

Becoming the Church People Actually Need

Part 2: Why Success Isn't the Goal... and What Is

Acts 18:9-11

Summary:

When success feels out of reach, Jesus calls us to something greater... faithfully showing up, trusting he's with us, and believing he's working in ways we can't yet see.

Main Ideas:

Showing up is more powerful than success.

Just because you're not seeing the results you hoped for doesn't mean what you're doing doesn't matter.

Sometimes presence matters more than progress.

Just b/c you don't see it now doesn't mean it's not already happening.

Real relationships, real healing, real life take time.

You don't have to be fearless... just faithful.

Invitation:

This week pray... "Jesus, thank you for being with me. Show me where I need to show up."

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you personally define "success" in life? How has that definition changed over time?
2. Why do you think we're tempted to measure church success by numbers, buildings, or programs?
3. Re-read Acts 18:9-10. How might it change our perspective if we measured "success" by faithfulness and showing up instead?
4. What does "showing up" look like for you in your current season of life?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

WE: How would you define what it means to be "successful?"

When you think about a church, what would you say is "successful?"

- Is it the music? The message? The size? The feeling you leave with?

Some of you come regularly. Others, it's been a month or two.

- No shame either way... but think about it... what brings you back, what holds you back?

Like we talked about last week

- If we judged CCC the way the world does (bigger numbers, louder programs, more stuff) we might look around and say: we've failed.
- And maybe you've felt that way about your own life, too.

But we asked last time... what if those aren't the standards that matter?

What if success has nothing to do with numbers... but everything to do with courage?

- What if staying when it's difficult is more "successful" than filling seats or building big buildings?
- What if it's more about the journey than what we think is supposed to happen?
- Trusting there's more to the story... even when it doesn't look like it.

We sat with Elijah in his cave... bone-tired, done, and ready to walk away from the mission... even wanting to die

- And we've all been there... disappointed with life, with God, frustrated that we ended up where we are and not where we hoped or thought we were going.
- Wondering what's wrong with us? Was any of the effort even worth it?

But we also saw God meet him in the stillness, the quiet, the whisper.

- Some of us needed that whisper.

We needed to be reminded...

- "You don't have to be impressive."
- "You're not alone."
- "You're not done."

Sometimes... you just need a nap, a snack, and a little reminder that you're not failing just because the fire hasn't fallen.

But... the point of life (especially the life Jesus offers) isn't just rest.

- Rest is so important, but it's what gets us ready to show up.

So here's what we're going to explore today: What does it look like to show up... when you're not even sure it's making a difference?

What does it look like to keep loving, keep engaging, even if it feels unnoticed?

What does showing up look like for you?

- And what might it look like for us... as CCC?

Showing up is more powerful than success.

GOD: The Apostle Paul asked those same questions.

If you've been in the church world a while, when you think of Paul, you might think of this amazing hero... who started churches all over the ancient Mediterranean.

- Courageous, preaching the truth of Jesus in the face of huge opposition.
- Even to his execution at the order of the Roman Emperor.

But he was also just a person like us.

When we jump into his story today... he's been run out of multiple cities for preaching about Jesus.

- He's been mocked in Athens.
- He's been beaten, jailed, lied about.

He ends up in the city of Corinth... where he tries to preach in the synagogue... he's opposed and insulted.

- So he preaches to Gentiles and sees some success

But by that point, he's probably exhausted, physically, emotionally, spiritually.

- He's underfunded. Probably disillusioned.

He's doing the work. He's still showing up.

- But it seems like Paul's considering whether it's time to move on. Maybe even quit.

Very similar to feelings we as leadership have felt looking back on our 8 years of CCC.

- Is this working? Have we made a difference at all?
- We've been opposed, misunderstood, and underfunded
- And tired... physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Maybe you've been there too.

- Whether it's a job that doesn't seem to be going anywhere
- Relationships that just won't smooth out
- Parenting/teaching kids that just never seem to "get it"

You've tried to live the best life you can

- You've been trying to love people, do good, even serve Jesus...
- Maybe you've even tasted some success

But you're tired. You expected more in life, and no matter what you do, it feels like the same cycle over and over.

Just can't find any traction. Maybe others are making it difficult for you.

- And you're wondering, "What's the point?"
- Is this going anywhere?
- Should I just quit?

That's exactly where Paul was. And it's exactly where Jesus spoke.

Acts 18:9-11 *One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me." So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.*

Jesus begins his encouragement with one of the most spoken phrases in the biblical story... **Don't be afraid.**

He's not rebuking Paul.

Or saying, "just stop being scared."

- Bc that always helps.

- “Just stop being scared.”
- “Thanks, why didn’t I think of that?”

He’s acknowledging Paul’s fear... of failure, of not being enough, of danger.

Fears we’ve all felt...

- What if this doesn't change/work/make any difference/what if it all fails?

Jesus tells him... I know all of those fears, but I’m bigger than them.

