

Alright. Hey, everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. It is good to be the church today. It is good to be the people of God united by the Spirit of God, under the Lordship of Jesus, sent to bring hope to the world.

And so just as a sign of gratitude, as a sign of just that we're thankful that we're together today, let's take a moment and welcome in all of our campuses together. Alright, today, we start a brand new series, simply called A Prayer for Us. A few weeks back, Pastor John came to the teaching team, and he just asked us to express what's been on our heart, to think about what we've been praying for our church family, how we've been just churning with the Lord and asking him on behalf of all of Valley Creek. You see, praying is something that all of us are called out to do, and pray in the Spirit, on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, and request with this in mind, be alert, be alert to what is happening around you and in the spiritual realm. And always keep on praying for all the Lord's people, a prayer for us, so many prayers that the Lord has placed onto our hearts, and I believe this series is going to be really personal.

I think it's going to open up our hearts and our minds. What the Lord I felt like just even wanted me to say to you, before we get started, is that we pray for you. Like every single week, I literally sit on a staff team that prays for you to start our week, we pray for you, we pray for us. And that's part of what happens when you're part of a church family is that there's a covenant covering of prayer over your life. And so there's lots of things that we've been praying for, lots of things that the Lord has brought to our hearts. But over these three weeks, as we talk about it, we really want all of us to lean and receive the prayers that have been spoken over our church family as we kick off this week. This is really what the Lord has brought to our heart to pray, we pray that we would embrace spiritual leadership in our lives.

You're like, that's it? I don't know if I want you to pray that over me. Well, I don't know if I want to preach it. So this is a lot. This is a lot. But spiritual leadership is so essential to each one of us. It's critical. If we want to become who the Lord has called us to be, if we want to live with deep peace, if we want to have meaningful relationships, if we want to see generations of the kingdom released into our church family and into our actual physical families, spiritual leadership is critical to that. There's really five essential things that we said are critical to the Christian experience to walking with Jesus, the grace of God, the Word of God, the Spirit of God, that people of God, and the mission of God. And I would contend that the spiritual leadership of God in our life is so essential. Why? Because there is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way of death.

There are thoughts and decisions and journeys that I take in my life, they seem like they're the right way. And as I begin to walk them out, as I begin to move forward, it ends up being the way of death of thoughts that lead to brokenness and broken relationships, and hurting hearts. And so how do we break past those mistakes? How do we get further on the journey? How do we actually see a way that leads to life? I would contend that's why spiritual leadership is so critical to us. And if you read this verse, you can think to yourself, yeah, I've seen marriages like

that. I've seen people's financial decisions. I've seen parenting for sure that way. And we think about it like it's out there somewhere. But what about in here? What about the ways that seem right to us, but in the way they lead us to death, that brokenness in our lives? Look at this on Romans, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. But their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claim to be wise, they became fools." Ouch.

So what that's saying is there's a possibility that you could know about God and still make foolish decisions in your life, unwise decisions as you move forward. You know what I want to see? I want to see this verse gets get flipped on its head. I want to see this verse read like this. Oh, no, they knew God. They knew them intimately, deeply. They knew the spiritual leadership that God had placed in their life, they glorified Him. They had hearts of gratitude that gave thanks for who He was and what He'd given them in their life. Their thinking became wiser and wiser. Their hearts were opened and enlightened. Although they claim to be wise, they grew in wisdom, in their life, and in their relationships and in their decisions. They continue to grow in the wisdom of the kingdom. I believe by faith that there's a way forward to grow in wisdom, not the wisdom of this world, not the way of this world. The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure and peace-loving, considerate, and submissive.

The wisdom that comes from heaven is submissive. It's willing to humbly and intentionally lay down preferences and opinions, underneath, submissive, submission to spiritual leadership in our lives. When I say spiritual leadership, what do I mean? I'm talking about the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people that God has placed into my life. People like parents, and circle leaders and pastors and leaders of our serve teams, people that disciple us, Christian counselors that we place ourselves under, really it's just the people that choose to lead and feed and lay down their life for us. That's really the definition of spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is those who lead and feed and lay down their life for us, just like Jesus laid down his life for us. I am the good shepherd, he says, I lay down my life for the sheep.

Jesus sees us. And he leads us by still waters, and it brings peace to our hearts and he feeds us from green pastures, through his word and through his ways and his wisdom in our life. And then he chooses to lay down his life for us. And this is why spiritual leaders in our life have to be actually active in our life, because they know what's going on and they're willing to lay down their life for ours because there are so many sheep that are starving and wandering and doomed for a path of destruction. Spiritual leadership is critical, to lead, to feed, to lay down their life for us so that -- and this is really what I want to get to today. Because spiritual leadership guides, protects and blesses my life. Spiritual leadership is guiding my life, is protecting me, and is blessing me in my life. So that's where we're going to spend the majority of our time.

