

What's up, everybody? I am so excited to be here with you tonight to get the opportunity to share. My name is Colleen Stickl, and I serve on staff here at Valley Creek. And I just love what God is doing through the young adult gatherings here at Valley Creek, He is moving. And many of you guys know that we started a brand new series last month called Learn from Me: Life in the Kingdom. Oh, good, you guys know it. And it is a series that is meant to encourage you, to challenge you, to call you to be everything that God created you to be. And one thing I love about this series is that it's designed to meet you exactly where you're at right now, but God is inviting you to so much more. You see, when we learn from somebody, we follow them, right? We become like them. And that's really what we're doing as disciples of Jesus. And so as we learn from Jesus, we begin to experience life in the kingdom. And I think sometimes we understand, the learn from me part, but the life in the kingdom, we're not so sure what that looks like. And so maybe today we don't have a vision for life in the kingdom. So let me show you what I mean by life in the kingdom. Matthew 11 says this, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Okay, this verse is causing us to have a great deal of time, greater vision for our lives, for kingdom life. It's literally telling us what can happen when we learn from Him. So it's like Jesus saying, "Hey, come, learn from me. And here's what I want to teach you. I want to teach you how to live a life where what you carry is light, a life where you walk in humility and gentleness, a life where you can actually live from a place of rest." Like if you've been around the past few weeks, it's the type of Selah, restful lifestyle that we've been talking about. And some of us are like, what? Like just hearing this, this seems so far from where we are tonight. Like maybe you're here and instead of feeling light, you feel heavy and stressed out. Maybe instead of sitting here and you're just fully present right now, full of rest and full of peace, maybe you're spinning and anxious about something. See, I think what happens is we spend most of our time not learning from Jesus, which leads to life in the kingdom, but learning from the world. And so we experience what the world has to offer. Things like stress, overwhelm, anxiety, insecurity, fear. So like, it's hard to even have a vision for a different way, but God wants to give you one. Like in such a pivotal season of your life, He wants to show you a different way. And I'm just really passionate about this series because I believe that God wants to show you that kingdom life for you is the norm now, so that you carry this on for the rest of your life. You see, this series is not "learn from the world and live like the world," because we all know how to do that, right? But there's something different available to you. He wants to give you a vision of what your life could be.

And so we just have to ask the question, what is life in the kingdom? What is life in the kingdom? Well, it looks a little bit like this. Life in the kingdom, it's where we experience things like peace in chaos, joy in every circumstance, hope in the midst of despair, love in relationships, freedom from the world. Last month, we talked about connection with God. That sounds like a pretty good life, right? That sounds like a pretty good life, amen? And so our prayer is that through this series, the Lord would give you a vision for what kingdom life looks like. That you would see that as you learn from Jesus, this is a life that's available to you. And I'm telling you right from the start that it is a very different life than the world offers. And it's

probably a life that's much different from even the one that you're living today. But see, as we live as disciples, as we learn from Him, He trains us, we become like Him, and we begin to experience life in the kingdom. So like, let's choose to grab it by faith, even tonight. Can you choose to grab kingdom life by faith? And so that's what this series is all about. And if you were here last month, we started off by talking about, who remembers? Connection with God and we learned that life in the kingdom means being connected to Him as our source of life. We learned what it looks like to live as a disciple, connected to God, remaining in Him. And we were reminded it's actually the Holy Spirit that gives us access to remain connected to God. And so now tonight, I'm especially excited because we get to learn from Jesus in another area of kingdom life. And that is, little drum roll please. Freedom from the world. Okay, so everybody say freedom. All right, so freedom. All right, what is freedom? Like what comes to mind when you hear the word freedom? No, like I'm really asking you, like legit. Like what would you say if you, what does the word freedom mean to you? Go for it. Okay. Okay, great, because I think if we're honest, and you guys just proved this point, many of us would have an easier time describing what the world says freedom is, because I think the world has a lot to say about freedom and how to find it. And a lot of times without even realizing it, we look primarily to the world to define freedom for our lives. And so like I would challenge, maybe you don't know what your definition of freedom is, but I would challenge you that I could learn a lot about your definition of freedom just by looking at like, your social media role. Like seeing who you're influenced by, because that actually becomes your view of freedom. Because you're a disciple, you're a student, you're a learner of the one you are following. So you're being shaped by who you follow. And so here are just some of the things we learn from the world about being free.

