

Show Up. Repeatedly. On Purpose.

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[0 : 00] So tonight's message, it's pretty simple. It's a scripture, two metaphors, and then a challenge. A scripture, two metaphors, and then a challenge. So let's start with the scripture.

If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn it on, flip it open, in the book of Ephesians chapter 2, verse 22. And for the past few weeks, we've been talking about this question of why do we gather?

Why do we show up in spaces like these, or in small groups in our homes, or why do we turn to the tablechurch.online.church, or wherever you go for Christian spiritual nourishment?

Why do we do that? And so we've talked about sociological concepts like proxemics, the idea that there are different spaces that do different things to us psychologically and sociologically. We talked about the things that we do when we gather, and how we build each other up, and how we point to the love of Christ, to those who believe and to those who don't believe.

We talked about Eucharist, and we talked about fellowship. We've talked about a lot of things, and I want to point out one more thing this week, as we wrap up this series. Ephesians 2, 22, says this, Paul writing to a church, In Christ, you are being built to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

[1 : 19] I'll read it again. In Christ, you are being built to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Now, if you've been part of the church or Christianity, some sort of, you know, faith like that, the words like these may just kind of glance off of you. Like, I'm in a room right now with a bunch of tired people who are all just like scrolling on a phone.

I know when I watch this sermon in a couple days, I'm going to be probably like on my laptop doing the same thing. And so we hear words like this, and we're like, yeah, yeah, I know. The Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Great. But like, I don't know, if you put on like your spiritual guru hat and tried to like start a new religion, and you declared like, hey, friends, God lives inside of you, like you could go put a book on like a bestseller list.

You could get it promoted by Oprah. You could make a lot of money. This is like mind-blowing stuff that someone could claim that the creator of the universe, the being, the source of everything that holds everything together resides inside of you.

[2 : 22] Like, this is huge, huge news. And this is like, we're used to it. This is like, you know, every other verse in scripture says something like this.

And so we're kind of, you know, over it. But this is massive stuff, massive implications that said like you, the created person, flesh and bone, and you get sick and you get tired, and you don't like your job, and you don't like your in-laws, and you're tired of your neighbors, and you really like curry, and you really like bubble gum, whatever, like all the things that make you you.

You are the dwelling place, the temple, the residing place, the living room of God.
G-A-W-D. God lives in you.

Now, here's the thing I want you to notice about this verse, and then we'll turn to our metaphors. It says, The you in the original language is plural.

The you is plural. It's, as our southern brothers and sisters would say, y'all, you-ins, all y'all, you guys, as us northerners like to say.

[3 : 35] In Christ, you all are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by God's Spirit.

And so, we think about our faith often in very individualistic, personalized kind of ways. Jesus is my personal Savior. I have a personal relationship with God.

When I feel close to God, it's just me and Jesus. And you know what? That's important. Like, we see in Scripture, even Jesus would walk away from the crowds. He would get by himself, just himself and his Father.

And they would spend time together, just the two of them. A personal relationship with Jesus is important. Don't get me wrong. But, most of the time in the New Testament, when we read this kind of language, that you are the dwelling place of the creator of all, it's talking about a group of people.

You can't be the dwelling place of God unless you're doing it with other dwelling places of God. It's a communal thing. It's a thing that we do together.

[4 : 44] It's a thing that we can't just do on our own. And that flies in the face of our very, oftentimes, white, individualistic, Western religion. But the original writers of this book, of the people who are experiencing God and Jesus in brand new ways, are saying, no, no, no, no, no, no.

You can't do this by yourself. If you want to be the dwelling place of creator of everything, you've got to do it with a crowd. You've got to do it with some friends. So, two metaphors.

I'm going to ask the people in this room to pay attention to me for a second. Name me some of your favorite TV shows about a group of friends. Favorite TV shows about a group of friends.

Friends. Friends. Classic. Any others? What? How I Met Your Mother, which is basically new girl. Stranger Things.

Yep, yep, yep. Group of friends. Any others? Community, office, parks and rec. Does the office count? I mean, workplace proximity associates.

[5 : 51] Yeah. Yeah. Okay, okay. So, pick your favorite show. You can put it in the chat if you're on there. Pick your favorite show about a group of friends. And it's a television show, and so, you know, they get together, like, every single week, and they're in the same place, hanging out.

Now, imagine that in this favorite show of yours, there's also another character named, let's name him Marcus. Okay? Now, Marcus only shows up, like, once or twice in the entire run of the show.

