

All right. Hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. Wherever you are, whatever's going on in your life, we are so glad you are here with us. Whether this is your first time here, or maybe you haven't been in a while, maybe you've left and recently come back, maybe you're here every single weekend, it really doesn't matter. Hope is here, everyone is welcome, and Jesus changes everything. It is back to school season. Ready or not, here we go.

Back to school, practices, commitments, responsibilities, routine, rhythm, stress, hurry, being overwhelmed, football, things we've got to do, places we've got to go, travel, projects, all this stuff, you can feel the freight train coming, yes? Yes. Before all that takes off, as a people, as a church, we're just starting in this back to school season by asking God for an awakening. We're just crying out and calling out to Him, saying, "God, would you turn my heart to you? Before all this stuff takes off, before I get lost in the rhythm and the routine, before I go back to my normal life, I want You to turn my heart to You. I want You to awaken me to Your grace. Awaken me to Your love, awaken me to Your presence, that You are right here. Awaken me to that which is good and true and right. Awaken me to Your kingdom."

You see, whatever your heart is turned towards, that is what you are awakened to. Whatever your heart is looking at, focused on, conscious of, that's what you're awakened to. Whatever your heart is turned away from, in a sense, you are asleep or dead to that thing. We know this is true because think of how many things are in this world that are real, but because your heart is turned away from them, in a sense, they're dead to you. You don't even know it's there. You're not even aware of it. It's like it's not real because your heart is turned away. Now, once that gets exposed to you and your heart has been turned towards it, you get a choice of whether you're going to continue to pursue it or decide to go right back to being asleep to that thing and turning back away from it. This is true whether it's a humanitarian crisis on the other side of the globe, or what's going on in the heart of the person sitting on the other side of the living room in your own house.

The problem for us is we're often awakened to the wrong things. We're awakened to the world and we're dead to God, but I don't know about you, I don't want any of my heart to be awakened to the world. I want all of my heart to be awakened to God. The interesting thing about an awakening is you can't wake yourself up. Even physically, this is true. This is why we set an alarm so we don't miss that which is important. We need God to awaken our hearts so we don't miss that which is important - the life He has for us that is right in front of us. We don't need an awakening because things are bad. We need an awakening because there is so much more of God. I mean, when Jesus says this; he says, "You will be ever hearing, but never understanding; you will be ever seeing, but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes." This is a very sobering verse.

Jesus says the people standing right in front of him, they hear, but they don't understand. They see, but they don't perceive, why? Because their heart is turned away. You will hear and see

whatever your heart is turned towards. Because their heart is turned away from Jesus, the King, they can't see or hear His kingdom. Now, I want you to think about these people that are standing in front of Jesus. They're hearing and they're seeing. What are they hearing? They're hearing Jesus, the one who spoke the universe into creation, literally teach them the Gospel of the kingdom. They're hearing Jesus teach the way, the truth and the life. We know it wasn't boring. We know it wasn't irrelevant. We know it wasn't confusing. We know it wasn't wrong. It's the best teaching that has ever happened. Yet, they still didn't understand it. What were they seeing?

They were literally watching Jesus do the works of the Father, heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cast out demons, and walk on water, and calm the storms, and do all those things. Yet, they still didn't get it. Why? Because their heart was already turned away and you will hear and see that whichever your heart is turned towards. In other words, Jesus is saying, you will hear and see exactly what you want to hear and see. Remember, kings rule their kingdoms by words and actions. Words and actions. You will hear and see that which you have chosen to be your king. If kings rule their kingdoms by words and actions, then whoever you have decided is your king, that's what you're going to see and that's what you're going to hear. If you've decided your flesh is your king, you're going to hear and see what your flesh wants you to hear and see. If you've decided the world is your king, you will hear and see what the world wants you to hear and see.

If you've decided finances or lust or yourself is your king, then you will hear and see exactly what that thing wants you to hear. When the world is our king, when we start to hear the things of Jesus and the kingdom, all of a sudden it's like, "Wah, wah, wah, wah." But, the moment we hear the world, we hear everything the world wants to say. But, the inverse is true. If your heart is turned to God, then you will hear everything of Jesus and His kingdom, but the moment the world starts to speak its lies and its deceptions and its fear and its brokenness, "Wah, wah, wah, wah," because my heart is turned to God. What I'm trying to show you in this verse is, before we run into the fall, before you're here on however many Sundays you're going to be here over this fall season, before you get in a Circle and do the Reading Plan and go to your Serve Team, we've got to make sure our heart is turned to God or we will hear and not understand, we will see and not perceive, and we will waste the entire fall because our heart is turned in the wrong direction.