So you want to be free? Here's what the world would say. Live your truth, own your own time. Make a lot of money. Spend a lot of money. Follow your feelings. Be successful. Have a really important job title. You are the god of your life. So if you can just get the right relationships, hobbies, trainer, pilates instructor, degree, distribution of macronutrients, then you will be free. In other words, if you can just be the center, the most important, and then everything can revolve around you, then everything will be good. Freedom, that's what we learn from the world about freedom. And we start to believe that and live like that, but see, that's just not true. Like some of those things in and of themselves aren't bad, but when it comes to freedom, we were created for so much more. And the truth is that pursuing any of those things outside of Jesus only leads you to more bondage. That's why life in the kingdom is actually freedom from the world. Okay. Life in the kingdom is actually freedom from the world. So let me say it a different way. I think what the world offers while appealing at first, it's like counterfeit freedom. Okay? A little spoiler alert. It's not the real thing. Like it was not God's original design. It's kind of like a fake freedom. And some of you I see are like nodding your heads in agreement because you've tried it. And you're still here and you still feel stuck. You see, the enemy, what he does is he always distorts and deceives. So he'll even take a good thing and just make it like five degrees off. And he draws us into things that appear to look like freedom and to lead to

freedom. They sound good, but ultimately they take us into bondage. And then he takes things that the kingdom says brings freedom and he makes those things seem like bondage.

See, the enemy wants us to think that anything outside of the world's definition of freedom is bondage. Things like humility, trust, servanthood, generosity, surrender. The enemy wants you to take on the world's definition of freedom, which we consume every single day to keep us from kingdom life or to keep us from even having a vision for kingdom life. So if you're here today and your vision for kingdom life is a little cloudy, maybe that's why. But God wants to show you a different way. And to be totally honest, in some ways, you guys have to face this in ways I didn't have to in my 20s. And I'm sure you get really sick of hearing people rail on like social media and phones and screens, but truly social media is what teaches you the world's version of freedom. Like you know your feed, you know what your influencers are up to all the time. And if that's not your thing, maybe it's a stock or a sports team or a statistic, its constant access. And so does that lead you to freedom? Or like the people you follow, are they free? Are they really free? Because part of living kingdom life is allowing Jesus to define what true freedom is. So if I could illustrate it this way, it's kind of like swimming in a fishbowl. Have you ever seen a fishbowl? Do some of you have a fishbowl? Nobody. Okay. Well, here's the thing. Fish weren't meant to live in bowls, but we try to make it look like this really free environment, but it's a substitute for what they were really created for. So like you've ever seen a fishbowl, people put in like fake palm trees and like neon rocks. Okay. Some of you know, you had a treasure chest, like the whole thing. And all of it is imitating life, but it's actually keeping the fish in bondage. It's not the real thing and here's the deal. It looks really cool. I mean, honestly, a fishbowl looks pretty cool, but it's pretty predictable, right? Like every day, the fish is going in the same circle over and over and over again. And the funny thing is in the fish, from the fish's perspective, everything revolves around him, right? Everybody's looking at him. He gets food, he gets fresh water brought to him. And the fish thinks he is the center, but it's a very limited existence. He's actually in bondage. I call it fishbowl freedom. And I think that's a picture of what the world has to offer when it comes to freedom.

And I think a lot of us, without even realizing it, live that kind of existence. The world says, be free. And so we live like the world and learn from the world. And we spend our life in the bondage of a bowl. Like we think freedom is a world where we are the center and everybody looks at us and everything revolves around us, fish, bowl, freedom. And it's like the enemy's thinking, "Man, I will make them feel free. I'll make them think they're free. But all the while I'm putting limitations on them that they were never created for." He doesn't want you to be free. And the truth is, when we're in a fishbowl, guess what? We're not moving. We're the only ones that are stuck. Everyone around us is moving and life is going, but we're swimming in the same circles over and over again. Fishbowl freedom, it's the only thing that the world can give us. And we know this because the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy. So he wants to fill your mind with ideas of freedom that are actually designed by the enemy to keep you in bondage. This is why life in the kingdom is freedom from the world, not within the world, from the world. Like we were made for a whole different environment, an entirely different environment, like

