

Well, hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. It is great to be with you. Let's welcome all of our campuses, all the way up into Gainesville and Denton, Lewisville, Flower Mound. Everybody online. Hey, it's great to be together. And have you heard? It's December, people. And so, you know what that means. It means we are smack dab in the middle of the holiday season. We've got Thanksgiving behind us. Christmas is ahead of us. And so, we are just in the magnificent middle of it all. And if you're thinking my middle is not magnificent, it's a little more messy or a little bit of mayhem. Okay, can I give you a different perspective? See, I think the middle, sometimes it's the very best part. It's the best part of an Oreo. It's the best part of a Rolo. And I think the middle is the best part of the series that we are in.

We are smack dab in the middle of our Someone Else Challenge. We are getting outside of ourselves. And we are taking the hope of Jesus to other people. See, we started this journey back in November. And we said, for the next two months, we just want to get outside of ourselves. We want to see the someone else's in our life. And we started that before Thanksgiving. We practiced being generous to someone else. And then, we expressed gratitude to someone else. And while those were great, y'all, I think the best is yet to come. I think we're just getting warmed up. You know why? Because it's Christmas. And I mean, isn't Christmas, isn't that what Christmas is all about, is someone else? We're buying gifts for someone else. We're spending time with someone else. We're meeting the needs of someone else. Y'all, that is the heartbeat of Christmas. And there's actually a story in Scripture that does tell the heartbeat of Christmas.

It's a story about seeing someone else and meeting the needs of someone else. But it's not the Christmas story. Remember with me the story of Jesus at the healing pool. The healing pool was this place where people would come, people that had significant physical needs. They were blind. They were lame. They were paralyzed. And these people would come, and they would lay around the healing pool because that's where they thought they were going to find their miracle. And so, every day, there would be crowds of people passing them by, and they wouldn't engage with these people. They wouldn't talk to them. I think they wouldn't even look at them because they didn't want to unintentionally convey a commitment that they weren't willing to make. So here's all of these people waiting for a miracle, all of these people who have a level of brokenness in their life, and the crowd's just walking by them. Sadly, I think that's a lot of what the holidays are like, a lot of hurting people that the crowd just doesn't see.

Well, one day, Jesus came to the healing pool. He came to the pool, and He saw a someone else. He saw a man who had been there for 38 years. Almost four decades, this man was waiting for his miracle at the healing pool. He was unable to walk. And one day, Jesus comes up and approaches him, and I think what Jesus says is fascinating. Jesus says to this man, "Do you want to get well?" Do you want to get well? I think that's a very interesting statement to make. But if you notice, it's actually not a statement. It's a question. He asked this man a question. And it's kind of an obvious question, I would think. I would think after almost four decades, He'd say, "Do you want to get well?" And the man would say, "Yes, yes, in fact, I

do." That's not what the man said. Look at what he said. He said, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.

While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Okay. Did the man not hear what Jesus said? Because Jesus pretty clearly asked a yes or no question. Do you want to get well? That's a yes. That's a no. But this man didn't say that. He starts giving all of these excuses and trying to explain the circumstances of why he is where he is. And so, what does Jesus say? Jesus responds by saying, "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk." At once, the man was cured. He picked up his mat and he walked. 40 years! Almost 40 years, 38 years he had been waiting. And at once, he was cured. At once, everything in his life changed. Why? Because Jesus stopped and asked the man a question. I mean, can you imagine what would have happened if Jesus had not asked this man that question?

Well, the man would not have experienced healing. He wouldn't have been made whole. He wouldn't have freedom. He wouldn't have gone back to his family. All the people around the pool wouldn't have seen there is still something to hope for. But actually, that didn't happen because Jesus -- actually, that did happen because Jesus asked him a simple question. One question changed everything about that man's world. He simply asked a meaningful question. And right now, as we're in the Someone Else Challenge, what I think this story is trying to tell us is if we really want to make a difference in the lives of others, if we really want to see someone else and we really want to bring hope to them, one of the best ways we can do that is by asking a meaningful question. See, Jesus knew this. He knew this, the secret of a powerful question. He knew how powerful that tool was. In fact, He knew it at a really young age.

