



A DIFFERENT WAY

DO WHAT JESUS DID

SEASON THREE TRANSCRIPTS

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A DIFFERENT WAY



**BLACKOUT:
GOLD SHIELDS**

SEPTEMBER 1, 2024
SEASON THREE, EPISODE ONE
"BLACKOUT: GOLD SHIELDS"

One thing I ask, this I seek. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. One thing I do, forgetting what is behind and pressing on towards what is ahead. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. And Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her." To the rich young ruler, "one thing you lack. Sell everything you have; give it away to the poor. You'll have treasure in heaven. Then, come and follow me." Jesus, we want You to be our one thing because You are the one thing.

Why don't you go ahead and grab a seat – whatever campus you're at?

You see, Jesus is the one thing. Jesus is the main thing. Jesus is the only thing. Whether we have chosen to make Him that in our life or not, it really doesn't matter, He is the one thing. In fact, Jesus can't just be a part of something. Jesus can't be left out of anything. Jesus can't be put to the side of anything. Why? Because He is the one thing. He is over all and through all and in all. All things were created by Him and for Him and through Him. In Him, all things hold together. In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. And all things were created through Him. In Him, we live and move and have our being. In the beginning, God. Where can I go to flee from Your spirit? If I go to the heavens, You are there. If I make my bed in the depths, You are still there. He is over all, through all, in all. Jesus cannot be a part of something; He is the only thing. He cannot be left out of anything because He is in everything. He cannot be put to the side because He is the main thing. The only question is, "Have we chosen that for our own lives?" And so, today, we remind ourselves that Jesus is the one thing.

In fact, when we gather and we come to church and we come together as the people of God, that's what we're reminding ourselves of every week: That He is the one thing, the main thing, the only thing. Regardless of how I lived this week. Regardless of what's going on in my mind. Regardless of my heart and my relationships and my life. He's the one thing. And so, today, what we've intentionally done is we've removed all the things that we love. I love all the things we have around here: the technology, the production, the lights, the videos, the bands. Every week, that stuff enhances our experiences – helps us meet with God. I'm so grateful for the teams that serve us and create– the creatives we have, the creative opportunities that are there. It's amazing, but sometimes we can over-rely upon all that. Sometimes, we can actually hide behind that. Sometimes, we can make it about that and unintentionally find ourselves entertained or spectating or watching. And so, sometimes it's good to just take all of that away to just remind ourselves that Jesus is here – with or without all that stuff. That Jesus is with you with or without all of that stuff in your life. Because if you could have one day to remove the house and the car and the job and the spouse and the children and all the things, you would find that Jesus is still with you. And so, in a sense, this is even a prophetic declaration by taking some of that stuff out for an hour together to remind ourselves that Jesus is still here. That if I lost everything in my life, Jesus would still be there. Because He's over all and through all and in all, so He can't leave and He can't just be a part and He can't be pushed to the side. And

there's something so powerful and beautiful and sacred about just worshipping together with a single guitar or a single piano. I mean, what would it have been like if you were part of the Israelites after getting set free from 400 years of slavery when they crossed the Red Sea and Moses and Aaron and Mariam led the entire people of God with a tambourine and song of victory? What would it have been like to be with David and his mighty men and a single harp singing a new psalm to the Lord? What would it have been like to be with Jesus and His disciples when it says they together, a cappella, sang a hymn at the end of the last supper before He went to the cross? There's something sacred and powerful and unifying about that.

