



A DIFFERENT WAY

DO WHAT JESUS DID

SEASON TWO TRANSCRIPTS

WATCH “SEASON TWO” NOW



A DIFFERENT WAY



FEBRUARY 25, 2024
SEASON TWO, EPISODE ONE
“SCRIPTURE, PART ONE”

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today. And we are in a series called A Different Way, talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. And last week, we finished up Season 1 of this series. And we kind of laid a foundation and cast a big vision and tried to lift up your head a little bit and speak to the deep things in your heart. And we asked some really big questions like, who are you becoming? Who do you want to become? Whom or what are you a disciple of? Can you change? And if you can, how do you really change? And we walked through some really big things together. And today, we are going to start Season 2 of A Different Way.

Just like your favorite series, there are different seasons and each season stands alone, but if you really want to get the most out of the season experience or the viewing pleasure, if you will, you have to know what happened in the season before. And when you get into a next season, that season starts with the assumption that you know what happened in the last season. So we are moving into Season 2 with the assumption that you know what happened in the last Season 1. And so if you missed anything that we talked about, I would encourage you to go back online, watch it, grab a hold of it. I'm going to start with that foundation, with that premise that you've got Season 1. Season 2 will be all self-inclusive. So if you don't want to know Season 1, that's fine. Season 2 will still be good for you. It just won't be as good as if you understood what was going on in Season 1. And what we are doing and what we're talking about is, we've been saying, if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we first have to 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 Jesus' life, I have to first take on His lifestyle. Like if I want to do the things that Jesus did, like have peace, and joy, and love, and be free from the love of money, and not have anxiety, and love my neighbor, and love my enemy, I have to first do the things that Jesus did, like pray, and fast, and meditate, and engage the Scriptures. And so as we move into Season 2, what we're now going to do is start talking about the specific practices, the things that Jesus did that enabled Him to do the things that Jesus did. And the verse that we've been using in this series is just, "Train yourself to be godly." Not try to be godly, not will yourself to be godly, not wait for God to make you godly, not train yourself to be worldly, train yourself to be godly.

My effort and God's grace coming together to change me from the inside out. And the best way we train ourselves is through spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines. And we've just been saying that a discipline is doing what I can do now, so I could do what I want to do later. A spiritual discipline or a spiritual practice is doing what I can do now to open myself up to God's grace, so I can do what I can't do or what I want to do later. You say, what does that mean? Well, it means if I can't be peaceful or be joyful or not be angry, I can't do that right now. What can I do? I can pray and I can fast and I can meditate and I can confess and repent. I can do some things that open me up to God's grace, put myself on the potter's wheel, allow Him to shape and mold and form me into His image and His likeness.

And then eventually God's grace in my life will allow me to do what I want to do later. Those are the practices. Those are the disciplines. And we've just given you some guardrails. And we just said spiritual practices as we go through this kind of Season 2. And I think there'll be a Season 3 and most likely a Season 4. Okay. So just letting you know, this is important. So you really want to make sure you get Season 1. We've just said spiritual practices are not a measure of maturity. Like if you do all these things, it's not a measure of maturity. No one really cares. Maturity is based on love and obedience and the Fruit of the Spirit. The point of practicing the piano is not to practice the piano. It's to become a really good piano player. The point of the spiritual practices are not the spiritual practices. They're to become shaped into the image and the likeness of Jesus. And we said they're an invitation, not an obligation, which means you don't have to do any of these.

There's no obligation, no expectation, no religious pressure to do anything. Now, these are all invitations from Jesus to people who are weary and burdened, who want rest for their souls, who would like to live their life a different way. You don't want to do them, you don't have to. These are not one-size-fits-all, which means not every practice works for everyone in every season. You have to be open as we go through these to what the Holy Spirit wants to invite you into, which means you actually have to. And they are done with God, not for God. These are not things we do for God to get some kind of favor from Him. In fact, we're not doing this for God. God's doing it for us. And we enter every one of these aware that He is with us and He is the one doing the work in our lives. And they're done in the secret place. In other words, we're not doing these to be put on display so your neighbors and your friends and the people in your life see how spiritual and mature and religious you are. No, we do them in the secret place, so the Lord sees them and then He rewards us in the open later.

So spiritual practices, what we've said is, they are a lifestyle. This is not habit-stacking, adding to an already-busy life, trying to force them in. This is about arranging and rearranging our life around Jesus and His lifestyle so that we can become like Him. And Season 2, we're now starting to talk about those practices. And we're starting with the first one, which is Scripture. So Jesus, today, as we start Season 2 of A Different Way, would you come and teach us how to be disciples? Would you come and teach us how to be disciples? Would you come and teach us how to arrange and rearrange our lives around You? Jesus, we don't want to do religious activities for the sake of doing religious activities. We want to become like You. So we put ourselves on the potter's wheel and we say, shape us, Lord, into Your image and Your likeness.

You see, one day after 30 years of hiddenness, Jesus comes to John the Baptist to be baptized. And as He's baptized, He goes under the water. It says the heaven's part open, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus. And the Father speaks from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And immediately after Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit leads Him out into the wilderness. And for 40 days and 40 nights, He is by Himself fasting, and at the end of that 40 days of not eating anything, when you would think He would be at His weakest moment, Satan comes to tempt Jesus. And three times, he comes to tempt Jesus. And the first

time he comes to Him and he says, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Interesting. "If you are the Son of God," he leaves out the most important word "beloved." Satan doesn't care if you know that you're a son or a daughter of God. He cares if you know that you're beloved because love makes you fearless. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." And Jesus responds by saying, "It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Three times Satan tempts Jesus and three times Jesus responds in the exact same way, "It is written." When Satan comes to tempt Jesus, Jesus doesn't freak out. He doesn't panic. He doesn't rebuke the devil. He doesn't cry out to God, "Why are you so mean to me?" He simply responds by declaring, "It is written." And in that moment, we learned that Jesus arranged His entire life around the Word of God. That for the past 30 years, Jesus had arranged His lifestyle around the Word of God.

He read it. He meditated on it. He memorized it. He prayed it. He prophesied it. He studied it. He learned it. His entire life was built around the Word of God because in that moment, He didn't have a Bible to turn to and say, "Hang on, Satan. Okay. This one is the one." No, "It is written." You can't say, "It is written," if you don't know what it says. He built His life around the Word of God. Now, I want you to compare that to Eve. Eve is in the perfection of the Garden. Adam and Eve walk with God in the cool of the day. And one day, Satan comes to tempt Eve much like he did with Jesus. And when he comes to tempt Eve, he gets her to question the goodness of God. See at the root of every temptation in your life is the questioning of whether or not God is good and whether or not God is good to you. And he comes to Eve much like he did to Jesus.

The serpent Satan said to the woman, "Did God really say..." questioning His Word, His voice, "You must not eat from any tree in the Garden?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the Garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the Garden and you must not touch it or you will die.'" Now on the outskirts, this looks really good. "God did say..." The only problem is, if you know the story, this is not what God said. Eve says, "God did say," but it's not what God said. She took a little bit of God's Word and a little bit of worldliness and she put them together and she was completely wrong. And isn't that what we do? Take a little bit of God's Word and a little bit of worldliness, put it together. Like "God helps those who help themselves." And we're convinced that's of God. "God helps" – in the Bible. "Those who help themselves" – in the world.

And we put them together and we fall and we crash. And what we learn is that Eve did not arrange her life around the Word of God. She couldn't say, "It is written," because she didn't know what it actually said. Jesus responded by saying, "God said," Eve responded with, "I think, and I feel." And what we learn is that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we got to do the things that Jesus did. And He arranged His entire life around the Word of God. And if we want to do what He did, then we have to arrange our life around the Word of God. You see,

God's Word is simply God speaking. God's Word is simply God speaking. Jesus is the living Word of God. The Scriptures are the written Word of God, but God's Word is God speaking.

In fact, this is why it says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. And the Word was God." Jesus is the living Word of God. It's God speaking to us through the life, the person, and the work of Jesus. And the Scriptures are the written Word of God. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away." Isn't it interesting that God's Word was in the beginning and God's Word will be in the end? It always has been, and it always will be. And what's so important for you to understand is that the Bible is not a book. It's a voice. The Bible is not a book. It's a voice. It's a voice of one crying out in the wilderness. A voice telling us God's thoughts and God's will. The Bible is not contained by leather and pages and font and text. It's Spirit and it is life.

It is God's voice. It is God's voice creating, God's voice blessing, God's voice loving, God's voice forgiving. It is not religious commands and expectations. It is not a book. It is a voice. And what we forget is how powerful and profound God's Word actually is. Like, do you realize that God created, sustains, and will redeem all things through His Word? He created, He sustains, and He will redeem all things through His Word. Go backwards with me. In Revelation 19, in the very end, "I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True" – Jesus – "And out of His mouth comes a sharp sword, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, with which to strike down the nations." At the very end of all things, Jesus comes and redeems all things, makes all things new with His Word.

That's how powerful it is. And not only that, but the Son is sustaining all things by His powerful Word. He is sustaining all things, literally right now, holding your life together by His Word. And in the beginning, "God said... and (it) was so... and (it) was good." In the very beginning, God spoke, it became so, and it was good. He spoke to chaos, and it became order. He spoke to darkness, and it became light. He spoke to nothing, and it became something. And when God speaks in your life, He creates. And God is sustaining your life in the chaos and the storm through His Word. And God is redeeming and making all things new with righteousness and justice, with grace and truth in your life, in the here and now.

And so what I'm trying to tell you is that God rules His kingdom with His Word. If He created, sustains, and redeems all things with His Word, then He rules His kingdom with His Word. And if I want to be a person of His kingdom, then I have to be responsive to His Word. Kings rule and reign with words and actions. Every king has a kingdom, and through words and actions, whatever is submissive and surrendered to those words and actions are a part of His kingdom. And God has chosen to rule His kingdom through His Word. And whatever is submissive and responsive to His Word becomes a part of that kingdom. And so if I want to live a kingdom life, I have to be one who longs for and values and is responsive, not to a book, but to a voice that comes from a person. I mean, have you ever stopped and thought about this? Have you ever

stopped and thought how or why do fish keep multiplying in the ocean, even though we keep polluting it?

Have you ever stopped and wondered, how is it that plants and vegetation keep just growing up, new plants from the ground, even though we strip the land bare? How is it that animals keep multiplying and reproducing, even though we've destroyed their habitat? How is it that humanity keeps multiplying and growing on this earth, even though we don't value human life? How is it that light keeps going to the edges of the universe and creating that which did not exist in the past? God said, and so it's so. "Let there be light," and that light is still moving and creating. "Let the oceans team with fish," so fish just keep reproducing because they're submitted to the Word of God. "Let the earth team with vegetation coming up from the ground."

"Let the earth be full of animals." "Let man be fruitful and multiply and reproduce." And even in our broken, fallen, sinful state, we are responsive to the Word of God. You say, that's biology and evolution. That's just what fish do. No, it's the Word of God. It's a king who has made a declaration over His kingdom. And even in its broken and fallen state, it is submitted and surrendered to it because it's the all-consuming, all-powerful Word of God. And so if I want to be a person who actually lives in God's kingdom, I have to become someone who responds to His Word. See, there are so much of our lives that is out of alignment with the kingdom of God. Not because we're bad people with evil intent, but because we're ignorant and apathetic and approach His Word casually. There are so many places in your life and my life, they're not in alignment with the kingdom of God. Not because God hasn't spoke, but because I don't know what He has said.

Think how much God has already told us about His kingdom, its values, its principles, its culture, the blessings, the opportunities, what's available. He has already spoken so much about His kingdom. The problem is I don't know what He says, so I can't align my life to it. God said it was so, and it was good. The problem is we don't know what He said. We don't believe it was good, and so it can't be so in my life. I don't know what God said. And what I do know, I question if it's good. And so it is not so in my life. Make no mistake, it will be so. God has just given you the freedom whether or not you want it to be so in your life. This is why Jesus, when He teaches us how to pray, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." You say, "God's kingdom, confusing language, I don't understand it." Well, God's kingdom comes wherever His will is done.

Wherever His will, His heart, what He wants, what He desires, what He chooses, wherever His will is done, His kingdom has just come. And the reason we pray "on earth as it is in heaven," because in heaven, everything is surrendered to the Lord. And so, it's the fullness of His kingdom. But on earth, there are kings and queens with kingdoms and queendoms. And God has given us the authority in this time, in this age to rule and reign and to decide whether or not we want to submit to His words or just speak out our own. And so if I want to see His

kingdom come, I have to surrender my life to His will. And His will is communicated by His Word. In fact, this is why Jesus goes on to say, "Give us today our daily bread." What was it that we just saw Jesus say? "It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." So could it be that Jesus is teaching us to pray for God's Word in our lives so we will know His will, so His kingdom can come?

That if I want to be a person who lives in God's kingdom, I must be a person who loves God's Word. God's Word will show me His will and His will, when I surrender to it, will bring His kingdom. If I desire to live in God's kingdom, I must love God's Word. To value His Word is to value His voice. To value His voice is to value Him. This is the great invitation – to repent for the kingdom is at hand. God's Word gives us the opportunity to repent and bring our will into God's will so His kingdom can come and I can reach out and take a hold of it. We spend so much of our lives being so worried, worried about the specific will of God. Like who should I marry? What job should I take? Where should I move? Should I buy this car? And that's great. Talk to God about all those things. Just don't ignore the general will that He has already released and revealed to us through His Word.

Consume yourself with that bread that you might know His will, that His kingdom would come. And I bet you wouldn't even be worried about most of the specific will we stress out about all the time. You with me on this? See, I love in Colossians chapter three, Paul and his passage where he's teaching us about how to take off the old self and put on the new self. He says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. And as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." If I want to dwell deeply in God's kingdom, God's Word has to dwell deeply in me.

God's kingdom is as deep in you as His Word is in you. Because if He rules His kingdom by His Word, and Jesus says the kingdom isn't here or there, it's within you. Then God's kingdom is as deep as God's Word is in my life. And so if I want to dwell deeply in His kingdom, I have to first dwell deeply in His Word, because He rules His kingdom by His Word, and where His Word is received, His kingdom will come. And when His Word is deeply in me, the kingdom is within me. And now I have songs to sing and gratitude to express. And all of a sudden, I now have wisdom to speak. Hear me. The authority to speak comes from the willingness to listen. And if you ever feel like when you talk, no one listens, your spouse doesn't listen, your boss doesn't listen, your parents don't listen, your kids certainly don't listen. It all just falls to the ground. Why? Because you're speaking your words, not His words. The word of the world dwells deeply in you. So it comes deeply out of you. But when the Word of Christ dwells deeply in me, now my words are aligned with His words. Now I have authority. Now I can do my actual commission, which is to rule and reign with God.

And if He rules His kingdom by His Word, how can I rule with Him if I don't know His Word? How can I be a hope carrier if I don't have the hope of Jesus inside of me through His Word?

This is how He creates, sustains, and redeems His kingdom. It must then become important to me if I'm going to ever live on mission to be a person of wisdom. In fact, if you can even catch this, do you realize Jesus says, "The Son says nothing by Himself. He only says what He hears the Father saying." He doesn't speak on His own. He only speaks what He hears. The Holy Spirit, it says, doesn't speak on His own, but He only says what He hears. Think of how much of our life we speak what we feel like saying, not what "it has been written." In fact, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, it's in the great teaching on how to live in God's kingdom. And this is familiar. You probably know this. This is how to live in God's kingdom. This is the end of the kind of conclusion of the greatest sermon ever preached.

He says, "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears the words of Mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." This is what Jesus says. "Whoever hears My words and submits and surrenders to them is a wise man who has built his life on the eternal, everlasting, unshakable kingdom. But whoever hears these words of Mine and does not submit or surrender to them is a fool who has built his life on the chaos of the world around him."

If God rules and reigns His kingdom through His Word, then we must become people who love His Word, not a book, a voice, a voice that shows us His thoughts and reveals to us His will in relationship, creating, blessing, loving, forgiving. Are you with me on this? You see, there are three profound things that God's Word will do in your life. God's Word will show you what's true in a world full of lies. It will show you what's possible in a world of impossibilities. And it will show you God's heart in a world without heart. God's Word will show you what's true in a world full of lies. Have you ever stopped and asked yourself the question, how do I know what's actually true? You spend any time thinking about like, how do you know what's true? What is good? What is real? What is right? Like, how do you know?

Is it what the news tells you? What you hear on social media? What your parents told you growing up? What you've experienced? What you feel? Your truth? Like, how do you know it's true? And maybe a better question to ask yourself is, how do you know if you're living your life under the influence of a lie? Have you ever stopped and thought about, what part of my life is under the influence of a lie? Jesus says, Satan's name is the father of lies. He is a great liar and deceiver. He speaks in the language of lies. And in this world, he just lies and lies and lies. And when you believe a lie, you empower the liar over your life. Jesus says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." They don't know what's true. Jesus says, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." So truth frees us from bondage. But how do I know what's true? Well, there's this amazing verse that says, "All Your words are true."

All of them. God's Word shows us what's true in a world full of lies. And either all His words are true or none of them are true. Because if He says, "All My words are true," here and one of them is not true, then they're all not true. They're either all right or they're all wrong. They're either all good or they're all bad. There is no in-between. God's words shows us what's true in a world full of lies. This is why you hear Jesus over and over again say, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." "Truly, I say to you." Sometimes He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you," like, "If you didn't get the first, I'm giving you the second." This is true. He says, "I am truth." It's called the Spirit of Truth. It's called the Word of Truth. God's Word shows you what's true in a world full of lies.

Have you ever thought about what it costs you to live your life under the influence of a lie? Think about humanity for all the hundreds of years we believe the world was flat, silly example, but a great one. What did that cost humanity living under the influence of a lie? What does it cost you to believe a lie about who you are, who God is, or you were created to do? What does it cost you to believe a lie about your past, or your present, or your future? What does it cost you to believe a lie about what is good, and what is right, and what is real? Lies like, "I am what I do." Lies like, "I'll never be enough." Lies like, "No one cares anyway." So subtle. And they have that Eve thing to them, a little bit of godliness and a little bit of worldliness, because we wouldn't flat out believe an overt lie, but that subtlety, that darkness, what does it cost you? God's Word wants to break the lies off of your life by showing you what's true. What lies need to be broke off your life? That's when His kingdom comes.

Second thing is it shows us what's possible in a world full of impossibilities. If we're honest, we live very small lives. I hate to break this to you, but most of us live a very small, finite life. We have reduced ourselves, we have, we have built walls and fences. We put ourselves in boxes and we live with the prison of impossibility. And we say the "always" and "nevers." This will always be like this, this will never be like that. And we believe that everything is impossible. Most of us have shrunk our lives so far down that we complain that our life is not more. And yet we're not even close to living to the boundary lines that have fallen in pleasant places for us from God, because of impossibilities.

And so, God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts and neither are your ways My ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts." God says, "Hey, My thoughts are higher than your thoughts. And My ways are higher than your ways. And the way I communicate My thoughts is through My Word. And My Word will tell you My thoughts and My thoughts will show you My ways. Because it's impossible to walk in My ways without thinking My thoughts. And you can't think My thoughts if you don't know My words or hear My voice. And My thoughts will show you what is possible in a world of impossibilities."

Like God's Word will show you that joy is not only possible, it's normal. God's Word will show you that peace is not only possible, it's normal. God's Word will show you that a healthy

marriage is not only possible, it's normal. God's Word will show you that healing is not only possible, it's... (normal). God's Word will show you that a different way is not only possible, it's... (normal). Huh. Impossibilities become possible when God speaks.

Think about all the things in the Bible where something was impossible until God spoke and it became possible, like Noah's Ark. Think about the Exodus, it was impossible until God spoke to Moses. Now, all of a sudden, it's possible. Peter walking on water when Jesus speaks to the impossibility and says, "Come," it's possible. The resurrection of Jesus from the grave, when He speaks and tells the disciples, "I know you think this is impossible, but this is possible in My name."

Hear me. It is impossible to dream, to have a vision, to create, to advance into the future, if you don't fill your mind with the Word of possibility. Listen, if you were here last year in the Hope Carrier series, I did three weeks on dreaming with God. There were the three most resisted messages I've had in years. And you say, "Resisted?" Like, like, listen, it's like a teacher here, like in school, like I know when you're listening, hate to break it to you. I know when you're not. I know when you're excited, I know when you're not. Okay. All the things, right. I know when you resist. Okay. Dreaming with God was the most resisted three messages. Like I can't even remember doing another one that was that resisted. And it really bothered me. And we talked with our team, couldn't figure it out. Same feedback from everybody, like people just resisted it. And I was never able to figure it out until this week. The reason we resisted dreaming with God is because we don't fill our mind with the Word of possibility.

And so all I see are the impossibilities. So I can't dream with God nor have a vision nor create because all I can see is the physical impossibilities in front of me, because I've not filled my mind with the Word of possibility. Could there be an invitation? To fill your mind with words that are Spirit and life, because Spirit is not confined by the physical and the supernatural is not confined by the natural and the kingdom is not confined by this world. The Word of possibility shows me what is possible and breaks through the limitations and barriers on my life to things I believe are impossible. And then it shows us God's heart in a world without heart. Jesus says, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." Listen to me, your mouth betrays your heart.

The mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart. Your words betray your heart every single time. Have you ever said to somebody, you said something and you regretted saying it? And then later you said, "Hey, I'm sorry, that wasn't me." Maybe you did that even this morning. "Hey, that wasn't me." Actually, it was, because that was what was inside of you. And that's why it came out of you. And Jesus is telling us here that God's Word betrays His heart. It will actually show us what's in there. I'm using the word "betray" to kind of catch your thinking. And what I mean by that is, because God is good, all He can do is bring good things out of the good stored up in Him. And so, the more I read His Word, the more I know His heart. And I

start to actually believe that He is the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and bounding in love, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. It's like, He can't hide that.

He can't hide how good He is in His Word because that's who He is. So when I read His Word, I start to see the good that's come out of the good things that are inside of Him because He is good. He can't say evil because there's no evil things that are inside of Him. You with me on this? You see, when Jesus says, "It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," what He's reminding us, is that our lives are sustained by the Word of God. But just like your body needs bread, your mind, your soul, and your heart need God's Word.

We're created to feast on it. And in the Old Testament, there's a great example of the Israelites every day, they had to go out and gather manna from heaven, bread from heaven. And it was a physical picture of spiritual truth that every day, I need God's Word. And I can't today eat on yesterday's manna. And I can't today store up enough for tomorrow's manna. No, every day I need to feast on God's Word. And if you don't feast on God's Word, hear me, you don't have to feel guilty, but you probably feel hungry. Your mind, your soul, your heart, are starving. Like if all you ever do is eat on the Sundays when you come in here and hear from us, that's great. We want to feed you, but you're starving.

That would be like eating one meal a week physically. Like you could do it, but your life trajectory is probably going to go like this. Listen, every week when you come in here, I've been cooking all week. Okay. All week, man, and I cook, and I cook, and I cook. I'm trying to be the best chef I can. And I mean like, it needs a little more salt, I put, you know, got to take that out of it. That ain't going to work. It's like, I'm trying to, it's too hot to cook cooked enough, not cooked enough. It needs a little more baking. I mean, I'm cooking all week to feed you the best meal possible. I, my calling from God is to feed His sheep, right? So I want to feed you the best meal possible, but I also want to teach you how to feed yourself.

And if you've ever wondered why on earth do we use so many verses? I think there's like 43 verses in today's message. We're not going to get to them all, but there's like 43. Why do I want to do that? Because I want you to see what's true in a world full of lies. And I want you to see what's possible and what's impossible. I want you to see God's heart. And so I want to feed you, but I want to teach you how to feed yourself. We want to be people who hunger for God's Word. But the problem is, I can't make you eat if you're not hungry.

And just like physically, if you starve yourself to a certain point, you're no longer hungry. We have starved ourselves spiritually to the point where we're no longer hungry. Because we've fasted from what we should feast on. And we feasted on what we should fast from. We fast from what we should feast on God's Word. And we have feasted on what we should fast from, the world. And so a lot of us we're like, we're starving. Listen to me, Jeremiah says, "When Your

words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight for I bear Your name." One of the things that I want more than anything for our church is that we would love God's Word. I mean, love it, consume it, desire it, pursue it, feast on it. It's not a book, it's a voice.

