

Not So With You

By Jake Wilkinson

Series: Presence With: One Another

About twenty years ago, *Time* Magazine had an article that came out called "Happiness 101." It was a scientific survey—not just an experiment—that used positive psychology methods to try to understand what actually made people happy.

If you focus on things that give you pleasure—and I have said ad nauseam here, but I'll say it again—our culture has confused happiness with pleasure. We've made this mistake and we're continuing to make it over and over again. But if you focus on things that give you pleasure, we get this thing they call the hedonic treadmill. This was a secular study where we become addicted to pleasure, our need for pleasure grows more and more, we're simply never satisfied, and we're actually never really happy at all.

They actually put religion to the side, and get this—they still came to this conclusion. The author didn't want to use the term morality at all. It's purely scientific, but the conclusion came down to this: the best way to increase happiness is actually to do acts of selflessness and acts of kindness and pour yourself out to needy people. Go figure. It can give you a sense of purpose, of usefulness and significance.

But then it was pointed out around the same time that you can actually do acts of selflessness selfishly. You can do things for other people—we've done this all before, right? Most of us. We help Mrs. Anderson across the road, pointing out to all the cars, "Stop! How could you be so insensitive?" And we're helping this old lady across the road, and we make sure they notice how gross they are for not noticing her standing at the crosswalk and getting out to help her like you did. And with a tear in her eye, she looks back at you and she goes, "Thank you. You're one of the best human beings I know." And you're going, "I am. I am one of the best human beings I know too."

The research actually showed afterwards that even people who would go do selfless acts—but their motivation was actually selfishness, to feel good, to feel more moral than somebody else—they would go back into the same hedonic treadmill that everybody else did, seeking pleasure. It was the same thing. You'd have to have more of it. You'd have to exercise this. You got addicted to this pleasure of doing good, of feeling more morally superior than everybody else.

So what's the answer? Do you do good to other people and do you help them out? No, we don't want to do that. Or yes?

See, what happens is when we come with the same motivation, we have a different fuel, but we're fueling the same engine. Our ego—it actually doesn't care if it's fed by pleasure or good deeds or virtue. It just cares that it's fed.

We built a whole culture around exactly this very premise—so much emphasis on making sure that I'm healthy and that I'm whole, that I feel good. And once we go down that road, we can guard our peace and we can unsubscribe from the drama.

And I will say this: I think we can go down that road easily. And I'm all up for taking care of ourselves. We're all in agreement we should take care of ourselves.

[Quiet agreement from congregation]

Yes, I'll answer for us—we should take care of ourselves. You've been given a body, a soul, and a mind. Please take care of it.

But I will say this: sometimes—and we all need a break, that's not the issue—the issue, I think, that has come down to in our culture, and even affecting my own life, I will say I use this as an excuse sometimes—the issue is when "I need to recharge" quietly becomes the reason that we actually avoid doing the very thing that we know we need to be doing in life. "I need to recharge" becomes "I'm going to avoid being with people that drain me dry"—the ones who would actually draw something out of us if we were close to them.

Jesus—what did He come to this earth to do? To save? To serve?

Well, you've heard the end of the sermon. We can go now.

He came to serve, but I want to say this: He came to serve in a specific way, and He came to die, actually. Jesus was born on this earth to be sacrificed, to die.

We'll be in Mark chapter 10 today. If you do have a physical Bible, or if you have your app there, go ahead and turn to it. We'll be kind of towards the middle to the end of Mark chapter 10.

Jesus came into this world to die, and I believe that He invites you and I actually to die as well. And actually that's what's necessary to be with one another—to be present with one another. Jesus describes this very thing actually on repeat for a few chapters.

But in Mark chapter 10, right before we get to where we're going to spend some time, He's talking to a man with a lot of money—the rich young ruler. And He tells him—you know, if you've heard the story before—He tells him, "I want you to sell everything." He's done all these things. He's a pretty good guy, this rich young ruler. He's a moral guy. He's somebody I would probably want to be friends with, actually. And yet Jesus comes up to him and He goes, "I want you to sell everything that you have, and I want you to give it to poor people, and then I want you to come and follow Me."