I mean, Jesus says, "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." That is like the saddest verse, guys. It's not a correction and a rebuke, it's a verse of sorrow. Like these people are duplicit. They try to say and do all the things on the outside, but their heart is turned far away from God. What Jesus is saying, He's like, "You don't have to live like this, man!" In fact, can I just free you for a moment? In this church, you never have to pretend. In fact, please don't. Jesus says, "Hey, I'd rather you be hot or cold, don't be lukewarm." He knows the tearing of the soul when we try to do one thing on the outside with a heart that's

turned in a different direction. He wants the internal and the external to be aligned. You don't ever have to pretend. Please don't.

Don't walk around here and be like, "Oh yeah, God is good, brother. Oh yeah, trust in God. Oh yeah, believe in God for big things." But your heart is truly not wanting anything to do that. Don't do that. Don't do that. Be free. I actually super respect the person that says, "You know what, my heart's not really into what God's saying right now, so I'm going in that direction." There is more hope for that honesty, why? Because honesty is the beginning of breakthrough. Start just by being honest with where you are because the duplicity of the internal and the external will destroy you. It will tear you apart. Jesus says, "I'd rather you be hot or cold." He says, "Go to the world or come to Me, but don't live the third road." Because if you go to the world, you'll figure out eventually that that way doesn't work so well, and you'll want to turn your heart back this way. But if you live in the third road, you're going to blame God for all the brokenness and pain that the world causes because you think you're following Him when your heart really wants nothing to do with Him.

Does that make sense to you? What we're doing is we're just crying out, "May He turn our hearts to Him to walk in all His ways and keep His commands and decrees and regulations that He gave our fathers." We're asking God to turn our hearts to Him because we can't turn our own heart to Him. We need His grace and His Spirit to do a work within us to take our heart and turn it from the world to Him. We know this is true because we know we can't turn our hearts on our own. A question I have for you, just real honestly is, is your heart turned to God? This is just you for a second. You don't have to live in that duplicity anymore. Is your heart turned to God? And not like, for an hour a week when we all sit in here together, but like is your heart turned to God in your marriage? Is your heart turned to God in your work?

Is your heart turned to God in school? Is your heart turned to God in that situation, that circumstance, your daily life? Is your heart turned to God in the other 167 hours of the week? The way you know if it is or it isn't is, are you walking in His ways? Because when my heart is turned to God in my marriage, I will walk in His ways in my marriage. When my heart is turned to God in my job, I will walk in His ways in my job. Is your heart turned to Him? The reason this matters is because whatever your heart is turned towards is who or what you're becoming. You will naturally start to pick up the qualities and the characteristics of that which your heart is turned towards. "But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory." You become what you behold. If your heart is beholding the world, you're becoming more like it.

You're starting to think like and act like and talk like and live like the world. But when my heart is turned to Him and is beholding Jesus, I become transformed into His image, into His likeness from glory to glory, and I start to think like and talk like and act like Jesus, naturally and effortlessly. We're crying, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead and Christ will give you light." We need an awakening in Jesus' name. You with me on this? You see, if you read

through Scripture, you're going to find all over the place, God showing up, interrupting people's lives to bring them an awakening, a resurrection, a renewal, a revival. In fact, you remember the story of Ezekiel and the dry bones. Ezekiel 37, the Israelites, the people of God, they've rejected God, they've rebelled against Him, they've turned their hearts away from Him towards the world. They're full of evil and idolatry and immorality. They've been exiled.

God takes the prophet Ezekiel and He brings him to this big valley full of dead bones of dead people. This valley is full of all these dead bones and God says to Ezekiel, "Ezekiel, can these bones live again?" Ezekiel says, "Oh Lord, only you know." In other words, "Not a chance, but I know I can't say that." God says, "Ezekiel, prophesy to these bones." As he starts prophesying to these bones, they start rattling all over the field, one by one, bone by bone, they start to assemble together and then flesh and blood and muscle and tissue begin to grow around these bodies. Then God says, "Prophesy breath into them, Ezekiel," and he prophesies breath and the breath of God comes into them and awakens this entire vast field that now becomes an army of God. It says, "O my people, I'm going to open your graves and bring you up from them... then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord because only I could do it when I open up your graves and bring you up from them."

