

Good morning, Valley Creek Church. It is so good to see you guys. My name is Justin. I get to serve on staff here as a Student Director at our Flower Mound campus, but before we jump in can we just welcome all of our campuses? Whether you are in Gainesville, Denton, Lewisville, Flower Mound or Online. We are so glad that you guys are here with us today and can you all believe that Christmas is only two weeks away and we are really excited about Christmas here at Valley Creek. We are going to have some amazing Christmas services that you do not want to miss and so I want to encourage you. Begin praying over someone that you can invite to experience Jesus this Christmas because here at Valley Creek, hope is here, everyone is welcome and Jesus changes everything, and we are just believing by faith that there is someone else in your life that God wants to change everything for this Christmas. And speaking of someone else, we have been in a series called The Someone Else Challenge.

Talking about getting outside of ourselves to love those around us and this has been so much more than a series. It has been a challenge. A challenge not just to be hearers of the word, but to be doers of the word. Jesus tells us that you will know a tree by its fruit and so this series is to help us not just be a leafy people filled with all the busyness and the chaos and the religion of this world, but to be a people that bear fruit and fruit that will last because as followers of Jesus, we all have a desire to do the things that Jesus did and so this series is to help give our desire direction by giving us a weekly challenge to just walk out and to put our faith into practice and man, the Bible tells us that those that refresh others, those that get outside of themselves, that they will be refreshed. And so our prayer for you is that this series has been refreshing because what God is teaching us is that real refreshing isn't a spa day or a weekend getaway as great as those things are, but real refreshing comes when we refresh others.

When we get outside of ourselves to love those around us and that's the kind of fruit that Jesus was talking about. Fruit that will last. And what better time to feel refreshed than going into the holiday season. Come on, anyone else want to feel refreshed going into the holidays? Man, I love Christmas and I love the holidays because there is so much to celebrate. In fact, if you read the Gospels, one of the things I love most about the Christmas story is just how much celebrating takes place. I mean, we've got angels celebrating, we've got shepherds celebrating, we've got wisemen Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, and if you don't know who all those people are, that's okay because know this, they celebrated. I mean, Christmas literally teaches us how to celebrate, but there's someone in our Christmas story who's celebrating. I really look up to because she was able to celebrate even through a season of trial and of hardship and that someone was Elizabeth. And for a lot of us when we think about the Christmas story, maybe we just think that, you know, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, baby, done, but when you read the Gospels, there's so much more that goes into the Christmas story and Elizabeth is one of those main characters. And maybe you haven't heard a ton about Elizabeth, but Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary and she was also the wife of Zechariah who was a priest in Judea and so Elizabeth and her family had devoted their entire life to serving the Lord and the Bible tells us that they had lived blamelessly obeying all of God's commands, but there was one thing that Elizabeth wanted that she'd yet to receive and that was a child and at

this point in her life the Bible tells us that she is very old, not my words, the Bible's, but really what it's wanting us to see is that at this point essentially all hope of having a child is lost and so I'm sure there was some confusion after living such a faithful life, maybe even some disappointment, but Elizabeth continued to seek God, to pray and to ask for the desires of her heart and then one day against all odds, an angel comes into their life and says "Your prayer has been heard, you will bear a son," and I can only imagine how Elizabeth must have felt.

I mean here she was very old, with a lifetime full of disappointment, but the Lord had just done a miracle in her life and if it's anything like our day and age, I bet Elizabeth probably couldn't wait to get out and tell the world so that she could be celebrated. However, there was no social media 2,000 years ago. There were no gender-reveal parties. Elizabeth had to hold on to this news until family and friends came to visit her, and so I'm sure the suspense was killing her, but one day, Mary, her cousin comes into town and so this is Elizabeth's big moment. After all this waiting, after all the time, after all the confusion and the disappointment, she finally gets to tell someone the good news. So as Mary comes into her home, before Elizabeth can say anything, Elizabeth notices that Mary is pregnant. And if I'm Elizabeth, I'm thinking, "Seriously? But this was my news. Like, I'm the one who's waited all this time, I'm super old, my story's way crazier than yours like, it's my turn to be celebrated." But that's not what Elizabeth says. Instead, as soon as Elizabeth walks into the home and she discovers that Mary is pregnant, look at what she says.

