

Where the Light Breaks In

By Pastor Jake Wilkinson

When I first got out of Walla Walla University, I was full of all this knowledge that I never had before, and I was really excited about it. And we had the privilege, my wife and I had the privilege of sitting with her grandmother before she passed away, and we sat there. We got to bring her Taco Bell. She loved Taco Bell. We loved Taco Bell. We ate Taco Bell together. And we would bring it to her, and this was some of the greatest moments of my life, because what would happen was we would go over and visit her grandma, and Crystal would begin to speak about—she would have a question about the Bible, and Crystal would start talking, and her grandma would go, "Hang on, I want to hear from the pastor." And I said, "Yes, honey, let the pastor speak." [Laughter] And her grandmother and I got to have this lovely conversation for over an hour while my wife got to sit there and listen to all the wisdom and wonderfulness that I got to speak about.

There was like a generation that kind of just adopted the professional life and the institution and whatever it was saying as capital T Truth, and they ran with it, right? There was this generation that went on with it. That generation, that type of thinking was gone within one generation. And in fact, it flipped on its head and there's this thing called post-modernism or relativism that popped up and came around. And it was destructive, actually, to our faith in many levels, but one area it actually helped in, and what people clinged onto, was that it called into question the voices of authority and the institutions. And many of those places, especially the ones that were abusive or destructive or manipulative towards other people, it started to question those and not just accept them for capital T Truth like Crystal's grandma. Lord rest her soul. Miss grandma. I miss her very much. Not just because of that.

But we came to this point through relativism where we dissected and we deconstructed until there was absolutely nothing left to stand on. And when we lose sight, and when we lose everything good, and we lose the ability to stand on anything, you will lose a couple other things. You will lose a sense of purpose, a sense of security, and a sense of belonging, and a sense of sight of where we could possibly be going. We deconstructed to the point where we ended up flirting with this thing called nihilism, which is the belief that nothing actually matters—nothing that I do actually matters. And then this pursuit of pleasure and our own happiness, like we talked about today in class, it became kind of the pursuit of people's souls. And the problem with that is that we can only deconstructed so long before there's nothing left to stand on. We have rubble. We found this meaninglessness.

And we started to do our research while instead of going to a classroom, we would sit on the toilet and watch YouTube for 30 minutes and think that we've become a professional in this area. Right? [Laughter] We adopted the philosophy from [vape_lordvince97](#) on Reddit at 2:00 a.m. in the morning, and then we blast everybody else with this newfound truth that we have to everybody that disagrees with us. I know none of you did that. I'm saying that this happened in our society.

And something—I want to say that something new has actually—thank you, honey—something new has actually risen out of this over the last 10 years or so. We call it metamodernism. It's an informed hopefulness showing up in our younger generations all over the place. And the meaning of it is—it's like this. It's like, "I haven't given up on building a better world." Relativism kind of gave up on some of that stuff in a way, or it looked at it in a unique perspective. It hasn't given up on building a better world, but "I'm done pretending that any single system or ideology will ever deliver utopia or, as we call it, heaven," right? They hold their ideas loosely enough to be adaptable as they're needed, but they're tight enough to hold onto what's valuable, what's stable, and what's important in life.

Hang on there, we're getting our lights adjusted. Thank you, guys. Let me just say that again. Metamodernism holds on loosely enough to be adaptable within the changes of society, but tight enough that we hold onto the ideals that keep us stable, the important things in life. It's like you—I hope you and I are convinced of a few key things, and one of those is what we're going to talk about today. My hope today is that we learn to trust again. Not blindly—Taco Bell nights—but wisely. Not because pastors or professionals in whatever or institutions are flawless by any means, but because we stand on a long line of people who have wrestled with doubt, with fear, they've been persecuted, they've been burned at the stake, we've struggled, and yet we're still here because we found a God who has been faithful through all this. And people's stories and how we overcome those things and how we come to the world today and how it is, it matters. And there are stories that can be trusted and believed.