And so, today, we are starting season three of A Different Way. And we wanted to start it by making Jesus our one thing and making it all about Him. And if you're new with us and you're trying to figure it all out, we've been in this year-long series called A Different Way, where we're just talking about doing the things that Jesus did. And like your favorite show, we've broken it up into four different seasons. Today starts season three of that series, but we didn't want to just jump right into a practice. We just wanted to stop, remove everything, and say, "It's all about Jesus. It's not about practices and training and trying and striving and struggling and earning and performing and religion. Nope – it's about Jesus." And when Jesus captures my heart, it will transform my life. It's about reminding myself that, no matter where I am on the journey or how I feel about my journey, He is over all, through all, and in all. And He invites me to let Him become my one thing, my main thing, my only thing. And so, as we get ready to start season three of A Different Way, what I want to do just for a moment is I want to share something with you that's been really impactful to me in these last six months. I recently just shared this with all of our leaders last week at our Leader Summit, but I think it's so important that I want to share it with you. And it's a little bit rambly, so you just got to try to follow with me. In fact, Holy Spirit, I just ask right now. Just give us ears to hear and eyes to see and a heart to receive because You're here and You are the one thing, the main thing, the only thing.

And late in the spring last year, I was just in my morning time. I was studying; I was praying; I was seeking God. And I was reading, and I came across something that I'd probably read a hundred times before. But I'd never seen it. And for whatever reason, it just caught me. Like, it stopped me in my tracks. And for that whole day, all I did was look at this passage that the Lord showed me. And the next day, I spent all my time doing it. See, I never meet with anybody in the mornings. My morning times – the way I've arranged my life is that's my time where I study. I prepare. I seek God. I work on the message. But that week, all I did was look at this unique thing that I felt like the Lord was showing me. So, that Sunday was probably a really bad message. I'm hoping to make up for it right now. There was this little thing that caught me. It's in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. We'll post about it later, and you can see where it is. But there's this little thing – it's talking about King Solomon, the king of Israel. And it says King Solomon built 500 gold shields. And when his guard would go with him to the presence of God into the temple, they would all bear those golden shields with him. And when Solomon builds these 500 gold shields, Israel is at the height of its prosperity. The kingdom is as large as it's ever been. The kingdom is wealthy. It's prosperous; it's wise. It says the whole earth sought counsel

with Solomon because of his wisdom and his prosperity. They were a representation of heaven on earth. They had built the temple. God was there. He was meeting with His people. He was revealing Himself. The goodness of God was everywhere. It says they had so much treasure that it basically couldn't even be counted. Silver was considered so invaluable that they didn't even count it. He builds 500 gold shields that his men use as they go into the presence of God. And after Solomon's reign, he dies. And his son Rehoboam takes over. But Rehoboam was not a good guy. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. And because he rejected God and did evil in the eyes of the Lord, God allowed the Egyptian king to come in and conquer Jerusalem – conquer Israel, if you will. And they raided Israel and took all the treasures, including, it says, the 500 golden shields. And there's this little line that's fascinating. After that, it says, "Rehoboam, after the 500 gold shields were stolen, rebuilt 500 bronze shields. And his men would bear them when he would go to the temple of God and put them back in the guardroom when they were done." Now at first, when you read that, it feels like an insignificant detail. Until you realize that the moment Rehoboam rebuilds bronze shields instead of gold shields, he has just traded the glory of God for the glory of man. You say, "what does that mean?" Well, what is gold? Gold is divinity. Gold is royalty. Gold is deity. Gold is precious. It's powerful. It's a treasure. It has worth. It has value. It is soft. It is flexible. It does not tarnish. It does not corrode. It is created by God and only God. And it is one of the heaviest metals in the world, which is a picture of the glory of God. It has substance and weight and significance to it. But what is bronze? Bronze is a cheap substitute. Bronze is an inferior standard. See, bronze is something that's man-made. It's a little bit of copper and it's a little bit of tin, put together by man and shaped into whatever man wants it to be. And so, it's a mixture. And it tarnishes and it corrodes and it's inferior. It's cheap. It's a substitute. It has all these deficiencies and deformities within it. All these impurities lie within it. And you can see it is a quick trade for the glory of God for the glory of man. And when Rehoboam's soldiers first bear those bronze shields that first time, there must have been a sorrow – a heaviness, a brokenness – because they remember what the glory of God was like. They remember what the standard of the kingdom was like. They remember how powerful and how wealthy and how prosperous and how great life was under God's rule and reign. And now, they've got this cheap substitute – very light, very hard bronze shields. But after they grieved after a while, I think over time they actually preferred the bronze shields to the gold shields. Why? Because bronze is significantly lighter, so it's easier to carry. It doesn't have weight. It doesn't have gravity. It doesn't have glory to it, so it's easier to carry around. And I think they preferred the bronze shields because, at the end of the day, they could just throw them back into the guard room. Why? Because if they were gold shields, you'd have to watch them and guard them and protect them and take care of them and place them back where they belong. But bronze shields – nobody really cares, so they just threw them wherever. And this became normal. And so, that first generation would have remembered what the glory of God was like. But after just one generation, every generation after that would have thought bronze shields was the glory of God. That this was the pinnacle of the standard. This was the height of creation. I mean, we're the people of God and we've got bronze shields, so clearly, that's what God wants; clearly, that's God's standard. Clearly, that's the height or the epitome of life in God's kingdom. And it would have become a

