

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today and we are in a message series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. And if you've ever wondered, why do we preach in message series, it's because we want to take one big idea, one concept, one thought, one word from God and we want to take it deep. And we want to give ourselves time to understand it, time to get revelation from it, time to respond to God, and move forward in faith, to wrestle through it and what it means for us in our lives. And with so many people coming and going every single weekend, we want to give everybody the chance to be able to grab this one big idea that we believe God is speaking to our church over a season of time. And so, if there is ever an individual message in a message series that you don't like, don't understand, aren't really enjoying, just think about it in terms of your favorite Netflix series.

There are some episodes that aren't your favorite, but if you put it back into the context of the series, it all makes sense. So, we are in a series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did, and we're talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. But we're saying that if we want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot we have to first do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. That if we want to do the works of Jesus, we have to first walk in the way of Jesus. That if we want to have the life of Jesus, we first have to take on the lifestyle of Jesus. And you say, "Well, what does that mean, do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did?"

It means if you want to do the things that Jesus did, which we all do, like heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cast out demons, but more practically in our daily life, not be angry, and not be anxious, and not be overwhelmed, and have peace, and have joy, and forgive people, and love one another, and not be trapped in the things of money in this world, then we first have to do the things that Jesus did, like prayer, and fasting, and Scripture, and silence, and solitude, and Sabbath, and community, and serving, and generosity. We have to take on His lifestyle. You see, we've been using this little graphic to just say these are just some examples of the things that Jesus did that we can see all throughout Scripture. He had peace in chaos, and joy in every circumstance, purpose in the mundane, love in every relationship He had, He was free from the world, He was connected to God in a disconnected world. This is just some of the things that Jesus did.

And so, the question I want to ask you today is simply this, is this even possible? It sounds really possible, and it looks really appealing, and it's a great graphic on social media, but is this even possible? Is it actually possible to do the things that Jesus did? Is it possible to have peace in chaos, and joy in every circumstance, and purpose in the mundane, and love in your relationships, and freedom from this world? Is that even possible? Said another way, is it even possible to live a different way? You see, the question I'm asking you is, can you change? Can you change? And if so, how do you change? Those are two pretty important questions that we really should wrestle through in our lives and come to some kind of conclusion, don't you think?

Is it possible for you to change? Can you go deeper? Can you become more mature? Can you become free? Can you become more mature? Can you become healthy? Can you be transformed? Is it possible for you in your life to actually change? Or do you think, this is just who I am. This is just how I do my life. This is as good as it gets. I've tried. I've struggled. I've strived. I've put in the effort. I've had the willpower. I've done all of the things and I've not changed. And so, many of us have just resigned to like, this is just my life, and I've learned to numb, and I've learned to cope, and I've got strategies for dealing with the brokenness in my life, and sometimes I have really good seasons where I can put the dogs at bay, but if I'm honest, no, I don't really think that I can change.

In fact, if I'm going to change, then God's gotta lightning-bolt-strike me. Or maybe some of us think, I don't know that I even really want to change. And some of us probably think, the reason I can't change is because I'm a victim to everyone else in my life. And if they would change, then I could change. Can you change? I don't think we think about that question a lot, and I think if we're honest, somewhere deep down inside of us subconsciously, most of us believe no. Why? Because we have brought our theology down to the experiences we've had in life. Our beliefs have been determined by what we've actually experienced, and for a lot of us, we would say like, "I haven't changed, and therefore, it's not possible to change." And I've been married to someone who hasn't changed. They were passive when I married them 20 years ago, and every year they become even more passive. My mom was controlling when I grew up, and every year she becomes even more and more controlling.

My kids aren't who I want them to be, and maybe they were just born that way, and it's impossible for them to be any different. Our boss hasn't changed. Our friends haven't changed. The people we've known in church for years, they haven't changed. And so, we've created this entire theological construct based on the experience of the lack of transformation we've seen in our lives and in the lives of the people around us. And we know the verses. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come." "You go from glory to glory, being transformed more into His image and His likeness." "'Come, follow Me and I will make you,' Jesus says." "We are the clay. He is the potter, and He will shape, and mold us into who He wants us to be." "His divine power has given me everything I need for life and godliness." We know all the verses, which doesn't seem to work itself out in our life, does it?

