

One of the things for me that I've always loved about music, worship through music in particular, is it's something that's so unifying. Well, there's something— I won't call it magical because I think God designed it this way, so it's not exactly— it is supernatural. Worship is ongoing from like the beginning of time to the end of time. We get to enter into it, you know. It's not a matter of like We're not bringing anything new necessarily.

We just get to decide, are we going to be part of this thing or not? There's so many people that I walk up like in here and talk to, and even for myself that it's, I heard that sermon and then it didn't hit until I was singing about it after. And it like, it fills a space where like, while you're trying to learn and trying to soak in like what God is bringing, the Holy Spirit gets to move for a minute because you let your guard down. That I think is my favorite part. And it's so unifying because everybody can do it.

All of us have been a part of and seen, you know, that on kind of this grander scale in Bloomington at the B-Town Worship Night. What's that been like for you experiencing that unity across churches in those moments where you get together? I think that the existence of the church is a miracle. It's so beautiful and surprising in a town like Bloomington where we have such, such a diverse set of values, backgrounds, and all that stuff. To see a bunch of people who honestly, if you polled 100 random people on that night, you'd get a pretty broad spectrum of political, social, et cetera viewpoints.

But they're not there to discuss and debate. They're just there to be unified under one banner, one voice, one name. I mean, it's so, so cool. Well, hey, good morning, everybody.

I do hope you'll join us tonight. Can't wait for that. We'll talk a little bit more about that here in a little bit. My daughter Adeline, we share a couple of things in common. Number one, our love for Mario Kart.

And boy, when she was younger, I could crush her. And like, I would, I would have to like play different ways. But, but then it wasn't that long, you're like, she— now we play and she's like, Dad, I'm taking it easy on you. Come on. She's really good at that now.

Another thing that we share a love for is Legos. As a boy, I grew up playing with Legos, and Adeline is in her sweet spot when she's got bags of Legos laid out before her that she's opening up and just building something. Her latest project is working on this Iron Man that she bought, and, and so it's just so cool to see how she enjoys doing something that, that, that I enjoyed as a kid. And still enjoy today. Every now and then as she is building a set, she'll be like, hey Dad, I'm having a problem, kind of stuck in something, can you help?

And I jump out of the seat and I'm like, yes, yes, I can help. And I go over there and we sometimes have to like pull some bricks apart and reset and find out where she was and then start building it again. And there's been a handful of times that she's had to remind me, Dad, this is my Lego set. Not yours. Like, you can stop now.

And so I'm like, oh, okay. I love playing with Legos. And here's the thing with Legos, you don't just go out and buy a single Lego. We buy them in packs. Now, Lego does have a page on their website where they sell individual bricks.

They have 4,442 bricks that you can choose from if you need that individual brick, but But we don't buy Legos individually, we buy them collectively because there's not much that you can do with a single Lego. Like, there's not a whole lot that you can do with this brick that's meaningful. You can put it in your pocket, you can display it, I guess, if you want. My Lego. If you are sadistic, you can put it in a dark room where people walk without shoes and sit back and wait for the carnage to happen.

But there's not a whole lot that you can do with a single Lego brick. They were designed, right, to connect. They were designed to come together so that you can build something out of them. And the same is true with us. We were designed to connect with others.

And I'm not just talking about the extroverts among us who who could talk to a brick wall and connect with it. I'm talking about all of us. Even the most introverted person was designed to connect, desires and needs to be in relationship with other people. All of us need a place to belong and people to connect to. And some people will say that the reason why we have that in us is because Like, over time, we just kind of evolved that way.

We have learned that if we want to survive, we need to survive in community. And so there's just something that is now in us that knows that we need to be around other people because being isolated can be very dangerous. And maybe there's a part of that that is true. We have learned through history and through experience that we need other people. But I think Scripture gives us a more meaningful reason for why we have this in us, why we have this desire to connect with others.

The Bible says that our desire for relationships is not just something that we picked up over years and years and years learning to survive. Scripture says that our desire for relationship is something that God has wired into our DNA. It is part of how he made us and who he made us to be. You go all the way back to the beginning in Genesis chapter 1, and we see God creating the heavens and the earth, and then God is filling the heavens and the earth in all of these ways. And after

every one of these kind of movements, God says, it is good.

