



Jimmy Witcher:

As many of you know, if you've been at Trinity for very long, this is Zion week. This is the week where we are pursuing God and pursuing God's presence. When you look at Zion all throughout scripture, it always represents the presence of God. Now, Zion, geographically, is a mountain that's inside the city of Jerusalem. David built his house on it. It's also where Jerusalem itself sits. So, in scripture, sometimes Zion is used interchangeably for Jerusalem or for David's palace. But in every case, when Zion is used, it's meant to indicate the place of God's presence. So, we go up to Zion, we pursue Zion, so that we can enter the presence of God.

And every year we have our Zion time together, where we set aside time as a church at the beginning of the year, and it's an opportunity for us to focus. We kind of tithe our time, we're bringing our time to the Lord, but it's also a time of focusing on the Lord, of centering ourselves, and preparing for what God has us for this year. So, I want to encourage you, be a part of what God's doing at Zion this year, be a part of what we're doing as a church.

Now, this year is going to be quite different than in years past. I think Kim and I have been coming to 31 different Zions since we've been a part of Trinity. And usually what we do for Zion is it's kind of a conference style. We have a lot of speakers throughout the evening. And what we've done this year is I've tried to spread out some of those speakers throughout the year. So, we're still going to get that prophetic revelation. We've got this tonight, as a part of Zion, we have Chuck Pierce right here in this room at six o'clock. And so I want to encourage you to be here. Pastor Chuck's amazing, he's been with us for dozens and dozens of years. He starts his year off, it's always an exciting time to hear what he has to say. So, we'll begin that this evening.

And then we're going to go into a time of prayer. And so this Zion is going to be quite different. So, instead of it being a conference style, where we're coming to get, now it's an opportunity for us to be proactive and experience what God's doing. So, here's several things that I'm going to be calling us to as a church.

First of all, I'm calling us to a fast. And so I want to encourage you, we're going to do a seven-day fast, starting today, and going through next Saturday. And so why do we fast? Well, for one, it's instructed in scripture, but really the purpose of the fast is to quiet our bodies, so that we can lean into our spirits and our spirit man can begin to rise up. And so it's a discipline that we do. And I don't know about you guys, but I've had enough fudge and cookies and all... And I need to tell my body, "That's it. We're done. Now I'm in charge, you're not." And so it's a way of quieting it. So, I would encourage you to fast.

Now, there's several different ways to fast. You can just do what we call a Daniel fast, which is where you give up meat. Or you might just skip a meal, you might say, "Okay, I'm not going to do lunch. I'm going to skip lunch and let that just be a time of prayer." Or it could be that you're going to do a whole... Whatever it is, just ask the Lord. I know for me personally, I'm going to be doing protein shakes probably for my morning and my lunch, and then for the evening I'll just have chicken and vegetables, just something real simple just to keep myself going. But I'm quieting my physical body.

But beyond just a physical fast, I also want to encourage us to fast entertainment. There's things that we turn to when we're kind of in those idle moments. So, maybe you pull up your social

media or a little game that you play, and I just want you to know that I think it's time to set those down. This morning, one of the first things I did after I prayed is I deleted all those things off my home screen so they wouldn't be a temptation. So, all my social media, solitaire, all that's gone so that I can be spending time with the Lord.

And so instead of going to those escapism things, we're saying, "No, I'm just going to spend this next time and I'm going to read the Word. I'm going to spend time in God's presence." And I would encourage us to do that as well. Just don't watch TV, put that down if we can. And again, it doesn't mean we're not going to enjoy a football game on the weekend or something, but just let's set aside time. Let's fast. Let this be a time of pursuing God. And when I get into the message, you'll see why that's so important.

So, we're calling us to a fast. I'm also calling us to corporate prayer. And so we have two ways that I would encourage you to participate with us in prayer. And the first one is we're going to send out a corporate prayer each day for seven days. Now, if you're not on the mailing list and you would like to be a part of that, go to tfc.org/subscribe. If you've already downloaded the app and you're running with us, we've already got your email, so you don't have to do that. But if you haven't and you would like to, go on and subscribe. Then right after church, you're going to get kind of an introductory email. This evening, you will get Sunday's prayer, and then for the next six mornings you will get a daily prayer. It's a short little prayer, but here's what I believe.

