

Alright, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. Whatever campus you're at today, we are so glad you are here with us. And we are in a series called A Different Way. We're talking about doing what Jesus did, so we can do what Jesus did. We've been 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 His life, we have to first take on His lifestyle. That if we want to do the things that Jesus did, like not have anxiety, or be stressed out, or worried, have peace and joy, have the ability to love our enemy, to be deeply connected with God, then we first have to do the things that Jesus did. His practices, like fasting, and community, and meditation, and silence, and solitude. And we've been talking about this whole experience and setting it all up. And last week, we kind of started Season Two of the series where we're now getting into the practices that Jesus practiced and kind of talking about how do we now arrange our life around those realities. And we started last week with the first practice. It's probably one of the most important and yet the least understood; one of the most foundational practices if we're going to live a different way, and that is Scripture. So, give me just a few minutes to set up Part One from last week, so then we can move forward into Part Two together. You with me on that?

After 30 years of hiddenness, Jesus comes, He gets baptized. As He comes up out of the water, the Father speaks from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Immediately, the Holy Spirit takes Him out into the desert where He fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. And at the end of that experience, when we would think Jesus would be at His weakest, Satan comes to tempt Jesus and says, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." And Jesus responds by saying, "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Three times, Satan tries to tempt Jesus and three times Jesus responds with, "It is written." And in that moment, we discover that Jesus arranged His entire life around the Word of God. That He had ordered His entire life around God's Word. When Satan tempts Him, He doesn't freak out. He doesn't panic. He doesn't rebuke Satan. He doesn't cry out to God. He simply responds with, "It is written." And He didn't have a Bible to quickly look up a verse; it was in His heart. You see, you can't say, "It is written," if you don't know what it says. And what we learned from Jesus in this moment is that He arranged His life around the Word of God. And so, if we want to do the things that Jesus did, then we have to do the things that Jesus did.

Like, arrange our lives around God's Word. And we talked about how God's Word is simply God speaking. God's Word is God speaking. Jesus is the living Word of God. The Scriptures are the written Word of God. The living Word is God speaking to us through the life and person of Jesus. The Scriptures are God speaking to us through the Bible, through the written Scriptures. And we talked about last week how the Bible is not a book, it's a voice. That the Bible is not a book contained by leather and pages and font and text. It's a voice. It's a voice that is communicating God's thoughts and God's heart and God's will. It's a voice that is creating, sustaining and redeeming. It's a voice that is blessing and forgiving and freeing and loving. It is a voice not contained in a book. It is spirit and it is life. And we talked about how God rules His kingdom by His Word.

That kings rule their kingdoms through words and actions. And so, God rules His kingdom by His Word. And if we want to be people who deeply live in His kingdom, then we have to become people who deeply love His Word. That His Word has to be deeply embedded in us if we're going to deeply live in His kingdom. Why? Because God rules His kingdom by His Word. This is why in creation, it says over and over again, "And God said... and (it) was so... and (it) was good." God says, it becomes so, and it is good. That's how He rules His kingdom. The problem is, we often don't know what He says. We question whether or not it's good. And so, it is often not so in our lives. God has given us free will, the ability to resist or reject that which He is saying, that which we don't believe in. There is this time of eternity in the here and now, where we have the freedom to have our own will. But if we want to be people who live in God's kingdom, then we have to be people of His Word.

This is why Jesus teaches us when we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth, as it is in heaven." God's kingdom comes wherever His will is done. And He communicates His will through His Word. So if I want to know His will because I want to live in His kingdom, then I have to become a person of the Word, which is why He says, "Give us today our daily bread." Bread is not just food we eat, it is literally the Word of God that sustains and nourishes our life. So, it's His Word that shows us His will. And when I submit to His will, I become a person who lives in His kingdom. And so, if I want to deeply live in God's kingdom, I have to become a person who loves God's Word. Because God's Word will show me His will and give me the opportunity to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And we said that it is our deep desire to be these kinds of people, "When your words came, I ate them. They were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear Your name." Our heart is to be a people that love God's Word, that receive it with joy and delight. "I bear Your name," evidence of being a Follower of the Way, of a disciple of Jesus, is someone who loves God's Word. And I've been thinking about this all week. So, can I just speak over your life for a second? I just want to declare over your life and your family and our church that we will become a people who love God's Word. It is probably not so today, but in Jesus' name, may it become so.

