

# The Main Character

By Pastor Jake Wilkinson

So, the last few weeks we have been, well, specifically last week we started a new section of our longer series on presence—on people of presence, specifically on presence with God and what it actually means for our church. And we ended last week with talking about if God exists, that He will reveal Himself somehow to authentic people who are seeking. He will have a way to uniquely communicate with each one of us, and it might not look like somebody else's relationship or communication with him, but he has a way with all of us.

Now, I am like you—like some of you anyway—that sometimes I'm a little leery when people say, "Well, the Lord told me." You're like, *here we go*, right? [Laughter] But just because some things weird us out like that does not mean that it doesn't happen, and it doesn't happen today, and it can't happen with you. And just because your experience in hearing him or experiencing his presence one way doesn't look like another person's, it doesn't mean that it doesn't happen. It absolutely can.

And this is where we find our identity. It's not in knowledge about something, it's in the transformation that actually only comes from the presence of our Savior and our Creator. This is where we find our meaning and purpose. And I want to show a video of what it looks like. You ever seen somebody who absolutely knows why they were created? They like know why they exist in the world. I miss this man, but let's watch a short video of what that actually looks like.

## Steve Irwin [Video Clip]:

"What good is a fast car, a flash house, and a gold plate of dunny to me? Absolutely no good at all. I've been put on this planet to protect wildlife and wilderness areas, which in essence is going to help humanity. I want to have the purest oceans. I want to be able to drink water straight out of that creek. I want to stop the ozone layer. I want to save the world.

And you know money? Money's great. I can't get enough money. And you know what I'm going to do with it? I'm going to buy wilderness areas with it. Every single cent I get goes straight into conservation. And guess what, Charles? I don't give a rip whose money it is, mate. I'll use it and I'll spend it on buying land."

Okay, we'll watch that—I could watch it on repeat. In fact, I think the world was robbed of more screen time with this man because he knew what it was that he was called to do in life. He was very clear on his identity. My favorite part about that is like, "I don't give a rip whose money it is, I'll get all of it and I'm going to know what I'm going to do with it." It's one thing. And looking back at his wife, his wife is like looking at him like, *you're insane and I love it*. To my knowledge, Steve never professed a faith in Jesus, but I believe something: that he lived as if creation mattered. He carried a theology. He said it was brought up by parents in a very Christian household, and from the very beginning of Genesis, he has a theology that looks at humans because we're guardians of the natural world, not masters of it. Now, you may disagree with how he did conservation. Not everybody loves animals and plants and God's creation. No judgment. But you cannot deny that this man understood his own identity, what he was put here on this earth for. You heard it in his voice. He found something bigger than himself, and it lives on in the world, even though we were robbed of more screen time from Steve Irwin.

Steve had some "main character energy," you know what I'm saying? But he understood something. He understood, *yeah, I may have many characters, but there's a bigger story going on than me*. And his legacy

lives on. His son is doing this. There's wildlife conservation efforts still going on in Australia under his name. Long after he's gone—it's been like 20 years—his legacy lives on.

And I believe that that is true with us. That knowing our Creator—like coming into contact with the one who created us—that helps us understand our identity and our small part in a bigger story. I think this is one of the main things to remember on Memorial Day: that we are part of a great story. *You* are part of a great story. The Summit Northwest Ministries church is actually part of a great story.

There's a chapter in the book of Hebrews—it's chapter 11—it's about the overarching story of the Bible, that there are people who have been faithful through some pretty crazy stuff and God's kind of rewarded them. And in the beginning of Hebrews chapter 11, it says this: it says faith shows the reality of what we hope for. It's evidence of the thing that we hope for. It is the evidence of things we cannot see, it says. And then it goes on to explain a couple of stories, and it starts with the story, actually, of Cain and Abel. You'd think it would start with Adam and Eve, but it skips right over that, and it starts with a murder, actually. And it says, even though Abel was murdered, even though he died, his voice still speaks through his faithful actions. It talks then about a man named Enoch and how he walked this earth.

And then there's this verse right after this, and people like to pick on this verse. And there's a reason why. It's Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6. It says:

"Now without faith, it's impossible to please him. For the one who approaches God must believe that he exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him."

How conceited and narcissistic could God be here, right? If you take this verse by itself, and it says you can't actually please him, you can't give him any satisfaction unless you believe in him—that's a pretty self-centered God.

Until we take a step back. Let's look at this verse again from taking a step back. (I'm not supposed to walk to the left—remind me when I walk over there, the lights are out, thank you Max. I'm supposed to only walk to the right.)

