

Well, hey, everyone. Welcome to Valley Creek and welcome to our June Young Adult Gathering. It's great to be with you. My name is Justin, and I serve as our Denton Campus Pastor. So, this is my home campus. So, love that all you guys are here to hang out with me tonight. So, some of y'all's faces I don't get to see, so this is great. And I hope you're having a great summer. You're getting some extra fun in. But I want to do this. I just want to just kind of set the tone for our Young Adult Gatherings. See, these are for you because we believe in you. We pray for you. We want to invest everything that we can into you. And so, we want these to be fun, engaging. We don't want them to be stuffy or boring. So, I want to encourage you, be verbal. Be expressive. If you agree with something, say it. If there's a question, yell out an answer. If something's funny, laugh. If you don't understand something, just fake it and nod and we'll talk about it later. But we want these, our Young and Old Gatherings to have a culture that is inclusive. That is full of faith. That's just engaging. Does that sound good? Okay. All right. Just like that. Okay. So, let's go. So, we have been in a series called, Learn From Me: Life in the Kingdom, where we are learning from Jesus what it looks like to just live life in the kingdom. And we've had this as a core Scripture along the way, Matthew 11, where it says, "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." Jesus' invitation is to come and learn from Him. We're discovering what it looks like to just learn from Jesus and experience life in the kingdom that He offers us because Jesus is the model. He is the prototype for what it looks like to really be human and to be living in the fullness of God's intended plan for that. We're learning what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus, which means to be a student. A learner, a follower. Someone who's becoming like the one they follow, becoming like Jesus.

And learning that life in the kingdom isn't hard and heavy. It's actually easy and light. And one of the things that Jesus said the most when He was walking along the earth, He said, "Repent for the kingdom is at hand." Repent just means to change your thinking and your direction and to start thinking and changing in another direction. And most of the people at that time, they thought of heaven as like one day, the kingdom one day. And people, really, they still believe that today. That's most people's mindset. It's just heaven someday, the kingdom one day. Jesus was coming and saying, "Hey, change your thinking about that. The kingdom is at hand." Meaning, it's right here within grasp. Not just heaven someday, but heaven available today. The kingdom available today. And then, Jesus spent three years showing everybody what life looks like in the kingdom. Literally living, walking life in the kingdom. And we talked about a few things so far. In our very first message, we talked about having a connection with God. That there is no life in the kingdom outside of being connected to Jesus. And we unpacked John 15 and we talked about, like, when we truly have a vision for our life from Jesus, that we will remain in Him, we will be connected to Him. And in the second message, we talked about freedom from the world. That freedom isn't doing whatever you want. Freedom is actually found in who you are. And that the world wants us to live in the bondage to its ways, but Jesus wants us to live in the total freedom of who we actually are. And then, in the third message, we talked about self-control. That self-control isn't found in trying harder, doing

better, because that's our flesh, but the self-control is actually a fruit of the Spirit. And that Jesus showed us to have a life that was spirit-filled, living in self-control. And if you missed any of those, you can listen to those full messages on the Young Adults page of our Valley Creek website.

