

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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The Church

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It was in this house that a young man started to come to church with his girlfriend and he hadn't been to church for a number of years. And he came and he just kept coming, he kept showing up. And listen, that's a sermon right there, isn't it? You just keep showing up God's going to do something in you. And he kept showing up and God did something in him. And God started stirring up some things and he poured his grace out into his life. And, man, I'm telling you, he received Christ and started a new beginning and even today he's still coming to the church and he's pressing in and God's blessings had been poured out, vision's been poured out on his life and it's this beautiful story, this beautiful narrative. And so, I asked him, I said, listen, what happens, what was it about this church that helped you reconnect with God? And he gave this description; It's one of my favorite metaphors or my favorite descriptions of our church community. He said this, he said, you know, church, it was kind of like a greenhouse and you know what a greenhouse, it's not one thing, but it's all these things that are working together and that are put in place to help something find health or help plant find growth. And he said when I showed up, it wasn't one thing, but you know, the message was given and that kind of spoke to me in this way. And then that one song really touched me. And then this person over here said this to me and I received some fellowship or some challenge or some faith over here, but all of these things work together. And he said this, so when I was a part of this location for so long, he said I couldn't not grow. All these elements had worked together. And I just think, isn't that one of the most beautiful aspirational descriptions of our community, right. I love this idea of the church being a greenhouse and us specifically.

Now, I think then that we can ask ourselves this question, how am I a part of creating a rich and a life giving environment? How am I adding to the soil, to the spiritual nutrition or the spiritual elements of this community, of this family, of this body? We spent three weeks talking about Better Together and we started talking about better together and marriage, and then we've talked about the power of words and we talked about stepping into relationships that are difficult or challenging last week, but today I want to do this. Today I want to talk about being better together in the context of this church community. And I want to do something if you'll give me permission instead of a traditional sermon I want to kind of just share prayer convictions on my heart. Is that okay? Okay. Alright. Well I won't get any emails tomorrow then, okay, good.

I was recently talking with a friend who was sharing that they have been having church at home more recently by themselves. And so, I thought this is okay, this is it, so stepped in and kind of express some love and then some care and concern and yeah, I appreciate it. It was just a good conversation. And they said, well thank you so much for that care and concern, but you know what, I'm actually doing great and everything's going good and I have everything I need. And I thought, well this is a curious conversation for me and there's probably some people here who probably feel some of the same things or are in that same place. And so I thought maybe can I process that for just a minute with us and maybe I'll nerd out for just a moment and kind of step into a theological clarification there, cause I don't know that we can actually have church at

home by ourselves. We can have prayer at home, we can have devotion at home, we can have worship at home, but church by definition is the body of believers coming together and gathering and giving God honor corporately together. There's this word in the New Testament, it's called ecclesia and it's the Greek word that we use for church and it means assembly or gathering or to congregate but it was used in the affiliation of the coming together of the believers to honor God and to encourage one another. And the scripture say, do not forsake the assembly of the believers. And it's the author of Hebrews who's saying, listen, he's talking to these young believers, listen, this is critical to your long term sustainability and growth in your faith in your life. You've got to continue to step and never forsake the assembly of believers. This is a piece that is vital to the long-term health of our community, of our faith. Corporate community is critical.

I think a church is kind of like exercise and that if you go a couple of weeks and you don't, it's not a large short term effect, right? Or you go a month and I'll be okay if I do that, but if you go intermittently for a year, you start to see it, don't ya? It's gonna show up. If you go for five years or 10 years where you just kind of doing here and there, there will be repercussions. There will be bodily repercussions; you'll pay for it in different ways, your heart, different things will happen. And I think church is like exercise in this; sometimes if you kind of step away, you don't see the short term repercussions but when you think long, there will be repercussions in the soul and the spirit in your faith over time. Corporate community is a sustainer of faith. It's a sustainer of relationship. It's a sustainer of friendship. And I would say this, that, that's just half the understanding of church because the other half is this. The older I get, the more mature I try to get in my faith, the more I realize that church is not about me, it's not about me. And you know who is a great example of this looking up here and watching our team, Lindsey Appiah and she blesses us, doesn't she? And she pours into us. And the fact is this though that Lindsey carries a big time position. God has positioned her in our city strategically. She oversees our DC youth who is trying to find rehabilitation, kids who need a second chance and are looking for that next step and try to find their way in life. And so she carries this burden with her, but then she shows up here and she faithfully gives of her gifts and pours and blesses us. And I remember a couple of years ago she shared this with us. I said, Lindsey, you're just amazing. She said, you know what? I don't just show up for three services for four or five hours on a weekend because I feel like it. She said, I show up because I understand I'm a part of a church family and I'm part of the family of God. And when God gives you giftings, you don't just use them for yourself, do you? You use them for the people around you. And we have giftings, we have time, we have the ability to serve and aren't we thankful that Lindsey has made that decision and we've reaped the benefit.

