

Hey Valley Creek, it is Christmas week and we can't wait for Christmas at Valley Creek. Our team has been working so hard behind the scenes, praying, preparing and planning. And this may be the best Christmas experience we have ever created. I am so excited for what we are putting together and what it's going to be for you and your family and for our city. And so can I just encourage you, come on, invite somebody. Step out by faith, be a hope carrier, a movement of hope for the city and beyond because we are believing that people are going to have an encounter with the living word of God. We're doing everything we can do behind the scenes.

I want to ask you to do everything you can do in the lives of the people around you to get them to any of our campuses for Christmas at Valley Creek because Jesus has come to make all things new.

All right, hey everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. I want to take a moment and just say from wherever you are watching this from, if you are a Flower Mound or Venue or Denton or Lewisville or Gainesville or online, wherever you are in the world, let's welcome each other together today. Come on, it is good to be one church that meet at multiple campuses, carrying the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. One of the places that we're experiencing hope this Christmas season is for our relationships. We're in a series called Wrapped. We are finishing the year with healthy relationships. You see, before we choose to wrap up presents or before we choose to just wrap up a busy semester or maybe even just a busy schedule, we're going to lean in and finish this year well with those that we love deeply.

We're going to learn how to love them. We've been doing that over these few weeks. And in the book of Colossians, it just says, "Clothe yourselves in compassion and gentleness and humility and kindness." It says actually put them like a wrap around yourself. Wrap yourself in those things and so when you do, you can learn to relate to one another in healthy ways. Well, today we're not just going to clothe ourselves, we're going to gain some new clothes for our wardrobe, okay? We're going to learn some new practical ways that we can really engage healthy relationships in our life. So here's what we're going to do, we're going to have three different speakers that have three great words for us about seven minutes each. I want to encourage you take down everything that they are speaking. Receive it inside yourself. Take it for yourself and for the relationships in your life. This is part of how we demonstrate and we sacrifice for one another.

So here we go, three great ways, three ways we're going to add to our wardrobe of our relationships today in three, two, one.

All right, so we've been talking about wrapping up the year with healthy relationships. And hey, here's the thing, I think if we really want healthy relationships in our lives, we have to be willing to ask the question what is it that all healthy relationships have in common? Like what's the essence of a healthy relationship? What's the foundation that they're built on? And I'm

sure there's a lot of things that come to mind, but I actually love what the apostle Paul has to say about this. You see, he says when it comes to relationships, at the end of the day we're to be devoted to one another in love and he says to honor one another above yourselves. So there it is, real clear, real simple. He says if you want healthy relationships, you're to love and you're to honor.

And when we hear that I think we're okay with the first half of this verse. Like we may not be perfect in love, but we understand that love in general is something to be expressed or something to be given away, right? It's sacrificial in nature. As God loves us, we get to love others. So there's a flow from me to you. But when it comes to honor, honor is just one of those words that we're just not as sure what to do with. And for whatever reason, when it comes to honor we don't always see it the same way that we see love. We don't always see it as something to be released. More often, we see it as something to demand. Yet all through the Bible, it says things like we're to honor our parents, we're to honor the authorities and the leaders that are in our lives. It says that we're to honor relational covenants, things like marriage. And that list it goes on and on. You see, the Bible seems to be a lot more focused on helping us become people of honor than it is in showing us all the ways that we're to demand honor from others, right?

So I would suggest if we're going to wrap up this year with healthy relationships, then one of the most important things we can do is learn to become people of honor, okay? You see, honor simply just means to assign value to something. It means to esteem it or to lift it up. It means to celebrate or draw attention to the greatness that's within something or within someone. And when it comes to relationships and specifically releasing honor through our relationships, I think we could think of it kind of like a cousin to encouragement. See, if encouragement is what you say to a person to build them up, we can think of honor as what you say about a person in front of that person to others to demonstrate that we actually value them being part of our life. Again, honor is what you say about a person in front of the person to others to demonstrate that you value them being part of your life. And can we just agree that this is something that has become so rare in the world today.

