

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek online. Wherever you are and whatever's going on in your life, I am so glad you are here with us today. Come on, let's just go ahead and give a big welcome to each other. Come on. I know it feels silly, I know it feels goofy, but we are welcoming each other. And whether you're by yourself, you're hanging out with your family, with a watch party, it reminds us that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves, that we are not on this journey alone, that God has planted you in a Jesus-focused, Spirit-filled, life-giving family. And if you'll stay rooted in that, He promises you will flourish in life regardless of what's going on in the world around you. And I'm so glad you're here with us today because we're in this series called The Essentials: What Do I Really Need?

And this has been a really good and really interesting series because in this season, we're all kind of asking ourselves this question, like what do I really need? And so many things have been removed from our lives, things that were comfortable and convenient, things that we could control have been kind of taken away from us. We've all been left kind of scrambling, trying to decide what's non-essential and what's essential. And all these self-appointed experts have arisen around us declaring what's essential and what's non-essential. Well, can I just tell you, in this season, it's time for you to become an expert in your own life, where you get to define and declare this is essential for me.

You see, it's actually a gift of God that so much has changed, that so much of the non-essentials of your life have been removed to make space for what's really essential. And as we stop complaining about the non-essentials that are gone, it helps us have gratitude for the essentials that have always been there.

And what we're doing in this series is we're just taking a look, and we said that from Genesis to Revelation, from Adam and Eve all the way to the second coming of Jesus, there are really five essentials that we need in life. And they're really simple, it's just the grace of God, the Spirit of God, the word of God, the people of God, and the mission of God. These are the five essential things you and I need in our lives, and we don't have to go get them, they've been given to us through the grace of Jesus. And the question is, are you building your life around this?

And I've told you this series is a little bit different. It has a different tone. It's a little bit more teaching because honestly, these things just kind of stand for themselves. We just kind of have to put them out there and then we get the choice of whether or not we're going to choose to build our life around them. And we've been going through one at a time. And this week, we're at the people of God. Okay.

The people of God. If we're honest, out of this list, this is the one I think we all would say, we're like, ehh, I don't know that we're bought into the belief that the people of God are really essential to our lives. We think things like, oh man, my life is busy and my life is full, and I've already got lots of relationships in my life, so I'm -- I've a couple of hundred Facebook friends.

Like I'm good, this isn't really essential in my life. But notice, it doesn't say just people, it says the people of God. And whether you want to admit it or not, this is essential in your life. Your life may be full of non-essential relationships, and maybe it's time to build some essential relationships in Jesus' name.

The people of God, the citizens of heaven, the children of God, your brothers and sisters, saints, the royal priesthood, a holy nation, the family of God, the church of Jesus, disciples, destiny-releasers. And whether you want to admit it or not, they are essential in your life. In fact, all you have to do is go back to the story of creation. Like when God made Adam and put Adam in the garden, before he sinned, do you know what, Adam had four of the five essentials. He had the grace of God, he had the Spirit of God, he had the word of God, he had the mission of God. You would think that Adam had everything that he needed, he knew who he was, he walked with God, he had a purpose and a mission for his life. And yet, there were no people of God for him to walk with. And so in Genesis 2:18, while creation is still perfect, look what God says, the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

In other words, God looks at Adam and we would think Adam has everything. And God says, nope, there's still one essential thing that's missing, the people of God. And if it was not good for Adam to be alone in the perfection of creation, it is not good for you to live your life without the people of God. They are essential to you. You could jump all the way to Jesus then if you don't like that. And we could just look at the story of Jesus and how he built his disciples. Like isn't it interesting that Jesus didn't go and just get like a disciple, he made disciples and kind of brought them together in community, put them in circles. Like can you just imagine that first day when Jesus came and called Peter to come and follow him. Like hey Peter, come and follow me. Peter is there with his fishing boat, and he's got his business, and he's looking at Jesus, and he's making this decision. Like man, I think Jesus is a better way forward in life than the world and my own business.

