

Swipe Left

By Jake Wilkinson

Series: Presence With: One Another

Just think about that church.

That looks a little too charismatic for me. You know what I'm saying? No, not that one.

Gentlemen. Gentlemen.

A bunch of ladies here in church. We know that's what gets us to come to church when we're single, right?

No, not that one.

Ladies—

This has never gone wrong before, right?

No, not that one. Not that one.

Seems kind of young. I'm more into the multi-generational church. Not that one.

Uh—no. I choose life. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Oh Lord.

No.

Not that one. Oh dear Lord.

No. Oh my goodness.

Save us, dear Jesus—is there a church out there for me?

Acts chapter 2, starting in verse 41. It says:

That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles. And all the believers lived in wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

That's the church you signed up for, right?

That's the church I signed up for. Where did it go? Oh, that's all right.

This is what we signed up for when we decided that we wanted to be a part of a community of believers that were worshiping Jesus together. That is what you signed up for, isn't it?

That's what we want.

And that's what the heart—I think—of what the Spirit can actually do within a body of people when we let the Spirit take over.

Well, let's go get it.

You can all go home now.

Here's the problem: two chapters, three chapters later in the Bible—Acts chapter 5—we get a couple that's stealing from the church, and they're killed for it. And then the very next chapter—and maybe this one is more of the important one—we have a group of old ladies, people's grandmothers by the way, that are going home hungry from church—from *that* church. They're going home hungry because they came with a different accent, because they're from another country. They had a different race to them. It's the same church. It's not long until you get to this really, really messy aspect of church where someone's grandma is going home hungry just because people don't like how they are. Something about them.

And when we say we want to get back to the early church—we need to get back to Pentecost, the day of Pentecost, right?—we see that those moments are short-lived.

I don't think we're wrong for wanting that, by the way. It's good to want those things. But I think sometimes we look for that highlight reel and we look for that to be reality. It's far from reality of the church—at least the long-term reality.

Bonhoeffer—Dietrich Bonhoeffer—he helps us here. Now, in this moment in life when he's writing this, he writes this at a time where he is just a few years away from execution. And his small group, his home church, is about twenty-five people. You don't need a big church to make a big impact, right?

He's got twenty-five people, and they're underground, and they're hiding from Nazi Germany, and they're doing their thing.

And we see he says something here to us. He starts talking about finding—about facing the disillusionment within a community. We look for the wonderful things in a community and not face the ugly and unhappy things, and we actually avoid those things. And then he says, the sooner we get to the shock of what community actually is—that it's hard, it's ugly, and it's difficult—he says, the better. And he says if we don't actually get to that shock, if we don't actually get to that moment, we risk losing community altogether permanently, because you won't actually find it. And I'm going to pick up where he says this. He says:

Sooner or later, it will collapse. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive.

Did you hear that? Then he says this:

He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter.

Easy.

Even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

This isn't a man that's being cynical and negative about things. It's a man who's actually dealing with that real thing right then, right there, in his twenty-five-person little house church. It's so easy to idealize community. We talk about this in our culture, in our community, all the time. "I want community. We want community." Are we willing to pay the price—the sacrifice—for that?

I think sometimes we don't just idealize community—we can idolize community.

Like in Acts chapter 2, we put all of our yearnings and our desires that our siblings, our parents, our friends never gave us. And we put all of our desires, and we hope we're going to find that in the church, right?

We put our need for love and acceptance—we put that on the church—and I promise you, you will be disappointed.

Accept it, Summit.

Not because it didn't live up to something it was supposed to do, but because we have a skewed view of what community—what that actually looked like, what a family dynamic actually looks like. We have false expectations headed into it in the first place. We do this with romantic relationships in our culture as well. We romanticize our romantic relationships.

And then we find out that it's full of a bunch of people. And we don't even like them.

You know? They're annoying and they say things at the wrong time and I'm embarrassed and I don't even know. They dress weird and maybe smell funny.

And so it's at this moment that often many people—what do we do? We bounce.

Wow. It wasn't what I thought it was. That church over there—it wasn't what they say they are. We're out of here.

And we move on to the next community and the next community and the next community, thinking and believing that that community might fit our felt need.

And we find out community is more like the Corinthian church more than it is Acts chapter 2. Let's read the first four verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Hang on.