And the story does not end positively. Now I hope we see that rich young ruler again because I hope things turned around for him, but the way that story ends, he's chosen something as his source of security, as his source of life, even over what Jesus has asked him to do.

And I like to say that that's only for him because he had a lot of money—that Jesus would never ask me to do that, right? But Jesus doesn't ask people to fix this or that part of their character because that's what this man wants. He wants you to say, "What else do I have to do? What else do I have to do to inherit eternal life?" He goes, "I want you to give your life up." And he couldn't do it. He turns away because he can't say goodbye to the things that he's put his life into.

Jesus asks us to die and to follow Him in death. And what Jesus is doing, teaching here over and over again, is what living according to His kingdom actually looks like.

Right in the text—Mark chapter 8, Mark chapter 9, and Mark chapter 10—Jesus predicts His own death. At first He's like, "Yeah, I'm going to die." And then He's like, "Yeah, I'm going to die and it's not going to be pretty. Now I'm going to be crucified. I'm going to be tortured at people's hands. I'm going to be led away to them unjustly. And I'm going to rise on the third day." He tells them plainly what's going to happen.

Do they get it? "He's just talking another parable, right? I don't understand what you're talking about, Jesus, half the time, but I'm with you."

Jesus predicts His own death. And this is the scene that comes up—I think it starts in verse 34—where James and John, two of His disciples, come over to talk to Jesus, and they're like, "Okay, Jesus." The literal term that they use here is they asked Him—they go, "We want you to do exactly what we want you to do."

Now, at first we're like—first off, I appreciate the boldness, by the way. Did you ever approach God in this way? "God, I just want you to do what I want you to do." Yes, you do, and so do I. We just mask it with different words. So at least they're bold enough to say what they really want. And I'm inspired by their stupidity as well, because it speaks to my life.

Jesus then asks them a question. He goes, "Are you prepared?" He goes, "Are you prepared to drink the bitter cup that I have to drink? To go through the kind of death that I'm about to, and torture that I'm about to endure?"

And their response is, "Yes. We'll do it. Anything, Lord, for your honor and glory, right? Not our own."

And Jesus didn't grant the request. And this is where we're going to read a text together. He actually told them that He couldn't do that. He doesn't actually get to choose who is at His right and left hand at all. This is where our text comes from:

When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant—furious. So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them." And He says these words: "But this isn't the way you do things. Not so with you." And He goes on: "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many."

We just sang a song about that.

We have this scene, and they're asking to be at the places of honor, at Jesus' left and right hand. And the rest of the disciples come up, and they say they're indignant. It literally means their blood was boiling. What is even happening here? Jesus' community—His closest community—is sitting there and they're arguing, and they're actually really mad at each other to the point of where this is about to be a physical altercation. "Because I want to be the closest. I want to be His best friend." Why?

First off, do you think they felt very much like the community right there? Ready to wipe each other out? Why do they feel like this?

I think it's because none of them actually understood the very assignment in which Jesus came here to do in the first place. They didn't understand His kingdom was completely different than the kingdom that they were even chasing after—being close to Him.

Jesus is saying to them, "This is how most people—forget leaders for a second, okay? This is speaking to all of us—this is how most people function in life. This is how they want to influence the world around them in order to get what they want. If they can come close to power, if they can come close to prestige, if they can get the next thing for them, then they can influence the world, they can be happy. We could just be happy if we were just that close to Jesus. If we were just that close to the leader, the president, whatever it is."

I think Jesus turns this upside down. He goes, "That's the way the world functions. You guys are doing it right now, and you won't. If you were to be a part of My kingdom, if you were to be My closest friends—this: not so with you. This will not happen among us right here. You guys are fighting over what? Sitting at My right and left hand."

We're going to talk about that in just a second—about when Jesus is most glorified.

There's a New Testament scholar named Richard Hays, and he comments on this very passage, but about God's character itself. He says:

Because God's manner of revelation—how He shows Himself to humanity, right—is characterized by hiddenness, reversal, and surprise, those who follow Jesus find themselves repeatedly failing to understand the will of God, and therefore there can be no place for smugness or dogmatism.

