

That One Thing

By Jake Wilkinson

Series: Presence With: One Another

While I have been here for almost a year, we actually just moved into our new house. We haven't even been in there for three months. And some of you keep asking, like, how's that going? How's the moving process? And I have the same answer, and it's been the same answer for two months. And that is, as long as I don't look in the garage, everything is just fine.

We just got our Idaho license plate, so now we don't get side eyes from our neighbors—especially the ones with the Confederate flag down the street.

This is our second house that we've moved into, but you would think that the moving process would be less stressful each time. And each time we get to the end of it and go, we're never moving again.

Now, we've had amazing help. The first time we did it, we did it without a realtor, and that was like a nightmare because we didn't know what anything was. Like, what's earnest money? And why do you want money from us like that? This time around, we actually had an amazing team that helped us. In fact, I will say this: not just the people that were helping us, but the people that we bought from, whom we've never met before, were amazing.

They actually chose us. There was another offer. They actually chose us because I had walked into the living room and I had a vision. And I told them—I said, I didn't tell them, I just had said it out loud. I said, I could see like a small group sitting here. And they actually chose us for that house because they said we had a small group ministry in this house and we want that to live on.

Pretty cool experience.

Yet it's still semi-anxiety producing.

That moment helped a ton, by the way. When you get that accepted offer, and when you do something and you start putting money towards it, each little step actually starts to relieve a little bit of anxiety, but it also starts to create more anxiety because there's still this chance that it might not happen. Sitting on the edge and not knowing the future.

A house—I think it represents our security. It represents a safe space. It keeps the world out there. We got our own problems in here, but at least the problems out there stay out there, right?

And I want to say something else: I think that the house represents this need for security, this need of assurance. We love to be sure of the future.

There's a reason people are interested. We know if you're familiar with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination—which you're sitting in a Seventh-day Adventist church on a Saturday, if you were not aware of that. And there's a reason why our denomination in particular has this interest in biblical prophecy and the type of people that attracts. Because, let's just be real—wouldn't it be nice to know the future?

Maybe. It might create all sorts of other anxieties actually in us. But I think it would quell at least this voice of uncertainty that we have about tomorrow. It tells us everything is going to work out.

In fact, one of my favorite quotes from a movie—I say it often—not a well-quoted movie in my house. There are some of those, but this isn't one of them. This is the only one I quote. But it's from a 2004 movie called *The Wedding Singer* with Adam Sandler. And he's sitting at the bar, and his relationships are falling apart, and he's sitting there, and he's miserable, and everything's kind of falling to pieces around him. And he goes, "I just want somebody to hold me and tell me everything's going to be all right."

Isn't that true?

In the movie there's an old guy in the bar that comes up and gives him a hug from behind and goes, "Everything is going to be all right."

I think he had something different in mind when he said that, but I still find that part amusing. But I think this speaks volumes to what we actually need in life in general. And I think there's a need for security for us. We want to be secure in something. Now, I think there's different people that find security in different things, but we're actually all searching for it. And this is why many fights develop—even out of friendships and in our homes and in our country and in our world—is this idea that we need to be secure and we need to make sure that we are secure. And in fact, we'll do whatever it takes to feel secure, even if it's things that hurt ourselves and each other in the long run.

And it's also the reason why many of us do things that are harmful to ourselves, because we're actually searching for the feeling of safety and security and assurance. And if something doesn't feel safe or right, what do we do? We run to the next thing.

I know in my own life, when I get really desperate, I will be honest with you—Jesus is my safety blanket.

[Congregation: Amen]

When I'm not super desperate, I've got my other things. It's not what it used to be. They're good things. They're fine, but they're just distractions. They're things that make me try to feel better in the short term because I don't want to face the reality of the unknown.

But I want to say that there's one thing. There's one thing in life that truly makes me feel secure. And it isn't running to the next thing or getting my next fix or doing whatever feels good or even bad in the forms we normally take.

I spent last week—thanks for letting me off the hook for a week—I spent last week with some of the teenagers sitting in this very room.