And when Marcus shows up, he's like, dude, guys, you're all my best friends. I love you. And then he disappears for, like, three more seasons. Okay? That's Marcus. Now, if you were to be asked, like, who's your favorite character in your favorite show, you're probably not going to be like Marcus, because Marcus never shows up.

He shows up occasionally. He says some really weird things like, you know, I don't go to the friend group. I am the friend group. I don't go to family. I am the family. And you're just like, Marcus, what are you talking about, dude?

Okay. Now, I actually had some friendships like this. Like, I had some college friends, me and four other guys. And, like, we still get together on Zoom, like, every other week or once a month and chat, talk it up.

[7 : 02] And, like, back in college, there was this other person. I'm not going to name them just in case they're watching. Hello. And, like, they would show up, like, at our cafeteria table or whatever. And they'd be just like, and they said this one time.

We all just kind of looked at each other like, you guys are my best friends. We were like, dude, this is, like, the first time you've ever sat with us. What's going on? And then he disappeared.

We wouldn't see him again until, like, our senior year or whatever. Now, when we talk about family friendship groups, we wouldn't say things like, you know, I don't go to family functions.

I just am part of the family. And I guess that's true. Like, if you had a family relationship, you know, mom, dad, brothers, sisters, and they were meeting on a regular basis. They had reunions. They had, like, Sunday dinner or whatever.

And you said, like, you know, that's not really my thing. So I'm just going to go over here. That's fine. You can make that choice. No one's going to stop you. I mean, maybe your mom is going to get upset, but whatever.

[7 : 59] But the rest of the family is going to be like, man, I really miss you. I wish you would show up. You're like, well, you know, I don't go to family. I just am family.

Like, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's true. But if you were part of the family and you felt that way, wouldn't you come? Now, we hear things like, you know, I don't go to church. I am the church.

Like, yeah, I suppose that's true. But that puts, like, this massive dichotomy, this massive space between doing and being. That, like, I can be something, but it's not actually going to affect my actions.

I can be part of the church, but I'm not going to do churchy things. And some of us, many of us, we have lots of reasons to feel that way. We've been hurt, abused, wounded by church and church people.

And so we make all as much space as we possibly can. And now we're in this season, this pandemic, which is basically saying, like, that go to church thing that you used to do and you kind of didn't like because you have this past.

[8 : 59] Like, definitely don't do that anymore because you're going to make each other sick and other people sick. And you're like, woo, finally, I don't have to do church. I can just be church by myself. But that's not how being and doing works.

Being and doing usually have to come together at some point. I could say, man, I don't go to the gym. I'm just a fit person. Like, well, eventually you've got to go to the gym. And that's how Jesus and that's how the early church saw the relationship between Jesus' people and the church.

Jesus was the one who said, like, on this rock, on this declaration of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed, the Son of God, the King of the world. On that declaration, I will build my church, Jesus says.

And the first century disciples turned to the book of Acts. What did they start doing? They started doing the exact same thing that Jesus was doing on a regular basis. He would gather a big crowd. He would teach them in parables.

He would try to get as many people, communicate to as many people as he possibly could. He would get on a boat. He would back up in the boat onto a sea so he could teach this amphitheater worth of people.

[10 : 03] He would teach to as many people as he possibly could. Thousands of people, crowds. And then the people who were interested, they would follow Jesus back into the oikos, the home. And they would say, you know, you just taught that, but I don't know what it means.

Could you tell me more? And Jesus would say, sure. And so the first century disciples in the book of Acts, they would do the same thing. They would gather in the temple, this massive multi-football-fueled space, gather crowds, teach. And then for those who were interested, they would go into the oikos, the home.

They would hear more about this Jesus and this King of the world who was making all things new. And so the doing and the being came together. One more metaphor.

I've got a wife. Her name is Emily. And when we met in college, she, and to this day, still is really into musical theater. Loves. I see some heads shooting up in this live space right now.

Musical theater, very important to her. She was like part of like a dance choir in high school. She would like go to plays and musicals in Chicago because that was what was nearby. And so when we started to like become friends and then eventually romantically entangled, she would want to do that kind of thing too with me.

[11 : 12] Now, I've got some options. I could say, you know, Emily, there are other ways I would prefer to get to know you other than this particular hobby. And Emily could say, okay, I guess that's fine.

But I, at that point, am intentionally putting up this wall, this barrier to getting to know the person who now is my wife. Now, musical theater is not like the only thing that Emily cares about.