When we all pray the same prayer together as a congregation, there's something powerful in that. There's something about agreeing in prayer around the same thing. So, it's a very simple way for us to do that. And so I want to encourage you to sign up for that, and then you get those emails. And just be sure to, it won't take you two minutes to sit down, read those scriptures, and then pray that prayer together. Something you might even want to do as a family.

And then the third thing to do is we're going to have corporate prayer live in the West Auditorium here for Hollywood Road, but it'll be live at every campus if you're from another community, at noon each day, Monday through Thursday of this Zion week. And so it's going to be an opportunity for us to come, gather for an hour, and pray. And if you can't make it in person, we're going to broadcast Hollywood Road live online. And so just put in your AirPods, put in your headphones, take time during your lunch, and join us in this corporate prayer time of pursuing God and pursuing His presence.

And then the third thing and the final thing that I have for us on Zion is worship. It's so important that we worship God and we pursue His presence. And so we're going to have a night of worship. It's going to be this coming Wednesday night starting at seven o'clock. It's going to be our normal Family Worship & Prophetic, but it's going to have an emphasis on pursuing God's presence. And I'm so excited, we've got our incredible worship team, as well as Pastor Michael Bethany is going to be with us this week. It's going to be an incredible night of praise. And so I want to encourage you, bring your family. It's a great time to bring family, even the young ones, let them come in. It's a time of family gathering to pursue God's presence. And here's the thing, like I said at the beginning, it's so important this year that we pursue God and we pursue His presence, because it's what's going to lead us into what we need to get through this year, which leads me to my message.

So, my title of my message, this is Zion 2025, Rest in The Storm. Rest in The Storm. And this is a prophetic message. So, let me just bring a quick comment. If you're not used to me giving my

year prophetic message or throughout the year, if I'm giving a prophetic message, I'll usually share this. When I bring you a sermon, usually it's a teaching. In other words, I've got some sort of aspect of scripture that I think is going to bring practical revelation to our lives that, when we engage with it, it's going to help us.

But a prophetic message is a little bit different. In a prophetic message, I have prayed and I've asked the Lord, "What are you doing this year, and what do we need to do to prepare ourselves to be in sync with you this year?" And I believe that this is a year of pursuing the rest of God, pursuing His presence, so that we can experience that rest, even in the middle of the storm. And if you've been with us for a few years, you're going to go back in 19... I'm sorry, not 19, back in 2020, I brought a Zion message. And when I was preparing that message, now remember, this is January of 2020. As I was preparing that message, the Lord dropped in my spirit. He said, "This is going to be a tumultuous decade." And I actually had to look up the word tumultuous. I didn't even know what that meant, but when I looked it up, it's just a clamorous, loud, clanging thing. And I was even a little hesitant to bring that word, but it was what I believe the Lord had given, and so I did.

And of course that was January of 2020. We know in March of 2020 is when COVID hit and everything went crazy. And then in May we had George Floyd and all of the racial tensions of that incident, and it sparked all over the nation. Then we go into 2021, and there was an upheaval in the government and the transition of power that year, and some things that were going on, which I believe God is redeeming this year, but there was some craziness that took place in that year. It was tumultuous. You go into 2022, and 2022 was the greatest year of inflation that any of us have probably seen in our lifetimes. And 2023 had all kinds of chaos, including all the things happening in the Middle East. And then we had 2024, and all the challenges of what went through with 2024. And I don't know about you personally, but for Kim and I, 2024 was probably the most difficult year we've ever had in our lives thus far. And so it was a very challenging year.

And so how many of you, and you don't have to raise your hand, but how many of you, 2024, you were just glad to see it in the rearview mirror? How many? Yeah. Yeah. I don't want to ever say that we want to talk bad about the time that God's given us, but when 2025 hit, Kim and I were just like, "Yahoo, it's over. It's done. That one's in the history books, and I'm glad."