I just have to wonder what are the gifts that are sitting in our seats today that we haven't received as a body, the time or the service that maybe we haven't stepped into yet that can add an element to this, this incredible, this beautiful ecosystem that we have where we could grow even further if a few of us would step up and give what God has put in our lap and give what God has put in our spirit.

Matthew chapter 16 says, I will build my church. Jesus says, *I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven and whatever you bind here on earth will be bound up in heaven. Whatever you loose here on earth*

will be loosed up in heaven. And we read this and I'm kind of fascinated and fixated on binding and loosing. Isn't that an interesting, odd, curious topic, right? That's another sermon for another day, I'm not going to go there today, but that's where we kind of lean in, yeah, the gifts, wow, yeah, I want that, I need that. But you know what? Togetherness comes before the gift, doesn't it? We see that he talks about church before those things show up and we get in the field and we expect fruit to grow in the field, but we haven't planted any seeds. The root comes before the fruit. Kiersten was talking about this earlier this morning with our volunteers and togetherness is the root, the gifts are the fruit. We've got to invest. First of all, we focus on what we want before we have cared for what our sister needs, what our brother needs. The challenge of today's culture is the appearance of relationship without the guts. What's the guts? The guts, that's the hard work, that's the time, that's the forgiveness, that's the grace that is given out, that's the inconvenience. I believe this with my whole heart; you have a part to play that is vital to this community that we need it in this ethos we need it. When's the last time that you took a meal to somebody else in this church community? When's the last time you invited somebody over to your home just to serve and be hospitable to them? How are you engaged in serving with this body of believers, with this family?

You know what I was thinking, I'm standing up here and I'm listening to Santi and Juan and I'm wondering like what if Santi wouldn't have decided to serve in our youth group years ago. Would Juan be up here? Would a next generation be stepping out into righteousness and kingdom purposes if Santi, hadn't made that decision. Somebody else's gift is on the other side of your obedience. Somebody else's fruit is on the other side of your decision to serve and to step out. God has gifted us with this gathering of people that we call a church and what does it truly look like to live out the ethic of community and of calling.

I want to go two directions today and the first direction is where we are going as a church, the second direction is who we are becoming as a church. So first where we're going, and this is kind of fun because we are literally going somewhere as a church and God gave us this building just down the road here at the car barn. It's across from the historic Navy Yard and 770 M Street southeast. We're going to be shifting over there, our Sunday services and Pastor Mark gave the aspirational goal, what if we could get there by Easter? And then he said this, remember he said, if we don't get there by Easter, you know, and we'll be there? After Easter. So we're kind of leaning towards the plan B there after Easter at this point and that's probably going to be more like summer, you know, maybe it could be beginning of summer. So we're excited, but things are cooking over there and things are moving. There are a few setbacks happening. We did all these tests, we found one test that had lead in it in the paint it's killing us and you know what that means. So, now we've got people in hazmat suits over there for the next couple of weeks working and taking that stuff down. That's a hit on the budget, that's a hit on the timeline. We're breaking up the concrete; we find tunnels underneath of the building, which is crazy. It's kind of cool though, isn't it? Like the car barns and the artifacts and the things but it's cool slash not so cool on our timeline, on our budget. So keep in prayer, we have challenges that are coming against it. And you know, this is not just an easy thing, this is a step of faith. So pray for our team, pray for those in construction. Pray for our budget; pray that God will provide the provision to make this thing happen.

At the same time, God is on the move, God is working. And you know, just the fact that we could do this thing in less than six months construction, hey, you know, every day that you save on time is actually saving. It's being good stewards too, so things are happening. And can I be honest? One of my greatest fears has been okay, we're shifting over that and we kind of make it happen over here. Some people drive, some people you know, bikes, some people walk, but we already don't have many, if we go over there and we got a bigger house, where are people going to park? I'm just saying and so I've been kind of worrying about this and you know, do you ever feel like you're a pastor and you should have more faith in that. Do you ever feel like that? You don't cause that's me and I didn't and so, I don't know how this is gonna work, is this going to float. And then the next thing you know, we realize right across the street from our door is a parking lot and it took months, but we found out who has it and you guys, its 210 parking spaces. And as of last week we have a lease on 210 parking spaces across the street from our door. And I didn't even get to the good news yet. How much do we pay for it? Free. We got a lease for a full year, free too. Are you kidding me? Like this is going to be it. We're just going to go to church just so we can park in the city and we're moving and we're shaking and we're going to get, and here's what it looks like. We'll get in and the theater is more than twice the size of this theater and the lobby and the kids' space, we're going to have kids' space all under one roof. You know, if you have three kids, you can go to three different buildings right now, right? It's going to be a one place.