May we be a people who hunger and thirst for His Word, who allow His Word to be our joy and our heart's delight. Even when we go through slides that we went through last week, may we not be like, "Let's get to the new thing." Let's be like, "That's God's voice speaking to me right now." And I love it, and I eat it. Serve me that meal again. Serve me it again. I want to see Genesis 1:3, "And God said... and (it) was so... and (it) was good." I want to see that again, and again, and again, because I know I don't believe it in every area of my life yet. So, I want to eat it. I want to feast on it. I want to become a person that loves, that loves, that loves God's Word. Listen, years ago, we weren't a worshipping church and we started saying, "We're going to become a worshipping church." And we weren't a church that prayed. And so we said, "We're going to become a praying church." And today, where we have become a worshipping and praying church, continually growing, okay, may we become a church that loves God's Word.

Because, we love Him, and we value Him. So, we value His voice and we long to live in His kingdom. And we ended last week with this passage in Proverbs. That's the Bible talking about itself. "Now, then my sons, listen to me. Blessed are those who keep my ways, listen to my instruction and be wise. Do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway, for whoever finds me, finds life and receives favor from the Lord." Listen, listen, do not ignore, listen, watch, wait, find. And then you will be blessed, wise, blessed, life, and favor from the Lord. The problem is, we want someone else to go listen so that we can be blessed. We have to learn to listen so that we can be blessed. We have to arrange our lives around the Word of God.

And that's where we left off. And we left off with this question that then says, okay, so then, how do I do that? How do I actually do that? Which is a really good and fair question, because if we're honest, we say things like this, like, "I just don't get God's Word. It doesn't make sense. I don't understand it. It's overwhelming. It's intimidating. I don't really know what to do with it. It's confusing. I don't even know where to start." All that is really fair. So here is what I want to say to you. Ability follows desire. The heart to hear is more important than how you hear. If you have the desire to know God's Word and hear His voice, ability will follow. If you have the heart to hear God's voice and to know His Word, how you actually do it will follow. We see it over, and over, and over again in Scripture. Jesus says, "He who has eyes to see, let him see. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. He who has a heart to understand, let him understand." Why? Because God won't make you see things you don't want to see. And He won't make you listen to things you don't want to hear. And He won't make you understand things you have no interest in understanding. It's literally why He declares, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." In other words, if you have the desire to hear, God will give you the ability. If you have the heart to hear His voice and know His Word, God will give you the how. And what I love about this is this is very reminiscent of Genesis 1. "And God said... let there be... and it was so." This is God creating in your life when you, when you have the desire to hear, "Let him hear." It's almost like God is declaring to the heart that's open. He is speaking to your ears. He is speaking to your, to His voice, to His Word. He is speaking to every obstacle, every learning challenge you have. All the works of darkness, "Let him hear."

Why? Because you have a heart to hear. We will hear if we want to hear. God won't make you see what you don't want to see. He won't make you hear what you don't want to hear. He won't give you understanding if you aren't interested. He won't empower your hands if they aren't surrendered. And He won't send your feet if they're not willing. He waits for you to say, "I want it. I want it." I mean, look what Jesus says. "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given. And you will receive even more. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them." That's really powerful. You know what that says? That God is speaking to those who are listening. That you will hear to the level you are listening. The closer you listen, the more thought and study and

interest and diligence you give to it, the more you will hear. But the less you listen, the less you're going to hear God's voice. Why? Because He won't make you hear if you don't want to hear.