And I believe that the same God who spoke to Abraham under the stars, who met Moses in the fire, spoke through a burning bush, who whispered to Elijah in the silence—I believe that He still speaks today. And I believe that every single person has the opportunity to hear that voice. That our story isn't finished. It actually begins when we start to hear the very voice that calls us forward out of the darkness into something far bigger than ourselves.

Now, the last few months, a couple months, we've been journeying through this, through our new vision. We are People of Presence. And specifically, we're shifting from the series of being People of Presence, and we're shifting into being present with God. And what does that actually look like? How does that actually help us? You know, we're in church, we should know these things. This should be like second nature to us, and yet it's not. This is the battle of our life, is understanding how to connect with our Creator.

We're going to look at the book of Hebrews. Now, the book of Hebrews was written to the ancient Israelites who had believed that the Messiah had come, and they believed that it was in Jesus. And this is the first three verses on how the book of Hebrews actually began. It says this: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom He also created the world." Do you hear what it just said? This is a claim in Scripture that God created the world actually through Jesus, through His Son.

And let's focus on verse 3 here for a second. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power." Now, if there is not a more dynamite verse than Hebrews 1, verse 3 right there—it literally means dynamite, and we'll talk about that in a second—but if this verse is actually true, let me read it one more time, just the last part. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the entire universe by the word of His power."

The exact imprint—it literally means it's the essence. He's the representation. If you see Jesus, you have seen—you've seen the Father. He says this. He goes—"Show us the Father." The disciples say this to Jesus. "Show us the Father." He's like, "I'm right here with you. I am the very essence of God, and I'm here in your midst." That's why his name was Emmanuel. It means God with us. It means the Father came down from heaven into our midst, into our mess, and lived with us. He is the essence of God touching this earth, walking among us, living among us. He's the very character.

This term, the word at the very end here, "by the word of His power"—that term power, it's where we get our term dynamite from. *Dunamis*. It's literally this explosion and this superpower that actually goes off. And it describes the ability to perform an activity by an extension, or it refers to someone in a position of power, or—I like this last one—it refers to the force of a person's action. The force of Jesus' action is power that upholds the entire universe. You and I can't even hold our households together half the time, right? Our lives are falling apart all around us, and yet the Word of God—the Word, Jesus—says He's holding the universe. By His Word, He's holding the universe intact. This is an echoing of John chapter 1 when it describes Jesus as the *logos*, the

Word. *Logos* literally means expression, reason, but it can also mean this—and this is where I want to get to today—it can also mean he is the purpose.

We are dying to know our purpose. People are longing. Do you know why—I have people that ask me, I'll ask them out to coffee. "Do you want to go out to coffee?" "Well, why?" He's like, "What do you mean?" "Well, I want to get to know you." Like, you don't even know why you exist, but you want to know why to go out to coffee with me, right? [Laughter] We ask the simplistic question of like, "Why do I do this in my day?" and "I don't even know why I'm even here in the first place." And I will tell you that the answer is right here, and it's in a Savior that wishes to communicate and wishes to show you this very thing.

When it talks about His radiance, I love that. That's the part that caught me in this verse. We can't look directly at the sun. If you try, I'll pray for you. Okay? [Laughter] You can't look directly at it, but you can see representatives of it coming down through the sky sometimes, right? You can see little things. We went on a backpacking trip to Olympic National Park, and there's a picture. Emrie, go ahead and show it. Okay, this is a picture—sorry you can't see the whole thing—but this is a picture of Sol Duc Falls in Olympic National Park. Now, I didn't take this picture. I stole it off the internet somewhere, but this was the scene that we actually got when we were there. It's like this mist coming up in the middle of it. And I remember this feeling of looking at the mist and the rays of sunshine coming down actually through this and saying, that sun that is millions of miles away—don't quote me, I have no idea—but however far away the sun is, that very sun is actually present right here. It's actually making its way through the trees and you could see it by the water droplets and can feel it on your skin and the warmth and the radiance of the very sun itself was there. And you could feel the presence of something that was a million miles away.