But tonight, I want to share with you this. I want to share with you joy in every circumstance. So, it sounds like, who wants to hear about joy? Okay. But who really wants to hear about joy? All right. I don't know if I fully trust that because I think some of us are like, "Yeah, we want to. We really want to hear about joy." But I think a lot of us are like, "Really? That sounds really churchy." Like, "joy in every circumstance," and then, kind of tune that out. Because think about joy. Like what is joy? Is it a feeling? Is it accomplishment? Is it happiness? Is it actually just a farce? Let me just start with this, that joy is actually really important. The Greek word for joy and rejoice is used 138 times in the New Testament. There are only 27 books in the New Testament, so that's a lot of repeating. And then, if you add the Hebrew word for joy in the Old Testament, it's actually now hundreds of times that God's talking to us about joy. And when God says something one time, it's important. He says something hundreds of times, I'm going to go out on a limb and just kind of guess, it's probably really important. And every time the Bible talks about joy, it's usually adding something very excessive to it. Like it's talking about abounding and full and overflowing and inexpressible and uncontainable. That's a lot of joy. And here's something else interesting about joy. The world of science has been making more and more discoveries about the impact of joy on a human being. Like, according to science, joy has a lot of psychological and physiological benefits that actually contribute to our physical and emotional, and mental well-being, like endorphins. Joy actually increases the brain's production of endorphins, which are our body's natural feel-good chemicals that help relieve pain, reduce stress, boost our mood. Like, that's pretty awesome. Go joy. Or our blood flow. Joy actually increases blood flow and circulation, which can improve your brain health and protect against heart problems. So, joy actually gives you a healthier heart. And then, your immune system. Joy can boost the immune system by increasing immune cells and antibodies that fight infection. They can help you be resistant to disease. It actually helps keep you from getting sick. So, I find it really interesting. It's almost like there was some kind of intentional design for us to thrive and operate more fully from joy. It's what? It's almost like science is just starting to figure out what the Bible's been saying all along. And remember this, it takes 72 muscles to frown. It only takes 14 to smile. So, just a little more proof that we're kind of designed to live from joy.

But I'm not saying that God designed us to live with smiles plastered to our faces all the time. Because Jesus actually says things like, "Hey, rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." The Bible talks about, "Hey, weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." See, God created us with a myriad of emotions to experience, but joy is really unique. And so, on the topic of joy, something that brings out a lot of joy is Disney movies. So, let me hear this. What's your favorite Disney movie? Just shout it out. Okay. I heard some good ones in there. I heard some other ones that was really interesting. Okay. All right.

Well, there's a lot of joy in Disney movies. One of my favorites that I get a lot of joy out of is Inside Out. Anybody had seen Inside Out? If you have not seen Inside Out, that's going to be your primary takeaway from tonight. Go see Inside Out. Inside Out 2 just came out this past weekend and it's incredible. It's so good. It's probably the best movie Disney's made in 20 years. It's awesome. But I love Inside Out because it's this. We get this look at the inner workings of a human being through the life of like this 12-year-old girl all through her emotions and all of the roles that her emotions have to play. And there's these – primary ones. She's got sadness. She's got fear. She's got anger. She's got disgust and she has joy. But it's interesting because like, Disney doesn't get a lot of stuff right, but they get – I think they actually nailed this one like bullseye because it was interesting that you – within all of these emotions, which one was in charge? Joy. And that's because joy is actually a superior emotion. Joy is the one emotion that can come alongside the other ones and support it and encourage it and lift it up and give it hope. Joy is unique in that regard that it really is a superior emotion. So, I'm like, Disney actually like, bulls-eyed that one. Now, don't think they did as well with Pollyanna. Anybody seen Pollyanna? That's an old, old movie so that surprised me. Well, Pollyanna's this little girl and she has this thing called The Glad Game that fixes all of her problems. It's like, anything that's going bad, you just found something to be glad about, and it's all fixed. I don't think they nailed that one because that doesn't actually fix everything. Because bad things happen. Things go wrong. Plans don't work out. People fail. And sometimes the very last thing we feel like experiencing is joy.

