

Well, hey, everybody and welcome to Valley Creek. I am so glad that you are here today. Wherever you're joining us, all of our campuses, come on, let's let everybody know we are so glad to be together as a family today.

It is a good time to come together. And today, especially, because we are wrapping up the series that we've in, A Prayer For Us. For the past couple of weeks, we've just been sharing what the prayers are that have been on our heart. And today, I have the privilege of being able to do the same. And I'm going to tell you something, I think that my prayer is right on time because next week, it is Easter. And Easter, it's that time of year that we celebrate life. I mean it's Spring time outside and the trees and the flowers, they're starting to bloom. And that makes us think of life. And of course, at Easter, we celebrate the resurrected life of Jesus, we remember all of his sacrifices that he made in his death on a cross so that we might live.

And so as I've been looking around and asking God, I mean, what is the prayer that's on my heart? I think it's falling right on time. Because of this, I'm looking around and I see a whole lot of people that are living, but I don't see a lot of life. I see people -- and they're going to school or work, and they're doing their hobbies and sports, even coming to church, but I don't see a lot of life. And some people, they just -- I don't know, some people seem sad. Some people seem kind of lost. They're lost in themselves or they're lost in the world. Maybe you've seen it too. Maybe you've noticed that it just feels like people are kind of flat. So as I've been noticing that, and noticing that next week is Easter, the celebration of life, that's what brings me to the prayer on my heart that I want to share with you today.

And it's simply this, we pray that we would live our one life with life. We pray that we would live our one life, the one life that God has given us, that we would live it with life. It's so simple, but honestly it's easier said than done. Because let's be real honest, life can be hard. And we all go through seasons when life is difficult, and it's hard to keep that pep in ourselves. But if we're not careful, we can slide, and what was a joyful experience in life becomes just getting through it. We were eager for the day and then we're eager just for the day to end. It's when we realize that our entire existence has become just that, we're just kind of existing in our marriages, in our friendships. In all of these places where we are, we're living, but I'm not so sure that we have life.

So can I start by asking you just a really simple question? Are you living your one life with life today? You. And not the people around you, not the people behind you. Are you living your one life with life today? And you may say, well, what does that mean? What is this life? What are you even talking about? Well, the world has a different definition of life than the kingdom does. See, the world tries to take death and it wants to put it in the wrapper of life, to try to get us to buy into a fake life. The world will say things like, well, your marriage is hard? Well, just get out of it and just go start a brand new life. Or if your job is hard, your boss is hard to deal with, man, this is the time because it's like the great resignation, so just go do what you want to do because you're -- that's where you'll be happy, that's where you'll find life.

One of the young adults on our staff team told me something and it kind of rocked me. They said that there is a real popular trend among young people today, and it's to sell everything you have to buy a van and just go adventure the world, and thinking only of yourself. And can I tell you, that is a really dangerous sly of the enemy because what that's doing is that's taking our young people and leading them into this existence where they're living in isolation and it's dangling this carrot of fake life, the carrot's hung on the hope of Instagram where you see all these pictures of people living in boundless bliss because it's not. I've given you boundary lines and my boundary lines are actually pleasant places in your life.

And they're not meant to constrict or confine your life. God's boundary lines are meant to shape and form us, to form us into His image, to shape us for the one life that He gave us to live. See, God has given us life. He actually gave us life when He gave us Jesus. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." He's letting us know that life is defined in him. And it's only in Jesus that we'll know what the truth of life is and where we'll find the way to life. And so today, if you're saying, yeah, I don't know if I really have life within me, maybe you've just lost your way. Or maybe you've got a little bit lost in the truth, maybe you've started believing and buying in to some of the lies that the world has pitched your way. And so the question then becomes, well, how do I know? I mean, how do we know if we're really living with life?

Well, here at Valley Creek, we say that we are Jesus-focused, Spirit-filled and life-giving. That's right. That means that we receive and release the life of Jesus around us. You say, what does that look like practically? Well, we walk out our lives believing that we are here on purpose, with a purpose, we do it with passion and enthusiasm, with peace and with love. Living is what we do, giving life is how we do it. So how do you know if you're really living with life? It's when you're releasing life to other people. And you say, I don't know that I'm doing that. That's okay. If you're not releasing life to other people, it means that you just start receiving life from Jesus. And you may say, you know what, I used to. I mean, that used to be me. I used to live like that, but I'm not living that way anymore. Maybe it was taken from you.

