

Come on. Bless the Lord. Give praise to his name. Lift him up. He's worthy of that praise. When we sing, "Bless the Lord," what we're saying is like, His name is worthy to be praised. His name is above every name, so we bless You, Lord. We give You all the praise. I want to invite you, now, to go ahead and find your seats wherever you're at. As we take the time to practice the values that we've been learning over these past few weeks; two weeks ago, we said that we are passionate about the presence of God. The presence of God changes everything. One moment with the presence of God is better than a lifetime without it. It's everything. The presence of God really comes down to understanding and knowing that God is with us, and are we aware of it? See, it's not so much as like, "Is God here?" It's a question of, are we aware that He's here? The presence of God is truly attracted to the praises of people.

That's part of why we start the way we do in services. We actually start by praising the Lord and we invite His presence to join us, and then we're aware that He's with us. During that week, we talked about the five dimensions of the presence of God. That there's five ways you can experience it. I'm going to walk us through those five. I'm going to invite you to settle your heart, and to lean into each one of these and experience the presence of God right now. See, this may be something you haven't done before. You may not have had moments where you've really honed in and said, like, "Okay, I'm going to take time to experience and be in the presence of God." But, if you'll allow me to just walk you through it, I believe that something amazing will happen. Because I believe that the presence of God changes everything. I believe it's going to change everything for you. The first dimension of His presence is that His presence holds us together.

Could you even just close your eyes right now, and be aware that God is holding all things together. "In Him all things hold together," says Colossians. That is the very molecules of your body, the chair you're sitting on, wherever you're watching this from, the area you're in, the earth itself, the whole universe; it's all being held together by God. If his presence wasn't in those spaces, then everything that I just mentioned, you, the chair, the buildings, the universe, it would cease to exist. Right now, can you be aware that His presence is holding you together?

If His presence is holding you together, that His presence is holding your family together, your finances together, your situation that you're facing together, your health, your worry, things that have been weighing you down, He's holding all of those because He's holding you in His hands. His presence holds you together. The second dimension is that His presence surrounds us. The Psalmist asked, "Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" The answer is nowhere. His presence is surrounding you even right now. He's before you. He's behind you. To your right, to your left, surrounding you with His goodness, surrounding you with His love. His presence surrounds you.

It means it goes before you into the future. It means He was with you way back when. It means He's surrounding you even now. His presence surrounds you. Can you be aware that His presence is surrounding you? The third dimension, for those that have Jesus, is that His

presence is within us. John Chapter 20, Jesus breathed on His disciples, and He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." In that moment, the Holy Spirit was placed into them, and the presence of God the very Creator Himself entered them, was inside of them. His presence is within us for those that follow Jesus. Will you just go with me on this? We just take a big breath right now, and know that you're breathing in the very presence of God.

As Jesus breathed down, His disciples breathed in, and they received the Holy Spirit. The presence of God is in you right now. He's moving through your body, maybe even feel Him right now - in your toes, in your ankles, in your lower extremities, moving up through your body, through your thighs and your torso, the middle of you. Feel him filling up your lungs. The very air you breathe was given to you by God. Feel the presence of God moving up through your shoulders, your arms, into your face, into your head, the presence of God in you. It moves up into your eyes, your head, into your mind.

Be aware that the presence of God is taking over your thoughts, your mind. He's healing those broken thoughts. His presence is in you. Thank you, Jesus, for your presence. The fourth dimension is that His presence is in our godly relationships. When two or three are gathered, there He is also. If you wondered, why we started today by making a connection, it's because a connection is part of the invitation to invite the very presence of God into this space, into today. His presence among us. Part of why it feels the way it does, to gather together as the church, is because as we do we're experiencing another dimension in the presence of God. More of Him comes and joins us. More of the realities of the kingdom of Heaven come and move among us.

It's why you feel so alive. That's why it feels like you're waking up when you come into spaces like this, because the very presence of God is among us in our godly relationships. Thank You, Jesus, for Your presence in church. Thank You, Jesus, for Your presence among Your people. Thank You for a chance to live in godly relationships with one another. The fifth dimension is simply that His presence is tangible in our worship. That when we worship, the Holy One of Israel is enthroned upon our praises. That literally when we worship, it's like we build a place for God himself to reside, to sit, to be among us. The reason that we worship like we do, is that when we do and when we lift Him up, and we turn our attention and our affection towards Him, we place Him on His throne - the place where King Jesus deserves to be. His presence is tangible in our worship.

