

Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome. It is so good to see all of you guys. Welcome to Valley Creek. Welcome to our Denton Campus. My name is Justin. I get to serve on staff here, and I love getting to be with you guys, because whether you realize it or not, what we're doing right now is we're actually creating the future. Like you and I, in this very moment, are building the future together, and quite frankly, we're building a future that I want to be a part of. We're building a future that I want to be a part of. And maybe some of you have been with us every single week, maybe some of you, a little more on and off. Maybe for some of you, this is your first time at a Valley Creek anything. If that's you, I just want to say welcome. We're so, so glad that each and every one of you are here with us tonight. And it's been a while since we've gotten to gather together like this. So, let me just remind you guys. This right here, this is a conversation. So, me or anyone else who's ever on this platform is never trying to teach at you, never trying to talk at you. Never trying to convince you of anything. We just want to spend some time with you talking about what God is showing us in this season. And so, if me or anyone up here ever says anything that speaks to your heart, maybe confirms something that God has been saying, we would love to know that. So, feel free to let us know that. Like, I want to invite you into the conversation. And I'm sure you've been with us on a weekend. You've probably experienced this firsthand. So, what are some of the things that we hear sometimes as people engage a communicator? What are some of the things you guys hear? Go ahead and just start saying them out. Okay, okay, that's good. Yeah, amen. Wow, right? Yeah, wifey's personal favorite right now is the wow. She loves the wow. And hey, hear me, please. When we're inviting you to do that, we're not inviting you to do that, so you can flatter me or whoever else is up here. We're doing that because guys, God is speaking to us. And when God is speaking to us, He is worth celebrating. And so, y'all ready to have a conversation? Come on. Say, I'm ready to conversate. That's good. It's just a fun word too, right? That's good though, because tonight, I'm excited.

Tonight, we get to take new ground. Tonight we get to pioneer. Tonight, we get to do something we've never done in this space before. And tonight, we get to kick off a brand new series. And I'm stoked for this series, because it's the kind of series that meets you right where you're at. But, oh, does it invite you into so much more. And the series that we're diving into is called Learn From Me: Life in the Kingdom. And when I say learn from me, just to clarify, I don't mean learn from me. So, you will not be learning from Justin in this series. You will be learning from the life of Jesus in this series. So, maybe another way of saying it is, really we're going to take this series to learn how to be disciples of Jesus in this series, to live in experience, to experience the kind of life that Jesus lived while He was here on earth. And before we even jump in, I just want to tell you guys, I want to receive this series. Like, I want to approach this series as a learner. I want to approach this series with some humility. I want to believe that through the life of Jesus, I can live my life in the kingdom, because the more that we're talking about doing things a different way, and what it looks like to really live life in the kingdom, y'all, the more that I'm learning, I am just scratching the surface, that there is so much more of the kingdom that I want to experience in my life. And so, that's my prayer and that's our prayer for you. And so, we just believe that this is going to be a big series for us. Like we believe that

God has a lot He wants to show us and say to us through it. And so, we're going to be in it for a little while. And quite frankly, we're okay with that, because we believe that God is moving, that God is speaking. And so, something different that we're going to be doing is, instead of what we used to be doing, which was meeting every other month, bi-monthly, we're actually going to start having these gatherings every single month. Because, man, we believe so much in how God is leading us, and what He's speaking to us. And so, we're in no hurry to get through this series, because what we want to do is intentionally create space for God to speak, for God to move, for God to lead this series wherever He wants to lead it.

And here's why we want to do it, because whether you realize it or not, you have a longing to live a life in the kingdom, because you and I, we're actually created to live a life in the kingdom. And if you're wondering, what is the kingdom? Well, the kingdom is simply the rule and reign of God. And so, when we live our life in the kingdom, we're choosing to align our will with God's will. It just means to live life like God is real, like we're citizens of heaven, and that heavenly realities are not just accessible to us someday, but that they're accessible to us today in the here and now. And if you've been tracking with us on the weekends, we've just been saying that there's a growing sense of hunger and thirst for the things of God. A hunger and thirst for the things of the kingdom. And that there's been a growing discontent for the things of this world. And we just have this sense that there's this desire, this longing, to live life a different way, a desire to change, like come on, anyone else want to have some change in their life? And so, in this season, we've just been paying attention to how people change. That's a great question. You ever ask yourself, like, how do people change? How do you change? How do I change? How do we change? And so, as we've been asking God, He's just been showing us a process that leads us to change, and it's a process called VIM. I want everybody to say VIM. VIM is an acronym, three letters, but stands for three words: vision, intent, and means, because if I'm going to change, I've got to have a vision to change. If I'm going to change, I actually have to have intent to change. If I'm going to change, I got to have means to change. Like, if I want to learn to play the drums, I've got to have a vision for why I want to play the drums. And if my vision is, because the drums are cool, it's an okay vision, but it's probably not going to create a lot of intent in my life. But if my vision is because I'm passionate about music, I'm passionate about passing something off to the next generation, I'm passionate about experiencing and worshiping God in a whole new way, well, that kind of vision, that's going to create some actual intent. That's going to create some willingness, some eagerness, some earnestness. And so, I will have intent to learn the basics. I will have intent to practice. I will have intent to play it even when I don't want to play it, because I'm so captivated by my vision. And so, in order for me to practice and to get to where I want to be, I've also got to have some means. Like, if I want to learn how to play the drums, I may need a drum set, at least a drum pad. How about some drumsticks? Maybe the school of YouTube. I don't know, a teacher, a book. I've got to have means. And so, if I want to be a person who learns a new skill, who changes, I've got to have a vision, I've got to have intent, and I've got to have means.