And he's saying, that's exactly what Jesus has done for us. Jesus came to this earth to show us what God was actually like, what his true character is like. He says, in the old times, God spoke through thunder. He spoke through animals and even bad prophets. He communicated through clouds and dreams and all sorts of matter. But in these last days, he says, "I spoke—I sent you my own child to show you the very essence of my being." And that same God who spoke the world into existence, who created you in the first place, He wants to resurrect your soul. And he does that by speaking to you. He does that by reminding you of your true identity and who you truly are in the Son. I believe that Jesus—that God created you. You are a created being. And in order to know yourself, you would need to actually know—you would need to know Him. And we are designed that way.

But we look in our current culture, in the world today, we continue to look over and over again for meaning and reasons for our existence. We try to find ourselves and we use different mediums like self-help books and AI. And by the way, I love both of those things and I use them. They're helpful. They're helpful, but they are not the answer. But we try to find ourselves and we use these things that are supposed to give us information. And let me tell you that we do the same thing with God and even understanding his own existence. We are looking for knowledge about something so that we can understand something infinite. We ask a robot that was created by humans if the creator of humans even exists. It's kind of ironic, isn't it?

So I tried it. I did it. I asked the robot, "Does God even exist?" And this is what it said. It says, "I don't know yet, but the question itself tells me something—that humans sense the meaning beyond what they can measure. Across history, people have described experiences of presence, purpose, and transcendence that points towards something greater. Whether that's called God, consciousness, or mystery, it's worth exploring." This is the answer we get. This is information that we get from a robot, and it gives probably a better answer than—never mind. [Laughter] But we sit here, we ask a robot that was, again, created by humans, if there's an existence, if God's existence is even there. We ask it questions about God, but the problem is that you'll actually find answers to this. And the problem with that is that we're even looking for an answer for it at all, and where we're looking for it from.

You can do that, but eventually AI knows actually a lot about God, by the way. It's read every single commentary out there, far more than you know about God. Our robot, our history books, everything—it's got it all in its database. It knows more about God, the concept of it, than you do. Ever will. Does that freak you out? No, it doesn't freak us out. I heard one person say no. That gives me hope. It knows about the Bible. It has it sitting there memorized. And I think it's genuinely—by the way, I think it is a very useful tool in even studying the Bible and even knowing the facts about God. But it has never wrestled with God at 2:00 a.m. in the morning through panic attacks. Through deep doubt and depression and existential questions, your bot has never struggled with any of that. And it's never found answers on the other side of that. It's never really asked the question of itself, "Why am I here? What's the meaning of life?" because it doesn't even have one.

But this is what I mean, is that we ask—this is what we continually do, and I think our process is faulty. We ask about information about something, even if it's the existence of something living, as if that's going to create a relationship with it. We even study our Bibles like this. We find some fact, some new thing about God, and we're like, "Oh, I'm in love." You don't do—I'm not dogging on Bible study. Bible study is critical, and we have to have it. This is the words of Jesus, and that's how we know who God is, right? But what I am saying is that you don't do that with any other living being. What if you did that with your significant other sitting on the couch? Should we play this out real quick? We're sitting on the couch with my wife and my dogs, and I'm asking the internet to tell me about women. And I find out about women and I'm like, "That's fascinating. I'm in love. I'm enamored with this fact about them." Nobody does that. But we do that with God. Nobody does that. What I do is I look deep into my wife's eyes and I look into my little puppy's and I just experience them here in the moment. And I go, "I'm in love." That is a—yeah, you already know.

But this is the difference, is that I think we've had a long tradition of substituting information and factual learning for experiential love that you can experience with a living God in your presence right now. Is it helpful to know facts about my wife? Yeah. How else do you think I come up with amazing creative gifts? I ask the internet. [Laughter] But that doesn't make us fall in love. It helps, right? She'll tell me later. But it's this idea of—that's not why we love each other. That helps, and that can actually help the process of falling in love, staying in love, and being in love. And it can tell us how to do something, but it cannot do the process for us. It cannot have the experience for us.

