

DAWSON SHIELDS: Well, hey everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek Church. Let's go ahead and welcome in all of our campuses real quick. It is so good to be with you guys. Hey, we've been in this series called The Someone Else Challenge: Getting Outside Yourself, and I love it. I love that we, as a church, do things like this that are just super practical where we just get to practice our faith. Last week, we did Hope on the Move Groceries, and there are so many things to celebrate. Like, seriously, because you took The Someone Else Challenge, so many lives were blessed. Because you were generous, because you got outside yourself, hope was released into the region. Man, we love seeing what God is doing through his people here at Valley Creek, so thank you for being a part of that. Man, we love it. Today, we're going to continue our series and myself and two other communicators are just going to give you the next Someone Else Challenge. I'll let you in on a little secret. It's got something to do with gratitude.

Because, this week, we've got Thanksgiving coming up and I love Thanksgiving. It's got my three favorite things: family, food, and football, you know what I'm saying. It doesn't get much better than that. Thanksgiving – it's a time of reflection of looking back on the year and just being grateful. For some reason, that means we all have to go around the Thanksgiving table, share what we're grateful for, like, you know what I'm talking about. It's like forced gratitude. I've been grumpy all year, bitter, jealous, angry, but, oh well, it's Thanksgiving, so I guess I've got to be grateful for something. And that's funny. Isn't it interesting that for one holiday a year we participated, we went around the Thanksgiving table and somehow that equates to us being a grateful person. I think that's funny because when we actually get to the Thanksgiving table, it's just awkward.

Grandma speaks for 30 minutes, your cousin said pass, and then uncle Bob, uncle Bob said some crazy stuff. "Did that really come out of your mouth?" "Yes, it did." "Okay," and then we, we just say the bare minimum. For 24 hours, we were grateful and then for the rest of the year, if we're being really honest, we're just not. But, maybe Thanksgiving isn't about stuffing our faces with turkey, watching the cowboys and then faking some gratitude. Maybe it's supposed to be a reminder that gratitude is the way of life, that it's the way of Jesus. Look at what it says in 1 Thessalonians, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." This is God's will, His desire, His plan is for us to be grateful in all circumstances. In my generation, we want to know God's will. We're always asking: Who am I going to marry, God? What job am I going to get? What city am I going to move to? Should I move back in with mom and dad? Absolutely not, God that cannot be Your will for my life.

But, God's already told us His will – It's to "give thanks in all circumstances." All circumstances – the good, the bad, the boring, the ones you just want to get out of; all circumstances. Can I just ask you, when was the last time you were grateful in a hard circumstance? But that's included in "all," isn't it? This is God's will for us, is to give thanks, to be grateful in all circumstances. But, what is gratitude? Well, gratitude is the response to the goodness of God in our lives. This is the definition of gratitude. It's the response to the goodness of God in our

lives. Hear me, it's not just a thank you. A lot of us are sitting here right now, we're like, "I've got gratitude locked down. I'm great at saying thank you." Okay, that's just called being polite.

A lot of us say thank you in response to maybe being kind or expectation, social awareness, fear of man, but not out of response to the goodness of God in my life. When gratitude is not in response to the goodness of God in our lives, then it's just not gratitude. That's just called being a nice person. Please, like, I'm not saying don't be polite; please, be polite. What I'm saying is that gratitude is so much more than what we're conditioned to believe that it is. Look at what it says in James, I love this, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." Okay, this says that every good thing in my life comes from God. He's given it to me. But, the really cool thing about this is that He usually chooses to release His good and perfect gifts through someone else into our lives. Seriously, it's His goodness coming to us through someone else. If someone gives me, like, a glass of water, and I say thank you to them, I'm actually acknowledging God's goodness in my life to give me something that I needed to survive.

If you can imagine, it's like a pass through, like, God's goodness is coming down through them into your life. Then, your gratitude, this is really cool, goes back through them to God. When we say thank you when we give thanks, it's actually giving praise and worship to who God is because He's good to us. Man, if every good gift in my life comes from God then it really doesn't matter who it's coming from. But, if that's true, then the inverse is also true. If a good thing comes to me in my life through someone else and I don't say thank you, then I'm actually not giving thanks to God for that thing. Here's the thing, it's not just when things are going our way. We don't just say thank you when it's the best circumstances ever and we're getting exactly what we want. We have to learn to say thank you for the things we really need in our lives. We could all probably grow in saying thank you for the things we really need.