I think, isn't that so often like our story? We've rejected God, we've turned away, evil, idolatry, immorality in our lives, and we're wore out. We're beat down, we're dry, we're broken, and our life is scattered all over a valley of death. That proverb says, "The crushed spirit dries up the bones." Some of you, your spirit has been so crushed that your bones and everything in you is dry and you think there's no hope left. Then, God shows up and He speaks to you and He calls those bones, those pieces of your life back together one by one and he breathes new life into you and He awakens you, that's God that gives life to dead thing, that's God that calls things that are not as though they were.

Or how about Jacob? Remember the story of Jacob? Jacob is the grandson of Abraham, the father of the faith. In fact, God wants to be known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but Jacob's not a great dude. In fact, his name means deceiver. That's how he lived his life. He deceived, he manipulated, he controlled, he would do whatever he needed to do to get exactly what he wanted. He cheats his brother out of his birthright, deceives his father in order to get it, and now he is running for his life in the wilderness. He lays down to go to sleep and in that night, God comes to him in a dream. He shows Jacob an open heaven and a stairwell going from earth to heaven and angels ascending and descending, and in this open heaven, God is standing there, and He says, "Jacob, I am with you and I am for you and I will bless you and all the peoples on this earth will be blessed through you."

When Jacob wakes up, it says, "Jacob awoke from his sleep and he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place? This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'" I think, how often is this our story? We're deceiving, we're controlling, we're manipulating, we're doing whatever it

takes to get exactly what we want. Why? Because we're not aware that God is with us. Then, God comes on His own and He brings an awakening. "Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it." Surely the Lord is in this marriage and I was not aware of it. Surely the Lord is in this relationship with my child and I was not aware of it. Surely the Lord is in my job and I wasn't aware of it. Surely the Lord is in this situation or the circumstance or this hardship or the valley of the shadow or the death. Surely the Lord is in this and I just wasn't aware of it, but now I have awakened to the fact that I live under an open heaven.

I'm the beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased. I have accesses to the wealth of the kingdom. "Repent for the kingdom is at hand." Turn, it's here. An awakening. Some of you just need to catch that. You control everywhere where you forget that the Lord is in this place. Control comes when I am not aware that God is in it. Everywhere you're trying to control right now, back-to-school season, that's a place where you don't think God is in it. Somebody just catch that. Because you don't believe God's in it. One more to build your faith. You remember the story of the Road to Emmaus? For three years, the disciples walk with Jesus, and then He, out of nowhere to them, it seems, is crucified. He's dead, He's buried, He's gone, and they think it's over. Two of them leave Jerusalem, and they're walking to Emmaus, a seven-mile journey.

As they're walking along, the resurrected Jesus comes and starts walking with them, but they don't know it's Jesus. He says, "Hey, guys, why are you so down? Why are you so sad?" They said, "Are you like, new to town? Did you not hear what happened? Jesus has been crucified. We thought that He would... He didn't do what we expected Him to do. All our hopes and our dreams are in that grave with Him." The resurrected Jesus, who they just think He's a guy, says, "How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe." Beginning with the prophets and the law, He explained all of the Scriptures according to himself. They go into town to have a meal, and it says, "When he was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him... They asked each other, were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

I think, how often is this my life? I'm walking down the road of my life disappointed because God didn't do what I thought. God didn't do what I wanted. He didn't move how I expected. I'm disappointed in this marriage, in this season, in this situation, in this circumstance, in my job. Then, Jesus comes to bring an awakening to show us that He has been walking with us every step of the way, that He is the Good Shepherd. We shall not want, because He's guiding us in paths of righteousness, and He is with us in the valley of the shadow of death. An awakening in Jesus' name. I tell you those stories to try to build your faith, that the grace that's working for you is greater than the flesh that's working against you. That no matter how hopeless, no matter how hard your heart might be, no matter how calloused it might be, no matter how lost it is in the things of the world, in Jesus' name, He can awake your heart and turn it to Him.

In fact, this is why it says things like, "I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with loving-kindness. Make no mistake, I am the one who is drawing you to Me." Or how about the last verse in the Old Testament? "God will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers." He will turn your heart to Him, and only He can do it. Yet, the Bible is also full of verses like this, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart." Because, "Hey, if you want Me, you've got to seek Me, and then you'll find Me." Or how about, "The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you look for Him, He will let you find Him. But if you leave Him, He will leave you." I love this verse. "He will let you find Him if you look for Him. But if you leave Him, He will leave you."