normal way of life even though it was a cheap substitute for what God had for them. You see, when you think about gold and bronze all throughout the Bible, what you'll find is that bronze is a picture of man. It's a picture of sin. It's a picture of judgement. It's a picture of a form of godliness but no power. In fact, when you look at the tabernacle in the temple, it has a bronze altar where the animals were sacrificed, representing the sin of man – stain, tarnish, judgement. Then, the priests would go to a bronze laver and wash themselves after that – again, representing judgement and sin and tarnish and stain. But the moment you walked into the holy place, everything was made of gold – pure, powerful, soft, made by God. The table, the lampstand, the altar of incense, the very ark of the covenant itself – pure gold, representing the beauty and the power and the treasure and the worth and the standard of God. His ways, His Word, and His kingdom. And you'll see all throughout Scripture, bronze is used for the sin of man. Like when the Israelites sin in the desert and God tells Moses they got to build a bronze snake and hold it up so the people can be saved – judgement, sin, rebellion, tarnish. Or how about the last king of Israel? When they are conquered by the Babylonians, it says he is put in bronze handcuffs, representing that he is now enslaved to the standard of the world that he used to call the very standard of God. Bronze shields will always lead you to bronze handcuffs at some point in time.

Now, some of you, you're trying to catch this analogy. And that's okay. Just stay with me on this. I mean, think of a gold shield in and of itself. A gold shield is a paradox because a gold shield is a terrible weapon. Why? Because gold is incredibly heavy and it is incredibly soft. Pure gold – it's incredibly weighty and it's incredibly soft, so you wouldn't want to go fight somebody with something that's heavy and soft. No – you would want to go to battle with something that's bronze. Bronze is very light, but it is very hard. It was actually like a technological innovation. If you had bronze shields, it was like you were on the technological leading edge of the day because they were light and they were incredibly hard. This is what you want to go fight your own battles with. This is what I want when God fights my battles. This is why it's a paradox – a gold shield. When Solomon and his men would go into the temple of the Lord, it was basically saying, "We don't fight our own battles. He fights our battles. We stand here by faith and we let Him do that which He does."

See, gold shields represents trust, surrender, submission, belief, faith. In fact, in Ephesians 6 when it talks about the armor of God, it says, "Pick up the shield of faith." And then, 1 Peter tells us that your faith is being refined like pure [gold]. So, did you ever think when you read that passage on the armor of God that the shield you pick up is a gold shield? That's why it says three times in that little run, "stand." Stand your ground. Stand firm. Why? Because you have a gold shield. It's a terrible weapon to run out and fight with. You got a gold shield, so stand firm because you have one who fights on your behalf. But if you want to wield a bronze shield, go for it. You just got to go fight your own battles. And you got to go do your own thing. And you got to go make it happen. And this is an exhausting way to live. In fact, it goes on to say, "Brandish the shield of faith, which can extinguish the fiery darts of the enemy." Here's the interesting thing about gold: do you realize gold, once it's been purified, gold