We're great at saying thank you for the things that we want. We want a new car and when we get it, we go crazy. "Oh my goodness, a brand new car, and it's the new TRD Texas Edition Supercharge Package. It's exactly what I wanted. Thank you so much." I got what I wanted and I'm stoked, but maybe what I needed was just some basic transportation. Maybe what I need in my life is just some encouragement, maybe a correction, a challenge, a rebuke. Maybe what I need in my life is just some air, food, water, shelter. It's funny because we get the things that we need in life and we're like, "Well, that wasn't fun. I wish that conversation wouldn't have happened. He invited me to lunch, we sat down, we got sandwiches, and then he challenged me on my attitude. Who does this guy think he is?"

We're really good at saying thank you for the things that we want, but we need to learn to say thank you for the things that we need. We think we're grateful when we get what we want. You know you're actually grateful when you're grateful you got what you needed. This is called being aware of God's goodness in our lives. That God's good, that He's given you grace and not just grace like for the forgiveness of sins, but grace for life itself. Do you realize that by

God's goodness and His grace, you woke up this morning. By God's goodness and His grace, He's giving you the air in your lungs that you need to breathe right now. By God's goodness and His grace, He's literally holding you together, sustaining you, giving you everything you need to function. Gratitude is a response to the goodness of God in my life, not just for the things that I want, but for the things that I need. I need some things. I need the people of God in my life to call me up. I need encouragement and love and grace and challenges and corrections and rebukes.

Those are the things we really need in life. Have you ever heard the story of the ten lepers? One day, Jesus is on the road and He's on His way to Jerusalem. When I say road, I don't mean I-35. He's not in the city. I mean road, wilderness, dirt and trees. He's in the backwoods. As He's on His way, He's approached by ten men with leprosy. Leprosy is this really horrific disease. There's no cure for it. In fact, these men are literally sent to die in the middle of nowhere, all alone. They're desperate, but they see Jesus and they've heard of what He can do. They call out to Him, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." Jesus sees them. He simply says, "Go and show yourselves to the priest." You see, according to Jewish law, if you were healed of leprosy, which by the way is impossible, you would have to go and present yourself to a priest in order to be brought back into society.

Jesus says, "Go show yourselves to the priest." They're like, "Okay." They start walking, and as they go, they're healed on the way. Man, I'm sure it was beautiful. Like, can you imagine that, that scene? But, I love what happens next. "One of them," one of them, "when he saw he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him." He came back and he thanked Him. Because He healed him, maybe. But, you see, I think he understood what had actually happened in his life. I'm sure this conversation was probably something like, "Jesus, I wanted to be healed, but you didn't just heal me. You gave me what I needed. You see, I needed someone to see me because no one sees me. In fact, everyone avoids me. I needed someone to care about my situation, to care about my desperation because no one cares about a man with leprosy."

"I needed someone to challenge my faith because I had lost all hope. In fact, I thought I was going to die. But, then, Jesus, You come and You call out to me. You tell me to walk like I'm healed, even though I'm not. Jesus, I didn't need a healing, I needed You." That's gratitude. That scene, the goodness of God comes down into his life through someone else and he can't help but express it. I have a friend in my life and she's sick. I'm talking in and out of the hospital, ups and down, it's a whole thing. She was just telling me one day, like, man, the situation that she's constantly in. You see, she's surrounded by doctors and people with a similar situation as her. She said that everyone's just so head down, focused on their situation, their pain, their suffering. She said it's almost like a spiritual blindness. Like, they can't see the goodness of God in their lives. She just told me, "Man, I got tired of living like that. I got tired of acting the way I was acting."