Do you know when He was 12 years old, that time that his mom and dad lost Him, and they found Him again in the temple? Do you know what the Bible says He was doing in the temple? It says He was asking questions. See, Jesus knew that asking questions, it's a great way to get outside of ourselves and to stay outside of ourselves. And there's really two reasons. There's two reasons that Jesus asks questions. The first is to help people discover something about themselves. The second is to help people discover something about Himself. Jesus is going to ask people questions because there's something within them that He wants to discover, He wants them to discover about themselves. And then, He's also going to ask them questions to show them things they don't know about Him. Now, in Scripture, we see this with a lot of people, but who I'll primarily see it with is our buddy Peter. Now, I believe that we can prove that Peter was the most hard-headed disciple of all of them. So, I wonder if Jesus was like, "You know what, I can tell Pete a lot of stuff and he's just going to like ignore Me. But if I ask him a question, maybe he'll just slow down long enough to listen to Me."

I mean, think about the first recorded question that Peter actually was asked by Jesus. Jesus says to him, "Hey, Peter, can I borrow your boat?" Well, that may sound like a kind of an easy question, but you've got to realize Pete was a fisherman. And so, that boat was like the whole way that he completed his life. That was really important. His livelihood was dependent on the

boat. If Jesus asked you to take your livelihood, would that be easy for you to say yes to? "Hey, Peter, can I borrow your boat?" Peter says okay. And in that moment, Peter discovers something about himself. He discovers, "I have something that can be used to advance Jesus' ministry." Fascinating. A little bit later, Jesus asked Peter another question. He said, "Hey, Peter, who do you say I am?" Okay, notice. Can I borrow your boat? Who do you say I am?

There's a progression of depth to the questions. That means there's a progression of depth to the discovery that's going to be made. So He asked Him, "Peter, who do you say I am?" And Peter says with bold confidence, "You are the Messiah. You are the Son of the living God." Look what Jesus says back to him. He says, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter. And on this rock I will build my church." See, Jesus is asking a question, and He's wanting to help Peter to understand. "I know who you think you are. You think you're Simon, son of Jonah. Everybody else sees you as Simon, son of Jonah. But I want you to discover something else. I want you to discover who I say you are." And so, he discovered who he was in the sight of God. He got a brand new name, a brand new identity.

Everything in Peter's life changed because Jesus asked him that question. Now, Jesus didn't just ask Peter easy questions. He asked him some hard questions, too. Like the time when a lot of the followers were walking away from Jesus, and Jesus looks at his disciples, Peter right smack in the middle of them, and says, "You want to go too? Do you want to go too?" In that moment, Peter had to look inside of himself and say, "Man, do I still have what it takes to be in this thing?" And maybe the most profound engagement between Jesus and Peter in the form of questions, it came after Peter had really messed up. Remember the end when Peter denied even knowing Jesus? And yet, the resurrected Jesus finds Peter after all of that, and He brings him to Him, and He cooks him breakfast. And then, He asks Peter this question. "Do you love me?"

That kind of takes my breath away. To think of that moment, can you see that moment, after everything they've been through? And Jesus looks at Peter, and He says, "Peter, do you love me?" And He doesn't just ask him that question once. He asks him that question three times. And in the course of answering, Peter discovers about himself. He's forgiven. He is reunited with Jesus. He has completely been redeemed. He's experienced the grace of Jesus. He's been restored. He has a second chance of the life he was created to live. He discovered all of that by that one question. So, Jesus will ask us questions to show us something about ourselves, but He also asks questions so that we can discover something about Him. I think we see this well played with the woman at the well. Remember her? This woman who comes to the well to get water, and her life is a wreck.