So he leaves everything he's got and he starts following Jesus. And for those first few hours, it was just like Peter and Jesus, it's amazing. And then I wonder how shocked Peter was a few hours later when Jesus introduces him to the other disciples. He says, hey Peter, this is Matthew, and this is Thomas, and this is Bartholomew, and John, and James, they're on the journey with us. And I got to believe in my mind that Peter kind of said to Jesus, like hey, Jesus, can I just -- can I just talk to you first? Yeah, just come here. Like, hey, I thought this whole thing was going to be you and me. I'm not so interested in them. Like I left my fishing business to come and be with you. I thought it was just going to be me and the J man, just like and me, Jesus. And Jesus would have looked right back and say, hey Peter, if you're going to follow me, you're going to have to walk with them. Because this isn't just about you and me, this is about you, me and them. And we're doing this thing together.

In fact, this is why in Mark chapter 3, I love it. It says, "Jesus went on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted and they came to him, that they might be with him." Isn't it interesting, talking about the 12 disciples, that it wasn't just one guy following Jesus, it was them in godly relationships, the people of God that they might be with him, because no one follows Jesus alone. Hear me, I know it's a strong statement, and I want to say it again. No one follows Jesus alone. And you say, well, how can you say that? Because if you're following Jesus, where is Jesus going? To other people. So eventually, he is going to lead you into relationships with other people of God. They are essential in our life. In fact, the people of God are one of the primary ways that God forms and shapes into His image and into His likeness. Like you need it to actually be a disciple.

Like take these verses out with me. Look at this next one. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." You might have heard this verse before. Maybe you got it like stitched on a Bible cover or like on a poster somewhere in your house, a knickknack. We like this verse in theory, like iron sharpens iron. Think about when iron and iron hit each other, it's loud. It's forceful, there's friction, there's heat. Things get knocked off. But eventually, it becomes sharp. Okay. That is what the people of God are supposed to do to each other. And so the question I want to ask you is, who's sharpening you? Like who's asking you questions about your heart? Who's prophesying into your life? Who's telling you about what God is saying to them? Who's building you, and strengthening you, and encouraging you? Who is holding your heart in their hands and help and sharpen you to become who you are created to be?

Maybe the reason we're dull and numb is because we don't have people of God in our life. Or how about this next one. It says, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." In other words, whoever you hang out with, whoever you do life with, you're going to become like them." So if you hang out with the people of God, you're going to grow wise. You hang out with the people of the world, you're going to start to suffer harm. And I think for a lot of us, if we're honest, we spend so much of our life with the people of the world. We're like, I'm good, my life is full of relationships. Right. But it doesn't mean those are good relationships. And then we wonder all of a sudden, why we start thinking like, talking like, acting like, living like, and believing like the world. Because whoever you hang out with, you're going to become like. And so if we actually want to become a person of God, we got to hang out with the people of God.

So maybe the reason it feels like we never actually changed in our lives, changed in our journey with Jesus is because we're not walking with the people of God. One more for you. Check this out. "Two are better than one." We need the people of God in our lives. "Because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up." In other words, we need the people of God in our lives because when we fall, not if, when we fall, we need someone to pick us back up. So can I ask you the question, who's picking you up in this season? Because let's be honest, I would bet you've fallen down more in these past few months than maybe in the past few years. And

maybe the reason we can't get back up is because we don't have any people of God in our lives to pick us back up emotionally and spiritually, and help us move forward in life. Come on. Are you with me?

The people of God are essential in your life. Like think of the primary analogies God uses to talk about his church. He says that the church is a family, the church is a field, and the church is a body. Church is a family, a field, and a body. Well, in a family, you build long-term relationships, you're together for a lifetime. A field, the plants grow their roots down, and the roots wrap around each other, and they're anchored into the ground. A body, all the parts need to be together to make it work. Okay. Well, can you imagine for a moment if every months you just decided you wanted a new family. Can you imagine, every few months, you just decided, like I want a new marriage, I want new parents, I want new kids, I want to go and live in somebody else's house. Or can you imagine if every few months, you are a plant and you uprooted yourself and thought, I wonder if the grass is greener over there. And your roots are running over here and you're getting all dry and weary.

