, is that we're reluctant to this idea of talking—I'm reluctant to talk about it, and I'm reluctant to even have it here, and this is the first time I've talked about it here. It's because it feels like we live in a day and age where everybody's after our money, more than ever. But it's not just that people are after our money, we're spending it more than ever. Here's a study that Bank of America actually did. And discretionary spending on non-essentials is at its highest of all time. Comfort spending on food delivery, streaming, and micro-luxuries is up 40% since the year 2020. In six years. 40%. Over 27% more on discretionary categories than 2019.

Even—and I know what you're saying, "Well, inflation has gone up like 80%, right? So that's got to account for..." This is actually accounting for inflation, and this is still spending on top of that. Spending on comfort goods, convenience services, entertainment, travel—digital subscriptions has gone faster than income has actually come in. And for some of us, money feels tighter than it's ever been before. And I want to say this is I think our intentions, even on spending money, our intentions are good, and I think we're searching for paradise. When we search for that next show, when we want to buy that next—I have Amazon Prime, okay? I get it. When we search for that next thing, we are searching—I actually believe we are searching for the eternal God when we're actually doing that. We're just buying the lie, literally. I know none of you do this. I was just talking about our culture out there, you know. Watching the next TV show, getting the next thing. And I will say this, is that it's crazy because we're never satisfied.

I just talked to somebody this week and they're just like—they've cut—they've done, oh, I'm so proud. They've done so good. They said, "We actually cut out all this stuff, but I really miss hitting that 'buy' button on Amazon Prime." [Laughter] And I said, "You can do this. I believe in you." Because it's so—it feels so good to actually get that package. It's like Christmas all year long, isn't it? You know the feeling. But we'll be never satisfied. It will just be onto the next thing because we're actually searching for something far greater, and it is our eternal God. And I do believe it is the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives.

In fact, there was a wise man by the name of Jesus who walked this earth and says, "It's more blessed that you give than that you receive." The word blessed doesn't just mean like, "Oh, I'll get more money." We don't believe in the prosperity gospel. But blessed means it's going to be a better life. And I'm not just talking about money, but any of our resources—our time, our energy, whatever it is—it's actually better for you. You'll be happier, live a more—far more fulfilled life if you give than you receive. And I realized that while I'm saying that, I'm like, "You want to bet?" [Laughter] I'm like, "I actually like receiving quite a bit. Let's play a game." Not that game. All right. [Laughter] That was a little dark. Sorry, guys. But let's play a game, Lord. We'll play a game. I'll see if I'm more blessed if I give somebody something versus receiving. And really, I like receiving.

But here's this thing. There's this man named Paul, and he's writing to the church in Corinth who is sending a financial gift to another church in Jerusalem, even though they couldn't afford it. And he says, "You're so enthusiastic. You're giving too much money and you're leaving yourself thin here," because they're so excited about what God is actually up to. That is not something I understand. And then he's sending people to them and he says, "I want you to go see in which way they are giving, in what manner you're giving." And he asked them, were you giving out of a heart that was begrudging? Have you ever received a gift from somebody who didn't want to give it to you? You know what I'm talking about? It's like you're like trying to take it and they're like holding onto it and you're like, "I don't know what to do right now. I don't even want that gift." You know what I mean? It like ruins the whole experience of receiving a gift when the person doesn't actually want to give it, and they're like reluctant, or they ask for it back. I've only done that a couple times.

Here's the thing, is that giving is never supposed to be this begrudging, reluctant thing. And we have a verse right here in 2 Corinthians 9, verse 7. He says, "You must decide"—he's talking to this church in Corinth—he says, "You must decide for yourself in your own heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure." Have you felt any pressure this morning? Don't do it! [Laughter] Don't give for that. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." Now, I heard this growing up a little bit, and I heard this, and I said, "Well, if you give, you'll get a bunch of money in return, so you should just give cheerfully, because you're going to become really rich if you give money." That is not anywhere near what we're talking about today.

I remember when my... how many is this? David hates it when I drink my water bottle at awkward times. My record is 10, and I don't know how many I'm on right now. [Drinks water] So when my life began to turn around, I stopped living as crazy as it was. I had met my wife. I met Crystal. And I remember that my dad had switched me vehicles, and really, he saved my life. My dad here on earth, he really saved my life because I was in a lot of trouble. I owed way too much money on my car, and he switched me vehicles. And I remember getting—for those of you that were here when I told the story about going to college, and somebody had dropped off a large financial gift so I could go to college. I told my buddy who I was previously out partying with, his name was Josh. And I was like, "Dude, you wouldn't believe it. I have a car now. All these crazy things started happening. And I have so much more than I had because I decided to follow Jesus."

