

Unit 2 Introduction

When God Shows Up

God has a habit of showing up in the most unlikely of places at the most unlikely of times in the most unlikely of ways. When Jesus declared a blessing on the pure in heart, He said, “. . . they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). I am persuaded that this blessing is not only a promise for the day of His showing up at the end of the age, but it is also promise that the pure in heart will see Him as He is showing up in the most unlikely of places at the most unlikely of times in the most unlikely of ways.

Several years ago I stopped praying that God would show up and began asking Him to help me show up. It is possible, I think, to be someplace but not really show up! By showing up, I mean to say that we live with eyes wide open to see Him and ears carefully attuned to hear Him. I repeat, most of us live extraordinarily ordinary lives of predictable unpredictability! It is the daily grind, the extraordinarily ordinary, that often clouds our vision and dulls our hearing. The good news is that God showed up in the person of Jesus Christ and is still showing up in the most unlikely of places at the most unlikely of times in the most unlikely of ways! The challenge? To see and to hear Him when He is present!

In his gospel record, John invites us to see and hear—to encounter—Jesus as He lived His life in our extraordinarily ordinary world. He navigated the predictable unpredictability of our lives. Jesus, as Eugene Peterson says in *The Message*, “. . . moved into the [our, my] neighborhood.” Jesus showed up in common daily events, ordinary places: a wedding in Cana (ch. 3), a roadside encounter with a distressed father (ch. 4), a pool called Bethesda where persons with disabilities gathered (ch. 5), a hillside where many had come to hear Him preach (ch. 6), “. . . as he went along . . .” (John 9:1), at a cemetery where a friend was entombed (ch. 11). We don’t think of these as “ordinary” places because of what happened when Jesus showed up. However, they were ordinary places, places and events that are rather common and ordinary in our daily lives: a wedding, a roadside, a pool, a hillside, “. . . as he went along . . .,” a cemetery. All ordinary places. Places where everyone was focused on their predictably unpredictable lives!

These people were on their way to what was next. Worrying about what was yet to come. And all too often regretting what had already come to pass. Sounds pretty much like us, doesn’t it? But there . . . in an ordinary moment . . . quite unexpectedly . . . Jesus showed up! It was His presence that transformed the wedding, the roadside encounter, the hillside, the pool, and the cemetery! It is rare that God sends out invitations to an event or a place at which He plans to show up—to meet us some place! But, show up He does!

The Scripture warns of those who have eyes to see, yet do not see; who have ears to hear, yet do not hear. But Jesus promised that the “pure in heart” would see and, by implication, would hear. In other words, some people, the pure in heart, know how to look for Him and listen for Him as they move through the daily grind of their lives. It must be said that we do intentionally prepare ourselves to see and hear as we gather for worship services or prayer times. And God does show up as we gather to hear His word, sing His praises, and fellowship in His Spirit. Often, He shows up in remarkable and memorable ways! Such moments are times of blessing as He moves among us correcting, encouraging, and inspiring! But God also shows up in ordinary places and ordinary events!

We have all heard the modern-day parable about the man stranded on his roof in a great flood. Being a person of faith, he began to call out to God to rescue him. As the water rose, a man in a 4-wheel drive pickup drove up and offered him a ride, but he would not get in the pickup. He would wait for God to rescue him. The rain continued and the water rose even higher. Soon a man in a boat came by and called out to him, but he refused to get in the boat. He would wait for God to rescue him. Then a military helicopter hovered overhead and they dropped a basket to him and called out to him to get in the basket, but he refused. He would wait for God to rescue him! He was a person of great faith! As the waters continued to rise, his home was swept off its foundation and he drowned. When he got to heaven he complained to God, “I waited and waited for you to rescue me and you did not come! Why didn’t you answer my prayers?” God replied, “I sent a pickup, a boat, and a helicopter!” His problem was that he did not know that God could show up in a 4-wheel drive pickup, manage a small fishing boat, and pilot a helicopter! God showed up, but he was so convinced that God would come in an extraordinary way. God showed up in a rather ordinary way, but he failed to see Him. Circumstances, both pleasant and not so pleasant, often make it difficult for us to see that God has shown up.

Since May of 2016 my wife Patty has had five major surgeries for the same issue. It has been a season of frustration, pain, isolation, and discomfort for her. Psalm 23 assures us that goodness and mercy will follow after us, but it seemed that for her, discouragement had overtaken them and followed after her for months without end. The ups and downs of hospital stays, doctors’ appointments, rehab, and the ever-present awareness that nothing is as it should be have been her daily companions. Unfortunately, pain and discomfort joined them. I often wondered why God did not show up and mirac-

ulously heal her! But He did show up in this predictably unpredictable season of her life and she saw Him before I saw Him. During this time, God showed up and began to take her into a deeper experience of intercessory prayer. She developed a more consistent and more meaningful pattern of Bible reading. Her seasons of prayer lengthened and her faith took wings to new places! She has followed our Lord since she came to faith as a 5-year old child, but in this “daily grind” season of life, He showed up to demonstrate that His grace was enough for her.

As I write, she is entering a good place for her health, but treasures what she has learned through all of this. God showed up through our children and grandchildren who gave hugs and prayed prayers for her, relatives who called and prayed, a wonderful Christian who happened to be a good surgeon, nurses who shared our faith, our pastor who sat with us through every surgery, friends around the world who prayed, a friend who came to stay with her when my work called me away, neighbors who checked on her . . . I could go on and on. And we saw Him! He showed up in so many ways and so many faces. And so it goes . . . God showing up!

Psalm 37 has taught me some practices that make it possible for me to see Him more clearly.

- *Trust in the Lord* (v. 3).
- *Delight in the Lord* (v. 4).
- *Commit your way—your life—to the Lord* (v. 5).
- *Be still . . . wait patiently for Him* (v. 7).

It is in our trusting (in all circumstances)—doing, thinking the right thing—that we see Him. It is as we delight in Him that our eyes are opened to see Him and our ears are attuned to hear Him. It is as we commit our way—roll it over on Him—that we sense our burden lifting even if our circumstances do not change. It is in the stillness, as we wait (eagerly anticipate His showing up) for Him that we sense His presence and our hearts are warmed. I will say it again; God has a habit of showing up in the most unlikely of places at the most unlikely of times in the most unlikely of ways.

Unless we see Him, He just might pass us by. In Mark 6:45-52, Jesus comes to the disciples as they labored to row the boat across the lake while the winds opposed them. In verses 48-49 we read: He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass them by, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost . . . “He was about to pass them by . . .” Jesus showed up and they almost missed Him. They were so preoccupied with their circumstance that they almost missed their deliverance!

May our Lord help us to live our extraordinarily ordinary lives of predictable unpredictability with the keen eyes of a pure heart so that we may see Him when He shows up!

J.K. WARRICK is General Superintendent Emeritus for the Church of the Nazarene.