As we continue to worship, would you just recognize more and more of the presence of God is with you, and that you can be passionate for that. You can be joyful for that. You can be so thankful for that. Honestly, if we just did all that, and you're like, I don't even know if I'm passionate about the presence of God at all or even want the presence of God? Can I just tell you, God is so passionate about you. He's so passionate about you. He wants to be in your presence. He wants to be with you far more than you've ever wanted to be with Him. Come on,

I invite you. With hearts open wide, express gratitude to God. Be passionate about the presence of God. Thank You, Jesus, for your presence.

Alright, go ahead and find your seats for me again. We are practicing our values. We are practicing the kingdom values that the Lord has been speaking to us. Over the past few weeks, we've been practicing the value, we're passionate about the presence of God, and now we want to just talk about that we live with the spirit of gratitude. Gratitude is the normal response to receive in God's grace. What is God's grace? Man, that is His undeserved favor, the supernatural empowerment that actually changes my life. God's grace changes everything. When I realized that God's grace has changed everything, I can't help but respond with the spirit of gratitude, with the thankfulness to give thanks, with a grateful heart for all that He's done.

You see, gratitude is like a garden. It must be cultivated in us. You've got to cultivate the garden of gratitude because bitterness is like a weed, it just springs up. You don't have to do anything to be a bitter, embittered, entitled grumbling kind of person. Gratitude - it's got to be cultivated. It's got to be cared for. Gratitude, really is God's will for our life. There's an amazing verse out of 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians 5, it says, "To rejoice always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Wow, God's will for my life is to be thankful all the time, in all circumstances, no matter what's going on. Living with the spirit of gratitude is truly living out God's will for our lives. It helps us experience all that He has for us.

What we're going to do today is we're going to practice some gratitude by being specific with what we're grateful for. Go ahead and take out that card that you received when you came in. You have a card that has ten spots on it for you to write down some things that you're thankful for. I want to encourage you to take a moment and let the Lord really speak to you about each one. Let Him speak really to your heart. Let Him show you some of the things that you had to be thankful for. Grab a pen, grab a pencil, and begin to think about all that you have to be grateful for. Can I just tell you, you have so much to be grateful for. I have so much to be grateful for, so much to be thankful for. What are some of those things? See, because true gratitude is humility expressed. That is, I'm actually expressing the fact that I didn't get myself here, God got me here. He's the one that's brought me this far. It honors God for His role in our life.

True gratitude begins to heal our hearts. I want you to catch that as you write some things down on the paper. You can begin to write right now if you haven't already. There's a healing that takes place inside of you - mind, body, soul; because your heart starts to align itself and be healed by the goodness of God. Because gratitude transforms you. It changes the way you think. It changes the way your heart receives God's goodness in your life. Actually, I thought about this today. I actually believe that part of what we're going to do in this practice right now is going to heal some wounds that you may have been carrying for years. As you write down,

by faith, some of the things that you're thankful for, I believe God's going to do a healing work inside of you in Jesus' name. Go ahead and think about that. What are some of the things you're thankful for?

Maybe it's for people that believed and invested in you and have gone before you to follow Jesus. Maybe it's for relationships in your life, or your parents, or your children, friends. Maybe you're grateful for spiritual leadership and for a family here at Valley Creek. Provision. It's not too lowly to say things like, "I'm thankful that I have a roof over my head and food in the pantry." Because just, at some level, we miss that, don't we? Like, places to stay and people that love you.

Those are God's goodness in your life and in my life. What else are you grateful for? Come on, fill up that list. How about the forgiveness of Jesus? His life. His death. His resurrection gives you life. The promise of Heaven. The promise of a life to come in Jesus' name. Hope when you feel hopeless. Peace when you feel restless. Joy when your heart is broken.

