

Well, hey, everyone. Welcome to Valley Creek Church. And Merry Christmas. It's great being with you. Let's do this. Whatever campus you're at, Denton, Flower Mound, Gainesville, Lewisville, somewhere in the world online, let's welcome each other together. It's great being with you and it is Christmas time. And I love Christmas. I love the lights. I love the parties. I love the Christmas party. I love the music. I love the movies. I love the eggnog. Who's my eggnog people? There we go. I have tried so hard to get my family on board with eggnog, but they will not admit how good it is. I mean, it's basically melted ice cream. And it's the ultimate lazy dessert. Like on the lazy dessert scale, you've got like ice cream, which you barely have to chew, and then kind of go to a shake, which you just have to swallow hard. But eggnog just goes down like water, like it's effortless. It's so great.

But what I love even more than eggnog at Christmas is just all the opportunity that we have to engage with and connect with each other. Just, people are so much more willing to just talk to each other this time of year. It's just a time of year where we just notice each other a little more. We notice someone else a little more. We engage with someone a little more. And that's actually what we've been talking about as a church family for the last several weeks. We've been in this series called the Someone Else Challenge. Just learning to live outside of ourselves and not be so self-focused, but more someone else-focused. In the first few weeks, we laid a foundation by looking at the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. And we broadened our definition of who someone else is by looking at what Jesus had to say about who someone else is. And it really helped us break out of our circle of friends and family to the people that are around us every day, like neighbors, and co-workers, and teachers, and coaches, and servers, and baristas, just the people that we interact with every single day.

And every week, we had a specific challenge to practically walk out, getting outside of ourselves to the people around us. Things like being generous to someone, and expressing gratitude to someone, asking meaningful questions of someone, celebrating someone. And I'll tell you what, like it has been so fun, the Someone Else Challenge. And every week through Circles, and serve teams, and just conversations on the weekends, we've heard so many stories of people just getting outside of themselves with someone else, and just the hope that has been released, and the life that has been found, the joy that has been experienced. And so, we're going to wrap up the Someone Else Challenge series this week. And normally at the end of the message, we have been given what the challenge is for that week. But this week, we're actually going to start with it. So, this week's Someone Else Challenge is... invite someone to a Christmas service this week. Invite someone to a Christmas service this week. Now, just because you already know what the challenge is, don't pack up and leave. Don't check out. Let's talk about inviting because there's actually so much about inviting at Christmas time. And usually, we're really excited about it.

There're so many invitations at Christmas; invitations to parties, and gatherings, and hangouts, and getting together with family. And there's invitations for things like caroling, which isn't weird at all to just, group of people show up at a stranger's house and start serenading them.

And for the person that's getting caroled, unless you're a total scrooge, you just got to stand there and take it. And you're staring at them, they're staring at you. And if you act like you enjoy it, they're just going to sing more. So, it's full of Christmas spirit. But here's what's interesting at Christmas is, it's a time full of invitation, but it actually is a time we can like, dread giving or receiving another invitation because we just got so much going on. We're like, I already have four Christmases planned. I got three more Christmas parties. I got family coming in. So, I've got presents to wrap and food to cook. And I still haven't watched Elf, or It's a Wonderful Life, or A Christmas Story. And I got to get those worked in and on and on. And we can get so busy with all of the stuff of Christmas that we miss the invitation to actually just be a part of Christmas.

Or we're the opposite. We're alone and we got none of that happening. And we look at all the busyness and all the activity, start to get a little jaded, maybe a little resentful. And we think, "Man, if an invitation comes, I'm just going to push it aside. I'm just going to toss it." It's ironic that Christmas time is it's like, the Christmas story is full of invitation, just one after another. And yet we can get so busy that the last thing we want to do is give an invitation or we can feel so alone and left out, the last thing we want is an invitation. But I believe there is really something special that God has for each and every one of us when it comes to invitations, especially this time of year, because Christmas is when the greatest invitation the world would ever receive was sent, Jesus. We're really familiar with this verse, John 3:16 and 17. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." And we look at that and you're probably thinking like, aren't those Easter verses? That's not Easter. These are Christmas verses. That when the greatest invitation literally the world would ever receive came through Jesus, the invitation to come to God. An invitation that crossed every barrier, that paid every price to be able to freely come to God. And it's an invitation that cost Jesus everything to give because it's an invitation that through it, we actually received everything. And Jesus came as the great invitation, but then He spent His entire life inviting and showing what He was inviting to. In fact, one of the very first things that we see Jesus do, "Come and see." A simple invitation, about as simple as you get. There're two guys, Andrew and John, and they're aware of Jesus. They've seen Him, followed Him around a little bit, and they want to know a little more.