Like how about you? You ever feel like that? Like, "I got no way to find joy. I don't feel joy. I don't see having any joy. And I certainly don't want to play The Glad Game because I know that's not going to fix my problem." See, "joy in every circumstance," I know that sounds like a really churchy thing to say. It seems kind of like a farce. Because here's the thing, when most people teach about joy, they usually contrast happiness and joy. And they talk about happiness is because of your circumstances versus joy is in spite of your circumstances. And so, I talk about the thing about this, like, I've got a little graphical image here to help you understand. Your circumstances are the things that are the circumference around you. It's basically your circumstances. I'm standing in the circumference of what surrounds me. And so, let's say you've got some great circumstances. You had a great night of sleep. Just best night of sleep. You woke up so refreshed. And then, you had the most amazing coffee you've ever had. Then, you get to work, and your boss gives you a raise. Then, that night, your friends all throw you a party. They're so excited. Like, those are great circumstances around us. And probably, you're going to have a lot of joy. You're going to have some happiness. But let's flip that and let's say you have a horrible night of sleep and you actually oversleep in the morning because you slept so bad. And then, you were rushing and you dumped the coffee in your lap on the way to work. And then, you get to work and partway through the day, your boss fires you. And then, that night, all your friends are ghosting you and they don't want anything to do with you. Now, you got some pretty crummy circumstances around you and you probably feel sad. You're probably a little bit depressed. So, how do we have joy in every circumstance when it seems like the greatest threat to our joy is our circumstances? Well, what if I was to tell you that just

like happiness is based on circumstances, that joy is actually based on circumstances too? So, what if the key to living with joy in every circumstance is realizing that our joy is based on circumstances?

Now, let me shift to Jesus to kind of unpack that and tell you what I'm meaning, because everything we have to learn, we have to learn from Jesus of how to live with joy in every circumstance. Think about when Jesus first came. Just even how it was announced. "Good news of great joy." Not just joy, great joy, and like, best Christmas anthem. "Joy to the world, the Lord has come." I mean, Jesus came bringing joy to the world, but think about His circumstances. He's born in a manger. That's like an animal's food trough in a barn because there was no room for Him in any kind of an inn or a hotel. There was no fanfare. He's got this poor, lowly family. And for the next 30 years, He was hidden as a carpenter. He's basically invisible and forgotten. And when He started his ministry, He was rejected by all the religious leaders. He was made fun of by his own friends and family. He was forsaken by his closest disciples. He was falsely accused, falsely convicted, beaten, humiliated, and ultimately put to death by the very people he came to bring joy to. That's some bad circumstances. And you've probably experienced some of those same things. Like maybe even coming here tonight, like you feel forgotten or hidden at work or school. Or maybe you've been rejected or made fun of by friends or your own family. Maybe you've been falsely accused of something. Or maybe things just haven't gone out the way you planned or the way you expected them to go. It's really rotten circumstances. And Jesus had them too. But I love in Hebrews 12, what it says about Jesus. It says, "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of God." I love that whole, just like, scorning shame. Like He's literally laughing at shame. He is living with so much joy because that was Jesus's life. He lived with a constant joy in the good and the bad.

And all through the gospels, you see people flocking to Jesus. Not because He's this sad, somber, depressed, "my circumstances are crummy" guy. It's because He was so full of life and joy. You see children coming to Him. You see Him going to dinner parties and wedding banquets. He lived this life of joy, but like how? It wasn't in spite of His circumstances. It actually was because of them. And what I mean by that is, look at Matthew 17. This is when God is speaking out over Jesus. And He says, "This is my Son, whom I love. With Him, I am well pleased. Listen to Him." Jesus could have had what was easily described as like the worst of worldly circumstances, but the circumstances that He focused on were not worldly. They were kingdom. He was 100% settled on standing in the circumference around Him looking like this. This was Jesus's circumstances. His identity of, "I am a Son. And I'm not just a Son. I am a beloved Son in a relationship with My Father. And My Father has empowered Me with all kinds of purpose and mission." And He knew His Father's heart for Him was that He was pleased with Him. That He accepted Him. That He loved Him, and that He had empowered and commissioned and given Him all authority. Those were the actual real circumstances around Jesus' life that He looked at, that surrounded Him. That actually said, "This is what it looked like to live in the kingdom while in the world versus living in the world and waiting on the