Can you imagine if every few months, your arm decided it didn't like your body? It wants to go and be a part of somebody else's body. That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? And yet if we're honest, that's how we relationally engage with Jesus' church and each other. We don't see it as a family, a field, or a body. We separate when things are uncomfortable, when they're inconvenient, when they require something from us, when we get offended because welcome, the life with the people of God, you will get offended, but it's to expose something in you so that you can be healed. And if we do that and jump around all the time, we become narcissistic, selfish and we never grow. This has been a season, even though we haven't been able to gather at our campuses in rows, that God has been inviting you to say, are you really a part of a family? Are you really planted in one field? Are you really part of my body? And are you willing to stay where I've positioned you?

See, can I tell you something? I've been here for 15 years. For 15 years, and I've been walking with the same people for 15 years. For 15 years, we've done life together. Fifteen years, we've sharpened each other, we've picked each other up when we've fallen down. We've become like each other. I am who I am today because for the past 15 years, I've been walking with the same people of God. And you could just take just about any and everything away from me, but don't take that away from me because that's life. So the question is, do you have people of God like that in your life? Because you need them. And I know right now some of you are sitting there and like, no matter what I say to try to tell you that you need the people of God for you, I won't be able to convince you. Like I've done this long enough now and preached enough messages to know that when you start talking about the people of God and our need for each other, a lot of us check us because we're convinced in our own minds we can do this life by ourselves.

Okay. So that's fair. So let me move on from that, and move to this. What if the people of God are essential in your life and it's got nothing to do with you? What if God says, the people of God are essential in your life, not because of what He wants to do in you, but because of what He wants to do in them? Maybe, just maybe, the people of God are essential in your life because God wants to prophecy through you into their life. Because wants you to sharpen them, because God wants you to pick them up, because God wants you to build or strengthen them. Maybe it's not about what God wants to do in you. Maybe it's what He wants to do in them. In fact, look at this verse in Philippians with me about Jesus. Look at what this says. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. But in humility, consider others better than yourselves.

"Each of you should look not only to your interest, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." You know what that says? That says the people of God are essential in your life for their good. Like think about it. Jesus came and built a relationship with you, not because he needed it, because you needed it. And it says, you know what, you need to have the same attitude as Jesus and consider others better than yourselves and look to their interests. Like maybe it's not about you. Maybe it's about them. In fact, look at this next thing. Look at the one anothers of the Bible. One another all over the Bible. "Forgive one another." "Love one another." "Serve one another." "Build up one another." "Strengthen one another." "Encourage one another." "Accept one another." Do you know that those verses are all over the Bible?

And they are not primarily our mission to the world, they are primarily how we're supposed to deal with other as the people of God. And you say, well, where do I get that? Literally, the entire New Testament says one another. So maybe it's not about you, maybe it's about them. In fact, look what Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." We're disciples, right? Like if you're here and you're listening, and you believe in Jesus, you're a disciple, you're a follower, you're moving forward, you're supposed to become like him. And so look what he says, he says if we follow him, we must deny ourselves. So here's my question for you, when was the last time you denied yourself to follow Jesus?

When was the last time you did something that was uncomfortable, inconvenient, costly to you to do what was important to him? It says we need to lose our lives for the sake of the gospel. So maybe, just maybe, God's asking us to build our lives around the people of God for their good. And part of that process is us denying ourselves for him and the sake of the gospel, and that's where we actually will find life. Like let me be real honest with you, pretty much most of what I've heard from people over these past few months is all about them. I'm busy, I'm overwhelmed, I'm afraid, I'm stressed out, I'm anxious, I'm worried. And all of those things are real. But at some point, it can't be about you anymore and it has to be they're stressed out, they're anxious, they're overwhelmed, they're busy.

I need to deny myself to follow Jesus into their life because I want to bring his hope into their world, not people who are lost, not the world. This is the family, the people of God. They're essential in your life because God wants to do something through you and to them. It's essential. I mean just think of a team with me for a second. Can you imagine a team that never practiced together and then shows up for the game? It would be like a disaster, man. They didn't know each other, they didn't have relationship, they didn't practice, they didn't hang out, they all show up for the game. They would get beat so bad up and down that field by the other team. Okay. Well, can I tell you? That in so many ways is how the people of God live. We think the game is Sunday. Hear me, the game is not Sunday, the Sunday service is the celebration. The game is Monday through Saturday. And we need each other to be together in order to win the game.