Well, right now, friends, I am completely frustrated by your unspiritual dealings with each other and with God. You're acting like infants in relation to Christ, capable of nothing more than nursing at the breast. Well then, I'll nurse you since you don't seem capable of anything more. As long as you grab for what makes you feel good or makes you look important, you're really no different than a babe at the breast—content only when everything's going your way. When one of you says, "I'm on Paul's side," and another says, "I'm for Apollos," aren't you being totally childish?

Now, I want to acknowledge something. You see, he addresses them, first and foremost, as a family—not as a social club who does fun things together. I like that. It's not about going to play pickleball together or basketball together or fishing. I'm calling myself out here, right? But all those things are great, and you should do them, but they'll never provide for you the depth a family will.

And what is the imagery he uses here? It's kind of gross, and I think he's being—it's like shocking stuff, right? This is an adult who is still nursing at his mother's breast.

And he says you should be further along than you are. You're living in your flesh. You're living in your worldly desires, to put it in biblical terms. In other words, you're more like the culture around you than you are the God that you claim to follow.

Exactly.

They were doing whatever they felt like. They had no boundaries in their lives. They were sleeping together. There was one man sleeping with his mother-in-law. They had cult—the men were going out with cult prostitutes. And we don't do that in Idaho. That's a Washington thing, right?

Sorry for those of you that made the commute.

My mother is here, by the way, and she's counting.

They were suing each other. There was all sorts of stuff going on in the Corinthian church that he was like, you're acting like infants. But the very thing he pulls up right here is actually none of those things. He lists them later on in the book. But the first thing he brings up in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, he says some follow Paul and some follow Apollos. And what he's describing is something that we call factionalism.

Or creating factions. There's divisions within the church, and you're dividing it over people that you think are more spiritual or better than others. This is really reminiscent to today's political structure and how we do this. Which, by the way, should be really low on our priority list, by the way.

[Congregation responds]

Thank you. One yes. Thanks, David. I work with him.

But this mirrors our political affiliations. But what he's saying is this has actually happened in the church. And if we were here today, I think he would say all the enemy has to do is either take a blue rattle out or a red rattle out. And he's like, here you go. And we're just enamored. We're completely enthralled with this little rattle. And he's like, this is an infancy.

You're not supposed to still be here.

Now Paul takes it and he goes—here's the thing: it's not just a political thing. This is something we do even on the religious side of things. Paul is somebody's favorite preacher, and let me tell you there is no better stroke of the ego than that—"You're the best we've ever heard."

I know.

And that's the part I can't get past here, because he's got a fan section in Corinth and he's not flattered by it at all. He's frustrated by it.

Because he knows what it does. It turns a family into an audience and it divides people.

We are living in a day and age of celebrity pastors, and we follow this around and we're excited about this—and it needs to die.

This dividing—this dividing—and it makes us look like little infants. And who would want to be involved in that?

And then there's this thing we do when we're divided, or we don't like, you know, the celebrity pastor at this one church, or we don't like the music that's changed or the preaching got too long, or they

didn't get the position that they wanted, or someone said something offensive and the kids' program isn't what it was. And then we go and we go find another one, thinking that that's going to solve the problem.

And listen, I want to say this. I'm the beneficiary. I think we are the beneficiary of this mentality. Right now, anyway. And we'll see.

Some of you are here because you left somewhere else, and I'm not going to pretend like I don't like that.

But this is what I hear people say sometimes. They go—the actual words sometimes—"Well, I wasn't being fed."

What does that sound like?

That's not the complaint of a starving old woman. That is the complaint of a baby reaching for more milk.

Which is the exact thing that Paul said—that we just figured out how to leave, and then we called it maturity. "That wasn't feeding us," until we go somewhere else.

If you rely on your church—on your church time for an hour a week—if you rely on this time for your spiritual growth, you will remain a spiritual infant for your entire life.

[Congregation responds]

A couple of amens over there. A lot of groaning.

It needs to be something actually more.

John Mark Comer—super helpful in this altogether—but he talks about a cycle similar to dating that we go through with our church hopping, with finding a community. And this is about what it means to be present with each other—present together. It's not just being here in one moment together.

He talks about this. He talks about a honeymoon stage that we have, if we can pull that up. And this is like our first, you know, dating experience.