"I just started looking for the goodness of God in my life." And she found it. When she was looking for the goodness of God, she saw her family around her, loving her, supporting her, caring for her. As she's getting poked and prodded with needles into her arm constantly, she's looking up at the people that are doing it. She's thinking, "They went through years of medical school just to help me." She's sitting in a doctor's office and she's trying to figure out what's going on. She's thinking to herself, "Man, I have access to healthcare, good healthcare. I can get help." You can see on her face and hear in her voice that she's grateful, not because she got what she wanted, but because she has what she needs — grace, mercy, love, kindness, the presence of God with her. Gratitude is not just a polite thank you. It's not just when we get something we want, and it's not something we say once a year at the Thanksgiving table. Gratitude is a response to the goodness of God in our lives.

KENNEDY HUGHES: All right, hey family. We are talking about gratitude, which we said is the response to the goodness of God in our lives. If we believe that God is good and God is good to us, why do we struggle with this? Why do we struggle with gratitude? I love the story of the ten lepers because we see a guy who got it right. I mean, he was so moved by the goodness of God in his life, he couldn't help but practice gratitude. But, you see, it's the story of the ten lepers, not the story of the one. That means there are nine unaccounted for who didn't express gratitude. Maybe we can learn from them. Let's talk about it.

Leprosy, like we said, was a brutal disease. It made everyday life painful. Their life is isolated. They're full of fear. They're full of pain from man, but also from God because it was incurable. At the time, they believed that the disease was a punishment from God. As we're thinking of these guys and putting ourselves in their shoes, think of their thought life. "Man, everyone's abandoned me. God has abandoned me." They had to think through like, what do I do now? What do I do next? Is this good? Is this God? Here comes Jesus, the one person who could offer them healing. Can you imagine what all must have bubbled up to the surface at one time? I don't think it was like a cute, "Hey, Jesus, over here." Like, you guys, they were desperate. They were desperate for healing. They were desperate to see the Savior.

It was a big deal that Jesus met them in that place. Yet, as big of a deal as it was, only one had gratitude. If you look back in Scripture, it says that he threw himself, the one "threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him." But, Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" Where were the other nine? I'd submit to you that the nine didn't return because they thought they were entitled to the healing. That may sound like a bold assumption, but seriously, let's talk through it. Like, Jesus is passing in front of them. Years' worth of thoughts bubble up to the surface. "Jesus, Jesus, He has to see me, right? He's not going to pass by me. Jesus, Jesus, You have to heal me. I've lost my job, my family, my life. You've got to heal me."

"In fact, let's talk about restoring some of those. I had so much was lost. Jesus, it's me; I went to church. Jesus, it's me; I prayed. Jesus, it's me; I did the Someone Else Challenge. I don't

deserve this. Maybe someone else deserves this, but I sure don't." Come on, guys. There's this inner dialogue that we don't often hear out loud. When we hear it, it's not exactly flattering, but Scripture is compared to a mirror. We have to stop and ask ourselves, why did God give us this story? Is He trying to warn us of a leprosy of the heart, of this same entitlement in our lives? We have to stop and ask, is this how I see my life? Is this how I see the people around me? I don't deserve to get passed on the highway. I'm going faster than they are anyway. "I shouldn't have gotten the ticket, officer. You should see that guy."

I should be manager at my office. I've got the tenure. I've got the experience. Why do I have to be underneath that person? In church, we even see it. God, why do I have to pray and prophesy over someone else? When are you going to send someone to pray for me? I mean, how many praying grandmas is it going to take for me to get this provision? I know there's enough of them. Come on. Instead of having eyes to see the goodness of God in our lives, I think we only see the things we're still waiting on Him for. We don't see what is; we see what isn't. We get so caught up on what could be, and we go back to God with entitlement saying, "Where's mine? When are you going to do this for me?" When I say entitlement, I don't mean something huge. It's rarely something big.

You see, not many of us are entitled to a yacht. Not many of us are going to God in our prayer saying, "When am I going to get my private yacht, God?" No, no, no. Entitlement, which is pride, is sneaky. It's usually for something that's just beyond us. Like, for me, it was my career. I went to a great university, and I was told time and time again about all the opportunities waiting for me after graduation. That time came and I struggled to find a job. I struggled to find an internship in the things I was interested in. The entitlement crept up and I started to see myself differently, God differently, the people around me differently. I looked around and people with half my GPA, half my work ethic, they didn't want a job. They didn't seemingly care.

