

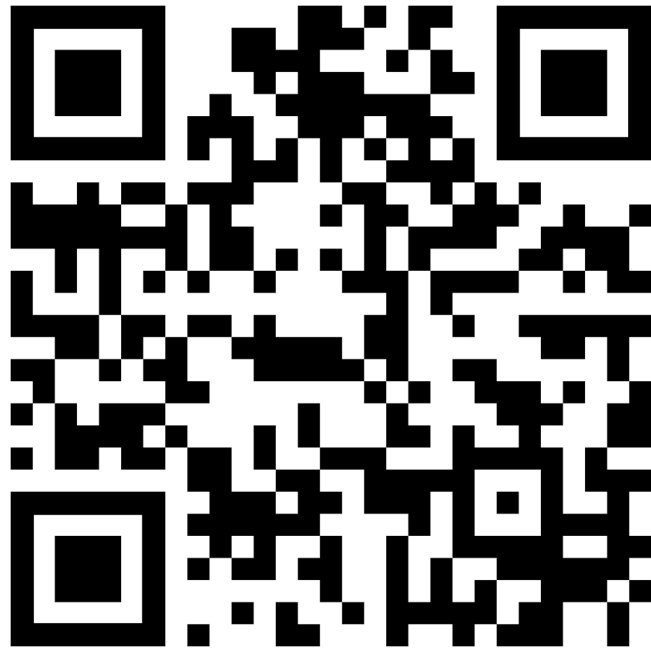
**A**

**DIFFERENT**

**WAY** DO WHAT JESUS DID

**SEASON ONE TRANSCRIPTS**

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## **A DIFFERENT WAY**



**JANUARY 21, 2024**  
**SEASON ONE, EPISODE ONE**  
**“CAN I REALLY DO WHAT JESUS DID?”**

Alright. Hey everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today. And what a great start to the year it's been here at Valley Creek. God is moving; people are responding. There are great things in store for us. And so today we're going to kick off a brand new series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. And this is going to be a big series. It's going to be a long series, it's going to be a deep series. If you were here with us last year when we did Hope Carriers and went really deep and really long in that, that's what we're going to do in this series.

And I'm excited about the series. I've been praying for it. We've been preparing for it. We've been waiting for it. And here's why I want to do this series. I want to do this series because I want to live a different way and do the things that Jesus did. I want to do this series because I want to be a disciple. I want to follow Jesus. I want to know Jesus. I want to walk with Jesus. I want to be with Jesus. I want to learn to think like and talk like and act like and live like and believe like Him. I want to go deeper with God. I want to live like the kingdom is real and that I'm a citizen of it. I want to live like I'm a new creation. I want to live like I can actually take off the old self and put on the new self.

I want to live like I can count myself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. I want to live like I'm a partaker of the divine nature. I want to grow in grace and knowledge. I want to grow in holiness and humility and purity. I want to do this series because I am hungry and thirsty for righteousness. And I believe like so many of you are too. You see one of the things that I got to do in November and December is I went to every one of our campuses and I would spend an entire day in the atrium from 8:00 in the morning to 2:00 in the afternoon hanging out in the atrium talking to as many people as I could possibly talk to. And I got to talk to so many people and get a perspective that you rarely get. The perspective you get is, is your service at your campus and the section that you sit in. But I got to go and see everybody at every place and talk to everyone. And here's what I discovered. We are an incredibly diverse church. Like, you may not be aware of it, or you may not even think about it, but we are incredibly diverse.

Like we have people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation speaking all kinds of different languages. We have people of every generation. We have kids, and students, and young adults, and young marrieds, and single professionals, and middle age, and empty nesters, and later in life. We have people of every socioeconomic status you could think of. We have people who are homeless, people who are in poverty, people who are middle-income people who are multimillionaires. We have people on every different phase of their spiritual journey. Seekers and skeptics, sinners and saints and sages. We have people who today is their first time coming to our church, people who have been coming for a few months or a few years, and people who have been here for decades, serving and loving and walking with God. We have this profound sense of diversity. And yet in the midst of that, there's this profound sense of unity.

In the midst of all that diversity, here's what just about everyone told me is how grateful they are for the grace of God in their life and how grateful they are to be a part of this church and

what God's doing in them. Just about every person I talk to told me about how they got invited from someone else to come and be a part of this or invited into a Circle or invited into a serve team. And just about everyone I talked to had this sense of a hunger and a thirst for more of God. You see, I think if we're honest, there is a growing sense of discontent for American Christianity. A growing sense of this understanding that American Christianity just doesn't work, if we can say it like that. American Christianity, consumerism, convenience, comfort, control.

We identify with Jesus. We're a fan of Jesus. We speak the language of Jesus. And we want Jesus in our life. We just want Jesus AND our way of life. Jesus AND the world. Jesus AND my flesh. Jesus and something. And we almost treat Jesus like he's a buffet line. Like we can go through and pick and choose that which we want. Like, I'll take some joy and I'll take some of that peace and I'll take a big old scoop of forgiveness and a whole lot of eternal salvation. But I'll pass on the obedience. I'll pass on the holiness. I'll pass on servanthood and generosity. Those aren't really the things for me. And we have this lack of intent to actually obey and actually follow and actually become like Jesus. And it just doesn't work. Like we've been angry and we've been angry for the last 20 years.

We got so much lust inside of us and we can't even remember the last time we weren't full of lust. It's like every year, we're a year older, but the anxiety and the depression and the fear, it feels like they keep growing. It's like it doesn't work. I mean, think about what we have deduced American Christianity to, we have reduced it to a one-hour-a-week gathering, one-hour-a-week, a one-hour-a-month, a one-hour-a-quarter, or a one-hour-a-year gathering as if that's what Jesus has invited us to. Now hear me, the one-hour-a-week gathering that we're all in right now is incredibly essential to your life, but it is not sufficient. I mean, think about what we do in this gathering. We have the Word of God taught and spoke over our life. incredibly essential in your life. It's just not sufficient. I mean, just think of the last two, two and a half years' worth of series that we've gone through as a church.

Yahweh. Hope Carriers. Holy Spirit. Ancient Future. Heart of a King. Face Your Giants. Kingdom Culture. You remember some of these? Okay, well, if a one-hour-a-week sermon was enough, wouldn't we all be profoundly mature and free and loving? Because man, that's a lot. That's a lot. Essential but not sufficient. Essential. Why? Because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. God says His Word will not return void, but will accomplish the purposes for which He sent it. Humbly accept the Word of God, which was planted. It's essential but not sufficient. Now, think about what else we do. We meet with God in worship. Think of the last two, two and a half years' worth of encounters and moments and experiences where you've heard God, you've met with God, you've felt God, you were around God, God was here and you knew it.

Essential, but not sufficient. But it's essential because God says in His presence is fullness of joy and He inhabits the praises of His people. Surely God is in this place and I was not aware of it. Think of the community that we have when we come into that one hour, whatever frequency

we're at, there's community in this place. But we have reduced that down to talking about the Cowboys and the weather. American Christianity, incredibly essential, but not sufficient. I mean, the Bible says do not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but spur one another on. To each one of you, a spiritual gift has been given for the building and the strengthening of the body. Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. Essential, but not sufficient to just come and go.

And then think about the things we do in the rest of our Christian life, our quiet times, our devotions, our podcasts, our Bible studies, our influencer algorithms, our little quotes, our quips, all these different kinds of stuff. Nothing wrong with all of that stuff. Here's just what I'm trying to tell you. It just doesn't work, does it? I'm just trying to draw attention to some, maybe some things that you have been experiencing. American Christianity doesn't work. Why? Because it's a form of godliness without any power. It doesn't have any intent to actually obey or follow Jesus and become like Him. And what we would call the deeper life, the Bible would just call normal life. What we would call radical, the Bible would just call being a disciple. What we would call extremism, the Bible would just call a new creation in Christ. And so what we macro, this isn't pointed at anyone or anything, it's just macro, would call American Christianity, the Bible would call just being a part of the crowd.

In the Bible, there's the crowd and there's disciples. There's no in-between. There's people who identified and liked and were interested in Jesus, inspired by Him and loved the bread and the fish. And then there were disciples who had an intent to obey, an attempt to follow and wanted to become like Him. American Christianity as we know it and as we've done it, it just doesn't work. And there is a hunger and a thirst for a different way. A way to do the things that Jesus did so we can do some of the things that Jesus did. You see, the question I want to ask you is this really simple question at the beginning of this year is like, who are you becoming? Have you thought about this in a while? Like, like, like who are you becoming? Not what are you accomplishing? Not what are you doing? Not what are you acquiring?

Like, like you. Like what kind of person are you becoming? Are you growing? Are you changing? Are you becoming more loving and free and healthy and whole? Like are you different than you were two years ago? Who are you becoming? And maybe a better question is to ask you this. Who do you want to become? Have you ever just thought about that? Do you have any vision for your life of like, who do I want to be two years, five years, 20 years from my life? Who do I actually want to be become? And then you have to ask yourself this question. Does the current lifestyle you're living, will it allow you to become that kind of person? Who do I want to be 20 years from now? Well, if my life is just a result of my lifestyle, is the lifestyle I've chosen going to help me become that person I want to be in 20 years? And do I even think I can become that kind of person?

Or am I just sitting around waiting for God to throw a lightning bolt into my life, boom and just magically make me loving and peaceful and kind and gracious? Who are you becoming?

Because you're being shaped and molded and informed by something or someone. You're a disciple, a learner, a student, a follower of something or someone. Like we've got the Swifties, and we've got the Trumppers, we've got the Never-Trumppers. And then we've got the celebrities and the influencers and the bloggers and all these people that want to shape and form and mold us into some, but like, like who are you becoming and who is shaping and molding you? And so maybe it's time for a different way because whether you realize it or not, you have a way you live your life. You have routines and rhythms and patterns and attitudes and behaviors and perspectives. You have a way that you live your life. And a lot of the people that I talk to, if we're really honest with ourselves, we don't really like the way we live our life.

Stressed, anxious, afraid, worried, overwhelmed, always busy, chronically tired, chronically sick. It's like all of it, all the time. And we're exhausted and we're overwhelmed and Jesus sees that. And so He invites us to a different way. "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 and heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." We in American Christianity, read this verse as, when you've got problems, situations, storms, circumstances in your life, crowd to God, let Him fix it. And then you can go right back to the way you were living your life. But what He says is, "Come to me. Come one, come all. Wherever you've been, whatever's going on, whatever your life looks like, whomsoever will may come. All you who are weary, weary, tired, wore out, broke down, beat down, discouraged, defeated, exhausted and burdened, full of cares and worries and anxieties and fears and doubts. And I will give you rest."

He offers to give you rest, not circumstantial rest out here, but a deep inner peace where your soul and your mind and your heart can be at rest. And He says, "I will give it to you," meaning that rest won't be found with your counselor or your medication or your self-help programs without Jesus. Because it's only found in Jesus. "Take my yoke upon you." You say, what's a yoke? A yoke is like a wooden thing that they would put on two oxen that would strap them together so they were forced to go in the same way. Whichever way those oxen were going, they couldn't go in different ways because they were yoked together.

So they had to take the same way. And Jesus is saying, "Take my yoke upon you like come take my way of life upon yourself. Come do your life my way, the way that I do life. Yolk yourself in with my way of life and watch what happens. But to be yoked in with me, you first have to unyoke yourself with the world." You have to first take off the yoke of self, off the yoke of flesh, off the yoke of the world. Why? Because you can't be yoked to two things at the same time. You can't take two ways at the same time. And the reason so many of us have this divided tearing in our own soul all the time is because we have yoked ourself to the world and to Jesus at the same time. And it's pulling us in two different ways. So our soul is never at rest. It's always being torn apart because you can't walk in two ways.

"Take that way off and come with me on my way and learn from me. Let me be your teacher. Let me be your leader. Let me be your Rabbi and show you how to actually live your life and your circumstances and your situations. For I am gentle. I am kind. I'm patient. I'm gracious and compassionate and loving and I am humble. I'm not arrogant and narcissistic and prideful. I'm a servant and I'm submitted and surrendered to the Father. So the kingdom can flow through my life into your life and you'll find rest for your souls." Remember when the Bible says something twice in the same section, it's really trying to emphasize it and not just rest, but rest for your soul, the deepest part of you. "For my yoke, my way is easy and my burden is light." Easy and light. Not hard and heavy. A lot of us are convinced the way of Jesus is hard and heavy. And the reason it feels hard and heavy to us is because we've tried to be yoked to Jesus and the world at the same time.

If you've ever really fully taken off the yoke of the world and the yoke of self and the yoke of sin and really gone in Jesus' way a hundred percent with everything that you've got, He promises you'll see that it's easy in light. You know what's hard and heavy? The world, religion, your way of life is actually very hard and heavy. And you know what's easy and light? Not worrying, not being greedy, being able to love your neighbor and forgive those who hurt you and trust in God in all things, that's easy and light. You know what's hard and heavy? Idolatry, immorality, anger and lust and greed. The love of money, the love of self, that is a hard and heavy way to live. And Jesus invites us to a different way.

He says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." In other words, He says, "Arrange your life around me. Arrange your life, rearrange your life. Order your life. Reorder your life around me and my way and I will take care of everything else." Can I ask you a really honest question? At the beginning of this year, what is your life arranged around? What is your life ordered around? Like, what's the thing that you arrange everything else in your life? Is it finances? Is it work? Family, relationships, yourself? Because make no mistake about it, you seek first something, something is in the center, and you arrange your life around it, believing that if I arrange my life around that thing, it will take care of everything else. Jesus promises that if we arrange, rearrange, our life around Him, He will take care of the rest of it.

In fact, do you remember when Jesus says to Peter, "Come, follow me." Come follow me. What? What's He saying here? See, we've Americanized this and what we're saying is, "Come receive forgiveness for your sins and eternal salvation and go right back to your life." No, He says, "Come. There's an invitation to respond and move and follow me." It's very literal like, "Follow me." Like, "Be with me. Wherever I am, that's where I want you to be. I want you to do what I do, and go where I go. Learn to live how I live. When I stop, you stop. And when I move, you move. And the lifestyle that I've embraced is the lifestyle I want you to embrace." What He's saying is, "Come and let me be your teacher. Let me be your Rabbi. Let me show you how to live your life in this broken world. Let me teach you how to walk with the grain of grace. Let me teach you how to flow with the current of creation. Let me show you a different way."



And what we think is that Jesus invited Peter to come and learn how to do church work and preach the messages and eternal salvation. So we hear this and think, okay, I come. I follow Jesus. I'm saved. I'm forgiven. I'm good, we say. "Come be my disciple and let me show you a different way to live your life." In fact, this is why He says in the Sermon on the Mount, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road" – a different way – "that leads to life, and only a few find it." Jesus says there are two ways. There is a wide and broad way. And that is the way of the world. Come one, come all. Do what you want, when you want, how you want. Take any way that you want. You can combine ways, you can do it your way. You can have religion; you can have all religion. You can have the world; you can have all of the world. You can do whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want.

And all it sounds so good and many go. But look what it says, that way leads to destruction. It's not a threat from Jesus. He's just telling you how it actually is. He's not threatening you saying, "If you go that way, there will be...!" No, He's telling you, "Hey, if you go that way, just so you know, at some point in time, like a bandit, destruction will come upon you when you least expect it, on your family, on your health, on your finances, on your soul, on your mind, on your spirit. But there's a different way, a narrow way that leads to an ever widening life. And only a few go on it." Which means, a different way means you are going to feel different than the people around you. If you take a different way, you decide to go the way of Jesus, not everyone's going to like it. Not everyone's going to get it. Not everyone's going to appreciate it. Your family, your spouse, your friends, your co-workers, the other kids at school. It's not going to make any sense to them, but it's a narrow way. And only a few find it. Jesus was a radical, a revolutionary, and a pioneer. So if I take the way of Jesus, I will be perceived by the people around me as radical, revolutionary, and as a pioneer, of which the Bible would just say is "normal."

Are you with me on this? I mean, think about it. You've been set apart. You are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You have a new nature. You're dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. You're a partaker of the divine nature. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. How in the world do you think you could live like everyone else and not stand out and not be set apart and not be a little different? We got to stop being afraid about other people thinking we're different. You are different because you're included in Christ, that's pretty different, in Jesus' name. One last verse for you. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the Gospel will save it." See, we want Christianity without the cross.

We like Christianity with Jesus on the cross. We just forget that He also has told us we have to take up our cross. We want to be fans of Jesus without actually following Jesus. And we forget that to be a disciple means I actually have to deny myself, and I have to deny my way, and my flesh, and the world that screams and calls and begs me to come with convenience and

comfort and say, "I know, but I have to deny myself here because there is a different way. There is a way of Jesus." And we spend so much time trying to save our life, control it, hold it all together, put it together, be successful, be affluent, be prosperous. And the more I try to save my life, the more I lose it. But if I would just give it up and say, "God, I'm going to entrust all of this to You and take Your way," He promises that, "I will save it." Maybe it's time for a different way in Jesus' name. Okay, you ready for this? Here's what we're going to say all through this series.