"In a loud voice she exclaimed, 'Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear, but why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'" After all this waiting, after all this time, this is how Elizabeth responds to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, blessed is the child you will bear." Okay, time out, do you want to know how you know you're experiencing the goodness of God in your life? When you don't need to be celebrated by anyone else, but you can't wait to celebrate someone else. Elizabeth didn't need to be celebrated by Mary. Instead, she could not wait to celebrate Mary. Elizabeth wasn't thinking, "Where's my party? Where are my gifts? Like, why isn't all the energy and the attention and the focus directed at me?" No, as soon as Elizabeth discovers that Mary is pregnant, all of her focus and her attention and her effort and her heart go towards celebrating Mary because Elizabeth didn't need to be celebrated by anyone else, but instead, she could not wait to celebrate the someone else who was right in front of her, which, side note, that's what aging well looks like.

Aging well isn't having a great 401K and looking fit and in shape when you're 65. Aging well is receiving and releasing the goodness of God in your life by celebrating someone else. And so celebrating is evidence of experiencing the goodness of God in our life. And when I say celebrating, I don't mean like a party or what we sometimes call a celebration, because you can be surrounded by a celebration with zero amount of celebrating, because celebrating isn't a party or a gathering, and celebrating isn't encouragement like, when I speak courage into you. And I think for a lot of us, we think celebrating is gratitude or expressing thankfulness to

someone for something or someone, but that's not what celebrating is. So what's celebrating? Celebrating is paying attention and calling attention to the good in someone else. And notice that it says "good" and not the "perfection" in someone else, because if you're waiting to celebrate someone until everything is perfect, spoiler alert, you're gonna be waiting a long time because I'm pretty sure that until Jesus returns, there's always gonna be some imperfections and so celebrating is celebrating someone in spite of imperfections and notice that it also doesn't say the success in someone else or the awards or the accolades or the promotion. Why? because the world is constantly celebrating those things and so what do we mean when we say celebrate the good in someone?

Celebrate the character in someone. The wisdom, the creativity, the excellence, the things that belong to the kingdom of God. And so when we say celebrate the good in someone, what we're actually celebrating is the kingdom of God at work in someone. We're celebrating the life of God in someone. We're celebrating the potential and purpose of God in someone. Even in an unbeliever, we're celebrating the image and likeness of God in someone because sometimes guys, even as believers, we just struggle to see the good at work in our own lives. We struggle to see the good at work in our own lives, but this is why celebrating helps us become someone we can never be on our own because it pays attention and calls attention to the good that we don't see in ourselves, but that we need to see in ourselves. So that we can walk out God's call and purpose on our life.

I mean, do you know how Mary initially responded when the angel told her that she was going to be pregnant? She was terrified. She was full of anxiety, worry, doubt. She wondered how on earth will this be? But then Elizabeth comes into her life and celebrates the good she sees in her and all of a sudden, she's filled with a joy and a confidence. She shouts with praise and she worships the Lord because that's what celebrating does in the life of others and when we learn to live like Elizabeth and pay attention and call attention to the goodness of God in our own lives, then we can't help but do the same in the lives of others and Jesus wants us to catch this. This is why in Luke 6, Jesus says, "The good man brings good things out of the good treasure of his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil treasure of his heart. For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."

So guys, our words show what our heart is filled with and you will see whatever's in your heart. And so if there's good in your heart, you'll see the good in someone, but if there's evil in your heart, then you'll see what's wrong or what's missing in someone. And so can I just ask you, when you think about the someone else's in your life, are you more prone to see what's right in them or what's wrong with them? Because how you answer that question gives you a glimpse of what's going on in your own heart and maybe there's an invitation for you in all of this because when your heart is filled with the world or with evil, then you'll always see what's wrong or what's missing in someone, but when your heart is filled with the goodness of God, you start to see the things that are at work, that are actually worth celebrating in someone and

so real celebrating isn't man's idea, it's actually inspired by experiencing the goodness of God in your life.