Do you know what this verse is kind of saying? Like, think about it like this. Have you ever been talking to somebody and you know they're not listening to you? Anybody that's married or has children, especially teenagers, right? Okay. So, if you're speaking and the other person is not listening, you have three options. One is, you can get angry and get louder and raise your voice. Two is, you can start talking faster to become more interesting and relevant, trying to capture their attention through speaking. Or three, you can stop talking and wait for them to start listening. Well, Jesus doesn't get angry and start talking louder. And He doesn't start talking faster to get your attention. He just waits for you to be ready to listen. Could it just be that we don't hear God's voice in Scripture because we don't really want to? Instead of making it about it's hard to understand, and I don't know how, and I don't know where to start, and it doesn't make sense, I get all that. But could it just be that we hear exactly what we want to hear? And I get it. We say, "I have a desire to hear God's voice." I hear you. But we have a desire for a lot of things. And I think sometimes that desire is convenience and comfort. I want it to be easy. I just want it to be what I want to hear, when I want to hear it, how I want to hear it. But what you have to understand is that desire is measured by devotion. You say you desire a lot of things in your life, but what you really desire are the things you're devoted to. The things you continue to do with intense effort despite difficulty, so we can say we desire to hear God's voice and to know His Word. But am I devoted to it? Do I continue to do it with intense effort despite difficulty? Because He says He is speaking and I will hear if I understand. So maybe, just maybe, it's not on Him. Maybe it's on me. Because if I have ears to hear, He has declared to the universe, "Let him hear." And it must obey. I mean, have you ever stopped to think about what is the difference between trash and treasure? If I asked you like, what's the difference between trash and treasure, how would you answer that question? The difference is availability and accessibility. That's what makes something trash or something treasure. Trash is available and accessible everywhere. It's all over your house. It's all over the road. It's all over social media. It is available and accessible everywhere.

Treasure is not easily available, nor easily accessible. That's why it makes it valuable. It must be pursued, mined, searched after, looked after. And God's Word is a treasure because it must be mined by the heart who wants to receive it. I mean, look at Proverbs again, the Bible talking about itself. "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding. And if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then, then, then, you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God, for the Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Can you catch it? Accept, store, turn, apply, call, cry, look, search. Then you will have knowledge and understanding. Could it be that I have the level of knowledge and understanding that I actually want? That I actually desire? Because the Lord gives wisdom. It's

not that He is not speaking. Am I accepting, storing, turning, applying, calling, crying, looking, and searching for it as a treasure? See, faith doesn't make God speak. Faith simply opens my heart to hear what He has already said. Faith doesn't make God speak. Faith just opens me up to hear what He is already saying.

And so, assuming I have a heart to want to hear God's voice, assuming I have a desire to lean into the Scriptures, because His Word is not a book, it is a voice. Assuming that I have a heart to hear, that's where we got to start from, how then do I actually practically do it? I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt that you have a heart to want to hear it. How then do I actually do it? I've got four points for you on doing it. If you're here a lot, you know I don't ever really preach in points, and I don't like practicals. So, this is the best I got for you, if you have a heart to hear, here's how you actually can do it. With me on this? And if you don't have a heart to hear, my encouragement to you is, stay here. Stay here. Don't get lost in practicals. They don't matter. What matters is, do I have a heart to actually hear? Because until God says, "Let him hear," you won't. You can't. But you have to have the ears to hear for Him to declare that over your life. Okay? How do we actually do it? First thing, engage God's Word from a Jesus-focused perspective. Engage God's Word from a Jesus-focused perspective. Listen to me. The Bible is not so small that it's about what you have to do. The Bible is so big, it is about what Jesus has done. The Bible is not so small that it's about you. It's so big that it's about Jesus. And one of the great problems is that we read the Bible from a self-focused perspective. We open it up. We engage God's Word on, what does this mean for me? How does this apply to me? Is this saying what I want to hear, when I want to hear it, how I want to hear it? What does this have to do with me? It's not about you. It's about Jesus. And that's what makes it so relevant for you because the more clearly you see Jesus, the more clearly you see everything else. In Him, we live and move and have our being. In Him was life and that life was the light of men.