They were getting amazing opportunities across the country. I stayed local in Central Texas and got a job that I absolutely hated. I looked at God and I started to pull away and my heart hardened towards the Lord, towards my friends. I thought they abandoned me. I pulled away from God and the church because I felt so misled by them. When I think of our four core truths, I think of how they got messed up in my brain. Like, I didn't think that God is good. I thought that God was holding out on me. I didn't think that Jesus had forgiven me in that moment. I thought, is God mad at me somehow? Like, I seriously did not think that I was loved. I thought, "God, You don't even see me." I certainly didn't believe that everything is possible.

I mean, I convinced myself this is as good as it's ever going to get. It took me a while, a journey with Jesus to get to a place where I realized I didn't have what I wanted, what I thought I was entitled to, but I had what I needed the whole time. I had the goodness of God the whole time. It was never contingent on my circumstances. When I say the goodness of God, think about it. I had the mercy of God. His mercy was new for me every morning, even though I

wasn't waking up to spend time with Him and receive it. I had the protection of God, even though I wasn't consulting Him or anyone else for that matter with the next steps in my life. I had the grace of God. He was like a still small whisper when I wasn't even looking for Him. All of that was available to me.

But, because I was so blinded by the "better" I thought I was entitled to, I became one of the nine lepers without even realizing it. If we're honest, I think this is the reality a lot of us are stuck in. We've got tunnel vision focused on ourselves and everything that life isn't. If we could just slow down to see the goodness of God, the tiny glimpses of His mercy, His protection, His grace, whatever it looks like in your life, it would change everything. I mean, come on, the one leper, "when he saw he was healed, he came back praising in a loud voice." All he needed as he was walking back to the priest with a little glimpse of the healing, what Jesus was doing in that moment, and it changed everything. But, as long as we're entitled, as long as we're focused on anything other than God, we're going to miss it. This didn't start with us.

It didn't start with the lepers, believe it or not. This actually goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. Like, think about it, Adam and Eve, made by God to live with God. God's right in front of them for Pete's sake, you guys. They're doing everyday life. They know their identity. They are confident in their relationship and their purpose. But, what happened? "A fruit that'll make me like God, knowing good and evil? I'm entitled to that." By acting according to their own will, their own desires, man was made separate from God. Similarly, our entitlement keeps us from seeing God in our everyday life. Yet, here's Jesus. God sent His Son to repair what was broken, to restore what was lost, to redeem that relationship.

He sent Jesus to stand before us and say, "Hey, you did it your way last time; you want to try again? Hey, you didn't trust Me last time; do you want to try again? Hey, you weren't thankful, You didn't express gratitude, You didn't see me; do you want to try again?" It's Jesus, you guys. Scripture says that, "My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." When we look at our lives and all the things that we want, we've got to stop and remember, we have everything we need in Jesus; riches in Jesus. I think the one leper got this. I think that's why he had to come back. I mean, sure, Jesus was sending him back to the priest, back to their job, back to their family, back to the coffee shop, all the things that they wanted.

But, really, the one had to come back and acknowledge God in flesh before him and give gratitude. If gratitude is the response to the goodness of God in our lives, may we have eyes to see it, eyes to see the goodness of God all around us, eyes to see the goodness of God in one another that we would overflow with gratitude.

CALEB CHAPPLE: All right, so we've talked about what gratitude is and we've talked about why we struggle with it. How do we actually express gratitude? Well, the good news is that gratitude is all throughout the Bible. It really is the language of the kingdom of God. We have a lot of examples of what gratitude looks like.

This year, as a church family, we've been reading through the entire New Testament. Have you noticed how almost every single letter in the New Testament begins with gratitude? Like, "I thank my God for this, I thank my God for that," even to the Corinthians who seem to be doing everything wrong, Paul said, "I thank my God for His grace because you guys are doing everything wrong." I mean, come on, there is always something to be grateful for, give thanks in all circumstances. But, I really love the book of Philemon, how Paul writes his letter to Philemon, who is a leader in the church, and look at what he says. "I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all His holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus." Man, I don't know about you, but I want to receive a thank you note in the mail from Paul. Like, this dude knows how to express some gratitude. But, what does this letter teach us about gratitude and how to express it? Well, it shows us three things. The first is that gratitude is expressed.