It's one of the things. And I can make this choice about like, I'm not going to get involved. I'm not going to get interested. And she can do without what she will. Now, that didn't happen. I now also really appreciate musical theater and can't wait for the day when it opens up again.

But I made that choice. I got interested in what she was interested in. And that grew us together as a couple. Now, you've got this person, Jesus. Jesus shows up in the pages of scripture.

And what does Jesus start doing? He starts gathering people in crowds and in small groups, in public spaces, and in transparent, personal spaces. He starts teaching them about God and his love and his forgiveness and his grace and his mercy.

[12 : 23] Now, that transforms us from the inside out. Now, again, I could make a choice. I could say like, well, Jesus, I know you did that.

I know that was like your primary method of ministry. But it's not really for me. So I'm just going to do like my own personal religion thing with nobody else by myself. You could do that.

And guess what? Jesus is still going to love you. He's still going to accept you. He's still going to forgive you. He's still going to offer all of the benefits of relationship with Jesus to you. But there's also going to be this barrier to being involved and part of everything that Jesus had to offer.

The first century church in the books of Acts, they looked at what Jesus did and they kept doing it. Now, again, don't get me wrong. We've messed it up a lot of different ways. And we've probably made it overly complicated.

And we've probably hurt a lot of people because we've tried to tie them down to institutionalize religion. You know what? I can preach a whole other sermon about the evils of institutionalized religion if you want me to.

[13 : 25] But it's also religion that got passed down from generation to generation because of places like this that I have to thank for even knowing who Jesus is.

And so I can't just reject the institution without also a little bit of gratitude for them passing on what it is that I'm trying to reject in the first place and like accepting what's so good about Jesus in the first place.

So a scripture, two metaphors, and then a challenge. If we intend to grow, we intend to grow in Christlikeness and looking more like God and God's spirit, what the New Testament calls the fruit of the spirit of being gentle and patient and self-controlled and all of that.

It seems to me that the primary method shown to us in scripture is through gathering. gathering in places like this, gathering in small groups and homes, and in the meanwhile, gathering on online communities like we're doing right now.

That seems to me to be the primary method of how growth happens. Now, it's hard and it's not instant.

[14 : 47] It takes time. And you know what? Sometimes people suck and we don't like them. But I don't think that's an excuse to say, I'm going to be the church but not do the church.

I'm going to be Christlike but not do the things that actually form me into Christlikeness. And so the challenge is this. Show up repeatedly on purpose.

If we want to grow, if we want to trend our lives towards Christlikeness, then we need to show up repeatedly on purpose.

Show up. You know the aphorism. 90% of success is just showing up. The other 10% is pick your thing, wearing clothes, whatever. Like, show up and see what happens with a sense of hope and expectancy and maybe a little tiny bit of optimism.

Repeatedly. It's not going to happen once. You're not going to show up once on a Sunday or once in a small group and be like, man, I am just mastered everything there is to life.

[15 : 48] Like, I'm sorry. That's not how it works. You've got to show up again and again and again and again. And when someone bugs you, you forgive them. And when you bug them, they forgive you.

And then you show up again and again and again. So you show up repeatedly on purpose. You show up with a plan. You show up with intentionality. You don't get strong on accident. You don't become a faster runner on accident.

You don't get fit on accident. You don't become more Christ-like on accident. And so you show up repeatedly on purpose so that we can become people who are known by being more loving and forgiving and kind and fighting in justice.

That we can be the kinds of people who bring God's will here on earth as it is in heaven. So, a scripture. In Christ, you, you all, all you all are being built together to become a dwelling which God lives by his spirit.

Two metaphors. Don't be a Marcus. Don't just show up once every once in a while and say like, oh, you all are my best friends. Peace out. Don't be a husband that, like, rejects what the spouse, what the significant other loves.

[17 : 03] Like, love what the person you love loves. And then show up repeatedly on purpose.

God, we thank you for your invitation to get to know you. And it seems that the way that you want us to get to know you is to get to know the people you made and you created and redeemed in group settings.

And I tell you what, God, I'm an introvert. People are exhausting. And yet, you invite me to continue to get to know them and to love them. And so, God, I pray that this church, the table church, would be a people known for showing up repeatedly on purpose so that we can show one another kindness and love.

And so that we can show those who don't yet know your love what your love is like. Give us that power and that patience and that perseverance, God. We pray these things in Christ's name.