I mean, do you remember when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan? Jesus was baptized. He came up out of the waters. The heavens opened up and what did God say to Him? He didn't say, "Hey Jesus, I'm just telling you now, the people are an absolute train wreck, like total disaster and so good luck because I'm not sure how you're gonna get anything done." Or, "Hey Jesus, I'm just telling you now, the disciples are a mess, like, I don't know really how you're gonna lead this thing with them, and so step it up because I don't want you to embarrass the family name." Come on, that's not what God said. As soon as Jesus was baptized in the Jordan and came up out of the waters, His Father said, "This is My Son whom I love. With Him, I am well pleased." His Father was paying attention and calling attention to the good He saw in His Son and so He celebrated Him. And what you've got to remember is this was before Jesus's ministry had even started, but God knew the thing that Jesus needed to hear most wasn't a pep talk or a motivational speech or some feedback with some course correcting. It was just celebrating Him.

Before Jesus did anything, His Father celebrated Him, not for what He did, but for who He already was and it's from that moment of celebration that Jesus goes off and turns the world upside down. I mean, if you think about it, Jesus was literally launched from a place of celebration and then all throughout the life of Jesus, do you know what we see Him do? Celebrate the good He saw in someone else. He celebrated them for who they were, not for what they did. Like Jesus saw beyond the outcome and the finished product, instead He paid attention to the things that were happening within them. Like, when Jesus saw a Centurion, He didn't just see a Roman guard. He saw a faith greater than anyone in all of Israel. When Jesus saw a widow who gave her two coins, He didn't just see a helpless woman. He saw a generosity that outweighed hundreds. And when Jesus saw a prostitute, He didn't just see a sinner. He saw the beauty inside of her and the potential of all that she could become. And Jesus didn't just pay attention to those things. He called attention to those things.

Jesus recognized their contribution, but He celebrated their personhood, their faith, their hope, their trust, their life, their character and so often don't we do the opposite? We celebrate the contribution, but we turn a blind eye to the character, but that's not what Jesus did. Jesus was someone who celebrated the good He saw in others and so if celebrating is something that Jesus modeled for us, then why is it that so many of us struggle to celebrate the someone else's in our life? Because I think if we're honest, we all want to be celebrated, but where we struggle is when it comes to celebrating the someone else's in our life. And so how did Elizabeth and Jesus do it? Like how did they live in this perpetual state of celebrating the someone else's in their life? Well, they had freely received celebration from their good Father.

Remember in Matthew 10, Jesus tells us, "Freely you have received, freely give," and so you can't give what you haven't received, meaning it's hard to celebrate someone if you don't feel

celebrated, but Elizabeth and Jesus received not just once, but constant celebration from their good Father. So they could freely celebrate the someone else's in their life. And so what about you? Are you freely receiving the celebration that God is speaking over you? Or if you're honest, when you think about God and how He sees you, do you think He has more He wants to critique than He wants to celebrate? Because how you answer that question will tell you how much or how little you celebrate the someone else's in your life. And if you're someone who thinks that God is always critiquing you, always criticizing you, can I just show you this verse?

"He will take great delight in you. In his love, He will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing." What do you do with this verse? If you're someone who thinks that God is always saying, do more, try harder, you're never enough, what do you do with a verse like that? Because when you start to understand that God rejoices, sings, celebrates you, you can't help, but celebrate the someone else's in your life. But if you think God is passive or not celebratory or critical or judgmental of you, then you start to let the world begin to define what celebrating looks like. And if we're honest, the world loves to critique and criticize a whole lot more than it wants to celebrate. I mean, think about it, society is constantly driving our attention towards the negative, and not the things that are actually worth celebrating. Think about the news for a moment. Doesn't matter what news outlet you subscribe to, it is hardly ever celebratory. What about all the reviews and the comments we read on the internet and social media? We don't wanna talk about the positives, instead we wanna focus on the negative. Like, no one wants to read a five-star Yelp review. Instead, we all want the one-star, all caps, "RATS IN MY COBB SALAD" review. Or think about reality TV.