Some of you are like, wait a second, I thought the Bible says "He will never leave us nor forsake us." But the Bible also says, "But if you leave Him, He will leave you," what does that mean? Here's what this means is, God won't make anyone's heart turn towards Him. If you don't want Him, He won't force Himself upon you. What He is saying here is He will hide Himself not from you, but for you. If I don't want God, He's not hiding from me, like, where is He, I can't find Him? He will hide Himself for me because He doesn't want to put Himself in your life when you're saying, "God, I really don't want anything to do with You." But when I look for Him, He will let me find Him. Which is it? Does He turn our heart to Him or do we turn our hearts to Him? Does He choose us or do we come to Him?

Does He reveal Himself to us or do we seek Him? Yes. You can't do it without Him and He won't do it without you; but make no mistake, it always starts with Him. It always starts with His grace and His spirit. It's kindness that leads us to repentance. He starts turning our hearts, gives us a glimmer of Him. Now, I get a choice. Am I going to choose to turn away from dead works and of faith towards God, or am I going to have a moment of awakening and decide to go right back to sleep? This is the question. How many times in our life do we have a moment of awakening with God, but then we put ourselves right back to sleep? You can't wake yourself up, but boy, you can put yourself right back to sleep. That's the interesting component. God's grace and His Spirit is working on you to bring you an awakening.

Are you with me on this? Okay. If you look throughout the Bible, because I want you to see how God awakens you. I'm going to say this number and it's going to stress you out. There are six, don't get lost in this, six main ways that you can see throughout the Bible that God awakens us. Don't be like, "Oh my gosh, six points." Whatever. Just let me walk you through this really fast. Okay, so you can be aware of, this is how God is awakening me. Look at this. God tries to turn your heart to him through creation. "Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them for since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse." In other words, God says He reveals Himself to us through creation, that He awakens you through what He has created. He turns your heart to Him when you look at creation because when you look at

creation, you can see His invisible qualities, His power and His divine nature where you come to this conclusion that surely there must be a God.

Surely there must be a divine power. Surely there must be a Creator. This is why so many people meet with God in creation. Why their hearts get turned to Him when they look at a mountain, a sunrise or a sunset, the waves on a beach, a cute little puppy, baby animal. That's not my one, but for some of you, that's the one. Every teenage girl is like, "Aw, it's Jesus." Right? Come on, every time you look at someone, a human that inspires you, that inspires you because they're beautiful, strong, wise, creative, innovative, loving, like you see something in that, that is God turning your heart to Him in his creation. This is why no one anywhere in the globe ever gets to say, "I never saw God," because He's turning their attention to Him.

It's plain through his creation. Second way is through God's people. He tries to turn your heart to Him through His people. "'Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again." God sends His people into your life to turn your heart from the world to Him. He uses the most unlikely people. We all have an idea of who this person should be. Yeah, God picks the opposite of whoever you were expecting. They come and they often come and say and do things that we don't want to hear and see through a challenge, a rebuke, an encouragement. The way they live their life, salt, light, and leaven, they're just different from the world around us. There's something about God's people that He uses so that we might see, to turn our heart to catch a glimmer of the goodness of God.

Who has God sent into your life to turn your heart to Him? Maybe it's the person literally sitting next to you right now, look at him, be like, "Is it you?" Some of you are like, "Nope, definitely not that person." Maybe it's your Circle leader. Maybe it's the person you serve with. Maybe it's your grandma. Maybe it's that person at work that really walks with God, but everyone thinks is weird. Yeah, yeah, that one. This is why it's so important for us to live as hope carriers, because God uses us to turn other people's hearts to Him. Because the life of God in us becomes light to the people around us, turns their heart, make sense? Third way, God does it through signs and wonders. "I will show you wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below." God uses signs and wonders to awaken us. You say, what is a sign and a wonder?