It is good. It is good. It is very good. But in Genesis chapter 2, we see God for the very first time say, ooh, this isn't good. He identifies something in his creation that is not good, and the thing that God says is not good is for man to be alone.

And the men in the room said, amen, and the women in the room said, well, duh, of course it's not good.

But God looked at Adam and he was, he was by himself and he said, this is not good. And so he created a suitable helper, someone to come alongside of him. We are created in the image of God and God is relational. He has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And as people who have been made in his image with his character in us, We have been designed to live in relationship with others.

We are designed to be in a community of people where we can be known and we can know others. We are built for belonging. We are built for this.

Which is why the pain that I know we've all experienced in our life, the pain of feeling like we don't belong in a place, can cut especially deep. Like, have you ever walked into a room and sized it up and kind of looked who was there and realized and thought to yourself, well, I don't know that I belong here?

Maybe you've walked into a room like this and felt that way. Maybe you've walked into a room like this and you've been made to feel that way. There is a pain that's inflicted on us in those moments because we desire to be in a place where we feel like we belong amongst people that we feel like we belong with. In this church that Paul writes to in Ephesus, that we're looking at this letter that he sent them today. This church knew what it was like to feel like they didn't belong.

Most of the people that made up this church, they were Gentiles, they were people outside of God's family at one point in their life, and Paul reminds them that there was once a time when you, church, you were on the outside looking in. You were separated, you were excluded.

He tells them that they were foreigners living without hope and without God.

And here's the thing that I wanna make sure that we don't miss this morning. That is not just true about those who were in Ephesus before Christ. It is true for every single one of us before we put our faith in Jesus. Without Jesus, Scripture says that we are dead in our transgressions and sin. We are separated from God.

But when we put our faith in Jesus, the biblical narrative says that

we are adopted into God's family. We are called his sons and his daughters. We are given the full rights of heirs to the King. We have been given a place to belong in the kingdom of heaven, and we have been given a people to belong to as the family of God that is made up of people from every tribe, and nation. And the story of Scripture that we see from the beginning all the way to Revelation is that God is taking what was dead and distant and divided and he is making it alive, near, and one.

And we see this beautifully captured in our text today. Look at it. With me. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 13.

Paul writes, but now, now, meaning something has changed, now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. You were once far away, but Jesus brought you near. And this is what Jesus does when we feel isolated, when we feel alone, when we feel separated from God and others. Jesus wants to bring us near, and we do not have to work to earn our place there. We do not have to be good enough.

Jesus, through our faith in him, has brought us near to God and he has given us a place to belong. And he continues in verse 18, for through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Both those who were in the family of God and those who at one point were excluded from it, through faith in Jesus we have come together. We have access to the Father by one Holy Spirit. And these are people, insiders and outsiders, Jews and Gentiles, who, who could have never imagined that they could be a part of the same family. But our Heavenly Father has made a way for us to belong in him.

In Jesus, we have been brought near and we have been given access to the Father through the Holy Spirit. We are built to belong, but not just to belong to God. We were built to belong to one another. Look at the very next word in verse 19. Paul says, consequently.

Consequently, meaning everything that we just talked about, it is consequential to. There is something that comes from this. It changes everything. And I wanna read the rest of verse 19 and see if you can hear the 2 things that Paul points to that this changes. He says, consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household. Paul points to 2 things that have changed, that are of consequence because of our faith in Jesus.

He says, first and foremost, you were once foreigners. You once lived outside of this kingdom of God, but you have been brought in and you are now citizens. You have a place to belong. And we are not just citizens, but Paul says that we are fellow citizens. We're not living in isolation.

In this. We are fellow citizens. We have been given a new shared identity. And Paul takes it even further and says you're not just citizens, but you also belong. You are members of his household.

That through faith in Jesus, we have been brought from strangers to family. We have been given a place to belong in and a family to belong to.

And Paul says that all of this, like central to all of this, is Jesus. He calls him in verse 20, the chief cornerstone.