Can you change? You see, I think if we're honest, a lot of us feel like the apostle Paul. He says, "I do not understand what I do for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my sinful nature for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin I do not want to do living in me that does it, for in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the

law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members who will rescue me from this body of death?"

How authentic. How vulnerable. How honest, and how real. Did you ever feel like this? Does this feel like your life? Like the things that you want to do, you can't do. And the things you don't want to do, you find yourself just doing over and over and over again. What is Paul saying here? He's saying, "Hey, the things I really want to do, I can't do them. And the things I don't want to do, I find myself doing them even when I'm trying not to do them." And what he's expressing to us is that he has lived in the world for so long that he's been trained and conditioned by the world so he naturally does the things the world does. We've been saying you gotta do what Jesus did if you want to do what Jesus did. Well, Paul is saying, "I have done what the world has done for so long that I naturally and effortlessly do what the world does."

I have these habits, these routines, these ruts, these neural pathways, these whole ways of life that I have created that just take over on-the-spot. I've spent so long doing what the world has done that I just naturally and effortlessly in the moment do what the world does. It's not what I want to do. It's not even who I am anymore. I'm a new creation. I'm part of the divine nature. The sin nature has been broken on my life, but there's this sin living in me in the members or the actual parts of my body that has made me a prisoner to the sin that is, in a sense, trapped or trained in the parts of my body to make me do things that I don't want to do. So, I've been trained, I've been trained by the world and that's why I naturally and effortlessly do what the world does on-the-spot. This is why we do things like we say, "I'm not going to be angry, I'm not going to be angry, I'm not going to be angry." When we get to the spot, we're angry and we can't help it.

This is why we say things like, "I'm not going to look at it, I'm not going to look at it, I'm not going to look at it," we look at it. So, we say things like, "I'm not going to be controlling, okay, today is the day, I'm not going to be controlling today, today, this hour, I'm not going to be controlling," and we control. "I'm going to serve, I'm going to be a servant, I'm going to go into that situation with my family, and I'm not going to be selfish, I'm going to serve," and we step into it, and we're selfish. Why? Because we've spent so long doing what the world has done that we naturally and effortlessly do what the world does on-the-spot, in the moment. We have been trained. We have been conditioned. We have ruts. We have habits. We have routines. We have whole patterns of our life that make us do things that we don't want to do or prevent us from doing the things that we do want to do. Think of how you have been formed by the world.

The family you grew up in, your family of origin, the house you were raised in, the things your dad did or didn't do, the things your mom said or didn't say, the experiences you've had at school, the dysfunctional relationship or relationships that were in your life, the ways that you've been trained and shaped at work, the religious condemnation and conformity that has

been pressed upon you, the media, and the ideas, and the images of the world that have just saturated your life year after year. Think of how you have learned to defend yourself, fight for yourself, protect yourself, glorify yourself, serve yourself, shame yourself, condemn yourself, you have been shaped by this world. And so, yes, you're a beloved son, but you've been trained to live like an orphan. And yes, I am free, but I have been trained to live in bondage.

And yes, I am holy in Jesus, but I've been trained to live like the world. See, if you can catch this, before you met Jesus, before Jesus became Lord of your life, you were lord of your life. And while you were lord of your life, dead in sin, living in the ways of this world, there were a whole network, a complex network of attitudes, behaviors, perspectives, opinions, responses, initiation, actions, words that were formed, and shaped, and literally impressed into who you are that when you now meet Jesus, yes, you're a new creation, you've been set free, the sin nature has been broke off you, you're a part of the divine nature, but all that forming, and shaping, and training doesn't just go away. So, you find yourself doing the things you don't want to do or not being able to do the things that you do want to do.