And our conversation after that made me realize that I was probably dangling the wrong carrot. Because he goes, "That sounds pretty awesome." He's like, "I want more stuff. Like, I want a new car. In fact, I want to go to college for free and party with college." And I was like, "No, hey, no. Okay, you're coming at it from the wrong approach." It's not about actually getting more. And I struggled with that, and he didn't really understand what I was talking about because I got all this stuff. He was taking it really seriously at first, and I got really excited, but then I realized I was dangling the carrot of wealth and materialism is probably not the best approach to life with Jesus and living a life full of purpose and meaning. And then that was when I was kind of unconverted from believing if I pay my dues to God or the church or whatever, I'll be rich one day. I'm not rich. I'm not rich because I love Jesus. And we'll talk more about this.

I believe that I'm financially rich, far more than I realize most of the time. I'm rich because I was born into a middle-class American life and married a wife, you know, who's the real breadwinner in our life. [Laughter]

Love you, honey. Now I may not be rich comparatively to many Americans or many people even in this room, but I'm rich because I've been to a third world country and I saw people live on \$20 a month. It's like, what? Like a sandwich and a coffee for us? And that was their entire—that was their entire living. And I realized that most of the time the more money I got as an adult, the tighter I actually held onto it and the more unsatisfied I was with it.

There's a following verse in 2 Corinthians 9, 8, and he says, "And God will generously provide all you need, and then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others." It's a promise we have. There's something about a little child that brings Jesus a meal. It may not have been a financial gift, but it was a meal, and he brings it to Jesus, and Jesus ends up feeding 5,000 people from one little child's meal. And you could think of the conversation the parent has with that child. It's like, "You gave away your meal," but he goes, "But Jesus, you should see what he did with it!"

One of the greatest joys of my young life wanting to follow Jesus—I remember it was about the time that my wife, right before the time my wife found that big bag of unopened envelopes in my pantry, full of all my bills and collections—one of the greatest joys of my young life was wanting to follow Jesus. I remember I was living on EBT, but I remember there was somebody in front of me that ended up not being able to pay for their groceries. And I remember paying for it. And I remember going, "I'll not eat a meal for that any day," because the woman broke down crying. She was like, "What?" At first, she was actually kind of offended, and I was like, "Oh crap, what did I just do?" But she looked at me, and she goes, "Why are you doing this?" I said, "I don't know. It just feels like the right thing to do," and I said, "God bless you." And she broke down in tears and she hugged me. And I said, "Now that's joy." It was in Andy's Market in Walla Walla.

And you would think—you would think that the more I got, the more I'd want to share, especially because of experiences like that, but really the opposite seems to be present in my life. But I believe that as "People of Presence," in order to be present, we have to see beyond our own little world. We have to see beyond the sandcastles that we're trying to build in this life and the little things that we think that we want and the momentary pleasures we think that we want and we're satisfying over and over again, and realize what Jesus is offering you and me when he says, "It's more blessed to give than to receive." Jesus is calling us to be present, but to be bigger than something that we're doing, something that he's up to.

You know, Jesus talks—I hate talking about it in church—but Jesus talks more about money than he does sex or any other sin. Any other one. He talks about the dangers that money has over your own heart. We have to live for something bigger than our own little world, and I know I hear stories of many of you doing that, and maybe today isn't for you, and so don't feel that necessarily. But it's this thing of, I think God designed us to be others-oriented, to be oriented around someone else's life.

In fact, Tim Keller talks about this, and he says the Trinity together—he calls it the "divine dance"—is that if you have one person and somebody else is orbiting around him, that's a self-centered life on the person, where the other person just continually—if this was a person, our life revolves around this person, right? And he says, but then when the other person starts revolving around, you can kind of get stuck. But if you add a third party into this, he calls it the divine dance, where the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, their lives revolve around the other. And this is actually how you were designed as a human being, to actually revolve around another. And we talked about it this morning in our marriage class about the fact that we live in a hyper-individualistic society. C.S. Lewis describes hell in his book *The Great Divorce*, and he says it's just this individualism pushing us further and further away from each other and less and less of a community. That's what hell is. That's what our world today promotes. Our church is going to stand against that.