[Congregation responds]

Yes—and we had a blast. I will say Saturday or Friday night rolled around and it's kind of the most important night of the week. And Friday night rolls around and we're sitting at camp and we have a bunch of the teenagers that come around and sit around the fireball. And it's like 9:30 at night, which is my bedtime, and it was very apparent. And they came and sat around and asked all these questions to Caleb and Jeff and myself and one of the other staff members that were there. And the problem wasn't just that they're asking questions—is that they kept asking them. And I remember sitting pretty much just like this, but with my hands like this. And whenever Jeff or Caleb were talking, I agreed with them. And so they would talk.

But you know what? There was something. There was one thing that kept waking me up. And it was not the voice of Jeff or Caleb, as lovely as they are. It was the questions these kids are asking. Some

of them were incredibly profound, and I don't even think we ask them of ourselves. There were questions of free will. Does God actually give it? And what about the flood? And what about all—they went on and on—and what prophecy is and what Sabbath even looks like.

And then someone asked this question: How do you know if you're saved? And how can you be sure of that?

I think you probably need to define what saved even means in the first place. But how do you even know that there is such a thing? How would you answer that question for yourself right now, sitting here? Do you ever ask that question? Or do we just assume?

And I will say, through all of our answers, there was one thing. There was that one thing that kept sticking out.

If you have a Bible, a physical Bible with you, or even an electronic one, and if you want to turn there, it's fine. I'll have the verses on the screen as well. But if you want to turn there, we're going to be in Ephesians chapter 1 and 2, but we'll start in chapter 1.

And he's actually talking—so Paul, the Apostle Paul, is writing this to a church, and he's talking about the good news or the gospel of our salvation. And it approaches this idea that God is no longer your boss. He's no longer your manager. That's kind of the old-school approach. He says, you are now adopted as a child into His own family. You actually now—not just by anybody—but you are the child of a King. And then he says something. He then talks about that there's an inheritance. And here's where we pick up right here in our verse in Ephesians chapter 1. He says:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of His glory.

He says two things that actually are required here for us to begin this process. He says if you hear it—first you have to hear it, the good news, that there even is a salvation. Because most of us—cultural Christianity included—lives like this is all we got. It lives like this is the only life that we're going to be living.

He says belief. And belief is not just an intellectual acceptance that Jesus was a real person. And that—anybody know anybody that does it? If heaven is a real place, anybody not want to go there?

No—like a place full of blissful paradise? Like, who doesn't want that, right? But the question doesn't boil down to if you want that or not. It's who lives there, and do you want Him?

It means belief in this instance. It means that it's what all of your hopes and dreams in life are made of. You want to know what you believe? You want to know? Ask yourself what you hope for. Where are your dreams? Like, what do you ponder? And what are the very things that you want more than anything else? And where do you put your future, quote-unquote, salvation? Your future. Where do you put that?

There's two ways to do this as far as—you know, we'll go back to the cultural Christianity aspect of things. There's this idea in cultural Christianity, which I don't think is true Christianity, by the way. Cultural Christianity is giving your life and heart to Jesus Christ. It's not developed on your own morals and trying to follow them. It's a very different thing.

A moralist is somebody who adopts the tenets of Christianity but leaves out the person of Jesus. Okay? And their life will go something like this: "Are you a Christian?" "I'm trying to be."

I remember preaching a sermon actually—it was ten years ago, not at this church. I would never do that to you guys. And I remember that was how I ended the sermon—is like, well, I'm trying to be—which puts what? Puts all the pressure on you. I'm like, is there something wrong with my life? And am I even accepted with Jesus? And are we good? It does not create any sort of assurance. And I will tell you that that will play out in your physical and your other emotional relationships within your household and in the world you're in. If you are not secure, that will destroy those things. You will be fighting for security. You'll be looking for it in some other form. You will always—moralism actually creates this idea that I have to actually find somebody to look down on. You ever met a Christian like that? We all have. We all have. It's because this is what it leads to without the person of Christ and the assurance that we can get from this. This is what it will boil down to: that you will have to find somebody that does life worse than you to be able to feel like you're saved. And that does not create connection between human beings. That creates disconnection. It does not create unity at all. It creates more problems.