Do you want to be the most boring person alive? I have a recipe for you: go live for yourself and nothing but yourself, in your own little world, making up your own rules, not answering to anybody but yourself. Become the center of the universe—of *your* universe. We call this "Main Character Syndrome." It's where you lose main character energy and you become the very essence of everything that exists, and everything needs to revolve around you. That is the most boring, miserable person ever to be around. They use people, and everything is about them and what they want.

Let me tell you that a belief in nothing outside of this world—that nothing exists—will lead to this. Because if there's nothing out there that I actually have to respond to, so I might as well listen to myself. I might as well make myself happy and do whatever I need to do and get what I need to get done. And you'll be not just miserable, but I think these are the loneliest people in the world.

And yet this is the underlying lie in the current of the society that we live in. And it's not just atheists, by the way. Many professed Christians live this way. You live this way because we forget a part of the story—about the bigger story that we're a part of. We forget about our Maker. And Hebrews 11 is all about this. He's like, "Remember all of these things." In fact, Hebrews 12 starts this: "Since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, throw off everything that's holding you back and run the race that God put before you." Because of remembering—of looking backwards and seeing how people have been faithful. And that responsibility is now put on you and me.

Now, understanding Hebrews 11:6, maybe—maybe God isn't as concerned with the fact that you are worshiping and focused on him for *his* own sake. But maybe he's worried about that for *your* sake. He sees what will actually happen to you if you don't live for a greater story than your short life on this earth. And if that's all you're living for, you are going to be miserable, and he understands it. And he goes, "If you have faith in me, your life is going to be better. It's going to be far greater. You're going to have things that you wished, you dreamed of because you see something better."

In 1883, there was a novel by Carlo Collodi. Everybody heard of Collodi before? 1883? He wrote *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Yes, it was not originally a Disney movie. Pinocchio's entire arc is a living parable of what happens to us when a created being tries to live outside the presence and wisdom and the voice of its maker.

There's an elderly man named Geppetto, and he creates this little wooden puppet, and he carves it with love and intention for the purpose, actually, of companionship. He carves this little puppet, and it springs to life because of some magical thing that's happening. But the moment this thing comes to life, his beloved creation runs. Pinocchio chases every voice except the one who made him. He's lured by applause. He's tricked by false friends. He's trapped by his own impulses, and slowly he becomes less human the farther he wanders from his creator. Every corner offers potential freedom for Pinocchio, and pleasure. There's strings that end up manipulating him, and humiliation. He's eventually put into a cage, and at the end of the story, the inevitable happens and he actually is turned into a donkey—which seems like a weird turn to the story.

But it's symbolic. A donkey is a symbol of a beast that just works until the end of its life. There's no pleasure, there's no companionship, there's no relationship. It just exists only to serve something else and to work. It's called a beast of burden. And this is the symbol that we get actually from the story of Pinocchio—to slave away and work at something he hates doing until his dying day. None of you can relate to that. [Laughter]

The whole time he's out there running away, his maker is searching for him. Finally, when Pinocchio stops running, he returns to the one who shaped him. And the novel describes him going to sleep one night and waking up, and he turns over and there's a wooden doll next to him, and he has become a real live boy. And this is where, if you've seen the Disney movie, he exclaims, "I'm a real boy!" But the reason he left in the first place—the reason he ran—was to try to become real, to become human. And that's what he's actually searching for. And yet he actually doesn't find it until he goes back home, returns to his maker.

And I believe that is true—we find our humanity there. We are in a desperate search to actually be human and to be whole and to actually become what we were created to be. And until we return to our Creator and have his presence in our lives, I actually don't believe that we can find that.

And if God is anything like Geppetto—putting a lot of weird things in the Bible to the side that people do, and looking at God when he describes himself to people—at best, like we talked about last week in the revelation, the radiance, the essence of God was Jesus. And when we look at that, we see humanity at its finest. We see a God who's desperately searching for his created little things, who are unknowingly chasing things down that will inevitably enslave them.

Can we pull up the verse one more time? Let's read this one more time.

"Now without faith, it is impossible to please him. For the one who approaches God must believe that he exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him."

I hope that hits different now. I hope we read that a little bit different. And this is why over and over again, the authors of the Bible were told over and over again to write, "Remember me."

That's a—that's a pretty simple thing, right? We would think that the God who evidently created the entire universe—not just the earth, the entire universe—and breathed it into existence, (that's what we read last week) would look at this tiny little speck called Earth, and this really, really tiny speck—*you*—on that tiny speck in the middle of nowhere, and say, "Remember me." How backwards is that? And it's like, "God, remember us." And he's like, "You've never left my mind. I've been searching for you."

Jesus himself, when he eats with his disciples at the Last Supper, he says, "Do this." They're eating bread and they're drinking the wine, and he says, "Do this and remember me." Why? Because it's so easy. We get into our own little worlds, our own little universes, chasing our tails and chasing the next bit of pleasure or chasing whatever it is, or we forget his existence at all or it's just a part of our life.