If you want to do the things that Jesus did, you first have to do the things that Jesus did. Say, what does that mean? That means if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to first do the things that Jesus did. It means if I want His life, I have to take on His lifestyle. If I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, I have to be willing to do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. If I want to do His works, then I have to be willing to take on His way. Say, what does this mean? Here's what it means. If you want to do the things that Jesus did, which we all do, like, heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cast out demons. You're like, "Those are big kingdom things." Like, okay, but how about just this? Like love your neighbor, and live free from money, and not be afraid, and have joy, and peace, and hope, and be full of faith, and deeply connected with God, and be free, and know what your life purpose is, and where you came from, and why you're here, and where you're going?

Those are the things that Jesus did, okay? But if I want to do those things, I have to first do the things that Jesus did, which are what? Things like, engage the Scriptures, and fast, and pray, and silence and solitude, and Sabbath, and celebration, and confession, and generosity, and service. You're like, "I don't know that I want to do what Jesus did anymore." It's foolishness to think I can do what Jesus did on-the-spot without doing what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. And so we have to look differently at the way He lived His life if we want to do the works of His life. I mean just, just look at this. This is just to try to bring everybody into the game. These are just some of the things that Jesus did, right? You read the Gospels and these are the things that we want.

Like, He had peace and chaos. The boat sinking, the storm is raging, everyone's panicking, He's sleeping. No matter how chaotic it got, Jesus had peace. How about self-control in the face of temptation? When the devil himself was trying to tempt Jesus, He had victory and walked in authority. He had joy in every circumstance, no matter how much grief or sorrow or pain or hardship. He had a sense of wellbeing with God. He had purpose in the mundane, whether it was serving as a carpenter, being hidden for 30 years, washing the disciple's feet, walking down the road, He saw purpose in the routine details of His life. He had hope in the midst of despair, right? When everything has fallen apart and Lazarus has been dead for three days, the little girl is dying, He's on his way to the cross, He still had a sense of the confident expectation of the goodness of God in the here and now.

He had wisdom in life. He didn't live down to the world's foolishness. He thought the very thoughts of God. He knew what was good, what was true, what is right. He had love in every relationship, whether it be difficult Peter, rebellious Judas, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery. He had freedom from the world. There's no anxiety in His life. There's no depression, there's no fear. He wasn't controlled by anyone or anything. And He didn't try to control anyone or anything. He didn't love money. He was free. He had security. He forgave no matter what. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And He had this profound connection with God in a disconnected world. These are just some of the things that Jesus did. Aren't these the things you want in your life? Without sitting down and talking to you, my guess would be most of your life is spent trying to pursue these things.

This is what we actually want. The question is, how are you trying to get this? Are you trying to get it through counseling, medication, self-help? Are you trying to get it through striving, performance, struggling, earning, succeeding, acquiring more resources, controlling the things around you? Through hot baths and long walks? My guess would be this is what you want. But if these are the things that Jesus did, then I first have to do the things that Jesus did to access them. Because these are the things that are found on a different way, down the narrow road, through the small gate. I mean look at, this is going to basically be the theme verse for this series. "Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." Train yourself to be godly. It's a command, not a suggestion. It's not an idea. It's not a good hope or wishful thinking.

And notice it doesn't say "try" to be godly. Train yourself to be godly. What's your plan to train yourself to be godly? Do you have one? Because ironically, in every other area of life where we want to succeed, we know we need a plan and we know we need to train. Ain't nobody in this room thinks that if you want to play Beethoven, you can just sit down at the piano and try, try and boom, you got it. No, you know you have to train, you have to practice. And for two years you have to sit down at that piano every single day and practice chords, and practice charts, and practice reading music, and practice moving your fingers. But if you train yourself and you practice, two years later, you could probably play Beethoven pretty well.

Ain't none of us think that we could just put on a Cowboys helmet and a jersey and run out on the field and be a part of the game. I know they need some help, but, but ain't none of us think we can do that. We get smashed. What do we think? We think, well, if I really want to do that, what do I need to do? I need to train. I need to train like those professional athletes. I need to eat like them, and sleep like them, and work out like them, and push myself, and I need to learn the plays, and I need to get in a practice squad, and I need to practice, practice, practice. We would never think we could just show up to the game, put the helmet on the jersey and go out and catch a touchdown pass. You would train yourself. Okay? Ain't none of us think that we can just fly to Beijing and just walk down the streets and speak Mandarin and connect with everybody in China. No, you would starve to death. You'd be so hungry you wouldn't be able

to communicate. But if you actually want to do that, you could train yourself and for the next however many years, sit and learn the language, and learn the alphabet, and learn how to speak it, and how to listen to it, and how to hear it. And you could train yourself to do it.

Ain't nobody think that we could just decide one day to be a doctor and just look at somebody and say, "Hey, I've diagnosed you. I think it's your appendix. Why don't you lay down? We'll take it out right now." No thank you. But if you go through a lot of training, I could actually become a doctor. So why then do we think we don't have to train ourselves to be like Jesus? We just think we can just try on-the-spot, or that somehow God will magically do it because I'm saved. And here's what we do. We try to jump into the things Jesus did on-the-spot without doing the things He did behind-the-scenes. And we fail and we get defeated and we say it doesn't work. It's like, we leave church and we're going out here and we've committed we're not going to be angry anymore. And then someone, before we even get out of the parking lot, cuts us off. And there is a reaction with both words and gestures that just come out of us.

And you're like, where did that even come from? I said I wasn't going to do it anymore. Well, the problem was is you tried to do it on-the-spot without doing the behind-the-scenes, like engaging the Scripture to wash my mind, or practicing servanthood where I give up control of my life. We say, "Hey, I'm not going to be lustful anymore. I'm not going to look at that thing." And so we've committed to do that and then all of a sudden, here we are in the moment, on-the-spot, and we look at the thing, and we do the thing, and then we are so defeated and embarrassed and all this stuff. What was the problem? The problem was we didn't practice. We didn't train ourselves back here by doing things like fasting, which is a practice of denying yourself and bringing your flesh into submission to your spirit.

We say things like this like, "I'm not going to blow up at my kids anymore. Oh, I really want to be a patient parent." And then they come home, you've had a long day at work, and they've had a long day at school, and they're rowdy, and bang! You just respond. And you lash out at them and you can't even believe it. And you're so disappointed in yourself. What happened? You tried to do something on-the-spot that you hadn't practiced behind-the-scenes. Like take a weekly Sabbath to rest and reorder your life and remind myself that God is in control. Or we say, "I'm not going to be gossiping and judgmental at school at lunch tables. I'm not going to do that anymore. I don't want to be that kind of student." And then we get to lunch and we find ourselves engaging in all of it. And we're not even sure how that-- Why? Because I tried to do something on-the-spot that I didn't practice behind-the-scenes and I failed miserably. Why? Because maybe I didn't practice any silence and solitude like Jesus does, to help me learn how to not speak and be in tune with God. Are you catching me on this? If I want to do what Jesus did, I have to first do what Jesus did. And any person that excels in anything in life knows that to do something with excellence in that space requires a tremendous amount of training and practice and discipline.

And yet, we get to our spiritual life and that logic goes out the window. This is why Jesus says, "Follow me." We think He means "follow me on-the-spot." He really means "follow me behind-the-scenes," and you'll become the kind of person who does the right thing on-the-spot. "Follow me in my lifestyle and you'll learn how to live my life." Because just so you know, your life is a direct result of your lifestyle choices. So if I don't like my life, don't get mad at your life. Look at your lifestyle and say, what do I need to think about differently? I mean, think about this. What is he talking about, Paul in this, in this passage, he's giving us this example of our spiritual growth in terms of physical training. He's talking about like, like your physical body. Like if you could use an example of like, a marathon. If you want to run a marathon, you've probably got to train. Yes. Like, if you just decided today you're going to run a marathon and you're going to like, practice by running home from here. Most of you would blow a lung before you even got to the road.

But you could actually run a marathon. You probably just have to start by doing what? Buying a pair of sneakers. And then the next day, putting them on and walking to the mailbox. And the day after that, one loop around the block. And the day after that, two loops around the block. The day after that, a mile walk. The day after that, a two mile walk. The day after that, a three mile walk. The day after that, a one mile run. The day after that, a two mile run. Are you catching me? This is true in our spiritual life. These are called disciplines, practices. That's what we're going to talk about in this series. You say, what is a discipline? The discipline is doing what I can do now so I can do what I want to do later. A spiritual discipline is doing what I can do now so I can access God's grace in a way that forms me and shapes me so I can do what I can't do later.

This is what we're going to talk about in this series, doing the things that Jesus did so we can do some of the things that Jesus did. Because the amazing part about Jesus is when He was on-the-spot, he never had to try. Why? Because he was so well trained. He didn't have to try to not be angry. He didn't have to try to not, He didn't have to try to forgive. He didn't have to try to love his enemies. He didn't have to try to not love money. Why? Because He was the kind of person that those things didn't even exist in. So we'll get here, but it was actually easy for, easier for Jesus to say, "Father, forgive them" while on the cross than, "Father, get them good." Because He was the kind of person that, "Father, get them good" didn't even exist in. So could you become the kind of person who, when you're on-the-spot, doesn't have to try.

Because you've been training where you become the kind of person that like, if right now, if I handed you a pen, you're right-handed or left-handed, you wouldn't even think about it. You would grab it and just start writing. Why? Because you've trained yourself to write. If you know how to drive a car, you don't have to think about it. When you get in the car to go home, you've trained yourself to drive. It's automatic. You're the kind of person that can drive a car. If I throw something at you, you probably will dodge or flinch. Why? Because you've been trained to be the kind of person that sees things coming at you to get out of the way. Could we train ourselves in such a way that we become the kind of person that naturally and effortlessly just

does the things of Jesus? Because I'm a new creation in Christ. I'm dead to sin. It doesn't control me. I'm alive to God in Christ. I'm a partaker of a divine nature. I'm a beloved son. I live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

And so, if I'm not able to do the things that Jesus did, the problem isn't on the finished work of Jesus or the kingdom dynamics or realities. Maybe just the problem is, I haven't trained myself back here in the lifestyle of Jesus so that God can form my spirit here to become the kind of person that does what I want to do here. And so we're going to ask God and we're going to pray, show me Your ways and teach me Your paths. Show me a different way. God, show me a different path. And we've made journals for you in this series, A Different Way journals. They're available today. They're just at-cost. We made them as cheap as we possibly can. Here's my encouragement for you. Get one of these. And you say, well, why aren't you just going to give them to us? Because I think there's something that, that's like, \$7. The point is though, there's something about having something vested to say, I actually want to buy the pair of sneakers because I'm ready to go learn how to run a marathon. So I gotta have something vested in it.

And, and my hope for you is, is this is going to be like, we're going to do this series like, a long time. So I will get one of these so you can have all your notes and all your practices and all the things that God is going to be saying to you. And watch what God is going to do along the way. Because these are the kinds of things that Jesus did. And these are the kinds of things I know you want in your life. The question we have to ask is, is then how do we become this kind of person? Could you become the kind of person who doesn't worry and who doesn't love money and forgives those who hurt them and has hope in despair, and joy in grief, and lives this posture of love? Can you become that kind of person? I'm genuinely asking you that question. You don't have to answer out-loud, but can you become that kind of person?

Can you become this kind of person? Jesus seems to think that you can, but it's only possible if I'll go a different way. And the prayer that I want to invite you to just start is, Jesus, help me be open to a different way. Don't decide today whether you're going to take this way or not. Don't say, "Nope, I'm good with my life. I'm great. I like what I got going." And don't say, "Yeah, yeah, I'm going to do all of it." Like, we need to actually start this whole process with a sense of humility. Like Jesus, help me be open to a different way of doing my life. Because I've been so formed and conformed, and shaped and molded in my mind and my heart, in my soul and my body that I just kind of, do my rhythm and my routine and my patterns and my attitudes and my habits. And I don't even know why I do them all. I just do.

And some I like, and some of them I don't. But I need You, God, to search my heart and show me a different way, a way that leads to life. But I first need You to help me be open to it. See, Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened. Take my way upon you for it is easy and light." Here's the invitation for this series, for this season. Jesus says, "Hey, do you not like the way your life is going? Are you tired, and worn out, and stressed out, and burned out, and anxious, and depressed, and afraid, and feel like everything's outta control while

you're trying to control everything? Just, is it not, if you're honest, is it not working? Then come to me and I will show you a different way. And that way is easy and light."

But when we start on the different way, it will feel awkward and uncomfortable and unfamiliar and it will be unknown and it will not be what you want, but it will be exactly what you need. And in that way, you will discover immeasurably more than you can even ask or imagine. Jesus invites you to a narrow road a different way. If you like your life and you think it's going great and you want to keep going, then go for it. This is the cool part about this series. This is the cool part about Jesus. There are no expectations. There are only invitations. And Jesus would just say, "Think about the trajectory of this way and where it ends up." Because destruction will come like a bandit. It's not a threat, it's just the way things are.

Or you can try a different way that's a little more narrow, but it leads to an ever-widening life. Because as I follow Him on His different way, He will take me through dark valleys and green pastures, and He will prepare tables for me in the presence of my enemy, and lead me beside still waters. And while I follow grace and truth into the future, goodness and mercy are following me into the present. Maybe, maybe, maybe it's time for a different way in Jesus' name. Maybe we can do the things that Jesus did if we just start by learning, because we gotta learn how to do the things that Jesus did. So close your eyes.

What do you feel like the Holy Spirit is just inviting you towards today? What's He speaking? What's He saying? Is there anything in your heart that was stirred? Anything in you that caught your attention? Anything in you that made you think, man, there's more and there's a deeper life and, and there's a different way. And hear me, saying, "I want to take a different way." I'm not, it's not questioning your salvation or your forgiveness or your eternal security. I'm not. I'm talking about saying, "I want to be a disciple of Jesus," and actually follow Him and let Him teach me how to live my daily life. And so, Jesus, I just, I just want to invite You into this series and the season of our church.

Thank You that You are gentle and humble in heart and in the way that you deal with us. Come with that gentleness and that humility and be our teacher and help us learn how to live differently. Jesus, come and help us have courage and faith to take off the yoke of the world, the way of religion and self. And take Your way. Show us that it is easy and light. Come lead our church into deeper places. Come teach us how to be disciples of Jesus in a broken and lost world. Come stir up a hunger and thirst for righteousness in the deepest parts of our soul.

And we can't shake that. We can't shake. It can only be satisfied in You. I pray for every person that's a part of this church, myself included, that we will hear Your voice, that we will follow You by faith and that You will do a new thing in us as we take an ancient path towards the green pastures and still waters that You offer all of us. Jesus, help us be open to a different way in Your name. Amen.

## **A DIFFERENT WAY**



**JANUARY 28, 2024**  
**SEASON ONE, EPISODE TWO**  
**“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE AGAIN?”**



All right, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today. Last week, we kicked off our big new Spring series, A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. I'm really hopeful for how God is going to move in this series and in this season. We started by just calling out for God's grace. All week, we've just been praying together as a church of Jesus, help me be open to a different way. The reason we want to do this series is because there is a growing sense of hunger and thirst for righteousness. There's this growing sense in our church of people longing for more, longing for the deeper life, longing to walk in the Spirit, longing to know God and to become like Him and to really be His disciple.

There's this sense of, I want to learn how to live in God's kingdom and do life with Him. And so what we're doing in this series is we're just acting like we're a new creation in Christ. We're just trying to act like we can actually take off the old self and put on the new self. Like we actually can count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. We're acting like we're partakers of the divine nature, that we live in God's kingdom, and we're actually acting like we can actually do the things that Jesus did. You see, if we're honest with each other, there is a growing sense of discontent with American Christianity. All you have to do is look around. You might feel it. The people around you are experiencing it. The people in the world are experiencing it. I'm like, there's this growing sense of discontent in American Christianity and partially because it just doesn't work.

I mean, if you look at what we've reduced American Christianity down to, it's a one-hour-a-week, one-hour-a-month, one-hour-a-quarter gathering. We've made American Christianity comfort, convenience, consumerism, control. We identify with Jesus. We're a fan of Jesus. We believe in Jesus. We can speak the language of Jesus and we want Jesus. But we just want Jesus... and the world. Jesus and our flesh. Jesus and our way of life. We want Jesus and something else instead of just Jesus. And so, it's almost like we've made Jesus a buffet line, and we go through and we want some joy and we want His peace and we want forgiveness. And man, American Christianity, we want a super scooping of eternal salvation.

But then, we don't want any obedience. And we'll pass on the holiness. And servanthood, that's not really for me and my meal right now. And so, we claim Jesus, but we have no intent to actually follow Him or obey Him. And the problem is, it just doesn't work. It's a form of godliness without any power. And what happens is we just never change. We don't grow. We don't become healthy. We don't become free. It's like some of us have said we're an American Christian for 20 years, but we still worry as much today as we did when we got saved. Every year we're a year older, but our anxiety and our fear and our addiction and our sin patterns, they don't seem to be getting any smaller. In fact, they feel like they're getting bigger. And the sad part is, is at some point we've come to this conclusion where we no longer even expect to change. We no longer even believe that it's possible to grow. And we don't expect the people around us to change or grow.