And we would love God's Word because we want to live in His kingdom. And if He rules His kingdom by His Word, then I'm not doing a religious exercise. I'm learning how to live in an unshakable kingdom. I'm learning how to live heaven on earth, heaven in my hell. But I got to be hungry for it. And I got to eat it when it comes. And I love, he says, "For I bear Your name." Do you know what evidence of bearing His name would be? Evidence of being a Christian, a disciple, a follower of the way? Someone who loves His Word.

"When Your words came, I ate them, for I bear your name." Evidence of walking a different way is a love for God's Word that becomes the joy of my heart, and delight, brings light to the dark places around me. I've got a hunger for this. And if you're like, "But I don't hunger for it," that's okay, tell God that! Say, "God, I've starved myself to the point that I'm not even hungry. Would you make me hungry? God, I actually really like feasting on the things of the world." Tell Him that. He already knows, so you may as well open up the door a little bit to be like, "I'm not even sure I want you in, but I'm going to confess. I'm just going to go ahead and say it. I like to feast on the world." God can work with that because you're now at least willing to acknowledge that He's the potter and you're the clay. I long for us to be a church that loves God's Word. I don't care what I have to say. I don't have funny jokes. I'm not really all that inspiring and relevant to the world's dynamics. I get all that, I don't care, I care about this. And I want you to know this and love this. And I want you to look forward to the slides that are in here. I want you to like, feel like you missed out when you see me skip one.

I mean, seriously, not because of me, because you're like, "There's more of God in there. There's more of God in that. Touch that thing again, touch that. There's more of God in there, I want it to come out. It's not a genie in a bottle, but touch that thing. I want, I want to know that." And I think sometimes we sit here and we're like, could you skip a few? And that shows us what we're actually hungry for. And that's okay, acknowledge that. I can't say, "It is written," if I don't know what it says. It's the difference between the lifestyle of Jesus and the failure of Eve. You don't have to live in the way of Eve. You can live in the way of Jesus. And we put all these barriers and boundaries around God's Word. And we think like someone else needs to speak to me on God's behalf. Listen, "The people say to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.'" They're like, "Moses, you go hear God, and then come put some slides in a deck and tell us what God said."

Here's the problem. If I won't listen to God, I certainly won't listen to His messenger. Straight up. If you don't hear God, you hear nothing I say because I'm just a messenger, man. "You speak to us, because if God speaks to us, we'll die." Not realizing that without God's voice, you're already dead because God's voice brings things to life, doesn't cause things to die. God's voice creates, sustains, and redeems. If I want anything in my life created, sustained, or

redeemed, I need His voice, because it brings things to life. And Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. God's come to test you. So that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." In other words, if you don't hear God's voice, you will never have awe and wonder and reverence and honor. You will never live a different way. You will live the world's way. But when I hear God's voice, all of a sudden my life becomes, "God said it's good. And so may it be so for me and my family."

Changes the whole dynamic. You need other people to prophesy, and to teach you, encourage you, and to equip you, but you got to hear God for you. One last verse for today. The Bible talking about the Bible. Talking about itself as a voice. Voice talking about itself as a voice. "Now then My sons, listen to Me. Blessed are those who keep My ways. Listen to My instruction and be wise. Do not ignore it. Blessed it is the man who listens to Me, watching daily at My doors, waiting at My doorway. For whoever finds Me, finds life and receives favor from the Lord." The voice talking about the voice. Listen, listen, do not ignore.

Listen, watch, wait, find. And what will happen? I will be blessed, I will be wise. I will be blessed, I will have life, and I will have favor. The problem is, we want someone else to listen, listen, not ignore, listen, watch, wait, and find for me. Because I would like to be blessed, wise, blessed, full of life, and favor. But that's not how it works. Jesus listened, didn't ignore, watched and waited daily and found what God wanted to say. And so, if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to do the things that Jesus did. And you can almost hear the pleading in this.

Almost. But it's also God saying, "He who has eyes to see, He who has ears to hear, He who has a heart to receive, will." God won't make you see what you don't want to see. And He won't make you listen to what you don't want to hear. And He won't force you to have revelation on something you don't care to understand. The question is, am I watching and waiting not for a book, not for a book, a book that's contained with leather and pages and font and text, but for a voice that's in the book, that's living and active, that Spirit and life that wants to speak to your soul and create and sustain and redeem, invite you deeper and farther into His kingdom of life. If we are going to be a kingdom church, if you are going to be a kingdom person, we must become people who love God's Word, not a book, God speaking. God speaking in all the ways that He speaks, and then arranging my life around that, and then being obedient to that.

And you'd be amazed at who we could become. And you say, well how do I do it? That's a great question. That's part two for next week. Your practice plan, though, for this week, and every week I'm giving you a practice plan. Do it or don't do it. I don't really care. I'm going to sleep good at night. I'm going to do it. You don't have to do it. But every week I'm going to give you one because we're assuming you got Season 1 and you like Season 1. So you're still here for Season 2. Hey, I'm smiling at you. If you didn't like that, you're all right. It's all right. It's all good. Engage the Valley Creek Reading Plan five times this week. Okay. I just basically, here's what I did. I walked you into the gym and I showed you a bunch of the machines.

And I told you what they do. And you're like, "But I don't really..." I know. And I'm like, "Hey, don't hurt yourself this week, but just go try it. And then we'll talk about how to actually use the machine next week." I want to get you going on your training plan. Okay? And if you're like, and if you're like, "Hey, I do it, I do, I do more than that," great. That's great. You didn't, no one's telling you to tone it down, just, but we're all going to start at a place that's reasonable. And if you're like, "But I don't engage God's Word." I know. And listen to me, I love you. And I am doing everything I can to help you think about living a different way and then practice it slowly, methodically, not in a way that kills you. I'm not putting on a machine that you can't handle. I'm not asking you to run a marathon. I'm asking you to put your shoes on and walk to the mailbox. Five times, it'll take you less than 10 minutes each time. So it's less than an hour. You can, if you're a fast reader, you can even do it faster than that.

Right. I'm not trying to give you "how" today, I'm just trying to get you activated with a little bit of open door, a little bit of clay on the potter's wheel, a little bit of like, yeah, God, like, like, I don't know, God, but I'd love to experience a little more heaven in my hell. And if Your kingdom comes where Your will is done, and You reveal Your will through Your Word, I, I got to figure out how to surrender my life to Your Word. That's not a book of paper and leather, but it's Your voice. It's not a mysterious somewhere-off-in-the-universe voice. It's Your voice and You're right here and You're talking to me because You love me. So I don't believe all that, but I want to. So would You help me find five times this week to just start by going to ValleyCreek+ and opening it up and just believing that You're going to speak.

Jesus, we want to be people that say, "It is written," because we know what it says, because we want to live deeply in your kingdom. Lord, for years, we've longed to be a church that loves God's Word. And so many people come and go over the times and seasons. But I pray for this time and this season and this body of Christ that's gathered and assembled in Valley Creek. Would we be people who love your heart. Help us hunger and thirst. Help us not be satisfied with news and TV and social media and the voices of the world because there are lots of voices speaking, but only one voice that can create, sustain, and redeem. There's only one voice whom I want to submit and surrender to, and it's Your voice. So speak, Lord. We know You already are, teach us how to listen. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MARCH 3, 2024
SEASON TWO, EPISODE TWO
“SCRIPTURE, PART TWO”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A DIFFERENT WAY



APRIL 14, 2024
SEASON TWO, EPISODE THREE
“MEDITATION, PART ONE”

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. Come on, whatever campus you're at today, Denton, Flower Mound, Gainesville, Lewisville or online somewhere in the world, let's just welcome each other together for a moment. We are so glad you are here with us and we've had a great couple weeks in a row. We had two weeks of Spring Break, Selah, rest in Jesus' name, then together as a church, we prayed for our Easter experiences and services, which was one of my favorite services we've had in a long time, then we had a great Easter, where we met together with the resurrected Jesus, and then last week hundreds of people got baptized are moving forward on their journey with Jesus, and what I just want you to see in all that is that God is moving. He's at work. He's doing things in our lives. He's doing things in our church and there is this growing sense of hunger. There's this growing sense of discontent for the status quo. There is this hunger and this thirst for God.

And we've been in this series, this season, if you will, just called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did, and we're taking most of this year to just talk about what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus, a learner, a student, a follower, one who becomes like the one they follow. Allowing Jesus to be our teacher; to give us a vision of who we want to become. And we're talking about, how do we arrange and rearrange, order and reorder, our entire lives around Jesus and His way. We've been saying that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we first have to... [do the things that Jesus did.] Yeah, you've been listening. That if I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, I have to first do what he did behind-the-scenes. That if I want Jesus' life, I have to first take on His lifestyle. You say, well, what does that mean, to do the things that Jesus did so I can do the things that Jesus did? Well, do the things that Jesus did. What did Jesus do? Jesus raised the dead, and healed the sick, and cast out demons, and He had peace in this life; He was full of wisdom, He was able to love His enemy; live in freedom. If I want to do those things, I have to first do the things that Jesus did, like His practices – fasting, prayer, Scripture, community, generosity and so on.

You see, we've used this little image to say, this is a picture of the life that Jesus lived and these are the things that we want. Peace in chaos, joy in every circumstance, purpose in the mundane, being able to forgive no matter what, and sometimes we look at the life of Jesus and we think it's so beyond us, so impossible, we can never live that life. Yet, Jesus Himself says, "I tell you the truth," and anytime The Truth says, "I'm telling you the truth," you should probably... this is important. "Anyone..." Does that include you? "Who has faith in me will do what I have been doing." He says the life that I'm living is not this extraordinary ordinary, supernatural, divine Son of God kind of life. No, this is the normal Christian life. This is what it means to be human. This is what it looks like to be alive. This is what it looks like to be a person in right relationship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' life is actually available to you, and I when we decide to allow Him to be our teacher and us be His disciples and He will show us the way. But it doesn't just happen. We actually have to train ourselves to be godly. Not just try to be godly, not just wait to be godly, not just hope to be godly, not let the world train you to be worldly. No, we got to train ourselves to be godly. Just like it might be hard for you to be like Jesus right now or to be godly, in the same way, you couldn't just go out and run a

marathon. But you could start training, and you could walk to your mailbox, and then the next day, walk around the block, and maybe the next day, go around it two times, and so on, and so forth, and train yourself to be able to run a marathon. Just like we can't be godly the way we want to today, we can start training.

We've been talking about spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines, which is simply doing what I can do now so I can do what I can't do later. Doing what I can do now, what I have authority and the ability to do to practice in the here and now, so I can do the things I want to do later in my life and become who Jesus says that I can become. So in a sense, all we're talking about is spiritual formation, the process of being formed into the image of Jesus to become a person of love. You see, one day after 30 years of hiddenness, Jesus is baptized. When He comes up out of the water, it says the heavens opened, the Spirit descended upon Him, the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Immediately, the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the desert to be in the wilderness for 40 days of fasting. At the end of that 40 days of wilderness experience, Satan comes to Jesus, at what we would think would be His weakest moment. Three times, he tempts Jesus. "If you are the Son of God..." and then tells Him to do something. Every time Satan tempts Jesus, Jesus responds by saying, "It is written..." and then He quotes a piece of passage, a Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy. In that moment, when Jesus defeats Satan, what we discover is that He spent the last 30 years of His life arranging His life around memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.

In that moment, when Satan tempts Him, and He declares and quotes three passages from the Book of Deuteronomy, we know He had it memorized and that He had meditated on it. Why? Because he doesn't have a Bible. He doesn't whip out a scroll. He does not have the Bible app to quickly type in "passages to help you find victory over Satan." No, He spent the last 30 years arranging and rearranging His life around memorizing and meditating on the Word of God. So He didn't win that victory in the moment, He actually won that victory long before behind-the-scenes. And what we see about Jesus is that He filled His mind so full of the Word of God that He thought God's thoughts, He spoke God's words, and He lived God's life. You see it over and over in the Gospels. He's constantly saying things like, "Have you not heard?" "Do you not know?" "Have you not seen?" "It is written..." He quotes these passages of Scripture over and over and over again because He has arranged and rearranged His life around memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.

If we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to first do the things that Jesus did, which is meditate on Scripture. So let's talk about this for a second. Meditation. It's a big word, a word a lot of us are familiar with, but we're not sure totally what it means. What does meditation actually mean? Well, to meditate on something means to think deeply about deep things. To meditate means to take a piece of Scripture and put it in your mind and turn it over, and over, and over, and over, and over again until you start to literally break it down. The way a cow would chew its cud over and over again, you keep turning it in your mind, breaking it down, smaller and smaller, until you actually start to absorb the very reality of that verse. That reality

starts to frame your entire mindset. As you absorb it, it starts to change your attitudes, and your judgments, and your opinions, and your preferences, and your perspectives. It changes your behaviors, and your motions, and your feelings. It literally starts to frame your entire perception of reality. See, to meditate on God's Word isn't just changing your thoughts, it's changing your thinking and your entire mindset. To meditate is not just thinking. Here's what I want you to understand. It's thinking with the Holy Spirit. That's what meditation is. It's not just going off in a corner and thinking deeply by yourself. No, it's thinking with the Holy Spirit, under the illumination and the influence of the Holy Spirit. When you're saying, "Holy Spirit, what does this mean?" "Holy Spirit, why did You say this?" "What does this look like?" "What are You trying to show me in this place?" You're allowing His influence and His illumination to literally break apart that verse until you absorb it. It becomes a very part of you. It's when you open yourself up to God's Word as it is, not to study or analyze it, but just to receive it.

In fact, let me try to make this clear for some of you. Meditation is simply having a vision for your thought life. That's all it is. It's choosing, intentionally choosing, what I am going to think about before the day even begins. Before the situations and circumstances arise, I've already decided, this is where my mind is going to go and this is what I'm going to be thinking about all day. And here's what's amazing. Every person in this room, you are already gifted at meditating. You're a great meditator. The only question is, is who or what are you meditating on? Ready? Do you ever worry? Do you ever worry? Okay. Do you know what worry is? Worry is simply meditating on the future without God. It's thinking about the future over, and over, and over again, but without God. So I worry, and I stress, and I have fear. How about this? Have you ever thought regretful thoughts? Have you ever been full of regret? Do you know what regret is? Regret is meditating on the past without God. It's thinking about the past over, and over, again. "Why did I do this?" "I shouldn't have done that." "I wish I would have done this." "I wish I would have done that." Okay. How about anxiety? Have you ever had anxiety? You know what anxiety is? It's meditating on the present without God. So I start to become overwhelmed, and stressed, and unsettled in all these things I have to do. How about this? Have you ever been really, really angry? Nobody wants to admit that one. Have you ever been really, really angry? And you just stew over, and over, and over again in your mind. You know what that is? It's meditating on how your will was violated. Have you ever been really offended at someone and you can't just seem to let it go? You know what that is? That's meditating on the offense and turning it over, and over, and over again in your mind. Have you ever been in love with someone and you can't stop thinking about them over, and over, and over again in your mind? Have you ever been really excited about something in the future and you can't wait to get there and you're thinking about it over, and over, and over again? That's meditation. You are actually already really gifted at meditating. The only question is, is who or what are you meditating on?

You see, I think we forget how powerful our minds are. God has made you in His image and His likeness, and He's given you this profound mind, and your thoughts lead your life. Right thinking will lead to right living. Wrong thinking will lead to wrong living. And whatever you fill

your mind with, your life will become full of the reality of. If I fill my mind full of the thoughts of God, my life will become full of the reality of God. If I fill my mind full of the thoughts of the world, my life will become full of the reality of the world. The problem for a lot of us is we believe we're victims of our thoughts. We believe that our thoughts choose us, but in reality, we choose our thoughts. You are not a victim of your mind. You are a product of it. God has given you the freedom of what you want to choose to think about. You are not enslaved to any kind of thinking. God gives you the freedom and the ability to choose what you want to think about. You can't choose the circumstances of your life, but you can certainly choose what you're thinking about. This is why Proverbs tells us, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Your thoughts lead your life. So sometimes we got to stop to think about our thinking and give thought to our thoughts. When was the last time you stopped to think about what you're thinking about or gave extended thought to your thoughts? "Fix your thoughts," which means you are not a victim of, but a product of. "What is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about it." Can I ask you a question? Are your thoughts true, good, and right? Are they pure and lovely? What are you meditating on? Because every day you're meditating on something and you get to intentionally choose what that can be. If we want to do the things that Jesus did, then we've got to arrange our minds around the Word of God and think about it all throughout the day. You with me on this?

See, what was Jesus' main message? Jesus' main message when He showed up on this earth was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Remember, the word repent means change your thinking, change your mindset. "Re," go back. "Pent," think penthouse floor, high view. Go back and get a higher perspective. Go back and get God's view on life. If you will repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand and you can access it. A lot of us repent enough to get into the kingdom of God, but we don't repent enough to actually live in the kingdom of God, to move forward and to advance. Why? Because we don't think about God's Word deeply enough or long enough to actually repent. If repent is changing my thinking, it's not just sitting in a church service being convicted by a verse and having a good feeling about it for 13 minutes and then walking out and going right back to my life. That's not repentance. Repentance is actually changing my thinking, and a lot of us in one moment can't actually change our thought life, so how do we actually repent? By meditating. Meditation is a key to repentance and repentance is the way we access the kingdom is at hand. The reason a lot of us never grab the kingdom is because we don't meditate on God's Word enough to actually be able to access it or to grab it; for it to become reality in our life. God gives us a piece of revelation, we see this little treasure and we think, "Wow, that's really good," and then we go right back to our life. But if I will take that thing and think about it, and mine it out, and turn it over, and over, and over again, I'm not just changing my thoughts, I'm actually changing my thinking and I'm actually changing my mindset until I start to think the very thoughts of God, speak the very words of God and walk in the very ways of God. Does this make sense to you? If you want to live deeply in the kingdom, you have to become a person who meditates on God's Word, because that's how you actually change your thinking. Not just once, but for good.

So, if you're here and you struggle with lust, don't keep trying to tell yourself, "Don't do it, don't do it, don't look at it." How's that working out for you? Instead, meditate on verses about God's love for you. If you're here and you struggle with greed, don't just keep telling yourself, "I shouldn't be so greedy." Meditate on verses that talk about God's generosity towards you. If you're here and you're always anxious, don't just keep talking about your anxiety, meditate on verses that talk about the peace He has already gave you. Why? Because that's going to help you repent, change your thinking, so you can access the kingdom that's at hand and bring it into your life. How about this? Paul in Romans Chapter 12, he spent 11 chapters talking to us about what we have in Jesus, the finished work of Jesus, the goodness of grace. So he says "Therefore," based on 11 chapters of theology of the finished work of Jesus, "I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy," based on everything Jesus has done for you, "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship." Worship is not just raising our hands. It's literally offering our bodies as living sacrifices. Every time you engage in spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines, you're offering your body to God as a living sacrifice. Every time I meditate, and every time I fast, and every time I pray, and every time I serve, and every time I do community, all those things, I'm literally offering my body to God as a living sacrifice. Why? Because I'm saying, God, I want to train to be godly. So here's my body. I don't want sin trapped in the members of my body. I want your righteousness to flow through the members of my body. So when I meditate, I'm literally offering my mind to God as a living sacrifice as an act of worship.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Okay. Let's see if we can get this together. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." The world has a pattern. The world has a way of life. The world has a very clear definition on what is good, and what is true, and what is right, and they want to conform you into it, shape you, mold you, press you, like a cookie cutter, form you into this thing where you become exactly like them in every way. All of us have more areas of our life that are conformed to the pattern of this world than we realize. So this is why he says, "Do not conform any longer." There are parts of your life that have been conformed to the pattern, to the standard, to the source, to what the world calls good, true, and right. He says, but don't be conformed, don't let them press you in.

Do you know one of the primary ways we get conformed to the pattern of this world? Okay. Everybody take a breath with me, and step on some things, is social media. Here's what's interesting. We go on social media, and we look for people to follow that we think are experts in the things we're interested in. So, we will follow people that we think are experts in finance, experts in beauty, experts in fitness, experts in relationships, experts in being Gen Z, experts in using our time, experts in travel, experts in the life that I think I want. The moment I follow them, let's use the words now, follow. I click the button. What does it mean to follow? It means they lead, and I have now submitted myself to be a student or a learner of that thing or that person. And now, let's use the words that we use. We call them influencers. What does

influence mean? Influence means to have power or authority over something. It means to have a compelling force on someone to make them do that which you want them to do. So the moment I follow someone who I think is an expert in something I'm interested in, I've literally just given them permission to lead my thoughts. I swipe through and I see an idea, an image, language, wording, a vision, a prophecy, whatever you want to call it, that I wasn't thinking about. Three seconds ago, I wasn't thinking about this, but because I've chosen to follow them and let them influence me, whoop, now there it is. Now I've let them, literally, I've invited them to lead my thoughts. And if my thoughts lead my life, I've basically allowed them to lead my life. So I'm allowing them to tell me what is good, what is true, and what is right. All of a sudden, I start to speak their words and walk in their ways and think their thoughts. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." So I allow their ideas and their images. All of a sudden, all of a sudden, they start to take over my life and I become conformed to the pattern of this world. I allow that way to become the way for me.

Does that make sense? Before you press the follow button and before you swipe through, just stop and ask yourself the question, do I want this person to lead my thoughts? Do I want this person to lead my thoughts? Why do I believe someone who lives like the world can be an expert of finance in my life? Because I'm in the kingdom. Why do I think someone who lives according to the pattern of this world can be an expert of health? Because I'm in the kingdom. But why do I think this person who says they're an expert in relationships and what life can be like in the world, why do I think they're an expert? Because I'm in the kingdom. So not only are they not an expert, they're actually, the Bible will call a fool. Where's the expert? The Scriptures. We didn't like that one. So don't let that happen to you. Ironically, we actually choose it.

It is so hard to lead a church to become like Jesus when we spend 167 out of the 168 hours a week consuming what the world says is the way. Most of us, all we get is the amount of verses I can get into this thing in 35 minutes. Can you see that? You choosing to be here today is a great thought, because here's what you're saying. You're saying I'm here to follow. Lead my thinking. Did you ever think that? You come to church and you sit there, this is why you should take notes. Lead my thinking because I don't want to think like that. I want to think like this. So "do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Change the way you think. It'll change the way you live. We need a renewing of our mind. We need a renovation of the mind. We need a restoration of the mind. We need our mind to literally be remodeled and He says we will be transformed. The word "transformed" here is the same word that's used when Jesus is transfigured. Do you remember that story? He goes up on the side of the mountain and it says He's transfigured. He's changed in front of the disciples and to the point where He radiates brighter than the sun and they literally can't even look at Him because it's so bright. In that moment, He's transfigured and what's happening is He is literally radiating the very glory, beauty, holiness, wisdom, the very life of heaven. In that moment, He fully represents the reality of another world. So when Paul uses that word, what he's saying is, when you will meditate on Scripture and renew your mind, your mind will literally

begin to radiate the very glory, and beauty, and holiness, and wisdom of heaven. People who think like the kingdom radiate the realities of heaven. Why? Because they start to think from heaven to earth and from the spiritual to the physical, from the invisible to the visible.

One of the great dreams of my own personal life is I want to become someone who literally thinks like the kingdom. There is no thought in this head that is of the pattern of this world, but every thought is primarily framed and shaped by what God says is true, the superior reality, an accurate perception of reality, instead of being deceived and being fooled. "Then," and only then, "will you be able to test and approve what God's will is." Only when your mind has been transformed by the renewing of it through meditation will you be able to see God's will in your life. The reason most of us can't see God's will that's right in front of us is because we've been conformed to the world and you can't see what you're not looking for. You can't understand the language you don't speak. You can't find that which you're not interested in. A lot of us can't find God's will for our life because we think so much like the world that even when He shows it to us, we can't see it. Are you with me on this? This is so important. I mean, when Joshua is about to go in and take the Promised Land, a picture of moving deeper into the kingdom of God, the Promised Land, the kingdom of God, Joshua is about to lead a couple million people, okay? Here's what God says, "Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it then. Then," everybody say, "then you will be prosperous and successful." He says the key to prosperity and success is meditating on God's Word. If I would have sent you a text this morning to say, "Hey, come to church today because I'm gonna tell you the secret of prosperity and success." We'd have a lot more people here than we currently have and everyone would sit with their journal and they'd be like this. Because we want to be prosperous and successful because God made us to desire that. God made us to desire prosperity, to have breakthrough and abundance and shalom and life. He's made us to desire to be successful, to accomplish God's purposes in our lives. He tells us the secret or the key of the whole thing is to just meditate on His Word.