A sign, think of a sign on the road, it shows you the way to go, and a wonder leaves you in awe. A sign shows you the way to go; a wonder leaves you in awe. Anytime there is something spiritual, a breakthrough, supernatural, anytime there is this thing in your life that you can't explain, it is a sign and a wonder from God to turn your heart to Him. There is no such thing as coincidences, chance, luck, happenstance. We've got to stop giving the world credit for what God is actively doing in our lives. Don't say, "Oh, I was so lucky that I didn't get in that car accident." No, that was a sign and a wonder to turn your heart to God. "Oh, wow, what chance have I that I got out of the hospital in this one to a million odds?" Nope, that was a sign and a

wonder from God. "What a coincidence that I got this job or got this house or got this new opportunity or made this team?" Nope, that was a sign and a wonder from God to turn your heart to Him.

You've just got to slow down enough to see it. Fourth way is through God's Word. Jesus says, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life." Jesus Himself says the whole point of Scriptures is not information to know, it is always an invitation to come. Jesus Himself says don't study the Bible for information. He says it's an invitation to come. Scripture is meant to turn our hearts to God. It's a lamp into our feet and a light into our path. It gets deep inside of us through joint and marrow and soul and spirit and begins to work on us to show us what is good and true and is right. The Bible says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word.

When I hear the Word of God, it starts to create a faith within me and awakens me from the deadness of the world and starts turning me to God. The question is, do I want to stay awake or do I want to go back to sleep? This is why God's Word is so important because it is always turning your heart to Him. The fifth way is through the Holy Spirit. "When He," the Holy Spirit, "comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment." Jesus says the Spirit is at work in both believers and unbelievers life to convict them. What does that mean? It means to convince them, to turn them, to awaken them, to shift their heart from what is not good and real and true to that which is good and real and true of sin. He shows you where there's sin in your life, where you're off the road, where you're bushwhacking, where you're about to get stuck in the muck and the mire, where you're living an inferior life to what you were created for.

The violation of your conscience and the law of God that's on your heart. He comes to convict you of righteousness to show you what is good and true and right. That there is a righteousness that is now by faith, not by works in Jesus' name. Judgment – that there will be consequences for how we live our lives. That's how one of the ways the Holy Spirit turns us to God. Is somewhere inside of us, we know one day we're going to have to give an account for all of it. But, He comes to show us that Jesus has already been judged on our behalf. We can now live free because we don't have to be afraid of the judgment, we look forward to the judgment because we are under the blood of Jesus. This is why Jesus says, "He, the Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth." Turn your heart to God, who is truth, and that He comes to testify about Jesus. He only comes to talk about Jesus, to point you to Him. Then, the last one is just through Jesus.

"But when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto myself." Jesus says, through what? Lifting up, through what? What's that? The cross and the resurrection, the ascension to heaven. When He was lifted up on the cross and ascended to heaven from now on, all men are drawn to Him through that reality. Through the person, through the work, through the message

of Jesus, all men everywhere when they hear and see the gospel of Jesus, their hearts are turned to God. They might turn it back, but in that moment, He is drawing, He is turning, He is trying to get our attention to turn to Him. The grace that is working on you is so much stronger than the flesh that's working against you. That's why I'm showing you all these. You're telling me that God doesn't want your heart to turn towards Him? Look at the lengths that He is willing to go. In every area of your life, He's at work to say, "Lift up your head." In fact, this picture is, I was praying for you this week, the Lord just gave me.

Here's what I think an awakening is like. Think of a little boy or a little girl who is full of shame or brokenness or fear or distraction, and they're looking down. Their father comes to try to get their attention and lift their head up, but they look back down; lift their head up, but they look back down. That's what an awakening is like, looking up, but then staying up. The Lord, bless you and keep you. The Lord, make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord, turn His countenance towards you and give you peace. An awakening is God lifting up our head to look and realize that He was already looking at us, that His face is already shining on me, that He has already turned His attention to me. Don't look down again, don't look back to the world and the distraction and the shame and the fear and all the things. No, no, lift up your head and look at the fact that God is looking at you because He loves you and He delights in you and He wants you and He is for you.

That's an awakening in Jesus' name. An awakening is not becoming religious. An awakening is realizing that God's face is already shining on me. I'm done looking at all these other things because what else would I rather look at? An awakening in Jesus' name, you with me on this? I can't see anything now because I looked at the lights for that whole time. Here's what we're going to do. For the next week, we're going to pray and fast together as a church. "If my people," not my person, my people, "who are called by My name will humble themselves." We humble ourselves by saying, "God, I can't turn my heart to You, I need you to turn my heart to You." "will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from," turn away, "from the wicked ways, the things of this world that we're already aware of and of faith towards God, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

The greatest healing that God can bring in your life is to turn your heart from the world to Him. You want a healing in your body, a healing in your marriage, a healing in that situation, a healing in that circumstance, those are all great, let's cry out to God for those. But the greatest healing is your heart being turned from the world, dead of faith towards Him. Okay. Fasting is simply giving up food to spend time to seek God. That's all it is. Don't overcomplicate it. Don't get stressed out about it. Don't think this is like a medical procedure so you can get, you know, like the sample test done right and all that kind of stuff; no, no. This is about breaking dependency on the things of the world so that my heart looks to God. That's really all it is. It's saying, God, I don't want to be hungry for the things of this world, I want to be hungry for You.