And so, it's like we've reduced Jesus to the forgiveness of our sins and eternal salvation when we die. We've reduced Him to taking care of our past and our future somewhere way off there. Which means He has no relevance to our life in the here and now. And we forget that in Jesus, He calls us to go from glory to glory. Not in the way back there and not in the way out there, but in the here and now. So maybe, just maybe, it's time for a different way. You see, what we said last week is that if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to first do the things that Jesus did. If I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, I have to first do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. If I want to live the life of Jesus, I have to take on the lifestyle of Jesus. If I want to do the works of Jesus, I have to first walk in the ways of Jesus.

And you say, "What does that mean?" Well, it means if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to first do the things that Jesus did. If you want to do the things that Jesus did, like heal the sick and raise the dead and cast out demons. And live free from the love of money. And live free from anxiety and fear and worry. And love your neighbor and be deeply connected with God, and have a sense of internal security. And have joy and peace and hope in your life. Then you first have to do the things that Jesus did. His lifestyle. Things like prayer, and fasting, and Scripture, and silence, and solitude, and Sabbath, and confession, and celebration, and generosity, and servanthood. We have to take on His disciplines, His habits. We have to practice the way of Jesus so we can live the way of Jesus.

You say, "What are the things that Jesus did?" Well, we showed you this graphic, and we just said this is just a great example of the things that Jesus did. You read the Gospels. This is what you see. Jesus had peace in chaos. He had self-control in the face of temptation. He had joy in every circumstance, purpose in the mundane routine of His life. He had hope in the midst of despair, wisdom in life, love in relationships. He was free from the world. He was able to forgive no matter what. He had this deep connection with God. These are the things that Jesus did. And isn't this what you want in your life? Without even knowing you, I know you spend most of your life pursuing these things. Why? Because this is what we long for as humans. The only question is, how are you trying to get this? You're trying to get this primarily through counseling, medication, self-help, striving, performing, earning, success, control, the hot baths, long walks.

We said all that last week. How are you actually trying to get this? Or are you trying to do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did? See, in Mark 9, there's this really interesting story. Jesus goes up on the Mount of Transfiguration, and this man brings his demon-possessed son to the disciples and he asks for their help. And the disciples do everything they know to do to cast out this demon. Everything they've watched Jesus do. Everything Jesus has taught them. They know it's possible and they throw every trick they have at it, but they can't cast out the demon. And Jesus comes back down off the mountain and the exasperated father brings his boy to Jesus and says, "Jesus, I brought my son to your disciples. They couldn't do it. If you can, will you take pity on us and heal my son?" Jesus says, "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes."

He says, "I do believe, but help me in my unbelief." And with a single word, Jesus casts the demon out of the boy. He's completely healed. Everyone is amazed. And then, later when Jesus and the disciples are alone, they asked Jesus, "Jesus, why couldn't we cast that demon out? We did everything we knew to do and we couldn't cast it out. Why?" Jesus looks right back at them and He says, "This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting." Now, if you're familiar with the story, the most interesting part about the entire thing is nowhere in the story does Jesus pray or fast. So, they're a little confused. This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting. What is He talking about? He's saying, "If you want to do what I do on-the-spot, you got to do what I do behind-the-scenes." There was no prayer and fasting on-the-spot.

There was just a healing. There was just the power of God. There was just life. But Jesus lived a lifestyle of prayer and fasting behind-the-scenes. This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting. These are the kinds of things that can never happen on-the-spot. They only happen first behind-the-scenes. If I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, there's a word for this, I first have to be His... disciple behind-the-scenes. So, you ready to talk about this? Okay. The word disciple. It's a word we're familiar with and yet it's foreign to us at the same time. We know Jesus had disciples. We know we're called to make disciples. We use words like discipleship. But if we're honest, the word has a lot of mystery to it. We kind of keep it at a distance. If we're honest, it's a little bit intimidating. So, let's just redefine what a disciple is.

Again, a disciple is simply a learner, a student, a follower; one who becomes like the one they're following. A disciple is someone who has considered their ways and counted the cost and decided they want to follow Jesus. They want to be with Jesus. They want to be like Jesus. They want to learn to think like Him and talk like Him and act like Him and live like Him. They have decided to arrange and rearrange their life around Jesus. To order and reorder their life around Jesus. They have decided to come to Jesus with an intent to obey, an intent to follow. And they've submitted and surrendered their will to Him. And they aren't perfect, but when Jesus shows them where they're off, they're quick to repent to get in alignment with Him. And they have decided that Jesus is going to say things like, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." And they have decided that whatever Jesus says is what is good and what is true and what is right.

So, they want to actually become like Him, not just identify with Him. In fact, Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." A disciple is someone who is training and being trained to become like their teacher. It's a disciple. It's someone who is training and being trained to become like their teacher. Now, whether you realize this or not, you currently, in this moment, are a disciple of someone or something. The only question is that you choose that thing intentionally or unintentionally. You're a disciple of something. You're a learner, a follower, a student of someone or of something. Make no mistake about it. There is something that is forming and shaping and pressing and conforming your life into alignment with it.

The only question is, have you chosen it intentionally or have you unintentionally allowed it to form and shape your life? Like you might be a disciple of Fox News. You might be a disciple of social media. You might be a disciple of the algorithm. You might be a disciple of ChatGPT. You might be a disciple of Hollywood, Silicon Valley, Washington DC, Wall Street. You might be a disciple of Netflix. You might be a disciple of that celebrity or of that influencer, but make no mistake about it, someone or something is teaching you how to live your life. The only question is, did you choose it? Or did it choose you? And you say, "Well, how do I know what I'm a disciple of?" Well, you have to ask questions like this, who defines what is good and true and right in my life? Who do I submit and surrender to? Who defines what success looks like?

And how I should live my life and how I make decisions and how I should be a mom or a dad or a student or a worker? Who defines what's normal? You want to know how you know who you're a disciple of? Whose thoughts do you think? Whose words do you speak? Whose truths do you believe? Whose actions do you emulate? And whose ways do you walk in? That is who you are a disciple of. So, the question I have to ask myself is, am I a disciple of Jesus or of something else? Am I training and being trained to be like Him or to be like something in this world? Because Jesus says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you." In other words, Jesus says His disciples arranged their entire life around Him. They order and keep reordering and rearranging their life with Him at the center. And when they have chosen to arrange their life around Him, it impacts every other thing in their life.

Whatever you arrange your life around is who you are a disciple of and it impacts every other area of your life. The question is, have you arranged your life around the right thing? Now, do you remember the story of Peter? Peter's a fisherman. He's married. He's got his life. He's living his way. And then, one day Jesus comes walking down the shore of the Sea of Galilee and completely interrupts Peter's life. And He comes to Peter and says, "'Come follow me,' Jesus said, 'And I will make you fishers of men.'" Come and follow Me. It's an invitation to move, an invitation to respond. And when He says, "Follow Me," this is not figurative, flowery, subjective language. This is not Jesus saying, "Hey, stay where you are. Keep living your life, but just think about Me every once in a while. And put one of My little fish things on the back of your boat. And go to church when you can, and do some good in the world. All right. Take it easy." No.

This was very practical and very literal. "You follow Me now. You come where I go. You stay where I stay. You live how I live. You learn to do life the way that I do life. Come and follow Me. Be with Me in relationship. And I'm going to teach you how to live your life. I want to be your teacher. I want to be your Rabbi. And I want to teach you the best way to do your life and I will make you. You don't have to change yourself because you can't. But if you come and follow Me, I will shape you and form you and mold you into My image and My likeness." And it says, "At once they left their nets and followed Him." In other words, Peter considered his ways. He

counted the cost and he left everything. He left all of the way he was doing his life to say, "I'm going to learn how to do it Jesus' way." Now compare that to the rich, young ruler.

He's rich, he's young, and he's a ruler. If we're honest, it's the life we want, but what a burden to bear. What a hard way to have to live your life as a young person. And he comes to Jesus and he says, "Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" In other words, he sees value in Jesus. He's inspired by Jesus. He sees good in Jesus and he wants what? Forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. And Jesus says, "You know the commandments, keep them." And the man says, "I've kept all of them since I was a boy." And then, look what it says. Jesus looked at him and it says, "He loved him. 'One thing you lack,' He said, 'Go sell everything you have and give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow Me.'" At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth." Here it is again, come follow me. Not figurative, subjective, flowery language.

Very practical. "You, come follow Me right now." And Jesus loved the man, which means He had good will towards the man. His will for the man was good. And He says, "One thing you lack," what was he lacking? Jesus. See, this man was a disciple of money. Money was his teacher. Money was his leader. Money was his Lord. And Jesus is saying, "Hey, if you want to be My disciple, you can't be a disciple of money. And so, the thing that you lack is Me. And the greatest barrier between you and Me right now is your money. And so, I don't need your money. In fact, I'm asking you to give it to the poor. I'm going to free you from the love of money and teach you how to do your life." But the man didn't want to walk in the way of Jesus in the area of finance. He wanted the way of Jesus in the way of forgiveness and eternal salvation, but not in the way of finance. So, his face fell, fell sad, and he went away because he had great wealth.

The more success you have in the things and the ways of this world, the harder it is to submit and surrender those things to Jesus and choose His way. So, can I ask you a question? Are you more like Peter or like the rich, young ruler? At once, when He points something out, are you willing to change your way? Or do you often have your face fall sad and go away in a different direction because Jesus invited you to take His way in a way you didn't want to take? And what I love about Jesus is He doesn't violate the man's free will. He has given you the ability to choose who you want to be your teacher, who you want to be a disciple of, and He will not violate it. He will not force you. He will not convince you. He will not lower the standard though either. And so, He loves you. And He says what you need to hear. And He invites you to come and follow Him. The only question is, will you choose to be His disciple?

I mean, Jesus says, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" That's a really fair question for Jesus, isn't it? Like, come on. Like, "Why do you call me Lord? Why do you call me master? Why do you call me God? Why do you call me Savior? Why do you call me teacher and then do not do what I say? It's a little paradoxical, isn't it? Because to be Lord means I know what's best, so come and follow Me." And so, every place where I know what God asked

me to do, but I choose to do it my way is a place that I'm saying, "I know better than you, Jesus, in this area." We just kind of got to say it like it is. It's like when I do it my way, what I'm saying is, "Jesus, I know more about sex and money and time and mental health and my life and relationships than you do. That's why I'm taking this way instead of Your way."

And we have to acknowledge the paradoxical nature of which American Christianity exists in. We trust Jesus, just catch it, for our eternal salvation, but not our daily life. I trust Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins, but not for the freedom of my current struggle. I trust Jesus for the next breath of air I breathe. Like that one. But not for the financial provision of my life. So, we have to acknowledge that many of us build our lives on an unstable paradoxical foundation in and of itself. I mean, it says, "Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did." If we say we're a follower of Jesus, then we actually got to do the things that Jesus did because we're following and learning and becoming like Him. This is why Jesus says, "If anyone" – that includes you, yes? – "would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

We love the cross of Jesus that was for the forgiveness of our sins that offered us the resurrection life. We're just not so sure we want our own cross. And so, we're a fan, but not necessarily a follower. And we forget to be a disciple means we have to deny ourselves. He says, "If you're going to come and follow me, you're going to have to deny yourself and pick up your cross." What does that mean? It means you have to die to your way of life. You have to die to your pride and your opinions and your rights, and you know better, and you want to do it like this and your feelings. That might be the hardest one for some of us to be crucified on. But if we want to experience a resurrection, there has to be first a crucifixion. So, could it be that we never experienced the resurrection life of Jesus because we're unwilling to first experience the crucifixion of our own flesh nature?

If I'm not willing to pick up my cross and die to myself, I can't then step into the resurrection life that He offers me. Which is why He says, "Whoever loses his life will save it." If I will deny myself and be crucified with Christ, I can rise to new life in Jesus. You see, every one of us at some point in time has to make a decision of whether or not Jesus is worth following. Just think about this with me for a second. At some point in time, you have to decide, is Jesus worth following? Like, does He know what He's talking about? Is He smart enough to follow? Is He wise enough to follow? Does He know what He's talking about? Does He have any clue? Is He good enough to follow? Because Jesus is either right about everything or He's right about nothing.

He's worth following in every way or in no way. He's either right about it all or He's right about none. He's either Lord of all or Lord of none. He either is worth all of my life or He's worth none of my life because He can't be mostly good. Usually true. Often right. For the most part, pretty good. Hence the paradoxical nature again. He's either worth following with all my life or with none of my life. And what we forget is that Jesus came in many ways to just show us how to be human. Right? Stay with me on this. Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. What's

amazing about Jesus is when we look at Jesus, we see exactly who God is like, and we see exactly who humanity was created to be.

Jesus says, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father. You want to know what God is like? I am the Son of God. I'm the exact representation of who God is. But you know what else I'm also like? I am the Son of Man. And I poured Myself out and I took on humanity and I moved into your neighborhood to show you a new way to be human." In fact, this is why it says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth," – this is His humanity; this is Jesus, the man – "with the Holy Spirit and power and how he went around doing good, healing all who are under the power of the devil because God was with Him." Jesus, the man, showed us what it was like to be a man in relationship with God and what that life could be like. Jesus showed us what it's like to live in right relationship with God and what this life actually looks like. This is why He says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." We literally read this and think, Jesus is the only way to heaven.

That is so true and so what this means, but it means more than that. It means He is the way to be human. He is the way to live your life. Do you know that the Bible says that Jesus, if you can catch this, is both the firstborn of creation and the firstborn among the dead. The word firstborn in the original language is the word prototype. He is the prototype of the resurrection life. In other words, He is the standard and the source of a new way to be human. I mean, think about it. When God made Adam in the Garden, we knew how to be human. We knew how to walk with God and live with God and what we were created to do and what it looked like to be human. But when we sinned, we lost the ability to be human. We were lost. We were lonely. We were broken. And then Jesus came as the firstborn among the dead, the prototype, to show us a new way to be human. A new way to live our life.

Are you with me on this? For six days in creation, God creates all things. And then, on the seventh day, He rests. Do you realize after those first six days of creation, He doesn't create anything again until you are a new creation in Christ? And He created an entirely new reality for those of us who, by faith, have chosen to be crucified with Christ and rise to a new life. And so, Jesus is now the standard and the source of what it looks like to be a new creation, how to live as a human in a new way. You say, why am I telling you all this? Because if you don't believe that, you will think, all the things that Jesus did, He did because He was Messiah and Savior and Lord. No, He did all the things that He did to show us what it looked like to be human. That if you want to be free and full of life and vibrant as a human, you got to do the things that Jesus did – His lifestyle – so you can do the things that Jesus did.

See, every place that you decide to do it your way instead of God's way, you're saying, you know how to be a human better than Jesus. So, when you do your sexuality in any way that's outside of one man and one woman in a covenant of marriage relationship, what you're saying is, you know how to be a human better than Jesus who created, redeemed, and blessed sexuality. When I do my finances in any way other than tithing, giving my first best 10% to God and refusing to live with the love of money and refusing to live in constant and chronic debt,

what I'm saying, just acknowledge it, I'm saying, I know how to be a human better than Jesus who created, redeemed, and blessed money. When I do my relationships and I hold on to offense and bitterness and anger and wrath and trying to get people back, what I'm saying is, I know how to do humanity, relationships, better than Jesus who created, redeemed, and blessed relationships.

When I do my time and I work seven days a week and I don't take a Sabbath and I'm always busy and I have no margin and I fill my life to max-capacity, what I'm saying is, I know how to be a human better than Jesus knows how to be a human, who is the one who created, redeemed, and blessed time. This is why it says, "The Lord Almighty says, 'Give careful thoughts to your ways.' You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it. This is what the Lord Almighty says, 'Give careful thought to your ways.'"

When it says it twice, it's trying to get our attention. Consider, give careful thought. Put some time into thinking about the way you live your life. How's it going? Do you feel like you plant, but never harvest? Do you feel like you eat, but you're never satisfied? Do you feel like you drink, but never have your fill? You put on clothes and you're never warm? You go and acquire all this stuff, but it feels like it's fleeting and running away from you? Like, consider your ways. How's the way of your marriage going? How's the way of your mental health going? How's the way of your emotions and your time and your finances and your family? Like, have you given any thought to the way you live your life? What I think happens to a lot of us is we live life our way, but we say it's in the name of Jesus. And then, when it doesn't work, we get disappointed and mad at God.

So, I do my life and I claim the name of Jesus over it. But if we're honest, that way doesn't look anything like the way Jesus lived His life. And then, when it doesn't work, we get mad and disappointed and offended at God. I think a lot of American Christianity has a lot of offense to God because we've confused His way and our way. We've put His name on our way. And then, when it doesn't work, we think it's His fault. See, a great question that every one of us has to answer is, what is it that you want from God? Do you ever think about that? What is it that you want from God? Why do you claim His name? Why do you gather in a room full of people that are gathered around the name of Jesus? Why do you call yourself a Christian or a follower of Jesus? Like, what is it that you want from God?

One day Jesus was walking along and two of John the Baptist's disciples, because disciples can be learner students of anyone or anything, but these two men are disciples of John the Baptist. And as they see Jesus walk by, He catches their attention and they start to follow Him. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" It's the question He asks every one of us to the depths of our soul. What do you want? What do you want? What do you want from Jesus? You want forgiveness? Eternal salvation? You want comfort? You want



religion? You want Him to alleviate some guilt in your soul? You want Him to bring some peace to the chaos of your life? Do you want other people to think well of you because you claim the name of Jesus?