"Do not let this book of the law," God's Word literally is the defining reality of what is good and true and right. "Don't let it depart from your mouth, but meditate on it day and night," in the morning and in the evening. When you're awake and when you're asleep. When you're coming and when you're going. When life is good and when life is bad. When the circumstances are favorable, when they're unfavorable. When you're driving, when you're playing, when you're working, when you're hanging. Everywhere you go, meditate on it. Then you will be able to be careful to do everything written in it. You can't align your life to something you don't know, and then prosperity and success will come. Here's what I want you to see. He says, "Don't let it depart from your mouth." Okay. The word meditate literally means to murmur. It doesn't just mean to think. It means to literally speak it out. We're not just supposed to read the Word. We're supposed to speak the Word. Biblical meditation would be literally speaking the very words of God over your life all day long. Be like everywhere you go, you're just walking around. You're just thinking, "God is for me, so who can be against me?"

"One thing I ask, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever." "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight." "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." "I am confident that God will work all things together for the good for those who love Him, who have been called according to His purposes." "I know there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." "I am convinced that nothing, neither height, nor death, neither angels, nor demons, nor nothing in all of creation will separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus." "My God will meet all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come." Are you hearing me? You gotta speak it. You gotta speak it.

When was the last time you spoke the Word of God when we didn't give it to you and say, "We're all gonna declare this together in church"? You're like, "That would just be weird, man." I think the way the world lives is pretty weird. You know what happens when you're meditating, murmuring, speaking the word of God? You know what's happening? It's the Word of God. God's Word creates. So when you speak it out, you're creating your future. God's Word prophesizes. When you speak it out, you're calling things that are not as though they were. God's Word heals. When you speak it out, you're bringing healing to your home and to your family. God's Word is living and active. When you speak it out, you're releasing life into the atmosphere. God's Word trains us in righteousness. When you're speaking it out, you're literally training yourself and your very spirit is becoming stronger in the moment. But instead, oh, we meditate, we just walk around and we do things like this. Like "I'm just, I'm no good. I'll never be able to do this." "I can't believe, why did she do that again? She always does that. Why does she never do what I ask her to do?" "I can't believe he's still acting this way. We've talked about this. Why isn't he doing it?" "This job, I hate this job. Why do I have to come here every single day? Why do they get to do it and why don't I get to do it? When is this gonna change? How do I just get out of this because this whole thing is awful?" So what's happening? That's the future you're creating. That's what you're aligning yourself with. You're being conformed to the pattern of the world because that's how the world thinks. Make no mistake about it, all those experts you follow online, that's the thought patterns in here. Oh, they may look really pretty, and they may have a lot of money, and a car you like, and they may have the vacations you hope for. But make no mistake about it, according to God, they're broken and lost and darkened in here. So I'm glad they look good on the outside, but do they have life on the inside?

The greatest thing you can do for your entire life, prosperous and successful, just meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing you can do for your marriage is meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing you can do for your future, meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing you can do for that sickness, meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing I can do for my work, meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing I can do for my anxiety, meditate on God's Word. It either is the definition of prosperity and success or it's not. You get to choose. If you don't think this is the

definition of how you become prosperous and successful, then here's my question. How do you believe you become prosperous and successful in life? That's a great thing to give thought to. Ask yourself, where did that thinking come from? Because it's a different thinking than what God says. With me on this? See, I've done this for like 20 years now. For 20 years, everybody has, the number one reason people say they don't engage God's Word. Do you know what it is? Don't answer, just think. Do you know why people for 20 years have told me they don't engage God's Word? It's because they say they don't understand it. "I don't get it." "It doesn't make sense." "It's just not for me." "I can't get it." Do you know there's no place I can find in the Bible where God commands you to understand His Word? But there are hundreds of places where God commands you to memorize it, to meditate on it, to read it, to engage it, to pray it, to prophesy it, to obey it, to align with it, to follow it, to delight in it, to consume it, to enjoy it. He doesn't tell us to understand it. He tells us to meditate on it. So we say I don't engage it because I don't understand it, and God says you don't understand it because you don't engage it. I mean, look at this. "For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding." You can't understand it on your own anyways. The Lord gives revelation and understanding and supernatural insight. You can't do this on your own. He has to reveal, reveal, literally show you that which was hidden and that which was covered and make it known to you. He longs to give it to you, but He only gives it to those who are hungry for it. In fact, right before it says this, look what it says. "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then" – then, then, then, everybody say... then – "you will understand the fear of the Lord and find knowledge."

He says if you'll accept it and store it up, if you'll literally memorize it, and turn and apply your heart to understanding, meditate on it, if you'll call out, and cry, and look, and search, then you will understand. Listen, we want to understand. God says faith leads to understanding. Understanding will follow your faith. By faith, put it in. By faith, read it. By faith, prophesy it. By faith, just think about it, for goodness sakes. Just think about it. You'd be amazed what kind of understanding you'll get. The reason so many Christians are so shallow and superficial is because we read it once, say I don't get it, and move on, and God says, "And that's why you don't get it. Because you're not willing to store up, apply, turn, call aloud, cry out because I want to give you knowledge." In fact, He says to the disciples, "The secret," the mysteries, "of the kingdom of God," there are spiritual truths that are spiritually hidden, but God wants to "give them to you." He gave them to the disciples because they were hungry. "But to those on the outside, everything is parable so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding." Do you feel like you don't perceive and don't understand? Could it just be then it's because you're not actually hungry for what He wants to show you? Because He gives the secrets to those who will steward them well. If God gives you hidden revelation that you don't want, you become responsible to now obey it. So if you don't want it, it's actually His grace to not give it to you. He only gives the secrets to those who are willing to

steward them because once they've been revealed, you are now responsible to repent and align your life with.

In fact, I love this. Jesus says to the Pharisees, "But go and learn what this means," and then He gives them something. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," whatever. He's saying to the Pharisees, the religious leaders who studied and analyzed the Word of God, "Go and learn what this means," and He quotes a verse. I want you to think about this. What is He saying? Here's what He's not saying. He's not saying, "Go read another commentary, go sit in another sermon, go talk to a friend." No, He's saying, "Think about this. Meditate on this under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and take some time to go deep with what I say is true." When was the last time you left a message with a verse that maybe didn't connect with you, or you didn't understand, and you went away and learned what it meant? Not from a commentary, or your Circle, or no, just by meditating on it and saying, "Holy Spirit, I don't understand, but you want to show me. So will You show me?" I get it. We say things like, "But God says, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth. So my ways are higher and my thoughts are higher.'" We're like, "I can't think God's thoughts. They're too out there." Okay, Jesus, the living Word came from heaven, took on flesh, moved into your neighborhood with grace and truth to bring the Word of God to you in the here and now. If He could do that, then the Holy Spirit, who has been released in your life, can liberally give you the mind of Christ, which is why it says, "We have not received the spirit of this world, but the spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned by the spiritually hungry. It's not that it's so far out there. It's just not available to those who don't want it. Are you with me on this?

Okay. See, for the last couple years, not even, 18 months, I've been really convicted and impacted by this truth that I'm trying to teach you. So we've started memorizing larger chunks of passages with some of our people. It started with just a couple of us and we started memorizing on some stuff and I watched how it went and then we started asking our staff to do it. In this last year, we've asked every leader in our church to memorize passages of Scripture, not like a verse, but like chunks, like a chapter. We started working it into our Kid's Leadership and our Student Leadership Experience. Then at Men's Nights in the fall, we actually worked on memorizing an entire chapter together. Every time I've asked anybody to memorize a chunk of Scripture, you should see them like, it's like you literally ask them to like, fly to the moon. Like, "Ah, I can't do that. That's so hard. I don't know how to... I don't have the mind for that. I can't do it. Oh, I, oh, ah, eh, oh." Oh my gosh. Okay, hang on a second. Breathe, first of all. Now let's talk about this. Do you know how good you are at memorizing? You know how many songs right now, if I could press play in your heart, bang, would just come out? You know how much useless information and knowledge you have stored up in there? Some of you guys are like, "I can't memorize Scripture." Bro, do you know how many sports facts you have? You could tell me like, Troy Aikman's incompleteness ratio from 20 years ago, on the spot. It's not that we can't memorize, it's that we don't want to memorize. I mean, do you realize that the Jewish culture, like in Jesus' day, the entire education system was based on Scripture? It wasn't based

on math, and arithmetic, and reading, and writing to get a scholarship, to get into that school so I can be prosperous and successful because if you don't get in that school, you can't be prosperous and successful. Oh, wait, sorry. That was a person I was following on social media. Unfollow. Okay. It's either true or it's not. You get to pick. The entire thing was based on Scripture. Every 12-year-old boy, by the time he was 12, would have had the entire Torah memorized. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the entire thing. Why? Because God said, "I want you to think my thoughts and speak my words and walk in my ways." If you will put that in here, that's who you will become. Every person who went on from education from that point would have gone on to memorize the entire Old Testament. So, Jesus, the man, not the Son of God, the Son of Man, would have most likely by the age of 30 had the entire Old Testament memorized. We sit here and argue about memorizing two or three verses.

And then, parents, okay, so I'm just going to go for it today. Parents, we say things like this. "My kid can't memorize Scripture. That's way too hard. They got too much. Oh, it's too much." Okay. Hang on a second. Pause. Okay. Your kid is in AP Physics, Calculus AB, AP Chemistry. They can learn world history. They can study Shakespeare. They can memorize their entire musical theater script. They can learn every play in the offensive playbook. Oh, but they can't memorize a couple of verses. So we bring what our students are capable of way down here. You are capable of so much more. God designed it this way. So you can't say you can't do it, because God made it this way. You can say you don't want to do it. The reason we don't ask our students to do it is because we don't actually believe, that's where prosperity and success comes from, number one. But number two is because if I asked them to memorize it, now I have to memorize it. I'm not so sure I want to do that. If you're in a Circle or on a serve team, I would encourage you to ask the leader of that Circle or that serve team, how their journey of memorizing John 15:1-17 is going. Because that's what we asked all our leaders to do this semester. Ask them, what are you learning? How is it going? How has it been challenging for you? How has it been changing? Ask them, ask them, and in some way, because I hope for the accountability of it. I'll just tell you right up front, we've lost staff and leaders over this because they don't want to memorize Scripture. Here's what I want to say. No problem. Thank you for playing. Bless you. Appreciate you. Because the moment you tell me you won't memorize and meditate on Scripture, you're telling me you can't be prosperous and successful. Because if God says that's the key to taking to Promised Land, you're telling me you can't prosper nor succeed. So why can I then, can't, in good conscience empower you over people that you can't prosper and succeed with? I mean, just imagine for a second, if whatever you believed made you prosperous and successful, if you took just a fraction of that energy and how you look, and education, and networking, all the things, you just took fitness, or took a fraction of that, and put it into meditating on Scripture.

A dream in my heart is that we would be the kind of church that could walk around and anytime we see each other anywhere in this world, we would be able to say, "Hey, what Scriptures are you working on? What Scriptures are working on you?" "Oh man, I'm trying to meditate on

this," or, "I've been memorizing this, and God is showing me..." You know how amazing that would be? When was the last time you committed a single verse to heart, let alone a chapter? Listen to me, if God is the one who made the mind, He knows how it works and just like He says your body needs water and food, He says your mind needs His Word. It needs His Word in here to renew and restore, to change the thoughts, the thinking, the actual mindset, to break it down to a point where it absorbs the very realities of heaven to frame your opinions and perspectives and judgments and emotions and thoughts and feelings so you perceive reality. When I don't do it His way, I literally have a darkened mind and my mind freezes up and it breaks and it doesn't work. I mean, look at this furthermore, "Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done." Meditate on this one this week. They didn't think it was worth memorizing and meditating on the knowledge of God so He gave them. They said, "I don't want to think with you, God. I want to think by myself." He's given you the free will to go do that, but understand that your mind will become depraved, darkened, foolish. Do you know what this word actually means? It means, "can't stand the test." Can't stand the test of what? Your life. Your mind becomes so empty, so void, so darkened, so seized and locked up when it's not full of the Word of God that it literally can't stand the test of your life. This is why we're often so broken, and then we start doing things that shouldn't be done, and we find ourselves doing things we never thought we would do or be like, because we didn't think it was worth retaining the knowledge of God. Believing when God says, "You will be prosperous and successful wherever you go in every area of my life." The greatest thing I can do is put the Word of God in my heart, in my mind, meditate on it, mutter it, speak it. Listen, can I just say something for some of you? If you're here and you struggle with mental health in any way, anxiety, depression, ADD, ADHD, bipolar, any type of mental trauma, brokenness, darkness, like a darkened imagination, whatever you choose for your path of healing, make sure it includes memorizing large portions of God's Word.

You got to choose your healing path, medication, counseling, reframing my life, so on and so forth. Just make sure whatever your plan is includes memorizing large portions of Scripture, because that's how God says your mind works. You can't say, "I can't focus. I can't do it." The reason you can't focus is because you haven't done it. Working on it will actually teach you focus, but then I'll be able to apply in other areas of my life. Why? Because God says I'll be prosperous and successful if I will meditate on His Word. That make sense? The people of God can't choose the world's way for healing. The people of God have access to all truth and the world has some access to truth, but we must make sure we include what God says is priority and first most as truth before we just run off and do all the things that the experts tell us to do. Because if they're not experts in the kingdom, I have to be very careful with how I let them influence my thinking. Some of you are like, "But I can't... I mean, I can't, my life is..." I know, this whole series is about arranging and rearranging. I'm not asking you to add something into your already over the margin life. I'm saying you probably need to take something out so that you can now rearrange your thoughts. Oh my gosh, your thoughts. It's so sad to me that this verse is supposed to describe the world, and yet it describes so much of the American church

that we don't believe it's worth retaining the knowledge of God. Oh, I know God. Yeah, sure. Oh yeah, no. I go out and I live like everybody else. Think, I think like everybody else. That's why I live like everybody else. If I will think like Jesus, I can live like Jesus, but I don't think like Jesus and I'm making no effort to learn to think like Jesus.

I'm getting close to pleading, and I don't want to do that. So we're going to stop there for today and that's what you missed, but we'll get there next week. Here's your practice plan. Practice plan for this week. Remember, in this series, all year, there's a practice plan at the end of every one of these, choose to do it, don't, it's totally up to you, but we are training to be godly as a people. Memorize Psalm 23 this week. Okay. Hang on. It's only six verses. It's already a familiar passage. You're going to have some reference in context of it. We're even going to make you a digital download that you can put on your phone. Try it. Try it. Here's my question for you. If you don't try it, that's fine. Just make sure you're very clear in acknowledging the reality of where you're choosing to put your thinking. It's okay. Don't say I don't want to do it, great. Just then define like, what am I actually then going to think about this week? Money, sex, beauty, fame, frustration, my dysfunctional spouse, my wayward children, my frustrating parents, being cool, being popular at school, just acknowledge at least what you are going to choose to think about, because you choose your thoughts. Your thoughts don't choose you. This is choosing to just have a vision for what you're going to think about just for the next seven days. That's all it is. You're like, well, it's just choosing to have a vision for what I'm going to think about in the next seven days and watch what God will start doing as He starts washing and healing and loosing and releasing the very mind that He's given you to see the very realities of heaven, the will of God around you. Try it. Rearrange your thoughts this week and we'll talk about it more next week. You're like, "But I still don't know how to meditate." I will talk more about it next week. Fair?

So Jesus, we want to be people that have a renewed mind. I want my mind to be transfigured till it radiates the very glory of God. We want the mind of Christ. We want to be people that think according to Your Word. So God, just help us have a little bit of faith this week. Not worried about understanding, or analyzing, or studying, or doing all those excuses, the defense mechanisms of, "Which translation should I use? That one is this, and this..." No, just tear it all down, Lord, and just help us open ourselves up to Your Word. I pray for every person that thinks they can't memorize, that their thoughts would be renewed in Jesus' name, that You gave them a mind, and You wouldn't ask them to do something they can't do. I pray for every mind that has been darkened and consumed by the darkness of this world. Just click on a little bit of light, Lord, just a little bit of light, even as they mutter it, and murmur it, and just speak it out. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want," as they go through their life this week, Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light into our path. They're literally lighting up the very path they're walking on by just saying, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Give us a courage and a faith, God, to actually believe that Your Word does what You say Your Word does. Give us a hunger and a thirst for it. And I just declare that every person in here that wants

"Meditation, Part One" | A Different Way

April 14, 2024 | Pastor John Stickl

to do this, can, and every person that doesn't want, You can change their want. So by kindness, would You draw us to repentance? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



APRIL 21, 2024
SEASON TWO, EPISODE FOUR
"MEDITATION, PART TWO"

Alright, everybody, and welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad that you are here with us, and we are in a series, a season called "A Different Way." We're talking about doing the things that Jesus did, so that we can do the things that Jesus did. We're talking about arranging and rearranging our life around Jesus and His practices, talking about being disciples and becoming like Him. And last week we talked about the practice of meditation and there was such a spirit of revelation and repentance in the room. And our practice plan for the week was to memorize Psalm 23. And I want to celebrate you, because so many people practiced in Jesus' name this week. I heard so many stories of people taking the challenge and practicing their faith. I heard of a woman who's struggling through cancer and she decided that memorizing Psalm 23 was going to be a part of her healing process. I heard about a man in his 80's who thought memorizing Scripture was for children, but he decided no matter how old he is, he wants to renew his mind, and so he memorized Psalm 23 this week. I heard of a young adult who struggles with significant insomnia and anxiety who memorized Psalm 23 this week and slept the best they have in two or three years. I've heard from so many students and young adults who took the challenge and took it upon themselves to memorize Psalm 23, and when I would see them they would show me their phone screen to show me Psalm 23, they're like "I'm doing it, I'm doing it!" I heard of so many families doing it together, I heard of people deleting social media or going through who they follow and unfollowing people they don't want to lead their thoughts. Here's what happened this past week, we started training ourselves to be godly.

We started training ourselves to be Godly, we said, let's not just talk about this, let's actually try, let's train, let's put some effort into this, let's arrange and rearrange our life in a different way and watch what God will do. And so if you participated in any way, if you got one verse, you got one verse more than you had last week hidden in your heart. You might not be able to run the marathon yet, but you got to the mailbox, you maybe got around the corner, some of you took a nice two-mile run, you're training to be godly in Jesus' name. And so my hope was this silly simple little exercise that we did this week is opening up your mind to what we've been talking about, what it actually looks like to train, to rearrange our lives to become like Jesus. See, remember this is not a religious community center, where we just comfort and entertain people. This is not just a rec center where you come and play pickup ball when you feel like it. No, this is a training center and we're training for something that matters – to become godly in Jesus' name. And so we're learning how to do the things that Jesus did, and what we learn about Jesus is that He arranged His life around the Word of God. He memorized and meditated on Scripture, filled His mind so full with the Word of God until He thought God's thoughts, spoke God's words, and lived God's ways. And if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to think the thoughts that Jesus thought, and that's the practice of meditation. So we got through part one, let me kind of start back again and let's kind of start walking through it and then let me take you to some new places with me on that?

Okay. The practice of meditation, what is meditation? Meditation, a big word, simply means to think deep about deep things. Meditation simply means to take a Scripture, take God's Word, put it in your mind, and turn it over and over and over again, the way a cow would chew its

cud, chewing on it, breaking it down until you're able to actually absorb it into who you are. It's breaking God's Word down to this place where you actually absorb it to this place where it starts to frame your opinions and your thoughts and your perspectives and your judgements, where it starts to determine your feelings and your emotions, and it becomes the way you actually perceive reality. It's not just changing your thoughts, it's actually changing your thinking and your very mindset. You see, meditation isn't just thinking, it's thinking with the Spirit. It's thinking under the influence and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, where we take God's Word and we talk to the Holy Spirit about it and we say, "What does this mean? And why did You choose that word? And what does this look like in my life? And what do You want me to see in this?" You see, meditation opens us up to receive God's Word as it is.

This is why it's different than study. When you study something, you try to analyze it intellectually, understand it, and we can try to control God's Word to make it say that which we want it to say. But when I meditate on God's Word, I allow it to control me, and I'm now open to it submitting and surrendering my life, submitting and surrendering to how it wants to shape and fold and mold me. You see, meditation is simply having a vision for your thought life. We have a vision for so many things; meditation is having a vision for my thought life. It's intentionally choosing that which I want to think about before the day even begins. And meditation makes you incredibly stable. You don't become this person that's erratic, all over the place, emotions, feelings, chaos, crisis. Why? Because Jesus says, "Whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a man who built his life upon the rock." So when I meditate on God's Word, I become steady, and I become stable, and I become strong. And the good news is, every person in this room, you're already a gifted meditator. You know how to meditate. Like, worry. Worry is simply meditating on the future without God. Regret is meditating on the past without God. Anxiety is meditating on the present without God. The inverse of those is true. Dreaming is meditating on the future with God. Gratitude is meditating on the past with God. Peace is meditating on the present with God. If you've ever been angry, or offended, or in love, or really excited about something in your future, you have practiced meditation. The only question is, who or what are you meditating on? You see, God has given you a mind made in His image and His likeness, and your thoughts lead your life.

Right thinking leads to right living, wrong thinking leads to wrong living, and whatever you fill your mind with, your life will become full of the reality of. So if I fill my mind full of the thoughts of God, my life will become full of the reality of God, and if I fill my mind full of the thoughts of the world, my life will become full of the reality of the world. And too many of us, we believe we're a victim of our own thoughts. That we don't choose our thoughts, but our thoughts choose us. But you are not a victim of your thoughts; you are a product of them. You cannot choose the situations or circumstances in your life, but you can certainly choose your thinking. So we need to give thought to our thoughts, and we need to think about what we're thinking about and this is what meditation is.

This is why it says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." The world has a pattern, the world has a way. The world has a sense of this is what is good, and this is what is true, and this is what is right, and they want to conform you, shape you, press you, mold you like a cookie cutter. They want to make you think their thoughts, because if the world can make you think its thoughts, it can influence your entire life. And "the mindset on the flesh is death, but the mindset on the spirit is life." We're transformed by the renewing of our mind. Change the way you think and it'll change the way you live. If we will renew our mind, renovate our mind, restore our mind by meditating on the Word of God, it's literally telling us that our mind will start to radiate the very glory and beauty and wisdom and reality of heaven. People who meditate on God's Word radiate the very glory of God to the world around us. This is why Jesus teaches us to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Meditation on God's Word is how we actually repent, change our thinking. Because you might not be able to go from this thinking to this thinking, but every day I meditate on God's Word, I go from there to here. And then I meditate on it again, it goes from there to here, and there to here, and there to here, and there to here, and before you know it, I actually start to naturally and effortlessly think God's thoughts and therefore experience His kingdom.

Then and only then will you be able to test and approve what God's will is. You see, only a renewed mind can see God's will. Only a renewed mind can see God's kingdom. And the reason so many of us can't see God's will, even though it's right in front of us, is because we think like the pattern of this world. You can't see that what you're not looking for, you can't understand a language you don't speak. And you won't find that what you're not interested in. You'll only see God's will if we first learn to think God's thoughts. In fact, look at this, "The god of this age" – Satan – "has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel." Satan has blinded the mind, not eyes, mind. When Satan can get us to think his thoughts, our mind becomes darkened and we literally cannot see it. This is why when you look at the world and you look at people around you and you think, "What are they thinking?" They've lost their... [mind]. They literally have. Satan has blinded their mind so they cannot see. If God's Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light into my path, and if my thoughts are not full of God's Word, then my mind has no light. So I literally cannot see. See, whoever influences your thoughts determines what you see. If Satan influences your thoughts, all you see is the world, when God's Word influences your thoughts, all you see is His kingdom.

Unbelief blinds you; faith gives you eyes to see. So here's my question for you. Where has Satan, the god of this age, blinded your mind? Where are you unable to see? The answer is, you have no idea. Why? Because that's an area you are blind and you literally can't see it. So we need the Word of God to turn on the light so I can actually realize that which I didn't see. That's what happened last week. The Word of God kicked on in so many people's lives that the spirit of revelation and repentance was released, we could see it like turning on a light in a dark room, and you're like, "Oh my gosh, that's been there all along." Yes, it has, and then we can respond in faith in Jesus' name. You see, here's the good news, no matter how blinded or darkened your mind has been, Jesus can heal it. "Jesus loved the church and gave Himself up

for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless." Listen, no matter how stained or wrinkled your mind is, no matter how darkened your imagination is, no matter how stuck your mindset might be, no matter how vile the thoughts that are in there, no matter how much of a lack of vision or dreaming you have, no matter how much mental health struggle you may have in your life, in Jesus' name, He wants to wash your mind, make it radiant without stain or wrinkle, holy and blameless, cleansing it in Jesus' name through His Word. You won't get to wash your mind through education, or enlightenment, or just sending yourself good vibes, or the three steps on social media to having a healthy mindset. It's the Word. It's the Word that washes our mind, and this is why God invites us to memorize it and meditate on it so we radiate His very glory.