And so as I was praying about this year, and I look at 2025... And I know Pastor Chuck is going to have insight for us tonight, and Rabbi Jason Sobel also will have some revelation. Pastor Rabbi has talked about this being the year of opportunity, year of open windows. And he'll be with us in September, by the way. And so we have a lot of things that I know are very positive. There's a lot of excitement about what God is going to be doing in this year, and I really believe this is an incredible year of advancement.

But when I prayed, this is what I heard the Lord say. "This year is a year of significant advancement filled with challenges." In other words, we experienced a lot of challenges over these last four or five years, and I think the challenges are going to continue. We're going to continue in this tumultuous decade. It's going to be a time of battling, and of difficulty, and things to overcome. And I mean that to be encouraging to you. It's encouraging when we know that this is what is happening for all of us, and it's encouraging to know this is how God is going to lead us through and prepare us. So, it's going to be advancement, but there's going to be some challenges to it.

And the key to success, I believe the Lord is saying, is to rest in His presence in the middle of the storms. This is a skill that we have to get good at. This is something we have to get good at. To get through this year, and to be successful in everything that God has for us, we have to learn to rest in His presence in the middle of the storm. And so let's start as we look. How do we do that? How do we rest in His presence?

So, let's go to Matthew 8. This is where the Lord directed me to begin this message. Matthew 8. Now, this is Jesus and His disciples, and they're in the boat. So, "Then Jesus got into the boat and He started across the lake with His disciples. Suddenly, there was a fierce storm that struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, shouting, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' But Jesus responded, 'Why are you so afraid? You have so little faith.' Then He got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was great calm. The disciples were amazed." Now, I want you to remember this phrase for just a minute. "The disciples were amazed. 'Who is this man?' They asked. 'Even the winds and waves obey Him.'"

Now, this is an incredible story, and I love this story. I love it for several reasons. One is it shows us something about the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is fully God, but He's also fully man. In this story, He's just been ministering in the area around Capernaum, and He's fed the 5,000, He's been healing the sick and the lame, He's been praying for people. He's been working hard, and He's exhausted. And so He gets in the boat, and He just falls down and goes to sleep. So, it gives us a picture of that human side of Jesus. But it's also a great opportunity for us to see something else. It's to see something about Jesus's expectations of us.

Because here's these disciples. Now, these were seasoned lake goers. And I've seen these boats, they actually have some of them that they've picked up and found in the mud in the Sea of Galilee, and they've got one that's preserved. They're not much bigger than we might think of as a good size rowboat. And so you've got 13 men, one of them is asleep in the bottom, that are in this boat trying to cross this big lake. The storm blows up, waves are coming in, and Jesus is fast asleep. And notice that when the disciples finally can't stand it anymore, they're like, "We're going to drown, we're all going to die, and Jesus, you don't seem to care." And so they go and they wake Jesus up. Now, notice Jesus's response.

Or let me just say this. This is what Jesus doesn't do. Jesus doesn't wake up and go, "Oh my goodness, there's a storm! I should do something." What does He do? The very first thing He does, before He rebukes the storm, is He rebukes His disciples. He's not upset about the storm. He's not freaking out over the storm. What He first addresses is the lack of faith of His disciples. And when I say He rebukes them, He's not just getting onto them. I believe this is a coaching moment. He's trying to encourage them. He's going, "What are y'all thinking? Do you really think that my heavenly Father is going to let us all drown, after everything that you've seen? Do you really think this is how it's going to end? Do you really have so little faith? I said, 'Let's go to the other side.' We're going to get to the other side."