And guys, what we're learning in this season is that the same is true for our spiritual lives. Like, if you and I want to become all that God has created us to be, we've got to have a vision, we've got to have intent, and we've got to have means. But here's what you really got to catch. It all starts with a vision. Everybody say vision. Guys, it all starts with a vision, because if you and I aren't captivated by our vision, like if our hearts aren't captured, if we aren't possessed by the vision of seeing what can be, then we will always stay stuck in the what is, and we will never have the intent to actually want to change. And so, in this series, what we want to do for you guys is we want to give you a vision. We want to give you a vision for a life in the kingdom, a vision of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and sometimes, the best vision we can ever have is found in someone else's life. See, in Matthew 11, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and," say it with me, "learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Guys, Jesus is saying, "Let my life be your vision. Let my life be your vision for what's possible in your life. Like, let me show you how to fulfill those deep longings and desires. Let me show you how to help you find rest." And not rest like take a nap, rest, but rest for your soul, rest for your life. Like inner peace, a deep sense of joy and contentment, a complete and total satisfaction. And isn't that the life you want? And in Luke 6, Jesus tells us, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." So, Jesus says, "Be my disciple. Learn from me. Learn from me, so that I can teach you how to live a life in the kingdom." But if we're honest, for so many of us, guys, this isn't the kind of life we experience. This isn't our norm. And the more and more I've thought about this, the more that I think I'm discovering that it's because we have a broken view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Remember, a disciple, a student, a learner, a follower, one who becomes like the one they're following, and guys, being a disciple isn't a program. Like, it's not something we do on the side. It's not something we can pick up and set down whenever we want. Like, Jesus wasn't looking for converts. He wasn't looking for people who just identify with Him. Being a disciple is a way of life. And so, when really Jesus invites us to be His disciples, He's inviting us into a new way of living life. He's inviting us into a new way of being human. See, we have to remember that Jesus was both Son of God and Son of Man. He was the prototype of what it meant to be human, and live a resurrected life. What I mean by that is, Jesus is both our source and our standard of what it means to be human, a new way of being human. And guys, as disciples, we have to remember this. And as disciples, we also have to remember that Jesus didn't invent discipleship. I know, right? Jesus didn't invent discipleship. In fact, have you ever thought about how someone actually becomes or became a disciple? Like, where did that term come from? How did this all start? Was it us? Or like, where did this all begin? And if you don't know, that's okay. I didn't either. So, let me share with you some of the things that I've been learning about how someone became a disciple thousands of years ago. See, being a disciple was something that was a Jewish tradition long before Jesus. In fact, the entire school system was built around you becoming a disciple. It was the highest honor, something that every Jewish boy would have esteemed towards. And so, how the process started was at age five, you would go to school in what was called the sefer. Everybody say sefer. Sefer just means