So many of us, what we think we need right now is to get back to campus and sit in a row. We think we need to get back in and we need to be there. It needs to be convenient, it needs to be comfortable, it needs to have low cost. It needs to be no strings attached so we can consume some content. Okay, hear me. What you actually need is to be in a circle that costs you, that's inconvenient, that requires you to sacrifice, serve and have a conversation with someone else. You don't need to just consume content, you need to engage in a conversation that will change you in Jesus' name. The people of God are essential for your life. And I know we start thinking things like, I don't care what -- and we're like in quarantine, we're not even having like services.

But how do I find people of God? Well, man, let us make it really simple for you. Just get in a circle. Just get in a circle. Look, this is a circle. A circle is an experience where we discuss the weekend message, engage the Scripture and pray together. That's that simple. A few weeks ago, we started on campus circles and the -- what's happening in them is so incredible and it's so amazing that we decided to just simplify it for everybody and not have circles and groups. We just, we're going to have circles. That's it. We just have circles. Some circles meet on campus. Some circles meet in the city. Some circles meet online. It really doesn't matter. They're all doing the same thing, discussing the weekend message, engaging the Scriptures, and praying together. And this is where life begins to change. And so if you're in a group, it's a circle, you're good. If you're on an on campus circle, you're good. You're online and you live in another state or another part of the world and you want it, let us get you in an online circle.

All you got to do, you just go on our website, register, let us help you. You want to lead a circle, let us help you start leading a circle. This is just like following Jesus. Like this is what it means and looks like to follow Jesus. Because nobody follows Jesus alone. And that is what I would say is probably the primary problem for most of us right now. See, this week as I was praying for you, the Lord gave me this really vivid picture. And I saw a bunch of individual sheep in different places like backed up, hiding under a bush. Individual sheep are here just like hiding under a bush, its ears back and its eyes wide open, kind of backed in the space,

trying to be in the shadow. And as the sheep that's just afraid, stressed out, it's anxious, it's trying to take cover, it's trying to hunker in from the world.

And all the while the good shepherd is standing right outside that bush trying to call your name and call you out. Remember, the Bible tells us that we're sheep and he's our good shepherd. And I would say, a lot of us, we've backed ourselves into this cover. We're alone. We're isolated. We're hiding right now. And for a variety of reasons. It might be we're scared. It might be our anxiety. It might be an insecurity. It might be apathy that you're just too tired to do anything else. It might be an offense that you got frustrated or offended. And so, okay, we're all just kind of in these individual bushes, like spread all out. Well, remember, a sheep's only defense mechanism is the shepherd in the flock. Sheep don't have camouflage. Sheep don't have horns and fangs and venom and teeth. Sheep are not fast. Sheep are not smart my friends.

Their only defense mechanism is to stay connected to the flock with the good shepherd leading them. And I think Satan has come and he tried to scatter the flock, and we've all gone and hide in our little bushes and we're kind of like, ahh, ahh, and the good shepherd is saying, hey, hey, hey, you've been alone too long. You've been isolated too long. You've been by yourself too long. I know those things are stressful. I know you've been afraid. I know the wolf has come. But come on, you got to get back in the flock. You got to get -- come on, it's time to come out. It's time to get in the flock. It's time to get in a circle. You say, I'm still too afraid of COVID, I can't be around. It's time to get in an online circle. It is time to get out of the bush and get back with the flock. In fact, think about, this is what Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me." He's a good shepherd. And we're his sheep.

And if you're actually following him, you can't stay in the bush because he's always leading you to other people of God. It doesn't matter if you're on the other side of the world right now watching online and you think you're alone, you are not alone if you are following him and listening to his voice. He is leading you to other people of God because they're essential to your life. Satan wants to steal, kill and destroy. He wants to divide and scatter. But the good shepherd wants to unify and draw us back to one another. And I get it. Some of you are listening, and you're like, bro, I've been there, done that game, it didn't work out for me. Okay. It's time to let go of the past and try again. Some of you, you've never done it before. It's time to go online, register and let us help you.

Some of you, you have the best godly relationships you've ever had in your life. It's time to thank God for them and double down on them. You see, what you have to remember, track with me, what you have to remember is that identity determines behavior. Who you are will always determine what you do. So we spend a lot of time in this church talking about living as beloved sons or daughters. If you really believe you're a beloved son or daughter, that's your identity, then your behavior will too be to live in Spiritual family. If you believe you're a spiritual orphan, you will live your life by yourself. So the question is, what does your behavior

tell you about what you actually believe about who you are? It's really hard to run around and say you're a beloved son or daughter if you never have any relationships with your brothers and sisters.

