

Well, hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek Church. I am so glad you joined us today. Man, let's go ahead and give it up for every single one of our campuses together. Come on, so glad we're here together. My name is Eric, I get to serve as our Next Steps Director over at our Lewisville campus and I am so glad that you joined us today because we are right in the middle of an incredible series called 60 Days. Where we're taking 60 days to learn how to live in healthy family. See, we want to take 60 days over the summer and learn biblical principles about how God has designed us to have the best families possible.

Whether you're single, married, kids, no kids, grandparents, blended family; it doesn't really matter because this series is for you. See, the secret of this entire series is it's 60 days of family, but this series is really not about your family. It's about you and me discovering, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." As for me, then my house; as for me, then my family; as for me, I want to learn how to be the healthiest member possible to my family. Happy Father's Day. I love being a dad, best calling that God has ever given me to have my two little kids. I was getting ready for this and I knew I'd be teaching on Father's Day and it had me thinking that Father's Day is so different than how we celebrate Mother's Day.

Like, and don't get me wrong, if Jesus says the greatest in the kingdom is the servant of all, then moms, you all are the best in almost every single one of our homes. But isn't it interesting that on Mother's Day we like, dress differently, act differently. Like, for one day of the year we actually do what mom wants to do? But, then on Father's Day, it's more like this sense of like, I don't know, leave dad alone, let him go play golf. I don't know about you but my dad, he had cupboards full of mugs and drawers full of socks because that's all I knew. I didn't know what else to get my dad for Father's Day. But as I was thinking about Father's Day, it just gave me this thought that man, sometimes Father's Day itself, it reflects the sometimes complicated and maybe even sometimes broken relationships that we have with our own dads. The number one complaint for most children when they grow up, it's really simple, about their own dads it was simply, "When I needed him, he wasn't there."

Maybe either physically, he was absent. Maybe you grew up or you're in a single parent home or he worked all the time. Or how about this, we would just say, "He was emotionally absent." What we mean is, "Yes, his body was at home, but his heart was absent." See, all we really wanted from our dads was just for them to be present. Why? Because God designed us not only to live in the presence of our dads, but really just to live in the presence of a family that He has given us. See, I think one of the number one attacks on our families over the last decade has been an attack to not be present. But did you know that God, the Father, even if you grew up with an absent father, He's literally named an ever-present help in times of trouble? Like, literally God's heart and design is to be present with you as a good Father and to put you in a family to be present with one another. See, what do I mean by be present? Here's what I would define presence as.

To be present means I am wherever I am with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, all my strength, and I am fully available to do whatever God wants to do. The question is, when we're in our families, in our homes, are we there with all our heart, all our minds, all our soul, all our strength, and are we fully available to do whatever God wants to do in our families? Because that is what it means to be present. See, one day Jesus was going along and He was teaching a parable as He often does, but this parable was about family. He said, "There was a man, he had two sons, and the younger son goes to his dad, and basically says to his dad, 'Dad, I wish you were dead, I want to go spend your money, I'm going to go do my thing out there, live in wild living.'" Ends up in a pigpen. Maybe you've heard the story, the prodigal son story, right. And we really love how the prodigal son story ends, because then he gets up and it says, "while he's a far way off..." I imagine the dad is like, on the porch with his cup of coffee.

He's got his World's Greatest Dad shirt on that he got for Father's Day. He's sitting there, and he, like, throws the mug because he sees his boy and he runs to him and scoops him up and he says, "My son is home. He was dead, he's alive. He's lost, now he's found." We love the prodigal son story. But it made me ask this question, what makes a prodigal son? What gets a son to end up in a pigpen while living apart from his family? What makes a prodigal son to where he doesn't just want to be present with his dad, his brother, his family? Like, what happened in the heart of the prodigal son that he didn't want to be present with his own family? See, I think Jesus at the beginning of the parable wants to give us insight about what actually keeps us from being present. See Jesus starts and He says this in the parable, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living."