Jesus tells that there is a thief and he comes only, see the word only, to steal, kill and destroy. But Jesus says, he came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Don't be deceived, they're very real in me. And he only exists to take life from us. If Jesus is the author of life, then Satan is the author of death. So the only reason that he exists is to steal and to take life from our life. But Jesus is backing that we would have it abundantly. Abundantly, I love this word. This word abundantly, it comes from the Greek word, perissos. And what that means is it means above a measure or a mark. It's more than is required. One dictionary says this, super added. Oh, I like that. Jesus came to give me life and to give me super added over the top. You say, over the top of what?

This is the top of all that we could ask or imagine. Over the top of that life of your friend that you're looking at and you wish you had. Over the top of that couple that seems to have

everything picture perfect. Over the top of the best job that you could dream of. God gave us Jesus that we would have life over the top. And sometimes that can be hard to believe. And the reason it can be hard to believe is because the enemy is not just trying to rob us of life, he's doing one better, he's trying to rob us of the belief that that life is even possible. See, some of us are living and we're completely unaware of what we're missing out on. You don't realize what -- you're unaware of what the thief has taken if it's something you rarely use. So if a thief stole my car, I would know real fast and I would be really mad about it. But if a thief stole, I don't know, my water hose, I can't tell you when I would know, really.

Because I don't use it every day. So if you and I are not relying on Jesus as the source of our life every day, we're not using it, it's pretty easy for the thief to come and rob and steal it from us. But there's good news. There's good news. If you've been robbed of life, there is a path to get it back. The psalmist tells us, Lord, "You will make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." See, God says, there's a path. There is a path to life and it has everything that you need to live a joyful, over the top, abundant life in your one life, but it's only my path. It's not on the path of the world. So can I ask you a question? The life that you're living today -- today -- what does that life look like? What path does it look like you're on? And you may say, I don't know, it's -- I felt like I had that life, but I lost it.

Okay, you lost it. Was it three weeks ago? Was it three months ago? Was it three years ago? Because God says, that path is still there. It's still there for you and I want you know. So maybe today is a time to say, let's look back and remember what it was like before we lost it. Let's remember what we have. It's like taking inventories so you can see what the thief has taken. It's actually reflecting. And reflecting is not bad. It's not bad at all. Proverbs tell us this, "As water reflects the face, so life reflects the heart." I think that we believe that our life, it reflects our achievements, our accomplishments, the work of our hands. But what this verse is telling us is that our life reflects what's going on inside of our heart. And we think that our most true, authentic self, it's been shown when it's on our best days; but the truth is, it's actually shown on our worst.

It's that day that things didn't go like you thought they were going to go. It's when that really close friend hurts you really, really deeply. It's when the future is uncertain and the pressure of that uncertainty starts to squeeze us. And when it squeezes us, what comes out in that moment, that's the true condition of our heart. So can I ask you? Do you live your one life with life only when it's good or can you live your one life with life even when it's bad? See, the world doesn't want us to reflect. The world wants us to regret. And so the world is constantly filling us with lies, saying, you don't have what it takes to live with life, you don't have enough. Enough of what? Enough of what the world says we have to have to live with life, enough fame, fortune, followers, enough of the finer things.

But that's simply not true. Joyful contentment in life, it is possible and it is actually a gift from God. Check out this verse. This verse says, when God gives someone wealth and possessions

and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil, this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart. This verse is telling us the ability to enjoy, accept and be happy, we have that ability and it's in God. And it's not just talking about wealth and possessions because the Bible says that every good gift comes from God.

So the gift of your spouse, your family, even your job, even when it's hard, when it's toil, toil, it's work, it's focus, it's grit, it's perseverance, even there, we can still be happy in it. But we have to have the perspective. There has to be a perspective of kingdom. And God says that we won't look back in our life with regret, but we'll actually stay occupied with a gladness of heart. Abundant gladness. Honest, this verse right here made me ask myself some questions. This verse made me ask myself, where am I wealthy? What possessions do I have? What abilities has God given me? Well, I may not have what other people have, but man, I'm wealthy in love for my family. I possess health. He's given me the ability to live my one life, the life that He has shaped and formed me to live.