Can you imagine how little reality TV we would watch if all they ever did was just celebrate the good they saw in each other? Just picture The Bachelor for a moment. "You know, Denise, I just love getting to be around you. You make me a better person, and you're so kind and compassionate." "No, you know what? I was thinking the same, in fact, I'm dropping out of the competition because he should be with someone like you." But we don't want that. Instead, we want the judgement and the criticism and the critiquing, I mean celebrating? Boring! And society is built on this bigger, faster, stronger, better, and there's so much good that's come from that, but if all we ever do is pay attention to what's next, then we'll struggle to celebrate what is, or even what could be. And we may even have this underlying fear that celebrating makes us weak or complacent or causes us to settle. Like, we can't sit around celebrating all day, otherwise nothing would ever get done.

Okay, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Guys, celebrating creates momentum. Celebrating creates belief in oneself. Celebrating moves us forward, and celebrating doesn't negate feedback or constructive criticism either. In fact, if anything, it validates it because when we are coaching or training or correcting or holding someone accountable, it's because we see the goodness of God at work in their life, and we just want them to grab ahold of it for themselves. I mean, check out this verse in Hebrews. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds." Guys, sometimes celebrating looks like

spurring each other on, but the question is, what are we spurring each other on towards? Bigger, faster, stronger, better, winning? Or towards the things that really matter? Love and good deeds, the life of Jesus? Because if Jesus thought it was worth spurring others on by celebrating prostitutes, tax collectors, outcasts, then how much more do the someone else's in our lives deserve to be spurred on by our celebrating of them? And I love that this verse says "Consider..." As in, consider how you celebrate. Don't just throw out lots of general celebrations or flippant "good job's" or "I celebrate you." What do you celebrate them for? Like be specific, consider, be intentional, think about what you want to celebrate. I mean, look at this verse, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth." Judgment, criticism, critiquing, "But only what is useful for building others up according to," say it with me, "their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Guys, "good job's," and "I celebrate you," those are great, but as followers of Jesus, we're called to higher. We're called to pay attention and call attention to the good in someone based on their needs because when we do celebrate someone, it can impact not just the person we're celebrating, but all who are listening because celebrating has a ripple effect. I've experienced the ripple firsthand. I mean, my father-in-law is someone who is constantly getting outside of himself and celebrating the someone else's in his life and he's unapologetic about it. Like, he goes into a space with an aim to celebrate someone. He does not care who's around, who's listening or being inconvenienced because he doesn't see celebrating as an inconvenience. He sees it as a privilege. There has literally not been one restaurant he is not the last one out of because he is hunting down our server to just celebrate something he saw in them and every single time he does it, you know what it does in my heart? It builds me up. It spurs me on. It makes me wanna pay attention and call attention to the good in someone else in my life, and it makes me wanna go celebrate them because celebrating is contagious. And so what would it look like for you to go into a space with an aim to celebrate someone else? Because here's why that really matters.

Celebrating is a tool that God gives us to release His kingdom and so if you're someone who never wants to celebrate or never wants to be celebrated, let me just remind you, God has made you His ambassador that means you have a responsibility to receive and release His kingdom. And so when you choose to celebrate or to be celebrated, you choose to release the kingdom of God in the atmosphere. I mean, come on, you were made to celebrate. You weren't made to sit back and be passive or hypercritical. You were made to receive and release the kingdom of God in your life. Look at this verse in Proverbs, "From the fruit of their mouth, a person's stomach is filled; with the harvest of their lips, they are satisfied. The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."