But before we keep moving forward in that, it is so critical to just take a step backwards and just ask the question, like, how did we get here? How did we get to this point in our life, or

sometimes when we hear the phrase spiritual leadership, there's a tension that churns inside of us and you have to understand it comes all the way back from the beginning of Genesis. In Genesis 1, in the garden with Adam and Eve, God created a system in which He would guide, literally walk with them, protect them within the boundaries of the garden, and bless them and the Lord bless them and said, "Be fruitful, multiply." They had all three of those in their life. And in Genesis 3, Satan, the very first one to rebel against spiritual leadership, comes to them and looks at Adam and Eve and says, did God really say, you're not supposed to from those trees? And in the moment that they said yes to eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, everything broke, including how we perceive spiritual leadership in our life.

That moment of rebellion has continued on through all these generations to bring us to where we are now, but we're taking it back in Jesus' name. We're reclaiming an understanding of what true spiritual leadership is in Jesus' name. So the first thing is this, spiritual leadership guides us. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Spiritual leadership is truly worth following. What this says is there's a little bit of a game of follow the leader when I'm guided by spiritual leadership. Last week, I had a chance to go snowshoeing in Colorado and snowshoeing is basically wearing giant tennis rackets on your feet, so that you can go in like four feet of snow and you don't fall all the way in, right? But as you're snowshoeing, following the leader is super critical because the person in front is working super hard to pack down the path that you snowshoe on and then you then align and you line up behind them, and you fall on that path.

Now you got a choice. You don't actually have to take the path that they're cutting in front of you, you can go your own way. It's just a lot harder. You're going to fall down a lot more. And you're going to find yourself wandering off not really sure which way to go. I'm just telling you, I want to follow the leaders that have been there. Like I want to – I'm just going to call it out in the Valley Creek family. I want to follow the wisdom of Pastor Cordel. I want to follow the joy of Nicole. I want to follow the encouragement of Richard, he's an encourager. I want to follow the relational connection of Steve. He's amazing at that. I want to follow leaders that have been there. I want to follow somebody who's guiding me into the ways and the wisdom and the word of Jesus. Remember your leaders, your leaders, the ones that God's placed into your life, because they have a word worth sharing, a life worth imitating, and a faith worth following. Hear me if that's you, if you're in any kind of spiritual leadership, if you're discipling anyone in any way, here's the question.

Do you have a word worth sharing, a life worth imitating and a faith worth following? And if the answer is I'm not totally sure, that's okay. Are you humble enough to just keep repenting and moving forward in Jesus' name? Are you humble enough to just keep trying to grow in that and to move forward because spiritual leadership in your life guides you? Here's another question. Who or what is guiding you right now? If you think about the -- what you're taking in what you're hearing, how you're making processes, who -- in your processing decision, who is -- who or what is guiding you in the season? Because that's really important. Spiritual leadership

guides us, spiritual leadership also protects us, also from Hebrews 13, "Obey your leaders, submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." I'll tell you straight up, that's a sobering verse for me. Spiritual leaders have to give an account for the people that they lead, and they're keeping watch over their sheep, over our souls.

The primary way that we do that, the primary way that spiritual leaders speak into our life is just through discipleship, discipling our life forward, leading us to become more like Jesus. A disciple is simply one that becomes like the one that they follow. They're discipling us and saying, follow me as I follow Christ. Come on, I'm going to guide you and lead you. And through that discipleship, there's a protection over our life. Another way that they do it is through declaration. See if you can catch this. Declaration is a form of protection over our life because when something's declared over us, it creates a banner of protection over every area, like when Valley Creek said, this is a year of Kingdom momentum, you're going to move forward little by little in Jesus' name, that declaration is a form of protection. Why? Because if I don't have the declaration on my life, and I don't start following it forward, I'm just going to get like swept away like in the apathy of the world, like a river of apathy, and lethargy is just wiping out the world right now.

But to say, okay, in Jesus' name, you're moving forward, little by little, kingdom momentum, I hear that, I start to believe it, I start to walk in it, it's a protection over my life. So then there's a protection in the form of discipleship and declaration, because spiritual leadership is like an umbrella. I want you to think about this for a second, like an umbrella like in a rainstorm. When that's over my life, when it's over top of me, I am not getting rained on, it's protecting me from the elements. Now, if you saw somebody holding an umbrella, and it started to look like this, and it's like hanging way out to the side, you'd be like, that's a horrible use of an umbrella. They're looking at you like, I'm getting rained on. I know. And I see that all the time. And it breaks my heart all the time. It's the dad that makes the decision to like uproot his entire family for some promotion, and he never checked with anybody or got any counsel for it at all.