And then there's phase two where that'll be temporary space first of all. And then we'll go to phase two where we'll build out state of the art kids facilities. And you see the yellow portion is phase one right behind me, a part of the orange is in phase two or excuse me, phase one, that's some temporary space that we'll have. But phase two we'll have this amazing... and can you just think of the blessing that is to this community? We don't have that around here. We don't have space that is intentionally for kids and families, that just doesn't happen. And so this'll be a part of phase two on the weekends, but then here's what's cool; during the week, we can double down and continue to bless the community because we know that one of the greatest needs is there's just a shortage of childcare. So we're going to have a CDC during the week, a child development center, and that will be a blessing again pouring back into our community.

Then there's phase three and we're dreaming about what could be and maybe a marketplace think union market and Pastor Mark even seeded the clouds. What if we could, you know, help some of our returning citizens find job and think about the job creation that we're stepping into and the people have a second chance and a third chance, could we connect those dots? And like, do you hear where I'm going here? I'm not just talking about an ecosystem that's right here. I'm talking about strategy for a greater ecosystem. We've said it before, we're going to say it again and I'll say it here today. We're not just trying to build a church; we're trying to bless the city. We're not just moving addresses; we are launching a new location. What's that mean? It means we got to step up. It means there is work to be done. Where can I step in, in this new season? And here's what can happen, we can say, okay, we got a bigger location. We could say, alright, seems like the church is good to go and doesn't need me. Can I just dispel that lie right there? No, it's the opposite. This thing is not just an easy thing that we're stepping into; this is actually an act of faith. It would be much easier just to keep doing what we're doing right here. That would feel more comfortable. I feel good about that, but no, this is a step of faith and we're family. When family moves, everyone chips in, right? Where are my parents here today? We all chipped in and

we do something and so we're moving. We're launching a new location. Where is it that I can step up and be a part of this thing? Because I'm just here to say, you know, this is not a guilt thing or coercion, this is an inspiration thing. God has a new anointing waiting for us, and guess what? That seeps into my own life when I'm praying for this. You know what? My marriage is a little bit better. The way I see my kids is a little bit better cause that anointing seeps in, anointing oil by itself, by its nature, soaks. It doesn't leave you, you wash it and it's still with you. God has a greater anointing for this next...

I have no idea where I am here, stepped off the stage. Okay, where are we going and who are we becoming? Talking about our culture, Ephesians one, verse 18 it says this, *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which has called you the riches of his glorious inheritance in the holy people and his incomparably great power.* For who? For us, not me. For us who believe. The first 14 verses Paul gives information about God and then the next stage of verses he prays for the transformation from God. He knows that life change doesn't come from the transfer of information. It comes through the power and the presence and the experience of God filling us. He can't say it. He's got to pray it right here. Henry Blackaby says, recognizing God is not the same as coming to him. Hearing God in your heart is not the same as answering. Now, these are just a few revelations that I want to upload to you today. And these are aspirations of who we are becoming.

And first thing is this, a naming community. These are my prayers guys, I told you. Just over us who are we becoming, God. A naming community. What are you talking about? This idea of naming Isaiah 43, and I have called you by name. I have called you by name. I know you and I call you out so that the grace of God would fill your heart would fill your life. We've got to continue to grow bigger, while continuing to grow smaller, right? I'm talking about fellowship; I'm talking about community, that's what I'm talking about right here. And this is expressed in Acts chapter two verses 42 through 44 it says,

⁴² *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* ⁴³ *Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs done by the apostles.* ⁴⁴ *All the believers were together and had everything in common.*

This is a perfect example of fellowship. Now, you know what I remember when I was younger and my dad passed away. I remember the people who showed up. I remember the people who were there, who were just around. You know what I remember? I remember the guy who brought cinnamon rolls to our door. I remember Rick Walkter, I love that guy because I love cinnamon rolls, fantastic. I remember the guy who left the funeral to go buy mints for me and came back just to try to do something. Man, I'm grateful for Matt Fogolsong. I haven't talked to that guy years. I won't forget him because it was people just stepping in and naming, right. Naming me, naming the challenge, naming something they can do, being community. How can we name the people around us? How can we name the things that we need to step? What are those little things that you put love into action? Love isn't love until you give it away.