Sister is a hot mess. She comes to the well. She encounters Jesus there. And He asks her a question. "Will you give Me a drink?" Will you give Me a drink? Now, she didn't have a lot to give. Because she was in such a state of her life, she didn't have a smile or a pleasantry. She

really didn't have much to give. But isn't it interesting, even when our life is in a mess, Jesus will never ask us for something we don't have access to. Will you give me a drink? And He asks her, and she kind of blows Him off a little bit. And then He said, "If you only knew who it was that was asking, you would ask him, and he would give you living waters." Okay, now He had her attention. And she leans in. And they have this beautiful conversation. And at the end of the conversation, she makes a discovery about Jesus. She discovers that that is Jesus. That she's sitting there talking to the Messiah. And she goes into town, and the Bible says that many people started following Jesus all because of her testimony.

All because of what started from one simple question. "Will you give me a drink?" See, Jesus is going to ask us questions. And every time, He's trying to show us something about ourselves and show us something about Himself. We read through the New Testament, so go back and remember when you were reading through the Gospels, and you'll start to realize how many times He asked a question. "Will you give Me a drink?" "Who touched Me?" "What do you want Me to do for you?" Feeding the 5,000? He said, "What do you have?" He was always asking questions for the purpose to show us something, to teach us something about ourselves and something about Himself. And those questions may seem a little context, just at face value, but when you look at them in Scripture, it all becomes very clear. Now what does this have to do with us? Everything. It has everything to do with us. Because if we can follow Jesus' model, then we too can ask people questions. And those questions can help them discover something about themselves.

But more importantly, it can help them discover something about Jesus. Because let's be honest, we encounter people all of the time who have brokenness in their life. They have broken mental health. They have broken relationships. They have a broken home life. And they're just waiting for someone to help by asking them a question to help them discover something about themselves and to discover something about Jesus to help make them whole. Questions. They're a great tool. They're one of the best tools that we have in ministry. They're one of the best ways that we can get outside of ourselves and stay outside of ourselves. And although, they are very, very great, they're really hard for us to do. They're really hard for us to do. Why? I think it's lots of reasons. I think one reason is that we oftentimes just live way too fast. We don't move at the pace of grace. In fact, what do they say about this time of year? They say it's the hustle and bustle of holidays. Well, questions are meant for people. And people are just a blur if we're hustling.

Or they can be a pain if we're bustling. So we have to slow down a little bit to see them. But I don't know that we do that. Sometimes, we're just afraid to get involved. We're afraid to ask a question. Because what if they ask us a question and they've got problems and we've got problems? But yeah, we've got to get outside of ourselves and ask them a question so that they can find Jesus as the answer to their problem. Or maybe we think, you know what, other things are going to change them. Like they need a good message. They need a preacher. They need a podcast. They need a good counselor. Okay, maybe. But man, never underestimate the

power of a simple question to help them make a discovery that can change their whole world just like that. But can I boil it down to like the raw truth? I mean, I know it's Christmas and I know here we are. It's church. But if I'm going to boil this down to the real raw truth, I think we don't ask people questions, because honestly, sometimes we just don't care enough about them.

I think we live so focused on ourselves, and we are so turned inward that we just, we don't care enough to stop our world in order to get into theirs and help them find the healing that they're looking for. I just don't think we care. And I know that may be a little bit rough to hear on a Sunday morning. But I believe there's truth to that. And if we can't speak truth here, then where can we speak truth? And I tell you, what an opportunity we have at this time of year. Do you realize how many questions get asked around Christmastime? So where are you going for Christmas? So have you got your Christmas shopping done? How many days till Christmas? Have you been good this year? Because it's Christmas. I mean, there's all kinds of questions that naturally get asked this time of year. So here's an idea. Why not leverage them? Why not leverage those questions and instead of staying at this superficial level, why not come down and ask a meaningful question that could change their life?