But here's the thing: you have this idea of moralism. You have this idea of these people who are seeking to work harder. Now, is it bad to work hard at being a Christian?

I heard one answer.

But hang on. Hang on. That was very aggressive, Marilyn.

The gospel is not opposed to effort. It's opposed to earning. And what we'll do is we typically try to—this is the world you and I live in. You've earned everything that you've worked for. Okay? This is how we were developed and how we're taught life is supposed to be. But this is not the answer of your salvation.

Does it take effort? It does. But one is struggling for something that it should be. And one is struggling to understand what already is. And those are two very different things. It's both a struggle, but it's a struggle coming from a completely different standpoint. The psychological, the emotional, the spiritual struggle is very different in those things, and it will show up in your life. Your belief—what you believe—it matters a lot, actually.

Most people in our world today, we live for the here and now, and we live in a world that's increasingly living in the moment-to-moment. We're watching people sell their retirements just to go on vacation and to get the next thing, to feel good today. Don't look at each other like that. That makes me feel like you've sold your retirement. I was talking to you two. You're probably safe, but you may know somebody that has done this. We live paycheck to paycheck more than our previous generations.

But here's the thing. Paul in Ephesians chapter 1—what he's actually saying is he's inviting everybody to actually live. There's a fancy word for people that are smarter than me. He calls them to live eschatologically. I don't even know why I mentioned that right now, except for it's the fancy word to say it's the study or the looking at the end of all things. Christianity is a religion that actually has a linear process. We're not cyclical. There is an end to your life, by the way. You have a soul, and there could be an end to that, or maybe not. Take care of it.

What Paul is saying in this moment is that typically as a denomination, we're like, oh, as long as we get to heaven, right? All we have to do is get to heaven, and that's what we've made. We kind of push the normal world out of the way, and we say, as long as I get to heaven, everything will get to heaven. Everybody wants to go to heaven. But here's the thing: Paul's not actually saying that. He's actually saying that you get to experience that very thing now. Is it coming? Yeah. Live for that. But the very

idea of whatever heaven is—it's actually a person. We sing, "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul." You guys remember that old hymn? Yeah, me too.

There's a really old saying from neo-atheists. Okay, so like Christianity promises a pie in the sky, by and by. They're saying, hey, it promises that you'll talk to your sky daddy and everything will be okay. And this is how they've accused Christianity of just being something where you're just trying to make everything be okay when it's actually not.

And here's the case: Paul's actually—his very argument is actually against that whole concept altogether. He goes, this isn't just about then. That piece—you get a big chunk of that pie right now. What does he say that pie—the piece of the pie—is? The sealing thing. Did you guys read it? It's the Spirit—the Holy Spirit. He says it has a seal. The seal is something.

Okay—so kings of old, when they used to make letters, what they would have is they'd have a little ring on their hand that was literally impossible to counterfeit. You couldn't do it. So you could write a letter and you could forge someone's signature. Kids, you've done that in school, right? With your parents' stuff. So people used to do that all the time with kings, you know, to try to get them to do something that they weren't supposed to do. And how were they sure that it was the very king that said he was sending that? It was their signet ring. And he says that this is actually the key to actually knowing—God has His own signet. It's His own ring. His own mark that He puts on people. It's supposed to lead to assurance. Assurance. And it's this.

Maybe on our next slide—yes, there it is. There's this mark. Okay.

Now when he says this, he's talking about this thing. He says the Holy Spirit itself is the deposit. It's the guaranteeing of our inheritance. We wonder, how do we know if we're saved or not? Paul is using this word where he talks about the deposit. It's actually not a religious term at all. He's stealing it from a realtor he used to know. It was commercial real estate language that Paul used straight out of the business world. And it literally means—what it means is it's the earnest money that God has paid for you.

So if you haven't bought a house, or if you forgot how—which I have almost forgot, at least I'm trying to forget, three months ago. So you come to this house, you see one that you like, and you make an offer for it, right? And there's this period of like, who else has made an offer? We don't know. Maybe one or two other people. Hopefully nobody. And we just get it for a super low price. That's what you want, right?