cannot catch on fire? Why? Because all the impurities have been burned out of it. And gold cannot burn. In fact, if you melt gold, it actually gets brighter and purer. Bronze, however, because it has so many impurities in it, it can catch on fire. It can burn when it's heated up. And it gets darker and even more stained and tarnished than it already was. And so, what I'm trying to tell you is what happened to me that morning as I read that and I felt like the Lord said, "See this example. This is what has happened to my people." Egypt, the world came in and stole the gold shields. Rehoboam rebuilt bronze shields. And one generation away, that's what they thought. That's all they thought they had – that they had to fight their own battles. "This is how it works. We've got it. We're good." Tarnished mixture, form of godliness but denying its power. And I felt like God was just showing me that for 2,000 years, it's like the world has come in and stolen the gold shields from the people of God. The world has come into our lives and stole the standard – the realities, the glory, the weight, the worth, the beauty of God and His kingdom and His ways. And we have rebuilt ourselves bronze shields and think we're better than the world because they have iron shields, wood shields, clay shields, or no shields. But you're not better than someone that has an iron shield because you have a bronze shield. If you don't have a gold shield, all of it is an inferior standard. This is the problem with bronze. It can look good on the outside for a few moments, but man, it takes a lot of polishing. It tarnishes. It turns green. Gold is created by God. Man can't make it. Bronze is not made by God; it's made by man, so it must be maintained by man. Gold is created by God, and it is sustained by God. Bronze is, "you have to do it. You have to make that marriage look good and you have to make that job and you have to make those kids and you have to make your religion. And you have to make yourself. And you have to put on a face." This is all we talk about face and vulnerability and authenticity – it's like bronze. It's like we hold on to this bronze all the time. And here's what happens: I think the world has come stolen the gold – the standard, the ways of God – and replaced it with a bunch of bronze. So we run around with a bunch of bronze marriages, bronze homes, bronze lives, bronze mindsets, bronze attitudes, bronze perspectives, bronze behavior, bronze work, bronze calendars, bronze churches – a form of godliness but no power. Claiming to know God but by our actions denying Him. Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say? These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

I think we've rebuilt a whole lot of things in bronze because that's what's been modeled to us. We're the two or three generations down from Rehoboam's men. All we've ever seen is bronze, so we think this is the standard. This is excellent. This is the height of all heights. No, no, no, no, no – Gold is the standard. This is the way of the kingdom. It's a totally different reality. In fact – if you can catch this – in heaven, there is no bronze. What are the streets made of in heaven? They are made of gold. Oh my gosh. Pure gold – so pure that it's as clear as glass, it says. So heavy, so weighty, so full of glory, so precious, so worthwhile. That if everything in heaven is made of gold, why do I want to build anything of bronze in this life? If my heart's cry is "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," then I can't build anything in my life that's of bronze. Which means what? I got to first identify and acknowledge that this is bronze. This is an inferior standard for what marriage can look like. This is an inferior standard of parenting. This is an inferior standard of being a young adult. I don't got to do all

of this. I can put this down and go pick that up. But you first have to acknowledge that. And here's the problem: we're so used to carrying bronze, even like good-hearted – like, for so many of us, I think this is doing the best we can with what we've got. And we get so used to carrying around what is light and hard that when we put it down and try to pick up a gold shield, it's like, "Oh my gosh, it's heavy. Oh my gosh, the ways of God are so heavy. Oh my gosh, memorizing Scripture. Oh my gosh, I can't do it. Oh my gosh, the fear of the Lord. It's so heavy. Oh my gosh, purity. Oh, holi– fear of the Lord. Oh my gosh. Being a disciple, carrying my cross. It's so heavy." It's not that it's heavy; it's just you're so used to carrying bronze. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, which means you were made for it. We just look at the fall short part. Forget that part. Catch the part that you were made for the glory of God – the weight, the worth, the gold, the heaviness. So, you might be used to carrying what is light and hard, but God wants to create within you the glory of God on this earth. And it might be heavy at first. But guess what? Second Corinthians tells us that as we behold Him and as we look to Him, we are transformed into His image and go from glory to glory. It's like He will strengthen me to hold that gold shield with purity and power and weight and substance as my eyes get fixed on Jesus. In fact, it tells us that one of the names of God is that He is our shield and our great reward. He actually is the gold shield; we've just been so used to bronze that we don't know anything else.