Like, the fact that we're able to go back and read this 2,000 years later means that someone went out of their way to write it down and express gratitude. The second is that gratitude is genuine. He says, "I always thank my God. I always thank my God." It's from the overflow of his heart. It's so genuine that it comes out in his prayers to God. The third is that gratitude is specific. He says, "Thank you because..." Thank you because, and then he goes out to list the specific reasons he's grateful for Philemon, because of his love for all his holy people and because of his faith in the Lord Jesus. He recognizes God's goodness on display in Philemon and he's bold in calling it out. What does this show us about expressing gratitude? It shows us that gratitude is expressed, gratitude is genuine, and gratitude is specific. Gratitude is expressed, genuine and specific. Like, gratitude is expressed. Paul is writing this letter specifically to Philemon. Like, he didn't just think about it.

He didn't just have a good thought or he didn't just assume like Philemon and me, you know, we're buddies, so like, he knows I'm grateful for him, but he goes out of his way to express gratitude. Like, he goes out of his way to write it down because he knows that if we don't express it, it's just a good thought. Like, it's not actually gratitude until it comes out of our mouth. That might mean that gratitude will require something from us. It might be a little inconvenient or a little uncomfortable. Like, Paul wrote that letter in prison. If anything, it was a little inconvenient and a little uncomfortable for him. Hopefully, you don't have to write a letter in prison, but expressing gratitude might feel vulnerable. It might feel exposing or maybe humbling. But, the truth is gratitude isn't gratitude unless it's expressed. Gratitude will require something from us. Then, gratitude is also genuine. Like, gratitude is genuine. You remember how Paul starts his letter, "I always thank my God." Here's a question, is your gratitude genuine enough that you would express it to God?

Like, is your gratitude genuine enough that it would come out in your prayers to God? Because Paul recognized that it was God's goodness on display in Philemon. He wasn't just thanking Philemon, he was thanking God for Philemon, for His goodness through Philemon. The Bible

tells us that the mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart. The mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A lack of gratitude in our lives is actually just a lack of heart. Like, if that's true and there's nothing that can come out of the mouth, then it actually means that there's nothing in the heart. If there's a lack of gratitude in our lives, it actually means there's a lack of heart. But, the good news is that when our hearts are full of the goodness of God, then our gratitude is always genuine. The mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart, gratitude is genuine. Then, gratitude is specific. Like, it's very specific. Like, we hear it all the time, people say thank you all the time. Like, "Thanks man." Like, we hear thank you all the time, but if anything, we would probably say that the world around us lacks in gratitude.

Like, we hear it all the time. Like, "Thanks, thank you bro, thanks man, thank you." Like, gratitude is specific. Like, "Thanks." Thank you for what? What are you even grateful for? I guess, "Thank you for..." Thank you for including me in that conversation when I felt very left out. Or thank you for sitting with me at lunch when I didn't know anyone and I felt very alone. Thank you for believing in me when no one else did, and when, quite honestly, I didn't even believe in myself. Notice how different it is when your gratitude is specific. Then, if you're having a hard time thinking of what to be grateful for or what to express gratitude for, remember that gratitude is a response to the goodness of God in our lives. It's recognizing that every good and perfect gift comes from God and a lot of times it comes through other people. If you're having a hard time thinking of who to express gratitude to, what if we took a step back and recognize God's goodness in our lives and recognize all the good things God has done for us.

Look at this, "Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things." Praise the Lord, express gratitude, expressive, genuine, specific to the Lord. Why? Like, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases. Like, has anyone ever forgiven you of something you've done or shown you grace when you didn't deserve it? Or has anyone healed you of something you were physically sick of? All that, express gratitude. Or how about who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion. What about the people who give their time and talent and resources so you could become the person God has called you to be. Like, the teachers who help you grow in wisdom and in knowledge or the leaders in your life that lead you in the very ways of Jesus.