What about you? What has He given you? But today, He's inviting you to view it as a gift, even if you're in a season of toil there. Because when we focus on these things and say, God keeps us occupied, good word. Occupied with what? With gladness of heart. A glad heart is a grateful heart. It's a heart that has absolute gratitude. And I think we struggle with this too, y'all. I mean, we have brief moments of gratitude, we'll drop a thank you note here and there. I know. But I'm talking about living our one life consistently, overflowing with gratitude. Why do we struggle with that? I think the reason we struggle with that is a handful of reasons and the same reasons that we struggle to live our life with life. The first one is just I don't really think we trust God. I think we want to and I think we may even think that we do.

But at the end of the day, we have to fully trust Him. The psalmist says, "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. God invites us to entrust our life to Him. That means to give every part of every area of our life fully to Him. And then we ask Him, Lord, what do I do? Where do I go with it? And when we live like that day in, day out, then we are grateful because we're receiving His unfailing love. Even when we fail Him, His love never fails us. So every day we receive that and that becomes the life source within us. We've got to trust God. Another thing we stumble with I think is things. Things. We get preoccupied thinking if I just had -- you fill in the blank. If I just had um then, boy, I could live with passion. But Jesus gives us a warning on this.

Jesus says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Abundant life is there for us, but it's not going to be found in our things. And I think it's interesting that he actually tells us to be on guard. I think he's telling us that because I think greed is deceptive. It can sneak in. It starts out as, that's nice, I'd like to have that, to oh, I really need that, to now, I can't live my life joyfully without that. Greed. We

have to really be careful of the things. Another obstacle is we take time for granted. We think that we have all of the time in the world. And the psalmist is telling us, "Teach us to number our days, that we would gain a heart of wisdom." To live with your days numbered, what that means is to live with intentionality. And intentionality is the opposite of passivity or apathy.

And so God invites us to live with our days numbered with intentionality believing that today, this day that we are all in right now, this day God has something amazing planned for us if we entrust it to Him. And as significant as those reasons are, the last one is the biggest one. The biggest obstacle to living with gratitude, to living our one life with life is we still fall for the bait of comparison. We still do. And the world is pushing things at us to compare ourselves to all the time. The proverbs says that, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy is going to rot the bones." If we want life, then our heart needs to be at peace. And our heart cannot be at peace if we're looking at this and that, wishing that we had this and that, and comparing why don't we have this and that. And did you catch what it does? It says that it rots. The envy, comparison, it will rot the bones.

It doesn't break. It's not fast, it's slow. It starts out really slow and before we realize it, it's broken. We understand that comparing to other people is toxic. I'm not so sure we get how toxic it is to compare ourselves to our self. We compare our life today to our glory days. For some, it's high school. For some, it's college. For some, it's your young adult years. And you say, man, that was the best part of my life. And so we try to live today's life and that one. Or we compare our life today to what we thought it would be. I thought that my marriage would be better. I thought my faith would be stronger. I thought this job would be more satisfying. And we are caught up comparing maybe not even with other people, but we're comparing our self to our self, which it can be just as life draining. When we live in a place of comparison, we start to chase things. We're chasing things. We're chasing our life today and we're trying to live yesterday's. We're chasing our life and what the other lives of other people that they have.

If we're chasing money and career that we start chasing the life that our boss has formed for us. And when we start chasing all of these different lives, well, we've lost our life. And the reason we've lost it is because we're not living one. We're living multiple fragmented lives. And people have a different personality in each one. Have you noticed? That at home, they're one person. And then they go to work or to school and they're a different person. And then they come to church and dare I say there may be even another person. Then you put a phone in their hand, put them on social media, we don't even know who they are anymore. I mean I'm not talking Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, I'm talking them, the seven dwarfs, Spider-man and throw Thanos in there all at the same time and we're trying to do that and call it one life, and it just doesn't work. We exist super engaged in some areas of our life and then we exist completely checked out of others.