And then later you hear about it, and like his marriage is suffering, his kids just never rooted back to church, and they don't get it. And it's because it's like he's way over here. And then I'll see people and I hear of people that decide to come under an umbrella of protection, and everything changes because they start to understand the importance of it. I actually heard a story of a leader here at Valley Creek. They're starting to get like the aha moment of the protection of spiritual leadership in their life and they had to make a decision about a job change recently, and this is what they said, like verbatim, their exact quote, "I stopped listening to all the voices telling me which job I should take. I slowed down. I spent time with Jesus, I invited godly relationships in and spiritual leaders into the decision and the right step became clear." Hallelujah, pass the pancakes. Like that's awesome. That's it. That's an umbrella of protection over their life. They checked it with people. They worked through it.

There is a protection to the decision that they made, the right step became clear. This is how Paul and authority and Timothy's life, speaks to him. He says, "Timothy, my son, I'm giving you this command, in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, be protected in battle, holding on to the faith in a good conscience, which some have rejected, and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith." Paul looks at Timothy and says, I've spoken a word worth sharing into your life, prophecies over your life. This is the declaration that protects you. By recalling them, you may fight the battle well when you're in battle, or some of them have rejected it, and so have suffered shipwreck. That is heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking to read. And so may we -- may we as it is a prayer for us, may we recall what's been spoken over us. May we use that to fight the battle well.

May we not suffer any kind of shipwreck in regards to our faith. Spiritual leadership guides us. It protects us. And now finally, it blesses us. It blesses us. Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people dwell together in unity. It is like the oil that runs over the head of Aaron over his collar. It's like the dew of Mount Hermon. For there, the Lord bestows His blessings forever more." What does that mean? For there, the Lord bestows His blessings forevermore. It's like the oil that comes over the head of Aaron, the first high priest over the people, spiritual leadership in their life. It's like the dew of Mount Hermon, the high places where God resides, where the King of King is in throne, when we submit and we unify with spiritual leadership in our life. For there the Lord bestows His blessings forever more. There's a blessing that comes over my life when I unify with the spiritual leaders that God has placed into my life.

And I've been asking myself this question, I wonder why we don't long more often for a blessing. Here's what I think we get it wrong. We think of the word blessing in terms of getting the thing I think I want, instead of thinking of blessing as I'm checking with the spiritual leadership in my life, so they can go with me on the journey, unify with them, and then move forward in Jesus' name. In the Old Testament, there's a story about Jacob and Esau. And in the story of Jacob and Esau, Jacob actually chooses to deceive his father to gain his blessing. Now, I just want to be really clear. Deception, bad; blessing, good. Okay? So deception, bad; blessing, good. So Jacob deceives his dad, he gets the blessing, but what you see in that -- in the passage, he longed for the blessing, he would do anything to get the blessing of his father. And I think sometimes for us, we miss that we don't long for a blessing because on some level, we kind of don't want somebody to tell us something that we've already made up our minds to do.

And so do you long for a blessing in every area of your life? Let me tell you a story about a time that I got -- I longed for, and I got the blessing and then the time that I didn't. This is called the parable of Naomi and Wolfie. Naomi is my youngest daughter. And when we started to get into the adoption process, we knew we needed a blessing, we knew that we could not make the decision on our own. So we invited people into it, we invited people to

speak into what we were doing. We even knew that adoption is like the right thing, but the right thing, in the wrong timing is the wrong thing. The right thing that's not the God thing, is the wrong thing. And so we needed people to speak into what we were doing. So Naomi is adopted from Ethiopia in Africa, it's a huge process. We had to work all the way through it.

And so we ended up inviting so many people in. Man, there's a huge blessing that we felt and a security that we felt by inviting spiritual leadership into our lives. And so we went and got her at 10 months old, now she's 11 years old, she's rockin, she's doing great, she has an amazing life. And then there's the story of Wolfie. Wolfie is my Irish wolfhound mutt. He's a great dog. Here's the problem. When we brought him into the family, he was one of three dogs that we had at the time. Now, three dogs is a lot. That's almost like, you know, we only have four, you know, humans in our family. So we're starting to get like a lot of energies in the house. And while you think to yourself, that getting a dog is not really a big deal, I hear you, I agree. But it's all of the energy and it's all of the finances, and it's all the decision making and it's our ability to just leave the house when we want to because we got to go, you know, go on vacation. There's so much more that goes into it that impacts every other area of life. So in the case of having three dogs and by the way, there's only one dog now, the other two died and the one was kind of a jerk so it's okay.