But then a reality starts to set in when your offer is accepted. And not only is it accepted, but you have to do something—I've already used it twice—where you have to pay your earnest money. This is the thing before the down payment that says—what it does, earnest money, and I'm still trying to learn this. I've done it twice now. You'd think I'd know. Earnest money says you're off the market. That nobody else can actually make offers on that house anymore. The offer's been accepted. I am so serious about doing this.

Here's the thing where this analogy breaks down: we usually put a little bit of money towards earnest money. And I want to tell you how much Jesus loves you—is that this: before He ever moved into the house, before He ever got there, He paid for the entire thing. And that is His earnest money. He took one look at you and says, whatever I have to do to get that. That's how sure He is. And His Spirit is the very promise of that desire. It's the real thing. It's the mark on the house. It's the earnest money laid down.

But let me ask you something: do we just assume that we have the Spirit? Most people do. Most people that want assurance—we just assume, oh well, yeah, it's fine, I believe in God intellectually.

This is the process. How do you know if the Spirit is even involved in your life at all? If He's there, how do you know if you have the mark?

Well, I think a little house renovation needs to be in order. I mean character renovation.

Paul talks about this in other areas. In the book of Galatians he even has a spot—at the end of this, towards the end of this book in Ephesians chapter 4—where he talks about a life that looks like it used to and a new life that looks like something completely different. There is a transformation that's actually happening in your life.

And here's the thing: that's even scary to me. Because when I look at my own life, guess what? Nothing's changed when I look a week ago. Sometimes it feels worse, right? In the week's span. Like I'm further from God than I have been. But that's not how fruit grows on trees, right? First off, it's not by the tree's own effort. And it doesn't happen overnight. Or watching this happen—we planted fruit trees before in our house and we'll never get to experience the fruit on them. But I dreamed of the day of just watching every little day, watching those little fruit grow. Have you ever tried to watch a piece of fruit grow every day?

No? No, it's for crazy people, okay? Because you won't see anything. There's no difference in the day-to-day life of a piece of fruit. But if you come back to it a month later, that looks a lot different. You come back to it as the tree matures—or whatever you want to take as your analogy—it looks a lot different as it continues maturing and continue changing. Your life will change. You are being disciplined by something. You are putting your life into something. In what direction are you going? And if you look behind you—I look at my life ten years ago: thank You, Jesus. I look at my life two weeks ago: I'm like, thank You, Jesus, but You need to work a little harder, right?

I think we need to sense God's presence from time to time. That was my answer to the kids, by the way, that comes up. I think there's moments where God left me a trail of breadcrumbs.

There's something called the intuitive—nah, I'm not even going to say the words. It doesn't matter. Here's the ideas, the concepts. When we look at marriage, okay, or a deep relationship—let's talk about marriage for a minute. There's one aspect. How do you know you're married? You got this document that's hidden in the cupboard somewhere in a folder that you signed like years ago. And you got those pictures on the wall that felt good when you took them. That's how you know you're married, right?

[Laughter]

You're laughing because those of you that have been married long enough know that sometimes marriage is just like that, okay? I signed that document. I'm sticking with you, okay? And then there's other moments where you just know you're married. Where things are so special, where things are connected, and you don't have to explain it—you feel it.

And I believe that our relationship with God actually follows both of these suits. That there are some times where it feels a little grindy. Where it feels like, man, I don't know where You're at. I haven't felt You in a long time. But I also believe that needs to translate to something where you experience His presence on a regular basis. And by regular basis, I mean, I'm not going to define that for you. I will say there are a few times a year where I feel lost. It happens every year. In fact, I'm coming out of one of those places right now, and it happens every single year, multiple times, where I go, God, I haven't felt Your presence. I need You. I want You. I've done the daily routines that we always do, and yet somehow there isn't something there. And I will just tell you that when eventually—it's not the day I pray that prayer, but eventually—He shows up.

And at one o'clock this morning—I'm not going to tell that story. All right. But let me just tell you that that—

Oh, man, I want to tell the story. I don't want to sound like a crazy person either, so I'm not going to tell the story. No, I'm not. No, I've decided. No, I love you all too much to share. What happens at 1 a.m. when I wake up with Jesus? Nope. Actually usually I cave at this point, but I'm not going to cave today. I'm not going to cave today.