See, I think it's three really simple things that actually prevented the prodigal son from being present with his family. The first one is just the very first words out of his mouth. "Give me my." "Give me my..." the very first words out of a prodigal son's mouth is a spirit of entitlement in his own family. Have you ever, in your home, experienced "give me my" personalities happening? Give me my respect; give me my cup of coffee before I talk to you; give me a certain tone of voice; give me a spotless clean house and then I'll be present with you. Have you ever experienced entitlement actually keeping you from being present with your family? The second thing was just divided property. Like, seriously, the prodigal son allowed property to divide him from being present with his family. A really simple question for you, has property ever divided your family?

When I say property here's what I mean. I mean anything that you possess that can divide you from your family. See, I'm not talking just houses and rooms. I mean anything you possess – hobbies, technology, that project, that work assignment. What things have actually ever come between you and your family that's kept you from being present? See, why? Why? Maybe it's because we actually don't know how to be present. Like, maybe we literally live in the same house and live totally separate lives. Maybe we actually go to the same office, the same school,

and live totally separate lives. We drive in the same car, and live totally separate lives. Has property ever come between being present with your family? And then, it says, "He squandered his wealth." The prodigal son squandered the good thing that God has given him. When I say wealth, I don't just mean money. I mean what are you wealthy in?

What are the things that God has given you? Energy? Health? Time? Does anyone know what it feels like to literally squander their health when their knees didn't hurt and their back didn't crack? Does anyone know what it feels like to literally squander your time when you didn't have kids yet? You weren't in that busy season. Do you know what it feels like to literally squander your energy on a hobby that literally, like two years later, you don't even care about anyway? Like, has anyone ever bought the brand new golf clubs thinking that that's going to make them a really good golfer, but then all of a sudden they have two kids so they can't go golf anymore because it costs too much money and it takes them away from their kids. The bags are hanging up in the garage; is that too specific? Like, isn't it fascinating that maybe the prodigal son's story is actually a story about a son that didn't want to be present with his own family.

I don't know about you, but maybe this is your family right now. Maybe your family, you're really like, yeah there's division, entitlement, squandering. But here's my question for you, how do we flip the entire script here so that we don't end up like the prodigal son and we actually end up more like the prodigal father? See, prodigal just means extravagant, lavish. The prodigal son wanted to use his extravagance to go live in wild living apart from his family. But you know what the prodigal father was extravagant in? Presence. I just want you to think about this for a second. The father had created and cultivated such a life of presence that he was literally present to a son who was not even home yet. The prodigal father had cultivated such a life of presence in his life that he was so aware and aware of what God is doing right now that he's sitting and he knows when his son's coming home before his son even gets there.

Like, how do we flip the script so that we don't become like prodigal sons, we become like prodigal fathers lavishing our presence on the families that God has given us? The first thing I think we need to do, practice gratitude for your family. We've got to go from a spirit of "give me my..." to a spirit that says, "I'm so thankful for..." How different would the prodigal son's story be if the first words out of his mouth were not "give me my..." What if he looked at his dad and just said, "Dad, I thank my God every time I remember you. I thank my God every time I remember you." Like, can I be honest with you guys? I think sometimes we hold on to complaints about our families for years, for decades.

We have to learn how to stop complaining for who our families aren't, and start learning how to actually be grateful for who our families are. Like, when we end up holding on to these complaints for years, all it does is actually end up stuck in the past and we don't know how to actually be present with our families. But here's the fascinating thing about gratitude. If you actually start to express gratitude to your family, do you realize that it actually awakens you to the present moment and what God is actually doing right now in your family's lives? See, I get

it. Our families can feel worthy of complaint. I have been worthy of complaint in my own family. I get it. Sometimes families can be the places that can sometimes hurt us the most. But here's my question for you.

Do you think that if you actually started to practice gratitude, that might be the thing that helps you finally release what your family has done to you, and actually help cultivate a heart of gratitude and love and peace and joy and build the family that you actually want to experience? Come on, we have to practice gratitude. You might be like, "Man, this is great, Eric, but I don't feel like being grateful." Great, because feelings follow faith, really. You just have to make a choice, and here's the thing. Just start with one person in your family, you can speak this over them. Just pick one person in your family and just say, "Man, I'm so glad that you're my dad." "I'm so thankful for you, my mom." "I'm so thankful that God chose me to be your dad." "I'm so thankful for my roommate." "I'm so thankful for this family that's loved me in this season and seen me and taken care of me." Express gratitude. We need to go from "give me my..." to "I'm thankful for..." The second thing is, we've got to start saying "no." Say no to what divides your family.