Like see, more often what we see modeled by the world is the opposite of honor, it's actually dishonor. And the challenge is it's become so subtle we hardly recognize it. It's that sarcastic comment that has just a hint of truth to it. Or for the spouses, it's when we talk over or when we correct our spouse in the middle of a conversation that they're having with others. Or parents, it's when we actually talk down to our kids in front of their friends. See, these are things we all do most of the time we don't even realize it, and I think that's because we forget that when it comes to our words we're either building people up or we're literally tearing them down, right? We're either releasing honor or we're just not. And a great example of honor that we could find in the Christmas story is the lesser known story of Simeon and Anna. See, these are two people that show up on the scene when Jesus as a baby is being taken to the

temple to be dedicated to the Lord. And the Bible tells us that each of them had lived long lives, that they were faithful and they were righteous and they were devout.

And we learned from their story that it had been revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't pass away until he first saw the Lord's messiah. So it says that as Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple that Simeon sees the baby and more than just sees him, he actually recognizes him for who he is. So immediately, he runs over and he grabs the baby, he lifts him up and he begins to praise God for all to hear. And we learned that Anna was also there that day and it says that as Anna saw and heard all the things that were being said and all the things that were happening, that she too started to praise God for this baby. And I love this story because here we have two people, two people that were very much in a season of life or at a place in life that they were deserving of honor themselves, yet they humbled themselves. And they humbled themselves in order to lift up and to draw attention to the greatness that was in a baby. See, what honor does, honor recognizes and it actually doesn't just recognize but it actually calls forth the kingdom that's within someone. See, it's recognizing and celebrating the best in people in spite of any differences that we may have.

And I get it, like people are far from perfect. And we all know that we have relationships in our life that are just downright hard sometimes. But honor is choosing to celebrate a person for who they are, without stumbling over who they're not. Again, honor celebrates a person for who they are, without stumbling over who they're not. And here's like the really cool thing about honor. When we release honor, what we're actually doing is we're actually releasing a blessing and it's a blessing that actually flows in like all directions, right? It blesses the person receiving it, it blesses the person releasing it and it actually changes the atmosphere around them. And it's even more than that, when it comes to relationships specifically, think of it like this, we have to remember that honor, it originates in the heart, right? And there's a kingdom principle that says wherever our treasure is then our hearts are going to be there also. So when we value a person, like when we genuinely appreciate the person in our life and when we treasure their relationship, in other words, when we honor them, what that says is then our hearts will actually attach to theirs.

So you can actually think of honor like supernatural glue that keeps the relationship together. So as you look back at this year, if you've experienced any level of relational drift in your life, like if you just feel that there is something pulling apart the relationships that are in your life, could it just simply be that there's an invitation to release honor into those lives? An invitation to reattach and rebind your heart to theirs. Like how do we do it? Practically speaking, like how do we activate and actually release honor in our life? Let me give you just a couple quick thoughts on how we could be people of honor. See, first it just starts with asking the Holy Spirit to help you see people the way that he sees them. Like we have to recognize that all people are worthy of honor, period. All people. You see, all people were created in the image and likeness of God, and if Jesus was willing to honor them with his words and with his life, then we should be willing to do the same.

And second, right, we have to ask the Holy Spirit to show us who he's inviting us to release honor to. Like ask him to bring someone specific to mind, maybe a family member or a friend. It could be a co-worker or a classmate. It might even be somebody who's hurt you or who's been hard to love. But then third, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you could release honor into their life. Like what's something specific, again, that you could say about the person in front of the person to others to demonstrate that you value them being part of your life. And let's take this a step further. So like parents, if we have parents in the room, what would it look like for you to honor your kids? Like what would it look like to actually call out the greatness that you see in them? See, more than ever our kids need to know they're valued in the words of a parent. They are so weighty in a kid's life especially when spoken in front of a teacher or a coach or a friend. Or for those of us who are married, what would it look like to actually honor our spouse?