So the more I see Jesus, the more clearly I see everything else. And if I engage the Scriptures from a self-focused perspective, I will never enjoy God's Word, because it's not about me. It's about Jesus. In fact, this is why, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If Jesus is the living Word of God, doesn't it make sense that the Bible would be about Him? If he is the living Word of God, then the written Word of God is probably about Him, not me. And when I see Him, I more clearly see myself. In fact, do you remember the story of the Road to Emmaus? Jesus has been crucified. He has raised from the dead, but the disciples don't know it yet. And Jesus comes and He is walking with two of them down the road. They're defeated and discouraged. "And the resurrected Jesus, beginning with Moses, and all the prophets, explains to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. 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?'" The resurrected Jesus teaches us how to engage God's Word, that the Scriptures are about Him. Moses and the prophets, and now the New Testament, it's about Him. In the season of their life, when they were the most discouraged and most defeated, you think Jesus

would come and tell them, "It's okay, guys, you're going to be alright. You're awesome, you're an all-star. Here's a cookie. Here's a medal. It's going to be okay. It's about you. And I promise everything will be better." That's how we read it. He came and said, "Let Me tell you about Me." And as He started to teach them His Word concerning himself, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, because when you start reading the Bible from a Jesus-focused perspective, you will see Him not just in the Bible, you will see Him all over your life.

And they said, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" Have you ever had a verse or a passage or a page or be sitting in a message and something, it just jumps off. It like, leaps up. You can feel this burning, this life, this sustenance, this encouragement, this enthusiasm, this supernatural reality inside of your heart. When we're looking for it from the Jesus-focused perspective, that's what happens. And He is talking with us because it's not a book, it's a voice, and He opened the Scriptures to us. You can open the Bible, but you cannot open the Scriptures. You can physically open the book, but only He can open the Scriptures. That's why the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation. It takes supernatural realities to reveal God's wisdom to us. So I have to look for it. And I have to look for Him, and then I have to expect Him to speak. See, we read it making it about us. We read all the heroes in the Bible and we think we're the hero. We read Noah's Ark and we become Noah. "I am going to save my family and the world through this wooden boat." We read about Abraham and we think we're Abraham. "I'm getting up and going to a place. God will show me and I will be blessed to be a blessing, and all the nations on Earth will be blessed through me." We think we're Moses, the Great Deliverer. "God has sent me to confront Pharaoh. Let these people go. And I'm going to lead them out of exile into a promised land." We think we're David and we're going to defeat our Goliath. We think we're Esther, that we have been born for such a time as this. "The world is lucky to have me." But those are not stories about you. They're actually prophetic pictures of Jesus. See, Jesus is the true and better Noah. Through a wooden cross, He saved His family and the world. Jesus is a true and better Abraham. He got up and went to a place the Father was going to show Him. And He was blessed to be a blessing, and all nations on the Earth were blessed through Him. He is a true and better Moses. He is the Great Deliverer that confronted Satan, the great Pharaoh, and said, "Let my people go," and brought them from bondage into His kingdom. He is the true and better David who, one man on a cross, defeated Goliath, sin, death, and the grave through one act. He is the true and better Esther. He was born for such a time as this. "For God, in the perfect time, sent His Son under the law to redeem those under the law that we might become sons of God." It's not about you. It's about Jesus. And the more you see Jesus, the more clearly you see yourself. Even commands like, "Don't do this, and do do that, and don't do this," we're like, we get, "Ah," God can command me to do things because of what Jesus has done. I can love because I am loved first by Him.

I can forgive because He first forgave me. I can love my enemy because when I was His enemy, He loved me. You know what? Even those sin patterns in my life, I can stop and say, "I'm no longer under the mastery of sin. I have been set free, brought into a new kingdom. I now walk

by the Spirit." Even the commands are looking for what Jesus has done. And that's what empowers you to actually even be able to walk them out. The more clearly you see Jesus, the more clearly you will see everything else. And when you start engaging it from a Jesus-focused perspective, you will have so many things to say about Jesus. You won't walk away from your time in God's Word talking about yourself. You will walk away from your time in God's Word saying, "Let me tell you what I found out about Jesus. Let me show you this verse that's about Jesus. Let me show you this thing that God showed me about Jesus." And the more clearly I see Jesus, in Him is life, and that life is my light. It actually shows me who I am, what I'm created to do, and why I'm here. Make sense?