It's Memorial Weekend, isn't it? It wasn't originally about barbecues, camping, and garage sales. It originated after the Civil War where families would visit the graves of fallen soldiers. It wasn't about escaping reality—that's how I often treat it—it was about remembering their identity. It was about remembering that they are here because of a sacrifice and they're part of a bigger story, one that continues to live on and move us forward.

There's an author—he's actually an expert on J.R.R. Tolkien—his name is Malcolm Guite. Look him up. He's an older guy, but he is almost as enthusiastic as the Crocodile Hunter. He's awesome. And he's in an interview and he says a lot of younger people feel sad and distressed because they feel like they don't belong, and don't have a culture, and aren't really a part of anything. And then he shares the story—I'm going to read you the quote in just a second—the story of Sam and Frodo that's at the end of *The Two Towers* movie, if you've only watched the movies. And he shares this section, and you're reading this—this is one of the greatest quotes, I think, in all of literature, and it's Sam talking, and he says:

"It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were, and sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened?

But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something... that there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for."

Malcolm Guite looks at this moment and he goes, you're reading this story and it's like Samwise has this revelation, and he's talking about other people in the story, and it's almost like he's asking himself, *Well, could we be—we're—we're in a story?* And you're reading this and you're like, *Yes, Samwise! You're in a story, and guess what? You save the day!* I've read the book like 20 times, and it's incredible. You save the day, and you get the girl.

But there's this moment of reading this story where, even the reader, reading Sam's story, you start to go: *Could this be true about me? Am I in a story? Do I have this little tiny part to play, it feels like, of a great story in history?* Malcolm Guite then says, in fact, to be human is to be a part of that story. He says this—this is a quote from what he says—he says: "You only think you don't belong. You don't remember. You've been robbed by the last two generations who stopped remembering the long stories and the old stories. And in fact, to be a person is to precisely be in that story."

Now we're going to take a moment right now and we're going to cut our live stream.

I believe that Summit Northwest has its own story to tell. I think that you are a part of this story. I'm happy to be a small part of this story. Courtney, would you and your family come up here, please? We'll invite all of you up here if you want. It's going to be worth it—well, I think it's going to be worth it. I know, he was sleeping so well! He heard the message on the rest a few weeks ago, and it was, *thanks for understanding*. [Laughter] Oh, come on up here, come on up here.

So you guys, you, three weeks ago, were baptized right here. You and Gabriel. And you mentioned something about wanting to attend this church, and I told you we were going to vote your membership in here today, right? That happened like three weeks ago, you already know. Do you know what we're doing right now?

**Courtney:** "You are voting us in?"

Yeah, sort of. Let's do something a little more fun.

Someone in this audience had something on their heart. They saw you there and the changes that are happening in your life. And I want you guys—we got you something. I want you guys to follow me. We put together a little bit of money because we want you to be here at this church. And someone had heard the call, and our whole church put together money, and **we have bought you a new car**. And we would love for you guys to be welcomed in this way. My wife has the flowers there, and Zeta has your new set of keys. We just want to tell you in a way that we love you. Thank you for being a part of our church family. Yeah, yeah! Love you guys.

I believe this church is called to be part of moments like this. Thank you, everybody. You all got to take part in giving to this so that they can be here, to welcome them in this way. Now, we can't do this for everybody, but it took a lot of effort, and especially the vision of one individual who said their project that they were working on had just fallen through. And they had just prayed the day before, if I'm remembering this story right, for somewhere to give their money. And they said they donated the first \$5,000 for that, which you guys matched. This didn't even come out of church funds. This came because somebody saw something, a need, and gave towards it.

I think this is what happens when the presence of God moves in this place. When we are connected with our Creator and we realize that we are but a part of this story, and we get to be a part of something far bigger than our own projects at home. Of being a part of somebody who gets to come to church here every week in their new car.

You guys, I believe that this is the start. (I'm supposed to stay to the right.) This is the first, maybe just a spark of a fire that has started in this place. There are things like this that make me like—I can't believe we're in a church that can do stuff like this. It makes you feel—makes you feel small and yet a part of something incredible and huge and a bigger story that's out there.

Let's bow our heads and let's thank God for these moments.

Jesus, we know that there are more of these moments to come in this place. This is the start of something. Thank you. I thank you for people who want to give, who see a greater vision and see a purpose beyond our own little lives, and that we're doing something and we're going to do that together. And a big part of that, Lord, is being with one another, helping one another, and seeing where your Spirit leads. Thank you for your presence in this place. Move us forward in Jesus' name. Amen.