Guys, our celebrating is the fruit of our mouth and anytime we celebrate someone, it fills our lives and it satisfies our hearts and our words have the power of life and death, and there's no neutral and so anytime we choose to celebrate someone, we choose to speak life into someone and God in His goodness fills our hearts and satisfies our life. Here's a really

important truth you gotta catch when it comes to celebrating the someone else's in your life, you will replicate the things that you celebrate. You will replicate the things that you celebrate and so what do you want replicated? Like parents, what do you want replicated in your kids? Spouses, what do you want replicated in your marriage? Students, young adults, what do you want replicated in your friendships? Bosses, supervisors, employees, managers, what do you want replicated in the workplace? The things of this world? Or the things of the kingdom? Love and good deeds, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, like what would it look like for your celebrating to replicate the kingdom of God? and knowing why celebrating is important matters, but what's just as important is knowing how to celebrate.

Like how to go into a space with not just a hope, but an aim to celebrate someone else because I would bet, there are probably a few different groupings of us here today. Maybe some of us really are celebratory. Like we go into a space with an aim to pay attention and call attention to the good in someone else and if that's you, let me just remind you, celebrating is not finite, it's infinite and so don't fall into the trap of, "I've met my celebrating quota for the day," because there's always more to celebrate. But for most of us, we probably have an invitation to grow in this and maybe for some of us, this is someone you're not used to. Like maybe celebrating wasn't a culture of your home growing up and that's okay because it's a culture of the kingdom of God and so I just wanna declare over you that it's going to be a culture of your home in Jesus' name because again, for all of us, myself included, we have some room to grow in this. And so real quick, here are just some do's and don'ts when it comes to celebrating the someone else's in our life, okay?

So some do's is: Be observant. The reason that Jesus was able to celebrate the someone else's in his life was because He was observant. He paid attention to the things happening out here, sure, but He paid more attention to the things happening in here and what Jesus shows us is that your level of observation will determine your depth of celebration because it's hard to celebrate someone you're not paying any attention to or thinking about. But if celebrating is paying attention and calling attention, well, we first have to make sure we're paying attention and then don't just think it, say it. Be observant. Our next do is: Do it with all your heart. Like if you're gonna celebrate someone, celebrate someone. Do it with all your heart even when you don't want to and even when you don't feel like it and don't just wing it.

Just like doing anything well, celebrating takes preparation and so even if it's just a few moments, asking God, "Okay, what is it You want me to pay attention to in this person? And what is it You want me to call attention to in this person?" Because you may not know it, but you may be someone's Elizabeth to their Mary. Celebrating something that they don't see in themselves, but that they need to see in themselves, so that they can walk out God's call on their life. I mean, can you just imagine if Mary went through the whole pregnancy full of doubt, fear, worry, anxiety, but she didn't because God was with her and because Elizabeth celebrated her with all of her heart. And so let's do the same when it comes to celebrating the someone else's in our life.

So our do's are: Be observant and do it with all your heart. Now, just a few don'ts for you. First don't is: Don't have expectations. Guys, the primary way to set you and the other person up for absolute failure is to have an expectation of how they may or may not respond to your celebrating of them. Why? Because that's not why we do it. Success is not results, it's obedience and we celebrate someone out of obedience and you're not responsible for how they receive it. You're just responsible to say it and if they don't receive it, say, "Hey, it's all good, I just take my celebration back." I'm kidding. Don't do that. Just wanted to make sure you're still with me. But also don't let someone else's response or lack thereof determine the joy you can have when you're just being obedient and you're just celebrating someone else.

Okay, and our next don't is: Don't make excuses. I am convinced one of the main reasons we don't celebrate the someone else's in our life is because we think it's awkward. It's awkward to go out of our way and celebrate someone, and I struggle with this. Like, anytime I legit celebrate someone, I'm like, "Are we in a Disney movie right now? Like, is this a Hallmark film?" And here's the reality. Anytime you celebrate someone, it might be cheesy. It might feel awkward, but that's okay because it might require humility and God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble and if celebrating is about getting outside of yourself, then it's not about you and how you feel anyways. Guys, again, I'm just gonna say it, anytime you celebrate someone, it could be awkward. There's a chance they may not know how to respond or like you want something from them or like you just spoke a different language because in a way you just did, because celebrating is not a language of the world, but it's a language of the kingdom of God and some people just don't know how to interpret it or receive it, but again you're not responsible for how they receive it. You're just responsible to say it and if the enemy knows that celebrating someone truly does release the kingdom of God into the atmosphere, it'll do anything and everything it can to convince you not to do it, but don't fall into that trap.