And so Jesus just says, "Hey, come and see, come have a look." There's no pressure. There's no expectation. He didn't ask them to study, or pray, or do a task. It was just come and see, come and see what this is all about. But then Jesus says, "Come and follow." A new invitation. Jesus always invites us to come and see so that then we can decide if we want to come and follow. If we actually want to be a disciple, a student, a learner, if we actually want to follow Jesus onto the narrow road that leads to a whole new reality. And as you read through the gospels, you see Jesus just on this nonstop inviting mission. He invites to come and see, invites

to follow, invites to hear, to learn, to discover, invites to see what it's like to live in the Father's love, invites to see what God's kingdom is like, to actually experience it. It's one of the reasons His main invitation was, "Repent for the kingdom is at hand." Repent. I'm inviting you to change your thinking because it's right here within reach. You can have it.

And I think we can probably picture or imagine Jesus inviting them. We can picture Him doing that. We can imagine Jesus inviting the disciples. Jesus and Peter. We can picture Jesus in a clean off-white robe, and He's got long brown hair, and a perfect-length beard, and just walking down the shore to Peter. And then, we can picture Peter, he'd be in like an ugly grey robe, and it's covered in fish goo. And he's going to be all stressed and mad about probably cussing about something. And Jesus coming up to him and He's just like, "Ah, this guy. It's a good thing I'm the Son of God. This is going to be a lot of work." But with just some grace and a confidence in what He was inviting Peter to, inviting him, "Hey, come and see. Come and see everything that I have for you." I think we can imagine Jesus inviting then, but how does Jesus invite today? It's through us.

Jesus says, "Hey, as the Father sent me, I'm sending you." When Jesus was on earth, He invited to come and see so they could decide to come and follow. But now Jesus says, it's you, you are the inviter. You get to invite to come and see so they can decide if they want to come and follow. It always starts with an invitation to come and see, to be able to make a decision to come and follow. And I love, there's a parable that Jesus tells in Luke 14, where He talks about this guy that's throwing this huge feast. This guy is throwing this awesome party. And all these people are invited to it. And when it's time for the party, he sends his servant out and tells, okay, tell everybody it's ready. It's time to come. So, the servant goes out to all the people who are invited and like, "Hey, everything is ready for the party. Come on, it's time." And one after one, they give an excuse for why they can't come. First guy is like, "You know, hey, man, I just bought a house. So, I got lots going on. I got a bunch of stuff to do at the house, so I can't make it." Next guy says, "Man, I got a lot of projects at work. I'm buried. I got stuff to do there. I can't do it."

Next one says, "Hey, I'm sorry. We just got married. We're just settling into this new life. We're really busy. We're not going to be able to make it." And so, the servant comes back and tells the master this, and this is the master's response. He says, "Go out quickly into the streets, and alleys of the town, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame." He's like, go out there and invite anybody and everybody, your lame friends or your cool friends. Anybody can come. Just go out and invite, bring them in. And so, the servant does it. He goes out, and then he comes back to the man. He's like, "Hey, I've done everything that you've asked and there's still room." And then he says, "Go out to the roads and the country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full." Jesus is saying, "Hey, I'm throwing the greatest party on the face of the earth. Anyone is welcome. It doesn't matter who they are, what they're like, what they believe. If you know them, everyone is welcome. And there is always room at my party."