And you know what? It might just be that there's a special anointing on questions at Christmastime. Because have you ever thought about how many questions were asked the first Christmas? I mean, think about it. They were all anticipating the Messiah. They knew the Messiah was coming. How? When? Where? There were a ton of questions at Christmas. And then, the angel comes and tells Mary, "You're going to have a baby. And it's going to be the Messiah." And she asks what I think is a pretty fair question. "How can this be?" I think that's fair. And then, she goes and talks to her fiancé, Joseph, and tells him, "Hey, Joseph, I'm pregnant." Well, do you think he had some questions? I think he probably did. And then, she goes to see her cousin, Elizabeth, and tell Elizabeth that she's pregnant. And Elizabeth says, "Who am I that the mother of my Lord would come to see me?" The Magi had questions. "Where is He who's born the King of the Jews?"

Shepherds were hanging out there, got scared to death by all of the angels. I'm sure, "What the...?" I'm just saying there were questions that were asked that first Christmas. And they were drastic questions, because it was bringing about some drastic change in their life. Maybe you have got some drastic change in your life right now. Has anybody looked you in the eyes and leaned in and asked you a question like, "Hey, how you doing? How's your heart doing?" And maybe you don't even have drastic changes, but maybe you're just in a hard season. Maybe you're in a rough spot in a relationship or something in your home life is rough. Maybe Christmas is hard for you. Has anybody stopped and looked at you and said, "Hey, how are you doing, really, this Christmas?" And I'm not talking about the casual, "Hey, how are you? How's the family?" I'm not talking about small talk. I'm talking about an unexpected question from an unexpected person that kind of puts you back on your heels in a good way.

Our son is out-of-state. He goes to college out-of-state. And so, when he comes home, every time, he just brings a gaggle of buddies with him. I never know how many of them are coming. But every time they come to visit, my heart grows. My grocery bill grows. They can eat a lot. And the last visit that he came, one of the guys that he brought with him, he was tall. Now, for me to say he was tall is saying something. Because I'm not short. I'm 5'9". And you add two-inch heels and two inches of hair, I'm going to hit 6' really strong. So when I say somebody's tall, this kid was tall. But he came in and all of them sat down and I made a big dinner and we're sitting around the dinner table. We're just talking, asking a ton of questions. So where are you from? What's your major? What's your family like? Is your mama okay? I always ask, is mama okay? And we're just asking all these questions. And I think it was probably his third helping of mac and cheese that this young man looked up at me and said, "You know, Ms. Reynolds, I don't think anybody has ever asked me so many questions without asking the obvious question: Dude, how tall are you?"

See, this young man is 6'9". So he's very used to people asking him questions of like, "What's it like to live at that altitude?" He's used to people asking about his height. He's not used to people asking about his heart. And y'all, we had so much fun. We had the best conversation with this young man. You want to know why? Because we got into the deep waters of his heart. It says the "purposes of a person's heart are deep waters. But the one who has insight draws them out." Deep waters. Think about deep waters. Think about the ocean. What's on the floor of the ocean? Treasure. And when you pull it up, what comes out? Silt and sand, but sometimes gold. And with this young man, we were drawing them out.

The insight was just questions. And we were pulling it out. And he found out discoveries about himself. And there's discoveries of Jesus to be made in that very same place. I mean, have y'all ever wondered, anybody that's up here that's part of our teaching team, when we're sharing with you, have you ever noticed how many times we ask you questions? Like that? I mean, really. Have you stopped and said, "Why in the world do they ask so many questions?" Well, it's because we're trying to get you to hear and to respond to God. We know that when you ask a question, you have to stop and think, and then discover what you think about that thing. See, if we were just talking at you all the time, you can deflect, you can disagree, you can ignore, you can tune out. But a question, well, it kind of demands a response. And so, we're trying to help you respond. Not necessarily to us. We want you to respond to God.

Because we believe that every time that we present Scripture, every time we bring the Spirit into the room, that He has a question for you, to help you discover about yourself and about Him. The question that we ask – What's the Holy Spirit saying to you? – that is not a churchy tagline. And it's not a hypothetical. We really do believe that there's something that He's trying to say to you. And so, we're trying to bring it to your attention and then help you listen. Listen. Because you ask a question, and then what? You listen. And that's something I think we don't do really well. Scripture tells us we should do this, and there's even an order to it. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak. Quick to listen. Slow to speak. I don't know that we do

it in that order. I think we can be really quick to want to speak, and we're kind of slow to want to listen.