- Our fears don't disqualify us. They make us human.
- I have more for you to do.

So he acknowledges Paul’s fear, but shows him there’s something more for him...

Speak out! Don't be silent!

Just because you’re not seeing the results you hoped for doesn’t mean what you’re doing doesn’t matter.

It doesn't mean God’s not using you to make a difference in your world.

A few times in the past 8 years, Liz and I have said to each other...

- It was clear God wanted us to start CCC
- So we can trust he’ll be clear if it needs to stop
- In the meantime, we’re going to keep showing up.
- It hasn't always been easy... In fact, there’ve been some really hard times.

But if you know what you are doing is from God... If you know this “is what love looks like”...

- Then keep going. Keep speaking. Keep loving.

And then Jesus says something I think we’ve all needed to hear when we wonder if it’s worth it: **“For I am with you.”**

- Not: “You’re doing great.”
- Not: “It’ll get better soon.”
- Not: “Stop whining already.”
- Just: “I’m not leaving.”

B/c **sometimes presence matters more than progress.**

When we’re discouraged, anxious, or spiritually stuck... what we need most isn’t a solution. It’s someone.

You might not have clarity right now, but Jesus is telling you. “I. Am. With. You.”

This isn’t just about pushing through the exhaustion... toughing it out... or delusional wishful thinking.

- It’s about who we are relying on.

If we can trust Jesus is with us, no matter what, that he is truly IN IT with us...

- We don't have to wear ourselves out trying to keep a machine running that Jesus never asked us to build.
- We can take a breath, take a nap, have a snack, and keep walking, speaking, and loving

It might be slower than we want.

- Slower than what others expect.
- Slower than what we've been told 'works.'
- But results aren't our job... faithfulness is

Jesus meets Paul in his exhaustion/disappointment/disillusionment and tells him... "I'm here. I need you to just keep showing up, because you don't see what I see."

"I'm going to use you and you're going to change lives you don't even know are out there."

He says... **"Many people in this city belong to me."**

Jesus doesn't just say, "I see where you are."

- He says, "I see who they are."

Paul doesn't see them.

- They haven't shown up yet.
- But Jesus already knows they are coming.

Just b/c you don't see it now doesn't mean it's not already happening.

Just because you're discouraged now... doesn't mean I'm not already working.

There are many (no idea how many) people in Salem hungry for real relationships.

- With other people and with Jesus

People who wouldn't feel comfortable/welcome at other churches

- People who have been rejected, hurt, been told God is mad at them
- People burned by religion. People bored by church. People waiting for an invitation... to a table, not a show.
- Who are starving for someone to show them they are loved, accepted, and that God and his people are FOR them.

We don't see them...

But Jesus knows every one of their names, knows their story, and has been orchestrating things so they are ready at the right time... He just needs us to show up.

And it will be slow work... b/c **real relationships, real healing, real life take time.**

So listen, if Paul needed a whisper to keep going... you and I might too.

If you're tired, discouraged, or praying your hundredth 'God, is this working?' prayer... you're in a great spot for Jesus to whisper again.

Let's rest, listen, and then show up.

YOU: So what does showing up look like for you, at work, with your family, at CCC, as you face your own discouragement?

For some of you, showing up might mean simply committing to come to our gatherings more consistently

- Not to earn extra holy-Jesus points, but to keep helping create the kind of community people actually need.
- A community that is welcoming and open.
- Showing up to engage in the conversation. To be a smile to someone who never expected a smile at a church

For some, it might mean committing to serving, not because church needs you... but because God's still forming you.

- Setting up, cleaning, kids, greeting, giving.
- We're not just creating a Sunday service. We're creating space for the unseen ones God already claims.

It might look like purposely inviting people into your life and to our gatherings.

- Give them an invite card, not to close a deal... but to open a door.

And for others, maybe showing up just means not giving up on your faith this week.

- Or that relationship
- Or being a present parent, partner.
- Still being an example of love at work.

So this week pray... "Jesus, thank you for being with me. Show me where I need to show up."

And then trust that he is with you. B/c he promised he is, and he keeps his promises.

And show up.

WE: We aren't done. We are being re-formed. Re-shaped. Re-commissioned.

There are people in this city who belong to Jesus.

- He desperately loves them and is pursuing them every day.
- He is inviting us to be a part of their story and his eternal story.

I don't know what that will actually look like.

- I do know it won't look like what we expect... b/c it rarely does.

It'll be difficult. It'll be scary.

- But it will be worth it.

Are you willing and ready to show up?

- Are you willing and ready to show up for those in your circle, and are you willing and ready to show up as a vital part of the community of CCC?

It might never look “successful,” but that’s not our goal. Our goal is to be faithful and keep showing up.

You don’t have to be fearless... just faithful.

Jesus is with you. He sees what you can’t. There’s more going on than you know. So let’s keep showing up... together.