Invite anyone and everyone to come and see what this is all about. So, they can decide if they want to come and follow. And you know who's great at inviting? Kids. Kids are the best inviters. They got no barriers. They got no requirements. You basically just need to be breathing. Like, "Hey, you want to come play? You want to come hang out? Can you come over?" Or they just invite themselves. "Can I play? Can I hang out? Can I come over?" They will go door to door finding somebody to play baseball, or football with, or Nerf wars, or video games, or play with dolls or a tea party. They don't even care if they know you. My family, we were playing pickleball a few weeks ago up in Denton. And our 19-year-old son met us there, and he left a little bit early. And when he was walking across the park leaving, a group of middle school boys were playing football and they stopped him and like, "Hey, you want to play football with us?" They've never seen him before in their life. Why are kids so willing and excited to invite people to things, even people that they don't know? It's because they think everything that they're inviting to is awesome.

They're like baseball and football is awesome. Dolls and tea parties, awesome. Man, this life I'm living is awesome. I am living my best life. You need to come and see so you can decide if you want to come and play. You know what you don't see kids inviting to? Chores, homework, mowing the yard. You don't hear any kids being like, "Hey, you want to come over? I'm washing the dog. I'm mowing the yard. I'm doing some math homework." They don't invite to that. Or mom's on a health kick and she's like, "Hey, tonight it's salads and brussel sprouts for dinner." They're not inviting anybody. But on burgers and pizza night, they're like, "Hey, can I have some friends come over to eat?" The point is just like the master and the servant in the story that believe everything that they're getting invited to is awesome. It's the same with kids. They say, "Man, what I'm doing is awesome. You should come and be a part." But what about us when it comes to inviting people to the party?

Inviting people to come and see Jesus. If we don't invite, what does that say about what we believe? Maybe we believe its chores, and homework, and brussel sprouts. What do you believe you're inviting to? Do you actually believe that this life with Jesus is awesome? Because the Bible tells us that the kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, not homework, chores, and brussel sprouts. It's like, it's joy is a primary trait of the kingdom. It is a party life. It is awesome. And so, we're invited to be more like kids to actually view it with an awe, and a wonder, and see that everything with Jesus actually is awesome. And I love it. There're a couple of Jesus' disciples that really got this, Peter and John. Jesus invited them to come and see, and they came, and they saw, and they followed, and they experienced that everything that Jesus said is true. This is incredible.

This life is awesome. And then, I love what their response is. "As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." This is like, we can't help it. I don't care if I know you, if I don't know you, or your life. We can't help but invite you and tell you how awesome Jesus' kingdom is, how awesome life with Jesus is. They can't help but invite people

to come and see so they can decide if they want to come and follow. But now we're the ones holding the invitations. But how can they decide if they want to come and follow if we don't invite them to come and see? You see out there, like out there in the world, people are lost, lonely, and broken. They're lost. They don't know who Jesus is. They don't know what His kingdom is like. They have no vision or direction for their life. They're just aimless. And they're lonely. They're in the orphanage of the world thinking, I got to fight for myself, fend for myself, make a way for myself. I am on my own.

No clue that there is a family waiting for them. And they're broken. And the world is a rough, dark place. And they have been beat down and broken down. And they got shattered dreams with no hope that anything is ever going to change. But in here, this is what a movement of hope looks like. People that have been totally restored and redeemed, people that have found a family to belong to, they've discovered who they are, and who God is, and what they've been created to do. They've discovered that God is good even when the world is not. That Jesus has forgiven me no matter what I've done. That I am loved for who I am, not for what I do, and that everything is possible. There is always hope. That's what we get to invite to come and see. That's what the people of God have. And that is awesome. But here's the thing, I think some of us, like we hear, hey, invite to a Christmas service.