I am a body, a soul, a heart, a spirit, a mind; I'm all of those things, and so I want to use my body to deny myself, so I can practice turning and looking towards You. Fasting is literally taking your flesh and surrendering it to your spirit, and then we become sensitive to hearing God. In fact, this is why it says, "'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to Me with all your heart with fasting.'" Fasting helps us turn our hearts, partnering with God. Is it Him or is it you? Is it Him or is it you? Yes, so it partners with what God is doing. You say, "What is God doing?" God is giving you an invitation through this message right now to turn your heart to Him. He's already doing it. Fasting is a way I partner with what God is doing to say, "God, I want to turn my heart to you." With "'weeping and mourning,' rend your heart and not your garments, return to the Lord your God." It goes on to say how amazing God is.

But here's the whole point, fasting rends or tears our heart from the things of this world and turns it to God. That's basically all it is. Jesus says, "When you fast," not if you fast. This should be a normal part of our life. "do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." In other words, Jesus says the point of fasting is to not walk around looking miserable and telling everybody how hard it is to fast. If you're going to do that, let me free you. Go back to one of the first verses, don't do it. Don't do it, because you already received your reward in full. What's the reward in full? Everyone around you thinking, "Wow, you're pretty amazing. You're a religious dude." I don't know, that's not a reward I want. If that's what you want, go for it. But be free from that in Jesus' name. "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father who is unseen, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Fasting is simply by faith saying, God, I'm going to seek you, and I believe that somehow you're going to reward me. That you're going to reward me with Yourself. That I don't live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. That I am not sustained by the things of this world. This is what fasting will teach you. That I am not sustained by the world. I am sustained by God Himself. This is why when He says, "Put oil on your head and wash your face," you know it's really, when you learn to fast and walk with God, what actually happens is there's joy on your face. There's peace in your spirit. There's hope in your heart, where you're not like, "This is so hard." You're like, "God is so good. I'm seeing him in new ways." Real practical, ready? If you've never done this before, don't decide for the next seven days, I'm not eating or drinking anything. You will fail and you'll be mad at me. Don't do that. Start small.

Maybe you simply say this, "I'm going to fast breakfast every day this week." What would you do then? Well, you normally wake up and you get that latte or you get that burrito or you get that bowl of cereal. Instead of doing that, you choose to set that aside and you take that time to seek God. The time you would have normally used for breakfast, you now use that time to seek God and say, "God, I want to know You. I don't even know how to do this. God, this is weird, but would You help me in this?" And watch what He will do. Then, between breakfast

and lunch, while you're not eating, every time you're hungry, every time that hunger pain starts, that's a moment to be like, "God, I want to turn my attention to You. God, I want to be aware of You in the here and now in my marriage or at school or at work or wherever I am." Then, when you get to lunch, you thank God that He is turning your heart to Him and you enjoy your lunch. That would be a great way to start. Maybe you do it for lunch, then you have a nice breakfast, but then you fast lunch. Instead of sitting with everyone at work or at school or wherever you go, maybe you go and you take that time away and you go and you sit in your car and you do the little exercises.

Every day, there's a 15-minute exercise on that card that you got in social media, ValleyCreek+, just a way of, if you're like, "I don't know what to do, do that." It will help you. You take that time instead of eating to seek God. Then, between lunch and dinner, when you're hungry and the hunger pains, and this is hard, that's when you cry out to God, "God, I want to walk in the spirit, not in the flesh. I don't want my fleshly desires to control me. God, I want to be aware of You and thank You that You're here," and you'd be amazed at what happens. Then, at dinner, you sit down for that meal and you thank God that He's moving in your life. You take that meal and you enjoy it in the goodness of God. See, this is not religious. Or maybe you fast an entire day. You say, "I'm going to take one day and I'm not going to do any of it." You take every one of those meals and you use it to seek God. As those hunger pains come, you say, "God, turn my heart to You." The next morning when you wake up and you eat, you thank God for it. Maybe you do a three-day fast and all you do is fruits and vegetables or a smoothie. Listen, the point is, that is not the point. The point is, ask God.