You see, when Joshua was going in to take the Promised Land, a picture of advancing in the kingdom of God, this is what God tells him, He says, "Do not let this book of the law" – God's Word – "depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it then. Then" – then, and only then – "will you be prosperous and successful." God tells Joshua the key for victory, the key for his life, is to meditate on God's Word. You see, the book of the law is God's Word, and it tells us what is good, what is true, and what is right. And He tells us we're supposed to meditate on it. Turn it over and over in our mind, day and night, in the morning, in the evening, when you get up and when you lie down, in your coming and your going, when it's good, when it's bad, when it's hard, when it's easy. No matter what's going on in your life, fill your mind with God's Word so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Because you can't align your life to that which you do not know. And so, the key to prosperity and success is to meditate on God's Word. And He says, "Don't let it depart from your mouth." We're not just supposed to read God's Word, we're supposed to speak God's Word. And so, hopefully this week, as you are going through your life, you're speaking God's Word to yourself. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul." Hopefully this week, when something hard happened in your life, you are saying things like, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me." Hopefully this week, when you made a mistake, you reminded yourself, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

We're supposed to not just think about it, we're supposed to speak it. And if you remember a couple of weeks ago, we said that you are the most important preacher in your life. Meditation is choosing what you're going to preach on. I spent a lot of time every week figuring out what I'm going to preach on to you. Do you spend any time thinking about what you're going to preach on to you? Meditating on God's Word is choosing, "I'm going to preach on this to myself." This week, I'm choosing to preach Psalm 23 to myself over and over and over again until I get it in Jesus' name. Now, I've been thinking about this all week. Why don't we believe that this is true? Why don't we believe that meditating on God's Word is the key to prosperity

and success? Because if we believed it, we would do it, right? Because you do whatever you actually believe, not what you say you believe. So why don't we believe this? I think it's because, inherently, we know it's not true. Inherently, we know that meditating on God's Word will not give me the prosperity nor the success I desire. Because I think a lot of us have the world's definition of prosperity and success more than the kingdom's definition of prosperity and success in our own soul. See, there are very different definitions. The world's definition of prosperity and success is fame, fortune, and freedom. It's doing what I want, when I want, how I want. It's a life of ease, and comfort, and convenience, and consumption, where I am in the center and everything else revolves around me. The kingdom's definition of prosperity and success is becoming like Jesus and accomplishing God's purpose for your life. It's about submitting and surrendering, dying to self, picking up the cross, saying, "Not my will, but Yours be done. Your kingdom come; Your will be done in my life." And Jesus becomes the center in which everything revolves around. And inherently, we know meditating on Scripture will not get me this and you're right.

I mean, let's think about this for a second together, okay? Take a 30-year-old. Let's say you've got a 30-year-old who has graduated from a prestigious university. They've got a big job with a fancy title. They're making a ton of money. They've got a massive social media influencing. They've got lots of followers. They've got a brand-new car, a nice house, they're sleeping around, they don't have any integrity, and they are gaining the world, and yet losing their soul. Now compare that to a 30-year-old who's working really hard at a behind-the-scenes job. Who's hidden from the world and isn't really known or seen by lots and lots of people. Who's making just enough money to get by and has an old car and lives in an apartment, but loves his wife, has the Fruit of the Spirit growing in his life, is a disciple of Jesus, and is living on mission with Him. Which of these two is prosperous and successful? Now, I know we're in church, and so, you know, you have to say this answer. But let's pretend we're not at church. Which of these two is prosperous and successful? How about this? Which of these two do you want for your life? One more, parents, which of these two would you rather have your children live? Because if we're honest, we want the world's definition of prosperity and success, even if it requires a little bit of sin, a little bit of immorality, a little bit of a lack of character, a little bit of evil, a little bit of worldliness. See, I think we forget that John the Baptist was beheaded, and Jesus went to the cross, and Peter gave up his business, and Paul knew what it was like to have nothing, and we would declare them as prosperous and successful. And we look at Pharaoh, and we look at Potiphar, and we look at Herod, and we look at Saul, and they had everything the world offered, but they completely missed God's purpose for their life. Oh, they got the world's definition of prosperity and success, make no mistake about it. They just didn't hit the kingdom's definition of prosperity and success. And so maybe we need to repent about what prosperity and success actually looks like, because the world's way won't get you to the kingdom's prosperity and success, and the kingdom's way won't get you to the world's prosperity and success. So you've got to figure out which destination you want to get to, and then choose that way. Maybe there's some repentance that needs to take place.

And it's not saying that prosperity and success in the kingdom is poverty, having nothing, a life of hardship. No, it's saying whether you have a lot or a little, whether wealth or poverty, whether everything or nothing, it really doesn't matter, because my goal in life is to become like Jesus and accomplish His purpose for my life. So maybe there's some repentance there. And maybe that's why we struggle with this. And if you've said that kingdom prosperity and success is my destination, then meditating on God's Word is the way, is the way to get there. Meditate on it, not understand it, meditate on it, engage it by faith, put it inside you. This is why it says, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes it grow." Our job is to plant and water the Word of God in our life, it's God's job to make it grow. I plant it, I read it, I engage it, I memorize it, I water it, I meditate on it, but I leave the growth to God. I leave the understanding and the revelation and the wisdom and the insight and the aha, light bulb. I leave all of that to God. My job is to plant and water; His job is to make it grow. But He can't make it grow if I didn't plant it nor water it. And no matter how much I plant it and water it, only God can make it grow. And this is the spiritual practice that we've been talking about. I can't do it without God, and He won't do it without me. This is opening myself up to the life of grace, allowing God to do a deep work inside of me. I plant, He waters-- I plant, I water, He makes it grow.

In fact, catch this, I love this. This is one of my favorite things for this week. "The Word" – Jesus, the Living Word – "became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory." Right? Jesus is called the Living Word. And Jesus came, He took on flesh, and He moved into our neighborhood, and He dwelt among us. Jesus didn't come for a visitation; He came for a habitation. Jesus didn't come and make an appearance and disappear, He came to abide. And the moment, He moved into the neighborhood, the moment He came to dwell, everything changed. He walked with us, and He talked with us, and He saved, and He healed, and He set free, and He delivered, and He blessed, and He anointed, and we saw His glory to the same level that the Living Word came to dwell in this world. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." To the same way that the Living Word dwelt among us in our neighborhood, the written or the spoken Word of God is supposed to dwell in you richly. God's Word isn't supposed to be for a visitation, it's supposed to be a habitation. It's not supposed to show up for an appearance on a Sunday, it's supposed to abide in you all week long. And when I make room in my heart for Him to come and dwell through His Word, then guess what? Everything changes. He starts to walk with me, and talk with me, and I start to experience salvation, and healing, and being set free, and being delivered, and being made whole, and being blessed, and being prosperous. All of a sudden, I start to be anointed. And when the Word of God dwells in me deeply, I eventually will see the very glory of God in my life. The Word of God is supposed to dwell in you so deeply that you literally see the glory of the one who spoke it. Everything you see in Jesus' life in the gospels is available in your life, if you will choose to allow the Word of God to dwell in you richly. Meditation and memorization. You with me on this?

Remember, last week I talked to you about the Jewish culture and how they built their education system around God's Word. As they're going in to take the Promised Land, here's what God says to them, He says, "This is for all of the people of God. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and your minds." There it is again, you choose what you think about. Your thoughts don't choose you, you are not a victim of them; you are a product of them. "Fix these words" – choose to put My words – "in your hearts and your minds. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads." They would take little boxes and they would put the Word of God rolled up into the boxes, and they would tie the boxes to their wrists and around their foreheads. Might not have been fashionable and trendy, but the point of that was what? That the Word of God would influence what they did and what they thought about. That every action they took and every thought they thought was supposed to be submitted and surrendered to the very Word of God, as the people of God. "Teach them to your children." They were literally responsible to teach another, a part of this in Deuteronomy 6 says, "Impress upon them." They were literally supposed to, like the way a mason would take a chisel and carve something out of marble, they were supposed to carve the very words of God into their children. A lot of work, hard effort, manual labor, sweating, grit, struggle. But they were supposed to carve the very words of God, the very thoughts of God, into their children so that they would forever think that way and be shaped and formed once and for all, for all the rest of their lives. But it's hard to teach something you don't know, and it's hard to impress something upon someone that hasn't been impressed on you.

We're supposed to "talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you get up." Like, fill your conversation with the Word of God. How much does the Word of God come into your conversation? You don't even have to give the reference, like the address, and the street number, like, but just like, how often when you're talking does the Word of God come into your conversation? "Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Catch this, they literally would write Scripture on the doorframes and on the gateposts. What does gates and doors represent? Access and entry. They would write the Word of God on the doorposts and on the gates, so that only things that were submitted and surrendered to God's Word had access to their lives. What is the gate and the door of your life? It's your mind. So here's the question, what's written on the doorposts and the gate of your mind? What, what have you written in the doorposts and the gate of your mind? Because when you put God's Word in there, the things of the world don't get access or entry. When you write, "Forgive as I have forgiven you," on the gate of your mind, then guess what? Offense never is able to come in. When I write, "Freely you have received, freely give," on the doorpost of my mind, then guess what? Greed never gets to enter. When I write, "There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear," then fear never gets to get into my life. When I write, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," then shame never gets through my gate. When I write, "My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you," then guess what? Anxiety doesn't get access to my life. The problem is, is we don't have any truth written on our doorposts or on our gates, so the world comes barging in the gate, right through the front door, tramples on our garden, and brings death,

darkness, and destruction into the very home of our life. What have you written on the doorposts and the gate? What are you giving entry and access to? Because when the Word of God is true in your mind, lies can't get in.

"So that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give you." In other words, then, then, then you will be prosperous and successful wherever you go. This is how they were supposed to live. This is how Jesus would have grown up, and this is how we're invited to live in the here and now. And yet, since we do "not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He [gives us] over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done." This verse was killer last week. When we don't think it's worth retaining the knowledge of God and say, "I want to think like the world, God." He says, "Okay." And we get a depraved mind that's dark and foolish, unapproved, and cannot stand the test of this life. And then I find myself doing the things that I really never wanted to do anyways. Okay, see, at some point, you have to take responsibility for your own life and stop making excuses and just start acknowledging that it just wasn't worthwhile. Like, at some point, we've got to stop making excuses. "It was too hard." "I didn't understand it." "I was too busy." "It didn't make sense." "I didn't know how." We got to stop making excuses and take responsibility for our own life, because repentance starts where excuses end. And just say, it just wasn't worthwhile to me. But I want to take responsibility for that, and I want to repent. Okay, so leaders, can we talk for a second? This week we told the church to ask you about how memorizing John 15 was going. How'd those conversations go? Was it awkward? Was it uncomfortable? Were you a little irritated? Were you able to share? Were you excited about the journey? See, remember, if you're a leader, you chose to be a leader. A disciple of Jesus who takes responsibility to create kingdom culture, make disciples, while accomplishing a specific task. And we want our leaders to be people who let their yes be yes, and their no be no, and do whatever they're doing with all their heart and can say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." And so, if you are irritated or offended that that was even brought up, why would you be offended about being held accountable for something you committed to do?

Accountable, give account for that which you're able to do. We say, "Well, that's not fair." But listen, Jesus says, "To whom much is given, much is required." Jesus says He holds us account to that which we're able to do, that we will give Him an account for that which He has asked us to do. That we're called to live a life worthy of our calling. And we have this demonic influence in the church from the world that says you can't hold anybody accountable to anything. Look at the world, schools, education, the police, teams, work. You can't hold anybody account for what they're able to do, because people make excuses, they make defenses, they deflect it, they say tolerance, they say mental health struggles, all these things. But we're the people of God. Are you kidding me? Do you know how much Satan wants you to deflect accountability? Why? Because he doesn't want you to live a life worthy of your calling. He wants you to live down here, this average, subpar, mediocre life, and accountability is to give an account for that which God has made you able to do. So Satan wants you to get offended about being held accountable instead of actually thinking about what God has made you able to do. And even if

you're held accountable up here, and you've got to hear, you still got a lot farther than you were. I want to live a life worthy of my calling. And so, Student Leadership Experience students, how have you been doing in your journal? The things you committed to do, the verses you committed to memorize, the practices you committed to do? VCLA students, how are you doing in the things that you wanted to be held accountable for, the life that you said you wanted to live? Leaders, John 15, how's it going? It would grieve me that we would have a single leader in this church that doesn't think it's worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. Leaders, what in your life is so important that you didn't have time to retain the Word of God? What in your life is so busy and overwhelming that you didn't see it important to retain the knowledge of God? Maybe our life isn't arranged as much around Jesus as we thought and we need to take responsibility. Responsibility or repentance starts where excuses end. You're not a volunteer coordinator doing Habitat for Humanity; you're a spiritual leader ruling and reigning with God, moving into the future, releasing His very kingdom. And a depraved mind can't lead other people to repentance. So it matters. Account-able; what you're actually able to do. Everybody memorizing Psalm 23. Here's the good news: you just blew up every excuse you ever have about your inability to memorize Scripture.

Look at this: "When Your Words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight." Here's what I'm trying to tell you, you will never love God's Word more in public than you do in private. If it's not my joy and my delight in my Bible, it will not be a joy and a delight on this monitor. If I don't love it in private, if it's not the joy and the delight of my life in my Bible, then guess what? It will be something I tolerate and eventually get offended by on this monitor. People who love God's Word don't get offended in this room, just so you know. Man, we might go to the third week of this because you've got to stay with me, people. I have never met anyone offended in this room who loves God's Word out of this room, not one. Why? Because if I love God's Word, if there's a joy and delight out there, then when I come in here, I'm actually waiting for God's Word to come. And I don't get offended by God's Word, I allow God's Word to offend me. I allow it to change me and convict me and shape me. I don't try to control it. I realize there's a part of my life that's been conformed to the pattern of the world, and I want it to shape and form me. You see, some of you have been in church for 20 years, and you should have 20 years of maturity. You have one year of maturity 20 times, because I have never loved God's Word in private; I've only been remotely interested in it in public. And the extent of your spiritual maturity is about all we can give you in a transactional, consuming, entertaining, religious construct. It's the extent of the maturity you'll ever reach. And you can go from church to church and preacher to preacher, and they're great churches and great preachers; go for it. Just saying, if you don't have a joy and a delight in it out there, why on earth would you think you're going to find joy and delight of it in here?

If when He speaks, "When Your Words came," when He spoke and it didn't mean anything to you out there, why do we think that when He speaks, it's going to mean anything to me in here? And so leaders, this is the John 15 conundrum. If it wasn't important to you out there, you're already declaring it's not important to you in here. This is just why I'm trying to turn the

light on and help us see with me on this? Alright? I'm going to give you this one, and then I don't know what I'm going to do. Just hang with me for a second. I've been wanting to use this verse for like six weeks, so I'm just going to use it just in case. Look at what God says: "'Is not My Word like fire,' declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?'" "My Word is like fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces." Okay, what is fire? Fire gives light, fire burns, fire purifies, fire consumes, fire is powerful, and it's contagious. Okay, what does a hammer do? A hammer breaks, a hammer smashes, and a hammer builds. So God says His Word is like a fire that's inside of us. It turns on the light so we can see. It burns, it literally consumes, overtakes our life with passion. It purifies us and burns off all the impurities of our life, our heart, the way we think, the way we act, the way we live. It literally is powerful; it's like the power of God inside of us. And it spreads, it's contagious, it's passionate. And it's like a hammer that comes into our lives and breaks the hardness of our heart, it breaks my pride, it breaks my shame, it breaks my ungodly beliefs, it breaks my strongholds, it breaks my addictions, it breaks the generational curses, it breaks down all the things of my life that are hardened to God. And then He puts them back together and builds them into something beautiful. So could it be that the reason there's not a lot of passion and softness of heart in the people of God is because we haven't put His Word deeply inside of us? Could it be that the Church of Jesus is so apathetic and so hard-hearted because we haven't put His Word inside of us that He says will make us passionate and soft? Here's a question for you: Do you have the courage to let God set a fire inside of you and carry around a hammer in your heart?

Do you have the courage to let God set a fire inside of you and carry around a hammer in your heart? I think for a lot of us, the answer is no, and this is our main reason we resist the Word of God, because I know if I put it inside of me, He's going to burn out some things that I find comfort and convenience in, and He's going to take that hammer and smash the idols of my heart. And I'm just not so sure I want to lose this and lose this. If we want to be a people of passion and wholehearted, soft devotion to Jesus, we have to arrange and rearrange our life around the Word of God. The very fact that we get offended about being asked to memorize and meditate on Scripture shows the hardness of heart, because a soft heart doesn't get angry; a soft heart is open and humble and receptive. A soft heart realizes there are so many more hard places in here that I need him to break up. So if this is going to help break that up, break it up, baby. A passionate person realizes there's so much more of their life that needs to be set on fire. So they don't resist the torch; they say, "Bring it, baby. Light this thing on fire." Cause there are blind things in me that I don't even know are there. Turn it on; let me see. Let's purify it. I don't want to walk according to the ways of this world. My vision is not prosperity and success of money, fame, fortune, and followers. No, no. My vision of success is to become like Jesus and accomplish God's purpose in my life. But I can't do it without this, without this. We're sort of excited about that.

Do you got the courage? Do you got the courage? So many of you this week, memorizing Psalm 23, that was the greatest step of faith you've made in a long time. Man, I celebrate you. Man, I celebrate you. You bought a pair of sneakers, you put them on, and you went around

the block. And I hope that invigorates you to keep going. And this is a little bit of a correction for some of our leaders who think we're beyond that. We're beyond needing a fire and a hammer because we know that we're coordinating volunteers like Habitat for Humanity, but that's not what it is. It's about bringing the open heaven realities to the world around me. And if I don't have a fire in here, why on Earth do I think I'm going to light a fire in a 15-year-old boy? A 15-year-old boy who's got wet wood, who is literally looking for someone to turn it on, for someone to light him on fire, for someone who has something that's bigger and better than what social media shows him is out there. But he's in the dark. He can't see. So he needs people around him who have raging infernos that when he gets around them, it's so hot that he knows there's something different because when he goes back out in the world, it's so stinking cold. So I want to get back around that guy, and I can't even put words to it, and I'm 15, and so I'm awkward, so I don't even know how to say it right, but I just know there's something different, not because they're a good volunteer coordinator, but because they're a leader who feels it's worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God and lives with a renewed mind and therefore does what ought to be done.

Well, not sure what we're going to do next week, but the practice plan for this week is to now meditate on Psalm 23. So last week we were memorizing it, trying to get it in. Meditate on it this week. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, I was going to teach you in those last 10 slides what that meant, but just go with what we've been talking about. Think about it, pray it, dream it, embrace it. If you didn't memorize it, keep memorizing it. And whatever you have memorized, start now thinking, "The Lord is my shepherd... the Lord, the Lord God, the Creator, the sustainer, the Redeemer, the one who has life in Himself, the one who knows all things. The Lord is my shepherd... shepherd, leader, guide. He knows me, He cares for me, and He's my shepherd. I didn't choose Him, He actually chose me because He wanted me." Think deeply about deep things and keep filling your mind with the Word of God, and watch what God will keep doing. Come on. Don't lose your energy from last week to this week. We'll figure out next week. This is my whole point. We're just not in a hurry this year. We're just trying to live a different way. So I'm okay, you're okay, because genuinely... Garrett, go back to the fire slide, please. No, fire slide. Because I want to see God's Word be a fire and a hammer in us and change us from the inside out in Jesus' name.

So close your eyes. Holy Spirit, come light a fire in me. Come bring a hammer to the hard places of my heart. Give me courage to trust that You are a good shepherd. So whatever You light on fire needs to be burned, and whatever You break needs to be broken. That's what Psalm 23 teaches me. Psalm 23 teaches me that I can trust Him to light a fire, and I can trust Him to carry a hammer in the deepest places of my soul. So I just declare over your life that the embers of a fire are beginning to burn. I just declare over your life that light is beginning to be turned on so that you can see. I just declare in your life that the hardness of heart is beginning to be broke up in Jesus' name. I just declare over your life that the idols that you have trusted in that have let you down and failed you time and time again are starting to be broken up by the hammer of the spirit in Jesus' name, and He is going to rebuild it into something beautiful

and glorious. I just declare over your life that your mind, your mind has the ability to radiate the very realities of heaven, and so may the glory and the beauty and the holiness of heaven begin to shine through your thinking, that the very realities of God may be manifest in your life. So Jesus, thank You for Your church. Thank You for a community of people that are training together, training to become godly. We are not in a hurry. We are walking with You, the Good Shepherd, at your pace, cause You lead us on paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. So lead us, God. This week, Holy Spirit, illuminate Psalm 23 to our lives. Illuminate it, turn the light on, show us something, apply it to our lives. May we not try to analyze it, study it, correct it, control it, may we just be open to that which You want to show us and that which You want us to become in Jesus' name. Lord, You are our shepherd, and we get to dwell in Your house forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

A DIFFERENT WAY



APRIL 28, 2024
SEASON TWO, EPISODE FIVE
"RISE WITH THE TIDE"

This life is yours. And may my heart only burn for You, Jesus. So wherever you are right now, maybe, can you just take a big deep breath in. And just become aware that God is here. And He is with you. Oh, and He is for you. And He sees you. And He loves you. And He knows what's best for you. Because He is a good shepherd that is leading you into green pastures. And beside still waters. Remember, church isn't church if we don't meet with God. And so we don't just sing songs and go through the emotions, we become aware that He is here. And over these past few weeks, there's been this beautiful Spirit of revelation and repentance in our church. The Spirit of revelation, revelation is something you didn't see, but now it's uncovered and you see it. And repentance, it's changing my thinking. Turning from one way towards another of turning away from dead works and of faith towards God.

And this week as the pastors were praying for you, we just felt like we weren't supposed to rush on, but that we needed to stop and take a moment to give some time to respond to the Spirit of revelation and repentance that's been at work. You see, repentance is a great gift to the people of God. We often keep our distance from it because we allow shame and guilt and condemnation to get all swirled up in it. But when we confess and repent of our sins, there is a cleansing and a renewal and refreshment that comes from God. In fact, Acts 3:30, 3:19 says, "Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out. The times of refreshing may come from the Lord." When there is a Spirit of repentance and revelation at work in our lives, refreshment comes from the Lord.

And sometimes we just have to stop and acknowledge there are things in my life that need to be confessed and repented of. Sins and broken thinking, ways I've been acting, ways I've treated the other people even in this room, how I view God's Word, things I've kept, things I've kept in the darkness. And Satan wants to do everything he can to keep it in the darkness. And Jesus is graciously drawing you into the light. And if you say, "Confession and repentance, I don't know how to do it." You just talk to God about the brokenness and the bad thinking of your life. And you offer it up to Him, and you repent, you ask for forgiveness, and you receive His grace and His mercy. And you allow Him to cleanse you, wash you, and make you pure. And I think sometimes, as the people of God, we just want to move on to the next thing. But it's so good to sit in a little bit of godly sorrow. Like Isaiah who says, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips." Or David when his sin is exposed and he is broken and humble before the Lord. Or Peter who hits his knees and says, "Away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Or when the first gospel is preached and it says, "They were cut to the heart and said, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" It's the prayer that I've been praying for our church all year long is that we would be cut to the heart and respond with confession and repentance in Jesus' name.

And so for the next few minutes at whatever campus you're at, can you just take some time to confess and repent of where your life has missed the mark? Of where you're not embracing the revelation that He has entrusted to you? Of, maybe, where your life is not arranged around Jesus and His way, but around the world and its way? For the next few minutes, can you just trust the Spirit of conviction and the Spirit of grace that wants to convict us and show us where

we're off, but wants to give us a grace that not only forgives us, but empowers us to live a totally different way. Let's not rush on, but let's, let the Spirit do what He wants to do. So Spirit of conviction, Spirit of grace, come bring Your light into our darkness and give us godly sorrow, humility, and honesty. May we respond to Your Word and Your presence and Your Spirit in this moment.