Okay. So, we've got to engage it from a Jesus-focused perspective. Second thing is, engage God's Word as a disciple. The Bible is not for information; it's for transformation. You have to engage God's Word very differently than you read Shakespeare, and fiction, and news articles, and stuff on social media. That's for information. This is for transformation. The point is not to inform your mind and sit there and ask questions like, "What was the geopolitical culture in Egypt during the time of the Exodus?" The point is not to read the Bible and figure out exactly what Roman culture was like during the first century church. The point is not to read and figure out what was the exact materials used to create the Tabernacle, and could we redo that today. That's fine. Learn all those things. That's information. The point is transformation.

I have to learn to engage God's Word by coming to it as a disciple. Like, don't even open your Bible until you have first said, "Okay, Jesus, today I'm here as a disciple, a student, a learner, a follower, one who becomes like the one they're following. So, Jesus, I need You to teach me how to live my life. Show me what it's like to be human. Jesus, I've heard a lot of things said, but I want to know what You have to say. May it be to me as You have said. Because You say so, Lord, I will do it." We need to learn to engage God's Word with the Spirit of Repentance. That I so desperately want to live in His kingdom and believe His Word is His voice that whatever He says, I've already decided to do it before He even says it. I mean, do you remember the story of Samuel, a young man who was learning to hear God's voice? It says, "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, for the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." He didn't know God because he didn't know the Word. And a lot of us are convinced, we can know God without knowing His Word. But if His Word is not a book, it's a voice, the voice comes from a person. So, when I'm engaging His Word, I'm hearing His voice, and I'm in the presence of a person. And when I'm in the presence of a person, I can actually get to know them and have experiences and encounters with them. Do you realize, even as we talk about these verses through this slide, it's God's Word, which is His voice, and He can only speak if He is present. So God's Word reminds us that God is right here, wanting you to know Him.

And he had a mentor in His life. So, Eli told Samuel, "If He calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.'" What a way to approach Scripture. Before I even open it, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." How different would our experience with God's Word be if before I even opened it, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening. I have ears to hear. So, would You

declare, 'Let me hear'?" And as he did that, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord, because it's in His presence, His personhood, from His voice and His Word, that I begin to grow and mature and change. The problem is, I think a lot of us come to God's Word with the inverse of this. "Listen servant, for your lord is speaking." I think we literally, sometimes open the Bible, and we don't say it like that, but we're kind of like, "Listen up servant, because your lord is speaking. And I got some things to say." And we put ourselves in the seat of judgement, judging God's Word, sitting there, almost like American Idol judges, deciding whether or not I like it. Am I going to push the button for this one or not? Do I like it? Do I agree with it? Does it make me feel good? Can I see this fitting in my life? How will this be in my world? Is this saying what I want to say, what I want it to say, when I want it to say, how I want it to say it? And all of a sudden, we put ourselves in this place of judge, critique, evaluator, judging God's Word, whether or not I'm going to receive it or reject it. But we have to acknowledge that we're not there to judge God's Word. God's Word is there to judge our hearts.

In fact, this is why it says, "The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Listen, God's Word is alive. You put it inside you, it starts to change you from the inside-out. We don't work on the Scriptures. The Scriptures work on us. We get them in there. It's alive. It's active, like a yeast. It begins to grow and transform us. And it penetrates. It gets all the way to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. In other words, it exposes all your secrets. It exposes your motives and your opinions and your pride and your secret struggles. All the things in the dark, it brings them to the surface in His goodness and grace. Why? Because it's a double-edged sword. It wounds so it can heal. God's Word wounds you so it can heal you. Make no mistake about it. If you engage God's Word, it will wound your pride, your ego, your false self, your selfishness. It will wound you so it can heal you, in Jesus' name. Or how about this next one that says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God's Word is His voice that's preparing us for the things He has created us to do. Teaching, rebuking, correcting, training. You're like, why do they have to say all four? Teaching, it teaches us what is true in a world full of lies, what is possible in a world full of impossibilities, what God's heart is like in a world without heart. It shows us what is true and that truth can set us free. It will rebuke you, which means convict you. It will convict you of wickedness, rebellion, and sin. It will bring those things to the surface to say, "Your life is off here. This is not true. This is not good. This is not real. Let's bring it back into alignment."