And when we feel the tension of that reality, we are not grateful, we're grumpy. We're grumpy. And so what do we do? We try to fix it. And we say, I'm going to fix it and I'm going to

balance my life, I'm going to compartmentalize it. That is just a fancy word for control. And we say, I believe that my life is, it's finite, I just have this much of it. So with my work, I'm not going to give it everything. I'm just going to give this much to my work. And when we do that, we're robbing ourselves of the passion of that work that once fueled us. We say with our family, how many members of the family that I have? Time to even it out. Okay, when we do that, then what do we do with that one family member going through a crisis that we need to be deep and intimate and close to them? This area of life over here is completely out of control so I'm checking out of it, not giving any life to that. And we miss out on the blessing that comes when we break through it by perseverance. When we start to control and exist in all of these different places, that's when we're trying to control a plethora of lives and we're no longer living one life.

And we're not meant to live like that. God gave us one. And the reason He gave us one life to live is because he gave us one heart to live it with. Colossians says, "Whatever you do, do it from the heart for the Lord and not for people." We have one heart to live one life. And when we take our one heart and we're trying to live multiple lives, then what do we do? We start breaking it and we break a little bit of our heart and give it to our work or our school, we break a little bit of it, we give it to our family, we break a little bit of it here and there and then Jesus is like, hello. We're like, oh. And we end up living as brokenhearted people, living broken fragmented lives. So what do we do? How do we live our one life with life. We look to Jesus. Because remember Jesus was fully man and he endured a lot of the same challenges we do.

He had a lot of roles. He was son, he was brother, he was friend, he was teacher, he was leader, he was lord of the world. I mean I'm just saying if he lived today, his inbox would be exploding, his DMs would be exploding, he would have more GroupMe threads than he would even know what to do. And I believe that he would live it but he would not disengage or pull away from it he would stay engaged because what would it look like if he didn't? I mean seriously, can you imagine the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus all of a sudden, he's like, guys, this is -- it's a lot harder than I thought it's going to be. It's a lot harder than I kind of thought it was going to be. And one of the lepers that I healed, yeah, he's got Airbnb up on the Sea of Galilee so I'm going to grab a camel and run up there and adventure. And when I get filled up, I'll come back in about a year or so, we'll pick up this cross business. He didn't do that. And you're saying, that's ridiculous. I know. But isn't that how we live our life sometimes? We don't stay in the thing, we want to check out. And in doing it, we're living different lives. But Jesus didn't do that.

He stayed in his one life and lived it was life. The best example of it in my opinion is in Luke Chapter 7, beautiful story of how Jesus was in a real pickle and he stayed true to his one life. Jesus gets invited to dinner at Simon the Pharisee's house. Now, Simon was a man who knew the law. He was smart. He was probably wealthy. Very, very highly regarded in the community. To get a dinner invitation to Simon's house was a big deal. And there was going to be a lot of very religious people there. And so Jesus accepted the invitation and he goes to

Simon's house for dinner. And, you know, he's not even greeted with the common courtesy that the other guests were, kind of sad. But the dinner party starts and everything seems to be going okay. And all of a sudden, this woman comes in and this woman is known by everybody at the party. And she's not known for good reason, she's known because she's a sinful woman. Every sin they know she's committed, multiple times. And this woman comes over to Jesus and she creates a scene.

She pulls out a jar of very expensive perfume. She breaks it open and she begins to pour it over the feet of Jesus. And she lets her hair down and she starts to wipe his feet and begins to sob uncontrollably. While the religious men are looking on, probably with disgust on their face, Simon the dinner host is looking at Jesus thinking, dude, if you were really a prophet, you would know how much sin was in this woman's life, you would not let her even be touching you. Meanwhile, the woman is continuing to wail. What is Jesus going to do? Before I tell you what he did, can I tell you what I think we would do? I think that if you and I were there, we would reach down to that sinful woman and we would scoop her up and we would get her to the outer courtyard as fast as we could and we would tell her that, you know what, I really appreciate the perfume gesture. That was really nice. Don't pay any attention to those religious guys. They don't know your life has been hard. And I get why you did what you did. Let's grab coffee next week and we'll talk about it.