And this is offered to us, by the way, right now, because spiritual growth is not about more information. It helps. Spiritual growth is about transformation. It's about this thing that happens only through connection with your Creator in His presence, when it comes down into your life and affects you and says, "I have to be like that." There is something that has moved me on a soul level where I am in love with this being and I will do everything I can to be like it and to be more in love with it. That's where we get transformation from. That's when Paul talks about "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." It's not just about—we tend to go, "Oh, okay, I'll just keep reading." Stop it. I mean, keep reading. Don't get me wrong, we need to keep reading. But what I'm saying is that sometimes that's our only understanding of that verse. And in reality, he's like, "Be transformed in your mind because the world is far bigger than your little mind can actually come up with." There's stuff out there. There's an experience to be had with an infinite God, which will blow your mind. There's an experience that we can have in a community when we worship that God—a community that loves you and you love it. I have grown to love you guys, by the way. Being a part of something bigger than ourselves. And I think we just actually need to stop and create time to hear His voice in our crazy, busy, distracted, sleepless schedules.

Did you ever just ask this question? I was like, why doesn't God just say something? Especially when you're hurting and we're struggling, right? Is there more of a basic question than, "God, why don't you do something? Why don't you say something?" And there's these moments in our lives where you just desperately pray for like, the clouds to part and for like, a voice to come projected down and just tell us at least where to take our

next step. We want that, right? We feel like we need it. And it's like sometimes it's like, God, where are you in this moment?

And I think—I might get myself into trouble here—but I think he allows the struggle for a reason. And I don't want to even say—I don't want to just leave us there and say God loves us to struggle. I remember hearing—there was a class about this in college. And I remember hearing one of my professors talk about this. And he says, "Yes, God chooses for our benefit remain like this." But there's this thing—without going too far down the rabbit hole—there's this thing called the rules of engagement, that God has to abide by certain laws too. He has to abide by certain rules, the rules of life, that other people tend to break and try to mow over or do things differently. And maybe it's that God is desperately trying to reach you, and maybe it's that he can't. You don't like that, do you?

Let me help us, I hope. We just got done moving. We moved into a new house a week and a half ago. Thank you. Very exciting. During this process, our little dogs have been through this process a couple times. And one of them in particular gets really panicked when he sees these big brown things and us loading our stuff full of them. He doesn't really like it. His name is Pippin, and yes, he's named after a hobbit. And he sits there and he gets anxious, and I sit there with my little puppy. And every part of me wishes that I could take his pain away, that I could take his anxiety away, and that I could show him and prove to him that everything's actually—we're going to be just fine. "I know you can't see it, but we're going to be just fine." And I'll even tell him those words. I'll say it. He doesn't—he hasn't learned English yet. Not all of it. He understands some words, but my—my ability to communicate with my—my beloved little creature there is actually incredibly limited because of the—because of the nature of our relationship.

That is how it is with us and with God. It is limited, but not non-existent. Do you understand the difference? And I also think it's unique. If you know God—the one, the loving one, the real one—I believe that he wants to communicate in here with every single person that is sitting in this room today so badly and tell you that he loves you and everything is going to be okay. But his ability to communicate that is limited.

Evidently, he sent his son. It says, "Long ago, God spoke in many different ways through prophets, through all these different things. But now God speaks through his very presence here on earth, through his son." Some of us are seasoned vets in their relationship with God, but my hunch is that very few of us know what it is to communicate with God clearly and regularly and allow Him, His presence, to change the very soul within our bodies. I'm not saying that to feel guilty. I'm saying that as one of you—as a rookie and as a novice in this, and as, yes, the spiritual guide of our church. I'm still learning, and I'm still growing in this area. And I want to tell you that there's—the more you taste it, the more you want of it. I've never heard God audibly speak to me, but I know what his presence feels like, and there's nothing in the world that can replace that feeling.