Why? Because you spent so long doing what the world does that, on-the-spot, you naturally and effortlessly do what the world does. What I'm trying to tell you is that your will is not stronger than your training. So, when he says, my will is not to do it, or to do this thing, and not that thing, but my willpower is not stronger than the training I've experienced. So, in the moment when I get to a fork in the road, I will take whichever rut is most deep in my life. And when it's been the things of the world, those ruts that I have created over time, I just naturally and effortlessly take them. Is this making sense to you? This is why right now, if I handed you a pen, and you're right handed, and I told you to write in your left hand, you couldn't do it. If I handed you a football and told you to throw it with your off hand, it would be the most awkward, uncomfortable experience for all of us watching you.

If you have a Texas accent and I told you to not speak with that accent, but speak with a Canadian accent, couldn't do it. And if I told you to stop making your normal facial expressions, like fix your face, you couldn't do it, right? Not that you don't want to do it, but you just couldn't do it. Why? Because you've been trained, your body has been shaped and molded in such a way that without a whole new round of training, that's what you're going to do. That's what Paul is saying. He's saying there is literally sin that is in the members or the parts of my body. I have literally been trained in this world to do and say certain things, and not do and not say other things that, on-the-spot, even though my will, my heart, is to go God's way, I've been trained the world's way, and I can't have the willpower strong enough to override my training.

It's like sin has been trapped in the members of your body, your body parts, your hands, your feet, your words, your facial expressions, your ears, all of that has been trained in the ways of this world. Does that make sense to you? It's like you get to this fork in the road and you've been trained so deeply to be depressed that you can't even be joyful. You get to the fork in the

road, and you've been trained so deeply to be bitter and resentful that it's almost impossible for you to be forgiving in the moment. You've been trained so deeply to be a person of control that you get to that moment, and literally, you can't trust God because the ruts are so deep, and they take you in the direction that you don't want to go. We've been trained to hide, to hoard, to hate, to steal, to kill, to destroy, the lust of the eyes, the cravings of the flesh, and the pride of life. And so, if we want new ruts, if we want new directions in our life, we've got to build new ruts that are deeper than the old ruts because your body has been trained to take you in the direction you don't want to go.

That's what I'm trying to say to you. And we think of the body, and we think we don't really want to talk about the body in church. We're not here to talk about our bodies. We're here to talk about our hearts, and our souls, and our spirits, but God gave you your body, and your body is you. And inside your body, God has put the creativity of the human spirit. And it's at the place of your body where heaven touches earth. Your body is meant to be God's will on this earth. There're so many verses about the body. "Offer your body as living sacrifices." "The Lord is for the body and the body for the Lord." "Your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit." "Your body is now the body of Christ on this earth." God has given you a body. And the reason He's given you a body is, is that you might become His person on this earth walking in loving relationship with Him, accomplishing His will as you rule and reign.

He's given you a body. This is the place that you rule and reign. He's given you the authority to choose what happens, how you speak, and how you act. It is the place where God has allowed you to have your will, and He won't override it, He won't usurp it, but what we have to acknowledge is that our bodies have been trained by-- we have done the things the world does for so long that our bodies naturally and effortlessly do the things the world does when we get to the spot. So, the words and the actions of our body are the world's words and actions, because we've done the things the world has done, so we do the things the world does. And we get so discouraged as followers of Jesus because we've done the things the world has done, and then we just want to be able to jump over here and do the things that Jesus does. But my body hasn't been trained for that. So, it naturally takes the ruts and takes me in a direction that I don't want to go.

Is this making sense to you? It's literally like sin has gotten trapped in the individual members of your body. It's been trained in the ways of sin. And so, Paul is basically saying like then, "Is it hopeless?" Who will rescue me from this body of death, this body that has been shaped in a life without God? Well, the good news is, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord," that He can change me. And he goes on to say, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you." He says you're no longer under the sinful nature, it's been broken. You're now part of the divine nature. You're included in Christ, and you have to start by acknowledging, "I am no longer a slave to sin, I am no longer controlled by it because God's Spirit lives in me." "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin."

My body has been trained in the ways of the world to naturally and effortlessly do and say the things the world does. This is why I react in anger. This is why I have this whole pattern of how we do our marriage. This is why I get frustrated. This is why I listen to gossip. This is why I can't help myself. Why? Because I've been trained, my body has been trained in life without God, yet my spirit is alive because of righteousness. "And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies." Your body, not just your spirit and your heart, but He will help you do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did, so that your body becomes the living will of God on this earth. One more, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ." Count yourself, reckon yourself, consider yourself dead to sin.