What this means is that we have no reason to be—the whole thing they're fighting over is a rightful position to be proud over the rest of everybody else so they can feel good. He says there's no room for this because you don't even understand why He came here. The disciples didn't even understand why He came over and over again. They're blown away. Like, "I don't understand what's even happening here."

And I want to tell you, I think this is true: if we have a comfortable Jesus that we understand all the time, that doesn't ask us to do anything difficult, that lets us stay in our comfort zone—I will tell you that I don't think it's the real one. Or at least it's a fragment of the real one, because it's not the one I see in Scripture.

I think Jesus asks us to do actually some pretty hard things that a lot of times we're like—think about faith in general. Faith doesn't happen in moments where it's like, "Everything's great." Faith happens when I'm like, "I don't understand why you're letting me go through this stuff. Why this is happening." Those are your deepest moments where you have an opportunity to get deeper in your faith.

It's easy—I think it's easy for us. It's easy for me to read over this story and be like, "James and John, you guys are so silly. I would never ask that." And we would never ask for that kind of power and prestige out loud. And here's the thing—this is why most of us are pretty put off by it, because who has the audacity to even come up and ask that? "How dare you—I want that spot," right?

We all want that. Want me to prove it to you?

Thanks—you ever stood in line as a kid? You were out at recess, right? You ever stood waiting to be picked for a team?

[Congregation responds]

Our man is right. You ever been picked first? And have you ever been picked last? And there is a big difference there in how you feel. They're no different. You're no different and I'm no different. I want that. I want to be—I want to be sitting there last, everybody's staring at you like, "Well, evidently I'm not good at this sport."

How dare James and John ask for that. But here's the crazy part—they're asking to be at Jesus' left and right hand, right? Do you know who sits at Jesus' left and right hand?

[Congregation responds]

First off, He says, "I don't actually get to pick who's next to Me."

When do you think Jesus is most glorified? His greatest hour of glory is where? It's on the cross. And He's got two nobodies that He doesn't even know. How glorious it would be to be with your best friends up there. You know, "We're going to go die for this amazing cause," and yet He is up there with nobodies—the people you and I walk by every day. He died next to two strangers that He didn't even know, and that's who I walk past.

I'll say this: I think it's much easier to love people whose lives are all put together, and they don't require anything of you. They're not a drain on your time, energy, any of your resources.

But even look at this and look at what Jesus came to do—and even His closest companions didn't have a ton to offer Him, by the way. They didn't understand Him most of the time. He asked them to pray—they're falling asleep. They let Him get taken. They're doing the wrong thing all the time, and that's His best friends.

They do some things right—I don't want to totally throw them under the bus, okay? They do get some things right, and I think that's notable. But a lot of times it's like He even gets madder. He's like, "What are you guys doing? What are you doing at this point? Haven't I told you over and over again?" He comes to us and tells them this all the time. How exhausting for you, Jesus, to have to do that to them.

Thank goodness—I mean, who doesn't want to be friends with successful people who have the toys, their families, they're happy and their lives are all together? Because it's easier to live in community with that. They understand social boundaries. They understand—I don't have to go on.

But love itself—if our church is to be built on love—love itself requires you to take a hit. No matter what that love looks like, who that love is towards, it requires something of you. Because when we're in proximity with someone who's really in trouble, something is taken from you. Some of their trouble is transferred to you, by the way. Secondary trauma—you ever heard of this? People that deal with trauma people all the time—they come home and they're just like, "I just got to cry. Because everything's too heavy."

Love requires a transference of the damage that's happened to the other person. Can we understand that?

[Congregation responds affirmatively]

There's tons of wounded people in our world, and sometimes you're one of them. Sometimes I'm one of them. And here's where we're going to have to battle our culture a little bit, okay? It's exhausting to be friends with significantly emotionally wounded people. Because in order for them to get back up on their feet and emotionally stable, it's going to take something from us. And if we hold on to our emotional comfort and try to avoid them, what happens to them? They're going to sink.

The whole thing is that we desperately need community. People are dying for this right now. The whole pushback against having a robot as a best friend is that it just won't be there the same way as a human being will. And yet sometimes some people find far more comfort in that.