Now the flip side is this. I remember when I was younger and my family went through a rough season, it was a little tough. It was awkward and we were going through it. And you know what, at that point, I don't know how to process things, but I knew I was alone and you know who

wasn't there for me? Church or the people in the church, and that was tough cause you know, I just needed somebody to be there and, and they weren't there. And that's hurtful isn't it? And I'm speaking a little bit in generalities, but I think maybe a few of us can relate. I wonder if you've been through a season where you just need somebody to show up and they didn't and it hurts, doesn't it? And maybe it was your family, maybe it was your friends, maybe it was your church community or a few people in the church that you thought you had expectation and then they didn't meet those expectations. Can I just step into that space with you for a moment? And can I just say I'm sorry and I relate with you. And for me, I know, that that was hurt and you know, you realize over time that wasn't intentional hurt and those are good people but it still hurts. But I decided I could have separated from the church but I didn't. And I thank God that I made the decision that I did because I think hurt could have become bitterness and then bitterness probably would've become isolation, which would have hurt me more and probably hurt that community of beautiful friendships that I developed over time. But I had this conviction in my prayers that I needed to be a catalyst, a catalyst for love, a catalyst for stepping in or a catalyst for forgiveness or grace and I realized I need to be what I didn't see and when I decided to be what I didn't see, then my hurt was brought to healing. And I just wonder if that's a word for somebody today and don't give up on your family, you guys don't give up. And I know there's hurt there. It doesn't mean that you step into that every time, right? Don't give up on the church. Don't give up on those friends, but step into that. Because the scripture say this, give and it shall be what, given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, overflowing into your lap. This is what God does. He shows up when we keep investing, he will show up. Don't give up you guys on the church. I know we have failure. You know what? I know that we all can say amen. That this community is a community of imperfections. Can I get an amen? Our families, our families have imperfections. Can I get a name then? I thought you'd shout me down on that one. Okay.

A naming community, first conviction, number two; a house of healing, restoration, renewal, refreshing in our soul. The car barn, it was also known as the turnaround. Remember us talking about this? That DC street cars would go out and would be used up and would take people all over the place and get beat up and bruised and then come back in and they would get restored and renewed and remade and this is what happens. And we're over there praying in the building outside of the building and Heidi and Joe had a moment that was such a cool moment because of what you were thinking about and the history and looking back on and looking back on many years ago running the streets and you were bartending, you are dating a bartender, not that bartender at different bartender. And that was a season of life and you were running it and weren't ya. And you were closing bars down and that was the season. And then as you described it, Heidi, you hit rock bottom and you had nowhere else to go, you couldn't go any further down. And then Joe, you described the season that you hit and went through a divorce and lost your place and ended up back at home and quit going to work and were drinking and all of these challenges and both of you kind of hit the bottom. And then it was Heidi who found Christ and guess where things started going? Up! And then she went and grabbed Joe's shirt, started pulling him up with her and invited him to church. He said, I haven't been to church in 30 years, I don't know what I'm supposed to do. And showed up at church in three weeks later you guys got baptized. And God set them on a new path. And in that moment we're outside of talking about the turnaround and what God might do, what he can do with the restoration, he can give. And you had a moment because of what God had done, and it was a look what the Lord has done

moments and what he will continue to do. I'm praying guys that this would be a house of healing, a naming community, a house of healing.

Number three, a sent people. Matthew 10 verse one, Jesus calls the disciples. He brought them in, he gave them a purpose, and then one verse later, he sent them out. They were blessed to bless, they were healed to heal, but Jesus saves and sends all within one verse. We get way too comfortable, don't we? We think, oh, I got to learn this or I got to do that, or I gotta get myself together before. No, Jesus saves them and says, alright, you're healed up, you're ready to go, now, giddy up, get out there. And the turnaround, streetcars are beat up and bruised and worked and then they're brought in and they're renewed, they're refreshed, they're made new, they are healed and then what? Those things are sent back out. I'm believing that the history of that house will push further into the spiritual nature of this community. I'm believing for that for today and for our future, we are a sent people.

Are we introducing people to the Gospel? How are we engaging the needs of our city? Are we speaking blessing into our homes, into our neighborhoods? The DC Dream Center didn't build itself, did it? No, the people of God, you, stepping in, stepping up. Our ministry to those who are out on the streets didn't just happen by a natural circumstance. No, it was out of our prayer life that we stepped up and stepped out into those needs. Ephesians 3:10, God's purpose in all of this was to use the church to display his wisdom and it's rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Jesus sent out the disciples didn't he and how did he do it? Two by two you're better together; we are sent people, God's strategy for mission. You know what it was? The Holy Spirit. He didn't send them to the outer courts, he sent them to the upper room. When they went to the upper room, they were filled with the Spirit and then they were sent into the outer courts because they were compelled by the Spirit of God within them. We, I believe this, have a next level to our worship. Can I get an amen? There is a next season to our worship and it's higher and it's greater. And so today I'm tag teaming with Joel and with Josh, and we're going to teach just for a couple of moments. Then we're going to come back and we're going to step into just a little praise, a little worship this morning. And, so listen to what Joel and Josh have to say.