Instead of criticizing or complaining, what if we just made it a point this week to share what we actually love about them? And what if we did it in front of our kids or in front of guests that come over to home? Like these are the little things that if we did it, it would literally change the atmosphere of our home, right? Students, you know have to go here, what would it look like to honor your parents or your teachers or the leaders in your life? And what would it look like to actually do that in front of other students? And really for all of us guys, what would it look like to just honor the spiritual authorities that God's placed in our life? Like when's the last time we just hopped onto social media to say I'm grateful for Valley Creek or I'm grateful for my campus pastor and the leaders that are here pouring into me? So again, ask the Holy Spirit to help you see people the way he sees them, ask him to show you who he's inviting you to release honor to and ask him to show you how. What can you say about the person in front of the person to others to demonstrate that you value them being part of your life? Let's end this year with relational help and let's do it by being people of honor.

So as we wrap up the year, let me ask the question, who's one person that you can honor? So I think we could all agree that this year has been loud. There's been a lot to hear, a whole lot to take in, the world is screaming and it's almost like everyone has something to say. But what I think we're learning the reality is, is that most of us have something to say but few of us actually have a desire to listen. And when I say listen, I don't mean listen to the noise of this world and the politics and the headlines and the trends in social media, I mean listen to the people that God has put in our lives. And this holiday season, I think God wants to remind all of us of the people that he's put directly in front of us for us to listen to.

And I love the Christmas story because the Christmas story reminds us of the significance of listening and it's full of great listeners. I mean Mary, Joseph and the shepherds all listened to the angel of the Lord. And now, guess what, we have a Christmas story all because they were willing to listen and they got to experience listening that led to life. However, there was someone in our Christmas story who maybe you haven't heard a whole lot about named

Zechariah. And Zechariah struggled to listen. The Bible tells us that the angel of the Lord comes to Zechariah and tells him that he's going to have a son, a son named John the Baptist. Maybe you heard of him, maybe you haven't. In case you haven't, cousin of Jesus, prepares the way for him, kind of a big deal. And as the angel of the Lord is telling this to Zechariah, it says that Zechariah didn't believe him. Zechariah struggled to see how listening could lead to life. So what the angel does next is he actually seals Zechariah's mouth shut and forces him to only listen until the day that John is born.

So as you're reading this, you may see like what the angel does and think, that's an overreaction. But what you've got to understand is that the angel actually does this out of the goodness of his heart so that Zechariah can learn that listening leads to life. And as I was thinking about the story of Zechariah, I realized that I would be such a better listener if my mouth were sealed shut. You see, for me I think the problem with listening comes when I feel like I have something that I want to say. But the Bible tells us, "Be quick to listen, but slow to speak." So can I just ask you in a year where it feels like everybody has something to say, who is one person you feel like you need to listen to? Because I think if we're honest, a lot of us look at this verse and our lives get it the other way around. We can be so quick to speak yet so slow to listen. We forget that listening leads to life.

But look at the life of Jesus. Jesus the guy who was the word of God, Jesus the guy who everything he spoke were words of spirit and life, Jesus the guy who had the most important things to say was constantly listening. Why? Because Jesus understood that listening led to life. Life how? Life in relationship. Life and intimacy and breakthrough and understanding and truth and revelation. And I think Jesus always had a desire to listen because he knew his Father always had a desire to listen to him. In fact, in the book of John, Jesus even says he's praying, "I know you always hear me." So Jesus had a confidence that his Father was listening to him. And so let me just ask you, when was the last time listening led you to experience life? Because the reality is we will always listen to the voices we value most. So if you value your career, you'll listen to your boss.

If you value your marriage, you'll listen to your spouse. If you value your grades, you'll listen to your teacher. If you value your friendships, you'll listen to your friends. And what that does is it reminds that person that they are valuable. But what happens when we're in a season where maybe we're struggling to listen? Well, we've got to be okay asking ourselves the question, how do the ones in my life know that I love them? Because you can only be loved to the level that you're known and knowing someone comes primarily from listening to them. So if we're struggling to listen, maybe it's because we've forgotten that listening leads us to life. But today, Jesus wants to remind you that he listens to you because you are valuable to him. And we get to remind others of that supernatural truth simply by listening to them. So when I ask the question, who's one person you need to listen to, there's maybe someone who comes immediately to mind.

And knowing who you need to listen to is important but knowing how to listen to them is maybe even more important. And as much as I'd love to take a page out of the Book of Zechariah, I'm sure all of us can't have an angel of the Lord come down and seal our mouth shut. So what I'm going to do is I'm just going to give you three things that you can try to listen well. Those three things are this. Posture your heart, ask intentional questions and love them well. P-A-L, pal. Posture your heart. Posture your heart before a conversation, during a conversation, after a conversation. And how to do that is remembering to do things like pray, remembering to remind yourself why the person you're listening to matters. It's having a heart of humility, heart that's willing to go into a conversation and learn something. It's becoming more interested in the things that they find interesting than maybe the things that you find interesting.

And it's remembering that listening leads us to experience life. Next thing we can do is ask intentional questions. But this takes things like intentionality, patience, eye contact, physical posture. Remember, our voice speaks, our face screams. So body language matters as you're asking these questions. It's asking follow-up questions, questions like tell me more about that. And then it's not interrupting them as they're responding. It's asking questions like what do you believe God is inviting you to do instead of maybe telling them what you think they should do. And that leads us right into our last point which is just to love them well. Love them well. And by that, I mean ask them the questions that maybe no one else is. Questions like how's your heart? Questions like how have you been leading yourself in this season? Questions like what has God been saying to you?

And here's a big one, you ready? What are you going to do about it? Remember, empathy is letting someone not be okay. Love is not letting someone stay that way. And so loving someone well is encouraging them, it's speaking prophetic declaration over their life, it's calling out the things you see God doing in them. You guys, this is the part where we get to talk. And so every time we respond, let's respond from that place of love. So three things, three things to listen well. And that's posture your heart, ask intentional questions, love them well. P-A-L. If you want to listen well, be a pal. Be a pal. I know, it's an acronym. We hardly ever do acronyms, but you know what, it's too cheesy to forget. So this season, let's listen not just to respond, let's listen to receive because that's listening that leads us to life. So as we wrap up this year, can I just ask you, who is one person that you need to listen to?

As we choose to wrap up this year with healthy relationships, let's talk about the power of an invitation. I mean who doesn't love a good invite? I'm not talking about an invitation to go to the dentist to get a root canal. I'm not talking about an invitation to go the DMV and get your driver's license renewed, right? I'm talking about an invitation to go organize your friend's garage. I'm talking about a really good invitation like when you're going through the mail and you're like Christmas card, Christmas card, bill, bill, toll tag, bill, Christmas card with the excessive couple on the beach, okay Christmas card, bill, then all of a sudden you get to it, that envelope and it's an amazing envelope because it has your name on it. You're even impressed

by the envelope and you open it up and it's that invitation you've been waiting for, it's tickets to that game, it's an invitation to go to that wedding to see friends that you haven't seen in forever.

It's to go that gala or that banquet. It's an invite that you've been waiting for. Now, that is an invitation. I mean, what is it about an invitation that really moves us? I really think it's two things. First, whenever you and I get an invitation, it communicates to us that we feel valued by that person and it also lets us know that that person would value us being with them at that big event. And I don't know about you, but in the last couple years me being a very, very people-person, that's been one of the hardest things to deal with in the last couple years, is that we've not only been not invited to as many things, we've actually been disinvited to things, into big events. And we haven't been able to extend invitations for people to come to our big events. Maybe you were disinvited from a graduation or from a wedding or for a birth announcement of some kind. And that's really, really hard to deal with. And so the last couple years, it's left a lot of us feeling left out.

Well, if that's you, if you've ever felt left out sometime in the last couple years, then there's a group of guys right in the middle of Christmas story that can totally relate to you, and that's the shepherds. You see, the shepherds were always feeling left out. They're the ones that were the outcasts of society. That's why they lived on the outskirts of town, in the middle of nowhere. These are the guys that their Christmas card got lost in the mail or you don't really have their address or lost it. You probably wouldn't have even invited them into your house for Christmas dinner because they didn't smell great. And they're the guys that you probably wouldn't want around your kids. I mean these are the lost, and the lonely, and the broken, the outskirts people and yet they're the last ones to know about anything but they're the first ones to know about the greatest birth announcement of all time. Luke chapter 2 verse 10 tells us about it, "The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'"

Now, that is an invite. Forget about going to a mandatory office Christmas party or even like a giant elf singing a Christmas telegram to you. Angels show up to these guys while they're at work. That is an invitation. And it's not just an invitation for some kind of good news. I mean we can listen to news all day long and hardly ever hear something good. This is the best kind of news. This is news of God becoming flesh. We sang about it a few minutes ago, here comes heaven. And the first people that get to find out about the messiah being born are the shepherds. I mean, how do you think the shepherds felt like in that moment? I think they were like, do you have the right field? Are you talking -- like the palace is that way, right? But remember this is good news of great joy for all the people. It's for all the people, right? And that's good news for you and me because it's just not just for the rich or the popular or for the privileged, it's for everyone.

And so the shepherds in that moment, they felt seen and known and loved because the angels were saying to them, guys, you are valuable and we would value you to be with us at this incredible moment for the birth of Jesus. I mean that's a powerful invitation. It's good news of great joy for everyone, for that neighbor. Yeah, you know what I'm talking about, right? That one. It's good news of great joy for that family member. Yeah, even that one. That co-worker, that crazy cousin that tags you on Facebook at inappropriate times, even that one. Like it's good news for everyone in our lives. It's an opportunity for us to say to those people in our lives, hey, you are valuable and we would much value you to be with us at this moment to experience something together. I mean, aren't you thankful for all the invitations you've gotten in your life? Would you like to join this team? Would you like to come work for our company?

Will you marry me? Like there's been some powerful invitations that you've had in your life but none is greater than the invitation that Jesus gave to you and to me. Aren't you thankful that Jesus himself is an inviter? He says to the disciples, he doesn't command them, he calls them and invites them and says, "Come and follow me and I will make you a fisher of men." He says to you and I today, "Come all you are weary burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest." There's nothing better than an invitation from Jesus to be with Jesus because Jesus says to you and he says to me you're valuable and I would much value you to be with me in my presence. Invitations are powerful. I mean, if invitations are so awesome to receive and they're fun to give, then why don't we hardly give them out? Well, I think one of the reasons is could be just because we're busy or distracted or our lives can kind of become our about ourselves.

But if we're honest, I think one of the reasons that we don't give invitations so much is because we've forgotten who they're really for. What I mean by that is maybe we're afraid to invite someone because we're afraid that they'll say no or that they'll leave us feeling rejected or worse they'll say yes to an RSVP and then no show, they're just going to ghost. Who doesn't love that, right? I mean in this season, it can be really difficult and challenging maybe to send out that invite. But here's the thing, here's the thing that we need to remember, invitations, Valley Creek family, they're not about us, they're about releasing value and worth into the person that we're inviting because we already feel seen and valued and loved and known by our heavenly Father so we can release that goodness and that treasure in the other person by extending that invitation for them. So in this season, who's one person that you need to invite to coffee, to lunch, to dinner, to hang out, to a family gathering?

And maybe, it's not someone new. Maybe if your life's like mine the last couple years, there's some people that I used to be close to that I'm not as close anymore because of whatever happened, happened. Maybe it's time to invite someone back into your life. Maybe it's time to go back to that person and say, hey, I love you. I'd love to hang out with you. Can we catch up? It's time to start inviting people again. It's time to remind them that they are valuable and that we would much value them to be with us in our presence. Remember, it's good news of great joy for all people, for everyone. And one of the best ways you can do that is by inviting people to one of our Christmas services. So you got a card whenever you came in today and I



hope as you received that, as we prayed earlier that God put someone on your mind to think of who can I invite to be a part of a Christmas service. This is an amazing way for us to tell someone, hey, you're valuable, we much value you to come and be with us at this event. Let's go back to the verse for a second. Remember it says, "The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid.'"

Remember, we don't need to be afraid. And the angels are saying that to the shepherds but I believe that the Holy Spirit's actually saying that to you and to me today. Whoever -- maybe a name came to your mind, you're like there's no way that's going to happen. Hey, Valley Creek, don't be afraid. Good news of great joy for all people. Good news for you. Good news for me. Think about it, 2,000 years ago, those shepherds accepted the invitation and then they extended an invitation to someone else to experience the good news and they experienced the good news of Jesus and invited someone else, and then two thousand years later here we are, okay? Invitations are powerful, so who's that one person to say you're not going to be afraid, you're going to be bold and courageous and say you are valuable, I would love -- I would very much value you to be with me at this event. Remember, it's good news of great joy for all the people, like all of them. So the joy that the Holy Spirit has given you and given me, it's for everyone. So Valley Creek in this season, who is one person that you and I can invite?

All right, so good, so practical. And if you noticed there's something that all three of those things had in common, listening and honor and inviting, you see they all assign value. They all assign value to the person that is being honored or listened to or invited just like God assigned value to us. And so this Christmas, that really is an invitation, you know, on the table for us to begin to really interact with each other in those ways, to assign value one to another. An invitation to Christmas is one of the best ways you can do that this week coming up. So this then kind of wraps up this part of healthy relationships and our conversation about how to truly finish the year with healthy relationships, but it is not the end of our healthy relationships.

And moving forward in those, there's so many more invitations we're going to have to love each other deeply, to relate with one another deeply. This is also the last regular weekend of 2021. So I want to invite you right now, go ahead and stand up on your feet with me, and wherever you're watching this from, go and stand up right now and I'm going to ask you as we pray this out, as we finish out this year and even just look to the goodness of God, would you maybe even just lay a hand on somebody that you're here with? Or if you came by yourself, go ahead and just raise your hand up in the air and just receive this by faith. Come on, join me in just praying out and thanking God for his goodness this year. God, you've been so good. You've been so good to me and to my friends, to my family. And overall God, you've showed us your grace in so many ways this year.

When we felt hopeless, when we felt like we were losing, you know, our heart and our worth and we were scared of what was happening in the world around us, you showed us, "Do not be afraid for I am with you." And your goodness even now is just surrounding our lives. Like even

now as I pray, can I just tell you, God's goodness is flowing over your life right now. He was good to you this year, he will be good to you next year, he will be good to you every year after that. He is crowning this year with His goodness and He will continue to do that. So even now as you just think about God's kindness to you, can you just even maybe tell him, God, thanks for being kind. God, thanks for being kind to me. God, thanks for smiling down upon me. God, thank you for your grace and your goodness for me. You crowned this year with your goodness.

You gave me so much in your abundance. He is so good to you. He is with you. He is for you. So can I speak to you right now and just say, the best is yet to come. The best of your life, your hope will rise as you see how God is going to move on your behalf, on behalf of your family. The best is yet to come. There's always more in God's kingdom. There's always more that He wants to pour out of His goodness and His kindness and His grace over your life. So receive that by faith and believe that no matter what you faced, the best is yet to come in Jesus' name. No matter what your year looked like, he's going to crown next year with His abundance. No matter how you felt about right now, there is more to be experienced in his kingdom. Thank you God for 2021 and thank you God for all that is yet to come. We just speak it out and believe it, in your name, amen.