Not in this church. We have to take a stand right now against this. And I don't mean getting AI out. I mean actually becoming the people that we were created to be as a church.

Okay, I'm not a parent. I don't have babies. I didn't have any babies. But I was a baby at one point. So speaking as a former baby, think about parenting for a second. You have this little tyrant of a thing, right? I remember one of my professors in Old Testament—this little angel came out, and then by her

two-year-old she grew horns and a tail, and she was a little demon that ran around orchestrating my whole life and ruining it, really.

They're dependent upon you for everything. They don't grow out of that dependency on their parent without depending on their parent. Can I say that one more time? Let me say that one more time: they won't grow out of dependence upon the parent without being dependent upon the parent. It requires a lot of the parent.

We listen to them, and while their initial babblings are cute—in fact, one of my earliest memories ever is my sister pleading with my mom, "Just tell him to shut up. He's not even talking about anything. He's just talking."

Not a lot's changed, Corey, my dear sister. The incessant rambling is making my ears bleed, Mom, please.

I mean, I think we're getting the point: unless we sacrifice our own life as a parent—your freedom, your time, your energy—your children do not grow up healthy and equipped to face the challenges of life. And we are living in an epidemic of a lack of relationships from home.

I just heard a stat the other day—it was something like back in the 1970s—it was like, I don't remember. Wow, this is a good moment. It was like one in thirty or one in thirty-five homes that were from a single-parent home, and now it's one in four without a father. More wounded people now than in the '70s. Because we've seen what it looks like on that side of things. Parents don't make that sacrifice, and children never actually really grow up. They have to have somebody. They have to have somebody there to sacrifice for them to grow up. This is how we function as human beings.

I do believe that there is such a thing—going back to the initial point—we can get to unhealthy measures in doing this. We've watched people go to the unhealthy side of sacrificing themselves. There's nothing left. You're not actually helping anybody. You've watched these people before. So I acknowledge that there is a boundary there.

But I also know that there is a time to sacrifice more than you think that you can give. And I think—I will speak for myself—I avoid that more often than I would like to admit, using a little me-time or self-care as means of avoiding the drain.

First Timothy says in the final days, the love of many—the love of most people—it's going to actually grow cold. And I will say: not so with us. This has to be an entire church. This has to be—it starts with every single one of us. It starts with me. But that love is a sacrificial thing that you choose to do. Our time, money, and energy.

And if we are in tune with God, I believe we can make the differentiation between when to make the sacrifice and when to—Jesus, He went to the wilderness, right? To be with His Father. He pushed the world away. You need that. But then there was also a time where the temptation was real for Him to avoid the real thing that was in front of Him.

There's this one time in Scripture where this happens. Jesus, again, He's saying, "I have to go and actually be sacrificed in this way." Peter—one of His closest guys, according to John, maybe the second closest guy—you know, like all my Bible nerds out there got that one—he comes up to Jesus and he goes, he says, "Never, Lord. You will never be sacrificed in that way."

See, Peter—Peter's really comfortable with Jesus, my best friend. What he's not—he wants Jesus to avoid the cross, by the way. He's not comfortable with that, Jesus. "I like my Jesus, the one that's my

friend, my closest friend, and giving me purpose and meaning in life, but the one that is going to the cross and I have to follow Him there? Hang on, that's not good for our mental health, Jesus."

And what does Jesus say to him? When Peter goes, "You should never do this"—these are the words where He goes, "Get behind Me, Satan." Because the temptation to do this is so real. The temptation to self-preserve when we know that there are people out there that need something—maybe even more than we can feel like we can give.

There's a man by the name of Nicholas von Zinzendorf. He was a German nobleman who died at about sixty years of age, but he was one of the founders of the Moravian Church. He was born into wealth and a very substantial life that was provided for him, and he had basically everything he needed and everything he could ever want was at his fingertips. And yet he spent all of his wealth—nearly down to nothing—spent all of his time pouring his life out for others and giving to needy people. That's what he did with his life.

And you're like, "How?" Because that's not a very common story. How did he come to such a radical life?