It will correct you. You say, what's the difference between rebuking and correcting? What the word "correct" means, it just means to straighten out something that was crooked. To correct means, I'm not in this rebellious state of wickedness. It means I just, I'm off and I don't even realize it. And God's Word will bring me back to true form, true alignment, so I can be straight in the way that He has created me to be. And training, forming, shaping, molding, spiritual



formation, and internal goodness. Can I just tell you, I think the reason a lot of us never live the good works that God's created for us to do? It's because we don't arrange our lives around the good news. It takes good news to be able to walk out good work. And if I don't submit myself to His Word and He rules His kingdom with His Word, how is He going to empower me to rule with Him?

I mean, do you ever sit there and look at Scripture and think, "This is right now useful to equip me to become the person God has called me to be, so I can do the things God has called me to do?" That is how you engage it as a disciple, very different reality. In fact, when the first gospel was preached, first time the gospel was preached after the resurrected Jesus, it says "When the people heard this" – the Word of God – "they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" When they heard God's Word, they were cut to the heart, laid bare, broke open. And their response is, what shall we do? Repentance. Not just different thinking, but different living. Being cut to the heart is always proved by the repentance that then I walk out. If you want to know if somebody is actually cut to the heart, it's seen in their actions, because repentance proves itself by its fruit. Can I ask you the question, when was the last time you were cut to the heart by what God said? When was the last time you were laid bare? Woe is me. A deep sense of conviction, a sense of brokenness, godly sorrow. When was the last time in God's Word or in a message that you were cut to the heart? And being cut to the heart doesn't always have to be negative. It could be like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. "Our hearts burned within us," with this overwhelming sense of joy, and faith, and hope, and the life of God. When was the last time you were cut to the heart? How about this? "When the people of Valley Creek hear God's Word..." what does the next line read?

"When the people of Valley Creek hear God's Word..." what does the next line read? Does it say, "cut to the heart," or does it say, "meh"? "Didn't like that message." "Don't know that I agree with that." "I didn't really understand what God was saying in the Scriptures today." And do we excuse it and push it off and move on? Because if we're cut to the heart, there will be an action that takes place in our life. And I've been asking our staff since we started this Different Way series, are people being cut to the heart? Here's my authenticity with you. Are we being cut to the heart? Or is it just kind of like, "Yeah, Different Way, that's cool. Super glad you changed from the red to the teal. That's great." And we laugh, like, disproportionately at random jokes like that because we feel awkward and uncomfortable with the answer in our heart. So it makes us feel good. It's like an emotional release, which is totally fine. But are you being cut to the heart? And if not, then here's what we do. We say, God, I fully acknowledge I'm not being cut to the heart and that concerns me. So, could You cut me to the heart? Watch what God might do in the midst of that. God, I don't have ears to hear, but I would like to. Could You help me? I really want You to speak over my life, "Let him hear." But I know I'm not there. But I'd like to be. That's how we move forward. That's how we change. That's how we live a different way and become disciples. With me on that?

Third thing is, we got to engage God's Word with Him. I wish I could stay there, but I need to give you these last two practicals and I can go through this quick. We got to engage God's Word with Him. Listen, I think sometimes the most ignored person when we're engaging God's Word is God. I think we think about ourselves and our kids and our boss and our school and all our stuff. But I think sometimes we forget that the Holy Spirit is there. So what we need to learn to do is just before you even just stop, sit down. Holy Spirit, I choose to become aware of You right now. Before I even open this and get going, I choose to be aware of You because I'm not. And I want to read this with You, not for You, and not by myself. Holy Spirit, I'm going to be aware of You. If that takes you a minute, two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, don't start until you've just become aware of God. Have you ever seen a farmer go out and try to sow His seeds in a storm? He can't in a storm, because the storm will blow it away. We live with a storm in here, and then wonder why none of God's seeds ever take root in our life. Because we have to first stop and be aware of Him and let Him calm the storm through His presence. Then I can receive. I mean, if God's Word is a voice, He is communicating. What is the point of communication? Communion. This is why marriages, what they have to primarily work on is communication, so they can have communion and intimacy with each other. God is speaking to you so that you will be with Him. So, hear me. Stop reading the Bible and start meeting with God. Stop reading the Bible. Never thought I'd hear that in church. And start meeting with God. Look at what 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." He says, "The point of the Scriptures is to bring you to Me." So, if I diligently study, read the Word, do the plan, mark the check off, get all the things done, but don't meet with God, I've missed the entire point. Point is not to read God's Word. The point is to meet with God, and His Word is a voice and a voice comes from a person. And He doesn't make me figure it out on my own. He gives me the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, "whom the Father will send in My name will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you." No matter what learning challenge you have or how difficult you think the Scriptures are, or how much you don't know, you have the Counselor who is there to teach you and show you exactly what Jesus has to say. His job is to teach. Our job is to be aware that He is there and He is with me.