book. And the book was the Torah. Torah is the first five books of the Bible. And so, every single day, you would be in school studying, meditating, mulling, and memorizing word-for-word the entire Torah. So, by the age 12, you were expected to have the Torah memorized. And so, as I'm sure you can imagine, this is where the schooling stops for a lot of people. Like most people were not cut out for this. And so, their next step was to go ahead, head on home, become a tax collector, become a carpenter, become a fisherman, start a family. Because the life of the disciple is, it's not for you. But if somehow, in some way, you were the best and the brightest, then you would be invited into phase two of schooling. Whoo! Now, phase two was called the Beth Midrash. I won't make you say that one. But with the Beth Midrash, you would do the same thing. You'd study, you memorize, and by the time you were done, you would be expected to know, word-for-word, the entire Old Testament. In case you're not sure, 75% of the Bible, word-for-word. So again, this would be where a majority would stop. But if – I would have stopped a long time ago. But if somehow, in some way, like you were, I don't know, 0.01% of your class, like few and far between, then you would be chosen to come under a rabbi. To come under a teacher and be a disciple. So, this is legit, the equivalent of like the most esteemed professor in the world coming to you saying, "Hey, I want you to follow me. I want you to do life with me. I want you to learn from me." And we're talking like, Ivy League school, not UNT or Texas Tech, both schools I went to, by the way. But we're talking like Oxford, Yale, Harvard, and they're saying, "Hey, like, come there with me. I actually want to take you through, like, a PhD program. We're going to do this whole thing together. And I will be with you every single step of the way." That's what it meant to be chosen as a disciple. And so, if you were chosen to be a disciple, the goal wasn't to just identify with your teacher. Like the goal wasn't to do little check-ins during office hours here and there or have class Monday, Wednesday, Friday from 9-11. No, if you were invited to be a disciple, the goal was very clear, and it was three things. You would be with your teacher, you would become like your teacher, and you would do the things your teacher did.

Guys, you would be with your teacher. So, the classroom actually became everyday life. Like, you would eat with your teacher. You would walk with your teacher. You would talk with your teacher. You would literally arrange and rearrange your entire life around theirs. And you would do that, so that eventually you could become like your teacher. You could talk the way they talked. You could think the way they think. You could act the way they act. And you would do all of this, so that eventually you could do the very things your teacher did. Meaning, when they were gone, you could stand in their place. You became another of the same kind. You didn't just mimic their lifestyle. You took on their life. And guys, this is what Jesus invites us into when He invites us to be His disciples. He invites us to be with Him. He invites us to become like Him. And He invites us to do the very things that He did, because Jesus did some pretty amazing things. Can we all agree on that? Okay, Jesus would heal the sick. He would raise the dead. He would cast out demons. But while Jesus was a human, He also demonstrated and did some other things. Like through the life of Jesus, we see him do all kinds of things. Let's go to that next slide. Like Jesus had peace in chaos. Jesus had wisdom in life. Jesus had purpose in the mundane. And Jesus forgave no matter what. And so, what Jesus is saying, "If you'd be

with me, you can become like me. And when you become like me, you can do the very things that I do." And again, guys, isn't this the life you want? Like, isn't this the life we're all chasing? And so, Jesus is saying, "Come follow me. Come learn from me, and I can teach you how to live life in the kingdom."

And so, each month, guys, this is what we're going to be doing. We're going to be spending time, not just talking about these, but really going through these, because we want to learn how to have a vision for a life in the kingdom, how to have a vision to be a disciple of Jesus. And so, tonight, tonight, we're going to start with what's maybe the most foundational of all these things. And that's a connection with God, because if there was one thing that could summarize the life of Jesus, it was a deep and unceasing connection with God. And you may be thinking, "Okay, wait, I thought Jesus was God. Like, you said the whole Son of God thing. So, I'm kind of confused how Jesus had a connection with God if He was God." Well, let's look at this verse together out of Philippians 2. It says, "Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness." So guys, again, Jesus was fully man. But He was also fully God. But Jesus surrendered His divinity. He took on the limitations of man, so that He could show us what it meant to be human and live with a connection to God. I mean, another verse that shows us this is that of Acts 10. It says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit. And he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." God was with Him. Jesus lived with a connection with God. And just side-note, anytime you guys see "Jesus of Nazareth," this is pointing to Jesus' humanity. This is reminding us that Jesus was fully man. So, Jesus didn't live as God. He lived as a human connected with God. He was the prototype. He was our model of what it looked like to be a man anointed with the Holy Spirit, to live in right standing, right relationship with God, so that He could walk out the very call on His life. And He was showing us how to be human.

And guys, as a human, Jesus lived with a deep connection with God. And that's the kind of connection that He invites His disciples into. In fact, have you ever just stopped to think about what it must have been like to be those original 12 that were invited to follow Jesus, to live connected with Him? I mean, can you just picture yourself in their shoes? Here were 12 guys who grew up in a culture to get that PhD. Like they grew up in a culture that was training them to come under that teacher, under that rabbi, but these were the guys who never made it past elementary school. Like these were the guys who got sent home early. They were like, "Okay, why don't you just go be a carpenter, a tax collector, a fisherman." Guys, they were totally under-qualified. But Jesus saw them and Jesus believed in them. And so, Jesus comes onto the scene and what does He say? "Come follow me." No back-story, no explanation. He simply says, "Come follow me," as in, come learn from me. Come live connected with me. And you got to remember that these were guys who grew up in that Jewish culture. And so, they knew exactly what it meant to be a disciple. They knew exactly what Jesus was inviting them into. Like, they knew that Jesus wasn't inviting them into a weekend mission trip. They knew that