Do you want bread and fish – what He can do for you? Or do you want Jesus? And do you want to be a disciple and be with Him and become like Him? What do you want? It's a very kind, very honest, very authentic question. And they said, "Rabbi," which means teacher, "Where are you staying?" Remember, following is not subjective. It was very literal. Where are you staying? Like, "Jesus, we want to follow You. We want to know You. We want to become like You. And we want to learn how to live in your way." "'Come,' He replied, 'And you will see.'" Whatever answer you answer to His question, what do you want, He will always respond with kindness and compassion. And He will always invite you to come and see who He is and what He offers.

And I think a great problem that happens in our lives is Jesus invites us to come and be His disciple and we come wanting something different than that. So, we come into our relationship with totally different premises. And when it doesn't work out, we get mad at Him and say it was His fault and we're disappointed and it didn't work. But Jesus doesn't invite you to a life of bread and fish. He invites you to a life in His kingdom as His disciple, learning how to be a human. And I get it. Some of you right now, you're like, "Dude, I hate this message." I get it. Because some of you, you're probably sitting here and you're like, "This whole disciple thing, I don't want to be a disciple. I'm happy being a Christian." Totally. Do you know what a Christian means though? Christian just means "little Christ." So, I'm going to be a little Jesus like learn how to do the things that He did so I can do the things that He did. In the Bible, they're not called Christians. In the first century, they weren't called Christians. They were called "Followers of the Way."

Which means the way they lived their life was learning how to live their life the way that Jesus did. And I think sometimes we forget that Jesus is so clear. I don't preach enough on this and so, I repent and apologize to you for this. But we don't talk enough about Jesus saying, "Count the cost to follow Me." Like, "There's actually a cost to following Me and you got to count it." In a run on talking about what it means to be a disciple, He tells the story and He says, "Which of you would build a barn without first sitting down and considering whether or not you have enough money to actually do it? And which of you is a king? If you are going to go to war with another king, would you not first sit down and think, 'Can I actually win this battle?'" You would count the cost. You would consider it. And then, He says, "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything He has cannot be my disciple." You say, "So, I have to give up everything and live in poverty to be a disciple of Jesus?" No. He's saying, "You have to be open to my way in any and every area of your life."

And we get so lost in counting the cost. I have to die to myself. I have to give up my pride. I have to give up my rights. I can't do my sin. I can't do the – it's like, so hard. It's all this stuff.

Yes, count the cost. But what does it cost you to not follow Jesus? What does it cost you to be a disciple of the world instead of Jesus? You know what it costs you? That. Is this a cost you're willing to pay? Is that the cost you're willing to pay for your family and your relationships and your life and your soul? Because that's a high price.

And what we forget is that the way of Jesus is not hard. This is love for God, to obey His commands and His commands are not burdensome. His way is easy and light. It's not hard and heavy. Yes, there is a cost. The cost is dying to my way and taking His way as a disciple. And what does He give me back? He gives me back this. He gives me back this. See, we forget and we think Jesus invites us to forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. But what He really invites us to is life in the kingdom with Him. That's why His main message was, "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand," and why He went around preaching the good news of the kingdom, the Gospel of the kingdom. And what is that? It's just simply that He came to restore your identity, reconcile your relationship, and redeem your purpose. That He's come to make you like Him, forgiven and free, included in Christ. He's invited you into this ongoing relationship with Him where He literally invites you into the eternal loving community of the Trinity.

If I'm included in Christ and Christ is in the Trinity, I have now just been invited into the loving eternal relationship of the Trinity itself. And then, He invites me to do the very things that He did. This is the gig. This is what He – this is a disciple. This is the kingdom. This is what He invites you to. We've used this language for years. Let me give you a different language for this series. He invites you to become like Jesus, to be with Jesus, and to simply do what Jesus did. Doesn't mean perfect. Doesn't mean you got it all figured out. I mean, have you read the Gospels? When those disciples got invited to follow Jesus, they were a mess. But they had made the intent to say, "He is the one I will follow." And when He shows me that my way is different than His way, I don't want to live in a paradox of life. I want to, by faith, say, "Jesus, I don't get it. I don't like it. It doesn't make sense. But because You say so, Lord, I will do it."

You with me on this? Let me try to pull it all together real quick on this. Jesus basically summarizes all of what it means of being a disciple to two things. Two things. The first is obedience. "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples." He says to be his disciple, I have to obey. Because you say so, Lord, I will do it. I don't have to like it. I don't have to get it. It doesn't have to make sense to me. It doesn't have to be what anyone and everyone else is doing. It usually is not what everyone and anyone else is doing. But if I have set my attention to be a disciple of Jesus, I actually have to live a life of obedience. So, obedience and love. "A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

He says, "If you're really My disciple, you will live a life of love. You will become a person of love and you will walk in the way of love." So, hear me. Obedience and love are both the intent and the result of being a disciple of Jesus. Obedience and love are both the intent and the result of being a disciple of Jesus. If I'm a disciple of Jesus, I enter into that with the intent to

obey Him and the intent to become a person of love. And as I walk with Him and follow Him, the result is, I become a person of obedience and I grow into a person of love. And you've been invited by Jesus to be His disciple.

This is why that big verse at the end of Jesus' time on earth, when He is ascending to heaven, "Therefore, go and make disciples" – that would be you – "of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you and surely I am with you always." Can I just tell you? This is what I want from God. This is what I want. This is my premise. This is why I come to the table. This is why I'm here. This is why I do this. This is what I want for you. But if you don't want it, that's okay. This is what I want. I want to be a disciple, a learner, a follower, a student of Jesus. I want to be baptized, not just into water, but I want to be immersed into the name or the reality of the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the power of the Spirit. And I want to learn to obey Him in every area of my life and be with Him and learn how to live in His kingdom. This is what I want.

But it's not what I always wanted. And so, you might be here today and you're like, "I don't really want any of that." That's okay. You can call out to Him and ask Him to change the desire within you. To say, "Jesus, please change my appetite from the things of this world to You. Because Jesus, I really want to do the things that You did. I really do. And I chase these really hard in my life. But if I'm learning that if I want to do the things that You did on-the-spot, I have to choose to first be Your disciple behind-the-scenes. Because I can't do what You did if I don't first learn how to do what You did." Because this kind can only come out by prayer and fasting. Or what Jesus did behind-the-scenes before the moment.

And so, here's my really honest, really genuine question for you today. Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? Not, are you a Christian? Not, have you prayed a prayer? Not, have you raised your hand or experienced salvation? Not, are you a good person? Not, are you trying to do good things? Have you ever decided to accept Jesus' invitation to be one who is training and being trained to be like Him in the here and now? Like, have you ever accepted, "Come and follow Me"? "Come and follow Me and be with Me and let Me form you and shape you and mold you." Have you ever come to Jesus with the intent to say, "My intent is obedience and love. And I know it's so far away from the reality that I'm currently living, but Jesus, You say that You will make me. And so, I need that grace because I can't make myself."

See, I think you can go to American church for 50 years and never make the choice to be a disciple. And nowhere in the Gospels do we see Jesus offer easy and cheap and free salvational moments and then say, "Now, go back and live your life exactly as it was." The grace of God was available to anyone and everyone, but it always was an invitation to a new way of being human. To a new way of life. To a new existence in God's kingdom for what you were created for in the first place. The standard is not the world. That is not the way to be human. That is the way to be dead.

Jesus is the prototype of being human and being alive. The only question is, will I accept that invitation? And some of you, hear me, you're sitting here and you're like, "I'm too young or I'm too old to be a disciple. I'm saved. I'm good." You're not too young. Students, hear me. The greatest decision you will make in your life is not to raise your hand and pray a prayer, be a Christian, identify with the church. It's to say, "I have decided to be a disciple of Jesus. And I will learn to live my life the way He lives His life." Listen, because most of his disciples were teenagers when He invited them. So, you are not too young. And if you think, "I'm too old. I'm 50 years, living my way, doing the thing. I'm saved. I'm good." Listen, Nicodemus was an old man. And when Jesus showed up, he was confused and disoriented and a little frustrated with the sermon series that Jesus started. Okay. It's like, "Don't be talking to me about a different way. I got a good way going here." And he didn't like it and he didn't get it.

But three years later of wrestling and struggling and seeking God, Nicodemus buries the body of Christ as a disciple of Jesus saying, "It doesn't matter how long I've walked in that way. I can change today in Jesus' name. And He has drawn me to a new life and a new reality and a new experience." Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? And so, here's the practice for this week, right? Every week in this series, there's something to do. Jesus, give me a desire to be Your disciple. That's it. Could you pray that this week? Not, "Okay, I'm a disciple. Okay, here I go. Okay, I'm going to do it." It's probably not going to work out all that well for you. Because we can't do it. So, I'm trying to – this whole series is, we can't do it, but we can position ourselves in ways that open us up to God's grace.

Jesus, my heart doesn't feel it. Jesus, if I got to give up this, this, and this, I don't know that I'm in. Jesus, I got no idea how You're going to take care of that, that, and that. But I guess I can just say, "Would You give me a desire to be Your disciple?" Because if I'm honest, there is an aching and a longing in my soul for more. I don't think that more is found in You, Jesus. I think it's found in sex and money and control and comfort and travel and feelings and family and friends and parties and activities in my life. But the more I do those things, the even emptier I feel and even less there is in my soul. So I'm losing my soul while I'm trying to find those things, which is something You actually just told me. So, maybe, just maybe, You are actually right. And I acknowledge my life exists in this continual paradox.

And I don't like being a duplicit person. And I don't like to be divided in my own self. So, maybe, just maybe, Jesus, You could give me a desire to be a student of You and start doing some things that You did so I can do the things that You did. Close your eyes. Have you ever made the choice to say, I want to be a disciple of Jesus? It is really hard to live a different way without starting there? What's the Holy Spirit been moving or speaking or stirring in your heart?

Let me remind any and every one that's listening, the beauty of Jesus is there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Nothing that Jesus is saying to you today is condemning in any nature. He's trying to show you what is good and what is true and what is

right. And like the rich, young ruler and like Peter, He's looking at you and He loves you. And He is trying to show you some things in your life that are keeping you from Him. And He's asking you to trust Him in that way, that you might experience the life. The life of the kingdom. Not in the past or in the future, but in the here and now.

So, Jesus, give me a desire to be a disciple of You. Give us, as a church, a desire to be a disciple of You. I pray Jesus for the questions that were posed today, that they would lodge in our ears and in our mind and in our heart. And that this week they would come back up through the grace of the Holy Spirit. And we would work through some of those things with You because You're not asking us questions to hurt us. You're asking us questions to free us. Because You are the way and You are the truth and You are the life.

Don't let religion, the world, or your flesh keep you from the resurrected life of Jesus Christ in His everlasting kingdom. That is not then and there, but is here and now and offers you all the things you really want. You just access them in a very different way than the world around you. Thank You, Jesus, that You give us the chance to be disciples. What a gift. In Your name we pray, amen.

**A DIFFERENT WAY**



**FEBRUARY 4, 2024**  
**SEASON ONE, EPISODE THREE**  
**“CAN I ACTUALLY CHANGE?”**

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today and we are in a message series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. And if you've ever wondered, why do we preach in message series, it's because we want to take one big idea, one concept, one thought, one word from God and we want to take it deep. And we want to give ourselves time to understand it, time to get revelation from it, time to respond to God, and move forward in faith, to wrestle through it and what it means for us in our lives. And with so many people coming and going every single weekend, we want to give everybody the chance to be able to grab this one big idea that we believe God is speaking to our church over a season of time. And so, if there is ever an individual message in a message series that you don't like, don't understand, aren't really enjoying, just think about it in terms of your favorite Netflix series.

There are some episodes that aren't your favorite, but if you put it back into the context of the series, it all makes sense. So, we are in a series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did, and we're talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. But we're 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 to do the works of Jesus, we have to first walk in the way of Jesus. That if we want to have the life of Jesus, we first have to take on the lifestyle of Jesus. And you say, "Well, what does that mean, do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did?"

It means if you want to do the things that Jesus did, which we all do, like heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cast out demons, but more practically in our daily life, not be angry, and not be anxious, and not be overwhelmed, and have peace, and have joy, and forgive people, and love one another, and not be trapped in the things of money in this world, then we first have to do the things that Jesus did, like prayer, and fasting, and Scripture, and silence, and solitude, and Sabbath, and community, and serving, and generosity. We have to take on His lifestyle. You see, we've been using this little graphic to just say these are just some examples of the things that Jesus did that we can see all throughout Scripture. He had peace in chaos, and joy in every circumstance, purpose in the mundane, love in every relationship He had, He was free from the world, He was connected to God in a disconnected world. This is just some of the things that Jesus did.

And so, the question I want to ask you today is simply this, is this even possible? It sounds really possible, and it looks really appealing, and it's a great graphic on social media, but is this even possible? Is it actually possible to do the things that Jesus did? Is it possible to have peace in chaos, and joy in every circumstance, and purpose in the mundane, and love in your relationships, and freedom from this world? Is that even possible? Said another way, is it even possible to live a different way? You see, the question I'm asking you is, can you change? Can you change? And if so, how do you change? Those are two pretty important questions that we really should wrestle through in our lives and come to some kind of conclusion, don't you think?

Is it possible for you to change? Can you go deeper? Can you become more mature? Can you become free? Can you become more mature? Can you become healthy? Can you be transformed? Is it possible for you in your life to actually change? Or do you think, this is just who I am. This is just how I do my life. This is as good as it gets. I've tried. I've struggled. I've strived. I've put in the effort. I've had the willpower. I've done all of the things and I've not changed. And so, many of us have just resigned to like, this is just my life, and I've learned to numb, and I've learned to cope, and I've got strategies for dealing with the brokenness in my life, and sometimes I have really good seasons where I can put the dogs at bay, but if I'm honest, no, I don't really think that I can change.

In fact, if I'm going to change, then God's gotta lightning-bolt-strike me. Or maybe some of us think, I don't know that I even really want to change. And some of us probably think, the reason I can't change is because I'm a victim to everyone else in my life. And if they would change, then I could change. Can you change? I don't think we think about that question a lot, and I think if we're honest, somewhere deep down inside of us subconsciously, most of us believe no. Why? Because we have brought our theology down to the experiences we've had in life. Our beliefs have been determined by what we've actually experienced, and for a lot of us, we would say like, "I haven't changed, and therefore, it's not possible to change." And I've been married to someone who hasn't changed. They were passive when I married them 20 years ago, and every year they become even more passive. My mom was controlling when I grew up, and every year she becomes even more and more controlling.

My kids aren't who I want them to be, and maybe they were just born that way, and it's impossible for them to be any different. Our boss hasn't changed. Our friends haven't changed. The people we've known in church for years, they haven't changed. And so, we've created this entire theological construct based on the experience of the lack of transformation we've seen in our lives and in the lives of the people around us. And we know the verses. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come." "You go from glory to glory, being transformed more into His image and His likeness." "'Come, follow Me and I will make you,' Jesus says." "We are the clay. He is the potter, and He will shape, and mold us into who He wants us to be." "His divine power has given me everything I need for life and godliness." We know all the verses, which doesn't seem to work itself out in our life, does it?

Can you change? You see, I think if we're honest, a lot of us feel like the apostle Paul. He says, "I do not understand what I do for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my sinful nature for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin I do not want to do living in me that does it, for in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the



law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members who will rescue me from this body of death?"

How authentic. How vulnerable. How honest, and how real. Did you ever feel like this? Does this feel like your life? Like the things that you want to do, you can't do. And the things you don't want to do, you find yourself just doing over and over and over again. What is Paul saying here? He's saying, "Hey, the things I really want to do, I can't do them. And the things I don't want to do, I find myself doing them even when I'm trying not to do them." And what he's expressing to us is that he has lived in the world for so long that he's been trained and conditioned by the world so he naturally does the things the world does. We've been saying you gotta do what Jesus did if you want to do what Jesus did. Well, Paul is saying, "I have done what the world has done for so long that I naturally and effortlessly do what the world does."

I have these habits, these routines, these ruts, these neural pathways, these whole ways of life that I have created that just take over on-the-spot. I've spent so long doing what the world has done that I just naturally and effortlessly in the moment do what the world does. It's not what I want to do. It's not even who I am anymore. I'm a new creation. I'm part of the divine nature. The sin nature has been broken on my life, but there's this sin living in me in the members or the actual parts of my body that has made me a prisoner to the sin that is, in a sense, trapped or trained in the parts of my body to make me do things that I don't want to do. So, I've been trained, I've been trained by the world and that's why I naturally and effortlessly do what the world does on-the-spot. This is why we do things like we say, "I'm not going to be angry, I'm not going to be angry, I'm not going to be angry." When we get to the spot, we're angry and we can't help it.

This is why we say things like, "I'm not going to look at it, I'm not going to look at it, I'm not going to look at it," we look at it. So, we say things like, "I'm not going to be controlling, okay, today is the day, I'm not going to be controlling today, today, this hour, I'm not going to be controlling," and we control. "I'm going to serve, I'm going to be a servant, I'm going to go into that situation with my family, and I'm not going to be selfish, I'm going to serve," and we step into it, and we're selfish. Why? Because we've spent so long doing what the world has done that we naturally and effortlessly do what the world does on-the-spot, in the moment. We have been trained. We have been conditioned. We have ruts. We have habits. We have routines. We have whole patterns of our life that make us do things that we don't want to do or prevent us from doing the things that we do want to do. Think of how you have been formed by the world.