And so, this whole Different Way series – you're like, "Why are you telling us about shields?" Because this whole Different Way series is this invitation – just a different analogy to try to connect with some of you – is putting down the bronze and learning to pick up the gold. But when you put down the bronze, here's what happens: you're exposed. You're naked. You're open kimono right there. That's all you got. And most of us want to be in control so badly that we don't trust God enough for the transition of setting down the bronze to be able to pick up the gold, so we'll just hold the bronze because it's lighter and it's harder. And I know how to fight with this. I don't know how to stand with that. And the interesting thing about gold is gold is God-created. Bronze is man-made. So gold you can never create it, but you can go find it. Do you realize if our faith is like gold, then that's true of your faith? You can't create it, but you can seek God to find it. Why? Because faith comes by [hearing] and hearing by the Word of God. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author, and perfecter of our [faith]. The author of it. So just like I can't create gold, I can't create faith. But what I can do is I can look at Him. And when I look at Him and I listen to Him, He shows me where the gold is and I'm able to harvest it. And it becomes a gold shield in my life that I'm able to stand strong by. The only question is, do you have the courage to put down the bronze? To lift up your eyes to maybe just maybe – there's more over here than we've ever begun to even ask or imagine. That there is a greater standard. There is a deeper reality. There is more of the glory of God available for your life, your marriage, your parents, your children, your work, your struggles. Your entire life is made for the glory of God, so don't settle for the cheap substitutes, the form of godliness without power. Do you know what this is? This is the Pharisees. You see it in the New Testament. The Pharisees, they get a bad rap, but they were trying. They just built their lives full of bronze shields. This form of godliness but without any power, trying to polish and look good on the

outside.

In fact, do you know Isaiah? God even says, "My people have bronze foreheads." You know what that means? That means, "My people have hard-headed realities with thoughts that are mixed of the world and the kingdom." Impure, tarnished, corrupted, corroded. A cheap substitute and an inferior standard. And he wants to give you golden thoughts. That's why crowns in the kingdom are always made of [gold] – golden thoughts. Right? The Pharisees carried around bronze shields. And if you can catch this – Jesus – after the gold shields were stolen, that was a physical picture of a spiritual truth. Remember: the Old Testament, physical pictures, spiritual truths. Real things that really happened that God shows us. That was a physical picture of a spiritual truth. And for all those years until Jesus came, the gold standard of the kingdom was gone. And then, Jesus shows up and in one moment when He gives the sermon on the mount, He reclarifies the standard. The sermon on the mount, when He shows up and says, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." He says, "You've been carrying around a bunch of bronze; let me tell you what the kingdom is like." You have heard it said, "Do not commit adultery." I know that's what you think; it's about the act. No, no – it's about being a person who lives free from lust. He says, "You have heard it said, 'Do not commit murder.' But, man, God's kingdom is that your heart would be free from anger. You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor. Hate your enemy.' No, no – I want to teach you how to love your enemies and bless those who persecute you and pray for those who are against you." And He resets the entire gold standard, and it doesn't feel impossible because the whole message starts with "blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom." In other words, anyone and everyone who wants to live in the glory of God, it is here and available to them right here, right now, if they want it. They just have to put down their bronze shield. Does this make sense to you? See, for like three days, this is all – I mean – so I don't know what I preached on that Sunday. It was probably average. But I hope this makes it up to you because if you've been here for like the last 18 months, I've been telling you, you can see in the world God is moving His people from good American church to kingdom come. This is what I'm talking about. Good American church: many things. Kingdom come: one thing. Good American church: fear of man. Kingdom come: fear of the Lord. But good American church: entertainment. Kingdom come: worship. Good American church: consumerism. Kingdom come: communion. Good American church: selfishness. Kingdom come: servanthood. Good American church: transaction. Kingdom come: transformation. Good American church: polish and performance. Kingdom come: presence. Good American church: earth. Kingdom come: heaven. Good American church: bronze shields – a form of godliness with no power. Kingdom come: gold shields – divinity, royalty, soft, treasure, worth, value, uncorruptible, incorruptible, uncorrodable. It is the purity, the gravity, the glory, the beauty of God. This is what we're trying to become. Not just as a people but as individuals in our own lives on our own journey with Jesus.