John Maxwell, I got to listen to him live this week. If you've ever heard of him, that was incredible. But he said a quote this week that struck with me. He says, "Obedience doesn't make sense until you're looking backward at

it." It can feel painful. It can feel a lot of things. But you can connect the dots only looking backwards. You cannot connect dots looking forwards. I mean, God is calling us to ask us to do something or to give away our life in some way. I'm not just talking about giving. This is not about giving to the church; this is about your own heart, okay? It's about living for something bigger and seeing that the world is bigger. [Drinks water] That was four. It's about seeing that the world is bigger than me.

Now, I try to make a lot of things in my office very meaningful, and I have these two lovely-smelling things. I don't even know what they are. I don't know if they're bookends or statues or idols. [Laughter] They're wood carvings. Thank you, David. Yeah, that's helpful. Wood carvings. And I saw them and I saw that they were beautiful, but I remember buying them on purpose. I bought these because they were \$20. And \$20, as I've already said, is something that Cubans live on per month. That's what they make in a month. And I didn't buy these because I thought they were beautiful. I bought them to remind myself that I'm rich. And that every time I start feeling sorry for myself and I start feeling like I don't know if I can do the next thing, I remind myself of this. And I remind myself of one other instance in Cuba.

There was a man by the name of Jesus. Not that one. [Laughter] His name is—he was my translator. And something they said when we—[Drinks water]—five. Something they said when we were on our way to Cuba is, "What should we be bringing?" And they said peanut butter and potatoes, because they don't have those in Cuba. I thought, "Okay, it's pretty easy for those of us in Idaho, you know. Bring some potatoes. World's best potatoes, actually." They're in for a treat. And I remember we made French fries one day. And these French fries are sitting there on this plate, and I remember Jesus coming at them—it was like a wild animal that had been starving saw whatever meat it was and was just tearing at it. And he's sitting there and he's stuffing his face full of these French fries. And he's packed his mouth full and he spits all of them out and he begins to weep.

And we are like, "What is going on right now? Were they that good, you know?" He begins to weep and he's trying to get out this story in English, and he says, "I remember when I was seven years old, I have a family of five and we shared one potato. We cut it up and we divide it up and I got two little fries out of that." He goes, "Look at me now. I'm a slob." If you've ever been to a third world country, you've seen poor. We're not poor.

I remember giving Jesus, I remember giving him \$20 for his daughter's sweet 16 birthday, and it was like the world changing for him. And I will tell you, I wish I would have saved more for the end of the trip to give him more. Because the joy on his face—he moved to Coeur d'Alene. He moved from eating potatoes—he's found his way to the promised land of potatoes, right? [Laughter] He was our translator. He loved Jesus. Jesus died about a year and a half ago in a car accident right here in Coeur d'Alene. I can't wait to see that guy again. I can't wait to eat French fries with him. And our fruits that we argued over whether it was an apple or a mango—the best fruit in the world. I like mangoes way better. I was just getting under his skin. Don't tell him when we get there though. [Laughter]

You see that I recognize in these moments when you actually see what poverty looks like, when you actually see what need looks like, how much more blessed it is to give than to receive. These are reminders of that for me. It's a reminder that when I see other people rise to the occasion and flourish, there's no greater joy in life than to watch that. To watch somebody get back up on their feet and take the life that Jesus is giving them. There's no greater joy than that. I'm not talking about our simple pleasures in life. This is something far more profound and deeper than anything that you and I buy or we watch or anything like that. Presence is about something. Presence is about actually someone else. It's about the other. Loving God and loving our neighbor.

Now I got back from—I got back from a conference at about midnight. My wife picked me up at the airport about midnight. It was one of the most incredible things I've ever been a part of. It's called the Thrive Conference. And my plane was delayed again last night. I was supposed to get in at 10:20 and I got in at

midnight. And I didn't care at all because I saw something bigger than my own little world. They had somebody come up on stage in the middle of this conference. They had somebody from Ukraine. He's a pastor from Ukraine. He's a pastor of pastors in Ukraine. And you know what's going on in Ukraine right now. It is war-torn. And I don't care what side you're on, but war is terrible, and this man was suffering. They were suffering.