But the one -- but Wolfie is a great dog and he's -- and it's great to have him. Here's what I wish we would have done. Here's what I wish we would have done. I wish I would have just checked that with the spiritual leadership in my life and just let them weigh into it even if their weighing is like, why are you asking me about it like a dog? Because you know why? Because it's asking the question how much of your life do you want to submit into the kingdom of God. How much of your life do you like want to place under like the guidance and the protection and the blessing of God? I so wish that we would have done that even with our dog. And you're like, I know it's a dog, I get it. But it's the little things. And it's this belief that as I humbly and intentionally place every area of my life, more of the kingdom will come into my life. And that is part of what God is calling us to, a prayer for all of us. Alright. I need you to take a breath for a second. Take a breath for a second because I want to put this up, and I want to explain why I've been using the phrase spiritual leadership.

What you have to catch is that spiritual leadership is spiritual authority. And when I say the word authority out loud, I know, I know, authority. There's so much inside of us that like wages war against authority in our life. Like think about what you see in the world right now. You see governments being toppled, you see currency being devalued and changed just because we don't want to have that like over our life. You see teachers in education, like it's just all of it is just like coming down, right? But here's the thing, authority is actually good, and it is actually from God. So changing the way we think, and believing that God's goodness is found, even within an authority in our life is part of the calling for each one of us. Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

So that police officer, your teacher, the president, Congress, construction zones, taxes, all of it established by God. And so how much more -- how much more should we value the spiritual authorities that God has placed into our life? How much more should we let our hearts align with those authorities and believe that God gives us a person we can see, to learn to trust in a God we can't see. God gives us an authority and the leadership in our life, to learn to trust more fully in His authority in our life. And one of the very best passages in all Scripture regarding spiritual authority comes out of Acts chapter 15 and 16. It's going to take me a second, let me just try to explain it. So in Acts chapter 15, they have this council in Jerusalem and this council is being requested by the churches, because they're having a hard time making a decision on whether or not new believers have to be circumcised in order to start to become part of the Christian family and follow Jesus.

Now, if you're a man, you are very interested in the outcome of this decision. You want to know what the council is going to decide. So all the churches give it to the council and there's like, okay, you guys help decide for us. Well, the council ultimately comes back and they're like, okay, we can't make it difficult for people to come to the Lord. It's okay. They don't have to -- they don't have to have that. They don't need to be circumcised. They proceed moving forward and following Jesus. Awesome. Thanks for that clarity. Everybody's tracking with it, everybody's bound together under the decision. The next thing that happens is that Paul meets Timothy, we just learned about him, Paul. Paul, a spiritual mentor, spiritual leader, and Timothy's life, Timothy, a future pastor of Ephesus. Paul meets Timothy and he says to him, Timothy, in order for you to minister to the people, I think God is calling us to minister to, I need you to get circumcised.

Now, if I'm Timothy, I'm like, come again? Just to make sure I heard you right. Because he just heard what the council said. He literally just heard like their decision, right? But in order to become all things to all people, so that by all means you might save some, he makes the decision to follow Him. And so he steps forward in spiritual leadership, when it didn't totally make sense to Timothy, check this out. The next thing that they do, Timothy and Paul, as they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem, for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and grew daily in numbers. So what I'm trying to tell you is that obedience is a currency of the kingdom. The more that I have of it, the more the kingdom I have in my life; the more that I have of it, the more that I'll be strengthened, real be strengthened, the church is strengthened, and we will grow. Strengthened, strengthened in our identity, strengthened in what God says about us. Growing, not just numerically, in depth, in personhood. That's what we're talking about when we talk about obeying.

So what we see is that there's a growth and a strength and God wants to do even within our own church family that comes from stepping forward in faith that comes from just saying, I'm going to go forward with what Jesus has spoken in my life with who he's given me in my life.

What we also learn from that story is that spiritual leadership is primarily found within the church that you're planted. Okay, we just named all kinds of places you can find spiritual leadership, right? The Word of God, the Spirit of God, the people of God. Everything from parents all the way through to pastors, all the way through to Christian counselors. It's primarily found in the church that you're planted in. Why? Because it's found in the place that's leading you and feeding you and laying down their life for you. So that person on Instagram, they might have great wisdom, they're not laying down their life for you. They're not covering your life in prayer.