We'll ask somebody a question, and then they're talking, and the whole time we're thinking about what we're going to say. Especially if it was a question that was a little bit, shall we say excitable, we're just working on our rebuttal the whole time they're talking. But what if instead, we actually listen to them? You never know. They may think we actually care. And we should care. Because we ask a question to listen, and then we listen to love. That's what Jesus did with the man at the healing pool. He asked him a question. And what did the man do? He starts talking about all these excuses and conditions. And I love it that Jesus didn't say, "Yeah, well, dude, nothing -- you know, 38 years, you could have like, inched at least a pinky into the pool. You could have tried harder." He didn't do that. He just listened to him. He loved him. And one of the ways that we show love is when we talk to people, and ask them a question, we stay engaged with them. We maintain eye contact with them. We put our phones away, and we give them our full attention.

Can I ask you a question? Can you do that with somebody outside of your circle? Can you give them your full attention? And if the answer's no, could it be because you're not doing that with the people within your circle? When was the last time that you asked your spouse, or your kids, or your best friend, or your roommate, when was the last time you asked them a meaningful question, and then you locked in, stayed engaged, and listened? This is what it looks like. And you feel that awkwardness in the air? Sometimes, that can be what it feels like. And you may say, "Yeah, I did do that, and it was a disaster." Okay. Well, if you did it, and it was a disaster, don't let yesterday's disaster keep you from today's discovery, because there's something fresh He wants to show.

And as we're talking about this, if you're starting to have like, a light bulb moment where you're like, you know what, I don't really think I do that well with anybody. I don't think I ask questions and then really stay engaged. I don't think I do that with anybody. Hey, that's okay. Maybe today's the day for you to ask the Lord a question. Why am I that way? What has happened to me? Or what has shaped my life that I'm so internally focused that I literally can't get outside and stay outside of myself? She's doing that awkward silence thing again. I know. Because you know what? I think there are so many times that the Lord has answers for us, but we're not willing to sit still long enough and listen to Him. Listening is so important.

And the people that are the best question askers are the people that walk the closest with Jesus. And it's because they have learned how to do this. They have learned how to hear Jesus' voice. They've learned how to hear the voice of God and they understand that that's how He speaks to us. That's how He speaks to you. And you may not have caught it yet. If you are in Jesus and you hear or you sense that thing inside of you that's like, why am I so anxious? "Why are you so anxious? Why are you so worried? Why are you afraid? Why don't you trust me?" That's Jesus asking you questions. And you may say, you know what, nobody cares enough

about me to ask me questions. I don't know if that's true or not, but I do know that Jesus cares about you. And He will ask you questions. We just have to tune in and be able to listen. And y'all, when we do that, it changes things. We just begin to naturally live this life where we're curious people and we want to ask people questions.

We see it in the life of Peter. Peter got so used to the question asking with Jesus, and then even staying in that heart posture with the Lord that Peter just became a natural question-asker of people. We see a beautiful example in Acts Chapter 3. Peter and John, they were traveling at the pace of grace. They came across a man who was begging, who was unable to walk. They see him. They get outside of themselves and they engage with him. And in Jesus' name, he gets healed. And the people hear about it. Look what happens when the people hear about it. All the people were astonished and came running to them. And when Peter saw this, he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" Do you see it? Peter didn't just tell them what happened. He asked them questions. He asked them two.