So, does He have it all yet? It's a good song to sing, but what are you still holding onto? What are you still holding onto that God's asking you to let go of? So you can feel the tide of the kingdom rising. And as it's rising, if you hold on to the things He's asking you to let go of, you will drown yourself. But if you will simply let go of that which He is asking you to let go of, you will rise with the tide and He will take you to new places in Jesus' name. And so, Jonathan, can you guys all come back out? Because I want us to sing it again. Because I think there's an invitation in this for you and for me, and I just don't want you to miss it, and I want you to just do church. You're hearing me week after week after week for like these last two years doing everything I know how, because I don't want to see you drowned. I want to see a rise to a new place in God, the world is winding down, but the kingdom of God is winding up. And we live too much like the world and call it the kingdom. And so there are things that I'm over there praying for you and I'm just like, we just haven't let go of them yet. And what we all want to do is jump into this part three of meditation. I do too, I worked on it all week for you, but it doesn't matter if I'm not willing to first let go of that, which I already know I need to let go of. Okay, so I'll be real direct on some of these. Pride. Some of you, you are shackled to the anchor of pride. It's time to humble yourself before the Lord. Sexual immorality. Doing sex your way instead of God's way, man, it is dragging you down and it's killing you. It's time to let it go in Jesus' name. Greed. Some of us, our whole life, two hands on the bucket of money, and God saying "It's time to confess and repent." Not just say it, but actually live according to what I now say. Fear. Some of you are being drowned by fear. Rebellion. The spirit of, "I do what I want, when I want, how I want, nobody tells this guy what to do." That's killing you, because the kingdom is a kingdom of submission and surrender. A total disregard for the ways of Jesus. Some of us, it's like holding on to 50 pound anchors. And the interesting thing is, you're not shackled to it, you're holding onto it. And Jesus is just saying, "If you just open your hands, and this one, I will bring you to the surface and I will show you a measurably more than you can ask or imagine." This is what a different way looks like. You can't say a different way, but still live the same way. A different way means pride has to go. A different way means rebellion has to go. A different way means worldliness has to go. A different way means the language that I've been using has to go. A different way means the thoughts that I've been thinking, they have to go. And God is just inviting me to open up my hands and His grace will do all the work. So, so with, oh, just nothing but love, and hope, and compassion for your life, I want to invite you, to just try the confession and repentance experience one more time. I want to invite you to, just, one more time before we build the song up and start singing it, just like, now. So just close your eyes and just ask the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, what am I holding onto that's not of You? That's drowning me? That's what I want to confess and repent of. And I want to open up my hands to You. And I ask You to lift me up. Wash me anew and take me to a new place. Don't miss the moments

where God is at work. This is one of them. The window is open, go through it. Let go of what you're holding on to. Spirit of conviction, Spirit of grace, come move in this room, come work in my heart. You're knocking, I choose to open up the door, come in and shine some light on some of the things that I just quickly pass by. You can trust in His goodness. And you can rest on His grace. Let the tide of God lift you up.

I never want to sing songs that I don't mean. Unless I know I don't mean it yet, but I want to mean it. That's called faith. Faith is, I know I don't mean it, but I want to mean it. So I'm going to sing it and I'm going to speak it, I'm going to declare it. Religion is, I sing it and I don't want it. And I don't want to want it. I want Jesus to have it all. All of my life. His Word is a fire; I want it to burn my life down. I want it to burn my life down. That the only thing that remains is Him. I want it to burn our church down to the ground that we might rise to the new life that we have in Christ. I want it to burn, I want it to, every idol we have, every ministry that's not of the Lord, every method that we use that's no longer of Him, every program that we put our trust in instead of the person of Jesus. I want Him to burn down all of our thinking of what church is supposed to be like. And if it doesn't check these three boxes, it wasn't church. I want Him to burn all of the idols that we, that we build, sometimes in this room, and at our own seat. And we declare it as "church" and "good church" and "what I need." And "this is what I expect." And "I've come to be entertained" and "come to consume." I know that's nobody in this room, but it needs to be burned down in Jesus' name. The whole lukewarm, apathy, walking like a zombie through life, it's just not okay anymore. I get it, that was COVID. That was like five years ago. It's time to move on in Jesus' name. It's time to move forward to the new things that He has created and called us to do. It's time to stir up the coals of revival and like, wake up to the life I have in Christ and this different way that He invites me to live. I'm so tired of, of being, being here for an hour and then going out and living 167 hours like the world. And then coming back for an hour and going back to the world. It doesn't work. Destroys your soul. Exhausts you. I think there's a whole lot of things in our life, including our own church, that Jesus is asking us to put on the altar. Are we willing to do that?

I mean, you remember the story of Abraham and Isaac? Abraham waits 25 years for this promised child, 25 years. And God gives him Isaac. He's the love of his life, the most important thing to him. Everything in his life is arranged around Isaac, because through Isaac, all the promises that God declared to Abraham will come to pass. And then one day, God says to Abraham, "Abraham, I want you to go and sacrifice your son to Me. Abraham, I want to see if you love Me or Isaac more." And so Abraham goes on a three-day journey up the mountain. And he takes his son, the thing he loves the most. But he has such a faith and a trust in the goodness of God that he sets his son on that altar. And when he is about to take his life, the Lord speaks and says, "Stop. Now I know that you love Me, because you have not withheld your one and only son for Me." What is it that we're holding back from God that He's asking us to put on the altar? Maybe it's sin in our life that we want to continue to live in. But maybe it's a good thing that's become a bondage thing that He's asking us to surrender. That's "Jesus, have it all." "Jesus, have some" is, "Oh, Jesus, I'm not going to give You Isaac, but I'll offer You

this ram." "I don't want the ram, I want Isaac. And the reason I want Isaac is, because Isaac has your heart, and what I want is your heart." So you might be like, "Jesus, I'll give you this," but He's like, "But I want this. Because this is what has your heart and I want your heart." See, that whole story is a picture of the Father and Jesus. He offered His one and only Son. Now we know that He loves us, because He did not withhold His only Son from us. Jesus, have it all, because Jesus gave it all. And we never have to question if we're worth it, if we're loved, if we're wanted, if we're seen, if following Him is a life worth living, because He already offered Himself up for us. Jesus gave it all. That's the only reason we can say, "Jesus, have it all." Because I know He is trustworthy. Because if He would not withhold Himself, will He not then, in Him, give me all things? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not..." Ah, He gives me all that I need, exactly when I need it, and withholds no good things from those who love Him. I don't know, maybe this is my way of just saying to you, Valley Creek is on the altar, in Jesus' name. And we're not interested in the past, or in what everybody else is doing. We're interested in what God's doing. And we're interested in the kingdom. And we're gonna do things like memorize Scripture. So if that's like, "Hey, not interested in that," I totally hear you. I just wanna be super clear to you. To be like, in Jesus' name, have it all. Have it all. I don't wanna do Circles, and serve teams, and Serve the City, and weekend gatherings, and teach through messages, and do all the things for us to just live like everybody else. Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. Live as though you are a beloved son or daughter in Jesus' name. And don't drown yourself as the water is rising. Let go and go to a new place in God.

See, today is great church. This is not what we were supposed to do. It's great church. You're like, "Hang on a second. I need to know what's in there." Okay, maybe next week. The whole point is, here's the deal. We, I think we forget that we're a people on a journey with God. And a people on a journey with God aren't in a hurry, because they go at the pace of God. I know some of you are getting tired of standing, I'm just about done. We're not in a hurry. So here's the good news, everything that's in the deck, it'll be in the deck next week, too. But let's not miss what God wanted to do today with a Spirit of repentance. A Spirit of revelation in the air. And here's the deal. Even if you let go of one weight and not the other, you're already a little higher. And now I'm just going to be praying for you that the Holy Spirit will use that visual image in your life over the course of this next week and month to show you, where am I holding on as the water's rising that I need to let go of? It's great, let go, great. Just so we all know, none of us are done letting go. You're like, "Oh, I did it. I'm good." No, I have things I need to let go of. You have things. And every time you let go, you rise a little higher. You rise a little higher, and you rise a little higher. And this is what a different way looks like in Jesus' name. If today was your first time with us, welcome to the heartbeat of our church. We have a real interest in meeting with God, because we believe that God is real, that God is good, and that God is here And we are willing to put anything on the altar to say, God, whatever You want to do, I just want to meet, I just want to know You, I want to meet with You, I want to become like You, I want my thoughts to be filled with You because You are good, and You are good to me.

So we're going to call it there today. You are welcome to stay. You are welcome to come up and get prayer. If you feel like you haven't let go yet, don't leave. We've got time, sit down, pray. Come up and ask somebody to help you. Whatever that looks like, let us love you. As we've been working the last two weeks, our practice plan has been to memorize and then meditate on Psalm 23. My encouragement for you is this. Make sure you -- I don't want to say it. Here's what I want to say. Make sure you've put all of your heart effort into memorizing Psalm 23 for next week. And we're going to do something together with it. My encouragement for you is like, that is a great repentance step of faith to say, "Okay, God, I can do this." The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. You can do it. You can do it. You can do it. In Jesus' name. For those of you that want to give, you can give it boxes on the doors on the way out or online. Some of you, that was the thing you just let go of, the love of money. Now, repent and tide. Give to God because that's what He says we're supposed to do. Can't be any more clear and direct for you than that, right? I mean, or you can choose to hang on to it and let the water keep going. That's -- this is what I'm trying to say, right? Don't just rush out of this building and go on about your day. Have a conversation with someone because God tells us to love one another and serve one another, especially in the body of Christ. So be the body with the 15, 20 minutes where we're leaving in service. Some of you, that's what you just let go of. Is that this place is actually a spiritual family, not just a religious community where I come and go, makes sense? These are the kinds of things that we're talking about that are so normal in the kingdom, so normal in Scripture, and they should become so normal to you and me as the people of God.

I pray, that in some way, fire was lit in your life in some way to be like, the old is gone, the new has come, a different way in Jesus' name. Here we go, next week, Meditation, Part Three. We'll keep moving on. We're not in a hurry because we want God. Valley Creek is on the altar. So Jesus, I just say to You, have it all. Have our church, have everything about us, have our, have our lives, our minds, our hearts, our souls, our energies, everything we do and say, Lord, may You have it all. Our jobs, our families, our homes, our finances, our futures, our freedom, everything. May You have it all, because you gave it all. So You are worthy of it all, in Jesus' name. Everybody said, amen. Amen, I love you. Have a great week.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MAY 5, 2024
SEASON TWO, EPISODE SIX
“MEDITATION, PART THREE”

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you're here with us today. We are a movement of hope for the city and beyond and we want to see God's kingdom come and His will be done. But before God's kingdom can come out there, it has to first come in here. Before it can come in here, it has to first come in here. So, I love what God is doing among us. I love the direction that we're going as a church. I love what we're doing and why we're doing it. God is deeply at work in the lives of the people sitting all around you right now. If you made me summarize some of what's happening in this season, I would say it's a season of purifying, a season of pruning, a season of sifting. It's like every person that really wants healing, and breakthrough, and freedom, and deep internal transformation, Jesus is offering it to them in the here and now. So, we've been in this series, really this season, just called A Different Way, talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. Talking about being His disciples and who we're becoming and arranging and rearranging our life around Jesus. We're taking a look at like, 12 practices that Jesus practiced in His life so we can arrange our life around what He did so we can do what He did. By now, we should be at practice like, seven or eight. We're on number two. We've talked about Scripture. Today, I hope we finish meditation. What I want you to see in this is, I think God has slowed us way down to get our attention to be people who love Jesus.

I think God is trying to get our attention. He's not in a hurry. He says, "Hey, you need Scripture and you need meditation if you're ever going to do the things that I did and become like Me." I mean, we are a people of the kingdom. Look at what this says. "Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above. Not earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." He says people of the kingdom are supposed to have a totally different mindset than the people of this world. Our mind is supposed to be set on different things, on the kingdom of God. The reason we need the Word of God in our life is the Word of God shows us what the kingdom of God is like. It shows us what's available in the kingdom. It shows us who we are and who God is and what we were created to do. We need the Word of God to discover our life that's hidden in Christ. In fact, when Jesus says, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," He says repentance is the way we access the kingdom. But how can I repent of things that I'm not aware of? How can I repent from things that I don't know are inferior? So I need the Word of God. I need to set my mind on the Word of God if I'm ever going to discover my life that is hidden with Christ.

Our problem is, we have expectations of what we've experienced. We have a vision for what we've seen. We think our destiny is somehow tied up in what the world has demonstrated to us. The problem is what you've experienced, what you've seen, and what's been demonstrated to you has been the inferior realities of this world. So, we need to renew our minds by setting our minds on things above, the Word of God, so we can discover the kingdom of God that is available to you and I in the here and now. So, I've been thinking for the last couple of weeks, why don't we love God's Word? If we can just be honest and don't make it about you for a

second, just why don't the people of God love His Word? I mean David says, "Oh how I love your law!" – Your Word – "I meditated on it all day long." He says the reason I meditate on God's Word is because I love it. I won't meditate on it if I don't love it. But why don't I love it? I've been thinking about all the times in my life where I did not love the Word of God. I've been wrestling with it and thinking, why didn't I love the Word of God? Why don't we love the Word of God? Here's what I think. I think it's really simple. I think we're not captivated by God's Word because if we're honest, we're not really captivated by God. I think we're not really interested in God's Word because if we're honest, we're not really interested in God. I think we're not really all that passionate about God's Word because if we're just straight-up honest, we're not all that passionate about God. Let's just say it like this. I don't think we love God's Word because if we're really honest, I don't think we always love God.

I mean, think about a couple that first falls in love. They are captivated by each other. Because they're captivated by the other person, they're captivated by their words. Have you ever had that experience where you want to hear everything they say? You want to read every letter they write you. You read and reread the text. You'll stay up until two in the morning talking eight hours with them about everything and nothing because there's this mystery, and this intrigue, and this excitement, and this hunger. You're captivated by their words because you're captivated by their heart. Think of your favorite influencer. You are captivated by their words. You want to read every book they write. Make sure you get the podcast that just got released. You want to make sure your social media algorithm has them at the top of your feed. You're captivated by their words because you're captivated by their life. Or maybe your favorite musicians, you want to hear every interview, every song. You want to be the first to hear the words that they're singing. Why? Because somehow you're captivated by their life. So, could it just be that the reason we're bored with God's Word is because we're just bored with God? If the mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart, I will only be interested in listening to the words of people who I am interested in the realities of their heart. So if I'm not captivated by God's words, it's because I'm not really captivated by His heart. It works in life and we know this. That couple that was captivated by each other, and therefore each other's words, 30 years later, isn't it interesting how they don't listen to anything the other one says? They still say I love you, but the other person starts talking and it's like, "Wah wah wah." Why? Because I'm no longer captivated by them. So, I'm not really captivated by what they have to say. If that's you, you don't have to sit here and feel bad and all of a sudden get discouraged and figure out, "Oh, my gosh, how am I going to be captivated by God's Word? I got to be..." No, no, just stop. Stop yourself. This is Jesus-focused theology. Don't focus on being captivated by God. Focus on the fact that He is captivated by you. Stop and ask, then stop to think that we love because He first loved us, and start to realize that Jesus Himself is captivated by me. He rejoices over me. He delights in me. He sings over me. I'm the apple of His eye. He has laid down His life for me. No one can snatch me from His hand. His mind is full of thoughts of me. When I start to realize He is captivated by me, I will become captivated by Him.

See, I love this. "But he who keeps (treasures) His Word (who bears in mind His precepts)" – meditates on the Word of God. "(Who observes His message in its entirety)." Not just the parts we like. Not just the encouraging verses that are on the knick-knacks in your house. The parts that correct and rebuke and train. "Truly in him has the love of and for God been perfected, (completed, reached maturity). By this we may perceive, know, recognize, and be sure that we are in Him." It says if I treasure God, I'll treasure His Word. I treasure His Word because I treasure Him. When I treasure His Word, meditate on it and observe all of it – not just the parts I like – then the love of and the love for God has been perfected in me. I have received the love of God and now I have love to give back. So, now because I understand God is captivated by me, I become captivated by Him. Because I'm captivated by Him, I am now captivated by His words. Because His words reveal His heart and I want to know His heart so I will listen to what He has to say. Does this make sense to you?

I mean, I love what Jesus says. "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. Jesus' love language is obedience. The way He receives love is through obedience. Love for Him is to obey His commands, but I can't obey that which I don't have. I have to have His commands, know what His Word says, so I can obey it, so I can love Him. Jesus' love language is obedience, but I first have to have His commands. So, can I ask you the question? Do you have His commands? "Whoever has my commands." I can't obey that which I do not know. I can't submit and surrender to that which I am not aware of. So, if I really want to love God, I know I have to obey His Word, but I first have to go get His commands. I have to go engage the Scripture, and memorize, and meditate, and hide it in my heart, and put it inside of me, and search it with all of my life, because I want to love Him. But I need to know what He says so I can obey Him because He says obedience is His love language. So, do you have His commands? Then let me ask you a really pointed question. If obedience is Jesus' love language, does He feel loved by you? If obedience is His love language, does He feel loved by you? You say, "God has feelings?" Yes, He do-- Yes, He does. He's a person. We can grieve Him. We can please Him. Does He feel loved by you? What was the last thing He asked you to do, then did you do it because you just loved Him? His command came and you obeyed it, whether you liked it or not, because you loved Him. See, love for God is not going to church. Love for God is not calling yourself a Christian. Love for God is not posting something on social media that's a Bible verse. Love for God is obedience. If you came in and you came in and you were married and we had marriage counseling and we sat down and you both said, "We love each other, but neither of us feels loved by the other person," we would start talking and we would probably figure out very quickly that you're not meeting each other's love languages. That there are five simple love languages – time, touch, words, gifts... and service. Thank you. This person wants time and this person wants touch. So, you usually give that which you want to receive. So, the other person doesn't feel loved because we haven't studied them and brought ourselves to do that which they long for and that which they want. What Jesus wants is obedience. But I can't obey that which I do not know. So, are we searching out and seeking His commands so that I can submit and surrender my life to Him? Because I love Him, because he

loves me. Does Jesus feel loved by you? If not, here's what's great. You can do it today. Whatever that last thing He gave you in His Word. Just do it by faith, because He says that's how He is loved. With me on this? I'm not so sure. He's worthy of my obedience. But I can't obey that which I do not know and I'm convinced we do not know. That's why we can't obey.

See, two weeks ago, here's where we got. "'Is not my word like fire,' declares the Lord, 'And like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?'" This is profound to me. God said His Word is like a fire and it's like a hammer that breaks. If you think about a fire and you think about a hammer, what does a fire do? A fire illuminates. A fire burns and consumes. A fire purifies. A fire is powerful and it's contagious. And what does a hammer do? A hammer breaks. A hammer smashes. And a hammer builds. So, when we put God's Word inside of us, it's like a fire and a hammer. It's a fire that illuminates and shows me things that I did not see in the midst of a dark world. It begins to burn and consume and take over my life and create this life of passion and it purifies. It removes the impurities of my life that should never have been there in the first place. It becomes contagious. It spreads from my life to other people's life. It's the very power of God flowing through me. And it's like a hammer. A hammer that breaks my pride, a hammer that breaks my ungodly beliefs, a hammer that breaks my idols, a hammer that breaks my unbelief, and the generational curses, and the strongholds of my life. It comes in and it smashes and it tears down so it can rebuild back together. So the question is, is the reason there's not a lot of fire and softness of heart in the church today is because we don't put His Word inside of us? Is the reason there's so much apathy and so much hardness of heart simply because we won't take His Word and meditate on it and think about it and dwell deeply on it and turn it over and over again in our mind? I left you a few weeks ago with this question of just, do you have the courage to let God set a fire inside of you, and carry around a hammer in your heart? Do you have the courage to let God light a fire inside of you, carry around a hammer in your heart? I think the answer is often, if we're honest, just, no. Because I don't want an uncontrolled fire. Because I don't know what it will burn up. There are things I find a lot of comfort and convenience in that I do not want to go. I don't want a hammer swinging around in my heart because I've worked really hard to protect my heart and build this little life that I got. I know there are some idols in there that if that hammer starts wheeling, those things are coming down and I'm not ready for them to go. See, if I can just tell you like personally in my life, if you said, "Hey, the last two years, just tell me what God has been doing in your life?" Here's my summary statement for you of my life. God has lit a fire in my soul that I must attend to. You want to know the summary statement of my life in this? God has lit a fire in my soul that I must attend to. God has started a fire inside of me, a fire of His presence, a fire of His love, a fire of His Word. I must attend to it. I must fuel it and steward it and protect it and arrange my entire life around it.

Then I said it to you two weeks ago, I want the fire of God to literally burn my life down. I want everything that's of me to be burned to the ground and only Jesus and his kingdom left. I want Him to burn my pride. I want Him to burn my ego. I want Him to burn the false motives that I have. I want Him to burn up everything that is wood, straw, hay, and stubble. I want Him to

burn religion out of my life. I want Him to burn sin, and ungodly beliefs, and broken thought patterns. I want Him to burn up the world. I want Him to burn up myself. I want Him to burn up my flesh. Everything that's not of Jesus, I want to be burned. I want this fire to be uncontrolled. I want it to be uncontained. I'm trying to remove the fire ring so it can just go. So, here's my question for you. What are you attending to in your life in this season? Because I'm attending to a fire in my soul. What are you arranging your life around? Because I'm arranging my life around a fire in my soul. I want God to church that we must attend to. I want Him to burn out everything that's not of Jesus. I want Him to burn our sin and our pride and our rebellion and our duplicity and our worldliness and our broken thinking and all the programs and methods and things that we do that are not of Jesus, all the religious baggage that we bring in, all the traditions that we worship, every idol, everything that's wood, straw, hay, and stubble that is a part of this family of God, I want it to be burned. I want it to be uncontrolled and uncontained where it jumps the fire ring and starts burning things we didn't think it was going to burn.

It's easy to cheer for that until it starts burning the thing you don't want to be burned. If you've ever been in church for a period of time, maybe you've come from another place or maybe you've been here, there are good things that become bad things because we start worshiping them. If you've been here for years, things like HUB Camp and Soul Sisters and Epic and Thursday Night Church, they were good things. When it was time to move on to the next thing, when there is a response that's negative over moving on from something that was good but has now become an idol, you see how much we actually worship that thing. Here's a great question for you. What would you be upset about if it got burned to the ground in this church? What would you be upset about? What would cause you to get offended, take your toys and go home, pull back, start grumbling? What if there was no more kids ministry and you had to have your own kid with you in church? What if there was no more cafe and you couldn't get a coffee and a donut in the morning? But what if there was no more lights and music and the whole thing? What if church Sunday mornings at 9:30 and 11:00 got burned to the ground? You're like, "Well, you can't have church if it's not at 9:30 and 11:00 on Sundays and without kids and coffee." So, I mean, here's the deal. At the end of the day, you know what we need? The Word of God, the Spirit of God, the grace of God, the people of God, and the mission of God, that's it. I'm not saying we need to get rid of anything. I'm just saying, I'm open for the fire to jump and burn down anything that is no longer of Jesus and the different way that He's leading us. What's in your soul? Is there any fire in your soul? Here's the great news. If your heart is so hard that there's no fire, you know what fire does? Fire can actually burn up rock when it gets hot enough. It's called lava. God can literally take the hardness of your heart and when you just put His Word inside of you, He can literally burn down and make it soft again in Jesus' name.

I mean, I love what Jesus says. He says, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." He says the moment you don't have an interactive relationship with the Scripture, not a mastery of, but you just don't know the Scriptures, you don't have a relationship with God's Word, your life is in error and you have no power. Your life

is in error. If you don't know the Word of God, your life is already inferior to what it could be. You no longer know what is good and true and is right. You now find yourself on the wide road, the broad gate that leads to destruction. You're in error and there's no power of God, there's no possibilities. But when I will know the Scriptures, all of a sudden, I start to live a righteous life, a life that is right, and good, and true. The power of God is all over me. I mean, if Jesus rules His kingdom through words and actions, then I have to value His words if I ever want to see His actions. The reason we don't see action of God in our life is because we don't listen to the Word of God in our life. There's an order. The Word comes before the action. If we don't see a lot of action or a lot of power, maybe it's just because we haven't valued the Word because we're in error because we don't know it, so we're out of alignment with God. He says, "Hey, you can be right. You can be on the good, true path, and you can have the power of God flowing through you if you will simply arrange and rearrange your life around God's Word." Because you become captivated by it because you're captivated by Him because you realize He is captivated by you. Are you with me?