An ancient building, the cornerstone was the brick that kind of everything else would orient around. And builders would oftentimes spend as much time making sure that that brick was, was perfectly square and in just the exact right place. They would spend as much time placing and forming that one stone as they would the rest of the building because it was so important. You didn't get this right, everything else would be off. But once you set the cornerstone, then it determined where and how all of the other bricks and stones went into place.

Everything else had to properly align around that cornerstone. And Paul borrows this image and uses it to talk about who Jesus is for us. The church is built together by our cornerstone, shared relationship with Jesus. The church is not built together by shared interests or passions or preferences. The church is not built around shared ethnicity or status or age and stage of life.

The church, listen, is not even built around around a politician or political party.

And you try to build a church on any one of those cornerstones, the whole thing is going to crumble apart. The church is built on the cornerstone of Jesus. He is our point of alignment above all things. And when that is true, when everything else is built built on him, then everything else falls into its proper place and we catch a glimpse of, I think, what Jesus had in mind when he said, and I will build my church. It is a church that shines the light and the love of Jesus into the darkness of our world.

I think that's why for many of us tonight is one of our favorite nights. Of the year. You know, it was 5, 6 years ago Quentin got together with a couple of local worship ministers in town and said, hey, let's just do something together, see what maybe the Lord has in store for it. And since that night, more and more churches have come, have been a part of the team. There's gonna be tonight dozens of churches gathering together at Switchyard Park.

And we're gathering together to lift up the name of Jesus, to not lift up the name of a church or a denomination, to not lift up the name of

a worship pastor or a talking head like me. It is to lift up the name of Jesus and make him known because he is the cornerstone of the Church, big C, church. Paul closes this section, verse 21 and 22.

He says, in Jesus 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.

So Paul points from the cornerstone, right, of Jesus to the temple. And the temple in Jerusalem served an important function in the life of Jewish faith. The temple was the place where God's Spirit dwelled on earth.

The temple is the place where periodically at different festivals and times throughout the year, people would come, they would make sacrifices, they would worship, they would seek atonement, covering of their sin, forgiveness, removal of their sin. And the temple stood as a witness to God's care and concern for his people. And Paul points to that image and says, that's who we are now. It is the place where God's Spirit dwells. The building that Paul is talking about in these verses is not a structure with a location and an address.

The temple is the people of God gathering together. We are being built to be the place where God's Spirit dwells. We are being built together so that others can experience grace and the freedom that is found in Christ through us. We are being built together to stand as living stones proclaiming God's love in this world that he has created. We were built to belong.

Jesus brings us near to God. He connects us with one another, and he makes his presence known through us in this world.

So what does that look like? What does it look like when Jesus said—like, this, this whole series that we're in right now is built off of that passage where Jesus says, and I will build my church. And so we're just looking like, what did Jesus have in mind when he said, I'm going to build my church? Well, part of it is that he was building it together. He was building us together.

He was building us to be that place of dwelling, to help people find and experience grace and forgiveness, to stand as a monument to God's love and faithfulness.

And in my role, man, one of the best parts of what I get to do is each and every I get to see how we are living this out at Sherwood Oaks, how the church is living it out in our community, like the big C Church. This last Friday, Wheeler Mission, one of our mission partners and just a great organization in our community that comes alongside of unhoused men, they had a ribbon-cutting ceremony. They've been working over the last few years to raise funds, not just for a facility, but

to be able to offer more services to guys who find themselves in just a place of need. And so now because of that facility, they're able to offer food and more showers to folks, giving more people a safe place to stay for the night. But more than that, they are wrapping around them with services to come and help them get their feet back underneath them.

I think most importantly what they do is they point people to Jesus.

Dana Jones, who's the director of the Bloomington Wheeler Mission, we were talking afterwards and he said for so many of these guys their lives are just chaotic, but you get them talking about faith and it's—he said it's amazing so many of them The last place in their life that they remember being stable was sitting at church with their grandma.

It was being in a place where they felt like they belonged with people that they belonged to. And Wheeler Mission is helping those guys find that again.