So, when you're going in the direction you don't want to go, you can stop as a follower of Jesus, not necessarily control yourself, because your will isn't strong enough, but you can stop, and you can say like Paul, "This isn't even me." That word, that action, that behavior, that response, that's not even me. That sin that's living in the members of my body, it's been trapped there because I've been trained in the ways of the world, but I consider myself dead to that, and alive to God. Starts there, I got to acknowledge that no longer has power. It did and it's all you could do before Jesus. You did the things the world did, and you did the things the world did because that's all you could do without Jesus. But now, you can consider yourself dead to the ways of the world, alive to God, so "don't let sin reign," have the highest influence in your body, the natural things you effortlessly do, "so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin." Why?

Because you spend so long offering yourself being trained, being formed, being shaped, creating these deep ruts of your life in the ways of the world "as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves," your body, through submission and surrender, "as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness." In other words, choose to submit and surrender to the Spirit, open yourself to God, acknowledge that there are deep ruts in your life that cause you to have words and actions that aren't the things you even want to do, and ask God to help train you, retrain you, reshape you, reform you. Ask God to help you do the things that Jesus did, like prayer, and fasting, and silence, and solitude, and confession, and generosity, and service. You're like, "What do those have to do...?" Everything, because they're creating new ruts.

They are now retraining the members of your body to do things in the way that God would do them as if He Himself were living in your body, which He is. And so, this is why He says, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't "try" to be godly. Don't use your willpower to be godly. Train yourself to be godly, because you have been so deeply trained to be worldly. And your will doesn't have enough power to override your training. Your will is not stronger than the ways that you have been trained. We've been using this verse and talking about running a marathon, that's how it's using it. The same way that you can't run a marathon right now, this is going to

be so freeing for some of you. In the same way that you can't run a marathon right now, some of you can't not be anxious right now. You don't want to do it, you've tried everything, you know how to do it, your will isn't to be anxious, but you've been so deeply trained in the ways of the world to be anxious that you can't not be anxious the same way that you can't run a marathon right now.

Some of you, in the same way that you can't sit down and play Beethoven on a piano right now, you can't not be angry. It's been so deeply formed and shaped in you, when you hit those junctures, it just takes over, and you feel ashamed, and disappointed in yourself, and terrible, and you have to make it right with everybody, but it just keeps happening because you've been so deeply trained in that. Some of us, in the same way that we can't bench press our own body weight, physical training, we can't not be controlling. And if you would see that and acknowledge it, it's incredibly freeing that the parts of my body have been trained in sin, and I'm included in Christ, but there's this residue, there's this leftover new training that has to take place. Just think about it with me for a second, think of how your hands have been trained in this world to take instead of give.

Think of how your tongue has been trained to curse instead of bless. Think of how your eyes have been trained to lust and covet instead of look with compassion and love. Think of how your ears have been trained to listen to gossip, and slander, and division instead of the voice of God. Think of how your mind has been trained to complain, to criticize, to judge, to look at what's wrong instead of being trained to focus on what is good, and true, and right. Think about how your feet have been trained to run away from God instead of running the race with perseverance that's been marked out for you. Think of how your heart has been trained to hunger and thirst for the things of this world instead of being trained to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Think of how your feelings have been trained to feel condemnation, and shame, and apathy instead of being trained to feel peace, and joy, and passion.

Think of how your heart has been trained to be wicked, and deceitful, and selfish instead of being trained to be honest, and humble, and servant-hearted, and vulnerable. You see, if you can catch this, it creates tremendous compassion for the people in our life because when we say to them, "Stop doing this! Why are you always doing this? Or why can't you ever do this?" Literally, some of them, they can't. The ruts are so deep that their heart is towards God, and they want to, but they actually can't. It gives us so much compassion for others and so much compassion for ourselves. When, all of a sudden, I realize there are these ruts that I don't want to take, but I can't not take them because they're so deep and it's not even me, it's the sin living in the parts of my body that's been trained. So, I got to consider myself dead to sin and alive to God.