kingdom." It was the superior reality of those circumstances. You see, Jesus lived with a nevertheless mindset. Say nevertheless. Now say, nevertheless. It's good. You see, nevertheless is a word bridge between two truths. That while something is true, it does not negate the superiority of a higher truth. It's saying that there are two truths, but that one is lesser and one is greater. See, Jesus refused to settle for a lesser truth. He refused to settle for living life in the world. He chose a higher truth, a superior reality of the kingdom circumstances of His life. You see, truth, Jesus wasn't wanted in His own hometown, and He wasn't recognized as their king. Superior truth, His kingdom is not of this world. Truth, Jesus was rejected by his own friends and family. Superior truth, Jesus was accepted and loved by His heavenly Father. Truth, the person in front of me is dead. Nevertheless, I have come to give life and life to the full. Truth, this person in front of me is demon-possessed. Superior truth, I have come to free the oppressed. Truth, this person in front of me is blind. Superior truth, I've come to give sight to the blind. Right before Jesus is going to the cross and He's praying in the garden He's about to endure the worst suffering of anyone that has ever existed. He says, truth, "If it is possible, let this cup pass for me." And then, what is probably the greatest nevertheless ever said in scripture is, "Nevertheless, not my will, yours be done." Jesus would never settle for the less. He didn't want to have to do it, but nevertheless, Your will, not mine. It was the reality of Jesus' true circumstances that determined His joy. So, what does that mean for us? See, the nevertheless of joy is deciding that, while there may be truths in my life, there may be truths around me in my earthly circumstances that are true. Nevertheless, I refuse to settle for those and allow them to decide my joy. I will declare a superior truth that is my kingdom reality, that are my kingdom circumstances. Because each of us are standing in a circumference of truth around us. Nevertheless, are you aware that there is a superior, higher truth of the circumstances around you?

So, Romans 14:17 tells us this, "That the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." This verse is really clear. It's telling us that the kingdom's not about earthly stuff. It's not about eating and drinking. It's not about the world around you. It's about righteousness, peace, and joy. But order matters. You can't have joy until you have peace and you can't have peace until you have righteousness. So, your circumstances, these superior ones, they all start with your identity as righteous. Righteous means having right standing with God. It means that everything between you and God is okay. Like, you guys are good. And that happens when you receive the grace of Jesus. Grace is undeserved favor. It is the forgiveness of your sins, and it is a complete deposit of the righteousness, right standing, into your life. I love it. Jesus says, "If anybody is in me, they are a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come." Old truth, higher reality, superior truth. "That God made Jesus who knew no sin to become sin for us so that we could become His righteousness." Truth is I'm a sinner. Superior truth, I'm now righteous in God. See, Jesus didn't come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people alive. He came to make lost people found, broken people whole, orphans into beloved sons and daughters, sinners into righteous. While something is true, He came to bring a higher truth. And it's out of that righteousness, receiving His grace, that we now can have peace in our relationship with God.

Peace in knowing we're fully accepted and wanted. Peace in knowing we don't have to prove anything. Peace in knowing we're forgiven and free. Peace in knowing we can boldly come to the throne of grace where we will find mercy and grace in our time of need. And having a restored identity and having a reconciled relationship with God, now we can go and walk boldly with joy into the purposes and the plans that God has for us. We can live on mission, building His kingdom and not our own. And that's the joyful life that we get to live. That's how the kingdom life is, righteousness, peace, and joy. I love it. Jesus says this in John 15:11. He says, "I've told you this, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." This is in a long run of things that Jesus is telling us, but it's basically, Jesus is saying this about everything that He tells us. That everything He tells us is so that we can live with joy. That we can remain in what He says and allow what He says to be the circumference of our life and the circumstances around us. And that be what defines our joy, because my joy, your joy, is completely dependent on our circumstances. And in Jesus, the ultimate circumstances we have are these four core truths. That God is good even when the world is not. That Jesus has forgiven me no matter what I've done. That I am loved for who I am, not for what I do. And that everything is possible. There is always hope. This is the how of Jesus. This is how we never settle for less.