We're just so used to bronze that gold feels radical, impossible, undoable. By yourself, it is. But with Jesus, it's normal. And it's time to change our mindset – change our perspective – and by faith, lay down some bronze. Even as I'm saying it to you, do you even start, "What is my

bronze? What is my form of godliness without power? What is my, 'I do it on my own?' What do I have to polish so it doesn't tarnish and rust and corrode? What have I taken and mixed together to make my own? Am I willing to trust Him enough to be exposed in the transition from the glory of man to the glory of God?" This is what a different way looks like. And for some of you, maybe this is the analogy that will help pop it to be like, "I want this." And everything we're talking about – the practices, all that stuff – is just putting down the bronze and learning to be able to pick up the gold because you can carry this in Jesus' name.

So here's what we're going to do. We are going to take communion together at all of our campuses because for this last week, we've been praying and fasting together as a church. Maybe you did that. Maybe you didn't. Maybe it went how you wanted it to. Maybe it didn't. Either way, that's okay. What we're doing as a people is we're seeking God and learning to lay down the bronze and pick up the gold. And communion is for anyone and everyone who has put their faith in Jesus, who by faith trusts Him, believes in Him, has surrendered and submitted to Him. And if that's you and you haven't done that yet, that's okay. I would just ask that you would pass it along until you do. Because here's what happens when you take communion. When you're taking communion by faith and you reach to that tray when it gets to you, in that moment by faith, when you take it, you're saying, "Jesus, You are the one thing. You are the main thing. You are the only thing. In the midst of my many things, in the midst of my side things, in the midst of my hustle things. In this moment when I take communion, I am reminding myself that He is the one thing. And I take communion to remember that that is true. Not only in this universe but in my life." And then, when we take communion, what happens is it reminds us that we're included in Christ. That I'm actually hidden in Him as I take His body and His blood. It's like Jesus is in me and I am in Him. Which means everything that is true about Him is now true of me. Which means I no longer live; it's Christ who lives within me. Which means I have died to sin and is no longer my master. It means I am a partaker of the divine nature. It means I am righteous. It means I am holy. It means that everything that is good of Jesus and true of Jesus and right about Jesus is now good and true and right in my life. When I take communion, it reminds me that I am no longer a sinner just saved by grace. I am a saint made holy by Jesus. That's what communion declares. You might think it's a religious thing and a cracker. It's a declaration that Jesus has made you a saint and declared you holy in His name. And as we take it, we're reminded that we are now a part of the body of Christ. Because this is the very body of Christ that was broken for you. And He has divinely assembled and placed you in it which means as you take it, you're reminded that you are divinely connected to the people around you. That we are His hands and His feet in this world and He is our head and we are united together one in spirit. And then, as we take it, what we're actually taking in is a fresh feeling of God's grace. Grace not just for forgiveness of sins. Yes, that happened. It's done. But grace – God acting in your life to do that which you cannot do on your own. A power, a strength, a victory that you are literally taking inside of you so that you can live the life that God has created and called you to live. His divine power has given you everything you need for life and godliness. Communion reminds me I don't have to carry a bronze shield on my own because His divine power has given me what I need to pick up