The family you grew up in, your family of origin, the house you were raised in, the things your dad did or didn't do, the things your mom said or didn't say, the experiences you've had at school, the dysfunctional relationship or relationships that were in your life, the ways that you've been trained and shaped at work, the religious condemnation and conformity that has

been pressed upon you, the media, and the ideas, and the images of the world that have just saturated your life year after year. Think of how you have learned to defend yourself, fight for yourself, protect yourself, glorify yourself, serve yourself, shame yourself, condemn yourself, you have been shaped by this world. And so, yes, you're a beloved son, but you've been trained to live like an orphan. And yes, I am free, but I have been trained to live in bondage.

And yes, I am holy in Jesus, but I've been trained to live like the world. See, if you can catch this, before you met Jesus, before Jesus became Lord of your life, you were lord of your life. And while you were lord of your life, dead in sin, living in the ways of this world, there were a whole network, a complex network of attitudes, behaviors, perspectives, opinions, responses, initiation, actions, words that were formed, and shaped, and literally impressed into who you are that when you now meet Jesus, yes, you're a new creation, you've been set free, the sin nature has been broke off you, you're a part of the divine nature, but all that forming, and shaping, and training doesn't just go away. So, you find yourself doing the things you don't want to do or not being able to do the things that you do want to do.

Why? Because you spent so long doing what the world does that, on-the-spot, you naturally and effortlessly do what the world does. What I'm trying to tell you is that your will is not stronger than your training. So, when he says, my will is not to do it, or to do this thing, and not that thing, but my willpower is not stronger than the training I've experienced. So, in the moment when I get to a fork in the road, I will take whichever rut is most deep in my life. And when it's been the things of the world, those ruts that I have created over time, I just naturally and effortlessly take them. Is this making sense to you? This is why right now, if I handed you a pen, and you're right handed, and I told you to write in your left hand, you couldn't do it. If I handed you a football and told you to throw it with your off hand, it would be the most awkward, uncomfortable experience for all of us watching you.

If you have a Texas accent and I told you to not speak with that accent, but speak with a Canadian accent, couldn't do it. And if I told you to stop making your normal facial expressions, like fix your face, you couldn't do it, right? Not that you don't want to do it, but you just couldn't do it. Why? Because you've been trained, your body has been shaped and molded in such a way that without a whole new round of training, that's what you're going to do. That's what Paul is saying. He's saying there is literally sin that is in the members or the parts of my body. I have literally been trained in this world to do and say certain things, and not do and not say other things that, on-the-spot, even though my will, my heart, is to go God's way, I've been trained the world's way, and I can't have the willpower strong enough to override my training.

It's like sin has been trapped in the members of your body, your body parts, your hands, your feet, your words, your facial expressions, your ears, all of that has been trained in the ways of this world. Does that make sense to you? It's like you get to this fork in the road and you've been trained so deeply to be depressed that you can't even be joyful. You get to the fork in the

road, and you've been trained so deeply to be bitter and resentful that it's almost impossible for you to be forgiving in the moment. You've been trained so deeply to be a person of control that you get to that moment, and literally, you can't trust God because the ruts are so deep, and they take you in the direction that you don't want to go. We've been trained to hide, to hoard, to hate, to steal, to kill, to destroy, the lust of the eyes, the cravings of the flesh, and the pride of life. And so, if we want new ruts, if we want new directions in our life, we've got to build new ruts that are deeper than the old ruts because your body has been trained to take you in the direction you don't want to go.

That's what I'm trying to say to you. And we think of the body, and we think we don't really want to talk about the body in church. We're not here to talk about our bodies. We're here to talk about our hearts, and our souls, and our spirits, but God gave you your body, and your body is you. And inside your body, God has put the creativity of the human spirit. And it's at the place of your body where heaven touches earth. Your body is meant to be God's will on this earth. There're so many verses about the body. "Offer your body as living sacrifices." "The Lord is for the body and the body for the Lord." "Your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit." "Your body is now the body of Christ on this earth." God has given you a body. And the reason He's given you a body is, is that you might become His person on this earth walking in loving relationship with Him, accomplishing His will as you rule and reign.

He's given you a body. This is the place that you rule and reign. He's given you the authority to choose what happens, how you speak, and how you act. It is the place where God has allowed you to have your will, and He won't override it, He won't usurp it, but what we have to acknowledge is that our bodies have been trained by-- we have done the things the world does for so long that our bodies naturally and effortlessly do the things the world does when we get to the spot. So, the words and the actions of our body are the world's words and actions, because we've done the things the world has done, so we do the things the world does. And we get so discouraged as followers of Jesus because we've done the things the world has done, and then we just want to be able to jump over here and do the things that Jesus does. But my body hasn't been trained for that. So, it naturally takes the ruts and takes me in a direction that I don't want to go.

Is this making sense to you? It's literally like sin has gotten trapped in the individual members of your body. It's been trained in the ways of sin. And so, Paul is basically saying like then, "Is it hopeless?" Who will rescue me from this body of death, this body that has been shaped in a life without God? Well, the good news is, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord," that He can change me. And he goes on to say, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you." He says you're no longer under the sinful nature, it's been broken. You're now part of the divine nature. You're included in Christ, and you have to start by acknowledging, "I am no longer a slave to sin, I am no longer controlled by it because God's Spirit lives in me." "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin."

My body has been trained in the ways of the world to naturally and effortlessly do and say the things the world does. This is why I react in anger. This is why I have this whole pattern of how we do our marriage. This is why I get frustrated. This is why I listen to gossip. This is why I can't help myself. Why? Because I've been trained, my body has been trained in life without God, yet my spirit is alive because of righteousness. "And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies." Your body, not just your spirit and your heart, but He will help you do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did, so that your body becomes the living will of God on this earth. One more, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ." Count yourself, reckon yourself, consider yourself dead to sin.

So, when you're going in the direction you don't want to go, you can stop as a follower of Jesus, not necessarily control yourself, because your will isn't strong enough, but you can stop, and you can say like Paul, "This isn't even me." That word, that action, that behavior, that response, that's not even me. That sin that's living in the members of my body, it's been trapped there because I've been trained in the ways of the world, but I consider myself dead to that, and alive to God. Starts there, I got to acknowledge that no longer has power. It did and it's all you could do before Jesus. You did the things the world did, and you did the things the world did because that's all you could do without Jesus. But now, you can consider yourself dead to the ways of the world, alive to God, so "don't let sin reign," have the highest influence in your body, the natural things you effortlessly do, "so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin." Why?

Because you spend so long offering yourself being trained, being formed, being shaped, creating these deep ruts of your life in the ways of the world "as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves," your body, through submission and surrender, "as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness." In other words, choose to submit and surrender to the Spirit, open yourself to God, acknowledge that there are deep ruts in your life that cause you to have words and actions that aren't the things you even want to do, and ask God to help train you, retrain you, reshape you, reform you. Ask God to help you do the things that Jesus did, like prayer, and fasting, and silence, and solitude, and confession, and generosity, and service. You're like, "What do those have to do...?" Everything, because they're creating new ruts.

They are now retraining the members of your body to do things in the way that God would do them as if He Himself were living in your body, which He is. And so, this is why He says, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't "try" to be godly. Don't use your willpower to be godly. Train yourself to be godly, because you have been so deeply trained to be worldly. And your will doesn't have enough power to override your training. Your will is not stronger than the ways that you have been trained. We've been using this verse and talking about running a marathon, that's how it's using it. The same way that you can't run a marathon right now, this is going to

be so freeing for some of you. In the same way that you can't run a marathon right now, some of you can't not be anxious right now. You don't want to do it, you've tried everything, you know how to do it, your will isn't to be anxious, but you've been so deeply trained in the ways of the world to be anxious that you can't not be anxious the same way that you can't run a marathon right now.

Some of you, in the same way that you can't sit down and play Beethoven on a piano right now, you can't not be angry. It's been so deeply formed and shaped in you, when you hit those junctures, it just takes over, and you feel ashamed, and disappointed in yourself, and terrible, and you have to make it right with everybody, but it just keeps happening because you've been so deeply trained in that. Some of us, in the same way that we can't bench press our own body weight, physical training, we can't not be controlling. And if you would see that and acknowledge it, it's incredibly freeing that the parts of my body have been trained in sin, and I'm included in Christ, but there's this residue, there's this leftover new training that has to take place. Just think about it with me for a second, think of how your hands have been trained in this world to take instead of give.

Think of how your tongue has been trained to curse instead of bless. Think of how your eyes have been trained to lust and covet instead of look with compassion and love. Think of how your ears have been trained to listen to gossip, and slander, and division instead of the voice of God. Think of how your mind has been trained to complain, to criticize, to judge, to look at what's wrong instead of being trained to focus on what is good, and true, and right. Think about how your feet have been trained to run away from God instead of running the race with perseverance that's been marked out for you. Think of how your heart has been trained to hunger and thirst for the things of this world instead of being trained to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Think of how your feelings have been trained to feel condemnation, and shame, and apathy instead of being trained to feel peace, and joy, and passion.

Think of how your heart has been trained to be wicked, and deceitful, and selfish instead of being trained to be honest, and humble, and servant-hearted, and vulnerable. You see, if you can catch this, it creates tremendous compassion for the people in our life because when we say to them, "Stop doing this! Why are you always doing this? Or why can't you ever do this?" Literally, some of them, they can't. The ruts are so deep that their heart is towards God, and they want to, but they actually can't. It gives us so much compassion for others and so much compassion for ourselves. When, all of a sudden, I realize there are these ruts that I don't want to take, but I can't not take them because they're so deep and it's not even me, it's the sin living in the parts of my body that's been trained. So, I got to consider myself dead to sin and alive to God.

And you say if I do the things I don't want to do and don't do the things I do do, do I just abdicate then? That's just who I am, there's no responsibility? No, no, no, no, no. What He's saying is, you take responsibility to acknowledge that reality, confess it before God, and then

start a new training program, a new training program to be godly. And we wake up one day and we realize, I don't have to do this, but I can't not do it right now because I don't have the willpower to override my training, but I can train differently, and I can train to be godly, and I can train to go in a different way. And then, you start realizing, this says, "Train yourself to be godly," not "train yourself so that you're not worldly." Big difference. A lot of us end up with a vision for our lives that's in reaction to who we don't want to be. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be like my dad. I don't want to be like my mom. I don't want to be like those people. Listen to me, if you have a vision for your life that's who you don't want to be because you're afraid of becoming that, just understand, fear attracts that which it's afraid of.

So, the moment my life is, "I'm training so I won't be worldly," or won't be like my mom, or won't be like my dad, it literally is attracting that thing into your life. as opposed to having a faith of who I do want to be because faith attracts that which it hopes for. And we don't just try to weed the bad things in our life, we've got to plant the good things in our life, seeds of righteousness, and they will grow, and eventually overshadow and choke out the old ways of life as we build new ruts to take us in new ways. Train yourself to be godly, but you've got to first decide that you want to be godly, which means I have to first decide that I want to be a disciple of Jesus. If I actually want to change, I have to first decide that I want to become something, that I want to be godly. And so when Jesus says, "Come, follow me, and I will make you," I have to choose to respond to the invitation.

I have to choose to respond that He initiates, that we don't choose Him, He chooses us, that He comes to us, and He invites me to come and follow Him, a disciple. We asked that question last week. Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? You say what is a disciple again? It's a learner, a student, a follower, one who becomes like the one that they're following. A disciple is someone who has considered their life, and counted the cost and realized Jesus' way is better. And I want to learn to think like, and talk like, and act like, and live like, and believe like Jesus. A disciple is someone who has arranged and rearranges their life around Him, orders and reorders their life around Him. They have an intent to obey, an intent to follow, and they're not perfect. They make tons of mistakes, but when they do, they're quick to repent, and they believe when Jesus says, "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." they believe that is what is good, and true, and right.

And being a disciple isn't this religious activity or exercise, it's someone who is literally saying, "Jesus teach me how to live in your kingdom with you because I'm tired of these old ruts in my life, and you said they're broken, but I need to create new ruts with you." This is why Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." A disciple is a student who is training and being trained to become like Jesus. So, last week, I asked you the question, who are you a disciple of? Who are you doing the things that they did so you can do the things that they did? Whose thoughts are you thinking? Whose words are you speaking? Whose actions are you imitating? Whose way are you walking in? Whose truths are you trying to believe?

And maybe a better way of saying-- because that can feel defeated and I do the things I don't want to do and the things I want to do, I don't do. Maybe here's a better way of saying it, whose thoughts are you training to think? Whose words are you training to speak? Whose actions are you training to imitate? And whose truths are you training to believe? And whose way are you training to walk in? Have you decided, I want to be a disciple of Jesus, and I want my body to be formed in a way that naturally and effortlessly takes me in His way? You see, here's how you know, in a sense, a different way of thinking about, am I a disciple? When you come here, do you listen like a disciple or do you listen like the crowd? Do you listen like a disciple or do you listen like the crowd? You say what does that mean? Let me tell you, you look through Scripture, and all the stuff and people like, here's how the crowd listens. The crowd sits there and thinks, "Man, this is a great message for my wife. I really hope she's listening today because she got some ruts that she needs to deal with."

The crowd sits there and thinks, "Man, this is a great message for my husband. I wish he was here today. I'm going to send him the link." The crowd thinks, "I hope that person in my Circle shows up today and that they're listening because I can't wait to get the Circle to be like, 'Did you hear it?'" That's how the crowd listens. The crowd listens to deflect, to defend, to argue, to disagree with an edge of criticism and evaluation. The crowd listens thinking, "How is this going to help my business? How is this going to help me as a coach? How is this going to help me in the classroom? How is this going to help me in my family?" But a disciple listens saying, "Jesus is speaking to me. To me." And there's nothing wrong with hoping someone else in your life hears it, and there's nothing wrong with wrestling through the content, and there's nothing wrong with using it for the good that God wants to do through your life, but you got to listen to it as a disciple first.

That's why He says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus says, "Why do you worry about the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye when you have a plank in your eye all along? You hypocrite. Deal with the plank in your eye then you can help take the speck out of their eye." In other words, do you have ears to hear first as a disciple? Because I will never change if I don't first listen as a disciple. You see, when we look at Jesus's 12 disciples, once they had decided to be disciples, and once they had started following Him, and were listening like a disciple, we see tremendous change. You read the Gospels and you see these guys, they were a disaster. They had done the things the world had done for so long that even while they're walking with Jesus, they naturally and effortlessly do the things the world does because they've been so deeply trained and formed. Sin had been trapped in the members of their body. They had been shaped in such a way that when they got to those junctures, they couldn't help but take the rut.

But then you look at Peter, and you see that he's edgy, and harsh, and arrogant, and prideful, but as he walks with Jesus, Jesus trains him and creates new ruts so he becomes peaceful, and kind and stable. We see John, and he's angry, and he's full of vengeance, and wrath, and

hostility, but we watch as Jesus trains him to become loving, and kind and peaceful. We see Matthew. Matthew loved money, he was selfish, and he spent his life taking advantage of people, but we watch as Jesus trains him to be free from the love of money, to be generous, and to love others. We see Simon the Zealot, a guy with a rebellious spirit who wants to come against everyone and everything, but Jesus trains him to be submissive and surrendered. We see Thomas, so full of doubt, but Jesus trains him to be a man of faith. And what we discover is that change is not only possible, it's normative.

It's not only possible, it's normative. It is actually the way of following Jesus and what actually happens in our life. You see, so many of us, we get so lost in salvation, and I've been trying to put this in this series for you that salvation is not just the forgiveness of your sins and heaven when you die, it's so much more than that. And we forget that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. We forget that we have been saved, this is the one we think about the most. You have been saved by grace through faith. Forgiven, set free, included in Christ, a beloved son, your past has been taken care of, your future is secured once and for all. You have been saved. And one day, you will be saved. One day, Jesus will return and He will make all things new. And He will save you from the sin, and the violence, and the injustice, and every dark, and broken, and vile thing in the world around you.

But right now, we are in the process of being saved. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it's the power of God." "Being saved," I thought I was saved? Yes, but you're being saved. You say, "Saved from what?" Saved means to heal, to make whole, to set free, to deliver. You are being saved right now from wrong motives, and ungodly beliefs, and the old sin patterns that have been built into your life. The sin that's been trapped in the members of your body that causes you to do and say the things that you don't want to do. You're being saved from the lust of the eyes, the cravings of the flesh, and the pride of life. You're being saved from your false self, from living the way that you want to live. And if we make salvation some eschatological event that in some future moment, my past is taken care of, we've completely missed the point of salvation.

If salvation is this end-times, some event in the future will pay for my past, and all will be well, and I can go back and live my life, that's a religious fairy tale. That's not salvation. God wants to save you in the here and the now from all of the things that have taken place in your life so that you can be free and naturally and effortlessly do the things that He does. This is why He says, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose." Work out, walk out your salvation, you have been, you will be, but you are being saved. And so, now what is my responsibility? How now shall I live? What shall I do believing that I have changed and can continue to change? I have to have an awe, a wonder, an urgency, and know that God is working in me to will and act according to His purpose.



