

On New Year's Eve Day, the Presslers held a family meeting. It's something we've done many times over the years but this one was significant because we have entered a new chapter in our family's life with my oldest, Christian, heading off to college this last fall, and we've lived through the last two years. So, we spent a few hours in our living room with flip charts and conversation asking how we are doing as a family, what we are about, and what we want to focus on in the new year.

First, we reaffirmed our values. Because we're a preacher's family, they all must begin with the same letter, and we agreed the Presslers are about faith, family, friendship, fun and, maybe most importantly, food. We also acknowledged how things have changed since Christian left, celebrated some real bright spots of last year, and recognized how our pace and distance has left us not spending as much intentional time relationally, in discipleship, and having fun. So 2022 will be about saying yes to more intentional time together, and saying no to things that will get in the way of that. It was a wonderful day together celebrating, defining reality, and looking ahead to what could be in 2022. We finished encouraged, united, and enthusiastic about the new year.

And that's what I hope to do this morning with our church family. Today is our annual Family Meeting. I want to spend some time talking about where we are, where we're going, and how we are going to get there, guided and encouraged by God's Spirit and Word, and leaving here with the faith and hope that we are in a great position to faithfully fulfill what God has called us to.

I want to begin by talking about what's happening in the Church nationally. I have some stats for you, though I know 30% of you hate statistics. 22% of churchgoing adults stopped going to church 2020, and while we await final number from 2021, we know it's gone up. Also, for the first time ever, Gallup showed less than half of U.S. adults say they belong to a church. Additionally, most churches are still at 50-70% of pre-pandemic attendance (thought that's up from last year). It appears the crisis of the last two years has accelerated the trends of the last decade, and we have experienced it at Fellowship. We are smaller than we have been and find ourselves being a church in a post-church America.

How does that make you feel? Discouraged, saddened, frustrated? Those are all ok, but the thing we must avoid is being hopeless. Because, what if God used the last two years as a time of pruning, faith building, learning dependence, and community building as he remakes us and prepares us for what he has next? What if we are exactly where, and who, God wants us to be?

Each ministry year I choose a Bible verse for our staff that acts as a rally cry, and I thought it appropriate for where we find ourselves at the beginning of the year. Here's the verse, not as a text slide, but as a photo of a giant chalk wall we have on our third floor **[1 Corinthians 12:18]**
¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

The Church is the body of Christ, each person is a member, and God has a place for each member in the Body. He calls some house churches, megachurches, and everything in between. And for a good number of us, he has called us to and placed us in Fellowship Dallas. I chose that verse this year and share it with you because it's such an encouragement to me. Yes, we are smaller than we have been, but those here aren't by accident, aren't leftovers, aren't a misguided remnant. We are the people God has, by his grace and providence, gathered together in this time

and place to worship him and fulfill the mission he's called us to. To use the name of a popular TV show, this is us, and each and every one of us is blessed to be a part of it.

So, who are we? How are we made up? Well, thanks to Grace, Michael, and a new service team, we are officially, once again, a church that serves coffee! If you've been here a while you'll see how much we've changed. Since the pandemic started, around 1,400 people have made a first-time touch point with Fellowship, nearly 700 have taken a next step, and 200 have become engaged. In total, nearly 2,000 made a touch point this year and over 1,000 people are actively engaged in multiple areas of our church, with 381 being covenant members.

We have grown into a multi-generational church. Of those who made a touch point, this is how we breakdown by generation. This range is wonderful news. It is a sign of a healthy church and every one of us should see the potential that there is someone who can pour into me in this church and there is someone I can pour into.

Our church has grown more concentrated geographically, with the vast majority coming from this area. There is a good chance you live close to someone who is part of this church. If you want help identifying them, let us know. We want to help make connections.

We are a generous people. I have waited until today because I wanted to tell you in person that we did not match our giving budget for last year... **we exceeded it by over \$100,000!** Thanks be to God for his provision and thank you for your bold generosity. It enables us to carry out the mission God has called us to.

Additionally, your generosity has allowed us to serve our city and world and spread the good news of Jesus. We have blessed over 1,300 in Dallas and participated with God and our ministry partners to bring over 16,000 people to faith and over 200 to the God given purpose. Your giving is changing lives and changing eternities.

And, speaking of God given purpose, we had 55 Repurposed and Yunique graduates this year and broke the 2,000 barrier for the first time. I want to do something new this morning. We've always celebrated these graduates in their class, but we've never done it here. But this is a moment of celebration and encouragement for something so central to our mission and vision, and I've asked those who are able and willing to join me up front and I want you to hear from a few of them.

So, why do we go through all that? Because **I want you to see God is at work, he has made us a new church, and we are ok.** And if you've made the faithful decision to be part of this church, you've gone against the culture, you've devoted your life to be a proclamation of the Gospel, and you've committed to dwelling with God's people here and now to build one another up and live out our mission together. How glorious it is to be a part of Fellowship Dallas.