Joel: Worship itself is a yielded vessel to the workings of what God is doing. Songs become something that stirs the faith of an individual and softens the heart to allow transformation to happen. I grew up in a very Charismatic Pentecostal church, so shouting, we always had to have somebody yell from the back of the room. Oh, let me clarify. Shouting means dancing, not just shouting out loud, but like somebody getting that good foot action, that's what we used to call it that was our worship. You know, we always had call and response. Call and response is more of a... somebody might say a line and then we responded with another line. It kinda came from slavery days; it was their way of communicating back and forth. Where one might say like, 'tonight the train is coming' and they will respond, 'we're on our way'. But it was a way of saying like, tonight we're making these moves and making these things happen, which spilled over into Gospel music as far as call and response, even in our songs,

Josh: Every week, the worship team, we come together and we rehearse and we bring a plan to the table, but that plan always transforms once you get everyone in the room, you have different people, different ideas, different backgrounds. So that creates something new. And then when

you bring that into Sunday morning, it's transformed yet again, because then all the people show up. And so the songs we sing and the noise we make when we praise and worship during service every week, it's not just what the team has prepared, it's what happens when you get everyone in the room and it all mixes together to create a unique expression for that particular Sunday. It's the sound of unity, not unison because again, we're all different, we're all bringing our own preferences and ideas and thoughts and lives. But when we come together and sing praise, it unifies us. And then out of that, you know, you want to leave space for those spontaneous moments because again, it's not just the worship team coming together with the congregation; it's also the mix of the spirit right in the middle of that. And so we bring what we have to the table and let the spirit surprise us, let the moment surprise us and offer our praise and worship to God.

Joel: I had somebody actually challenge me and say, why do we sing all these songs about how great God is? Doesn't he know how great he is already, you know? And it made me think and made me say like, yeah, why do we do that? He knows. But the honest thing is I think we don't know which is why we sing them. So, to somebody that's coming in from the outside in, I would tell them, give yourself space and grace. You know, this is not a place where you're coming in because everybody lifting their hands, I must lift my hands. You know, everybody's clapping their hands, I must clap my hands. It's my desire that that comes from an authentic place. That you're really lifting your hands because you're saying, God, in this moment I yield to you. My hands are up because I recognize whatever it might be that morning. But to that person that's out there, that's just starting to a new, maybe take it as more of a learning posture of learning the character and learning through songs who God is versus trying to engage it from a knowing position because you're just learning. And for those that that know that said it as reminders to yourself of who God is, where he is and what he's doing. And to those that have been here for a while, remind yourself of how faithful he's been. My encouragement also would be doing worship that we take the songs themselves, take the lyrics and allow them to connect back to your own story. I think we don't do that enough. I think we kind of just sing songs just to sing. But people sometimes ask me like, what are you thinking about when you're singing up there? For me, I'm constantly thinking back like over like God, you have been faithful. You know what I mean like? And that comes out in the song as I'm singing it. And the same way, like I hope that somebody in the audience is also singing the song louder than I can sing it because they're connecting it back to their own testimony and somebody around them is saying, oh, there's a freedom in that. So it's like we all become worship leaders like not just me, but we all become worship leaders because we're singing out of our relationships. But worship is yielding your life to him, to becoming who he created you to be. That's the ultimate goal of worship at the end of the day, that when I die, I die empty that I'm done with everything and I can say I finished my course. That's worship.

Pastor Joel: We can't box worship in a little segment, can we? I love how we ended it, that worship is a lifestyle, but this is also a catalyst moment. And so I want to invite our prayer teams just to come up and we're just going to create an ethos of praise here an ethos of worship here together and we're going to honor God and worship him as a church community. And so if you'd like to stay where you're at, if you'd like to push yourself a little bit and raise a hand or get down on a knee, we're going to open up the altars if you'd like to come down and pray and get down on your knees in the altars or let us stand with you as a church community. You might be here and you say, I got that hurt and my pastor today and I need somebody to pray with me. We want to

pray with you. Come to the sides and we want to pray with you today. We're going to step into some honor and in some worship and let's just give him what's in our..., let's give him whatever we have. Let's worship him.