In other words, if you want to change, you can't do it without God and He won't do it without you. If you're waiting for the lightning bolt, you're going to wait a long time, because God says there's a responsibility on you to change, but you can't do it without Him. Just like you couldn't raise yourself from the dead, you can't actually get rid of the ruts in your life in your own strength, in your own power. We have to submit, and surrender, and allow Jesus to retrain our eyes, and our hands, and our feet, and our mind, and our lips, and our tongue, and all of it in the way of Jesus. Are you with me on this? Okay. Hang with me for this and let me try to put it all together. Dallas Willard, the great theologian, has helped me tremendously understand this, and he has such a profound grasp on it. And he says that if you ever want to know how people change, there are three components.

He calls it VIM – vision, intent, and means. That if people want to actually change, you have to have vision, you have to have intent, and you have to have means. You say what does that mean? Well, if I want to change in any area of my life, I have to have a vision. I have to see what can be in the midst of what is. I have to have a preferred future. I have to have an alternative reality. I have to see something that's really good, and really captivating, and grabs a hold of me. Then, I actually have intent. I have to be determined. I have to be focused. I have to, I have to be eager, and earnest, fully committed. Regardless of the cost, it's like I intend to become that no matter what it takes of me, but then, I need means. I need next steps, and opportunities, and education, and training, and teaching, pathways to be able to move forward. And he uses this great analogy and he says, why is it that almost every other country in the world, everyone is trying to learn English as a second language?

Just about every other country in the world, everybody speaks their language, but they want to learn English as a second language. Why? Because they have a vision for it. They realize that if they can learn English, it will give them opportunity, success, prosperity, it will bless their family, it will open up a whole new reality, so they intend to do it. They become deeply devoted, and committed, and eager and earnest to see that reality come to pass. So, then they find means like Duolingo, and going to English-speaking cafes, and watching English programming, and trying to find people that speak English to teach them. And they put all this effort into it and it's amazing how they actually learn to do it. And then, he says why is it that Americans don't learn to speak any other language as a second language? Why is it that we, as a people, have no interest in learning Arabic or Japanese?

Because you don't have a vision for it, you don't see how it will make your life better, it's not a preferred future, it seems it won't increase your opportunities, your success, your prosperity and your life, so you don't intend to do it. You have no actual intention to go and do it. So, it doesn't matter that the means are as plethora as they have ever been in all of human history to learn another language. We have no interest in doing it because we don't have the intent or the vision. Okay. Could it just be that the reason a lot of us don't experience change in our walk with Jesus is because we don't have a vision to be His disciple and to live in His kingdom? Therefore, we never intend to actually do it, become determined, eager, earnest, committed

regardless of the cost. So, it doesn't matter that there are so many means available to become that kind of person because we don't have a vision for it nor do we have the intent.

I mean, I want you to think about our church. Do you know how much vision and means there are? Do you realize that my primary gifting as a communicator is vision? Vision, movement, life, here's who you can be, here's what God says, here's what's in front of you, here's a preferred future, there is vision upon vision upon vision. And means, there are so many means. Get in a Circle, join a team, come to Tuesday Night Prayer, Serve the City, ValleyCreek+, the Reading Plan, worship music that we create, weekend experiences, all the things. There's vision and there's means, the question is, is there intent? And what I've learned over the years is I have no ability to move your intent, nor does anyone else, because your intent is in your body that God has given you rule and reign over, and you get to decide what you intend to do. And when we use the word intent, I'm not talking about a New Year's resolution like, "I intended to get healthy this year, I just haven't got around to it."

Or, "I intended to get the groceries on the way home, but I just didn't really want to do it." Intent is eagerness, earnestness, devotion, commitment with all my heart and here's the problem. This will be so helpful for some of you, when you don't have a vision to become, and you have no intent to really pursue it, you will become critical of the means. This is American Christianity. We don't have a vision to live life in the kingdom. We have no intent to do it. So, what do we do? We complain about the means because we're not changing, and so it's got to be someone else's fault. Why do we do Circles? Can't we do Bible studies? And why do we do the student ministry with these MVMNT nights and Circle things? When I was a kid, we did youth group and that was great. Why can't we do that? And why do we do these songs? Why can't we do the hymns? Those were my favorite back in the day. And why are we doing this Different Way series again? I don't know. John just seems a little off. It's not my favorite series. There's got to be something else.

And reading through the New Testament again, didn't we just do that last year? Why on earth would I reread that this year? At least give us the Old Testament. The problem is not the means. When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. So, you can complain about the means all day long in any area of your life, it's not the means, there are more means available to do anything you want to do in human history, more than any other time in human history, anything. From play the piano, to learn Arabic, to become a person who lives in the kingdom of God, it's all there. And listen, I'm in a season where I have kids, teenagers that are in sports, in theater, in school, and I watch – this isn't just spiritual – I watch teachers, and coaches, and directors cast great vision, and have amazing means. "This is who you can be and what we can do," and, "This is how we will do it if you will come!"

And I watch them pour themselves out, and what they can't do is they can't move the intent of the student. And we sit there and we say things like, "Man, that student could be..." "Boy, if they care just a little bit, do you know how good they would be at this?" It's intent. It's intent.

So, here's the question, do you have intent? And you will never have intent if you don't have a compelling vision. And I've thought long and hard about this, and I'm convinced that change is really so simple that it comes down to humility and hunger. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." You will become filled with whatever you are the most hungry and thirsty for. Why? Because you have a vision for it so you intend to do it and you'll find the means.

What are you hungry and thirsty for? What's the vision that's captivated your life and the intent that you are pouring yourself out and pursuing? This is why it doesn't matter how many times I stand up here, for some people, we can talk about things like-- and if you're going to follow Jesus, you're going to have to change your schedule, and you're going to have to learn to live free from the love of money, and you're going to have to find time to prioritize God, and you're going to have to learn to walk in some different ways. And we can say those things over and over and over again, but if you don't have a vision to become that kind of person, which is why I ask you all the time, who are you becoming? You realize, some of you, ting, light bulb. Why do you ask us all the time who we're becoming? Who do I want to become? Because what I'm asking you is what's the vision of your life? Because that's what you are intending to pursue.

So, if I say the vision for my life is to be a follower of Jesus, but there's no intent to pursue it, it's not my vision. It's what I say my vision is, but my vision is whatever I actually have intent to do. So, for a lot of us, our vision is actually the path of least resistance, because that's what we intend to do and we can see that by the means that we go after in our life. So much more to say about this, I kind of want to, but I actually have to leave it here. Do you believe that you can change? And if so, how do you change? And do you have a vision to become the kind of person that God says He created you to be? And is there an intent within you to pursue that?

My hope in trying to help you realize that you have been trained in the ways of the world helps open up your eyes to, if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I got to actually do the things that Jesus did because all I do are the things the world does because I spent so much of my life doing what the world has done. And so, our practice takeaway for this week that we've been-- just one more prayer again, Jesus, help me intend to change. Jesus, help me have the intent to actually become who you say I can become because there are so many means. Just for one more time for some of you, it's why literally, when we say things like, "Hey, you could get in a Circle! Hey, you could come to Students! Hey, you could come to Tuesday Night Prayer! Hey, you could come to Serve the City!" you know what you hear? "Womp, womp, womp, womp." And it's totally okay, I'm just helping you try to connect the dots because there's no intent.

The person who has intent hungers, and thirsts, and it doesn't mean they do everything, they ask God for wisdom on what means to take advantage of so they can become the kind of person they long to be. But the problem, hear me, is not the means, and it's not really the vision. "Come follow me, I will make you fishers of men." It's intent. And so, this week, maybe take some time to think about, can you change? How do you change? What ruts have been so

deeply formed in your body that you naturally and effortlessly do the things you don't want to do and don't do the things that you do want to do? And then, ask yourself, spend some time with the Lord, Jesus, help me have an intent to change. So, Jesus, thank You that You change us.

Thank You that You fill us with righteousness when we hunger and thirst. Holy Spirit, I know that was a lot, and I did my best, broken attempt to try to explain some of the deep profound things that You do in our lives to set us free. And so, Holy Spirit, would You just speak to us as we go throughout this week? I pray that when we hit some of those ruts and routines, You'll show us and say, "That's one right there." And that we wouldn't condemn ourselves or be defeated in ourselves, but that we would consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, and it's going to open up a new place for us to be trained so that our body, our life would become literally the living will of God on this earth.

Lord, I pray that You would continue to just lay bare our souls, and help us be honest and authentic about what we actually have intent to do. Jesus, may You keep inviting us into Your kingdom, casting the greatest vision that was ever cast, man living with God in an everlasting eternal kingdom that is good, and true, and right. May we repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. May we take a different way, in Jesus' name, Amen.

**A DIFFERENT WAY**



**FEBRUARY 11, 2024**  
**SEASON ONE, EPISODE FOUR**  
**"HOW DO I CHANGE?"**

All right, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad that you're here with us today. And we are in a series called A Different Way. And before we jump in, I just want to start by celebrating you. I want to celebrate you for the way that you've been listening over these last few weeks, the way that you've been open, the way that you've been wrestling, the way that you've been thinking and contemplating and reflecting on what God is saying and what God is doing. We've been getting incredibly consistent feedback from all our Circles and our serve teams of how God is moving in this season and in this series. And so, all I'm trying to do at the beginning of this series is lay a foundation, cast a really big vision, try to lift up your head a little bit, and then speak to the deep things inside of you. Because you were created for more.

You see, the first week we started this whole thing and we just said that Jesus invites us to a different way, that we don't have to live like everybody else. We don't have to live a life of stress and worry and anxiety and hustle. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Come and let me teach you how to do your life." And then the second week. Then we talked about how God invites us to come and be His disciple, a learner, a student, a follower, one who becomes like the one that they're following. Jesus invites us to come and arrange our life around Him and He will teach us how to live in the kingdom. He will teach us how to live our lives. And then last week, we talked about change. And we said it's actually possible to change. Not only is it possible, it's actually normative. And yet if we're honest, we have been deeply shaped and formed and molded by sin in our lives. So, we have these deep ruts, these deep patterns, and we find ourselves often doing the things that we don't want to do and not doing the things that we do want to do because of these ruts that have been created in our life.

And I spent all week sharing that with you last week and studying on it. And then this week, I fell into one of my ruts and finding myself not doing what I want to do and doing what I don't want to do and watching as the sin patterns of my life hurt the people that I love that are around me. Sin always steals, kills, and destroys. And it can be incredibly defeating when you find yourself in one of those ruts. And then you have to stop and remind yourself there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He's broken the power of sin off my life and He's training me to go in a different direction. He is inviting me to a different way where I become one who does the things that He does. And we said that if we're going to change, Dallas Willard, the great theologian, gives us this great little acronym, that if people have changed, they have vision and intent and means.

That if you're going to change in life, this is how people change. They have vision, they have intent, they have means. They have vision. They see an alternative future. They see what can be in the midst of what is. They see what must be in the midst of what is. And then when that vision captures their heart, they have intent, eagerness, earnestness, determination, all their heart, they're set on it. And then they will find means, next steps, pathways, education, training, opportunities. But that's how people change. And he gives us this great example and says, why does almost every other country in the world learn English as a second language?

Well, it's because they have a vision for it. They have a vision that if I learn English as a second language, it's going to bring me prosperity and success and blessing and opportunity, so I intend to do it. I'm eager, I'm earnest, I'm determined with all that I've got. So, I will find the means, like Duolingo and English-speaking cafes and English programming, and I will change.

And yet he says, why then is it that Americans, we don't, almost none of us, learn any language as a second language? Like, why haven't you learned Arabic or Japanese in your life? Because you don't have a vision for it. It's of no value to you. You don't see how it's going to make your life any better, so you never intend to actually go and do it. And it doesn't matter that there are more means available to you right now to learn Japanese or Arabic than have ever been in human history. So, could it be the reason a lot of us never spiritually change is because we don't actually have a vision to be a disciple of Jesus, and live in His kingdom. So, then I never actually intend to do it, and it doesn't matter what kind of means are available to me, I don't have a vision nor intent, so I'm not interested in the means. There is all kinds of vision that is cast for you and all kinds of means that are available to you. The question is, is do you have intent?

And no one can do anything about your intent but you. And the reason it's so important to have a vision and then to have intent is because then your life is not led by your feelings. If you find yourself saying all kinds of, all the time, I didn't feel like doing it, then just be clear, you don't have intent, which means you don't have a vision. Because feelings don't matter when I have intent, when I'm captivated by a vision. And if I don't have vision or intent, eventually I'll start to complain about the means. And that's what I shared with you last week; what happens to so many people in churches is because they don't have vision or intent to live in the kingdom, they start to complain and criticize the means, the methods, the things that are available. So, the next time you find yourself complaining or someone else is complaining to you, stop and ask yourself the question, are they actually growing right now? Because maybe the reason they're complaining about the means is because they don't have intent or vision.

And what the church organizationally does in that dysfunctional scenario is we just keep adding means upon means upon means upon means, convinced that if we just give enough means, eventually it will move your intent and you will have a vision. The only problem is when we stockpile all the means, there are so many activities available, we get so overwhelmed we don't even know which one to do. Or we start doing all of them and we become so busy doing the activities of God that we don't actually become like God. Okay, neither of those are good. And what I've learned over time is that the people that actually change are people that have humility and hunger, which is why Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." You will always eventually be filled with whatever you are the most hungry for, okay? That's where we got to last week and left it off. And what I want to do is I want to keep taking this conversation further with you and I want to give you a model for how people actually change. Like once I have vision, once I have intent, once I start pursuing means, how is it that I actually start changing?

And after doing this for a couple decades, reading the Scriptures a ton, studying, thinking about this a lot, a working theory, a working method for how people change, I think it's something as simple as this. If you're actually going to change and be formed, you've got a vision, you've got intent, you're pursuing means, this is you and it all starts with the Holy Spirit. You don't change yourself, the Holy Spirit changes you. Just like you can't save yourself, you can't change yourself. It's the Holy Spirit's work in our lives through two things. Its encounters and His daily activities. See, we change when we have encounters with God. See it all over Scripture. Moses has an encounter with God at the burning bush, his entire life changed. Jacob wrestled with God all night, his entire identity changed. Paul had an encounter with God on the road, his entire reality changed. The lepers encountered God. The woman at the well encountered God. The woman caught in adultery encountered God. And their lives changed.

One word, one moment, one experience, one encounter, one breath, one visitation from God can completely change your life. The Holy Spirit changes us through encounters, but also His daily activity. See, Jesus says to the disciples, "It's for your good that I go, because if I go, the Holy Spirit will come." And you are now the temple of the Holy Spirit and He resides inside of you. And every day, the Holy Spirit is active in shaping and forming and molding you. He convicts you of sin when you're on the wrong track. He guides you in truth when you need to know where to go. He points you towards Jesus. The Holy Spirit is constantly at work in your daily life, forming you into the image of Jesus. In fact, it says, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious." The acts of the flesh, your life without God, this is the best you can do.

"Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, and envy." That's the best you can do on your own. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." When the Holy Spirit is at work in my life, this is what He is producing and this is what He is forming in me. That's why Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. But apart from Me, you can do nothing." Which is why Paul says, "Don't grieve or quench the Holy Spirit." Be open and hungry and thirsty and let Him work. We change by the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

And then, as the Holy Spirit starts moving, He starts moving through God's Word. God's Word. God says, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge." We don't have knowledge about how the kingdom actually works, so we get destroyed. And you know this is true in your life. You need knowledge to find the way. You have to have knowledge to change a flat tire. You have to have knowledge to prepare a healthy meal. You have to have knowledge to file your taxes. And without knowledge, there is a destruction, which is why Jesus says, "You will know the truth. And the truth will set you free." He says, "My Word is designed to free you from the bondages that you don't even know you have."



Think about how God's Word talks about God's Word. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." "God's Word is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating soul and spirit, joint and marrow." "He sent His Word and healed them." "My Word is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path." "The words I speak to you are spirit and they are life." "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." "Change your mind, the truth has come." This is why this verse says, "All Scripture" – God's Word – "is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training" – the word we've been using – "in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every work." What a verse to sit on and meditate on. That God's Word is His breath, training us to become who He has created and called us to be. This is why we need God's Word in our life, through Scripture, through Bible reading, through study, and through preaching. This is why we have such a high view of preaching because preaching is God's Word declared over your life to shape and form you. Just like Ezekiel preached to Moses and prophesied to the dry bones.

When God's Word, like right now, is being spoken over your life, dead things are coming to life. Things within you are awakening. Dreams are being released. Destinies are being released. Revelation is being given. Movement is happening. Healing is taking place. And the best thing that happens is seeds get planted in your heart and they begin to grow, night and day, whether you're asleep or you're awake. You don't even know how, but it starts to change you from the inside out. How are we ever going to become like God if we don't first learn to think like God?