In fact, the more you don't wanna celebrate someone, the more you probably should celebrate someone. I mean, recently, my wife and I got to feel that rollercoaster of emotions. We were in the ER a few weeks ago with one of our sons and by the time we had gotten out, we were coming off 20+ hours, no food, no sleep and so by the time we were done, we just wanted some rest and some french fries. So we go to Whataburger because where else can you get french fries at 6.30 a.m. in the morning? and the lady that took our order was so kind. She was so gentle and patient and compassionate towards us, and we had no idea how bad we just needed someone to be nice to us. So we pull up to the window and can very much recognize this is an opportunity to celebrate this sweet woman, but what do we do? We start to make excuses. We start to think, "Should we really do this?" Like, "Is this gonna be cheesy? Do our words carry any weight whatsoever in this woman's life?" But then she opens the window and you know what? We just go for it.

We celebrate her for doing her job with all of her heart. We celebrate the fruit of the spirit that she displayed to us and you know what guys? It was a little awkward, but as we started to drive



off, the amazing thing was, all of a sudden we started to feel life, perspective, hope, into what had been a really hard 24 hours for our family because we had just gotten outside of ourselves. So I don't know if our celebrating had any impact on that woman's day whatsoever, but it had an impact on our day and that's what happens when we get outside of ourselves and celebrate the someone else's in our life and so don't wait, don't make excuses. Nike this thing. Just do it. Just celebrate the someone else's in your life and that leads us into our last don't: Don't wait for the perfect moment, because there is no such thing. When is the perfect time to be obedient to Jesus? Right now. Right now is the perfect time to say yes to Jesus and so don't wait. Like if you notice that barista or that server, or that government worker, or that neighbor, or that someone else you don't usually talk to, display the kingdom of God, don't wait. Go celebrate them. Who cares who's around? Who cares whoever's listening? Because maybe they need to hear it just as much as the person you're celebrating, and so don't wait and don't have expectations. Don't make excuses, let's go celebrate the someone else's in our life in Jesus' name.

So, are you ready for the someone else challenge this week? The someone else challenge is to go rebuke someone. No. Come on, the someone else challenge this week is to celebrate someone this week. Celebrate that coach. Celebrate that teacher. Celebrate that neighbor. Celebrate that someone else. Whoever it is, pay attention and call attention to the good you see at work in them. I mean, can you just imagine if every single one of us went into a space with an aim to celebrate someone? To pay attention and call attention to the things that they don't see in themselves, but that they need to see in themselves, so that they can become someone they never thought they could be. So that they can walk out God's purpose on their life or even better, so that they can encounter God in their life. And we don't have to wait guys. We're celebrated by the King of kings and Lord of lords. We have everything we need to get outside of ourselves and celebrate the someone else in our life and so Valley Creek Church, let us be a people who pay attention and call attention to the good you see in someone else and let's learn to celebrate.

So would you close your eyes with me? Come on, what's the Holy Spirit saying to you? I think He's even reminding me that when I came to this church years ago, I was a mess. I saw no good inside myself, but I'm so grateful for the leaders and for the people that He has placed into my life over these years that celebrated the good they saw in me, so that I could become someone I never thought I could be. So Valley Creek Church, you are celebrated. You are celebrated by God. He no longer rebukes you, but He rejoices over you with singing and celebration and so you have everything you need to get outside of yourself and to celebrate someone this week and so as you do, may it bring life, refreshing, satisfaction, and fulfillment to your heart and to your soul. In Jesus' name. Amen.