I mean, just think spiritual warfare for a second. "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." You are in a real spiritual battle. Don't ever kid yourself and pretend that there is not the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness engaged in a war. We already know who wins, but there is a real war for the reality of your life in the here and now. We think spiritual warfare is a lot of demons hiding behind the bushes of the situations and circumstances of our life. But what this verse tells us is that the primary battlefield of spiritual warfare is in the mind. The mind is the primary battlefield of spiritual warfare. Most spiritual warfare does not happen in the situations or circumstances of your life, they happen in your mind long before you get to this situation or circumstance. We're so worried about a demon hiding in the situation or circumstance in our life, but here is the reality, he doesn't have to go hide in the situation or circumstance in your life. If he can influence your thought, he's already won the situation and circumstance before you even get to it, because whoever influences your thoughts leads your life. So, it says that the spiritual warfare we do is to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. In other words, I can't afford to think a thought that is not faith, hope, or love. I can't afford in my life to have thoughts of unbelief, despair, and fear. Why? Because I empower darkness in my life. We get all confused about how do I take captive a thought and what do I do and remove and replace and bind and loose and all these things? I've been waiting a couple of weeks to just tell you this. If you will just fill your mind full of the thoughts of God, there will be no room left for the thoughts of the devil. If you will just simply fill your mind with the thoughts of God, there's no room left for the thoughts of the devil. If I will fill my mind with God's Word and memorize on it and meditate on it, all of a sudden, there's no room left for a thought of the devil to get in there. Why? Because it's full. Think of a glass that's full when it's all the way to the top, there's no room for anything else to get in there because it's full. But the way, you know it's full is when it's overflowing because if I

get this close to the top, there's still this much room for something else to get in there. So, I know my thoughts are full or my mind is full of the thoughts of God when the words of God are actually coming out of my mouth. It's overflowing.

So, what I want you to see in this is meditation is an act of spiritual warfare. Literally, meditating on the Word of God is an act of spiritual warfare. Why? Because when I'm meditating on the Word of God, there are no thoughts to take captive because they're all obedient to Christ. When I'm meditating on God's Word, everything I'm thinking is in alignment and submitted and surrendered to the lordship of Jesus. So, rearranging your thought life around God's Word instead of the world is an act of spiritual warfare that brings you great victory because it's the primary place of battlefield. Here's our problem. Our problem is our mind is so full of the thoughts of the world that there's no room left for the thoughts of God. Our minds are so full of the thoughts of this world, filled and overflowing, because we can tell by the words that we speak that are words of unbelief and despair and fear, that there's no room left for the thoughts of God. Listen, those of you that really say you struggle with memorizing Scripture like Psalm 23 or John 15, can I just help you? I don't think it's that you struggle memorizing. I think it's your mind is so full of the thoughts of this world that there's no room left for the thoughts of God. So John 15 can't get in there and Psalm 23 can't get in there. Why? Because it's full and it's overflowing with the thoughts of the world. So, there's no room left. So, we go out in life and get smashed by darkness and then blame God. There's another demon hiding in that situation and circumstance. No, there wasn't. There was a thought that you chose to come into agreement with that is not of God. I mean, when Jesus goes to the cross in John 14, He literally tells the disciples, He says, "I'm going to the cross and Satan has no hold on me." You study it and you pull it apart. He literally says, "There is nothing in Me that belongs to him." I don't have a single thought in my mind that is in alignment with darkness. So, I'm not worried about the journey ahead because God has a stronghold on my mindset so he has a stronghold on my life. Whoever influences your thoughts is who has a stronghold on you. So, when Satan and the world influence my thoughts, then I have a stronghold of darkness in my life. But when, like Jesus, I can say, "There is--" oh, what would it be like to wake up one day and say, "Satan has nothing in me. There is not a single thought in my mind that comes from that pit of darkness because I've filled my mind so full of the Word of God that I am not afraid to go to the cross because I know who has a stronghold on me, and He's the good Father." You believe a lie, you empower the liar. Satan, according to this, is only empowered through human agreement. If Jesus says all authority has been given unto Him, then Satan has... none. So, he only has that which you give him. When I think his thoughts, thoughts that are rebellious to Jesus, I've empowered him to rule and reign in my life. So, that situation and circumstance, it takes me out because of my bad thinking way back here. This tracking with you?

I mean, let me give you one more on this. Remember when Jesus tells the disciples He's going to the cross and Peter steps up and he's like, "No, Lord, I'm never going to let that happen. That is the worst idea I've ever heard." "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of

men." Jesus says worldly thinking is agreement with the devil. "You have in mind the things of men." Worldly thinking. "Get behind me, Satan." Agreement with the devil. Worldly thinking is agreement with the devil. When we think like men, like humanity, we are in agreement with the kingdom of darkness. Logic, reason, common sense. We have all these good ideas that should come to pass. What the world thinks is foolishness, God says is wisdom. What God says is foolishness, the world says is wisdom. So, we have to acknowledge that worldly thinking is agreement with the devil, which means heavenly thinking is agreement with Jesus. I don't know about you, but I'm not real interested in common sense. I want uncommon wisdom. I don't know about you, but I don't really want logic and reason. I want the mind of Christ and thoughts that are above our thoughts. What some of you are sitting here and you look at this verse and you're like, "Man, that's a lot, but that ain't me. I don't think like God, but I certainly don't think like the devil. I think kind of right." You're like a "good, healthy, normal person." Do you understand? You just proved my point. That is a thought of man. To say there is not just two extremes. Good and evil. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of darkness. The Spirit and the flesh. The narrow road and the wide road. Gathering or scattering. I'm with or I'm against. There is no "I'm just a good person and I don't think like the devil." "I know I don't think like God, but I have good logic, reason, and common sense." According to Jesus, it's agreement with darkness. Influenced by darkness. Now, can you imagine if Peter would have said when Jesus says you're going to the cross, if Jesus would have said, "Lord, that breaks my heart. But I know that's of the Father, and so we will help you get there." Jesus would have said something like, "Peter, well done. As the Father has sent me, so I send you whatever you ask for in prayer, it's yours because I know you're already thinking in alignment with kingdom." I think a whole lot of the prayers we pray are out of alignment with the kingdom. That's why God can't answer them the way we want because we think like men saying it's good when it's not God. It's actually darkness.

I think it's fascinating that Jesus says, "You are a stumbling block to me." How many times are we the stumbling block to God's kingdom coming in our own life? How many times are we the stumbling block to the cross of Jesus being demonstrated for those around us and for ourselves to die and be raised to new life? I mean, it's logical to say. You can get Peter's perspective. Jesus, you're doing some good stuff. You can't go. That is a terrible thinking. But that was God's thinking. It just shows us how different the thought patterns actually are that we need to renew our mind in Jesus' name. Worldly thinking is agreement with the devil. If you think about the time and season that God has placed your life in, just like catch this for a second. Yeah, we went through the great pandemic of COVID, but we live in an epidemic of mental health. So, God has put you in a time and place of history in a world full of broken thinking. So, one of the greatest witnesses we have for the life of Jesus in the kingdom of God is to have a renewed mind. The people of God, we should be so full of wisdom and divine strategies, divine solutions, beautiful creativity, a holy imagination, visions, and dreams. Our mind should be so renewed that it literally radiates the very glory, beauty, and holiness of heaven. That people around us in the mental health trials see it and say, "You think so differently than me. Tell me how. Tell me how." So a great question to just ask yourself is this is,

are you inspired by your own thinking? Would you want your mindset? If the answer is no, why do you think anyone else would? Maybe we need to renew our mind with the Word of God so we don't think like the devil and call it God. So, we don't think like the world and try to tell everybody else to follow Jesus. Because I don't want your life if I don't want your thinking, because your life is a product of your thinking. Whoever influences your thoughts influences your life.

You see, in this fall, we had about 100-- or about 500 men memorize Psalm 1. If you're looking for another passage to memorize, to fill your life that reinforces everything we've been talking about, let me just read this to you. "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight, his delight is in the law of the Lord. On his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." He gives very graphic picture of the blessed man and the cursed man. He says the blessed man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. Because of that, he is like a tree planted beside streams of water, has everything it needs, its leaves do not wither, it bears fruit in season and he is successful and prosperous in the kingdom of God. There it is again. Compared to the cursed man who walks according to the foolishness of this world, whose life is like chaff, means looks really good on the outward because there are leaves and sticks and husks, but there is no seed and there is no fruit. So, they are tossed to and fro by this life because they have no stability, no anchor, no rudder because they have no truth. Because they spent their whole life standing in pride, they will fall at the judgment. So, can I ask you a question? Is your life more like the blessed man or the cursed man? Do you delight and meditate in the law of the Lord or do you walk according to the foolishness of this world? I mean, this is why David says, "I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." He says, "I put your word inside me that I don't want to miss the mark." I don't want to live an inferior life. I don't want to just be average and just get by. No, no. I want to be prosperous and successful. You see, when you read God's Word, it gets in your mind. When you memorize it, it gets in your heart. When you meditate on it, it gets in your Spirit. You read it, it gets in your mind. You memorize it, it gets in your heart. You meditate on it, it gets in your Spirit. It becomes a part of you. You literally soak it up until it actually becomes a very part of you. It's like a sponge put into water and it soaks everything up. All of a sudden, everything that's in that sponge is what it's been immersed in. When you squeeze that sponge, the only thing that can come out is that which is soaked up in the first place. The only thing that comes out of you when you're squeezed in this life is that which you've soaked up in the first place. So, when you're squeezed, what comes out of you? That's what you've soaked up into you and it's become a very part of you. I think we have no idea how much worldly thinking we actually engage in on a daily basis because we've soaked up the wisdom of this world and we've called it normal and healthy and good. Wouldn't you want every, I mean, who would want to go to the cross? So when we're squeezed, what comes

out of us is all this worldliness. That's why David says, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing." The words of my mouth come from the meditation of my heart. When my life is squeezed, whatever I've been ruminating on, whatever has become a part of me, whatever I've soaked in, is now what quickly comes out of me. Is what comes out of you pleasing to the Lord? If not, this isn't to make you feel bad. It's to bring a light on the reality of your life so you can see, I got to get off social media, man. I got to stop watching those Netflix series that are basically just like glorified porn. I got to stop listening to the music that I've been listening to. I got to break up with this girl or this guy because everything they say is just so bad, and I know I can't have this friend in my life anymore because their thinking is so broken. You know what? I might actually have to consider changing jobs and taking a demotion because this environment is so toxic for me, I can't do it. You know what? I can't sit at this lunch table anymore because all these things are soaking up into me and I'm starting to think them as normal. It's not normal. Set your heart on things... above, not earthly things. We're consumed with the earthly things and then wonder why we get thrashed in life. The people of God are so unvictorious. It's so sad. If I was a lost person and I looked at most of the modern-day church, I would be like, "I don't think I want your life. I mean, you say these things and you post a few verses, but you actually live a more miserable existence than I do. You don't even enjoy the bad things that we do. You use one hour a week to go to a building and sing some songs, listen to one guy talk. You give a little bit of money and feel guilty to volunteer. I don't want that." Would you want that? But that's what we present as Christianity because our thinking is so unbelievably broken. "I don't think like the devil. I know I don't think like God. I think like a good person." Jesus says there's no third thinking. Every thought is either influenced by God or it's influenced by Satan. There is no, well, "good person" thinking. There's hidden in Christ's thinking and there's living like the world thinking. The journey of renewing your mind is going through this process of acknowledging that's a worldly thought and I've thought that for 30 years. So Jesus, I need to confess and repent of that. Number one, acknowledge it, not make excuses. Then number two, I need to like, find things to remove that thought by filling my mind up with this over here. So, yeah, I'm not going to argue about memorizing John 15 because that would just be foolish because I actually want to think like God. I can make excuses of why I can't do it, but I'm realizing, my gosh, my mind is so full of thoughts of the world. There's no room for the thoughts of God. So, what happens when the cup is full and you want to put something else in there? You have to put something in there and it displaces everything. So, there must be a displacement. There must be a rearranging of your life if you're ever going to get there. Sort of lost you on all that, didn't I? We're either thinking deeply or we're wondering when it's going to be over. Don't worry. This is not long.

This is for all my bullet-point, black-and-white friends who for the last three weeks watched me flip through this slide and were like, "Dear Jesus, please show us the bullet points." This is really fast. How do you then actually do it? Don't worry. This is like three minutes. How do you actually do it? Pick a passage. Pick a passage. Don't be like, "I'm going to meditate on these 46 different things." Pick a passage. It can be a verse. It can be like we did Psalm 23, all six verses. Pick a passage. Maybe it's something we talk about on a weekend message. Maybe it's

something God shows you in our daily life. Maybe it's just a verse that God brings your-- maybe there's a struggle or a stronghold in your life and you want the antonym. Pick a passage and then keep it in front of you. Just keep it in front of you all day long as much as you can. Write it down on a card and put it on your dashboard. Write it on your bathroom mirror that you get ready in the morning. Put it on your phone screen. Put it in a little memo recording and listen back to it on your own. Work on memorizing it. You work on memorizing something that's in front of you all day long. One of the greatest things I can tell you to keep it in front of you, what I try to do in my life is, let it be the first thing you think of in the morning and the last thing you think of before you go to bed. Three, two, one, I'm awake. Don't touch your stinking phone. "What's the world have to say today? Oh yeah, I need more worldly thinking." I'm not sure what country I'm in with this accent, but don't touch your phone, and don't talk like that. Three, two, one. "Okay. The Lord is my shepherd. Doesn't feel like a shepherding kind of day, but Lord, You're my shepherd. I shall not want." Okay. Before you even touch the world, think about God. Then when you're going to bed at night, don't sit there. "What's the world have to say as I go to bed?" You want to know why you don't have good dreams and visions? Because you fill your head with the thoughts of the world right before you go to bed. So, Satan has your night because he has your thought. He has your mind. You go to bed watching something of darkness on the TV and then you wonder why I don't hear from God in the watches of the night like Scripture promises. Why? Because it just filled my mind with the thoughts of the world right before I go to bed. Turn it all off. Lay down. "Lord, today You were my shepherd. Fascinating as I think about my day, how much You are there." Find times throughout the day where you just sit down for five minutes and be like, I'm just going to sit down and turn it all off. I'm going to think about this passage from you. Keep it in front of you. See, we're so used to informational reading, reading for information as fast as we can to get the bottom. What does this mean? We want context. We want reason. We want information. Got it. Here's the da-da-da-da. Okay. But there's transformational reading. Transformational reading is, I'm not trying to get any information and I'm not trying to control the text. I'm opening my life up to say, "God, whatever You want to do in me through this passage, transform me." I'm not going to argue. I'm not going to fight it. I'm not going to defend it. Transform me. Then ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate it. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you God's Word and what He wants to say in the midst of it along the way.

Are you ready? Here's how it just-- "The Lord is my shepherd." The Lord, God, Yahweh, the maker of heaven and earth, the One who holds all things together, the One who has life in Himself, He is my shepherd. He's a shepherd. He leads me and He guides me and He's for me and He claims me and He owns me. He is my shepherd, not because I chose Him, but because He chose me and "I shall not be in want." Even though I feel like there are lots of things I want in my life, there really is nothing I need in my life because He withholds no good things from those who love Him and He promises to meet all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Sometimes He asks me to do things I don't want to do, but they're always for my good. He's always leading me to places of abundance and "He leads me beside quiet water." Sometimes He takes me places where I

never thought we would go, but He's always bringing me to peace and there's only peace found in Him. "He restores my soul," which means He will fix the very depths of the broken parts. I mean, the deepest brokenness that I don't even know. He promises that He will restore it. If He will restore that, will He not restore all other things? You see it? That's meditating. That's thinking deeply and pulling and pulling and pulling.

Last verse for you and this is so important. Jesus says to the Pharisees. "You search and keep on searching and examining the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. Yet, it is those very Scriptures that testify about Me and still you are willing to come to Me so that you may have life." Says there's a whole bunch of people that look at Scripture as a checkbox. Search it, examine it, memorize it, meditate on it, do the daily reading plan. Did I get the check? Did I need the check? Did I get the checkbox? Does this count? Does this? Did I get? Okay. Did I do? Jesus says, "Stop." He says, "The whole point of those Scriptures is to bring you to Me." He says, "If you memorize it, and meditate on it, and read it, and engage it, and get your checkbox, and your journal for the day, but you didn't come to Me, you missed the whole point." So, hear me, hear me, hear me. Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. There is no win in memorizing Scripture if you don't come to Jesus. There is no win in the reading plan if you don't come to Jesus. There is no win in checking off all of your little boxes. Scriptures are the footprints that lead us to Jesus. Some of us follow the footprints all the way to Jesus and He's like right here and then we're like, because I got to get my checkbox. Did I get my checkbox? Did I get it? Did it count? I was one word off. Did it count? There's no counting. There's coming to Jesus. Okay, that's for some of you. Now, there's a whole bunch of others of you that are like, my whole life is about coming to Jesus. Oh, I don't memorize Scripture. I don't meditate. I don't do anything that anyone else asks me to do. I don't do things that smack of religion or duty or obligation. It's just me and Jesus. Whatever me and Jesus feel like doing, that's what we do. Just so that you're clear, He says those are the very Scriptures that testify about Him and bring us to Him. Jesus wants to reveal Himself to you through His Word. So, if I actually want to get to Him, I have to go the way that He says and it's through His Word. So the point is not getting the checkbox. It's coming to Jesus. But I can't come to Jesus without searching and keep on searching and examining, memorizing, meditating, seeking, dwelling, thinking, absorbing the very Word of God. Does that make sense to you? This is what spiritual practices look like. I don't do it to do it, but I know I need to do it so I can find the one who is captivated in me.

So, close your eyes. Actually, no. Here's what we're going to do. Here's what we're going to do. Here's what we're going to do. I got ahead of myself and we're done. Here's your practice plan for this week. Declare Psalm 23 out loud every day this week. Every day, Psalm 23, speak it out over your life. You'd be amazed at what happens. As you're doing it, what's happening is you're renewing your mind. You're transforming yourself. You're declaring God's Word out in life every day. Just try it. You're going to feel really weird the first time you do it and I'm going to give you practice right now. So, on every campus, stand up, wherever you are. Every campus, stand up. Here's what we're going to do. We're just going to declare it all together.

That's how we're going to end today. Okay? We're just going to declare it out together. If you have it memorized, great. If you don't, no problem. I'm going to get you started, but then I'm going to back out. You're going to do it. Ready? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That's it. That's it. See? That's meditating. That's declaring. That's filling your mind with the Word of God. So, Jesus, thank You so much for Your Word. May we be people who love Your Word and practice the way of Jesus. We can't do the things that Jesus did if we don't first think the thoughts that Jesus thought. So, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for a fire that burns. Thank You for stirring up our faith. Thank You that You are the good shepherd. You lead us through dark valleys. Even when we mess up, Your goodness and Your mercy follows us all the days of our life. In Jesus' name, everybody said, amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MAY 12, 2024
SEASON TWO, EPISODE SEVEN
“CELEBRATION”

Pastor Jason Hillier: All right, hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. Happy Mother's Day to you. You came on a great weekend because this is going to be the kind of weekend where we celebrate all day long. And so, in just a second, we're going to spend some time praying for mothers, but before that, we're super excited to celebrate our next-gen graduation here at Valley Creek. You see, at Valley Creek, we're all about raising up generations of hope carriers. We believe that the next generations, the place where they start, their floor is going-- or, their ceiling is going to be our floor. Wherever we go into the love of the Father, as far as we go into that, they're going to go even further and farther. And so, all these hope carriers that are represented across all the generations, we're celebrating that they've learned so much about who they are, who God is, and what they were created to do. So today, we get to celebrate all the people that graduated different parts and facets of both the Kids Leadership Experience, Student Leadership Experience, VCLA, high school graduates, college graduates, trade school graduates, we're celebrating all of them, because they're going to take a next step into a new season. And so if that's you, if I just said you, come on down. We want to pray for you also. If you're one of those graduates in any of those areas, we want to pray over your next season, maybe just raise a hand as a sign of blessing to the ones that are down here out front, so go ahead and raise your hands with me as we pray over all of our graduates into this next season. You see, they don't go forth alone, they go forth with the people of God. And so right now, we pray over every single one of our graduates. Thank You, God, for what You're doing in their life. Thank You for the fact that You're with them, and You're leading them, and they will truly go out in joy. They'll be led forth in peace, and that the Word deposited into them is not going to return void because You are the one, Jesus, that's taught them who they are, who You are, and what they were created to do. We speak an identity over each one of them. We speak a peace over their next season. We speak so much life into wherever they're going to go, wherever You're going to take them. Thank You, God, that there is an entire family, the people of God, that are here praying for them. And so I just want you to hear this. Wherever you go, know that you have an entire church that goes with you. You have a people that loves you. You have a people that's praying for you. And a people that wants to see you become everything that God has called you to be. Thank You, God, that You are raising up a generation of hope carriers here. You're raising up a generation of hope carriers that's going to carry the hope of Jesus everywhere they go. They do not do it alone; they do it in Your name. Amen! Come on, God's so worthy. What if we just took a second to give him a shout of praise? Come on. God, You're worthy. You're worthy of the glory. We give You praise. Praise Your name. All right, it is a day of celebration.

We're going to just take a second to say, Happy Mother's Day. Moms, we love you, we need you. We hope that you feel seen and known and special today. And we also know that on something like a Mother's Day, it's filled with so many different kinds of emotions. For some people, it's a lot of disappointment. It's a lot of memories that are difficult. It's maybe places where your heart needs to be healed. So we first of all just speak to that part and just say, may the Lord heal you. And may He heal those places that are hurting inside of you. And Mother's Day also represents all kinds of things, including the fact that we're not even just celebrating

only mothers, we're celebrating spiritual mothers. We're celebrating those that want to be mothers. We're celebrating single moms, and all kinds of moms in all areas of life. Really what we're doing is we're celebrating women that are made in the image of Jesus and that carry His beauty and His creativity. We're celebrating all of you that are women in the room. We want to do that by just praying a blessing over you today. So if you came with a woman in your life, if you're here with her, I want to encourage you to just lay a hand on her shoulder and pray for her. If you see somebody in your area that maybe is here by themselves, you can ask them, if you can bless them and pray for them, because we celebrate all the women that are made in the image of God, and we pray a blessing over them. So right now, Jesus, we just pray over every single mom, every single spiritual mother, all the women in this place, we pray the hope of Jesus into them. We pray the life of Jesus into them. Specifically, we want to pray that any places where the world has tried to tell them who they are, or somebody's trying to speak lies over them, we speak the truth of Jesus. And we speak the love of the Father into their life. Anytime that they've maybe not been seen, not been known, we speak that they are known, and they are seen. In fact, I say that to you right now. You're seen, you're known, you're loved, and His grace is more than enough for you. So may you have a feeling that Jesus Himself is smiling down upon you today. It's not just your family praying for you, it's that the Father looks down upon you, and He looks at you with love. He looks at you with rejoicing. May you have dreams that rise up in your heart. May you have visions for a future and a hope with Jesus. May you know the best is yet to come. The best of your life is yet to come in Jesus' name. And so we speak that over every woman in this place, and we just see that they say that Jesus has been faithful to you. He will continue to be faithful to you now and forever. Come on. In Jesus' name, we worship You, God, because You are faithful to the end. You are faithful to every woman in this room. You are faithful to every mother in this room. You are faithful to every person in this room. In Jesus, we are seen, we are known, we are loved, we are valued, and we are wanted. And we have faith because You are faithful. So today, Jesus, we turn our attention and our affection and our focus to You because You are worthy of it all. Today, we celebrate You, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

Hey, whatever campus you're at, why don't you go ahead and grab a seat. Once again, let me welcome you to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us on this Mother's Day. On this day of celebration because today we're not only celebrating mothers, we're celebrating graduates, and we're celebrating all the amazing things that God has been doing in our next generation ministry. And so, I want to introduce to you Pastor Dave Scriven, our Executive Pastor of Next Gen. And Sebastian Mancillas, our Central Student Director. Dave oversees all of our next gen ministry. Sebastian oversees all of our Student ministry. And they're going to share with you some of the amazing things that God has been doing in our next gen as we keep celebrating how God is moving in this time, in this season.