And we think, is it really a big deal? Does it really matter? We hear invite to a Christmas service, and maybe some of us think, man, it's like an hour service. There's hot chocolate and candles and some songs. And is it really a big deal? And it is so much more than that. You're not inviting somebody to religion or to just a church service. You're inviting them to an experience with the presence of God and the people of God. You're inviting them to an environment that has literally been bathed in prayer, people that are praying and contending and interceding for each and every person that is coming through the doors. You're inviting them to the presence of God. And there is literally no more powerful transformation agent on the face of the earth than the presence of God. And you're inviting them to where the Word of God is going to be spoken over their life. And God's Word is active and alive. It's a lamp to our feet.

It's a light to our path. And you're inviting them to a family environment that says, "Hey, come one, come all." You are seen and valued. You are welcome and wanted. And those simple invitations are changing people's lives. Let me tell you about Sam. So, Sam grew up an atheist. And his very first time at Valley Creek was to a Christmas service. And it was there that the grace of Jesus began to reach him and grab him. And he was invited to keep coming, and he kept coming, and he just fully grabbed hold, and received the grace of Jesus and it's changed him. And he was baptized and then was invited to get into Circles. And he just started to learn what it meant to be a disciple and following Jesus, engaging the Scriptures, and praying and growing in relationship. And he got on a serve team. And now, he's inviting people like Austin. Sam and Austin met on a Reddit chat thread. There's engaging on there, but Sam is sharing

with such passion and conviction that Austin is compelled to direct message him outside of it and just say, "Dude, what's this all about?"

And he shares with him, "Man, it's Jesus, and it's my church family." And Austin, who had tried every religion that the world had to offer, and everything that the world had and found nothing, he came, and he saw, and he experienced something that he never had, an encounter with God, the presence of God and a family that was on mission to love him and serve him. And so, he kept coming, and then his wife started coming, and then his teenage daughter started coming, and all of them were radically changed by the grace of Jesus. And they discovered who they are in Him, and they discovered who God is, and they discovered the purposes and plans for them. And they are now living a life of purpose and joy, one that they didn't even know was possible. And let me tell you about Steve and Sarah. They were just living the American dream. They're just making money. They got lots of friends, lots of stuff, lots of activities and lots of empty. They're empty. And they had grown up around religion, but they didn't know God. They didn't have any relationship with God.

And a few years ago during COVID, we actually had a "Christmas At Home" experience. It was Christmas in a box. And Sarah's co-worker, Katie, and her husband, Ronnie, they invited Steve and Sarah to do the "Christmas At Home." And so, they gave them the boxes, invited them to do it. And that was their very first experience with Valley Creek was a "Christmas At Home" service. And it was there that the grace of Jesus began to grow. And they were invited to keep coming back and they kept coming. And they were invited to be a part of Circles and they got into Circles. Then it's funny. We called them inchworm Steve because they started in the very back row. And then it was like week after week, they'd inch forward to another row and another row. And a couple of months later, it'd be like another row. Now, they're in the second row, like man, loving it. And they've been radically changed by the grace of Jesus. And their daughters and kids leadership, their son can't wait until he's old enough to be in it. They're following Jesus as a family with a family and found a peace and a joy they didn't know they could have.

Let me tell you about Scott. Scott's next-door neighbor invited him for two years. Two years. "Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope." Two years. He kept inviting him. Until finally one day he said yes. And he came. And he had an encounter with the presence of God. The grace of Jesus began to grab him. And then, he started, his wife started coming, and their little girl. And they found hope. And they found life. And as some storms of life were hitting them, they can't imagine having weathered those without having found Jesus and this family to walk with them. And then, just this last year, Scott invited his mom to come to a Christmas service. And so, she came. And she loved it. She loved everybody she got to meet. And she got to have an encounter with Jesus. And shortly after that, his mom passed away. And that was the only service she was ever able to come to. And Scott was so grateful that she was able to come and meet Jesus. Well, you just saw at the very beginning of the service that story from Jason.

So, Catherine and Jason, man, they met online. And Catherine was coming to Valley Creek. And she invited him. "Let's test this. First date, come to a Christmas service with me." That's crazy. And he came. And he had an encounter with God. And he realized for years he had identified with Jesus, but he had never really followed Jesus. And so, he began following and became a disciple. And they began journeying together. And they got married. And they had been diving in deep. And now, man, they are leaders. And they're a thriving part of the family, all from a simple invitation to come and see. See, each of those stories is rooted in a simple invite to a Christmas service that changed everything. Changed individuals. Changed marriages. Changed families. Changed eternities. All because someone was willing to get outside of themselves and say, "Hey, come and see so that you can make a decision to come and follow."