Man, seriously, do you know how biblical it is to actually say no? Like, I think we think when I become a believer in Jesus and I start to actually follow Jesus, He's got like a list of things He just wants me to accomplish and do in His name. But here's the first thing that Jesus wants to teach you. He just wants to teach you to actually say "no" to the things that are distracting you, or hurting you, harming you. Don't believe me? Check out this verse. "Grace," the grace of Jesus, "It teaches us to say 'no' to the ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age." See, the grace of Jesus actually wants to teach you to say no. Say no to what? Ungodliness, sure, but worldly passions. All the things that the world is so passionate about – possessions, TV shows, phone, video games, that project, that hobby.

How about the meticulous need to have your yard like, perfectly taken care of, the almost OCD thing that we do with our yards before we actually want to be present with our families? If we say no, we might actually learn how to live in the present with our families. We have to learn how to say no. See, I'm not saying that any of those things are bad. Like, genuinely, I don't know if I could even get to church today without my Waze app. I love what God has given us in the technology and the things He's given us, but here's my question. You are present to something. Is it the right thing? Like, literally right now, you're present to something. Is it the right thing? Because to be present to something first requires me to be absent from something else. Think about this. If I want to be present in a classroom to actually learn from my teacher, you know the first choice I actually have to make is?

I have to decide that I'm going to be absent from all the distractions, the side conversations, my phone, if I actually want to be present to learn from my teacher. Or if I want to be present to work out and actually change my fitness, you know the first thing I'm going to have to do is,

I'm going to have to choose to be absent from the couch. Like, literally, to be present to something requires me to be absent to something else. Do any of you all ever get those like, updates on your phone that tells you how much screen time you've used in the last week? I hate those things. Because sometimes it'll be like, "Bloop! Eric, your screen time was up 200% over last week." I'm like, "That's impossible." That is literally impossible because it actually makes me have to ask the question, have I been more present to my phone this week than to my own family? Like, have I actually been saying no to the things that are dividing me from my own family? Because, like, can I be real honest with you? You know what I really think God wants to say to us today?

I think God really just wants to be like, "Wake up." "Wake up, Eric. Like, seriously, wake up. You're falling asleep in your own family." Like, I want to literally – I think God literally wants to say to our families today, "Let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober." Do you realize, when God says, "Let us not sleep," He's not saying you can't take a nap. He's literally saying the word "sleep" is associated with the word "death," literally. When someone would die in the Bible, they will literally use the phrase, "and they fell to sleep." It's very soft and beautiful. But, the reality is, they're associating sleep with death. Well, what happens to you when you die? What happens to you when you die? Your body is still here, but your heart, mind, soul, strength has all been separated from it. What do we do? We're not physically dead in our homes, but you know what we do?

Our body is present, but our heart is caught up with money. Our body is present, but our mind is separated with social media. Our body is present, but our souls are passionate about everything else that the world is passionate about. Then we wonder why it doesn't feel like our families are fully alive. Like, I think God just really wants to say to us, "Wake up." Do you know what the turning point was in the prodigal son's story? It's literally while he's sitting in a pigpen, it says the phrase, "He came to his senses." It's like maybe for the first time in his entire life, the prodigal son was finally fully where he was with all his heart, all his mind, all his soul, all his strength. He was finally fully available to God. He wasn't perfect. He hadn't gotten anything right yet.

He still had a long road to go, but for the first time in his life, he was actually awake to what God's doing in his own life and he was finally present. It's almost like – it's literally like the father looks, and it's like, "Man, there you are. Where have you been? There you are." He came to his senses and then "he was alert and he was finally sober." Do you know the word "to be alert"? It literally means "to keep watch." I don't know about you, but I don't know how we can keep watch of what's happening in our homes if we're literally eyes down. "Oh, that's cool! Awesome! No way!" How do we actually keep watch of what's happening in our homes when our eyes are not up and actually watching, what is God doing in my family? And then, sobriety, what is sobriety? Sobriety is to abstain from anything that steals, kills, and destroys my mind. For us to choose sobriety in our families, it might literally be not picking up that drink.