Now, He didn't say it's going to be a lovely journey across the lake this evening. It might be a storm, it might be a challenge, it might be a difficulty. So, Jesus has an expectation of us that we endure the storms the same way He does: rest, peace. See, that's why Jesus rebuked them, because all they had to do... Think about this. They're in the presence of God. All they needed to do was look at Jesus and go, "Well, He's not freaking out, why am I freaking out? He's not upset, why am I upset? He's not worried, why am I worried? He doesn't have any cares, why do I have

cares? He thinks we're going to make it, I know we're going to make it." He wanted them to respond that same way. That's why He rebukes them for having such little faith.

Now, there's something else that I see in this story, and that is Jesus, after He rebukes them, He does rebuke the storm, and then "suddenly", it says, suddenly, instantly, the lake goes calm, and the winds and waves die down. Now, my personal opinion is this. That's the reality that Jesus was living in. Jesus was taking a nap on a calm lake while the disciples were living in a storm. And when they got Jesus's perspective, suddenly, everything changed. See, here's what I want us to see. Your circumstances do not define your reality; God does.

Just because your circumstances seem difficult, the circumstances seem challenging, the circumstances are such that we don't have an answer as to how we're going to get out, we don't know where this is going to end, we're out of control. But just because we're out of control doesn't mean God's out of control. Just because we have anxiety doesn't mean God has anxiety. We know God doesn't have anxiety. So, all we have to do is get His perspective. And how do we get His perspective? We get in His presence. We recognize that we're here with the presence of God, and in the presence of God, we can have the rest of God. We don't have to live in that place of anxiety and turmoil, in the middle of the war, in the middle of the battle, in the middle of the challenge, we can rest in it.

And there's a third point that we see in this, and that is this. These men were seasoned fishermen. Most of them were, were seasoned fishermen. Even Matthew grew up there in that area, and was very familiar with the navigating of the lake on a boat. So, this was an area of their expertise. And I think this is where we have to be careful. So often we trust God easily in the areas where we know we have weakness, but in the areas where we really have expertise, sometimes we don't trust God as much. We trust ourselves more. And then when we find ourselves in the middle of the storm, we're shocked to know, "Oh God, oh, you have authority over this too? Oh, you can change this too? You're not limited?"

See, they thought God's power was limited. They'd seen all the miracles, they'd seen all the healings, they'd seen the multiplication of food, but it shocked them that he also controlled nature, the winds and waves. They thought His power was limited. See, that's what happens when we get an anxiety and worry and strife and we're focused on the storm, we think God's power must be limited because we're focused on the wrong thing. We're focused on the challenge and the difficulty, we're not focused on the presence of God. Which, in their case, was asleep in the bottom of the boat. When we shift our focus to the presence of God, we enter into the rest of God. And that's a skill we have to learn.

That's why we're doing Zion differently this year. That's why we're doing these prayer times, that's why we're doing the worship time, that's why we're... Because we've got to learn to activate within us the skills of entering into God's presence on a daily basis. First thing when we get up, engaging with Him, engaging with Him at noon, engaging with Him in the worship night, engaging with Him so that we can rest in His presence.

My first point is this: God's presence changes everything, and learning to rest continually in His presence this year is critical. This is a critical skill for us to learn, to shift into focusing on God's presence. All right? Let's go to Exodus 33. I want us to see this pattern and how it develops throughout scripture. In Exodus 33, we've got Moses, and He's led the Israelites out of Egypt as slaves. They've been on Mount Sinai, the 10 Commandments have been proclaimed. Moses and Joshua had been up on Mount Sinai, getting the Word of the Lord. And while they were gone for

the 40 days, the Israelites sinned and they built the golden calf. And then Moses and Joshua come down, they run through the camp, the Levites come through and they're killing people in the camp to calm them down. They get order back again. And then, all of a sudden, they're about to regroup and try this again. And that's where we pick up the story in Exodus 33:1.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Get going, you and the people you brought up from the land of Egypt. Go up to the land I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I told them, "I will give this land to your descendants." And then I will send an angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Go up to this land that flows with milk and honey.'" But listen. "'But I will not go, I will not travel among you, for you are a stubborn and rebellious people. If I did, I would surely destroy you along the way.' When the people heard these stern words, they went into mourning and stopped wearing their jewelry and fine clothes."