godliness and life, the glory, the very weight of God. When I am weak, then I am strong. His grace is sufficient for me. His power is made perfect in my weakness. That's what happens when I take communion. And then, what happens is I am reminded that this is how much Jesus loves me. That in a world of rejection and abandonment and feelings of insignificance and insecurity, feelings of a lack of worthiness or value, those moments where we don't feel desired or wanted or seen or known, or anybody cares about us, communion reminds me that God demonstrated His love for me. While I still was an enemy with Him, He did this for me. This is how we know what love is. That Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. You see, this small simple act of communion is a reminder that I wasn't made to run around with a bronze shield but that I was created for the very glory of God. And I don't have to go make it happen on my own because He's already made it happen for me. I just now open myself up to by faith receive His grace, His goodness, and His love.

You see, on the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He took the bread and He broke it. And He gave thanks. And He said, "This is my body broken for you. As often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me." Can we receive the life of Jesus together? A life reminding you that He is the one thing, that you are included in Him, that you are a part of His body. That His grace is working mightily from the inside out and that you are deeply loved. Because after the supper, He took the cup saying "This is the cup of the new covenant. My blood, which is going to be poured out for you. As often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me." Can we receive life from above? The goodness and the glory and the gravity of the kingdom of God together.

So Jesus, by faith today, I lay some man-made things down, and I look to you. The one thing, the different way, the narrow gate, the small road but the way of life. You are the one thing. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

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SEPTEMBER 8, 2024
SEASON THREE, EPISODE TWO
"PRAYER"

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today, and we are in season three of A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. We're in season three of a year-long series where we're taking all year to ask this question: Who am I becoming? And who do I want to become? And what does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? And how do I arrange and rearrange my life around Jesus and the way that He lived His life? And so, what we're saying all series is that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to first do the things that Jesus did. If we want to do the things that Jesus did – like be a man of peace and have joy and freedom and victory over temptation and deep connection with the Father and free from the love of money, free from the love of this world – then I first have to do the things that Jesus did: His practices, like prayer and fasting and Scripture and meditation and celebration and generosity. Like, if I want to do what Jesus did on the spot, I have to first do what Jesus did – I'll keep saying it until we all get it – behind the scenes. If I want Jesus's life, I have to first take on His lifestyle. If I want to do the work of Jesus, I have to first walk in the ways of Jesus. And if I want the health of Jesus, I have to first take on the habits of Jesus. And so, our theme verse is just simply, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't just try to be godly. Don't wait around and hope one day you'll become godly. Don't just assume that somehow God's going to send a lightning bolt to make you godly. Don't allow the world to train you to be worldly. Train yourself to be godly. Take on the practices, the spiritual disciplines, if you will, the lifestyle of Jesus that will shape and mold and form you more into the image and likeness of Jesus. And so, what we're doing is talking about these practices – the way Jesus lived His life – so we can open ourselves up to receive His grace so it will change us from the inside out. I'm not doing something for God; I'm opening myself up to God's grace so He can change me from the inside out. These practices have been practiced by the people of God for thousands of years because they're the way to be human, so we're learning to arrange our lives around that.

You see, one day at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when word got out about who He was and what He was doing, so many people started coming and going. I mean, they heard about Jesus, so the sick, the lost, the lame, the broken, the oppressed, the demon-possessed – people who were in great need – were constantly coming to Jesus with these major needs in their life. And I love that it says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went out to a solitary place where He prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for Him, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'" And in this moment, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, we discover that Jesus's life was arranged around prayer, not around people. That Jesus arranged his life around relationship with the Father, not the demands of the people. It's like it almost didn't matter what people wanted from Him. What mattered was arranging His life in prayer, communion, relationship with the Father – and everything else flowed from that reality. And you see it all throughout the Gospels over and over again. "The news about Him spread all the more, so that the crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." It's like the more people wanted stuff from Him, the more He removed Himself to go be with the Father. And I'm sure that super confused the disciples

because they're like, "Jesus, this is why you're here. Everyone is here. You cannot leave right now and go on the mountain. This is the whole point." And Jesus is like, "No, this isn't the whole point. The whole point is me being connected with the Father, and everything else flows out of that."