And most of us—most of us from a young age, myself included, have been taught to talk to God like he's Santa Claus. As long as I have a need or something that I want, I'm going to ask God for it repeatedly, over and over again until I get it. Is it wrong to ask God for things? You should! It's there in the Bible, you should ask for things. But if your relationship with him never gets beyond the asking and just desiring of something, or the next thing or whatever it is, you will remain spiritually immature and stunted. Asking God for things is actually not what you need for a better life. I want to say that it's actually asking God for this one thing is what gives you life in itself.

If you're going to ask for anything, in Luke chapter 11, there's this scene where Jesus is talking to the people and he's like, "You—you guys are evil." Not you guys, okay, hang on there. [Laughter] Okay. "You guys, even though you're evil, you know how to give good gifts. When your child asks for a fish—something to eat—you don't give them something poisonous. You don't give them something that's going to kill them. You give them what they're actually asking for them that's going to heal them." And then he says this line—and I've never

seen it in this way until this—he goes, "How much more would your Father in heaven give you the Holy Spirit when you ask for it?" He's saying something. He's saying, more importantly than food, which anybody gives away, more important than any of that is this thing—this presence of God that can come into your life. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he goes, "I'm going to give you something far better than my own personal presence on this earth. I'm going to give you a Spirit that can communicate with each one of you." The very essence of life of God himself is actually here and available to us. The best gift, not comparable with material things or even edible things. And even when we're starving, there's something better. It will allow you to handle life.

C.S. Lewis has this and says this on *Until We Have Faces*, his book. He says, "The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing to find the place where all the beauty came from." Is that an amazing line? The very depths of a man who knew Jesus, I think, pretty well. There's no information out there that can tell you that something is beautiful. It just is.

Last night, I had the huge honor of having the prayer for the Flourish—the Ladies Flourish meal. Really, I was just there for the free tacos. [Laughter] But I had the prayer there, and it's sitting there, and it's pouring down rain on the lake. And it's like the far side of the lake—those of you that were out there or have seen this area—the far side of the lake, the sun broke through the whole thing, and it was like shining through this absolute downpour. And it was just like, I don't even know what this is. It was beautiful. And there's no way I can even tell you or even describe it to you. You had to have been there to experience it. And he's saying that's the type of beauty of where all life comes from. He goes, that very longing to be in that presence, to be in the beauty, to be in the very thing that fills your soul—that's the sweetest thing of my life.

I don't know if I told you guys this. I remember when I told my dad that I was going to be a pastor. Did I tell you guys this? All right, tell it again. Good stories are worth repeating. I never remember anyway. [Laughter] I remember when I told my dad I was going to be a pastor and, you know, there was just this silence that you could have cut with a butter knife on the other end of the phone. My dad's a military guy, ran his own businesses, ran a surgery center. Like, this was his life and he wanted that life, I think, for me, even though he allowed me the freedom, but not this. I remember there's this long silence on the other side of the phone and I heard him take a breath and I was like, "Please just say something." And he goes, "Well, bud, I'm glad you're not selling drugs anymore." [Laughter] I said, "Thanks, Dad. Me too."

Pastoring, this life was never on the docket for me. This was never a desire of my life. This was never something that I looked at and was like, "Yeah, that's what I want to do with my life." But I remember feeling the presence of Jesus on the floor of a church when nothing in my life was going right. In fact, everything was wrong and things were falling apart and I had nothing going for me. And I remember feeling a presence that told me that everything was going to be okay someday and "I've got you, and I'm going to use you for something bigger than me."

I remember right after that moment—I didn't have a Bible, I didn't have anything—I would take my quarterly. I think there's nine Beatitudes, by the way. The ninth Beatitude is "Blessed are the hands that have never laid upon a quarterly." [Laughter] And if you don't know what a quarterly is, you're also blessed. Some of them are good. I give it a hard time. But I'm sitting there with this little book and it has a couple Bible verses in it, and I just sit down by this creek and I cry every morning just begging God for a new life, begging God for a new purpose and a vision for my life. And I'm thankful that that prayer is answered, and it can be answered for you. It was all I had, this stupid quarterly. It was all I had to point me towards him, and it worked. I wish it would work for more people.