Y'all know what that—well, some of you know what that's like, right? Some of you are there right now. Single people are like, yes, it's like amazing. You can't see anything wrong. You've got the rose-colored glasses. It's like, I think I'm in love, right? If you have no idea who this person really is, then it's like a euphoria, and we have this. And by the way—by the way—I hope we're still, some of us are still here right now in this church. We're still on that stage. Stay there for a little while. It's very pleasant. Everything's good. Because then we get to this stage, okay? And then we get to the apathy stage where people get annoying. The pastor isn't special. And I want to tell you that this is exactly where we need to get.

This is the crux of your spiritual growth of Christianity as a whole—is in the apathy stage. It will make or break you, not the honeymoon phase. We don't do it for the vibes or the energy. You do it for this, actually, because it's this moment where you get to decide whether I stay or whether I go. You can go and still sit in this church. Okay? You can completely withdraw and say, this is not for me. This person hurt me. I don't like that. I don't like the whole thing. I'm just going to go to church because there's—well, there's nowhere else. There's no other Summit. It's true. We're the best. But there isn't. And there might not be another Summit, but we can stay here and stay removed from the community as a whole, and you will never spiritually grow—because this is it for us. Excuse me. This is not

where changing and transforming takes place—is me talking to you for thirty-five minutes on a Saturday morning, or even that amazing worship service we just had.

It feels transformational in the moment, but that's not where it takes place.

Apathy is this moment where we want to change, we want other people to change, and we actually want other people to change even more than we want to change, you know?

And this is the point where people bail. They swipe left.

It's next—it's on to the next one. Let's romanticize this more and find somebody that looks like they're going to fit our felt need. And this is the moment that a community or a relationship no longer meets their needs and it's time to leave and sometime find another church. Now there's more on that. There is a time to leave a church, by the way. There is a time to leave a community. Not so much on that today. I think there's good reasons, actually, to leave a community. But I will say this: err on the side of staying way too long.

Not too short. And when you leave, you don't have to make it messy.

And don't make the decision alone.

And then we have something that pops up after apathy. If we make it through, we make it to this, and we go—we want—we're going to stay through this apathy phase. We have this thing where—well, we continue this cycle—

Yes, thank you. I forgot to bring that up. Thank you.

But the next cycle after this one—we keep this going, and this is an ever-occurring cycle. We make it through the apathy stage and we actually stay, and this is where something will happen where we re-engage with people, we re-engage with the community. And actually I want to tell you something: that this is exactly what's supposed to happen. This is a cycle that God uses with broken humanity where we don't like this stage. We don't want to stay in this stage. We don't want anything to do with this stage. But we get to this and it leads to that. And that's what you want.

This cycle of tearing our body—this works in our bodies too. We tear our muscles down slightly and then we regenerate. And this is true with our social muscle as well. This is true about being present with one another. You need to not like each other for a little while. It's actually really important.

And there's this thing that we're going to talk about for probably close to two months called forgiveness, and I think it is the basis of all human relationships, by the way, because sometimes we're stinky.

Was that too cheesy? I'll hear about it later.

This doesn't happen—transformation doesn't happen—if we move every year or two, if we move on to the next thing and get a better job in this area and get this other community. And the grass is always greener, you guys. It's always greener, and it never provides what you really want in life, I will tell you. This is the deepest desire: it's for people to see the real you—maybe not even like you—and they stay. And we don't jump ship. And we stay through the awkward conversations and the things that we don't want to talk about. And we get to a level of depth that you are desiring, because every human desires that. That's what being present does for us. Being present with one another. Joseph Hellerman talks about this. He says long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible—the very thing that forms genuine progress in the Christian life.

People who stay grow, and people who leave—they don't grow. And we treat our biggest spiritual growth is often like sometimes our one-on-one time with God, which is great. People don't replace that. We sometimes treat the sermon time or the worship time as the number one thing for our growth, but we just went over that—but that's not actually the very thing that's going to grow us. It's actually being present with one another and staying. I think in all ages this is incredibly difficult, and it's becoming more and more difficult, but I also believe that it will become, in an age of AI, of artificial world, real relationships will become the most important thing that we can provide as a church.

Church will be relevant. It will stay relevant, I promise, when this is the thing that we focus on—when we stay.

There's one of the oldest—we talk about, can I—we kind of tore the Catholic Church down early on. Can we build them back up a little bit? I know we're Seventh-day Adventists—we should tear them down, right? I get it.