And you say if I do the things I don't want to do and don't do the things I do do, do I just abdicate then? That's just who I am, there's no responsibility? No, no, no, no, no. What He's saying is, you take responsibility to acknowledge that reality, confess it before God, and then

start a new training program, a new training program to be godly. And we wake up one day and we realize, I don't have to do this, but I can't not do it right now because I don't have the willpower to override my training, but I can train differently, and I can train to be godly, and I can train to go in a different way. And then, you start realizing, this says, "Train yourself to be godly," not "train yourself so that you're not worldly." Big difference. A lot of us end up with a vision for our lives that's in reaction to who we don't want to be. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be like my dad. I don't want to be like my mom. I don't want to be like those people. Listen to me, if you have a vision for your life that's who you don't want to be because you're afraid of becoming that, just understand, fear attracts that which it's afraid of.

So, the moment my life is, "I'm training so I won't be worldly," or won't be like my mom, or won't be like my dad, it literally is attracting that thing into your life. as opposed to having a faith of who I do want to be because faith attracts that which it hopes for. And we don't just try to weed the bad things in our life, we've got to plant the good things in our life, seeds of righteousness, and they will grow, and eventually overshadow and choke out the old ways of life as we build new ruts to take us in new ways. Train yourself to be godly, but you've got to first decide that you want to be godly, which means I have to first decide that I want to be a disciple of Jesus. If I actually want to change, I have to first decide that I want to become something, that I want to be godly. And so when Jesus says, "Come, follow me, and I will make you," I have to choose to respond to the invitation.

I have to choose to respond that He initiates, that we don't choose Him, He chooses us, that He comes to us, and He invites me to come and follow Him, a disciple. We asked that question last week. Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? You say what is a disciple again? It's a learner, a student, a follower, one who becomes like the one that they're following. A disciple is someone who has considered their life, and counted the cost and realized Jesus' way is better. And I want to learn to think like, and talk like, and act like, and live like, and believe like Jesus. A disciple is someone who has arranged and rearranges their life around Him, orders and reorders their life around Him. They have an intent to obey, an intent to follow, and they're not perfect. They make tons of mistakes, but when they do, they're quick to repent, and they believe when Jesus says, "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." they believe that is what is good, and true, and right.

And being a disciple isn't this religious activity or exercise, it's someone who is literally saying, "Jesus teach me how to live in your kingdom with you because I'm tired of these old ruts in my life, and you said they're broken, but I need to create new ruts with you." This is why Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." A disciple is a student who is training and being trained to become like Jesus. So, last week, I asked you the question, who are you a disciple of? Who are you doing the things that they did so you can do the things that they did? Whose thoughts are you thinking? Whose words are you speaking? Whose actions are you imitating? Whose way are you walking in? Whose truths are you trying to believe?



And maybe a better way of saying-- because that can feel defeated and I do the things I don't want to do and the things I want to do, I don't do. Maybe here's a better way of saying it, whose thoughts are you training to think? Whose words are you training to speak? Whose actions are you training to imitate? And whose truths are you training to believe? And whose way are you training to walk in? Have you decided, I want to be a disciple of Jesus, and I want my body to be formed in a way that naturally and effortlessly takes me in His way? You see, here's how you know, in a sense, a different way of thinking about, am I a disciple? When you come here, do you listen like a disciple or do you listen like the crowd? Do you listen like a disciple or do you listen like the crowd? You say what does that mean? Let me tell you, you look through Scripture, and all the stuff and people like, here's how the crowd listens. The crowd sits there and thinks, "Man, this is a great message for my wife. I really hope she's listening today because she got some ruts that she needs to deal with."

The crowd sits there and thinks, "Man, this is a great message for my husband. I wish he was here today. I'm going to send him the link." The crowd thinks, "I hope that person in my Circle shows up today and that they're listening because I can't wait to get the Circle to be like, 'Did you hear it?'" That's how the crowd listens. The crowd listens to deflect, to defend, to argue, to disagree with an edge of criticism and evaluation. The crowd listens thinking, "How is this going to help my business? How is this going to help me as a coach? How is this going to help me in the classroom? How is this going to help me in my family?" But a disciple listens saying, "Jesus is speaking to me. To me." And there's nothing wrong with hoping someone else in your life hears it, and there's nothing wrong with wrestling through the content, and there's nothing wrong with using it for the good that God wants to do through your life, but you got to listen to it as a disciple first.