Pastor Dave Scriven: Yeah, what a great day of celebration. And we truly love what God is doing in this season. Specifically, we love what God is doing in the lives of our next generation. So you guys may not realize it, but on any given week across all of our campuses, we have

about 1,500 kids and students that engage with us through our weekend experiences, through Wednesday nights. And on top of our kids and students, we have this growing and thriving young adult community that is literally getting plugged in. They're serving, they're leading in all aspects of our church. And see, what that means is, we're not just a church that believes in the next generation. We are a church of generations. And this has always been God's heart. See, it's always been about multiple generations coming together to serve God, to advance His kingdom. And that's why everything we do is about raising up the generations to come. See, if you ever wonder, like, why we make such a big deal about our kids and our students and our young adults, why do we, like, lay down our preferences and our priorities to raise them up? This is it. See, it's why every single weekend we are focused on helping our kids grow in their knowledge and understanding of the four core truths. That God is good, that Jesus has forgiven them, that they are loved, and that everything is possible. The same four truths that we declare over ourselves each and every weekend and that's because it's the core of what we believe, it's the foundation that we want them to build their lives upon. Right? It's why every single weekend, we invite our students to come and be part of this experience and not just be part of it, it's why we give literally the front and center of every Worship Center to our student section. So the students can lead the way in worship and raising up an atmosphere of faith and passion.

It's why every month we do things like Student MVMNT Nights, kind of like our "come one, come all" big gathering for students where literally every student can come and encounter the presence of God, and hear about Jesus, and learn how they could activate their faith. It's why we do Student Circles every Wednesday night. It's a place where like, students that are in motion in some way on their journey with Jesus can connect with other godly relationships; where they could press into what God is doing in their lives, where they could come together to learn how to engage the Scriptures and pray together. And it's why we do things like have Young Adult Gatherings and Hangouts every single month. Man, again it's all about raising up the next generation. And while those are some of the core things that we do, there's more than that. See, we have incredible leadership experiences for our next generation that is raising their hand to say they want to learn how to rearrange their lives around the things of Jesus. In fact, this year alone, we had more than 300 kids, students and young adults that participated in either Kids Leadership Experience, Student Leadership Experience, or VCLA. And we don't talk a lot about numbers but that is an incredible number. And if you're not familiar with those experiences, see basically what it is – Kids and Student Leadership Experience – it's a nine-month experience, where kids and students, they come and they learn how to genuinely grow as disciples of Jesus and how they could lead their generation today. Again, that's kids and students that's raising their hand to say, "I want to learn to live a different way." That "I want to be impressed upon. I want to be shaped, and molded, and formed into the image and likeness of Jesus." That they want to grow in character and accountability and they are surrounded and led by incredible coaches, literally some of the greatest leaders that we have in their church that have given up their lives to invest in our kids and our students, right? These are leaders that are leading the way to raise the standards, to raise them up in all things that

God has called them to, and to set an example with their own life. And finally VCLA, Valley Creek Leadership Academy, come on. So VCLA, it's a two-year college experience where our young adults can make the decision to invest in their personhood and their future while they pursue their education. See, while so much of the world right now is choosing the wide road and the broad gate, VCLA is full of students that recognize that narrow is the way and small is the gate that leads to life. See they've counted the cost and they said that they're willing to give up two years of their life to invest into who they're becoming so they can grow in personal holiness and purity, and ultimately fulfill everything that God has for their lives. So again, there is so much going on in the lives of the next gen. So much goodness and faithfulness that we see in what God is doing. Man, there is so much today that we want to celebrate.

Sebastian Mancillas: Yeah, and it has been an amazing year. And over the past several weeks, we've had our end-of-semester graduations and celebrations and man, what we would love then, to recognize every single kid, student, and young adult because they're all deserving of recognition. One of the things that we did new this year was recognize and award those that excelled in specific areas that we want to draw your attention to. You see, while we would love to share every single one of their names and share their journey that they've been on this year and as you can see there's a lot of them, but there's so many of these students that are joining with Jesus at a different level. But what I want to do is share the heart of each one of the awards so that we together can celebrate what they're being recognized for and what God has been doing in their lives. You see, in a Kids Leadership Experience, we awarded the Kids Leadership Award and that award went to our fourth and fifth graders who embodied the heart of who we are as a church. Who embodied the kingdom culture. Who lived out the gospel, and lived as a hope carrier in their lives and we're really excited that we got to recognize those kids in Kids Leadership. And for our students and our VCLA graduates, we got to celebrate them with these three awards that are behind them. See, the Kingdom Culture Award, and that's the heart of who we are. And this embodied the student and VCLA graduate that truly walked out kingdom culture, that advanced it and really embodied the values of Valley Creek, and by doing so, everyone around them experienced the culture that we want everybody to be a part of. The Three Circles Award was given to the students and VCLA graduate who embody living with a heart of the gospel in their lives. You can see the gospel, the kingdom, working in and through them everywhere they went. And the Hope Carrier Award was given to students and a VCLA graduate who just lived on mission. They are living as a disciple on mission to change their world, both in the church and outside the church.

And in these awards, if you can catch it, represent our visual language, a movement of hope for the city and beyond. Everything we do and everything that we're recognizing these students for is embodying all of who we are. The calling on our lives of raising up generations of hope carriers. So if you ever wondered why we do what we do, this is why we do what we do. If you ever wonder why we give, this is why we give. It's so that the next generation can truly go further and farther than we have ever gone. So man, I want to encourage you, if you know a kid, student, or young adult that needs to be involved in what's going on in this generation,

man, go to our website or scan the QR code in the seat back in front of you and invite them to get involved into everything that God has for them in this season. And if this inspires you, and if this is what you're giving goes to. Man, if you go scan the QR code in the seat back in front of you, man, we have made it really easy. Man, if your heart wants to be attached to the mission that we're on, to give to a VCLA scholarship. Man, this allows us to continue to do what we get to do to raise up generations of hope carriers. So if you're inspired by this and that's what God is leading you, man, we would love for you to consider that. But come on, these students right here are the ones saying, "I want to continue to grow as a leader, as a disciple of Jesus, rearranging my life around the things of the kingdom." So will you join me in giving them a hand right now? Come on, let's celebrate them. And we're already doing this. So at every single campus, come on, if you're not already, go ahead, stand up and let's cheer on this amazing generation of leaders.

Pastor John Stickl: Oh, come on. What a good day. Come on. What a great day. Go ahead and grab your seat, whatever campus that you're at. Today is a day of celebration because we are a movement of hope for the city and beyond. And we want to raise up generations of hope carriers. And everything we do is about the next generation. We really want our ceiling to be their floor. We want our summit to be their basecamp. The things we take by faith, we want them to be able to enjoy by sight so they can go and take new things by faith. And so everything we do in this church is geared and designed to help the next generation follow Jesus with everything that they've got. And that really is a picture of the gospel. The entire gospel is the story of laying down your life so that someone else might live. Jesus laid down His life so that you might live. And now He invites us to lay down our lives so that someone else might live. And so we will never apologize for celebrating the next generation, for giving up our preferences and opinions for the next generation, for designing everything around the next generation, because that's what it looks like to be a church of generations. In fact, I love what Nehemiah says, "Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." Come on, fight for your sons and daughters in Jesus' name, fight for your sons and your daughters in Jesus' name. Like, it matters. They matter. And they need the generation ahead of them to fight for them, which means you got to pick up the shield and you got to pick up the sword and you got to get in the game, which means you got to stop complaining about how bad the generation is and you got to start believing how great they can be in Jesus' name, which means you got to not make it about you, and your preferences, and your opinions, and your money, and your time, and your vacation, and how you like it. No, no, no, no, no. I got to remember the Lord. And the more I remember the Lord and how great and awesome He is, I start to believe how great and awesome this generation can be because they're made in His image and His likeness. And God has appointed them for such a time as this. And He has decided that they would be a generation of hope in a world that is hopeless. Hey, fight, fight for your children. Some of you have just abandoned your own children to the chaos of the world. You've abandoned the generations of the chaos of the world. Fight in Jesus' name. Just like if someone broke into your home, you wouldn't just let it happen and just sit there and allow

them to do whatever they want, you would fight. The world has broken into our homes. Fight in Jesus' name and believe you already have the victory through Him. Come on.

This is why God tells His people, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts, impress them upon your children. Talk about them when you sit at home. And when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up again." God says that we are responsible to impress His commandment, His laws, His decrees, His ways, His words, His wisdom, His kingdom, His life. We're supposed to impress them upon our children at home. Impress, shape, form, mold. Do everything you need to do to make sure God is at the center of every conversation you have. So what is this saying? He's saying, "Hey, you want to know how to raise your children?" Because parenting is hard. Every parent want to agree with that? Parenting is really hard. He says, "Hey, you want to know the way to do it? Make sure that I am at the center of everything you do. Make sure that talking about Me is at the center of everything that you do. The decisions you make, how you do your energy, what you do for life, what you do with work, how you handle hard situations, how you correct, how you discipline, how you celebrate, how you encourage. Make sure I'm at the center of it. Impress My life upon your children." And not just your biological children, your spiritual children, the children of this church, the children of this House, the children of this generation. See, I'm all in on this deal. And I think a lot of you have figured that out by now and this is like my whole life. And I have no idea how I would impress all the things of God upon my children without the other people of this church. Like, I'm all in on this deal and I fully acknowledge I can't do it on my own. I have a 14 year old and a 16 year old. They're both involved in students and the Student Leadership Experience. And so like my daughter has Meredith, and Virginia, and Sherry, and Eileen, and my son has Ron, and Greg, and Brian, and Josh investing into their life every single week. Not to mention Nicole, and Justin, and JZ, and Zach, and Charlotte, and all these amazing adults who aren't paid to do anything. They have decided they want to give their life to raising up the next generation. And so they encourage, and they correct, and they challenge, and they inspire, and they raise up, and they invest, and they're faithful, and they show up, and they show my kids what walking with Jesus looks like. See, you can't celebrate a generation of hope carriers without acknowledging there's a whole bunch of amazing leaders and serve team members who invest in them every single week. And we have outstanding leaders and serve teams in this church. In fact, they are worth celebrating right now. So we just at every campus, come on, every leader, every serve team in the next generation, every person that invests in somebody else's kids, somebody else's students, somebody else's young adult. You're outstanding. You helped me raise my kids in the ways of the Lord. And we need a whole lot more of them because we got a whole lot more of the next generation coming to this church than we had leaders and serve teams, who are willing to give their life to invest into them.

We're reaching so many lost, lonely and broken kids, and students, and young adults who have no parents who are interested in pressing anything upon their children except the world. So we need people to rise up and say, "God's commanded us to do this? Then I'm in on this deal." And you say, "Well, I can't do it. I'm like an empty nester. And I have nothing in common with

this generation." Some of our best leaders are grandmas and grandpas who don't know the lingo or the language, but they love so well. And you might say, "I'm a young adult. I don't have anything to offer this next generation." Oh, some of our best leaders are young adults who are walking with Jesus, showing this generation that it's cool to follow Jesus. You say, "Bro, I'm just trying to raise my own children. I'm up to like here with my own kids." Some of our best leaders are moms and dads who have decided, "I'll be a leader and that will help hold me accountable to get my kid or my student to the thing. Oh, yeah. Because now I'm accountable to be there, which means I'm going to get my own kid there. And I'm not going to lead my own kid there. That's probably not a great idea. But we're going to be there and we're going to be a part." Before you tell me this isn't for you. Can I just ask you, have you ever asked God if it's for you? I get it. But if you ever asked God, "God, is this something You want me to be a part of, this whole next gen thing?" And before you tell yourself no, just, just ask God. I mean, look what He says, "Train a child in the way he should go. And when he is old, he will not turn from it." Train a child in the way, train. Don't hope, don't have wishful thinking, don't assume it's all going to be alright, don't step back, don't abdicate, don't just let it all happen, don't just hope for a good result. No, train a child in the way. Not a way, because there is only one way and His name is Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. The problem is this, is we spend so much time abdicating the spiritual reality of our children, but we train them to be athletes, and we train them to be educated, and we train them in music, and theater, and we train them to be like the world. What are you training your children in? In all honesty, what is your plan? What's your vision? Because we've been talking about this kind of verse all year, "Train yourself to be godly." And we said that that requires practice and discipline and doing things I don't want to do and being told no at different times. What are you training your children in? Because when they are old, they will not turn from it.

Isn't it interesting how, when life gets hard, we fall back on our training, not our desire. It's shocking how many of us in this room are exactly like our parents. Like, "Oh, I'm not anything like my mom." "I've spent my whole life trying to not be like my dad." And yet, isn't it ironic? That when life gets hard and trials come, you don't live according to your desires, you fall back on how you've been trained. Now you can retrain yourself in Jesus' name. It takes a lot more work than the original training. And so, what we're trying to do is train our children in the ways of the Lord. And so when life gets hard, they're going to fall back on their training instead of their desire, because training is stronger than desire. It's a lot of what we've been talking about in this series. And so what are you training your children in? What are we training this generation in? And it's really hard to train somebody to walk in a way that you don't walk in. Listen, I'm all in on this, this is like my life. My whole life is trying to train up the next generation. I don't want to build things for myself. I don't want to acquire a bunch of things for myself. And I don't want to just enjoy life by myself. I want to lay down my life to raise up the next generation. Can I ask you a question? Are you building for yourself? Are you acquiring for yourself? Are you just trying to enjoy life for yourself? Or are you like, man, I am training up this next generation to walk in the way of Jesus. And I don't know how, and I feel inadequate, and I feel unequipped. Great. That's where the Spirit of God shows up and does a deep work in your

life. In fact, I love it when John says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." John had no children. So he's talking about his spiritual children. "I have no greater joy than to hear my children are walking in the truth." Can I just tell you, there is a joy that so many of us will never know because we don't train our children to walk in the way of the Lord. And he says there's no greater joy than that. The greatest joy is watching your children walk in the truth and not just your biological children, but your spiritual children. There is a joy many churches will never know because they don't raise up the next generation. And hear me, if you don't see this place as family on mission, this whole experience thus far today is like being at a high school graduation of people you don't know. We done? Can we move on, can we get to the good stuff? But if this is family on mission, oh, this is a day of joy. You actually don't even care what we do for the rest of the time we're together because you're so full of joy because you're watching the children of God. The children of the family you're a part of walk in truth. So you have something to celebrate and something to be excited about and something to move forward on.

And so if you're here and this feels like challenging and convicting of your own life, listen, that's okay. You're like, hey, you're like, "I totally blew it, I didn't do any of that. My kids are like, 30." Great. And what do you do today? You own it. You just go and say, "Hey, I'm really sorry for the choices I made. I did not train you to walk in the way of the Lord and I have now had revelation and I was wrong. I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me? I am trying to learn to walk in the way of Jesus and I hope someday you will too." That's how you start. Or you start by saying like this. "My kids are in this season now and I know, that means I probably need to rearrange my life. If I'm going to train them in the way of the Lord, that has to be the first priority. It can't be like, the last." Here, can I just tell you what we do? We do this. Like, what sports are we going to play? What clubs are we going to be a part of? What activities are we going to do? What road trips are we going to take? What commitments are we going to make? What am I going to do for work? What are we going to do for hobby? What are we going to buy? Are we going to get this? Oh, and then church. Like, just I know. And you're like, it's Mother's Day. Don't do this to us. Listen, just so we're clear, bringing your child to church when you have time is not training them in the way of the Lord. It's training them in the way of the world because the world gives God its leftovers. The way of Jesus is, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and everything else will be added unto you." So what if you arranged or rearranged your entire fall – you got all summer to think about it – around, how am I going to train my child in the way? Because I will give an account to the Lord one day for it. And we will give an account to the Lord one day for how we do it as a church. And so even if you're a part of this church and you have no investment in the next generation, one day you will give an account to the Lord for how this family raised up the next generation. And you say, that means I need to be a leader or serve team or, no. But it means you're giving, you're praying, you're creating culture, you're encouraging, you're celebrating, you're interceding, you're giving up your preference and your opinion. Why? Because we're trying to teach this generation to go further and farther than we ever did. If it's taken you 40 years to figure out how to be a disciple, imagine if when you were 14, you knew how to be a disciple. How different would your life be?

How many mistakes would you have avoided? How much pain would you have not experienced? How much freedom would you have in the here and now? "I have no greater joy than to hear my children are walking in the truth." So I just declare in Jesus' name that your child is worth fighting for. Whether your child is 60 years old or six years old. I just declare that this generation is worth impressing upon the commandments of God into their life in Jesus' name, and that whether your child is 25 or two. That it's going to happen in Jesus' name. And I just declare that this generation is worth training, practicing, disciplining. Asking them to do things they don't want to do. Huh. That would actually be parenting. Huh. For whatever it's worth, for all we want to dogpile on the next generation, I actually think there's more to dogpile on in parenting than there is the next generation. But it's Mother's Day, we're not going to do that. All I'm trying to do is lift up your head. And say, in Jesus' name, you can do this. God has entrusted your children to you because He believes in you. And God has entrusted this generation to our church because He believes in our church. Let's live a life worthy of our calling in Jesus' name. You're with me on this? Okay.

Well good morning. I'm so glad that you're here. Today is a day of celebrating. And if you've ever been here, you know we like to celebrate. We're loud, we cheer, we hoop, we holler, we sing, we shout for the Lord. And if the first time you came, that was like, super disorienting to you, I get it. I get it because it's not normal in church, but it's supposed to be. You see you might know that we celebrate but do you know why we celebrate? We celebrate because celebration is a spiritual practice. Celebration is actually a spiritual discipline. See we've been in this series for most of this year called A Different Way. Talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. And we've said that if we want to do all the things that Jesus did, like love His enemies and pray for those who persecute Him, and live free from anxiety, and have no worry, and not love money, and be full of joy, then we have to first do the things that Jesus did, like His practices. Like Scripture, and meditation, and celebration. If we want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, we have to do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. And when we look at Jesus' life we discover that Jesus' life is full of celebration. He's always celebrating. And it's actually a discipline. A discipline is doing what I can do now, so I can do what I can't do later. A discipline is doing what I don't want to do right now, like celebrate, so I can do what I can't do later, like have joy in the midst of a hardship. Huh. Like have faith in the midst of a storm. Like see the goodness of God when my whole life is crumbling around me. That happens when we first start by practicing the simple discipline of celebration. And celebration is really simple. It's just simply paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God. That's all it is. Celebration, really simple word, really simple concept. Paying attention and then calling attention to the goodness of God in my life. It's looking around and seeing God's goodness and then acknowledging it. Elevating it, declaring it, praising Him for it. And if you read the Gospels, you see Jesus celebrate all the time. One of my favorites is in Luke chapter 10. The disciples were on mission, they come back, they bring a good report to Jesus. It's a good day with the disciples. There aren't many of them in the Gospels. This was one of them. And it says, "At that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise

and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure.'" Jesus, full of joy, celebrated the goodness of God. The words "full of joy" in the original language literally mean "leaping and dancing." Okay. Can you picture Jesus leaping and dancing? I mean, I think we pictured Jesus as like, stoic, and stern, and angry, and frustrated, and like, guys, all the time, leaping and dancing, celebrating, singing, joyful, top of His lungs. I mean, I don't even want to try to do it up here for you, but can you just picture? Jeez, I don't know what's harder to picture, me leaping and dancing or Jesus leaping and dancing. But either way, the point is, is that Jesus was constantly celebrating, turning water into wine at the wedding feast, playing with the children, hanging out with His disciples. He's always celebrating. And because He celebrated in the easy times, He was able to celebrate in the hard times. Because He practiced paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God when things were easy, He was able to pay attention and call attention to the goodness of God when things were hard. Because He could do it on a good day when the disciples came back and things were good, He could do it in the storm when the boat's about to sink. And He could see the goodness of God when His disciples all deserted Him. And He could see the goodness of God when He was on His way to the cross. Maybe if we spent more time leaping and dancing, we would have more faith when life gets hard, because we got to practice in the easy so we can be trained to do it when it's hard.

In fact, I love what God says to the people of God, this is in the Old Testament, the Israelites, He says, "Three times a year. You are to..." say it, "celebrate a festival to Me." Three times a year, they arrange their entire lives around a celebration. It didn't matter who you were. It didn't matter where you lived. It didn't matter what you were doing. It didn't matter what the situation or circumstance was like in your life at that season. Nope, everything stops. All the work, all the sports, all the activities, all the programs, all the things that we get so stressed out about stopped. And they all celebrated the goodness of God. They literally built their entire calendar, their life rhythm, around paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God. We're supposed to be people who celebrate. "Rejoice in the Lord always and again, I say rejoice." "The joy of the Lord is your strength." "The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Celebration is the way of the kingdom. And we need to learn to practice it in the easy so we can see it in the hard. I mean, do you remember when God is leading the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land? He sets them free from 400 years of slavery. He's leading them towards the Promised Land. And I want you to catch this. It says, "In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt, there we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted. But you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'The Lord has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we that you should grumble against us?'" Who are we? "You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.'" So I want you to catch it. God is leading them from Egypt to the Promised Land and they are grumbling that they can't eat the food of the world. They're grumbling that they can't eat the food of the world. It's like they have nothing to celebrate. And you say celebrate, well, what would they have to celebrate? Oh, I

don't know. How about getting set free of 400 years of slavery? How about the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night over them? How about being declared a kingdom of priests? How about being declared as God's special possession? How about being led by God to a Promised Land, a land full of milk and honey that He was going to give you? Oh, I don't know. But they were so busy complaining, grumbling, that they had no room for celebrating. And I think this story is a whole lot more like my life than I care to admit. I think sometimes I'm so busy grumbling that I have no room for celebrating. I'm so busy focused on what's wrong with the world that I can't see what's right with God. And if I would spend more time focused on what's good with God, I would have no room left for grumbling, complaining, about what's wrong with the world.

See, if celebrating is paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God, then grumbling is paying attention and calling attention to the brokenness of this world. And if we're honest, we grumble a whole lot more than we celebrate. And we constantly talk about all of the things that are wrong with the world instead of all of the things that are right with God. And you might look at this and you might say, "Yeah, but you don't know what's going on in my life and all the places that I've been, and all the things that are happening, and all the things that I don't have that I want in the world." Oh, I don't know, you might have something to celebrate, like being rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light, like the Spirit of the living God dwelling inside of you, like living in the kingdom of God in the here and now, like being called God's beloved son or daughter. You see, this is a perspective issue. Two people can go into the exact same situation and one person pays attention and calls attention to the goodness of God, and somebody else grumbles by paying attention and calling attention to what's wrong with the world. And what I want you to see is that God takes grumbling personally. "The Lord has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we? You're not grumbling against us, but against the Lord." Listen to me, whenever you're grumbling, God takes it personally. Because when you're grumbling, you're saying there's more wrong with the world than there is right with God. He's going to take that personally. When I'm grumbling, I'm saying there is more brokenness in this situation than there is the goodness of God in this situation. And make no mistake about it, there is always more of the goodness of God than there is the brokenness of this world. It's just have you trained yourself to see it? And so, like Jesus, we have to practice it in the easy so we can see it in the hard. "Who are we? You're not grumbling against us." Just so you know, you're not grumbling against your spouse, or your parents, or your boss, or the government, or this church, or your friend, or your parent, or that person, you're grumbling against God. And you're saying there is more wrong in that situation than there is the goodness of God in that situation. God takes that really personal.

The cool part is, on the flip side, when you celebrate anyone or anything's goodness, God takes that personally too because every good thing comes from Him. So today when you cheer for a next generation student, you're actually celebrating God. You're not actually even celebrating them, you're actually celebrating God because every good thing comes from God. Every good thing is done by God's work in our lives. So He takes that personally as well. "Who

are we? You are not grumbling against us but against the Lord." Who are we? You are not celebrating us, you are celebrating the Lord. And you have to understand that celebration is offensive to the grumbling spirit. If you start practicing celebration, here's what I'm going to tell you, what's going to happen is the grumblers around you are going to be offended by you. Why? Because when you start paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God, surrounded by people who can only see what's broken in the world, they're going to get offended. They're going to think you're ignorant. They're going to think, "Don't you see all these problems and don't you see this stuff?" All these things are real and they might be facts. But there is a truth that is higher. And it's that God is good and He is good in the here and now. And I choose to train myself to see that instead of this. This is why, in the story of the prodigal son, when the prodigal son comes home, and the father throws a... party, and celebrates, and what happens? The older son refuses to come in and celebrate. He's offended, he's offended at his father paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God, because all he can see is what's wrong with his brother. Celebration offends the grumbling spirit. That's why in church, when people are celebrating, there are always people that are offended, and it's so silly because it's the way we've trained ourselves to live by sight or to live by faith. I don't know about you, but I have more to celebrate than to grumble about, but I have to practice it, because otherwise I will complain about all the food I wish I had, too. But oh, I don't know, I've just been set free from slavery, the Spirit of God is leading me, and I'm on my way to the depths of the kingdom. So I actually have more of God's goodness, than the brokenness of the world, but it's a training, it's a thinking. You're with me on this?