It can give you all those things. So much to be thankful for. What else? Keep writing it down. If you haven't had a chance to write anything yet, I'm going to just encourage you, maybe even just right like, "I'm breathing." I woke up. I get to be here today. Those are some great places to start. We couldn't think of a better way to keep practicing gratitude than to take communion today. As our teams come forward to distribute communion, I want to remind everybody, you can do that now, teams, wherever you're at. I want to remind everybody that communion is for those that have said, "Yes," to following Jesus.

If that's you, you're very much welcome to take it here at Valley Creek, because communion is a reminder of the very first thing we had to be thankful for - Jesus; who He is and what He's done. You might have noticed, we've been taking communion more often recently. Has anybody noticed that? Here's why. Scripture tells us that we overcome the evil one by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. Communion is the reminder of the blood of the Lamb. Communion is us practicing the word of the testimony, doing it, and remembrance of Jesus. We're winning, and we're living from victory in this season. Because we're doing what Jesus told us to do. Because we're taking communion by faith. There's a life and there's a healing, and there's a hope that happens every single time we do.

There's a gratitude that rises up inside of us. Last week, we talked about a story called The Road to Emmaus. In that story, there's two men that have been -- just life has beaten them down, man. Nothing worked the way they thought it was going to. They're walking along the road, and they're bitter, and they're frustrated, and it didn't turn out the way they thought it would. As they walk along the road, and they were kind of grumbling among themselves, Jesus Himself comes and walks with them. He starts to share the realities of the kingdom. He starts to remind them of what was spoken about Him; reminding them, so they could remember what God had done, what He had promised to them. Then, as they continue to walk, they invite

Jesus to come to their home. Amazing things happen. It says, "As He's talking with them, He breaks bread, He gives thanks, and then their eyes were opened."

He broke bread, He gave thanks, and then their eyes were opened. It's a part of what happens when we break bread, when we live with the spirit of gratitude, is that God opens the eyes of our heart, and He shows us more of His goodness. He reminds us of how He's worked on our behalf. He places gratitude right into the center of our hearts. What a perfect weekend to express the gratitude that we know, that we want to express; to live with the spirit of gratitude, to carry this value of the kingdom in our hearts. I believe by faith that today, as we break bread, as we're reminded of who Jesus is, and give Him thanks, that our eyes will be opened.

That we'll see Jesus for who He really is. Somebody who's hearing me right now, has never said yes to making Jesus Lord. Can I just tell you, by faith, I believe that today is your day of salvation. By faith, I believe that in Jesus' name, as we break bread, as we give thanks, that your eyes will be opened. May your eyes be opened. May you see Jesus for who He really is. May you come to understand His love, that it's wide, it's long, it's high and deep. It's the love that the Father has lavished upon you and I. If you've been looking for hope in all the wrong places, can I just tell you, there is a person - His name is Jesus and He is the hope of the world. There is a Savior for you and for I, and we get to experience and remember what He's done every single time we take communion together.

In the night He was betrayed, Jesus took that bread and He said, "This bread is like my body, it's going to be broken for you. I'm going to be broken, that you can be made whole. Every time you take it do it and remembrance of Me." Let's take the bread together. In the same way, He took the cup. He said, "This cup is a new promise, a new agreement between God and mankind. No longer will you have to try to strive to earn a way back to God. I'm making a way. My way is called my blood, the full forgiveness of sins, access to your Creator, to your Father. Every time you drink of it, remember what it is that I've done for you with the Cross, in my burial, in my resurrection." We remember Jesus together today. Let's take the cup.

Thank You, Jesus, for what You've done in our lives. For Your goodness to us. Thank You for your salvation. It was an act of faith. Oh, this is my favorite. We're going to get a chance to express gratitude, and put these two values together - that we're passionate about the presence of God, and that we live with the spirit of gratitude. Here's what we're going to do. In just a moment when the worship team leads us through this one last song, I'm going to invite you, by faith, to be passionate about the presence of God, and to express your gratitude by bringing your list, all the things you're grateful for, to the front and literally placing them on the platform. Placing it as a sacrifice on the altar, remembering Jesus, and what He's done, remembering His goodness in our life. Anytime you're ready, during the song, you could feel free to stand up and express gratitude for the goodness of God.