That's why He says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus says, "Why do you worry about the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye when you have a plank in your eye all along? You hypocrite. Deal with the plank in your eye then you can help take the speck out of their eye." In other words, do you have ears to hear first as a disciple? Because I will never change if I don't first listen as a disciple. You see, when we look at Jesus's 12 disciples, once they had decided to be disciples, and once they had started following Him, and were listening like a disciple, we see tremendous change. You read the Gospels and you see these guys, they were a disaster. They had done the things the world had done for so long that even while they're walking with Jesus, they naturally and effortlessly do the things the world does because they've been so deeply trained and formed. Sin had been trapped in the members of their body. They had been shaped in such a way that when they got to those junctures, they couldn't help but take the rut.

But then you look at Peter, and you see that he's edgy, and harsh, and arrogant, and prideful, but as he walks with Jesus, Jesus trains him and creates new ruts so he becomes peaceful, and kind and stable. We see John, and he's angry, and he's full of vengeance, and wrath, and

hostility, but we watch as Jesus trains him to become loving, and kind and peaceful. We see Matthew. Matthew loved money, he was selfish, and he spent his life taking advantage of people, but we watch as Jesus trains him to be free from the love of money, to be generous, and to love others. We see Simon the Zealot, a guy with a rebellious spirit who wants to come against everyone and everything, but Jesus trains him to be submissive and surrendered. We see Thomas, so full of doubt, but Jesus trains him to be a man of faith. And what we discover is that change is not only possible, it's normative.

It's not only possible, it's normative. It is actually the way of following Jesus and what actually happens in our life. You see, so many of us, we get so lost in salvation, and I've been trying to put this in this series for you that salvation is not just the forgiveness of your sins and heaven when you die, it's so much more than that. And we forget that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. We forget that we have been saved, this is the one we think about the most. You have been saved by grace through faith. Forgiven, set free, included in Christ, a beloved son, your past has been taken care of, your future is secured once and for all. You have been saved. And one day, you will be saved. One day, Jesus will return and He will make all things new. And He will save you from the sin, and the violence, and the injustice, and every dark, and broken, and vile thing in the world around you.

But right now, we are in the process of being saved. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it's the power of God." "Being saved," I thought I was saved? Yes, but you're being saved. You say, "Saved from what?" Saved means to heal, to make whole, to set free, to deliver. You are being saved right now from wrong motives, and ungodly beliefs, and the old sin patterns that have been built into your life. The sin that's been trapped in the members of your body that causes you to do and say the things that you don't want to do. You're being saved from the lust of the eyes, the cravings of the flesh, and the pride of life. You're being saved from your false self, from living the way that you want to live. And if we make salvation some eschatological event that in some future moment, my past is taken care of, we've completely missed the point of salvation.

If salvation is this end-times, some event in the future will pay for my past, and all will be well, and I can go back and live my life, that's a religious fairy tale. That's not salvation. God wants to save you in the here and the now from all of the things that have taken place in your life so that you can be free and naturally and effortlessly do the things that He does. This is why He says, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose." Work out, walk out your salvation, you have been, you will be, but you are being saved. And so, now what is my responsibility? How now shall I live? What shall I do believing that I have changed and can continue to change? I have to have an awe, a wonder, an urgency, and know that God is working in me to will and act according to His purpose.

In other words, if you want to change, you can't do it without God and He won't do it without you. If you're waiting for the lightning bolt, you're going to wait a long time, because God says there's a responsibility on you to change, but you can't do it without Him. Just like you couldn't raise yourself from the dead, you can't actually get rid of the ruts in your life in your own strength, in your own power. We have to submit, and surrender, and allow Jesus to retrain our eyes, and our hands, and our feet, and our mind, and our lips, and our tongue, and all of it in the way of Jesus. Are you with me on this? Okay. Hang with me for this and let me try to put it all together. Dallas Willard, the great theologian, has helped me tremendously understand this, and he has such a profound grasp on it. And he says that if you ever want to know how people change, there are three components.