Now, this is a very scary thought, because what God's saying is, "You can go forward in my blessing, but you're not going to have my presence." And this should be scary to us, because I think that's what we do so often. We think we can go forward in our own strength and have the blessing of God, but we don't have the presence of God. And without the presence of God, we're not operating in His blessing and in His peace, in His rest. He might bless us, He might drive out the enemies, we might still have some success, but we're not going to find rest. It's going to be at a severe cost. And the Israelites knew this. They were upset about that, so they started mourning.

Just drop down a few verses here. I'm just, for the sake of time, skipping down. Verse 7, "It was Moses's practice to take the Tent of Meeting and set it up some distance from the camp." Listen. "Everyone who wanted to make a request of Yahweh, a request of the Lord, would go to the Tent of Meeting outside the camp." Now, get this, there was a place for meeting with the personal presence of God. And anyone could go anytime they wanted. They could go into God's presence. Verse 8, "Whenever Moses went out to the Tent of Meeting, all the people would get up and stand in the entrances of their own tents. They would all watch Moses until he disappeared inside. As he went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and hover at its entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses." See, Moses is used to spending time in the presence of God.

Now see, what we see here in Exodus 33, and I'm going to continue here in verse 12 in just a second, but what we see in Exodus 33 is a differentiation between God's omnipresence and God's personal presence. See, we know God is everywhere all the time. That's part of His omnipresence. There's nowhere you can go without God. The psalmist says, "If I go to the highest heavens or the lowest places on earth, you are there." There's nowhere we can go away from the presence of God. But there's also this aspect of His personal presence. Now, I believe the difference between God's omnipresence and His personal presence has nothing to do with God; it has everything to do with us. In other words, it's our actions that draw us into the acknowledgement of God's omnipresence as it relates to us personally.

And in those moments where we stop to acknowledge God, and we're engaging with Him, we get to experience His personal presence. Just like the people could go into the Tent of Meeting outside of the camp, they could go into it anytime they wanted to and engage with the personal presence of God, we have that opportunity. All right, let's keep going in verse 12. Again, we're just skipping a couple of verses. And this is now Moses, one of those times he's in the tent.

"One day, Moses said to Yahweh, 'You have been telling me, "Take these people up to the Promised Land." But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. You have told me, "I know you by name and I look favorably on you." If it is true that you look favorably on me,'" Now, listen to Moses's prayer here. "'Let me know your ways so that I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor.'" He's just basically saying, "God, I want to know you. I want to know your ways. Teach me about you. I want to know you." And it's not a kind of knowing that I can just get from reading a book, though when we read scripture, it's different because it's alive. But it's the kind of knowing that comes from spending time with the person. Let me know you. I want to know your ways so I can understand you. "'And remember that this nation, these people are your very own people.'"

Now, listen to the Lord's response to that prayer. "Yahweh replied, 'I will personally go with you.'" Now, in other translations, it says, "My Presence", my capital P presence, "will go with you, Moses." Now, listen. "'And I will give you rest. Everything will be fine for you.'" Now, when you think about the context of this, Moses is about to lead these Israelites, at least he's going to try to. We know they don't make it because of the spies and all that, but Moses doesn't know that now. They're going to go to the Promised Land, they're going to enter into battle, and there's going to be war, and there's going to be all these things they're going to have to deal with. It's going to be a tumultuous time for them, securing the Promised Land.

But what does God say? He promises them that, "When you go and my presence goes with you, I will give you rest, and everything will work out fine for you. Everything will be fine." How many of you want to live in the promise that everything's going to be fine for you for the rest of your life? Right? We want that promise of knowing, regardless of what I'm seeing out here, regardless of the storm, regardless of the battle, regardless of the difficulty, regardless with my boss and my work situation, or this relationship that I'm working through, regardless of what I can see, my circumstances are when I spend time in the presence of God, I can rest in the middle of this, and know that everything's going to be okay.