That friend you have from high school, I'm glad that they follow the Lord, that's awesome that they're following. They're not in it day to day like this is, like we are together, growing, being strengthened in Jesus. It's primarily found within your church family, you are members of his household, built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, with Christ himself, Christ Jesus himself, as the chief cornerstone. There's an order to it. Jesus is the foundation, and the leaders and the rest of the church, the whole thing being built up. So the whole thing rises to become this holy temple unto the Lord. Check this one out of Ephesians also, so Christ Himself gave, so that his spiritual leaders are a gift that Jesus gives, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, the teachers, to equip his people for works of service so the body of Christ may be built up. So that is Jesus gave leaders in our life, to equip, to lead, so the body may be built up to feed. Think growing bodies. He gave us leaders to lead and to feed us and to lay down our life for us.

So the primary place for spiritual leadership is actually found within this church family. Are you currently being led by someone in this church family? And if you hear me talking about this the whole time, and you could tell it's close to the surface for me, you can tell that I'm in this, our prayer for us. I'm in this too. It's real in my own heart and my own life, in the fights that are within my own self sometimes when it comes to leaders speaking into my life. And maybe you've heard me and you've heard me talking so far, and one of the things you're thinking is, yeah, but Jason, you just don't know what I had to deal with, with spiritual leadership in the past, like, you have no idea. You're right, I don't. I don't know it. I have a guess of what probably played out.

And so if you've been hurt, if you've been, if you've been misled by spiritual leadership in your life, I want to, first of all just start by saying, we are so sorry. We're so sorry. That's not the heart of Jesus. It's not the love of the Father. It's not supposed to be like that. It doesn't reflect all the stuff we've been talking about. But I need just -- I need you to hear this. You can't just let a mistake of a man keep you from the blessings of God. Because the way that -- the way that we sense it, the way that we feel it, we are those who will have to give an account. And that's like, that's real. And that's serious. And it doesn't always go right, man. It's people. It's not -- we don't do it right. We don't always do it right. But I hope, I hope that we're quick to be humble and willing, and changing our thinking, let the Lord move and speak to us, that



He moves inside of our church family, in such a way that you can learn to trust a person, person or persons that you can see, to learn to trust in a God you can't see.

So practically, are you under a cover of spiritual leadership in your life? Like when we preach things on the weekend, do you actually apply them? Do you actually -- like don't just be hearers of the word, be doers. When you have to make a decision, do you make up your mind ahead of time and then inform people? Or do you fully process it all the way from the beginning front to back, desiring the blessing more than the outcome of the decision that you want to make? Do you seek counsel and blessing as desperately as you seek all those other things in life? And if you've been listening to me so far, and you're like, man, there's just -- I just observed a wall here. Like, I don't want to be hearing this right now. If you've been hearing that, and you just have like, this resistance that's inside of it, can I just ask you, will you just take that to the Lord? Will you just be like, Jesus, why? Why do I feel resistant? Why do I feel fearful? Why do I just feel like a distance between what we're talking about?

Just take it to the Lord because I genuinely think He wants to speak to each one of us regarding spiritual leadership, and like raising the value of it in our life, as a guidance, as a protection, as a blessing over each one of us. I think there's an entire wisdom that the Lord wants to bring to bear to each one of us in a different way, once again, for the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, it's peace-loving, it's considerate, it's submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. The greatest wisdom of my life is submissive, I'm willing to submit it to people in my life, to leaders that are over my life. It's impartial. I haven't already made up my mind. I'm willing to just talk through it. I'm humble enough to know that I may not have it perfectly right. And it's sincere, sincere. Man, we don't always get it right. But we try. And we try to live wholehearted to everything the Lord has asked us to do.

That's the goodness of God over our life. Leaders who lead, who feed, who lay down their life for us. Leaders that guide, protect, and bless each one of us. Our prayer, our prayer for us is that we would embrace spiritual leadership in our lives. So would you even just close your eyes with me right now? Thank you for going on that journey. Thank you for your openheartedness and your willingness to even hear it. So God, I pray for our church that we would be renewed by the transforming of our mind, that you would change everything we think about what it is to be a person under authority or how authority works or what's good and bad and everything else.

We would just see it the way you see it. Jesus, thank you that you are the good shepherd, you feed, you lead, you laid down your life for each one of us. We see that, we're thankful for it. Our hearts are open to you and to what you've done as the good shepherd in our life. May we truly grab hold in this season and every season of the value of spiritual leadership over each one of us. I want it for me, Jesus. I want it in my own life. So now, I speak over each one of us. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his countenance upon and give you peace, in Jesus' name, amen.

"Led & Loved" | A Prayer For Us  
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