If you have health issues and you can't do it, no problem. This is not religious. Ask God what else you can do. If you fail, it's okay. Just tell God, "God, the Spirit is willing, but my flesh is so weak. I refuse to feel condemned right now. I refuse to be religious and tell everyone else I did it, even though I didn't. In fact, I choose humility by saying, I didn't do it because my flesh is strong. I want it to die, so help me, Lord." Wow, what might God do in that? The point is not to just fast. This isn't dieting. The point is seeking God. "Ask and it will be given to you; Seek and you will find; Knock and the door will be opened to you... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

If I ask and I seek and I knock, He promises to give me what? Himself. Himself. The greatest gift that you will ever receive. The deepest healing of your life. Your heart turned from the things of the world and have faith towards God. Looking at His face that is already looking at me. It already delights in me. Listen to me. If you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got. If you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got. You like what you're getting? Keep doing it. If you want something different in your relationship with God, maybe you have to do some things different. Different results require different actions. Maybe this is a moment by faith. I know some of you, you're sitting here and you're like, "Man, I don't even believe in God. Why would I do any of this?"

Listen, my encouragement to you is just pray the atheist's prayer this week. "Oh God, if there is a God, save my soul if I have a soul." There have been more people that have been awakened by that prayer than probably anything else. Some of you, you're here and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I want more of God, let's go." Then, some of you, you're sitting somewhere in the middle. "I believe in God. It's back to school church, man, I'm here. But, I'm not really going to do this thing. In fact, I've been bored, are we done yet? Because remember in the beginning you said Jesus was relevant and inspiring and all that, yeah, you're not." That's fine, listen, if there's no desire in your heart to turn your heart to God, that should concern you. If there's no part of you that's sitting here, and you've already decided why you can't do it and you're not going to do it, forget doing it.

Be concerned with the fact that there's no desire in my heart to say, "God, I want to seek You more." That should concern you. Maybe that's what you bring to God this week. "God, I'm really concerned that my heart has gotten so far. I'm convinced that I'm following You, but I have no desire to seek you this week. That concerns me. I don't want to get much farther down that road." I know some of you are thinking, "Bro, you're crazy. You picked back-to-school week to ask us to do this. Do you know how many things we have to do?" Exactly! If your life is so busy that you don't have time for God, you need a different life. If you say, I've got 5,000 things to do and then I can get to seeking God, maybe God's asking you to seek Him first and He'll take care of the 5,000 things for you. Maybe we go to back-to-school season a little different than we have in the past, right?

By saying, God, I can't do it, but You can. I can't turn my heart to You, but You can. Come on Valley Creek, let's cry out to God. Let's humble ourselves. Let's not be religious. Let's be honest. God loves honesty. Let's ask God for strength. In fact, come on, what does the Holy Spirit want to say to you right now? The entirety of today is God trying to lift your face to see that His face is already shining on you. Fasting and praying simply partners with that which God is already doing.

Let me free you; there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Let me free you; you do not have to do any of this. Let me free you; you don't have to talk a big game with a heart that's going in a different direction. Let me free you; that it is He who is drawing you with loving-kindness, and it is He who is turning the hearts of His children unto Himself. Lord Jesus, thank You that You turned my heart to You when my heart can get so lost and caught up in the world and the flesh and the demonic.

Thank You, God, that You interrupt my life and that You can put the dry bones back together because surely You are in my life even when I'm not aware of it. Holy Spirit, I just entrust all these amazing people to you this week. Would You come and guide them into truth? Would You speak in ways they've never heard Your voice before? Would You give them insight and wisdom and discernment, a sensitivity? For every heart that's gotten hard and calloused and

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turned away, Holy Spirit, would you make it sensitive to Your grace and Your love? Lord, would You come and lift up our face that we might see Your face, and may we choose to not put ourselves back to sleep but to stay awake in Jesus' name.

I am believing by faith that this week some flesh in your life is going to be broken and fall off; that God is going to move in a new way; that you are going to hunger and thirst for the kings of the kingdom and He will fill you. Lord, turn our hearts to You and bring us an awakening. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.