That's what the personal presence of God gives us. This is how we rest in the storm. This is what Jesus was rebuking the disciples for. He's like, "Look, I'm taking a nap. You're okay. You can rest in the middle of this storm. Doesn't mean we don't have to row, doesn't mean we don't have to have somebody with a bucket doing the thing, but don't be freaked out about it. It's going to be okay. We're going to make it."

Moses's prayer is not a request of somebody wanting to know about God. This is a pursuit of an intimate relationship with God. And again, that's why we're shifting Zion, because it doesn't need to be about us coming and getting information, though we've had some incredible speakers, and I've been blessed and transformed my life. But this is a time for us to actively pursue God, pursuing Him in prayer, seeking His presence, pursuing Him in worship. This is a time for us to turn that up and develop that spiritual skill, so that it becomes second nature for us, so that as we're going through 2025 and as we're advancing in the way God wants, we're going to have battles. How many of you know there's a devil that does not want you to walk in the promises that God has for you? So, we're going to have resistance as we're moving forward.

But here's the thing. In the middle of that resistance, we don't have to give up hope and lean into worry, we just have to seek His presence, where we'll find rest, recognize everything's going to work out all right, and then we can continue forward in the battle that God has for us. That's what God is trying to teach us, and that's Moses all throughout scripture. It's all about

finding the presence of God. If we look at redemptive history, what God is teaching Moses is He tells him, "I want you to build a tabernacle, a tent for me, and I want you to build this Ark, and I'm going to put my presence on the top of that Ark. And then you're going to put it in the holy place, and in the holy of holy place, that's where my presence is going to be. And the priest can then come in to my presence every day and bring the prayers of the people. And once a year, they can bring the blood of the bull in to cover the sins of the people for a year."

And then when Jesus came and He died on the cross and He screamed out, "[Greek 00:29:34], it is finished, the debt is paid in full," what's the very first thing that happened? The veil was ripped from top to bottom, and it was now opened up, so that the presence of God was now accessible to everyone who would come in through the blood of Jesus. This is why the author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 10, tells us we can now boldly go before the presence of God, having our hearts sprinkled by the blood, coming in through Jesus, and having our consciousness cleaned by the washing of the water. In other words, acknowledging that Jesus paid for all of our sins. Having that done, we can now boldly enter into God's presence. We can take the time to do that every day, every moment, whenever you want to. His personal presence is available to you as we turn our hearts to Him.

But we have to recognize that to do that, to turn our hearts and to engage with Him, is an intentional activity on our part. And we have to recognize that it's not always when the world is calm that we get to have these peaceful moments with God. It's actually in the middle of the battle. So, let's look at my second point, it's this. This is an amazing truth. God avails His presence to us so that we might have relationship with Him. See, the whole thing is about a relationship. We have a relational God who wants to have a relationship with us. "I will give you rest. Everything will be fine for you."

All right, I want to look at two psalms: Psalms 23 and Psalms 46. These are common psalms, maybe you've memorized Psalm 23. If you haven't, I encourage you to maybe make that a goal for this year. It's an incredible psalm about how God cares for us, but I want us to see it in this context of rest in a storm. So, this is Psalm 23. "The Lord is my shepherd. I have all that I need," is the declaration. Isn't that beautiful? When I acknowledge that God is my shepherd, He's the one that's guiding me, the immediate response is, "I have everything that I need." "He lets me rest in green meadows; He leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to His name."

This is the picture of a disciple that is so enamored with the shepherd, with the Savior, with Jesus, with God, that we're just, "Whatever, my eyes are on you. I'm not seeing what's going on. I'm just focused on you. You're leading me beside still waters and peaceful green meadows." Now look at the context, though. Now go to verse four. "Even when I walk through the darkest valley," or some translations say, "The valley of the shadow of death", the Valley of Baca, "I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life," listen, "And I will live in the house of the Lord forever."