He calls it VIM – vision, intent, and means. That if people want to actually change, you have to have vision, you have to have intent, and you have to have means. You say what does that mean? Well, if I want to change in any area of my life, I have to have a vision. I have to see what can be in the midst of what is. I have to have a preferred future. I have to have an alternative reality. I have to see something that's really good, and really captivating, and grabs a hold of me. Then, I actually have intent. I have to be determined. I have to be focused. I have to, I have to be eager, and earnest, fully committed. Regardless of the cost, it's like I intend to become that no matter what it takes of me, but then, I need means. I need next steps, and opportunities, and education, and training, and teaching, pathways to be able to move forward. And he uses this great analogy and he says, why is it that almost every other country in the world, everyone is trying to learn English as a second language?

Just about every other country in the world, everybody speaks their language, but they want to learn English as a second language. Why? Because they have a vision for it. They realize that if they can learn English, it will give them opportunity, success, prosperity, it will bless their family, it will open up a whole new reality, so they intend to do it. They become deeply devoted, and committed, and eager and earnest to see that reality come to pass. So, then they find means like Duolingo, and going to English-speaking cafes, and watching English programming, and trying to find people that speak English to teach them. And they put all this effort into it and it's amazing how they actually learn to do it. And then, he says why is it that Americans don't learn to speak any other language as a second language? Why is it that we, as a people, have no interest in learning Arabic or Japanese?

Because you don't have a vision for it, you don't see how it will make your life better, it's not a preferred future, it seems it won't increase your opportunities, your success, your prosperity and your life, so you don't intend to do it. You have no actual intention to go and do it. So, it doesn't matter that the means are as plethora as they have ever been in all of human history to learn another language. We have no interest in doing it because we don't have the intent or the vision. Okay. Could it just be that the reason a lot of us don't experience change in our walk with Jesus is because we don't have a vision to be His disciple and to live in His kingdom? Therefore, we never intend to actually do it, become determined, eager, earnest, committed

regardless of the cost. So, it doesn't matter that there are so many means available to become that kind of person because we don't have a vision for it nor do we have the intent.

I mean, I want you to think about our church. Do you know how much vision and means there are? Do you realize that my primary gifting as a communicator is vision? Vision, movement, life, here's who you can be, here's what God says, here's what's in front of you, here's a preferred future, there is vision upon vision upon vision. And means, there are so many means. Get in a Circle, join a team, come to Tuesday Night Prayer, Serve the City, ValleyCreek+, the Reading Plan, worship music that we create, weekend experiences, all the things. There's vision and there's means, the question is, is there intent? And what I've learned over the years is I have no ability to move your intent, nor does anyone else, because your intent is in your body that God has given you rule and reign over, and you get to decide what you intend to do. And when we use the word intent, I'm not talking about a New Year's resolution like, "I intended to get healthy this year, I just haven't got around to it."

Or, "I intended to get the groceries on the way home, but I just didn't really want to do it." Intent is eagerness, earnestness, devotion, commitment with all my heart and here's the problem. This will be so helpful for some of you, when you don't have a vision to become, and you have no intent to really pursue it, you will become critical of the means. This is American Christianity. We don't have a vision to live life in the kingdom. We have no intent to do it. So, what do we do? We complain about the means because we're not changing, and so it's got to be someone else's fault. Why do we do Circles? Can't we do Bible studies? And why do we do the student ministry with these MVMNT nights and Circle things? When I was a kid, we did youth group and that was great. Why can't we do that? And why do we do these songs? Why can't we do the hymns? Those were my favorite back in the day. And why are we doing this Different Way series again? I don't know. John just seems a little off. It's not my favorite series. There's got to be something else.

And reading through the New Testament again, didn't we just do that last year? Why on earth would I reread that this year? At least give us the Old Testament. The problem is not the means. When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. So, you can complain about the means all day long in any area of your life, it's not the means, there are more means available to do anything you want to do in human history, more than any other time in human history, anything. From play the piano, to learn Arabic, to become a person who lives in the kingdom of God, it's all there. And listen, I'm in a season where I have kids, teenagers that are in sports, in theater, in school, and I watch – this isn't just spiritual – I watch teachers, and coaches, and directors cast great vision, and have amazing means. "This is who you can be and what we can do," and, "This is how we will do it if you will come!"