One day he came across a painting by someone—I'm not going to try to pronounce his name. I'll try. It's fun. Domenico Fetti painted this. And across the bottom of this very painting—it's not on here, but across the bottom of this painting—he was so moved by the artist's inscription that Jesus could have said to anyone sitting in this room as well:

All of this I have done for thee. What doest thou for me?

When we go back to our original thing that we were talking about—and how we can even do selfless things selfishly—there's a way out of that.

Will it be the most happy and the most fulfilled and everything? I actually do think that—I think we tend to gravitate towards people who are easy to be around and to give to what makes us feel good financially, with our time. "As long as I don't really feel good about that one, so I'm not going to go do that."

And I will say this: giving to what makes us feel good, and giving however that looks, is not wrong in its face value, but it can quietly become the same self-preserving version of generosity that our culture around us, the world around us, already practices. Good deeds are really about protecting how we see ourselves, how good we feel about ourselves.

I want to ask us for just a second: what if we simply did a good thing because of this? Because somebody has done everything—more than I could ever imagine—for me. And I'm grateful. "Thank you, Jesus. I'm grateful for a King who did far more for me than I could ever do for anybody. And I'm going to do good not because this is what will make me happy, but because someone else did this for me."

That is why we're here. That's the thing that will bind us together. That's actually the thing that will keep us from being like the disciples on that road. It's when we are simply doing good because we recognize our Savior did good and we didn't deserve it. He got nothing out of it except you. That was enough for Him.

And I'll say this: there are a lot of people—not just out there, but in here—who need genuine help in many forms, and it will cost each one of us what this looks like in human form.

A number of years ago, Mel Gibson caught sight of a little story about a man named Desmond Doss. Most—if you've ever been in the Seventh-day Adventist church for very long—he's kind of like our World War II hero, right? And it says he saved between seventy-five and a hundred people. People are like, "It's not even possible." He was a conscientious objector. He did not take—he wouldn't take a weapon into battle, but he went in to save his troops. He didn't grow up in Idaho, evidently, in other words.

But they said it wasn't humanly possible to actually do what he did to save seventy-five to a hundred people. And you know what his prayer was every time he went up that mountain: "Help me, Lord." Do you think it was good for his mental state? His physical state? But he recognized that something—a call that had been placed on his life—and says, "Help me, God. One more. Help me with one more. I don't have the energy for this. I don't have even the compassion for this, but you have to help me right now because there are people out there that are going to die if I don't show up."

Sacrifice? He was willing to sacrifice everything. He almost dies a number of times, but lives through it. And he's an inspiration to millions of people today simply because he heard the call and he said no—even to himself—because he was saying yes to the sacrifice that Jesus was asking him to do.

It's inspirational, isn't it? I hope. Looking at his life is inspirational to myself, and it calls me out. It says the next time where I know that God is calling me—even to sacrifice something I don't have—He will give you the power to do it. I wouldn't even know what it was like to sacrifice my own child, my own life for the sake of humanity. He gave everything. And I think I can try sometimes, you guys.

I believe that this is what actually creates true community—is when we give to things even beyond what we think is our own capacity. And we have—take care of yourself, right? Go to the wilderness once in a while. But also acknowledge that our culture spews this lie that you can't give more than what you have. You can—only because God's Holy Spirit lives in you and gives you the power to do so.

This is what will create a culture here where we can be together with one another—presence with one another.

Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for coming here and doing what you did. And I pray that whatever our motive is for doing good, I pray that somehow it can transition to being grateful for what you've done for us. Sometimes we've heard this story a thousand times and it feels like it gets mundane. It gets normal, Lord. Please don't ever let this story be normal to us. Let it be convicting of something that you have done for us, and let us be grateful in that, Lord, that we might do the same and follow in suit and do whatever we need to do, Lord, that you called us to do—to sacrifice.

All the disciples did this because they believed so strongly. Let that be us, Lord, and let it start in this place, Lord, in this church—that we do this for one another. No greater love than this is to lay down your life for a brother and sister, somebody in this place right now.

I think so many of us are like the disciples. We're willing to die for you—and are we willing to live for you, Lord? Please make that—convict us of that and help us, Lord. Help us. In Jesus' name, amen.