When you see "the house of the Lord", He's talking about living in His presence. I'm going to pursue His personal presence. Now, we see this beautiful psalm of David, and it talks about the peace and the serenity and the provision in the context of going through the valley of darkness, the valley of hell. Now, Kim and I have actually been to this valley. It's an actual path from

Jerusalem to Jericho. And it kind of goes down, and there's this deep valley and it curves. There's a lot of switchbacks, backs and forth. When Jesus gave the story of the Good Samaritan and He talked about the one that was... This is the road that He was talking about. This was known to be a very difficult traveling part, because it was very easy to get mugged, which was a common thing to happen in Jesus's day, or in the old times, in Jerusalem days, too.

And so what would happen is there's so many twist backs, and you're in this deep valley that there's really no way out of, you just don't know that bandits aren't just around the corner or just behind, coming up behind you, to beat you up and rob you. And so as you're going through this valley, this valley of darkness, the valley of the shadow of death, as you're in this difficult time, this difficult season, David is saying, "What does the Lord do? Does He deliver us out of the difficulty? Does He pull us out of the storm or the challenge?" No, He sets up a table in the middle of our enemies.

Now, what we have a tendency to do, I don't know about you, but my prayer is often, "God, get me out of this." Not, "Meet me in this." I would like for this pain to go away. I would like for this hardship to go away. I would like for the storm to stop. But instead, what God's normal plan is like, "Hey, but we're going to advance. There's some advancement here. There's something for you to get on the other side. So, how about this? How about we just have a meal? How about we have a time-out, and we sit down and have a meal?"

Now, if God is inviting us to a meal, if He prepares a table for us, as the psalmist says, He's not doing that because He's going to serve us just to serve us. Jesus isn't standing in the back with a little white thing over here and making sure we're fed. No, He wants to dine with us. Remember, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This is taking a moment in the middle of going through the valley to spend time with the presence of God and have a meal, to be refreshed, to be fed, to be strengthened. And he says, "In that moment, He anoints my head with oil." What does that mean? He washes me up, He strengthens me, He gives me a moment of rest in the middle of the difficulty, and then He sends me on and says, "You got this. Let's go. Let's go take them together."

And what happens is when we get our eyes off of the storm, off of the threats, off of the difficulty, and we focus on God, our reality changes. Our circumstances may not have changed, we're still in the valley, but our reality has changed, because now I've been refreshed by the King. I've been refreshed by the one who can give me rest and strength to continue through and continue going on that journey.

Psalm 46. "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and when mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge." Interlude. And again, I did this the first service. I don't know why, but I feel like I have to go, "Interlude." And here's the thing. When you see interlude in the Psalms, remember these were psalms, and so it's an opportunity for the band to play for a minute and for you to go, "Okay, now think about that for just a minute. Ponder that for just a minute." God is our refuge and strength. Though the mountains are crumbling, and there's earthquakes, and there's difficulty, and there's challenges, God is there. He is there. Let the mountains tremble. He's our refuge.

Verse 4. "A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the most high." Remember, home, city, talking about God's presence. "God dwells in that city." His presence is there. "It cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it. The nations are in

chaos and their kingdoms crumble! God's voice thunders, and the earth melts! The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress." Interlude. We have this moment of peace in the middle of the storm, because we're resting in God's home and His presence.

Verse 8. "Come, see the glorious works of the Lord. See how He brings destruction upon the world. He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; He burns the shields with fire." This is chaos, this is war, this is difficulty, challenge, storm. Verse 10. "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world. The Lord of Heaven's Army is here among us. The God of Israel is our fortress." Interlude. In other words, what does that mean? In the middle of the battle, in the middle of the challenge, in the middle of the chaos, if we'll get our eyes off of the storm and put our eyes on the presence of God, if I will be still and know, what does that mean? That means I'm taking an intentional moment to realign myself with the personal presence of God, so that I can engage with Him and get His perspective of the situation in that moment.