And I watch them pour themselves out, and what they can't do is they can't move the intent of the student. And we sit there and we say things like, "Man, that student could be..." "Boy, if they care just a little bit, do you know how good they would be at this?" It's intent. It's intent.

So, here's the question, do you have intent? And you will never have intent if you don't have a compelling vision. And I've thought long and hard about this, and I'm convinced that change is really so simple that it comes down to humility and hunger. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." You will become filled with whatever you are the most hungry and thirsty for. Why? Because you have a vision for it so you intend to do it and you'll find the means.

What are you hungry and thirsty for? What's the vision that's captivated your life and the intent that you are pouring yourself out and pursuing? This is why it doesn't matter how many times I stand up here, for some people, we can talk about things like-- and if you're going to follow Jesus, you're going to have to change your schedule, and you're going to have to learn to live free from the love of money, and you're going to have to find time to prioritize God, and you're going to have to learn to walk in some different ways. And we can say those things over and over and over again, but if you don't have a vision to become that kind of person, which is why I ask you all the time, who are you becoming? You realize, some of you, ting, light bulb. Why do you ask us all the time who we're becoming? Who do I want to become? Because what I'm asking you is what's the vision of your life? Because that's what you are intending to pursue.

So, if I say the vision for my life is to be a follower of Jesus, but there's no intent to pursue it, it's not my vision. It's what I say my vision is, but my vision is whatever I actually have intent to do. So, for a lot of us, our vision is actually the path of least resistance, because that's what we intend to do and we can see that by the means that we go after in our life. So much more to say about this, I kind of want to, but I actually have to leave it here. Do you believe that you can change? And if so, how do you change? And do you have a vision to become the kind of person that God says He created you to be? And is there an intent within you to pursue that?

My hope in trying to help you realize that you have been trained in the ways of the world helps open up your eyes to, if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I got to actually do the things that Jesus did because all I do are the things the world does because I spent so much of my life doing what the world has done. And so, our practice takeaway for this week that we've been-- just one more prayer again, Jesus, help me intend to change. Jesus, help me have the intent to actually become who you say I can become because there are so many means. Just for one more time for some of you, it's why literally, when we say things like, "Hey, you could get in a Circle! Hey, you could come to Students! Hey, you could come to Tuesday Night Prayer! Hey, you could come to Serve the City!" you know what you hear? "Womp, womp, womp, womp." And it's totally okay, I'm just helping you try to connect the dots because there's no intent.

The person who has intent hungers, and thirsts, and it doesn't mean they do everything, they ask God for wisdom on what means to take advantage of so they can become the kind of person they long to be. But the problem, hear me, is not the means, and it's not really the vision. "Come follow me, I will make you fishers of men." It's intent. And so, this week, maybe take some time to think about, can you change? How do you change? What ruts have been so

deeply formed in your body that you naturally and effortlessly do the things you don't want to do and don't do the things that you do want to do? And then, ask yourself, spend some time with the Lord, Jesus, help me have an intent to change. So, Jesus, thank You that You change us.

Thank You that You fill us with righteousness when we hunger and thirst. Holy Spirit, I know that was a lot, and I did my best, broken attempt to try to explain some of the deep profound things that You do in our lives to set us free. And so, Holy Spirit, would You just speak to us as we go throughout this week? I pray that when we hit some of those ruts and routines, You'll show us and say, "That's one right there." And that we wouldn't condemn ourselves or be defeated in ourselves, but that we would consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, and it's going to open up a new place for us to be trained so that our body, our life would become literally the living will of God on this earth.

Lord, I pray that You would continue to just lay bare our souls, and help us be honest and authentic about what we actually have intent to do. Jesus, may You keep inviting us into Your kingdom, casting the greatest vision that was ever cast, man living with God in an everlasting eternal kingdom that is good, and true, and right. May we repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. May we take a different way, in Jesus' name, Amen.