I get to see it through our mom-to-mom ministry. Every Friday we have over 100 moms that gather here that are looking for community. They're looking for a little bit of a break, but they are looking to do this with one another. And they come from very different backgrounds and they're in very, very different places when it comes to faith and church involvement. Beth and her incredible team of leaders, they give them a place to belong and to experience Jesus.

Our international ministry, I love that on any given Sunday right here within the walls of Sherwood Oaks, we have people who, who gather to worship Jesus, quite frankly, from all over the world. Brad told me this morning that there are some 30 different nations represented in Sherwood Oaks on a Sunday morning at any given time. Different languages, same Jesus. Different backgrounds, same Jesus. Different stories, Jesus, fellow citizens in God's kingdom, and brothers and sisters in his family.

And that is the church.

Our Iglesia Hispana ministry last Sunday, Iglesia Hispana served with an organization in Bloomington kind of in a celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month. And we have people from Iglesia Hispana that were serving in that and connecting and welcoming people and inviting people to come and join us on Sunday mornings. We have over 100 that join us in our chapel to worship here on Sundays. And there were booths that were set up at the event that represented every nation that is kind of represented in Bloomington and Central and South America. And as our leaders looked around, they realized that somebody from Iglesia Hispana was at every single one of those booths.

And oftentimes people come to Iglesia Hispana from very different

countries, from very, very different cultures. Sometimes those cultures even butt heads and there's longstanding animosity between them. They have different stories of how they eventually found themselves living in Bloomington. And yet, when they gather here, they are one family within the family of Sherwood Oaks, within the family of God.

And next Saturday– next Sunday, they want to invite you to a lunch that they're throwing. It's after the 11 o'clock service. Join us down in the fellowship hall. Everyone is invited, and I promise you it will be some of the best food that you have. So come and join us for that.

I'll wrap up with this. We are built to belong. But the truth is, is like this single brick, we can be amongst 1,000 and feel disconnected, feel alone, wonder where our place is. We can shake hands, we can talk to people, we can bump up against others, and yet still wonder where our place is.

So my encouragement to you today is to step in. Find community. Find a group to connect with. Find a serve team to join and get to know others as you're serving alongside of each other. Maybe invite someone to lunch today.

The question I want to leave you with is, where are you still trying to follow Jesus?

Alone? Where are you trying to do this by yourself?

Maybe your next step is, is to step out and find that place where you belong.

For some of you, your first step might not just be belonging to a church, but belonging to Jesus.

Not trying to do life on your own anymore, walking your own way, doing your own thing, trying to be your own authority, but submitting and surrendering to the King who gives you a place in his kingdom and who invites you to be a part of his family. And if you are here today feeling like an outsider, feeling far away, wondering if there is a place that you can belong, And we want to invite you to come find Jesus and follow him.

You don't have to come clean and fixed up before you come to him. No, you can come. I just want to repeat those words of Paul to you one more time. No, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. Jesus brings you near.

And there is a place in God's family for you. It does not matter where you've been or what you've done. As we come to our time of response, we'll have some people around the room that if you're feeling isolated

and lonely today, they would love to pray with you, help you find a point of connection, maybe even help you make that decision to surrender your life and start following Jesus. We're gonna have this moment where the lights are gonna come down and you can go, and they just want to pray with you. They'll have orange lanyards on, talk with you.

Man, don't miss this opportunity. And we're gonna come to a time of communion. We've got communion stations up here in the front and in the back. Just whenever you're ready during this moment, we're gonna have some, some light music playing. Get up, grab communion, take it back to your seat.

Take it whenever you're ready.

Communion is a reminder that not only is there a place that in God's family for us, there's a place at the table for us. And he invites us to this table to remember his body that was given as we take the bread and his blood that was shed as we drink the cup that made it possible for us to belong. And so Jesus, we give this time to you. We ask that you will meet us in it. For those of us who maybe feel like we are wandering and alone this morning, wondering if we belong anywhere, wondering if we even belong in a place like this.

God, meet us with that love that welcomes us, that loves us as we are, loves us too much though to leave us as we are. So meet us in this moment with your grace and in your peace, in your presence, Lord. And remind us that we have been given a place in your family and a seat at the table. And it's not because of how awesome and good we are. It is because of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection.

And we thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen.