

Alright. Well, hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. I am so glad you are here with us today. Wherever you are in the world, we are one church that is currently meeting online, bringing the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. And this is a great week. We've got all kinds of good things going on this week. See, this is the last week of our shoe drive. And if you haven't had the opportunity to participate in that, let me encourage you, bring some new shoes to whatever campus you're a part of not because students need shoes on their feet, but because you need to be a part of bringing hope into someone else's life.

It's not just about serving them, it's about keeping hope alive in your own heart by serving somebody else. And when the school district asks the church for help, we must respond. And so let's go ahead and do that together this week. We also are kicking off Circles. And if you're ready for that, we can't wait to see you at a Circle at whatever campus you're a part of. And if you're not ready, no problem, get in an online group, start a circle in your own living room. It's okay. We are just going to keep slowly moving forward together.

And then we're starting a new series today called The Essentials. What do I really need? That's a great question, isn't it? You see, if we're honest over this last season, we've heard this word a lot. There's been lots of conversations around what's essential, what's non-essential. It's like all of a sudden, all the things that were convenient and comfortable, that we could control in our life, they had all been removed from us. And we're all asking this question like what do I really need?

What is really essential in my life? And all these people have kind of popped up all over the world self-defined experts of what is essential and what is non-essential. And the longer this whole season has gone on, you're starting to hear people say things like this, like man, I just need football season to get started, or I just need my kids to go back to school, I need the economy to come back, I need to get my hair done and my nails did, i need to get to a movie, I need to go out to eat. And while all those things are great, let's be honest, we don't really need them.

I think a lot of us we just want to go back to what life was, but what life was wasn't necessarily essential. You see, if you think about the pre-corona season, if you're honest and if I'm honest, a whole lot of us, we were living on the hamster wheel of this world.

Running fast with all these things the world told us was essential. And the faster we ran the more exhausted we became and the less progress we made. And we just kept running, striving, Struggling, achieving, performing, earning, grinding, doing all these things to become someone, all these things the world told us was essential, we're going faster and faster and faster, getting exhausted and overwhelmed and tired. And all of a sudden, just like that, the wheel stopped. And it didn't stop because you stopped it. If we're honest we don't have the courage to stop it or even really to get off of it on our own. No, no, no. This whole pandemic stopped it.

And all of a sudden, all the things that were convenient and all of a sudden the things that were comfortable, the things you could control, all these things you thought were essential to your life were removed. And you are left asking yourself the question, what is really essential and what is non-essential?

What do I really need in my life? And whether you realize this or not, that is an incredibly great gift that was given to you. It was a gift that the wheel of this world stopped because it allowed you to stop and evaluate your life, like do I want to keep running on that wheel or maybe there is a better or a different pathway to take. In fact I would submit to you that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity where everything stopped so you could evaluate your life and figure out, are you going in the right direction? Like could it actually be that God stopped the non-essentials so we could make room for what was really essential?

In fact I love this verse. Look at this, Luke 9, it says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very soul?" could it be that God stopped the world on our behalf because we were losing our soul?

We were running so fast trying to gain the world, trying to do all the things the world told us was essential. And in the process we were losing ourselves. So could it just be that God was the one who stopped everything to save us? To help us have a moment in time because we don't have the courage to stop it ourselves. So God stopped it in a sense for us to like, look, and be like, do I really want to keep doing that or maybe there is a better way?

See, you have to remember that Jesus doesn't put burdens on you. Jesus takes burdens off of you. The world, religion, yeah, they put burdens on you. Jesus takes them off. So I look at this next verse, this is Jesus talking, he says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened." Come on, when you live in the world's way, it's weary and burdensome. "And I will 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."

Let's be honest, the world is hard and heavy. And so could it just be that God in his grace stopped the non-essentials of life to help us actually make room for what's essential in our life? And as the world now wants to fire this hamster wheel back up, before you get back on it, it would be a really good idea for you to figure out what is essential in your life and what direction do you want to keep going. And that's what we're going to kind of talk about in this series.

You see I love this next verse that tells us, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness." God has already given you everything you need. He has given you

everything that's essential. You don't have to go find it, you don't have to go get it, you don't have to earn it. He has already given it to you.

In fact, look at this next one, Philippians 4:19, "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." That's not really how we want this verse to read, is it? We want this verse to read, my God will meet all your wants. No, all your needs. In Jesus he has given you everything that is essential through his glorious riches. The problem is we look at the glorious riches of God and we kind of -- we kind of think they're the non-essentials. Kind of like a kid being served vegetables from his mom. We look at the glorious riches of God and we're kind of like, yeah, I'm not so sure those are essential. I'm not sure I want those because we've been so conditioned by the world. The world has told us that God's wisdom is foolishness, that God's strength is weakness, that God's ways are non-essential. And so the question you and I have to ask is, what does God say is essential?

We know what the world has told us is essential. They've been telling us that for years. What does God say is actually essential? What do you really need in your life? Well, if you look at the Bible, I think there are five things from Genesis through Revelation, from Adam through the 1st Century church, that we can see over and over again that are essential to our lives. And here is what you really need. You need the grace of God, the Spirit of God, the Word of God, the people of God, and the mission of God. If you want the life that God offers you, these are the essential things of which your life must be built around.

And so the question right out of the gate in this series is, do the essentials of life have a place in your life? Is your life built around the grace, the Spirit, the word, the people and the mission of God?

And the reason these are so important is because the grace of God is identity. The Spirit, the word and the people of God is relationship. And the mission of God is purpose. This is identity, relationship and purpose. This is the gospel and this is what we need. And so for the next few weeks we're going to take these and kind of break them down so you can be set up for the essentials of what you really need in life. And we're going to start with the grace of God because everything starts with the grace of God.

The grace of God is the most essential thing in your life. Grace is the doorway through which all of life is found. And grace isn't just some religious term. Let me show you what grace is. Grace is undeserved favor, supernatural empowerment and the life of Jesus flowing through you. It's so much more than a religious way. It's undeserved favor, it's God giving you what you didn't deserve not because He has to but because He wants to.

It's supernatural empowerment. It's not just the forgiveness of your sins, it's a supernatural empowerment to give you an ability to do what you could never do in your own strength. And

it is the life of Jesus, literally the resurrected power of God flowing through you. This is grace and this is essential for life.

I mean do you remember the apostle Paul. He's one of the great heroes of the faith, writes much of the New Testament. And we read this amazing story about Paul. He has a thorn in his flesh, some kind of sickness, we don't know what it was. It could have been the coronavirus for all we know. And while he's got this sickness in his body, look what he says, he says, "I was given a thorn in my flesh," some kind of sickness, we don't know what it was, "a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away and each time he said, 'My grace is all you need for my power works best in weakness.'"

Here's the apostle Paul, the guy who has raised the dead, healed the sick, cast out demons, the guy who has been shipwrecked and persecuted and beaten. And here is Paul he's got a sickness in his own body, he can't get rid of it, he's crying out to God, and he literally says it's tormenting him. For Paul to use the word torment of after all the things that he has been through, this is a pretty big deal. And in the midst of all that, God's very simple response is, Paul, my grace is all you need. My grace is what is essential in your life. Paul, my grace will help you deal with the thorn, help you defeat darkness, will help you deal with that battle, will keep you from becoming proud. For guess what, Paul, my grace brings my power in the midst of your weakness.

And if all Paul needed was grace then all we need is grace. You see, grace is the essential of your life. It's grace that made the sun rise today. It's grace that there is air to breathe right now. It's grace that your heart is beating and that you're alive. Grace created you. Grace sustains you. Grace redeemed you. It's grace that sent Jesus to the cross. It's grace that opened your eyes to see your need for a savior. It's grace that gave you a future and a destiny. It's grace that you're online tuning into this, a part of a life-giving church right now. And what you have to remember is that grace is not a concept, he's a person and his name is Jesus. Grace is God speaking over your life saying, I want you, I love you, I chose you, I accept you, I have empowered you, I will take care of you, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Grace is being included in Christ, included in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, receiving his blessing, his inheritance and his life. Grace brings you home. And grace is all you need.

And so like Paul I bet in your life maybe you've got a thorn right now. Maybe you're battling some darkness. Maybe there's some kind of torment or brokenness or storm in your life and maybe there's some pride that's been building up. Well, guess what, this grace is all you need in Jesus' name. That's why this next verse tells us, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

When we're in need, the most essential thing in our life is the grace of God that is freely given to you and me.

In fact this is why in John 15, Jesus talking says, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; but apart from me you can do nothing." If Jesus is grace then let's replace Jesus with grace. If a man remains in grace and grace in him, he will bear much fruit; but apart from grace you can do nothing. Grace is the essential for your life and when you remain in grace and grace remains in you, you will bear much fruit, fruit in your job, fruit in your relationships, fruit in your heart, fruit in your life. But apart from grace you can do nothing. Grace is the most essential thing in your life. And yet we so treat it as trivial and as a non-essential.

And so if you'll open up your mind with me, I just want to show you this. Grace is essential for your forgiveness, your freedom and your future. Come on, let's be honest right now. We could all use a little bit of forgiveness, a little bit of freedom and a little bit of hope for our future. So let me just show you how you need grace for this. Just walk through this with me on -- the first thing is literally this, like you need grace. Grace is essential for forgiveness. In fact grace is only non-essential if you don't need to be forgiven. If you're perfect and you never mess up and you never do anything wrong, well then guess what, you don't need grace. But for the rest of us, it's pretty essential. Like check this out, "For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ." Come on, Adam and his sin and his failure in the garden of Eden set in motion all of the death, the destruction and the darkness that you can see in the world around you.

But then Jesus came and God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness is even greater than the death and the destruction that Adam Brought. In Jesus, you are forgiven, you are cleansed, you are made holy and righteous and blameless and pure. And not only are you forgiven, your identity is literally transformed and you become a new creation in Christ Jesus. It's essential for our forgiveness.

In fact, check out what King David says, I love this, it says, "David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works who gets righteousness apart from the law." Ready? "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD will never count against him."

Catch this, this is King David, the man after God's own heart, the guy that walks with God, the guy that writes most of the Psalms. And you know what David is saying here? He's saying he's jealous of you. He was prophesying of the grace of God being released on this earth because, look, David knows what righteousness from works is like. He lived under the law, having to perform offering, sacrifice after sacrifice for his sin and his failure. And he's speaking about you

prophesying hundreds of years earlier saying blessed are you because your transgressions are forgiven, your sins are covered, and the Lord will never count your sins against you because of the grace of Jesus. Come on. Listen, we live in a cancel culture. You hear it all the time on the news everywhere right now, everybody wants to cancel everything. We want to take one moment of somebody's worst failure and cancel them for it. Sure sounds like the world, doesn't it?

But in the Kingdom of God, there's no cancel culture. Why? Because Jesus was canceled on the cross once and for all, so you will never have to be. In the Kingdom of God, we're not canceled for our failures, we're blessed by grace. Jesus was canceled so you'll never have to be. So can I just remind you today the grace of God has forgiven you for that thing 20 years ago, the thing 20 minutes ago or just the way that you've been living in this coronavirus season that you know it's not God's heart for you. Come on, grace is essential for forgiveness.

And not only is it essential for forgiveness, it's essential for freedom. Like let's be honest, we all want to be free and yet we feel like prisoners often in our own life. That's why we struggled so much with quarantine, we feel like a prisoner in our own home. But extrapolate that out, when you're on that hamster wheel, you feel like a prisoner in your own life sometimes. And yet, look at this next verse, "You live under the freedom of God's grace."

Grace is essential for freedom. Why? Because I don't live under the law anymore. I don't live under sin anymore. I don't live under death anymore. I now live under the freedom of God's grace, which means I have nothing to prove, nothing to earn, nothing to achieve. I don't have to struggle, or strive, or perform, or prove my worth to anybody. I don't have to get on the hamster wheel. I don't have to live the way the world tells me to live, striving, struggling, hustling, moving, trying to do all this. No, no, no, just stop. I'm a beloved son or daughter in whom the Father is well pleased because of the grace of God. I have nothing to prove, nothing to earn and nothing to achieve. Come on. Can I ask you, what are you trying to prove?

And who are you trying to prove it to? Trying harder doesn't set you free, it just makes you tired. Achieving more won't make you happy, it just makes you exhausted. Running faster won't get you where you're going, it's just going to make you weary. What are you trying to prove? And who are you trying to prove it to? The grace of God has set us free. And what you need to understand is this, under grace, you are as free as Jesus. You read the gospels, man, that guy was free. Well, guess what, you now have that freedom for you. Why? Because under grace when God looks at us, he sees us the same way he sees Jesus. He's empowered us the same way He empowered Jesus. He loves us the same way He loves Jesus. He walks with us the same way He walked with Jesus. Grace sets you free.

That's why I love Titus 2, it says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, grace has come to find you." You didn't have to go get the most essential thing in life,

Jesus literally brought it to your door and knocked on the door and he's trying to offer it to you. Grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and live self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age. In other words, grace sets us free. It sets us free from selfishness. It sets us free from sin. It sets us free from self-condemnation and beating ourselves up from self-righteousness, trying to do it all on our own. Grace sets us free from living the life we don't even want to live ourselves, let alone that God's been saying, hey, I got something better for you. Anywhere you feel like you're in bondage is a place where you're not receiving the grace of God.

And so can I just remind you that under the grace of God, you've been set free. Free from that addiction, free from that self-condemnation, free from performing, free from getting back on the hamster wheel of life. Grace is essential for freedom and it's essential for our future. You see, ain't it interesting how so many of us have such a confidence in our eternal security, but man, we are stressed out about tomorrow. It's like, man, yeah, yeah, I know, I believe in Jesus, I'm going to heaven someday when I die, I feel great about that. But man, I am all worried and stressed out and anxious about tomorrow. Come on, man, grace is essential for your future, for tomorrow to live free. Check out this next verse, "Live your life empowered by God's free-flowing grace, which is your true strength." That's a great verse. That could be your life verse if you don't have one.

Live your life empowered by God's free-flowing grace. It's not a limited supply, it's freely flowing in. All you got to do is receive it and it is your strength. It will literally empower you with supernatural ability and empower beyond what you have to walk into the unknown of the future. Like come on, let me ask you right now, what are you anxious about? What are you stressed out about? Come on, what are you worried about? You realize all those things are about the future. They're not really about today or the past. They're about the unknown of the future. And that's why we get all spun up around it. Well guess what, God's grace has empowered you with true strength to step into the unknown. He's empowered you, he's empowered you to go ahead and move forward even though you don't know what's going to happen with school. His grace has empowered you to move forward even though you don't know what's going to happen with your job. His grace is essential and has empowered you to move into the unknown of the reality of the future of your family.

But his strength is empowering you. Live your life, let it flow through you and let it strengthen you in Jesus' name, to have a supernatural ability to go beyond what you could do in your own natural strength. Come on, grace empowers you to be a hope carrier in hopeless environments. Grace empowers you to have joy in a depressed world. Grace empowers you to love those unlovable people. Grace empowers you to have peace in the midst of the storm. Grace empowers you to have wisdom in the midst of the unknown and all the choices that you have to make. Remember grace is being included in Christ, which means you have his character, and his power, and his mind, and his spirit, and you become a new creation in Christ

Jesus. If we want to have a future full of righteousness, peace and joy, faith, hope and love, it's grace that empowers us to step into the future.

And so if you're stressed, and anxious and worried about your future, can I just speak and remind you today that grace is essential to help you walk into the unknown. Listen, in my life this last week, probably over the last couple weeks, there's been all kind of non-essential bombs going off all over my life, bombs of discouragement and defeat, hard conversations with people, and disappointments, and struggles, all these non-essential bombs going on. And I kind of got lost in the midst of it. And as I started studying on this series, started studying grace, all of a sudden it's like God pulled my head back up and he said, stop looking at all those non-essential things and get lost back into the midst of my grace. Because guess what, it's really hard to be grumpy when you're focused on grace. It's really hard to be depressed when you're focused on grace. It's really hard to complain when you're focused on grace.

It's really hard to be offended by anyone or anything when you're focused on grace. And I know some of you as you've been listening to this message you're like, yeah, yeah, yeah, this is all great, nice theology. But how do I actually get it in my life? Like what do we do? Give me the steps. It's called grace, man, undeserved favor, supernatural empowerment, the life of Jesus flowing into. You know how you get it? You receive it. You humble yourself and you just allow God to pour it in. That's why Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith." Grace comes through faith. When you believe that Jesus is who he said he is and did what he said he did, grace starts flowing in your life. And guess what, even if you don't have faith to receive grace, grace will give you the faith to receive grace because grace is all you need.

This is why James 4 says, "He gives grace generously." There is not a limited, finite supply of grace. God is pouring it out forever and always. The Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble." In other words, all we have to do is humble ourselves. Here's a great question. When was the last time you just said, God, I need your grace. Come on. When was the last time you said, God, I just need -- I need your grace today for my marriage. God, I need your grace today for this decision. God, I need your grace today for this addiction. God, I need your grace today for this relationship that's just -- it's just not working, it's struggling. God, I need your grace today for the storm that's raging around me. God, I need your grace today from my mind that won't just -- it won't stop with these things. God, I need your grace today for what's going on. When was the last time you humbled yourself and said, God, I just need some grace. Maybe we need to stop resisting it and just start receiving it.

And here's how you know if grace is freely flowing in your life. Here's how you know if grace is an essential that you're building your life around -- you have grace to give to others. You can't give what you haven't first received. And so if there's no grace that you have to give to other



people, if you're highly offended, and angry, and edgy, and taking everything out on everyone else, that's the first warning sign to say, I'm not receiving God's grace for me. That's why I don't have any to give. See, when Jesus hung on the cross, he said, "It is finished." In that moment God's grace was poured out once and for all. Everything that ever has been or ever will be required from you has been paid in full. It is no longer about what you have to do, it's about what Jesus has done. In that moment the resurrected power of Jesus was poured out onto this earth. Grace was freely given forever and always.

That is why God can so confidently declare in 2 Corinthians, "My grace is all you need." My grace is all you need. The question is, are you receiving it? Are you looking to it? Are you open for it? And do you believe this is essential in your life? Listen, I know it's been a hard season. I know it hadn't been easy. I know there's been battles, and burdens, and struggles, and disappointments, and weight, and worry, and anxieties, all that, and all of it is real.

But as the hamster wheel has stopped by God's grace, maybe it's time to look down a different path than where we were going. You see grace forgives tomorrow or grace forgives yesterday, it empowers tomorrow and it gives you freedom for today. Grace is the door through which all of life is found. Maybe it's time to walk through that door in Jesus' name because maybe it was God who stopped the non-essentials to make room for the essentials in your life. Last verse, and this is more of a prayer to speak over you than anything else. In Jesus' name I declare over you, "And so now I entrust you into God's hands and the message of his grace, which is all that you need to become strong."

All of God's blessings are imparted through the message of his grace, which he provides as the spiritual inheritance given to all of his holy ones." So Jesus right now I just ask that every one of us would be open to receive your grace. Lord, right now, we just ask that the essential nature of the grace of God would flow into our lives. Thank you for Jesus and the cross and the resurrection and his grace that he poured out upon us. And so Lord, today, may we humble ourselves in the midst of the thorns in our flesh, and the battles of darkness, and the torment, and the pride, and the brokenness, and the weakness, and the pain. We declare your grace is all we need.

And so we turn our eyes and our focus to you, Jesus. And we say we really need your grace. And we believe that you have fully provided all that we need according to your glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Thank you Jesus for grace, in your name we pray, amen.