But some people have a different experience than me. But mine is largely this: that He shows up and He leaves me a breadcrumb trail that says I'm still got you. I'm still with you. My presence is still here. And sometimes it feels in those moments—sometimes it's so overwhelming that it's like everything else, all my other things that I look to for security and assurances—and no matter what it is—they just stop mattering. Because there's something so much better. Something that this world cannot satisfy. And a peace that surpasses all human comprehension that comes into my life and guards my heart. I believe that we actually need this experience from time to time to know. There can't just be some intellectual thing that we accept and that I apply to Christian tenets or whatever it is. You need to have the presence of God in your life and actively moving. And sometimes I don't know what that looks like for you, but I know what it looks like for me. And I know if there's a God big enough in heaven to create you, He can find a way to communicate with you in a way that you can hear it.

I need assurance consistently. And my security needs to come from that one thing. From that connection with Him. But you know what I'm most assured? When I'm most assured in life is not just when I'm experiencing that, but when I hear the stories of all of you and how you're experiencing God's presence and the crazy stuff that He's doing in your lives.

The next chapter of Ephesians talks about this. It says:

In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

Have you ever been a part of a community where it's actually living that out? I actually haven't. Not a big community. But I'm starting to see it show up in little places here. And it's incredible. And I'm just wondering, what if that was our entire church—where we start living out this? When we start seeing the Spirit at work in our lives, and He's moving not just in our own personal lives, but He's moving in our church. I do feel like that's happening here.

Paul talks about this at the end of the chapter, and he says this is what keeps unity:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

And I want to notice what Paul says. He never says create unity. It's not up for you to create the unity. He says the Spirit will actually create that all in itself. Even though you guys are so different, you have different political views, you have different—you name it—you could be different and you can still have unity because we have that one thing. Because the Spirit of the living God actually rests in this place and He brings us together and we can be present with one another and put everything else to the side because He is here with us.

Here's the one thing about our house. If we show the last house picture. The sellers chose us. Before we ever got the keys, they had already decided that that was going to be the situation that was going to happen—we were going to have the house. And that's the gospel. That's the good news in a nutshell: God decided first. He chose you before you were even born. He chose you. The question is,

will we do this? Will we open our lives to Him and hand Him the keys so that He can come live in a place?

That is easier said than done. When everything in this life teaches us to be self-sufficient and support ourselves and to watch else for yourself because nobody else is going to do that, God is telling you to do this. And unity is what happens when a whole church does that. When a whole church full of people does that with the same owner of the house, by the way—same Spirit walking in every hallway, in every place.

Do we have assurance? Can you have assurance? This is typically gone unanswered in the Seventh-day Adventist circle. We don't know. But Paul is telling us right here, it is yours to have, and here's how you get it. That assurance is there.

Last week you heard a story. And I am sure that I'm going to see that little girl. As sure as the sunlight comes up, I am sure I'm going to see that little girl again. And I can't wait. And I'm not sure just because it's some conceptual thing in my mind. I'm sure because God's presence has spoken this into my life. And I'm sure that He exists, that He sits on His throne, and that He has conquered death forever. And I get to share a piece of that pie of eternal life right now, right here in this place. And that is the very thing that bonds us and keeps us with one another. Can we try this, you guys?

Even if it's scary—opening our door of our heart, whatever we want to call it, to Jesus and actually allowing Him control. As scary as it is, let me have prayer for us.

Jesus, if we need one thing, that's it. We need assurance—not just in our mind that You are real, but we need to experience Your presence and find out what that even looks like. Because my fear is this, Lord: that most people that are subscribed to Christianity in the belief system and the tenets have never really experienced Your presence in life. And I pray that to be banished from this church—that Your presence is the very thing that unifies us. Stronger than any other belief system is that Your presence, experientially also, but the knowledge base of who You are, Lord—it is the very thing that binds us, that keeps us together, because little things will fall away, Lord. They just won't matter. The little things that become big things, Lord, they need to stay little. And we need to focus on that one thing. Thank You, Jesus, for a church that is seeking You, that wants You. Help us to know how to do that. In Your name, amen.