And it can just be five deep breaths in the middle of your workday. In that moment, all of a sudden, my perspective changes, because now I know Him as God and the Lord, what does it say? "The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us." I have a whole new perspective of the situation. I don't have any reason for anxiety, I got the Lord of Heaven's Armies here. There's no reasons to worry, God's got it. And when I spend time in His presence, He gives me rest and everything's going to work out. Everything's going to be okay, as I am in that place.

This is the skill for us to work on this year. It's the skill. And this is something I'm working on. This is something that I feel like is so significant for us, that we're totally changing Zion so we can engage with this. So, I want to close very quickly, and give you eight ways. If you have the notes, you can see these in here, you don't have to write these down, and you get those online if you don't have the app running. But here's eight ways that we engage with God's personal presence. And I'm giving these to you so that we can maybe incorporate this in our New Year's activities.

Number one, a daily prayer and conversation with God. Just first thing you do in the morning when you get up is spend time with Him. And if you don't know how to do that, I encourage you to follow us on Biblecast. Four days a week, we do Biblecast. You can get it on the app, you can get it on any of our social media, get it on YouTube, whatever. It's a way of you spending 10 minutes of time in the Word and then time in prayer.

Meditating on scripture. Getting a scripture. Take Psalm 23, and just read that every day for a month, and then just think about it throughout the day. That's a way of engaging with God's presence.

Worship in spirit and in truth. We worship God, and as we worship Him, and you can come to our night of worship, that's the reason that's so important, is we worship together corporately. But you can worship privately; worship in your car, worship in your house.

Practicing stillness and solitude. One of the things I'm trying to do this year is instead of even doing my Bible study when I drink my cup of coffee, because I'm not fasting coffee, by the way. God did not call me to that. And Kim says, "Praise Jesus," because that's not a good idea. But in the morning when I have my cup of coffee, what I'm trying to do now is instead of doing my

Bible study and drinking, I'm just going to drink my coffee, and just drink one cup of coffee with Jesus every morning. Practicing stillness and solitude.

Living a Spirit-filled life. Recognizing that I'm dependent upon Holy Spirit.

Practicing gratitude. So often when we find ourselves in difficulty, if we'll just start thanking God for what He has done well, all of a sudden it moves us into His presence. We enter His courts with thanksgiving. So, as we give thanksgiving, it brings us in.

Number seven, seeking God in community. "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." This is why it's important that we gather together in community. We come to church, we come to the worship nights, you get in a small group. As you gather together with other like-minded believers, we encounter the presence of God.

And then number eight is journaling the thoughts of God. Journaling and writing down what we believe He's saying. These are just eight ways that you can very practically engage with the Spirit of God.

Friends, we have a God that wants to have a personal relationship with us. And He has gone to great lengths, Jesus came to the cross, and died and rose again, so that we can have access to God's personal presence. Where we can be refreshed and strengthened, and know that everything's going to be okay. And learning that so that it's like breathing, that's what it needs to be this year. It needs to be like a reaction, like a breathing, so that when we face tension and we face worry, our first response is to seek the presence of God. That's what I believe God has for us this year. And as we do that, there's just going to be a great advancement and a peace that's going to come to us. Can I pray for you? Will you bow your heads?

Holy Spirit, come. Come and minister to us this morning. And God, we just open ourselves up to you. And we're so thankful that you give us access to your personal presence, that we can engage with you personally. And so Father, I'm asking that you would allow us, even just in this quiet moment as we're still, to know that you are God. And as we're going into worship, that we can experience your personal presence. And regardless of the circumstances of our life right now, or the circumstances we might be going into as we enter into this year, we can know that you are God, that you set this table for us in the middle of our enemies, that we can dine with you, we can spend time with you, we can trust you.

But it's something that we each have to do individually. We can't experience the personal presence of God corporately. Now, we can come into a corporate experience and experience it personally, but it's something we each have to enter into. So God, we ask that we could just enter into that presence, and you would make yourself very well known to us. And that you would let your peace that passes understanding, and the strength that comes from being in your presence, to just let that rest settle on us. Restore our souls, eliminate worry and anxiety, let us have that confidence of what you're doing in us as we receive from you. Amen.