But how many of us are phone-aholics, hobby-aholics, distraction-aholics? How about this one? Control-aholics? How many of us have cultivated a heart that isn't sober minded about what God is doing in our families, so that we can just be present with them? Let me just say, I know this is really, really hard. It can be really, really hard to actually say no to the things that we've fallen in love with, that we enjoy. But here's the thing, man. Like, literally, can I tell you the truth? I knew I was going to talk about presence. Like, a month ago, for the entire month of May, I grabbed a few friends, and I said, "Hey, I need some help because I don't even know if I know how to be present with myself." I grabbed a few guys, and I said, "Hey, for the entire month of May, will you do two things with me? One, no TV shows for the entire month of May. Number two, hey, no phones whenever we're at home."

Those two things. For the entire month of May, I kid you not, May 1st; May 1st, my wife is out of town. I'm laying back in bed. It's like 8 o'clock. I'm like, I don't know what to do anymore. I think I was praying, doing something great and amazing. I'm sitting back. Mistake number one, I had my phone right on my nightstand next to me. I just remember, it's like 8 o'clock. I'm like, sitting back. I'm like, "I wonder if I could just touch it. Like, maybe I can just check the weather. Or maybe I'll just look at my finance app. That's super responsible of me, and that'd be great of me." I know it's really difficult to say no sometimes to the things that we found out we're actually maybe addicted to, been controlled by, been in love with. But here's the thing, man. Grace, remember? Grace of Jesus, it wants to teach us.

You know what I think the best thing about Jesus is, is sometimes I don't think He needs you to do anything. He wants you to sit back in bed and go, "Jesus, would You teach me not to pick up my phone right now?" "Jesus, would You teach me how to be present at this ballgame right now?" "Jesus, would You teach me how to be present in this conversation, in this meeting, in my own car?" "Jesus, would You just teach me how to be present?" He wants to give you grace. He wants to give you grace; grace that forgives the choices that we've made, and grace that empowers us to actually live present to our families. See, and then the next thing that we need to do is, we need to invest our wealth in our families. See, because here's the really good news. I know that was sobering, but seriously, here's the really good news. If we actually say no to all the things that are distracting us, that are stealing, killing, dulling our minds, do you know what happens to us?

We instantly become maybe the freest and the wealthiest that we have ever been. Like, literally, again, we are the freest we've ever been because we're not chained to all the distractions, to all the addictions, to the social media, to anything else in our lives. We're not enslaved to that, but also we're the wealthiest we've ever been. Because, again, wealth is not about the vacation you can buy – the vacation you can go on, the house you can buy. The wealthiest thing in your life, the greatest resource that God has given you is your time. Literally, as soon as you say no to all the things that have been distracting you, boom, you are instantly maybe the wealthiest you have been in years. The question becomes, what will I do with that wealth? Will I squander it again? Because the temptation is, here's what I know, is if you clear

something else, something else will just backfill it right in. No TV shows, but here comes my phone. Hey, no more work. I'm not going to work extra, but here comes this hobby that I really want to pursue.

How are we going to invest our wealth? Because I think the greatest opportunity for us to invest our wealth is through something called the ministry of presence. Like, the greatest way we can invest the wealth of time that God has given us is through the ministry of presence. What do I mean by ministry of presence? I mean Jesus moved into your neighborhood with grace and truth. Jesus took on flesh and He was literally called Emmanuel, God with us. That Jesus spent His time on the thing that was most important to Him, the family that God had chosen for Him. You see, what did Jesus do for 30 years? Literally, before miracles, before any preaching, before any healings, what do you think Jesus did for 30 years? He didn't go make a bunch of money. You know what He did? He hung out with His mom and dad, was present to His brothers and sisters and neighbors and friends.