So where are we going in 2022? A disruptive two years helped us see what is most important. **We are going to make much of Jesus and let him do much in us.** Next week we begin a series in the book of Colossians. The key verse is [Colossians 1:18] ¹⁸ **And he is the head of the body,**

the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Preeminent means surpassing, supreme, to have first place. He is the head, we are the body. He is our Lord and Savior, and we are his people. Every person has something or someone preeminent in their lives. Do you know who or what it is for you? When trial comes, we can get distracted or look elsewhere for answers, guidance, and purpose. But as a church we will commit to the supremacy of Christ and rest in the sufficiency of his saving work. Everything we do will be about him, for him, and with him. If our priority this year is to make much of him and know him more intimately, the rest will follow.

There is also something he wants to do in each of us. Jesus wants you to end this year different than you are right now as you follow him. We call it discipleship, and we are going to continue our work moving from the programs of discipleship to the process of discipleship. Programs are good, but they only get us so far. Discipleship is a non-stop journey to becoming more like Jesus, and while we are all on the same path with the same destination, we are at different places. We want to be a church that meets everyone where they are.

I coached a lot of years in youth baseball and my kids will tell you we were about three things: having fun, building their character as men, and becoming more and more capable as baseball players. That goal was the same for everyone, but these boys showed up at different places in their development. So, at the first practice each season, I'd have them do a few exercises to show me where they were, including how they threw the baseball. One year the first kid threw it so hard no one could catch it, or it sailed over their head. I handed the next kid the ball, said "show me how you throw", and he proceeded to put the ball in his glove and catapult it to the other player. They were headed in the same direction but started in different places and needed to focus on and grow in different things. That's just like the journey of becoming more like Jesus.

So this year we want to help many of you understand where you are in your relationship with Jesus and help you take your next step. For some of you that may be trusting in Christ. Others of you will connect to community and service. Many of you will discover your God given purpose and begin to live that out on mission. **All of us have a step to take along the path, and all of us have a call to help others do that as well.** This is not the staff doing this for everyone. This is all of us helping one another become more like Christ.

Follow Jesus. I'm not talking about dabbling in Jesus, I'm talking about following. It must start here. Will he be preeminent in your life? Will you give him everything this year? When you get really busy, and you will, what will be the first thing to go? Resist it being Jesus. He wants you to know him more in 2022 and help others do the same.

Don't go it alone. I read a book about the state of the church that said, "A Christian without a church is a Christian in trouble." God never meant for us to do this alone, and I want to encourage you to be resistant to doing that in 2022. Be present often, not to increase our numbers, but because **we need you and you need us.** That's the way Jesus set it up. You cannot live out your purpose from God on your own, and we need your help living out ours. Go a few

verses after our verse of the year and you'll see Paul call everyone in the church indispensable. You have a need God fills with others, and he has a part for you to play in their lives.

Extend the invitation. The DFW metroplex is the fastest growing area in the nation with 200+ moving into it every day, often from under-churched areas. Do you realize the gospel opportunity this disruption is causing? I gave you some discouraging facts earlier, but here's a couple encouraging ones. Over 50% of adults reached to Scripture for guidance and comfort in 2021. Online evangelism sites have been busier than ever as people ask about Jesus. This world has been robbed of its perceived peace, confronted with death, lost their control, and it's searching. How many might God want to come to faith through Fellowship this year? 100? 200? 500? How many does God want to awaken to the purpose he has for their life? Be bold. Don't keep your faith a secret. Welcome others in.

Now, you may say "That's nice and all, Kurt. But can we really do this? It's been really difficult." So, I want to end with some encouragement for you.

[Matthew 28:16-20] ¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

We know this passage as the Great Commission and, yes, it summarizes what Jesus is calling us to. But I want to focus on the first part. You see, the disciples had been through a tough season. They faced serious trials, saw their Messiah hanging from a cross, and they lost someone. What started as 12 was now 11...their attendance was down 8.33%. And they were about to take the gospel into a hostile world. They worshiped Jesus, but they also had some doubts. You know who didn't, though? Jesus. He wasn't worried about the mission. He received all authority from the Father, he passed it on to his followers, and he promised to be with them the entire way. He took those eleven, and he changed the world forever.

What was true for them is true for us. Fellowship, I know the last few years have been hard on so many fronts. And we may be a shrunken, battered, beat up, fatigued, and sometimes doubting church, but **we worship the risen Christ who has made us a family and given us everything we need, most importantly himself.** That means nothing can stop us if we are faithful. This is going to be an amazing year, not because of us, but because of him. Let's lovingly and faithfully follow Jesus and watch what he does.