The first one, "why does this surprise you," that was a question for them to discover something about themselves. The second one, "why are you looking at us like we did what Jesus did," it was a second question to help them discover something about Jesus. If we can learn to do this, if we can learn to ask questions and get used to Jesus asking us questions, then we will be equipped. We may not be walking by a healing pool, but trust me, we're walking around people that are sick. People that have physical sickness. People who have sick thought lives. People who, you know what, this time of year, there's just some people that are just downright homesick. They may miss a loved one who's no longer with them. They may be in a different city than their family, and they're just homesick. And here we are. Here we are with the hope of Jesus inside of us that we can extend to them. And it doesn't have to be a message. It doesn't have to be a book, chapter, or verse. It can simply be a meaningful question. And let me take the pressure off. You're not responsible for their response.

We're not responsible for them. But we are responsible to them. So, this week's challenge. Remember, we said every week from November to Christmas, we're going to have a challenge. Once a week, we're going to have one thing that we're going to do. So this week's challenge, are you ready for it?

Can you guess what it is? Am I doing it right now? This week's challenge is to ask someone a meaningful question. It's that simple. Ask one person a meaningful question. Maybe it's your coach. Maybe it's your teacher. Maybe it's that coworker that you only have this much knowledge of, but God's inviting you to go deeper. Maybe it's your neighbor. Maybe it's your hairstylist. I don't know. Ask, who is that one person that you can get outside of yourself and ask a meaningful question? And you may say, I can't do that. Yes, you can. Yes, you can. It's not that hard. First thing, just simply ask God to keep you present this week.

Ask God to give you His eyes. When you open your eyes, say, "God, give me Your eyes and let me find them." And then, when you find them, just ask one question. You don't have to interrogate them. If you're an introvert, it's hard to ask one question. If you're an extrovert, it's hard to stop at one question. I usually have about 16 in my pocket. But all you have to do is ask one question. Hey, what are you hoping for this Christmas? Hey, what do you want to be different about this Christmas? Hey, what are you looking forward to this Christmas? And then, last thing, listen. Listen with your ears to what they do say. Listen with your heart for what they don't say. And just stay engaged with them. Y'all, that's it. And yet it could change everything. I bet over the course of the next month, many, if not all of us, will go out to dinner. We'll go to get food somewhere. Lunch, breakfast, dinner, doesn't matter. When your server comes to your table, just ask them, "Hey, what are your plans for Christmas?"

And then, listen. Like really, really listen. And then, before you get up to leave, make one more circle back with them and connect with them and say, "Hey, I'm going to be praying for you this Christmas. Is there anything specific that I can pray about?" And you might be surprised. They may say, "In fact, would you please pray for my..." and there it is. Or they may look at you and start backing away slowly because people don't know what to do with grace. People don't know what to do with genuine, authentic, extension of love. That's okay. If they start doing that thing, don't make them feel awkward. Just jump in there. "Hey, that's cool. I got you. I just want you to know that I'm going to praying for you this Christmas." And then, you practice generosity and leave them a big tip. And then, when you go outside, when you get in your car, before you even put your car in reverse, stop and just pray. And it doesn't have to be this... just pray. Look what happened when Jesus said, "Do you want to get well?" Just stop and pray. Because you never know.

They may discover something about themselves, and they may, for the first time, discover something about Jesus. All because you asked one simple, meaningful question. So, that's it. That's our challenge. Let's rise up to it. Let's lean into it. Let's ask God to give us the strength, and the courage, and the excitement and just the curiosity to do it, because you never know. That question, it may be the best Christmas gift you give this year. Close your eyes with me. You know it's coming. So, what is the Holy Spirit, what's He saying to you? Do you realize how much He loves you? Do you realize how much Jesus sees you? And do you realize how much power in His name you carry?

And it's the most beautiful invitation to give it away. It's the most precious treasure we could have. And the most privilege that we can do in our life is to give it away. So, God, I thank You. I thank You for the power of a question. I thank You for the simplicity of what it takes. Obedience for us is simple, but impact on their life is profound. And so, God, right now, I just pray in Jesus' name that the questions will be asked, and You will show the discoveries. Teaching them all something about who they are, and showing them something about who You are, because we want to know more of You. So, we love You. And we thank You. And I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

"A Simple Question" | The Someone Else Challenge
December 3, 2023 | Pastor Becca Reynolds