One of the oldest Catholic monastic orders is the Benedictine order. And you join this order and you take a number of vows, but one of them is called the vow of stability. Not just to remain in the order, but to remain in the community until you die.

You don't ever move. You're not allowed to, and this is a promise that you make with your entire life. It's a group of nuns, actually. And this is part of their vow: that we live together, we pray together, we work together, and we relax together.

The Benedictine order vow—stability—it says this.

In a second here. Yes, here we go. We give up the temptation to move from place to place in search of an ideal situation.

Ultimately, there is no escape from oneself.

The idea that things will get better someplace else is ultimately just an illusion.

This is when interpersonal conflicts arise, we have a great incentive to work things out and to restore peace. This means learning the practices of love: acknowledging one's offensive behaviors, giving up our own preferences, and even forgiving.

Now, I'm not asking us to take a Catholic vow and all become living in the same place and vowing to die in the same place. But what I am suggesting—and I think the Bible is inviting us to do this—I think God wants this for us. Today, taking a vow or taking a promise or moving into that space where you feel like you have no way out can feel like joining a cult.

But in reality, it is the very thing your heart desires the most.

I think it's the answer.

I have a basketball group that I get together with and we play on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. I don't really know any of the guys except for maybe one. They got locked out of the gym on a Sunday morning when we decided to play them.

And we were standing around there for like an hour. And I remember there was like this acknowledgement that you're another human being.

It was like, usually we just sit there and we play basketball and we, you know, talk at each other. And we get all of our testosterone out, and we hug it out afterwards—sometimes the next week—because it gets a little dicey.

But there's this genuine acknowledgement that you're a real human being, and you recognize something. Someone called it like men's group—next week's men's group.

But I want to say something. Recently, someone suggested that I come to a Bible study with them, and I was excited about it, and I said yes to it before realizing what morning it fell on.

And I found myself on Tuesday mornings going to a Bible study instead of basketball, and I remember the first week I was really wishing—

You already know. But I want to say this: that was one of the best mistakes I've made since I've been here as far as double-booking myself, and I attend the Bible study. And I want to say this: that we're finding something in that group that you cannot possibly find with a group of strangers, even playing a casual sport that is fun, that is great. But there is a need that is provided there that cannot be found anywhere else.

When you get this depth of relationship—when you start to be vulnerable with something, someone—and have this thing start to take place in your life, there is nothing—a sport, or anything that is like, I just need to get away and do something—that that can provide. It just won't.

And it's not that I'm giving up basketball, and it's not because it's better than basketball, because there's, you know, I need to run, and I'm not one of these psychopaths who does that for fun.

But here's the thing: it's just not the same thing. It's not close, and it will never be, because God designed us to be vulnerable and in close connection with each other.

That can't even happen in this room on Saturday morning. It's impossible. We have to take that next step.

And it's frustrating because sometimes we've reached out and we've failed. And I'm saying: don't give up on that.

Don't give up on each other and figure out a way and keep trying, because it is here and it is possible to have those deep relationships.

When we say we want to be like the early church—fine, let's go be like the early church—but realize that it's chapter 6, not chapter 2, really. It's the old nuns that—I mean, nuns, I'm stuck on this. It's the old ladies that go home without food and you say, wait a second. And they sit there and they deal with each other and they moved on. They got through it together. They recognized who was wrong. They forgave. They moved on.

That's the one. That's the community that's actually available to us.

We stay. We embrace the difficulty of deep relationships. We embrace the difficulty of our self-changing, self-transformation.

It takes sacrifices, but it's taking the vow into our own hearts to not go back to shallow relationships only.

To rebel against our cultural norms of leaving, and we end up staying instead of swiping left. Let's pray together.

Jesus, Lord, we love to jump ship.

It's a cultural thing, but it's been a thing for actually a long time—of not wanting to deal with other people's garbage, even though You sit and You deal with ours, and we want that.

Speak to our hearts, Lord. Speak to our souls. Help us to recognize the power of staying when everything we want feels like it's pulling us away. Recognize that it is found within a community who loves You and You are the center of our lives—and that there is forgiveness, there is love, and there is a building block for actually your own spiritual growth in the moment when you want to walk away the most.

Save us from ourselves, Lord.

Help us to be present with one another. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.