here's what I'm trying to tell you guys tonight. Do you want to be free? Okay, do you want to be free? Then you've got to get out of the fishbowl. Okay, you've got to get out of the fishbowl because God created you for the ocean. He created you to live free, to live free from the world. And so the question we have to ask ourselves is this, do you have a vision of what freedom looks like for your life? Do you have a vision? But here's the more important question, does your vision for freedom line up with what the Bible says about freedom? Because Jesus has a lot to say about freedom. There is a lot we can learn from Him about freedom from the world. Okay, so how do you have a vision for a life of freedom, for a life in the ocean, well you start with the Word of God. The Word of God always shows you what's possible, where His Word has revealed His kingdom will come, so take a look at a few of these verses. 2 Corinthians 3:17 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Everybody say freedom. John 8:36, "If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed." Say free. Next one, John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Say free. See, Jesus has a lot to say about freedom, so are you free? Free from the world? Or are you living in fishbowl freedom? Because when we talk about freedom, I think we instantly think about what we need to do. Like some of you guys are tracking and you're like, okay, this is great, is this where she gets to the three points, like what we need to do, and I'll get around to that right after, and then I'm good. Like what are the three things I need to do to be free? But see when we start with that perspective we're doing it in the flesh and it doesn't work. Like we're disconnected from the Holy Spirit. Like could you imagine a fish just one day being in the bowl and be like, "You know what, I just realized, I'm trapped. So what can I do differently today to get out of the bowl?" Like right, other than Nemo, this is a highly unlikely scenario. Okay. See freedom is not something you do, free is who you are, free isn't what you do, free is who you are. Look back at these verses 2 Corinthians 3:17. "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." We talked about this last month, you're connected to the Spirit. So wherever He is, you are free, it's your identity, you're free. John 8:36, "If the Son sets you be free, you will be free indeed." Exclamation point. This means if you've put your faith and hope in Jesus, if you have said Jesus is Lord and I will follow, then you're free; it's your identity. John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." See the Word of God teaches us that we're free from the world. Freedom isn't what you do, free is who you are.

And the truth is, it takes something greater than ourselves to live in freedom. To experience freedom from the world like the fish can't free itself from the bowl, okay? Only Jesus can do that. In other words, God says, "I love you, let me get you out of the fishbowl." Like when He looks at you swimming in circles like, think of whatever area in your life today where you feel like, you're not free from the world. He sees you swimming in circles and He loves you and He looks at you and says you are my beloved son or daughter and I didn't create you for fishbowl freedom, you belong in the ocean and He releases you to a life of freedom. A life of discovery and exploration. See, Jesus calls you by name and says, "Hey I've not called you to live in the world, to live in bondage, so be free." Because you are free, see that is what the Holy Spirit empowers you to do. This is the journey of discipleship. So if you weren't sure about what

discipleship, this is what it is, and this should get you inspired to keep taking next steps on your journey of discipleship, to live free from the world, because free is who you are. And if the extent of the vision you have for being free is swimming in circles day after day, feeling stuck, being at the center of your world, there's more for you. There's more for you. So stop decorating your fishbowl, okay? Stop celebrating life in the fishbowl. Instead, acknowledge, I'm stuck in this fishbowl where I'm the center, but I'm going nowhere. I feel trapped. I know I was made for more, Jesus, would You help me? See, until you become tired of the fishbowl, you'll never want life in the ocean. Until you become tired of the fishbowl, you'll never want life in the ocean. So for some of you tonight, it's like saying, Jesus, I actually like the fishbowl, so would you help me to see it for what it is? Would you give me the eyes to see where I have taken on the world's definition of freedom? There is more for you. In Jesus, you are free from the world. And see, the passage we talked about last month is John 15. And if you're familiar with John 15, it is all about remaining and abiding in Jesus, and it talks about being connected to God. And as that chapter continues, it goes on to talk about, guess what? Freedom from the world. Because it's connection to God that leads us to freedom from the world. So check out this verse, John 15:19. It says, "If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." Okay, out of the fishbowl, into the ocean. This verse is good news. Like this verse is telling us we can be free from the world. We don't belong in the world. Like the paradox is this. Jesus says to be free in this world is to be an alien and stranger of it. Because I'm a citizen of a totally different realm. And so if you're living in freedom from the world, there are times that you will feel rejected by the world. Like, do you ever feel rejected by the world? Do any of you ever feel rejected by the world? If you don't, it might be because you've made a comfy home swimming in the fishbowl. But when we're free from the world, we're going to experience rejection from the world. These are those moments where you're like, why am I so different from my friends? Why do I live so differently from my co-workers or friends I went to high school with? Because you're different. But guess what? The Bible says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You're blessed. Like we tell our kids all the time, you're different. You're going to feel different. Like everyone is swimming in a fishbowl and you're in an ocean. This world was literally designed for fishbowls and aquariums and the kingdom is an ocean. You're free from the world. Jesus says He's actually chosen you out of the world. So be free.