So, am I open to His changing Word? Then the Holy Spirit starts to work in our lives through godly relationships. And notice it doesn't say friendships, acquaintances, community. This isn't the girls' night out girls. This isn't fishing buddies. This isn't that student that I think is cool and I want to be around. This is another disciple of Jesus in my life. Another person who knows what a disciple is and has decided to be one. I need at least two or three of those directly involved in my life where they're saying, "We're going to do this thing together." Think of elite athletes. No elite athlete ever trains alone. They know they need other elite athletes in their life to push them to be their best. Come on, think about what the Bible says. "Confess your sins to one another and pray for each other that you might be healed." "Spur one another on towards love and good deeds." "Encourage one another." "Forgive one another." "Build up one another." "Strengthen one another." There are so many "one another's" in the Bible. Who are the one another's in your life? "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Who are the other elite athletes that you're training with to become who you say you want to become?

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will" – not, "I will;" not, "you will" – "We will in all things grow, change up into Him who is the head that is Christ from Him, the whole body connected, joined and held together by every supporting relationship grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work." Like, I can't become who I'm called to be without you. I need another disciple or two in my life that is helping form and shape and mold me. So, my

question for you is this. Is there anybody in your life that you can confess sin to? And when was the last time you did it? Is there anybody that will love you enough to forgive you when you mess up and point you towards Jesus? Have you built any relationships where you spur one another on towards love and good deeds? Because you become like who you hang around.

So, the Holy Spirit works through godly relationships and then through trials – hardships, grief, suffering. This is the one we probably like the least. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." It says trials help us become mature and complete. Trials, like that marriage that falls apart, like that broken relationship, like that sickness in your body, like the lost job, like the financial hardships, like the, like the wayward trial. Yeah, those things are the things, when we're surrendered to God, that He uses to make us mature and complete.

Remember, God tests you to strengthen you. Satan tempts you to break you. And there's a big difference. God is not tempting you in your trial. He's testing you to remove the things in you that aren't supposed to be there. And this is why He says, "Consider it pure joy." How? Joy is a pervasive sense of well-being. And if I have a vision and intent to become who God has called me to be, then when trials show up in my life, I can actually have joy because I know they are part of the means of what God is using to help me become who He has called me to be. Or how about, "In this you greatly rejoice" – there it is again – "though for now" – for a little while – "you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials, these have come" – why are they here? – "so that your faith of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire may be proved genuine." He says, "Rejoice because the trials are refining you."

See what trials do in our lives is they break us. They break us open. They humble us. And they bring us to this place of submitting and surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus, like a big storm that comes in and it unearths everything that was really there. All the things that we didn't even think were inside of us, they get exposed, they get laid bare, and God invites us to surrender them to Him. And trials remind us of what's really important in this life, and what really matters. In fact, this is why it says that famous verse that we know, that "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him..." Listen, you wouldn't have to say God is working for the good if you thought it was good. So, it immediately implies trials, suffering, grief. "...who have been called according to His purposes." We like that verse. It's on your pillow and your knick-knacks and your frames. But the next verse tells us why. "For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son."

Those trials have come and they're good because your destiny is to be shaped into the image and the likeness of Jesus. Are you open to what God wants to do in your life, in trials? And then there's the spiritual practices that form and shape us. These are the things we've been talking about. Training, habits, this is: we can't do it without God. But He won't do it without us.

This is why we have verses like this. "Since you have taken off your old self with its practices" – the way you used to live in the world – "and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." We actually have a responsibility to partner with what God is doing in our life, how He is changing us. That's the practices, the disciplines. That's primarily what this series is about, and then time. Maybe we like this one even less than trials.

In our instant, immediate, convenient, overactive, under-meaning lives, we don't like time. We want it now. We want it instant. We want it yesterday. But that's not how it works. It's a process. "Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we don't give up." Most of Jesus' teachings on the kingdom revolve around agriculture. Plants, trees, seeds. What do those things take to grow? Time. And if you're going to change, it's going to take time. This is a working theory for a big word: spiritual formation. How God actually forms you into the image and likeness of Jesus. But it's not just the image and likeness of Jesus. See, this is how people change. And if you have time, you should think through this later on your own in every area of your life that you're a part of. How do people actually change?

But just let me invert one for you. The spirit of the world, the spirit of the world has a plan and a destiny for your life. And what does he start with? Teaching. God's Word could be teaching. Indoctrination, ideas, images, media, lies. Lies deceived as truth. Or, what would be the word? Hidden, covered. I don't know. Disguised, thank you very much. Disguised, that's the word I was going for. Disguised as truth. Community. Finding other people that are moving in the direction of the world. You become like who you hang out with. That's why who you hang out with really matters. The spirit of the world wants to use the trials to get you to pick up ungodly beliefs, to be offended at God, to question His goodness and His love and make you become bitter and hard-hearted. He then wants to cause you to start practicing, training, picking up habits of the world. Enjoying the temporary pleasures of sin.

And then over time, he has shaped and molded you into the image and likeness of the world. This is spiritual formation. And everybody gets one. Whether you want it or not. Hitler had one. Mother Teresa had one. Osama Bin Laden, the Pope, your mom, your boss, and you. The only question is, is it intentional spiritual formation or unintentional spiritual formation? Because you are being shaped and molded into a kind of person. Is it the kind of person you want to be? And I get it. Spiritual formation, big word, not a word we use a lot around here. Let me just define it for you. Spiritual formation is the process of being formed into the image of Christ to become a person of love. Spiritual formation, which was that graphic I was showing you, it's a process. It's not an event.

It's not a one-time moment or an experience. It's a journey. It's an ongoing lifestyle and it is not linear up and to the right. There are good days and bad days. There are moving forwards and moving backwards. There is up and there is down. There is failure and there is victories. It is a

process of being formed. Notice, it doesn't say that you form yourself, because I can't form myself. I'm being formed, which means I don't have control. But I have to partner with God. He won't do it without me. I can't do it without Him. So, I'm the clay and I put myself on the potter's wheel, I'm the gold and I put myself in the refiner's fire, I'm the garden and I open up the gate and ask the Master Gardener to come in and work the soil. I am being formed, but I work with God in that process into the image of Christ. He is the prototype, the standard, the source of humanity of who we were created and called to be and ultimately to become a person of love.

That's the end result. A person that knows and relies on the love of God. A person who has good will towards God and towards others. A person who actually starts to live like, think like, act like, and believe like Jesus. That's spiritual formation. And you have one, whether you realize it or not. You've already had one. The question is now, what kind of one do you want going forward? Because you've been formed by the spirit of the world and by the Holy Spirit in different ways. What do you want to be as you go forward? Which is why we keep using this verse, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't try to be godly. Don't wait for God just to zap you and make you godly. Don't just will yourself to godliness. Don't train to be worldly. Train yourself to be godly.

And he uses the example of physical training and we've been talking about this in this series, that we all inherently know, I can't just run out and play for the Cowboys. I can't just put on a helmet and a jersey and run out there. If I really want to do that, I've got to train. I've got to practice. I've got to build habits. I've got to totally have a different, have a different routine. I've got to do all the things that professional athletes do. If I want to play Mozart, I can't just sit down and play at the piano. I've got to back up and practice every day, scales and chords and charts for long periods of time to be able to do that. If I want to speak Mandarin and just go to Beijing and drop in and fluently talk to people, that's illogical, and we all know it is. But I can do Duolingo and practice and learn and read and study. If I want to run a marathon, we all know we can't just run out of here and go run a marathon. But you can get sneakers and walk to the mailbox, the next day around the block, and the day after that, a mile, and so on and so forth and build up. We all get it in all the other areas of life, but for some reason when it gets to godliness, that logic goes out the window.

No longer do we think we need to train. We just think we become. I'm here. Poof, yes. Let me give you an alternative way of trying to understand this. Think of the area that we live in and how parents are very focused on having a training plan for their children to become who they want their children to be. The area we live in, there are lots of people who want to train their children to be great athletes. They're not just trying, they're not just willing, they're not just hoping. They actually have a plan. We're going to join this team and make this select and get on this travel squad and get this coach and this trainer and go to this gym and practice here and do there, it's a very clear plan. Why? Because they have such a vision and an intent to have

their kid be a great athlete. There's a lot of families that want to train their kid to be a great musician.

It's not arbitrary. They have a plan. We're going to be a part of this studio and have this teacher and be a part of this band and go to live in this school district so we can be a part of that one because that guy is the best director. And we're going to go to this practice and this training. There's a lot of families that want to train their kids to be educated. It's not arbitrary. You're going to go to this school, we're going to take these classes. You're going to get this tutor. You're going to go to this prep thing. You're going to take this study class. You're going to read these books. It's not arbitrary. Fair?

Okay. So, now if you ask those same families what their plan is to train their child to be godly, what's the answer? Let me ask you this. If you're a parent in this room, what's your plan to train your child to be godly? Do you have one? Have you ever thought about it? And if the answer is, "Well, we come to church one hour a week on the weeks that we're available," that would be like saying I'm trying to help my son be a professional golfer and I take him to the golf course one hour a week on the weeks that I'm available.

We all know that's absurd and doesn't work. And we've been called by God to train our children in the way they should go. So, what's your plan? And if you're sitting here and you're like, "I don't know. What should my plan be?" You know why you don't have a plan? Because you probably don't have a plan to train yourself to be godly. The greatest plan to train your child to be godly is to have a plan to train yourself to be godly. You are the greatest vision and means your child will ever see. Vision, you can't become what you haven't seen. Means, we need someone else to show us the way. And when I choose to train myself to be godly, I am now a vision for my kids to see and I can say, "Come follow me as I follow Christ."

I can't move their intent, but I can certainly cast a compelling vision and means by my life. This is why it says, "Remember your leaders consider the way of their life and imitate their faith." Just so you know, your kids are considering your way of life and imitating your faith, or lack thereof, whether you realize it or not. And I get it. I want my kids to be great at the other things that God has created and called them to do, too. But I want them to be godly more than anything else. I want them to live in the kingdom and I want them to be disciples, which means I have to train to live in the kingdom and I have to train to be a disciple, because I can't take them where I haven't gone.

I get it. Those other things, he says, have value. There's some really good value in the sports and the education and the music, all the things. But godliness has greater value because what good is it for your kid to gain the whole world and lose their soul? What good is it for you to gain the whole world and lose your soul? It's amazing how anytime I talk about the next generation, the whole room is like, "Yeah!" I want to be like, "But you, man. But you." Who cares if you make that money, get that job, accomplish that thing, win that trophy and have a

darkened, blackened, distorted, broken soul? At some point in time, I have to acknowledge I'm being formed and shaped either by the spirit of the world or by the Holy Spirit, and I get to choose which one I really want to go towards.

At some point in time, you have to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his purpose." Like I can't do it without God, but He won't do it without me. And if I've really been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light, I've got to work that salvation out. Like, I got to walk it out. It's got to kind of now mean something and my life should probably be different.

And there should be some fear and some trembling and some awe and some wonder and some gravity and some urgency and really thinking through, "What does my life look like in regards to this salvation that I now claim that I've experienced?" Because it should be different than the world around me. And God is working in me to help me become who He has created and called me to be. And this is where the spiritual practices come in. This is where spiritual disciplines come in. Are you still with me on this? A discipline is simply doing what I can do now so I can do what I want to do later. It's doing what I can do now so I can do what I want to do later. For example, I can't play Mozart. But if I have a vision for it and an intent and I really want to do it, then I can back up here and every day for the next two years, I can practice 15 minutes of piano. And discipline will allow me to do what I can do now, eventually I'll be able to do what I can't do or what I want to do later.

If I can't run a marathon right now, I can't do it. But what I can do is every day, go for a walk that becomes a jog, that becomes a run. I can do what I can do now, so eventually I can do what I want to do later. Okay. A spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice, is simply doing what I can do now to open myself up to God's grace, so I can do what I can't do later. That's all it is. A spiritual discipline or a practice is doing what I can do now to open myself up to God's grace. I can't change myself. But I'm the clay and I can put myself on the potter's wheel, and I'm the gold and I can put myself in the fire, and I'm the garden and I can open up the door and ask God to come in and move. I need His grace so that eventually I can be empowered to do what I want to do later.

Spiritual disciplines or spiritual practices are simply opening yourself up to God. They're submitting. They're surrendering. They're offering your body as a living sacrifice. There's nothing magic in them. What they do is they open you up to God, so God can do what He wants to do in you.

Because as humans, we have an amazing ability to be completely closed off. And the practices open us up to God's grace, so He can do what He wants to do in our lives. You see, a disciplined person is someone who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. That's all it means. A disciplined person is someone who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. A disciplined businessman is not someone who gets up at four in the

morning, works out, does all his emails, prepares for the day. A disciplined businessman is someone who can make the right decision in the middle of the day when it needs to be made.

A disciplined athlete is not an athlete who is in the gym all the time, training all the time. No, a disciplined athlete is someone who can make the play when it needs to be made. They just know I can't make that play if I don't practice a whole bunch. Okay. A disciplined Christian is not someone who does the disciplines all the time. They're someone who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Like be wise when wisdom is needed, be loving when love is needed, be joyful when joy is needed, be peaceful, forgiving when that's needed. That's a disciplined person. And if we're honest, we look at that and we're like, "I can't do that now." I know. So, we back up and we say, "But I can do this, and that's going to empower me to be able to do that later." Are you with me on this?

It's simply opening ourselves up to God's grace. Ah, we got to skip. We got to skip. We got to skip. And here's the deal. These are the practices that we're going to talk about. These are ways you can open yourself up to God so you can do what you can do now so you'll be able to do what you want to do later. The lifestyle of Jesus, so you can live the life of Jesus. And if this overwhelms you, don't worry. You don't need to do all of these. We're going to talk through them and they're tools of grace. Means of opening yourself up to God, so He can do what He is really good at, which is changing us from the inside out. I just have to open myself up to Him. And what you'll see is that there are practices of abstinence and practices of engagement. Practices where I do something and practices where I practice not doing something. And those are meant to help me because the sin in my life is either sin of commission, I do something, or sin of omission, I don't do something that I should do. And they counteract.

So, let's say you have a sin of commission, anger. You just explode with anger. You can't control it. Well, that's commission. You would need to practice practices of abstinence. Like Sabbath, and simplicity, and fasting. Let's say that your struggle is, you can't forgive someone else. A sin of omission. You're not doing what you know God has asked you to do, to forgive. What do you need to practice? Practices of engagement. Like generosity, service, celebration. Let's say your struggle is pride. You're just a really prideful person. Acknowledge that and then look at the list and you say, "How can I counteract that in my life? Well, I probably need to practice service, and confession, and repentance. And probably some simplicity or some Sabbath." And if you'll take time to think through this, it's going to make sense to you. You see, as we get started, I just want to give you these guardrails as we go through these next bunch of weeks, because this was all the foundation. And this is really simple.

Spiritual practices are not a measure of maturity, okay. This is not a measure of maturity. You doing all the practices every day, eight days a week, does not mean you're mature. The Pharisees did all kinds of religious practices and activities and yet they were broken and decrepit on the inside. They had a great external, but a really broken internal. Jesus is going for the inside out. So, it doesn't matter if you do the practices, they are not a measure of maturity.

You know what's a measure of maturity? Love and obedience. The Fruit of the Spirit. See if you can catch it like this. The point of practicing piano is not practicing piano. The point of practicing piano is to become a really good piano player. And if you can be a great piano player without practice, go for it. The point of the spiritual practices are not the spiritual practices. This is so important. The point of the spiritual practices are to help me become like Jesus.

And if I can become like Jesus without them, go for it, because they are not the measure of maturity. Second thing is spiritual practices are an invitation, not an obligation. Okay, these are all invitations. Hear me, hear me, hear me. You don't have to do any of these. Yes. None of you. I don't care if a Circle leader tells you, a staff member tells you, a serve team member tells you, your spouse tells you. If anyone tells you you have to do them, you can just say, "Hey, point back to week four, John said I don't have to do them." You do not have to do any of these. In fact, if they're obligations to you, please don't do them, because you will hurt you and everyone else around you. You're free. These are not commands. These are invitations from Jesus. He says, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and you'll find rest for your soul." So, hear me. If you're vibrant and free, and your soul is at rest, carry on.

But if your life is weary and burdened and there's unrest in your soul, Jesus invites you to a different way of living your life. Third thing is, these are not one-size-fits-all. Not everyone needs to do the same practices. You find one you like, it doesn't mean your friends or your family needs to do that same one. And you don't have to do all of them. We need God to show us which ones to do, when to do them, and how to do them. Like if you're an introvert, you probably don't need to practice silence and solitude. What do you need to practice? Community. If you're an extrovert, you do not need to practice community. You need to practice silence and solitude. Yes. If you're a thinker, you probably don't need to practice meditation. You probably need to practice prayer. And if you're a feeler, you probably don't need to practice prayer. You probably need to practice meditation. Are you catching me?

Whichever one you're the most concerned about me talking about, that's the one you need to do, because your flesh is already crying out saying, "Not that one, not that one, not that one, not that one. Uncomfortable, inconvenient, I don't feel it. Nope, nope, nope, nope. Let's be sick on that week. We're not going. Nope." That's the one you need to do. In all seriousness, whichever one on that list you're already like, checked off, that's the one. In all seriousness, that's the one, because that will be the one that actually forms you. They're done with God, not for God. We don't do these for God as some religious merit, as if He is going to like, somehow give us favor because we do it. No, no. We enter into all these practices with God to know God. To be with God. In fact, the spiritual practices aren't something we do for God. They're something He does for us. If we will enter them with Him. And then they are done in the secret place.