We all have truths in our lives. Every single one of us have truths of the circumstances in our lives that want to steal, kill, and destroy our joy. Nevertheless, we live from our kingdom circumstances, not in response to our worldly circumstances. And that allows us to live with a deep, inner joy that can never be taken. And so, I want to kind of wrap all this up. I want to tie a bow on this with something really unique. I want us to take communion together. And so, the band's going to come out because we're going to do one more song at the end, and the team's going to get up, and they're going to start passing out communion. And you may be thinking, "How is this unique? And what in the world does this have to do with joy?" Well, I'm going to have us take communion in a way and kind of from a posture that you probably never have. And I'm going to share with you how it has actually everything to do with joy. You see, first, if you're not familiar with communion, just what communion is, is it represents everything that Jesus has done for us. His broken body and His shed blood. And receiving communion is saying, "I believe in it. I believe Jesus is who He says He is, and He did what He said He came to do for me." And so, communion is for anybody that's actually placed their faith in Jesus. And so, if that's not you, like if you're not ready, if you're not comfortable, you can let that pass by. But if you have believed, or even tonight, you're like, "I want to believe this. I'd love to be able to live with a deep, inner joy, no matter what's happening. I'd love it if these were the reality of my life. If these were my superior circumstances." Then, maybe tonight you're going to receive communion for the very first time. But here's the thing. Most of us, communion's probably always been taken from a place where it's really somber. Like, we quietly reflect. We examine. We think. And it's done in a very reverent and really kind of an intimate way. And there's nothing wrong with that, but that's not the only way to take communion. You see, there's a whole joyful and party side to communion. Because you see, communion represents the greatest victory that was ever won. It represents Jesus being led to His death as the

sacrificial lamb, but then roaring back to life as the conquering lion. It represents all of our striving being finished. It represents death's hold being broken. Sin's power being demolished. It represents the life of the kingdom being brought and dropped right into our laps. It is because of Jesus' shed blood and His broken body that life in the kingdom is even available to us. And so, literally, if there's ever something you could do with some joy, it is receiving communion. Because it represents everything about Jesus. Everything that He's done. All of the victory that He's won. And it represents you having circumstances that are far superior than anything that is around you. And I love it when Jesus is unpacking communion in Scripture. He's really clear about what to do. He says, "As often as you do this, remember Me. Don't think about you. Think about Me. Remember Me. Remember who I am. Remember what I've done. Remember what I've given you. Remember My grace, My forgiveness, My spirit, My life, My joy, My victory. Everything I've given you, remember that."

And so, let's do this. I want to invite us. Would you all just stand up? And I want us to take communion first, just from a posture of standing as a sign of faith that I'm literally standing in the circumference of this as my circumstances. That God is good. Jesus has forgiven me. I am loved and everything is possible. And what I want to do is I actually want to remember Jesus, and I want us to give Him a shout of thank you. Because He says on the night that He was betrayed, that He broke the bread and He gave thanks. He was grateful to be broken so that we could be made whole. And He says, "As often as you do this, to remember Me." And so, do this. Take your piece of cracker, represents His broken body. Let's just lift it to Jesus. And on the count of three, give the loudest yelling "thank You" to Jesus you can muster. You ready? One, two, three. Thank You! That's right. Let's receive that, remembering Jesus. And then, it says that He took the cup and He said, "This cup represents my blood that's poured out for you. I'm writing a new deal with it. No longer are you going to be judged by what you've done. You will only be judged by what I've done. And I've done it perfectly. It is finished, period." So, He says, "As often as you do this, remember Me." So, can we lift this to Jesus on the count of three? Tell Him thank You. One, two, three. Thank You. So, Jesus, thank You for Your grace and Your life. Thank You that because of You, no matter our earthly circumstances, nevertheless, we have a superior reality in You to allow us to live with joy in every circumstance. In Jesus' name, Amen.