So how do we do it? How do we live free from the world? We learn from Jesus. Sound familiar? We learn from, we learn from Jesus, life in the kingdom. We learn from Jesus so we can be free from the world. And He says to us, "I will give you a vision of what that looks like." So wherever it feels cloudy for you, He says, "I will give you a vision." So like if you just begin to study the life of Jesus, you'll see over and over that He's free from the world. And here's how He does it. He knows His identity. He knows who He is. He walks in relationship. We talked about it last month. He's connected to the Father and He lives out His purpose. See, Jesus modeled freedom from the world. He lived a kingdom life, life in the ocean, not fishbowl freedom. And not only was Jesus free from the world, He actually took the disciples on a journey of freedom

and it happened by way of formation. Okay, so one next step at a time, one conversation at a time. And what I want you to see tonight is that He's taking you on a journey of freedom. Some of you are like, what? Yes, wherever you are, He is taking you on a journey of freedom and it's happening by way of formation, one step at a time. So like, areas in your life tonight that you feel like you're swimming in the fishbowl, you're stuck, you're in bondage, He wants to release you to the ocean because free is who you are. And what I want you to catch is the disciples of Jesus, they were changing as they followed Jesus. Like they were constantly changing and growing because freedom requires change. Again, this is where the kingdom and the world are very different because the world would say, you can't change. Who you are, is who you are and it's always going to be this way. Or the world will say, absolutely you can change all by yourself and you don't need anybody and you can do it all in your own strength. But neither of those are true. See, Jesus says, "Only my Spirit empowers you to change. Only I call you by name out of the fishbowl and into the ocean." It's His spirit that empowers us to change. So learn from Him. Like, would you say Jesus walked in freedom from the world? I'd say yeah. I mean, He was actually the freest person who ever lived. Okay? So why don't we learn from Him? Like why we learn from people on social media how to have worldly freedom when Jesus showed us what true freedom actually looks like.

Okay, there was a storm. I don't know if you read this story that He legit walked on top of the storm. Like the hail a few days ago, that was nothing compared to it, okay? He walked on top of it, and he overcame the very things that make us stressed out, anxious, insecure. He was free, and you are free. So stop limiting your freedom to an action. I'm free when I choose not to drink that substance that's had a hold on me. I'm free when I'm able to believe I'm secure and I don't think everybody's mad at me and I did something wrong. I'm free when I stop comparing myself to other people and I'm just confident in who I am. But guess what? All of those things are my doing. And so your freedom is really contingent on the choices you do or don't make in the moment. But what if freedom is so much more than that? What if freedom starts with who you are, identity? See, we learn from Jesus that freedom was His identity, and it's ours too. Like who He was informed everything He did. And so He was secure as a beloved Son. He was connected to God, so He was free. He was free from the world. So learn from Jesus. He knew His identity. Do you know yours? And I think some of us are like, "Oh, I don't want to talk about identity. We're talking about freedom. So let's stick with freedom because I need to know how to get free from this addiction and free from my anxiety and free from my insecurity." Okay, I got it. But first, do you know who you are? And it's okay if you don't. Let me just tell you what God says about you. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are seen. You matter. You're valuable. You're set apart in Jesus' name. See, when you know your identity and your security is in God, that's actually where true freedom begins. Because the Bible tells us apart from Him, we can do... Nothing. The world says apart from Him, you can do all the things, right? But you see, when you know who you are, freedom flows from that place. And I want you to remember tonight that you are on a journey of freedom, okay? A journey means you're taking one next step at a time. So be patient. Trust the process because the one who is leading you, He is trustworthy. And not only that, the Holy Spirit is at work in your life. He is freeing you all the

time. He is freeing you from the world through your godly relationships, through trials, through spiritual practices. He's moving, like tonight, he's moving in your relationships. He's moving, you are free, so don't be discouraged. Like even ask Him to have the eyes to see the power of the Holy Spirit bringing change in your life as you're willing to surrender to Him. Like, Jesus, I'm stuck. Would you remind me who I am? Release me into the ocean? So this all sounds good, right? Freedom, yes. Let's get on the freedom train. This is awesome. We love it. But I just want to make this really practical for you and get honest for a moment and ask you this question. Do you ever feel stuck on your journey of freedom? Like you hear all this and it sounds great and your spirit is agreeing with it, but the reality of your everyday life looks nothing like the ocean. Surrendered to God, on an adventure, trusting, filled with peace. Here's what I would say. I think the reason many of us get stuck on our journey is we want freedom from the world, but we also choose to learn from and live in the world. Like we want freedom from the world. We do, but we also want to be a disciple of and practice the ways of the world. So like we want to swim in the ocean, but we kinda like the fishbowl, right? Look at what John 15:19, another translation of this verse says, "If you lived on the world's terms, the world would love you as one of its own. But since I picked you to live on God's terms and no longer on the world's terms, the world is going to hate you."