In fact, you remember the story of Mary and Martha? "She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the things that had to be done." Only an undistracted heart can go deep with God. Depth requires discipline, focus, attentiveness, devotion. Mary had to sit at the Lord's feet before she could hear what He said. And we live in a land of distractions. Work, kids, sports, school, stuff, not even saying those things are bad. But you can't go deep with God with a distracted heart. Here's a key for some of you. This is the best thing you're going to hear me say in this entire message for some of you is, don't read your Bible with your phone in the same room. Why? Because what is the point of having a phone? The intended point of a phone is to give me access to all the other voices out there. So by actually putting it in a different room, walking into a different room, sitting down, and opening up my Bible, aware of the Holy Spirit, what I'm saying is, God, no

other voice in my life matters to me right now but Yours. It's a work of faith. You say, I like to read it on my phone. I don't care. Get a paper Bible. Put it in the other room and sit there and meet with God. Why? Because we all have these addictions to touch our phone, even if nobody is calling you, like every two minutes. Why isn't anybody calling me? You know? Then all of a sudden, you're like, "What's the weather?" And then, all of a sudden, there is a bing. Then all of a sudden, a thing. And then your mind goes, "Oh, the kids, I've got to get there later." And then all of a sudden, it's like, "What's the world saying?" Put your phone in the other room. You'd be amazed at how you'd start hearing God's voice. Come on.

Jesus, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, says, "Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in your name, drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.'" Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, I read the Bible." "Lord, Lord, I did the Valley Creek Reading Plan." "Lord, Lord, I went through the New Testament twice. Didn't want to either time, but I did. It's got to count for something, right?" "I never knew you." The only place in the Bible where Jesus defines eternal life, He says, "This is eternal life that they may know you." "Away from me, you evildoers." You say, "That's harsh. I'm a good person. I do good things." Goodness is not a work of the flesh. It is a Fruit of the Spirit. There is no amount of work I can do in the flesh to become good. It is a Fruit of the Spirit that grows in my life when I know Him. So the point isn't reading the Bible. The point is meeting with God. And if you read the Bible out of duty or obligation or religion or expectation, let me free you. Don't read it anymore. Don't read it anymore. Why? Because it's just hardening your heart. And it's just cluttering your mind. You don't have ears to hear so you're not hearing anything anyways. And there are no points in Heaven given for just reading the Bible. None. Stop reading the Bible and start meeting with God. And one of the greatest ways you can meet with God is by reading the Bible. Let him who has ears to hear, hear that.

Last thing. Engage God's Word with a plan. You probably just need a plan. If you're going to run a marathon, you have a training plan. If you're going to learn to play piano, you have a practice plan. If you're going to get healthy, you have a plan. To try to read God's Word without a plan, it's that whole saying, "you're planning to fail." Why? Because we need to know what we're going to read, when we're going to read it, and where we're going to read it. The whole point of having a Bible reading plan is so that when you wake up, or when you're going to read it, and you open it up, and you're like, "I'm not sure where I should start." It's like walking into a gym to work out with no plan and you see 10,000 machines. Where do I start? Just kind of aimlessly like walking around, looking. "Oh, that one looks hard." Come over here. You know, that's like turning to Leviticus. You're like, "Oh, aye, aye, no. Let's see if there's something better," you know? You've got to have a plan. And then you've got to know when you're going to read it. Make it work in your life. Arrange your life. If you're a parent with littles, maybe you've got to do it in the morning before they get up or at night after you've put them to bed. If you've got a big job, maybe you need to do it during your lunch break. If you're a student, maybe you need to do it as the last thing before you go to bed. But hear me. That's