But something kept calling me. It kept pulling me towards a direction that I couldn't ignore—a path that I knew I needed to take in life. And when everything—you know what this feels like—when everything inside you wants

to give up and say, "This isn't worth it," there is something calling you to take the next step and keep going. "I've got you." That is not something this world can—we'll quit, we'll do the next thing that makes us happy, we'll do the next thing, our next fleeting pleasure in life. And you will miss your entire purpose in life if that's what you're following. You hear the call of your Creator and you follow it. You truly begin to see yourself. And time and time again, it may not be an audible voice but it will become unmistakable.

I remember when I first started coming back to church, there was a teacher who had a sermon, and we had all the kids of a school—we had them all up singing in a choir. And the first thing he does is he gets up, and he goes, "Who heard my daughter's voice? I want you to raise your hands." A bunch of people raised their hands. "No, no, no. You heard singing. Who heard my daughter's voice?" Nobody raised their hand. He goes, "I heard it. Do you know why? It's because I listen for it every day, and I can pick it out of a crowd."

What I'm saying is this takes time. It takes intentional effort and energy—your precious energy that we spend on many things—and it takes us creating a space to try to listen and try to hear the very calling of our Creator in life. And I think we're designed like that. It's not something we hear every day, but it's something—sometimes we strain to listen to it, and sometimes we don't even find the silence or time of day to actually get there. But often, when I least expect it, it breaks through and reminds me of why I'm here. And it can do the same thing for you. It calls us again.

One more C.S. Lewis quote. Are you ready? Hang on. It's from *The Magician's Nephew*, and it's talking about Aslan, who is the lion who was representative of Jesus. And he says, "Out of the darkness, something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was beyond comparison, the most beautiful sound he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it. The voice rose and rose until the air was shaking with it. And just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had ever produced, the sun rose. You could imagine that it laughed for joy as it came up. The earth was many colors. They were fresh, hot, and vivid. And they made you feel excited until you saw the singer himself. And then you forgot everything else."

This is what the presence of God in our lives—that one day, one day we will lay eyes on that, and we will forget everything else. No matter what's going on in our lives, no matter what's happening right now, that day is coming. And I believe that we can get little snippets of that day. We can get an essence, if you will, of God right now when we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives to live with us.

And I want you to do something. You ready? I want us to—it takes six experiments, by the way, for one of our experiments to actually stick in life. And this goes—this is a universal thing. If you haven't felt the call and the feel of what the Holy Spirit can provide, try it. I think some people are too afraid because, "I'm not doing it in the right way," or "I don't have the right process." You can even—dare I even say—you can even use AI to ask, "How do I speak to God?" and it will at least give you something to go off of. [Laughter] But try it. And don't be discouraged when we don't hear it the first time or when it doesn't come around the first time, because the presence of God, I believe, it takes patience and it takes a longing of our heart. And I believe your heart is longing after that.

I also believe that the presence of God is not just something that's attainable, but it's actually necessary for you to know who you are, to know why you exist. It's not immediate. It's a lifelong journey. And I'm just inviting us to do this together as we try to seek the presence of God that I think is not as far away as we think it is.

Let's do that right now for just a second.

Jesus, we need your presence. You are the Creator of all things, even ourselves. Even if we don't fully realize that yet, I just pray. I pray for help. Help us to know even how to do this. Your closest disciples asked for you to teach them how to pray. Teach us, Lord. Teach us to seek your presence, to have an experience with you, and to let your presence overwhelm our souls so that we are not just informed, but we are transformed by your

presence. Thank you for this church. Thank you for the beauty that is here within it, and thank you for the beauty that's coming. We love you. Amen.