You see, "They will celebrate Your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of Your righteousness." They, in context, this is generations. The generations, whatever generation you are, and whatever generation the person next to you is, will celebrate Your abundant goodness because it's everywhere, we just have to practice it. If I can be super honest with you, out of all the practices we're going to go through, this one is going to be one of the hardest ones for me personally. I am super gifted at seeing what is wrong. I mean, it's like a, I don't know, I was trained that way, I guess. I can walk in here, stand here and I'm just telling you right now, I can stand here and in three seconds, I can tell you that lights out, there's a piece of paper on the floor over here, there's five more people in this section than there is in this section, this guy's on his phone, this couple back here is fighting. And that thing on the wall is crooked. That's before I even say, "Hey, everybody, welcome to Valley Creek." Okay. That's my life. And so, for the last year, one of the things that I've been doing, I make my coffee in the morning and I go sit in my chair. And before I even open my Bible, before I pray, before I do anything, I just sit there and I practice celebration. I try to sit there and I try to celebrate the goodness of God from the day before. And some days it's so easy, some days I can sit there I just be like, oh, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. And some days I sit there and the coffee gets cold. And I have to work really hard and ask the Holy Spirit to show me His goodness when I can't see it. And so I'm practicing. I'm training on a daily basis because I can't run that marathon yet, but I want to do more than walk to the mailbox. And so I practice and I'm growing and I'm learning and I'm trying and I'm working it out with God, because I want to be

the kind of person that walks in and before I even say "good morning" to you can see I see the mercy of God over here. I see the compassion of God back there. I see the love of God right here. I see the provision of God over here. I see the protection of God in this. I want to train myself to pay attention and call attention to the goodness of God instead of training myself, or having been trained by the world in my flesh, to pay attention and call attention to what's broken in this world. And it's not easy. It requires you slowing down, it requires you lifting up your head and being aware and it requires humility. See, you can't celebrate the goodness of God if you're going a hundred miles an hour. You can't celebrate the goodness of God if your head's always down in your phone, you actually have to lift it up and look around and you can't celebrate God's goodness when you have a spirit of pride. Because celebration is not about looking at how good you are, it's looking at how good God is.

Celebration is not paying attention and calling attention to how good you did, it's paying attention and calling attention to how good God is. And hear me, it's all over your life. The goodness of God is all over your life. But like a deer in the woods, you have to train yourself to look for it and spot it, it's like, there it is. And the more you pay attention and the more you call attention, the easier it becomes. And you start to become the kind of person who did what Jesus did, so you can do what Jesus did, which is have faith and see the goodness of God in the storm, and the chaos, and the brokenness. So your practice plans for this week, really simple. And then we're going to do something together. Every day, this week, when you first wake up or right before you go to sleep, celebrate the specific goodness of God in your life. If you're like, "What's a practice plan? I haven't been here in a while. What is this?" Every week at the end of the practice that we're talking about, we're just saying, here's a practice plan to train yourself. We want to train ourselves to be godly. And the way we want to practice it this week is just every day and right when you wake up first thing in the morning or right before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes, just sit, just celebrate the specific goodness of God in your life, pay attention and call attention. And some will be so easy. Here will be the easy ones. The easy ones will be all the things God's given you. "Oh God, thank You for my house, I thank You for my spouse, I thank You for my parents, I thank You for this..." Those are the easy ones. And then you go a little deeper and you start celebrating the goodness of God in things like, "God, thank You for a hot cup of coffee. Thank You for this good meal, like, I just enjoy it." Like God wants us to enjoy our life. Like, I just, "God, thank You. I see Your goodness in this sunrise. I see Your goodness in this friend who is just kind to me." And then you kind of get through that little list. And then all of a sudden you're like, now what? Now you're in the good ones, because now you actually have to rely on the Holy Spirit to start showing you the goodness of God in your life. And you'd be amazed at how you start seeing things different. Because when I'm busy celebrating the goodness of God, I don't have any room left to complain about the brokenness of this world. Okay? So here's what we're going to do? Instead of me teaching you a bunch more about celebration, here's what I want to do. I want us to actually practice it right now. So if you'll grab your journal with me real quick, hopefully you have your Different Way journal with you. If you didn't get one of those, we'd love to get you one. And if you don't have any kind of journal, that's fine. Grab a pen, grab a piece of paper or grab your phone, if you

need to just go to a notes and space. And for the next five minutes, I just want to invite you to write down where you can see the goodness of God in your life. Just about five minutes. These guys are just going to play to keep you in the space. Let's just practice it right now, it's not just be hearers of the Word, let's be doers. I can see the goodness of God in my church. His Word in my life, the way He protected me this week, in the way He just forgave that brokenness in my life. Five minutes, I can see God's goodness in. And at every campus, I would just ask you, if you don't want to participate, that's fine. Could you just be still for the five minutes so as to not disturb anybody else? Holy Spirit, come show us. Help us pay attention and call attention to Your goodness in our lives because it's everywhere in Jesus' name.

Pastor Jason Hillier: Man, He's so worthy of the glory. He's worth celebrating and He is worth giving our lives to. And so, I'm thankful for all that we've got to celebrate today. I'm thankful we had an amazing day of practicing joy in the kingdom. In fact, what if we just gave Him another round of applause? Thank You, God. Your joy is our strength. This is great church. This is what it is to experience great church, to be in the church together. Thanks for being a part of it. If you need prayer for anything, right down the front, we'd love to pray for you and your family. Maybe if you want to come up with your graduate and pray at the end together. If you want to give, man, all of this is what we're given towards. All this raising up the generations of hope carriers. That's why we're doing it. That's what God has called us to. So you can give as you leave in the boxes or online at valleycreek.org. But as you go today, may you go with the joy of the Lord, knowing that God is good. Jesus has forgiven me. I am loved and everything is possible. We'll see you back next week.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MAY 19, 2024
SEASON TWO REVIEW

Come on, that's our prayer. Jesus, make me more and more like You. Jesus, You are a different way. Jesus, You are a better way and Jesus, You are the way of life. And You call each one of us by name to come and follow You, to pick up our cross, deny ourselves, and find the life that You offer in Jesus' name. May we have the faith and the hope and the love to move forward into the freedom that You offer us. God, we thank You for this journey, one simple next step at a time. Oh, God, make me more like You. Make our church more like You. Make our families more like You. Make our city more like You. May Your kingdom come and Your will be done starting from my heart to the ends of this earth, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Why don't you go ahead and grab your seat. Whatever campus or service you're at today, I am so glad you are here with us. And I love that last song that we just sung. Our team has been working hard on writing that, just based on what God's been doing in the here and now in our church. You see, we've been in this year-long series called A Different Way. And all we're doing is talking about doing the things that Jesus did, so we can do the things that Jesus did. It's that if we wanna do what He did on-the-spot, in the moment, we have to first do what He did behind-the-scenes. That if we want His life, we have to take on His lifestyle. And so we've been talking about the things that Jesus did, like He just lived without fear. And He had no anxiety. And He was peaceful. And He was full of joy. And He was free. He was deeply connected to God. He loved others well. He didn't get caught up in the circumstances or situations of life. And we look at Jesus' life and it's the kind of life we all want. It's the kind of life we're all pursuing. We just don't know how to find it. And until we realize that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to first back up and do the things that Jesus did, like the way He practiced and lived; His lifestyle. Things like fasting, and prayer, and Scripture, and meditation, and generosity, and service, and community, and all these things that He practiced day in and day out in His life that allowed Him to do the things that He really wanted to do. And so we've been talking about this. We've been just talking about like, what does it mean to be a disciple?

Asking big questions like, who are you becoming? And who do you want to become? And who are you a disciple of? And what is the direction of your life? And what's the vision for your life? We've been asking these big questions, wrestling through these big concepts. And today we finish up Season 2 of this Different Way series. See, we've simply broken this series, this year-long series, which wasn't intended to be, but that's what it's becoming, into just different seasons like your favorite TV show. And so the first season we talked all about, what does it mean to be a disciple? What is this life that Jesus invites us to? What does it look like to really follow Jesus? And then we're finishing up today's Season 2, where we started looking at some of those practices that Jesus invites us to take on, to train ourselves to be godly. And we were supposed to get through, honestly, all 12 of them, and we got through 3: Scripture, Meditation, and Celebration. Now, here's what I want you to hear, and you keep hearing me say this throughout this year is, we are not in a hurry. We have nowhere to get, we have someone to become. So I'm not trying to get somewhere; I'm trying to become someone. And I'm trying to help you become who God has called you to be. And so we're not really in a hurry; we're willing to go at the pace of God. And if you've been in our church for a long time, we just have this little cultural phrase we use just called "follow the cloud." So we're just a

church that follows the cloud. When God set the people of God free, the Israelites from Egypt, He led them to the Promised Land through a cloud, it was His presence. And when it moved, they moved. And when it stopped, they stopped. And where it went, they went. And what it did, they did. They just followed the cloud, and it brought them to the fullness of life that God offered them. And so we just say we follow the cloud. Wherever God is going, whatever God is doing, whatever pace God is taking, we're willing to arrange our lives to make that the centerpiece of who we are as a church.

And so we've slowed down, and I think what God has wanted us to grab in Season 2 is that we must become people who love His Word. That if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to first think like Jesus thought. And I will never think like Jesus thought if I don't learn to love God's Word for myself. And I love what God did in Season 2 of A Different Way. See, like I've loved it. You might be like, "Um, not so much." I loved it. I love what we're talking about. I love what we're discovering. I love the revelation God is showing us. I love the repentance that's happening. Like, this is the life that I want to live like, I loved Season 2 and what God is doing and saying in my life and who I am trying to become. And I loved so much of the goodness of God that I saw, all in your life. You see, whether you realize it or not, He who began the good work in you is faithful to complete it. And we're working out our salvation with some fear and some trembling. And it's God who is working inside of us to will and act according to His desires, and His purposes, and His calling in our life. Like God is at work and I'm watching revelation and repentance happen in people as they're rising up to a new reality with a clear vision of who they want to become and a new understanding of what it actually looks like to be a disciple of Jesus. And to be a church that says, "Hey, we just want to see His kingdom come. And His will be done in everything we do when we're gathered together and when we're scattered out in the world." And if you made me give you a summary verse for Season 2, I would just present this to you as kind of the summary verse. I think this captures so much of what we've been talking about for the last couple months. And it just says this. "So let what I'm saying sink deeply into your hearts and souls. Do whatever it takes to remember what I'm telling you. Tie a reminder on your hand or put a reminder on your forehead, where you'll see it all the time, and on the doorpost where you cross the threshold, or on the city gate. Teach these things to your children. Talk about them when you're sitting together in your home and when you're walking together down the road. Make them the last thing you talk about before you go to bed and the first thing you talk about the next morning. So that as long as there is sky above the earth, you and your children will enjoy the good life awaiting you in the land the Lord has promised you." I think that is a great verse to summarize Season 2, of Scripture and Meditation and Celebration. Three practices that the Lord is inviting us into that we would be people who love value His Word.

And so today we're wrapping up Season 2. And here's what I want to invite you to do. I want to invite you to grab your journals. Hopefully you have your Different Way journals. If you got one with us at the beginning of the series and you've been using it all the way along, taking notes, that was the point so that it could all be self-contained. And if you didn't get one, we'd love to

get you one. We've got some more on order. But here's what I want to do for the next about five minutes. I'm just going to invite you to read back through the notes you took during Season 2. Not Season 1, but Season 2 that started with Scripture. I just want to give you five minutes to just read through your notes. And if you didn't bring your journal, or you're new with us today and you're like, "I haven't taken any notes," on the QR code on the seat-back in front of you, you can use your phone and scan it. And we've created a Season 2 recap for you. And I want to give you just five minutes to just look at your notes of what God has been saying to us, because what is the point of taking notes if you never reread them? And maybe a better question to ask is, if you never take notes, how are you going to remember what God has been saying to you? Because here's a great question, if I just asked you this. What did God teach us two weeks ago? Can you remember? I preached it and I probably can't remember it. So what did God teach us six weeks ago? I don't remember. So that's why I write it down. So I can remember what God says, because we want to consider carefully what we hear, because how we use what God is saying to us determines what we will keep hearing in the future. And so you can use the QR code for a season recap, if you don't have one, but hopefully you have your journal. Let me give you about five minutes. Just re-read through what has God been saying to you over the course of Season 2, A Different Way. God speaks to you because He loves you. And sometimes when you just stop and look at all the things He's been saying, it reminds you how much you're loved. That God, Yahweh, Jesus, the One who has life in and of Himself has decided to speak to you, that you might have relationship with Him. Be healed and be free. And have revelation on hidden things that might be mysterious. But He wants to show them to you so you can walk them out. Don't be hearers of the word, be doers of the word. Which means we have to steward that which He says to our lives and value it because we value Him.

That was less than five minutes looking through your notes. For some of you that probably felt really long and for others of you, you felt like, "I read like one page of week one." So it's just a good reminder that this is A Different Way. Rearranging our life, and our time even together as a church, together around Jesus and His practices, because we are not interested in entertainment, we're going for transformation. And transformation requires slowing down and going back to that which matters. That which God has said, that which God has said, that which I need to master so that I can become free, because I'm tired of this world mastering me. And so here's what I want to invite you to do, you flip to a blank page. And if you don't have a journal, you can just grab your phone. Try to keep it on silent. But if you could just open up a brand new note page. And just maybe at the top of it, you can just write you know Season 2 Recap Questions. And I'm just going to walk you through five questions that I want to give you an opportunity to just process with the Holy Spirit as we wrap up Season 2. And so Holy Spirit, I just ask for You to keep speaking. We don't have to ask for You to come, because You're here. We don't even have to ask for You to speak, because we know You already are, but help us hear. And help us sort through our own thoughts, and our own confusion, and our own disorientation. Help us be focused, just process these with You. First question for you is just simply this. How is my understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus been

changing? How is my understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus been changing? How are you changing your thought process on what it actually looks like to follow Jesus? What it means to call yourself the people of God? What it actually means to say you're a believer? How has your mind been changing? Jesus keeps expanding our own definition of what being His disciple looks like. Keep leaning into how He wants to open up that box that we've put following Him in.

Second question for you is, how have I been re-arranging my life around Jesus and His practices? How have I been rearranging my life around Jesus and His practices? We've said that's kind of the key word in a sense of this series, arrange and re-arrange, order and re-order. How is your life arranged differently today than it was at the beginning of Season 2? And when you hear the word rearrange, I think some of us think like rearrange our furniture. You keep the same amount of furniture in the room and you just shuffle it around and then you buy another chair from IKEA and try to shove it in an already crammed living room. When we're using the word rearrange, we're saying, what do you need to get rid of so that you have space for that which God wants to do? You can't keep adding things into an already over-full life. So what would it look like and how have you been re-arranging? And if you haven't, then maybe the question you answer is just, why haven't I rearranged anything yet? If we learn practices to become godly, but never practice them, they don't help us. So really easy answers for this one would be like, "I changed what I listened to." "I've changed what's on my phone." "I changed how I do my mornings or my evenings to arrange my life around Jesus." And just think about this. If you had a baby for the first time and you brought that baby to your home, your entire life would be re-arranged and there would be evidence of that baby in every room of the house – cribs, changing tables, diapers, wipes, toys, bouncies, car seats – every room there would be evidence that your life has been re-arranged around that baby. Is there any evidence in your life that you're re-arranging your life around Jesus?

Third question is, if repentance starts where excuses end, where is God inviting me to stop making excuses and simply repent? If repentance starts where excuses end, where is God inviting me to stop making excuses and simply repent? In other words, where are you making excuses about why you can't follow Jesus? And just need to own it. Because you can't repent, change my mind, change my direction. If I won't take responsibility, respond according to the ability that He's given me with the revelation He has now shown me. Like, where are you just like, I just straight up, I'm just making an excuse here. I just say I'm too tired, but that's an excuse. I just say I don't have enough time, that's just an excuse. Like, where do you just need to own that? Holy Spirit, come help us. Repentance is such a gift from God. It brings refreshment, breakthrough. We want to be people who are quick to repent so we can live with a renewed mind that we might see God's will right in front of us. That one is an important question for you. I would wrestle on that one this week. Where is it an excuse, when God's inviting you to repent? Because your boss, and spouse, and your child, and your parent, and your work, and your circumstances, and situations, and your health, and your finances, and the government can't keep you from becoming who God has called you to be in Jesus' name. So

don't make excuses. Choose to repent, to become who He has called you to be because the kingdom is at hand.

Fourth question is, what is my Season 2 summary statement? What is my Season 2 of A Different Way summary statement? If you had to boil up this entire series season, like just this last, however many weeks this has been, in one statement, what would it be? In other words, if I came and talked to you in the atrium right after service and said, "Hey, just tell me, just, what's God been doing in your life? What's the Holy Spirit been saying to you over these last six, seven, eight weeks?" What would that be? This forces you to actually have to think deeply about a deep thing and consolidate it into one statement. I don't -- not a paragraph, just what's your summary statement in one sentence you could tell me. What God's been doing in Season 2 of A Different Way in your life? When you're flipping through Netflix and you get to Season 2 of your favorite show, the subtitle is like the summary statement of that season. This is like the subtitle of this season and we did it for Season 1. Mine was life-changing for me. And I want to help you by the time we get to the end of Season 4, have a summary statement for each season, so you can remember what the Holy Spirit is doing in your life. Because He loves you and He is forming you into His image and His likeness. And there is a subtitle for this Season 2 of A Different Way that you can't forget. So write it down, highlight it and don't lose it, because when we get to like, November, I'm probably going to ask you, what was your Season 1, and your Season 2, and your Season 3? When we do Season 4, you're like, "Oh my gosh." Yeah. Think of who you're going to be by then.

Okay. Last question. What is my practice plan for the summer? Every week I've given you a practice plan for all of Season 2 and most of Season 1. Today is your opportunity to create your own practice plan for the summer. It might be using things that we've done. For example, it might be to engage the Bible reading plan, or just-- the three practices of Scripture, Meditation, and Celebration. It might be to memorize and meditate on a new passage. Because you did Psalm 23 and you did it so well. You might want to do like our staff is doing Psalm 103:1-13. Join us in that, if you want or pick your own. Maybe it's to celebrate the specific goodness of God for 30 minutes each week. You set aside time to actually pay attention and call attention to His goodness. Maybe for some of you, it's just to come to church every week. That would be like hardcore training in your life. The way that it's currently arranged, that's incredible. Do, do that. Maybe it's re-listening to all of Season 1 and Season 2, because it's easy to forget like, what is your practice plan? We're training ourselves to be godly. And here's the deal, we can't run the marathon yet, but we've all gotten past walking to our mailbox. We've got to maybe like a three-mile run. And if you don't practice over the summer, you're going to lose all of that endurance that you've built up. So what's your practice plan? Because we're going to start our 60 Day summer series like we always do and we're going to take a break from A Different Way. I know some of you, you need a breath. You're saturated with it. We got it, we're coming up for some air, but what is your practice plan? Because if you just like check out of all this and then come in August and I'm coming back in hot. And I'm saying, "We're going to 10 miles, baby." And you can't walk to the mailbox

anymore. We're going to have a challenge. You're going to have a challenge because I'm going to 10 miles, so I'm trying to make sure you don't settle, in all seriousness.

Just like, what's one thing. What's one thing and wherever you are on your journey, Holy Spirit, come on, show us. Give us one practice plan that we should be able to say when somebody says, how are you practicing your faith this summer? How are you training to be godly this summer? You should be able to say that. It's not really complicated, it's not really hard and it's not really subjective. It's very objective. I am going to... fill in the blank. I don't even need to get to five miles, but I can't lose my three miles. I can't lose it. I can't lose it because it's too important to who I'm becoming. So I refuse to lose it because I'm not going back to zero to start over again because my wife, and my children, and this world needs me to become a person of love. So I'm not giving this ground up. That might mean I'm going to give up some of the worldly things that I would have done this summer, some of my own time, catch it. I'm preaching to you while you're doing this point. So I'm trying to help you. It's worth it. One thing, don't look at that list and think you got to do all this. You don't have to do anything on that list. I don't care. Just what's your practice plan? We did three practices, Scripture, Meditation, Celebration, just pick something. Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, You're the great trainer anyways, train us. Give us a plan. And this is called taking responsibility for your journey because you have to be able to be like, even if no one gives me one, I have to learn to do it. This is me teaching you how to like, come up with your own practice plan. See, here's what I want to say. Some of you, some of you might feel like, as we've gone through this and as we're going through, you might feel like, man, it's striving, it's performance, it's hard, it's making me do things I don't want to do, I'm earning. I have to do all this stuff and it's just getting so overwhelming. I just want to like, stop you with all that to be like, listen, this isn't about doing something for God. All of this is opening yourself up so you can just receive His grace to become who He has called you to be. John 15:5, 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." The spiritual practices help us remain in Him. They help you be aware of Him. They help you be focused on Him. They help you rest in Him. They help you rely upon Him. They help you stay open to Him so that He can flow through your life and effortlessly and naturally bear fruit the character of Jesus. This isn't striving, struggling, earning, performing, you don't have to do any of this stuff. I told you that in Season 1. You don't have to do any of these things. But these things open me up so that God's grace can flow into my life and can change me from the inside out.

And what I want to remind you is that your spirit longs to do these things. The Spirit within you actually has a desire to please God, to follow God, to obey God. And that Spirit that is within you is stronger than that flesh that longs against you. And the kingdom within you longs to obey God more than the world around you and the world that might even be still inside of you longs to rebel against God. So we got to keep reminding ourselves, stop saying, "This is so hard, this is so hard, this is so hard." No, you have a new nature, you're a new creation. You have been re-created to live an entirely different reality. This is now the normal way of life. A

Different Way is the normal way for the people of the kingdom. And so all I've been trying to do, is lift up your head to say, it is hard to go against the grain and live like the world as the people of God. It is easy and light to go with the way of Jesus as His people. Season 2, you did it. It's a great season. Season 3 is going to be amazing, summer is going to be great. God is moving. Let's keep becoming the people He's called us to be. And so I want to finish all of this up with communion because it's a reminder of who we are. And so at all our campuses, our teams are going to come and they're going to start passing out the elements of communion. And this is for anyone and everyone who has put their faith in Jesus. And if you're here and you haven't done that yet, when it gets to you, we would just ask that you would pass it along because by taking it, what you're saying is, I'm a disciple of Jesus. I live a different way. I've been included in Christ. And I'm a new creation and communion reminds me that there is a calling that I'm now called to live by. I want to live a life worthy of my calling in Jesus' name. In fact, this is why Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The way of Jesus is easy and light. It doesn't feel like that to us a lot of times because we've been trained to live like the world. And your training is stronger than your will. So even though you desire to follow God, you've been trained to live like the world. So to live like God feels hard and heavy, feels burdensome and confusing. It feels disorienting and unreachable because we have been trained to live like the world. And so we're in process of retraining ourselves to be godly. To take the way that is easy with a burden that is light. We're doing what we can do now, so we can do what we want to do later. We're doing the things that Jesus did, so we can do the things that Jesus did. And communion reminds us that Jesus already did everything that ever has been or ever will be required from me. Communion reminds me that I've been included in Christ and there is a new reality of which I live by called the kingdom of Heaven. Communion reminds me that He is the vine and I'm the branch, and if I'm severed from Him, I have no life, no fruit. You can do nothing. But if I rest in Him and remain in Him and rely on Him, I will bear much fruit in Jesus' name. Jesus is a different way, he is a better way and he is the way of life.

And as we finish Season 2, all I want to say to you at the end of this whole thing of this, this part of the journey is man, God loves you so much that He wants to not only include you in Him, He wants to help you become like Him, because He shows us what it's like to be human, what it's like to be alive, and what it's like to be free in relationship with God. You see on the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He took the bread, and He gave thanks, and He broke it. And He said, "This is my body, which is broken for you. As often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me." In other words, He says, "Remember who I am and what I've done and what you are now included in." Can we receive the life of Christ together? And in the same way, after the supper, He took the cup and He said, "This is my blood, which will be poured out for you. The blood of the new covenant, a new deal, a new arrangement between you and me. And as often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me. Remember that I was poured out so that you could be poured into." So that you don't have to live defeated and discouraged, weary, burdened in this broken world. But that you could be healed and made

"Season Two Review" | A Different Way
May 19, 2024 | Pastor John Stickl

whole, have rest for your souls and walk in a way that is easy and light in Jesus' name. Let's receive His life together. So Jesus, You are the different way. And we choose to follow by faith. In Your name we pray. Amen.