Or the people who serve you, like the people who stand out in the parking lot in the freezing cold and in the rain or the people who open the door for you or the ones who take your kids and invest into them so you can experience the love and compassion of Jesus. Express gratitude. Or who satisfies your desires with good things. Like, have you ever been given something that you desired? Like, someone went out of your way to give you maybe a job, an opportunity, a provision. Have you ever received something you desired? All of that; all of that, praise the Lord. All of that, express gratitude. Be expressive, genuine, and specific. That's



exactly what happened in the story of the ten lepers. The one guy who came back, look at this. "One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back to Jesus," he expressed gratitude. He turned around, he went out of his way, "shouting, 'Praise God!'" He was genuine. It was out of the overflow of his heart. "He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking Him for what He had done."

It was specific. He thanked Jesus for what He had done. He expressed gratitude. It was expressed, it was genuine and it was specific. Look how Jesus responds to the man, "Then he said to him, 'Rise and go, your faith has made you well.'" Rise and go, your faith, your gratitude, your response to the goodness of God has made you well. Isn't it interesting? All ten of them were healed, but only one was made well. Like, all ten of them, they were healed. They got their breakthrough, but only one was made well. They were physically healed, but the one, his heart was made well. What this has shown us is that gratitude actually makes our hearts well. It keeps us focused on the goodness of God instead of the brokenness of the world. The other nine, they got their breakthrough, but only one found life. The other nine, they got their physical healing, but only one found Sozo, salvation. Only one found shalom, peace. One found blessing and prosperity.

The other nine, the leprosy of their body was cured, but the one, the leprosy of his heart was cured because gratitude is curing the leprosy of our hearts. Can I ask you a question? Has the leprosy of your heart been cured? If gratitude is the key to being made whole, have you been made whole? Have you expressed gratitude? Have you responded to the goodness of God in your life when it comes through other people? Because gratitude is expressed, it's genuine. and specific, and it requires us to get outside of ourselves to the someone else's in our life. We're in The Someone Else Challenge. Last week, The Someone Else Challenge was to show generosity by participating in Hope on the Move: Groceries. That was amazing, we did a great job.

This week's Someone Else Challenge is to express gratitude to someone this week. To express gratitude to someone. Express gratitude to someone, be expressive, be genuine, be specific to someone in your life, like a neighbor, someone in your path, someone outside of your immediate circle of friends and family. Because remember, it's getting outside of ourselves, so it's outside of our immediate circle of friends and family. It might be like writing a thank you note or writing a note of gratitude to someone, or maybe giving a gift of gratitude, and when you do, expressing why you're grateful for them. Just to set the record straight, texting does not count. Remember, this is specific, it's genuine, it requires something of us. Texting does not count, but it could just be like looking someone in the eyes, slowing down, and just saying "thank you," and being specific. Doing it when they're not distracted with a hundred other things, like actually taking the time to slow down and say thank you.

Remember, it's getting outside of ourselves, so it's the someone else's in our life. It might be like that teacher in your life. The one who always goes above and beyond, and goes out of

their way to make your class super enjoyable, that teacher. Or it might be like that ticket agent at the airport who has so much patience and so much kindness, even when the person in front of you has no patience and no kindness. Or it might even be that person who did something for you five years ago that you never got to express gratitude for. Who's someone in your life that you can express gratitude to this week? That's this week's challenge, The Someone Else Challenge, express gratitude to someone this week in a way that's expressed, that's genuine and specific. Would you close your eyes with me? What's the Holy Spirit saying to you? Who's He inviting you to express gratitude to and how's He inviting you to do it?

In a way that's expressed, that's genuine, that's specific, that's this week's challenge. Jesus, thank You that You show God's goodness to us, that gratitude is the normal response to receiving God's goodness in our life, that we have so much to be grateful for. This week, when we get outside of ourselves to the someone else's in our life, we express gratitude in a way that's expressed, that's genuine, and specific. As we do, would our hearts be made well. In Jesus' name, amen.