Okay, we learn, like, you can't have freedom from the world while still participating in the things of the world. Like, we live in the world and then we claim the name of Jesus and we feel like neither option works. I don't really feel free in the world, but I certainly don't feel like this Jesus thing is working. And it's like we try to do both at the same time, one foot in the fishbowl, one foot in the ocean, and it gets real frustrating. And so then we come to this false conclusion that neither option works. Like, I want to swim free and live in the kingdom, live the life I was created for, but also I refuse to leave my fishbowl. Because I like being comfortable and I like being at the center. Like I want to be present in all of my relationships, but also I want to numb my mind all day with social media and technology. I want to be secure and confident in who I am in Jesus. But also I just spent three hours scrolling and comparing myself to other people in my same season of life. I want to pursue a life of sexual purity before marriage, but also I'm watching pornography. I want to have my life align with the things of God, but my schedule is so crammed that the likeliness of me coming to church or Circles or anything depends on my mood. I want the life that Jesus offers, but the lifestyle of the world. And so we can't take authority over things we're participating in. And that's why I think a lot of us get stuck. Like we try to make this third road. But the truth is this, we either choose the way of Jesus or the way of the world. We live in the fishbowl or we live in the ocean, and we can't do both and so it's time to get out of the fishbowl. Like it's time to get out of the fishbowl.

In first John 2:15, it says this, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Okay, this is a powerful verse. It's telling us, do not love what the world says is freedom. Like wherever we love what the world, wherever we love the world, we have yet to believe that what God says is freedom is truly freedom. So what Jesus is saying is He wants us to be all in with Him, ocean life, kingdom living. And anywhere

where we love the world and we've got one foot in the fishbowl is an area where God wants to reveal more of His love to us. Like, that's what the verse is saying. He wants to say, "Hey, there, I love you. Will you let me set you free?" It's His love that sets us free. It's His love that empowers us to say, "Give me Jesus. You can have all the world. Just give me Jesus." It's His love that changes us. And so let me close with this tonight. We've been saying here at Valley Creek that it's an open door season, right? Not open door, like stepping into new opportunities and stepping into promotions, but open door as in us opening the door and letting God in. Us opening the door to more of His love. And so any area where we feel stuck, where we know we're in that fishbowl life and living the world, He calls us by name. He reminds us of who we are. And He says you were made for so much more. And so the journey of being free from the world is really a daily invitation to surrender our stuckness to Him. To say, alright, Lord, I'm stuck. I'm hitting a wall, the same thing over and over again. I'm doing that thing where I'm making it all about me and I'm at the center of my world. Would you help me? Would you help me? So we practice, its surrender and obedience. Where there's obedience, there's grace. Like where we surrender and obey, that's where God actually shows up and gives us all the grace we need to keep moving forward one next step at a time. Not only that, in surrender and grace, God gives us exactly what we need. He gives us everything we need and He shows up every single time revealing more of His love. And the more we truly experience the kingdom, the less we want of the world. And so wherever you are, He has more for you. He's always inviting you to deeper layers of the ocean. And so it's time to be free. It's time to remember who you are and you are free. So remember, Jesus teaches us how to live free from the world. And it starts with receiving your identity as a beloved son or daughter. Your identity is free from the world. And so if you spend most of your time learning from the world, it will lead you to the inferior life that a lot of us live. It's time to get out of the fishbowl. Are you ready? It's time to get out of the fishbowl, to open the door and surrender to God's love so that He can set us free. And the cool thing is when we learn from Jesus, we start to live kingdom life.

Remember, we started with Matthew 11 tonight. Kingdom life, where we're light and humble, where we're gentle, where we live and rest, that life is possible for you today. God has so much more for you than fishbowl freedom. So don't settle because freedom is not what you do. Free is who you are. So choose today to have a big vision for a life of freedom because He wants to give you one. Let's pray. So Jesus, I thank You so much for each person in this room. I thank You that You know them, You see them and You love them. I thank You that they're here and they're ready to receive from You. And Holy Spirit, I just pray in Jesus' name that You would just break every chain off of them. Anywhere they feel like they are living in fishbowl freedom, You would remind them that they were created to swim in the ocean. So I just declare breakthrough over their lives, that they would remain connected to You and that they would remember that free is not what they do, free is who they are. We love You, Jesus. And we thank You for tonight. In Your name, amen.