This isn't about you running around telling everybody, posting on social media, making sure everyone knows you're practicing the day of Sabbath. Like, if you had to post on that, it wasn't the day of Sabbath, just so you're clear, you know. Jesus says, "When you pray, when you fast, when you give, do it in secret, and your Father who sees will reward you." It doesn't mean that you can't tell family or friends or the godly relationships you're walking with to help you to grow. I'm just saying, the point is not virtue signaling where everyone else sees and is like, "Oh, you're so mature." Why? Because it's not a measure of maturity anyways. You can be the meanest, nastiest person that practices every discipline there is. Or you can be a really loving and gracious person that's learning how to walk with God.

See, what I'm trying to tell you in all this, concept of change, and disciplines and practices is, this is a lifestyle. I am not talking to you about habit-stacking, about fitting this into your already-busy life, about doing these things while you're doing something else. This is about arranging and rearranging your life around Jesus and His lifestyle. If you were actually going to train for a marathon, you couldn't habit-stack your way into it. You couldn't fit it in your already-busy life. You would have to change some things. So, if you're actually going to walk a different way, you're going to have to change some things. I'm just going to tell you right now, it'll be awkward. It'll be uncomfortable. It'll be foreign, unfamiliar. It's a little unknown. Why? Because we've been so deeply shaped to live like this world that a different way feels very out of control. It feels very uncomfortable. It will actually be hard. And you're like, "I thought the way of Jesus is easy and light?" It is easy and light, once we have learned to walk in it.

It is very hard though to go from the way you've been living your life for 50 years to now trying to do the things that Jesus did. So I have to acknowledge that and ask for grace. And we're going to practice. We're going to try. And we're going to train. And we're going to struggle. And you're going to fail. And you're going to fall. And junk inside of you that you thought you already dealt with is going to come raging back to the surface, and you're going to be like, "I thought that was gone." And God is going to be like, "Hey, we're going to do a new level." And you're not going to get defeated and you're not going to get discouraged because you realize there's thousands of other people trying to do the same thing with you. And we're going to keep our minds set on Jesus. We're going to keep gathering back. We're going to keep encouraging each other. And we're going to say there actually is a way to live a different way in this world. I can actually be someone that does the things that Jesus did so I can do the things that Jesus did. And we're going to change. But change isn't the point. And you're going to grow. But growing isn't the point. And you're going to get a better life. But the better life isn't the point. The point is that I want more of God.

The point is not the disciplines. The point is that He is my one thing. And I want to offer my body as a living sacrifice. And I want to know You, God. I want You to teach me how to live in Your kingdom. I want to be Your disciple. I want to do life with You. And I want to move deeper into Your heart and actually become a person of love. This week, last prayer that we're going to

pray like this. Just Jesus, help me be open to Your changing grace. That's what the spiritual practices and disciplines are. Presenting ourselves to changing grace, not just saving grace.

Yes, grace saves you. But grace empowers you to do what you could never do on your own. It changes you from the inside out. And the reason I've been asking you to pray these little prayers, and I'm not sure if you write it down and forget about it all week, or you don't even write it down, or you don't think about it, or you do it once. Here's all these little prayers that I've done for these four weeks have just been to try to get you to crack the door of your life, so a light beam from God can shine into some of your darkness. And as your eyes begin to see, maybe, just maybe it's going to make you hunger and thirst to open up the door even more so that His life will be your light and flood all the dark places of your life and show you what's really available to those who want to walk a different way. So, close your eyes with me. I know that was a lot. And I know in a lot of ways today that was just a foundation setter.

Just trying to bring some clarity to you of how this stuff actually works. But what do you feel like the Holy Spirit is just stirring up in you today? He is so gracious and compassionate. He will not force us to be who we don't want to be. If we want to live like the world, He will let us. But when we have a vision for a different way, He will even help us have an intent that is greater than our feelings. And He will give us the means, one next step at a time.

My sense is for some of you, it's just like, super overwhelming. Don't be overwhelmed. The Holy Spirit is showing you where we're headed and what's available for you in the future. And then He is bringing you back to what's the next step. Every journey starts with a single next step. And it might just be that prayer, Jesus, help me be open to Your changing grace. Jesus, help us believe that we can change. Help us experience the spiritual formation that turns us into people of love. And help us to consider the ways of our lives because You offer us a different way. A much better way, because Your way leads to life. In Your name we pray. Amen.

**A DIFFERENT WAY**



**FEBRUARY 18, 2024**  
**SEASON ONE REVIEW**

That is the cry of the season. I surrender. I surrender all to You, Jesus. And over these past few weeks, I've been thinking that if we want more of God, we have to give God more of us.

If I want more of God, I have to give God more of myself, because it's not God who is holding out on me. He has already offered me all of Himself to be filled to the full measure of His fullness. We're told that if we will give, that we will receive. And that if we seek, we will find. And that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. And He tells us, "When you seek Me with all your heart, then you will find Me." If we want more of God, we have to give God more of us.

Because it's really easy to sing, "I surrender all," while surrendering some. And the invitation is to surrender all. So, will you, with me, for the next few moments, will you just give God more of you? If we're called to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, what if we just take a moment and give Him those things of our life? Like, can we start with just your mind? Maybe if you want more of God, could you just, say like, God, I give You my mind. I want You have my mind. I don't even know what that means, and I don't know how to do it.

And I know You won't come and take it, but I can release it to You. So, God, I give You my mind. And God, I give You my heart. The very center of who I am, my will, my choices, my decisions. God, I give You my heart. You won't come and take it, but I can release it to You. So, I choose to surrender my heart. And God, I give You my body, this body that You've given me authority over. A place where I rule and reign, and You won't come and take it, but I can offer it to You as a living sacrifice. And You will gladly receive it.

God, I offer You this body. And then, I give You my soul. The deepest part of me. The part of me, Lord, that if I'm honest, I myself don't even understand. And You won't come and take it. You won't come and force it. You won't come and steal it. You wait for me to release it. To give it. To offer it. And so can you just say, God, I give You my soul. I want to give You more of me, because I long for more of You. In this moment, I surrender.

Maybe not all, because I don't know how and I don't know that I can, and I don't know that I'm ready yet, but I surrender more. How about that? Could you pray that to the Lord? Maybe not I surrender all, but I surrender more. I let go a little bit of the things that I've been holding on to. You won't come and take them. But You will gladly and joyfully receive them when I open up. And so, Lord, we surrender more, because we want more of You. Come and stir up within our hearts and our lives a hunger and thirst for righteousness, because you promised to come and fill us with more of Yourself. By faith, we believe that You have just released more of Yourself to us, as we have given more of ourselves to You.

Why don't you go ahead and grab your seat with me for a moment. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're glad you're here with us today. And we've been in this series called A Different Way. A big series, talking about living our lives the way that Jesus did. And in a sense, we've kind of

finished up Season One of this series. If you think of your favorite show, it has different seasons, well, we've kind of just finished up Season One, which was the foundation, which was the vision, which was trying to lift up your eyes and call to the deep things in your heart. And before we move on to Season Two, which is going to be the practices, which I know so many of you are ready to get to, we just have to stop for a moment and reflect, and think, and make sure we're aware of what God has been saying to us.

See, it's really hard to train if you don't know why you're training or what you're training for. And it's really hard to start to practice if you don't really want to play in the game. And so, sometimes we have to just stop and reflect, and contemplate, and think, and remind ourselves of what the Lord has been speaking and saying and doing. You see, you can't be a disciple if you're always in a hurry. If a disciple is someone who becomes like Jesus, Jesus was never in a hurry. So, if I'm always in a hurry, it's going to be really hard to be His disciple.

And in our culture of speed, we don't ever slow down enough to reflect, to think, to contemplate. And I would guess that most of us over these last five weeks haven't spent a lot of time outside of our hour together reflecting and thinking and contemplating on what God is trying to do in our lives, not because we don't want to, but because our lives are so busy, we don't have the time or the space to. And yet, God has called us to think deeply about deep things. God has created you to be a deep thinker about deep things. The problem is, is we've been disciplined by the world to be shallow, and to be surface, and to be fast and just move on, as opposed to slowing down and actually reflecting.

God says, "Come now, let us reason together. Consider your ways. Give careful thought to your life. Examine your ways, how you're living, and test them and see if they are leading you to the path of life." And so, what I want to do for the next 25 minutes or so, is just give you a breath to take some time to actually reflect and think deeply about deep things by giving you this time back. And if you've been tracking in this series, you keep hearing me saying things like, following Jesus, it's about arranging and rearranging our lives around Him. This is an example of rearranging our lives around Him and what He is doing. We have an agenda, we have a plan. We have a calendar for this series.

And yet, we have to be willing to push all that to the side to arrange and rearrange our lives around what God is doing in the here and now, and actually be kingdom come kind of people that believes God is here, God is in the room, God is speaking, and He has been moving in my life over these past few weeks, and I don't want to miss it. Okay? So, can you just take a breath with me? I'm going to lead you through this a little bit, and here is how I just want to start. I just want to put up Matthew 11:28-30, one of the verses that we've been looking at in this series, and I just want to give you a few minutes to just read it. Think about it. What is God trying to say to you in this verse?

Now, I'm going to give you the same verse again, but in a different translation. Read it again, and see what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you.

One more time. I'm going to give you one more translation. Read it. What's God trying to say to you?

What a verse. I don't know where you are, and I don't know what's going on in your life, but what an invitation from Jesus to you.

Those aren't just ancient historical words in a book. Those words are living and active. The God of the universe speaking to you today. And that little five-minute run there was an example of thinking deeply about deep things, about contemplating, reflecting, refusing the shallow and surface answer, but desiring to go a little bit deeper into what God wants to say to me. And so, for the next 7-10 minutes or so, here's what I want to invite you to do is, if you have a journal and you've been taking notes, grab your journal. This is why I was hoping, why we wanted to make these for you in the first place is, it's one place where it's all contained together. If you don't have that, however you've been taking notes, or if you're new, I'm about to give you something here in a second, if you don't have one.

And for the next 7-10 minutes or so, I just want to give you the space to reflect on what God has been saying to you through these last five weeks. What notes have you taken? What Scriptures have jumped out? What words has He been speaking? What work has He been doing in your heart? And you might be amazed as you look at week one, you already forgot five weeks later what He was saying, and that was so impactful the hour you were in here. But then we forget about it when we go out there. Think of just some of the questions we've been asking so far in this series. Questions like, who are you becoming? And who do you want to become? Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? What is it that you want from Jesus? Who or what is discipling you? Are you happy with the direction your life is going?

And so, for the next few minutes, can you just look through your notes, reflect through the series. And if you're new and you're saying, "Today is my first day," or you're like, "I was only here one week, I don't know," just think on the question, who are you becoming, and who do you want to become? Holy Spirit, come move among us for these next few minutes.

What good is it to hear with no intent to obey, to listen without ever really trying to understand? To take notes without ever rereading them and reflecting on what it is that I was learning from God? And so, what I want to invite you to do now is, if you can in your journal, in one sentence, if you had to say, here is what the Holy Spirit is saying or doing in my life, right now, if you had to summarize in one sentence. This is thinking deeply about deep things.

This is good practice. If I came and saw you as soon as service is over in the atrium and I said to you, "Give me your one sentence, what the Holy Spirit has been saying or doing in your life,"

what is that one sentence? I want to invite you to actually write it down by faith. One summary of this last two months, here is what the Holy Spirit is saying or doing in a single sentence, or here is what He is inviting me to, or here's how He is moving in my life, here is how I'm experiencing Him, one sentence. What would that be?

And if you feel like you don't have one, then maybe your summary statement would be the Holy Spirit is just inviting me to be more aware of Him, or He is inviting me to just pay more attention to His work in my life, because I'm really not sure.

See, what we've just been doing together for the last 25 minutes or so, that's a different way. That's not "good American church." Some of you are like, "I know, because this isn't what I came for today." But that was just amazing kingdom come, because we just acted like God was real, God is here, and that God has been speaking to me. And we just acted like I'm actually on a journey with Jesus, moving with Him towards something, becoming someone different than I am today. And I just acted like I actually believe that my time in the gathering and having the word brought to my life is actually worth looking at and doing something with and, and responding and reflecting to, that was a great example of a different way, rearranging our lives, our time together, that didn't cost us much. It was just a little awkward maybe.

It was just a little uncomfortable maybe. It was just a little bit unknown, like I'm not sure where all this is going to go. And so, I just tried to demonstrate to you that all these practices that we're going to start, when they're done with the right heart, will be a little awkward and uncomfortable and unknown, but you can do it. In fact, if it was hard for you to just sit here in about 10 minutes of silence, that's a great question for you to reflect on. Why was it hard for me to sit in 10 minutes and think about what God has been saying to me? If that's you in your life, that should be the loudest siren you will ever hear in your life screaming to you of "Warning! Warning! Danger! Danger!" If your soul is that overwhelmed, that broken, that wore out, that disoriented, that trying to stay surface, I don't want to go in there.

That is God showing you, "Hey, there's something off here, invite Me in." Because sitting for 10 minutes to think about what God has been speaking to me is part of what being a disciple of Jesus is all about. And we did it with other people who are doing it with us at the same time. That's a great example of a different way. Let me try to pull this together for you in this. This week, a woman in our church shared with me what she believes is a prophetic word for our church in this season. And as she shared it, it super resonated with my soul because it's been things that I feel like the Lord has been speaking to me and showing me for us. And the, the prophetic word was that this is a season of open doors. A season of open doors, but not the kind of open doors we think of.

Normally, we think open doors, God opening doors for us, so we can go out. New opportunities, new breakthroughs, new relationships, new places to go. It's a season of God opening doors for us to step out and do all kinds of new great things. No, the open door is a

season of opening the door, not so we can go out, but so God can come in. In fact, Revelation 3:20, this is Jesus speaking, saying, "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me." If you've been in church for any period of time, you've probably heard this verse preached for salvation, for lost people that don't know Jesus. That's true. It's a great use of that verse. But in context, Jesus is speaking to the church here. This is not Jesus to the world.

This is Jesus to His own people, saying, "Hey, I'm here. I'm knocking on the door. And just so you understand, there's only a handle on the inside. I can't open it for you. I'm here. I'm knocking. I'm speaking, I'm talking. And if you want Me to come in, I can't open that door for you. You have the empowerment. You've been given free will. You have been given authority over your mind and heart and soul and body. So, will you open the door and let Me in? Will you invite My light into the dark places of your life?" Because if we're honest, there's a whole lot of dark places inside of us. Pride, fear, rebellion, unrepentant sin, anxiety, stress, worry, doubt, ungodly beliefs.

Shame, the pain of our past, there are so many rooms inside and we often allow God into the lobby when He wants to come into the basement. So, it's a season of open doors, not to go out, but to let Him in. And not just once, and not just in one place, but again, and again, and again, and again. Every door He knocks on, it's a season. There's a favor. There's an invitation from God to say, "Open up that door and let Me in. Open up that door and let Me in. Open up this door and let Me in." And that's what a different way life looks like, is letting Him into any and every place He wants to go in our lives. And with a little bit of fear and trembling saying, be gentle and humble with me in this, Lord. Be kind and compassionate in my pain.

Help me. When You come in this room, it's really dark. I don't even understand it. Can you bring Your light? And watch what He will do. And if we don't get this heartbeat as we move forward into the next part of this series, into Season Two and Season Three, it's going to get disorienting and it will be religious and it will be activities, and it will be things for things' sake. All of the practices that we're talking about are just ways of opening up the door and saying, it's a season of open doors. Come on in Jesus, into this place of my heart, the place that I'm even afraid of, the place that I don't even know how to control, but I'm inviting You in because You're here and You're knocking and You want to come in and eat with me deeply. You want to teach me how to live in Your kingdom in that room.

And You want to teach me how to become a person of love in that space. And so, if it's a season of open doors, I choose to let You in. And I'm starting by letting You in today by just being willing to slow down for 30 minutes and think deeply about deep things that actually matter, because I want to become a person of love, formed and shaped and molded into the image and likeness of Jesus. That's what church is about. And that's what life in the kingdom looks like. And this is the great invitation of a different way. Do the things that Jesus did. Jesus



always let the Father into any and every place of His life. There was no place the Father was not welcome.

If I want more of God, I got to give God more of me. May that be a word for your life and for our church in this season. And may we open the door as individuals and as a community to say, come Lord Jesus, come. So, thank You, Jesus, for Your goodness and Your grace. Thank You. But today, You are here and You are meeting with us. And so, we're willing to arrange and rearrange our lives around You, because we want to let You in. And I want You to do a deep work in my life. God, I confess and repent that so much of my life has been formed and shaped by the world to be shallow in surface and fast.

And You're inviting me to a life that is deep and profound and slow. And so today, even in maybe your uncomfortability in this room or the awkwardness for the, "I don't know about that," is God's gracious knocking on the door of your heart to say, "If you let Me in, I will bring you peace. Come all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Come learn from Me, for My way is easy and light." Jesus, lead us wherever we are and whatever pace we're at and whatever level of, of spiritual maturity we may be at in our journey today, would You lead us from that point.

Meet us where we are, God, and help us walk a different way one next step at a time. Thank You, Jesus, for Your presence. In Your name, we pray. Amen.