Jesus was inviting them into a way of life, a way of being human. And so, the disciples were being invited to walk away from everything, everything they knew. They were being invited to break a cycle of life, a cycle that they were expected to carry on for generations to come. And so, there was a significant cost, but the disciples didn't see the cost. The disciples saw the privilege. The disciples saw the favor. The disciples saw the honor that it was to be called. Like, "Me, Jesus? Are you sure? Don't you know that, like, don't you know what I do? Don't you know where I come from? Like, me, Jesus?" And Jesus says, "Yes, you." And man, as I've been preparing to share with you guys, I feel like I've just been so overwhelmed with the fact that Jesus has called me to be His disciple. Jesus has called you to be His disciples. Man, when was the last time you were overwhelmed with the fact that Jesus has called you to be His disciples, because the disciples were overwhelmed. The disciples could not believe that they were called. And they didn't care where they were going, what they were doing. They just cared about who they would be connected with, because there was something about the life of Jesus that they couldn't resist. When they were with Him, everything changed. Like when Jesus spoke, words came to life. When Jesus spoke, they knew why they were alive, and they watched Him perform signs and wonders. They saw Him cure things that were told were incurable. They saw Him multiply food for thousands. They saw Him look at a storm and tell it to be still, and it obeyed. Like day after day, minute by minute, miracle after miracle, the disciples were immersed in His presence. They were connected with Him. And when they were connected with Him, it made everything else inferior, because connection with Jesus literally changed their appetite for life, and so it's all they longed for. It's all they wanted.

And so, in the last week of His life, I'm sure you can imagine how they must have felt when Jesus tells His disciples that He has to go. I mean, I can't even begin to comprehend how that must have felt. Like, Jesus, we're learning from you. Jesus, we're connected with you. What do you mean you have to go? But Jesus says, "I have to go. I have to go, but I'm sending another." And in the Bible, when it says another, that translates to literally another of the same kind. Another of the same kind. Okay, so right now, you're sitting on a chair. And in this drum cage back here, there's a chair. So, chair here, chair there, two chairs, but both very different. But the chair that you're sitting in and the chair next to you, the exact same chair. Jesus was sending us another of the same kind. Jesus was sending us Himself. But the disciples are hearing this, and I'm sure they still can't wrap their mind around what Jesus is saying. Like, what do you mean? You're here. We're good. Let's leave it at that, because the disciples were immersed in His presence. Like, the disciples were immersed in a lifestyle that no human being had ever experienced, unless you were Adam in the Garden, walking with God in the cool of the day. Do you realize that no human being has ever experienced that kind of connection with God until Jesus called the 12 disciples? I mean, can you imagine having God in the flesh within reach, being able to talk with Him, to just look at Him, to laugh with Him, to cry with Him, to be embraced by Him, to have His words of spirit and life spoken over you in the exact moment that you need it, and then telling you that He has to go, that He has to go? And then Jesus says something that would have been even more difficult for them to hear, because He says, "It's not only the fact that I have to go, but it's actually better that I go." It's better that I go.

And the reason Jesus said it was better that He leaves is because Jesus knew who He was sending. Jesus was sending us the Holy Spirit. He was sending us another of the same kind. And Jesus tells His disciples, "You already know the Spirit." Even though technically they didn't yet, but what Jesus was saying was, "You already know me. You already know me, and so you already know the Spirit, because the Spirit is me. He's just another of the same kind."