Just was available, fully available to whatever God wanted to do in His life. Then, even after He started this ministry, you know what He did? He didn't go and try to make a huge influence and gather thousands of followers. He picked 12 guys, and it literally says, "He appointed 12 apostles that they might just be with Him." The ministry of presence. And all throughout the Bible, God is declaring the ministry of presence over His people, over families, over our lives. He declares over and over and over again, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." He declares over and over again, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." He declares it when the Israelites are facing oppression. He declares it when the Israelites are needing a miracle. He declares it when there's broken families, when there's generational sin. He keeps declaring over and over again, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

Then as actual followers of Jesus, do you realize that the very ministry that God's offering you, the very words He's speaking over your life, like, if you need to hear it today, "I don't even like my family very much, Eric." If you need to hear it today, He declares over you, "Don't be afraid, I'll be your Father and I am with you." But do you realize that then when you receive the grace of Jesus, you actually are now empowered to walk just the same way that Jesus walked on this earth? In a very, very real way, did you realize that you can actually say to your family, "Don't be afraid for I am with you"? Like, do you realize how many marriages just need one spouse to finally turn and say, "Don't be afraid anymore, because I'm with you"? How many kids don't need another lecture, don't need another assignment, don't need another talking to?

They just need to hear from their dads or moms, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you." How many of your friends and your family just need to hear, "Don't be afraid, I am with you with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, all my strength and I am fully available to whatever God wants to do in your life." We have to choose to actually be a person that carries the ministry of presence. That the best way we can invest the wealth of time that God has given us is to make the choice to be a person of presence. Here's my final thought. Like, if you get nothing else out

of anything else today, "as for me" – the reality is, you can make the choice to be present, but you can't make anyone else in your family listen to this today.

You can't make anyone else in your family decide that I'm going to start being present and I'm going to throw the video games away and I'm going to throw everything away and I'm just going to be present. You can't make your family do that, but here's what you can do. Here's what we can do, as for me, I'm going to make a decision today. I will always be available for whenever they're ready to be present. I will always be available for whenever they are ready to be present. I want to be like the prodigal father. I want to be like the prodigal father that has cultivated such a life of presence that I'm watching and I can see what God is doing even if my family isn't even aware of it yet. I can see what God is up to and I am fully available to my family anytime they need me. In a real way, we have to make a decision to say, I will always be available whenever my family is ready to be present. Because – can I let you in on something that's probably going to happen?

It's probably going to come at the most inconvenient times. Your kids are probably going to want to play with you right when you're like, I just wanted five minutes to sit on the couch and scroll on my phone. Your wife, your spouse, is probably going to want to be present finally when you're like, I just had this assignment, this project I really wanted to do. That's why, today, we have to decide that I will always be available whenever my family is ready to be present. As for me, I will be present to my family. Here's the worst decision you can make today, is to say, "I'll get to that tomorrow," because it's literally already a step backwards from not being present. Seriously, to just today, today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to just make a decision to say, man, I'm all in. I'm throwing away some stuff. I'm just deciding like I'm always going to be available. I'm investing my wealth in the ministry of presence to my family.

Because it's the best thing that I can offer my entire family. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day I'd make that choice. Come on, let's choose to be present with our families so that we actually can build a healthy family. Why don't you close your eyes with me real quick. Jesus, Holy Spirit, what are You speaking to our family today? Maybe just literally take a breath, be present, and just ask the Holy Spirit right now, how do I need to respond to the invitation to be present with my family? Maybe, today, He just wants you to say thank you to someone in your family.

Maybe, today, the Lord, the Holy Spirit is inviting you to say "no" to some things that have been dividing you from your family. Maybe He's just saying, "It's time to invest your wealth, the wealth of time that I have given you to give everything you have, all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your strength to your family." Jesus, can You help us carry the ministry of presence to a world that is so lonely, to a world that doesn't realize how significant it is that we can just say, "I am with you"? Thank You Jesus, that You are always with us and that we get to carry a ministry that has blessed us beyond all measure. Jesus, thank You for this. May You be

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present with us and help us be present to every single person in our family. In Jesus' name, amen.