when you're going to read it. But when you're going to read it is not when you start. You start before that happens. If I'm going to get up early in the morning, it means I've got to go to bed and probably not watch that last episode. If I'm going to read it at lunch, it means I have to already have thought about what I'm going to eat for lunch so I don't spend my whole lunch break trying to find food, so then I can sit down and read. If I'm going to read it as a student before I go to bed, I've got to use my study hall, not on my phone, but to get my homework done, so at night before I go to bed, I don't have to do homework. I can actually engage God's Word.

And then find a place. Where is a place that works for you where you meet with God? But you've got to have some kind of plan. And some of you are like, "That's so like, faithless to have a plan, like, just let God speak." Listen, faith is back here saying, "I'm going to build a plan with God because I'm arranging my life around His Word. And if He wants to change the plan at any point in time, He is free to change the plan." Come on. "Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway." Blessed is the man who daily has a plan, a place, and a time to meet with God under an open Heaven, expecting Him to speak. And when you have a plan, you'll fail at that plan. And you will struggle. And you'll be defeated. And you'll sin. And you'll make mistakes in your life. And Satan will use that to create a big divide between you and God's Word. He will bring shame and condemnation and fear and worry. And, "Is God mad at me?" And, "I need to feel stressed out about this." Here's the last verse for you. Here's how we approach God's Word. "So we know and rely on the love God has for us, for God is love." Here's how I approach God's Word. God is love. I am loved. And everything He says is loving. For some of you, that's your takeaway. God is love. I am loved. And everything He says is loving. If you have a plan, and you get behind, don't catch up on the plan. Catch up with God. The point is not the plan. The point is not putting a little check mark on that little thing we give you to say, "I did them all." Think of any relationship in your life. The point is not catching up on the plan. The point is catching up with God and saying, "God, I missed You. But more importantly, You missed me. And You are love. And I am loved. And so, I read this in love, because Your voice is loving." So, our practice plan for this week, for those of us that have set our hearts to say we're going to train in this season to become godly, to live a different way, these little practice plans each week, is to read Psalm 119 and engage the Valley Creek Reading Plan five times this week a different way.

Read Psalm 119. Psalm 119 is all about God's Word, and what God's Word will do. Sometimes you need to read less Scripture more. Sometimes you need to read more Scripture more. Sometimes you need to read less of God's Word more deeply. Less of it, but more deeply, so it changes you. Sometimes you need to read more of it more, so it's like a pressure washer, washing you with the Word, washing the world off of you. Psalm 119, this week is more Scripture more to wash the world off, and then engaging the reading plan five times in a different way. If you're like, "I already got this training plan down, read Psalm 119 in the past, and I do the reading plan. Easy practice week." In A Different Way. Which means, when you read the reading plan, come with a Jesus-focused perspective. Come as a disciple. Come do it

with God, and then follow the plan that He has for your life. The Bible is not a book; it's a voice, calling out in the wilderness to show you His thoughts and His thoughts will show you His ways. A Different Way. If I want to do what Jesus did, I got to do what Jesus did. And He arranged His life around God's Word. So, close your eyes. Come on, this is why I usually ask you most weeks, what is the Holy Spirit saying to you? Because I can't open the Scriptures for you. Only the Holy Spirit can. I can open the Bible, but I can't actually open the Scriptures. So what's the Holy Spirit saying to you? What's He stirring up? How about just this, what do you need to think about this week?

What do you need to talk to God about this week? Jesus, I ask that You would cut me to the heart when I hear Your Word, and that I would do things differently when that happens. Holy Spirit, come and cut us to the heart. Teach us to live a different way. May I not sit in judgement on Your Word, but may Your Word do a deep work in my soul. Give us ears to hear, Lord. And may we become a church that loves Your Word, not in information or knowledge, but the Word as a voice that comes from the great I am. In Your name, we pray. Amen.