And so, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus literally sends Himself to be with us, a seamless connection. In fact, an even better connection, because Jesus is saying, you've had some access to me. Imagine having total access to me. Like, you've been dwelling with me. Imagine if I dwelt in you. You've had some connection with God. Imagine having total and perfect connection with God. And so, yeah, it's better that I go. And when Jesus did this, He didn't just do it for 12 dudes 2,000 years ago. Jesus does this for anyone who calls Him Lord, wants to learn from Him and live a life in the kingdom. Guys, Jesus did this for you. And Jesus did this for me. And so, because of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the living God, now dwells in us. And so, the way the disciples of Jesus are to be with Him today, to stay connected with Him today, is through the Holy Spirit, because God has decided to make His home in us, because to be with the Spirit, is to be with Jesus, and to be with Jesus is to be with God. See, through the Holy Spirit, He gives us connection into the very life of God Himself. I have to say that again, because it took me about 12 times to really wrap my mind around that. But through the Holy Spirit, do you realize that you literally have access into the very life of God Himself? The question is, do you access it? Because you can have a million dollars in your bank account and go broke if you never access it. And so, do you access the inner life of God in your life? And guys, what's really amazing is that through the Holy Spirit, Jesus didn't just give us a promise. He gave us a practice. He gave us a practice on how to live connected with Him. In fact, in John 15, we see Jesus give us a tutorial on just how to live a connected life. And it's simply this. "Abide in me, and I in you. Abide in me, and I will abide in you." Abide means to stay, to dwell, to make your home in. And so, what really Jesus is saying is, "Make your home in me, because I've made my home in you." Make your home in me and never leave, because that's a connection with God. And the beautiful thing about Jesus is He's not asking us to do something we're not already doing. Guys, you and I, we're abiding in something. We're connected with something. The question is, what are we connected with? Are we connected with ourselves, our thoughts, our feelings, that significant other, maybe a hope for a future, or a promise, or a job, a promotion? Are we connected to just distraction and entertainment? What are you abiding in? What are you making your home in? What are you connected to? Because the reason that matters is because whatever you're connected to will determine the fruit of your life.

And so, what's the fruit of your life? What would the people in your life say the fruit is of your life, and what are you connected to, because Jesus is asking, "What would it look like for you to live connected with me? For you to make your home in me and have a deep, unceasing connection with me?" The way that Jesus did. Because when we make our home in the inner life of God, He provides the Fruit of the Spirit in our life. And so, we will be marked by love,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, the fruit that gives us everything we need for every single day of our life. See, what Jesus is really teaching us, guys, is just how to be two places at once. Like how to eat breakfast and be with Him. How to be in the middle of a lecture, the middle of an assignment and just be with Him, how to be in the middle of a workday doing something you don't want to be doing and be with Him. Guys, God is so good. And He longs for more of an hour a week, an hour a month of a connection with you. He wants to be connected with you every single moment, every single day. And Jesus wants our bodies to become temples, temples where the Holy Spirit gets to dwell, the Spirit of the living God gets to dwell. And He wants us to become the intersection between Heaven and Earth. Like, He literally wants us to overlap heaven and earth into our lives, and He invites us into that every single day through the Holy Spirit and connection with Him. Because guys, God longs to have a deep, unceasing connection with you. And He wants you to have that with Him, because He knows that when we do, it changes everything. And so, when Jesus invites us to learn from me, what He's actually inviting us to is a connection with God, because Jesus experienced that connection 100% of His day, and He wants us to do the same.

Because guys, you and I were created to live a life connected with God. And so, this is where we're going in this series. Every single month, we're just going to take a look at the life of Jesus, and we are going to learn from Him. Because you may not have a vision for your life, but oh, God has a vision for you. God has a vision for you to experience each and every one of these things, for this to be your new norm, and not just some of these things, all of these things. Not just some of the time, all of the time. And yes, you may struggle. Yes, it may take some time. Yes, becoming like Jesus takes time. Who knew, right? But guys, keep at it. Be patient. Extend yourself grace. And if I could just encourage you, be here. Like, arrange your life around the things of Jesus, because if we become what we behold, the more that you and I can practice beholding the life of Jesus, the more that you and I will live a life in the kingdom. And guys, the life of Jesus is the most attractive and best life that's ever graced the Earth. And Jesus is teaching us how to live that life. Jesus wants us to learn from Him, so that we can experience life to the full. And guys, the more we learn from Him, the more you'll discover that there is no longing too strong, no problem too big that being a disciple of Jesus can't solve. That being a disciple and learning from him can't solve. And guys, just like the first disciples, Jesus believes in you. Jesus sees you. Jesus wants to meet you right where you're at and say, "You're perfect. You're exactly what I'm looking for. And so, come follow me. Come learn from me. And I will teach you about a life that you could never ask or imagine." And so guys, what would it look like for us to learn from the life of Jesus and live a life in the kingdom?

Would you guys close your eyes with me? So Jesus, thank You that You have called us to be Your disciples. Thank You that You invite us into a life, a new way of being human. And You say, "Come learn from me, and I will lead you to rest for your soul. I will lead you to a life in the kingdom." And so, Holy Spirit, we just invite You in. We invite You into our spaces. We invite You into the margin. We invite You into the things that we maybe don't enjoy doing. Would You

just give us eyes to see You, even in those? Would You remind us that you've chosen us to dwell in, that You've chosen us, so that we can be an overlap of Heaven and Earth, and so that we can experience life to the full. So, Lord, in this series, would we look to You. Would we long for You. Would we live connected with You and would we learn from You, so that we can experience a life in the kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.