We would say to her what we thought would make her feel comfortable. Then we would trot back into Simon and we would say, I have no idea what that was. That was completely inappropriate. Wow, I sure hope that this doesn't keep me from getting invited to your next party. We would say whatever we think would make Simon feel comfortable. And then we would step back and go, awkward situation avoided. Now, I feel comfortable. Because let's be honest, we value comfort over kingdom. I'm just saying. I've seen this play out in modern Christianity over and over. But that's not what Jesus did. What did he do? He stayed true to who he was in his one life. And he looked at Simon and he said, hey Simon, you've got some things that you can actually learn from this sinful woman. Said it right there in front of all of his friends. And he said that to Simon with grace and truth in love. And then he looked at the woman.

And he called her life what it was, it was sin. And then he forgave her and he looked at her with grace and truth in love. He corrected one and he celebrated another and he did it without compromising and he didn't care what all of the other people thought. Jesus lived his one life with life and that is why he can be called the friend of sinners and the holy one all at the same time. See, Jesus wasn't trying to please the people. Jesus lived his entire life to please his Father. When we live our life trying to please people, we are exhausting ourselves, we are letting go of the life of Jesus because we're not living Jesus-focused, we're living people-focused. And when we do that, you know what we open the door, when we open the door to people-pleasing as our lifestyle, fear comes in and then all of a sudden we can't say that to them because we're afraid we're going to offend them and so we dial Jesus down.

We're dialing down our very source of life. And I'm here to tell you the people that are lost and broken in this world do not need a dial down Jesus, they need us plugged into him as the source of life so that we are overflowing that life over the top to them. They need us to be the same person, living the same life with the same love to different people in different places. I'm telling you, when we do that, it makes a difference in the lives of people. Let me close by sharing the words of James. James was Jesus' brother. He watched Jesus' ministry go by like that in three years. James has a really unique perspective on time and life. This is what James tells us. He says, "Listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, we'll spend a year there, carry on business and make money,' why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

James is saying we don't have time for this people-pleasing business. Our life is a mist and it will go away just like this. All the more reason for us to focus on it and not fragment it, to maximize living one life with life and modeling that for the people around us. Like I said, it's inspiring. I know someone who lived a life and was very inspiring in that way. Eighty five years she lived a life like this and she lived every single day with it. The world would say that her life was just mediocre. She ended -- and she didn't have a lot of things or high education or wealth or assets, but I can tell you that she actually lived every day of her life with life.

She loved over the top. She lived one life with one man married for 67 years. And I could tell you countless ways that this woman lived her one life with life because I know her really well. I'm talking about my mom. And my sweet mama died eight months ago. And I really wish that I had the words, I really do, I wish I had the words to explain to you what happened on the last day of her life. I was with her, it was just the two of us. We were there, holding her hand. And I don't have the words to explain it, but I can tell you this, even in her death I experienced life because of the way she lived and she loved.

Because of Jesus in her death, I experienced life. Let me tell you something, I want to live a life like that. That is my prayer for me, that is my prayer for you and that is my prayer for our church, that we would live -- he's only given us one -- that we would live our one life keeping it together, holding it together so that our workplaces and our schools would receive the life of Jesus so that our entire city would have hope carriers to come in and they're the same people in the job as they are whenever they come to church, on good days and bad days, they're still receiving and releasing the life of Jesus. That is my prayer for us. Listen, the enemy, he's going to come at you every day, just know it. He's going to come at you every day because he wants to rob the life that you have. But don't forget, Jesus has come that we would have life over the top life to give the glory to God and to live it all in Jesus' name.

Would you close your eyes with me? So what's the Holy Spirit saying to you? Where is he inviting you to maybe entrust something to him? Where is he showing you that you're actually

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pulling the ripcord of the life of Jesus because of things you're focused with or people you're focused on or your own life and the disappointments that are within it? Can you surrender that to him today? Can you exchange that for every morning unfailing love that is going to be delivered into your heart? Somebody here today needs to hear your life matters, your life counts.

You are seen and you have a purpose, a purpose to complete in Jesus' name. So Father, I thank you. I thank you for the blessing of life. I thank you for Jesus who came to give us life abundantly over the top. May we live our one life with life receiving it and releasing it and giving you the glory for it, we pray in Jesus' name, amen.