And he says, here's what's happened, is that everybody's fleeing Ukraine except for people of faith. They're heading into Ukraine, and they're starting new churches. And we are watching people turn around and accept Jesus as their Savior and wanting to be baptized and having new pastors come in unlike what we've ever seen before. And he says it costs \$10,000 to raise a new church in that place, in Ukraine. Now this pastor of other pastors, he didn't speak English, and he says, "I think we can raise that here tonight in this place. I think we can raise enough money for him to start a new church." There's a lot more people here than this. [Drinks water]

We sat there and we watched people give \$50,000 to open up new churches. And then somebody came up and matched the \$50,000. We ended up giving this man \$100,000 to go start 10 new churches in a war-torn country where people are accepting Jesus at an unbelievable rate. When they gave him the money, he fell to his knees and he's just weeping in front of people he doesn't even know what to express. Because the reality was that they told us in English is that we would never see him again. But he's going to his own death, and he wants it. And if he is going to give his life for Jesus, he will be starting new churches for that.

Yesterday—I told you yesterday we got keys to our house. And I—hang on, just—[Audience reaction]. We got keys to our house. And I wanted—I knew I was supposed to be excited about that, but I could care less. There was a part of me I could care less because I saw something so much bigger and so much greater than my own little sandcastle take place. That God was actually up to something so much bigger. And I didn't give a ton of money because, you know, we just got a new house, but I got to give and to be—I'm throwing myself under the bus—but I got to give and be just a small part of this. And it was this moment of like, this surreal moment as I'm flying home and I was just on cloud nine because I got to be a tiny little part of someone going to do something that crazy.

We all want that, by the way. You want to be a part of something that's bigger than you. And I do believe that those things are going to take place in this church. I believe that God's movement in this place, that we will see things like that happen right here. I believe when we become "People of Presence," there will be opportunities—in fact, I promise you there will be opportunities—to become a part of something bigger than us, than our little sandcastles and these little empires that we're trying to build for ourselves in this temporary life that are going to get washed away and it won't even matter.

There was a youth pastor there and he had grown his youth group to like 150 kids and he was like, yeah, living on cloud nine, and he's teaching us how to reach Gen Z people. It was one of our breakout sessions while he was there. And he said this, and he goes, "I had a dream one of the nights after youth group. I had a dream and I was on my way up to heaven, but I was alone." And he said, look, you may grow, we may have 300 people, we may have 400 people—it's happened once, Christmas, in this room—but he says, if we don't have the Spirit of God in your people and they're not learning about Him and they're not giving their life to Him and whatever it is that's on their heart, they're giving over to them, you are going up here alone. And he made a commitment that he was going to seek God with all of his heart, and he was going to teach that to his kids. I believe that that can happen here in this place. I believe that will happen, and I do believe it is happening, and that's why we are seeing the people here.

You guys, we've been on a journey about learning how to be present, and we've focused on our little cards, if you didn't have one, where we want to be more present in life, where we can identify an area of our life that we want to be more present, one small step that we can take to accomplish that thing, what is something that I need to even remove of my life, a boundary in my life that I need to take to be present. Last week we said, "Are

you rested?" And that was our question. And I want to add another question. If you have those little lists, I want you to add another question is: "What part is God asking me to give of my heart that I'm holding onto with a clenched fist?"

This isn't about money. This is about our focus. Dave Ramsey does talk about this in his financial management class. He says if we're holding onto something with a clenched fist, how is God going to bless us here? The only way God blesses is if we open up our hand. He can take out, but he can also give right back into it. And giving Him the freedom to really do what He wants to do with a thing we try to think that's actually ours, but it's really just His. The opportunity to live an adventure and a crazy life, the very desire of your soul is actually here. And I'm not—if you don't ever give to this church, I honestly could care less. Now, I hope we do. This is not about that. This is about giving so that you can experience the joy and be a part of something far bigger than something that you're up to in your own little world.

Let's have a word of prayer.

Jesus, thank you for calling us. Sometimes I feel like the rich young ruler and which direction would I have taken? And I'm scared to answer that. And if I would just realize it's not just about giving things up, but it's actually getting the very thing my soul desires in a greater purpose, in something that is far bigger than myself, far more meaningful than these little sandcastles that we built. You said anything in this life, we'll build on the sand, the waves are gonna come wash them away, but if you build it on the rock, that's You, that is Your purpose, God. If we build it on the rock, it will be eternal, God. That is the cry of our hearts. It's the cry of my heart. Help us to have that type of vision, looking into the future and seeing where You are going to take place, where You're going to take our church, where You're going to take us, because we're ready to give our hearts to You first and foremost. Thank You for saving us, even from the god of money, even from the god of material, even from the god of continual, never-ending, simplistic pleasure. Thank You for wanting to be a God of deep joy and profound purpose in our lives, and I pray that we take a hold of that now. We thank You, Jesus, in Your name. Amen.