So, let me ask you this question. Are there people in your life that you would like to be one of those stories? Is there someone in your life that you want to come and see Jesus? Because that's actually what we spent the entire first half of the year talking about when we talked about being a hope carrier. That's what all that was about. A hope carrier is a disciple of Jesus living on mission to change their world. Just think about what that means though. A hope carries a disciple. A disciple is a learner, a student, one who's becoming like the one they follow. They're becoming like Jesus. Jesus, the way, the truth, the life, the living hope, who's living on mission like they're partnering with God to see His kingdom come and His work be done, His good all around them to change their world, to see God come into the lives of the people that they live and interact with. That's what being a hope carrier is. A disciple of Jesus that's living on mission to change your world, not the world, your world, right around you.

Your life is the come and see invitation so they can decide if they want to come and follow. Well, I love it. Jesus says it like this. "You are the light of the world." You are the light of the world. Your life is the light that lights up for them to come and see. That's why lights are such a big deal at Christmas. Lights get a bad rap at Christmas, but it's a big deal because it's when the light of the world came to you and me. But now we have that light to be able to shine for others through our lives. And maybe you haven't lived as a hope carrier all year long, that's okay. You can start today. All you have to do is decide. Today, I want to start living as a hope carrier. Today, I want to let my little light shine. Today I'm putting it on display. If you have received the hope of Jesus, you carry it everywhere you go.

If you've received the light of Jesus, you carry it everywhere you go. You just make a decision. I'm going to put that hope and that light on display in my world today. And so, hey, so every week, we've always brought it down to the end. We've said, here's your challenge. Here's your way to practically walk this out this week. And this is the end. This is the culmination of the entire Someone Else Challenge series that we're wrapping up right now. And I said it at the beginning, so let me say it again. This is our challenge for this week... invite someone to a Christmas service this week. Invite someone. Invite someone to come and see so that they can make a decision to come and follow. Invite them to an encounter with the presence of God.

Invite them to see just what this is all about because if you invite them to come and see, they get to see what God is like. They get to see what his family is like.

They get to see what his kingdom is like and then they get to make a decision if I want to come and follow. So, would you do this for me? Would you please just grab that invite card that you got? Would you just grab it and hold it in your hand? Because I just want to invite you to do something. So, take that card out. Hold it in your hand. And let me ask you, would you just close your eyes? Just hold it in your hand and just close your eyes. And would you picture the one person that you want to see come to a Christmas service? Picture the one person that you want to come and see Jesus. And don't like, scroll past them immediately if you think they would never, no, no. Just settle on that face. Settle on that person. There's a reason why they're coming up first.

And now here's your challenge. Invite them. Invite that one person. Invite them to come in in-person. Invite them to come online. Invite them to come and see. And don't write them off and don't answer for them. A simple invitation can change everything. Just invite them to come and see so they can make a decision to come and follow. Again, what you're inviting to is the presence of God. An environment that has been bathed in prayer. The supernatural, alive Word of God being declared over the world, and a family on display to tell them this is home.

A simple invitation can change everything. And so, Lord Jesus, I thank You so much that You brought Your hope to us. And so, Jesus, would we have the eyes of a child? Would we be able to look and see how awesome Your kingdom is, how awesome Your life is, how awesome everything You have is, and may we be compelled, may we not be able to help but talk about what we have seen and heard. May we be compelled to invite to the party. And so, Jesus, I ask that Your house would be full. That we would go out. You send us as the inviter, so may we go out and may Your house be full of people who get to come and see You, and Your grace, and Your truth, and Your life and Your kingdom. And then, Jesus, would You do only what You can do, which is the miraculous? Would You change individuals and change families, and change eternities all through the simple invitation to come and see? In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.