I think so many of us, we like this identity statement, but we still live like a sheep hiding in a bush, like an orphan fending for themselves when the good shepherd is saying, come on, it's time to come back to the family. And not just a weekend gathering like a circle, with other people who know you, who sharpen you, who pick you up, who you get to encourage and help them. This is how this whole thing works. And I get it, you might be sitting here and you might be saying, yep, not interested in it. For me, I can do my own life myself. Not interested. For others, there are other people that can take care of them. I'm still too busy. So I get it, you don't want to do it for you. You don't want to do it for them. Well, how about one more for you? What if you just did it for the Father?

Because if you talk to any healthy parent, what they want more than anything else is for their children to be together. And what the Father wants more than anything else is for His sons and daughters to see each other as essential and be willing to be inconvenienced, to pay some cost, to sacrifice, to serve, to get together with them. This is why in John 17, Jesus talking to the Father says, "I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one." In other words, the Father is glorified and honored when we choose to make each other an essential part of our lives. So if you don't want to do it for you, and you don't want to do it for us, do it for Him. Because if you want to live a life that glorifies God, you have to treat His people as an essential part of how you build your life.

Come on. All these non-essential -- all these non-essential relationships that have been removed from your life, don't go hunt them back down, don't go chase them down, don't double down on Facebook. No, no, no. See, God has allowed that to be pruned out of your life so that you can start building some essential relationships with the people of God. At some point in time, you are going to have to activate your faith and take a step in the direction that the good shepherd is leading you and saying, okay, I'm afraid, I don't know how to do this, this is scary, never been here before, had a bad experience in the past, and the good shepherd says, come on, come on. Come on, you'll be safe over here. I'm going to protect you over here. And I'm leading you to green pastures over here. Come on. Come on.

Here's my last thought for you. The people of God know the song in your heart and sing it back to you when you have forgotten it. The people of God know the song in your heart and sing it back to you when you've forgotten it. My guess would be, a lot of us have forgotten the song of our heart, the song of life, and joy, and hope, and purpose, and peace, and redemption, and righteousness, and freedom, and destiny. We've forgotten that song. And so it's time to get around some other people of God and let them sing it back to us so that we would arise to the life that God has for us in Jesus' name. No one follows him alone. We need each other for our good, for their good, and for His glory.



So close your eyes with me. And let me just ask you today, come on, what's the Holy Spirit saying to you? Like right now, in this moment, what is the Spirit of God saying to you about the people of God? What's He whispering in your heart or in your life? Maybe you've become aware that you've isolated and separated yourself from the flock and He's drawing you back out. Maybe you're realizing right now in this moment how much more essential the people of God really are than maybe you've given credit to. Maybe for some us we're realizing, man, we think we're a beloved son or daughter, but man, we're living like spiritual orphans.

What's He saying to you? Here's what I know. The five essential things in life have given to us by God. He has given you people of God in this amazing church to build relationships with, to follow Him with, to change the world with. But at some point in time, here's the line, you're going to have deny yourself and give something up to move forward to take the ground that God has for you. So good shepherd, Lord Jesus, would you draw us out of our hiding places? Would you draw us out of the places where we've gone to protect ourselves to isolate, to numb?

Would you reignite fires in the apathetic parts of our hearts? Would you remove the barriers and the blinders and the ways we think we have to do this on our own? And may we trust your voice, the good and gentle voice that leads us into green pastures? And would we follow you out into the flock? I pray right now for the flock of Valley Creek Church that we would unite together and come together and follow you into the future protected, knowing that it's the individual ones as we pull off, those are the ones vulnerable. So we refuse to be vulnerable. We pull in together. And Lord, I pray that our church would be as vibrant and as full of circles as we used to be on our weekend services. That we would have more passion to get in a circle than we used to have to come before March, to come into these buildings and worship and hear the word of God. Lord, we love and we look forward to that again soon. But give us that kind of passion for circles because you say that's what's important in our lives.

Spirit of God, draw us to the people of God. In your name, we pray, amen.