And not only was it early in the morning or late at night – it was all throughout the day in the middle of environments, events, experiences, activities. Jesus would just start praying. I mean, when He's raising Lazarus from the dead and there's all kinds of people weeping, mourning, wailing, waiting, wondering what He's going to do, it's just: "They took away the stone. And then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. And I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people.'" In other words, everyone's there. You would think He would just be talking to the people. No, He's just talking to God. And what you get when you read the Gospels is this sense that Jesus was always aware of the Father. He was always conscious of the presence of God with Him. And everything in His life flowed from that reality. It was like He was constantly connected with the Father, so He was able to be connected with everyone around Him. And you just see it over and over again. Another time, you watch Jesus is talking about going to the cross, and He just shouts out, like, "Father, glorify Your name." Like, imagine in the middle of the message, I just start talking to God. And you're like, "Are you talking to God? You're talking to us? We're not really sure." I think that's how it was with Jesus all the time. The disciples are like, "Who?" Because He was that aware of the presence of God with Him. You see him pray all the time. He prays at His baptism. He prays all night before He picks His disciples. He prays when the disciples come back with joy that the demons submitted to their name. He prays when there's great sorrow when Lazarus is dead. He prays on His way to the cross. He prays while He's on the cross. Over and over again what you get from Jesus is the sense of the awareness of the presence of God in His life. He acted like God was alive, like God was real, like God was available, like God cared, like God was deeply involved in the intimate realities of His life. You never see Jesus using religious words to talk to God or complicating it or pleading and begging God to just show up and do something. No, He just lived like God was real, God was available, and God cared about what was happening in His life. Early in the morning, late at night, all throughout the day.

In fact, His prayer life was so powerful that one day Jesus was praying. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." Like, these are men who knew how to pray; they're Jews. They had the prayer tradition, the prayer religion, the prayer dynamics. They were men who prayed, but there was something about the way Jesus prayed that was so personal and powerful that it moved them to ask Him to say, "We see how your life is arranged. Help us arrange our life like that." See, Jesus didn't see prayer as a last resort; He saw it as a lifestyle. And if we're honest, we see a prayer as a last resort, not as a lifestyle. But if prayer was how Jesus arranged His life and we want to do the things that Jesus did, then we have to arrange our life around prayer. And so, let's talk about the practice of prayer together. Because see, if we're honest, I think if I asked you, just about all of us in this room, we would all

say, "We wish we had a better prayer life. Oh, we want more. We want to go deeper. We want to connect with God. We want our prayer life to look more like Jesus' did." We have this heart within us, and yet, for somehow, it gets all confused and complicated. Like, prayer is so simple, and yet, for us, it feels so complicated. And it's so basic, and yet it often feels so mysterious. And most of us where we pray and when we pray is one of two things. One is when we're led to pray in a group of people or, two, when life has fallen apart and we have nothing left. I don't think we pray a whole lot more than that, if we're honest. And our perspective of prayer has been shaped by the way we've been raised and what we've experienced, what's been modeled to us and by the disappointments of perceived unanswered prayers. We think "I've prayed, and it didn't happen." So I make a theology from that and then live my life based on that false reality. And if I asked you and I said, "Hey, what do you think prayer is?" Like, if I had to get you to define: prayer is... How would you answer that question? Like, if you were going to define what prayer is, prayer is what? I think if we're honest, across the majority of Christianity, prayer would be defined as asking God for things. I think for the average person, we would have reduced it down to prayer is asking God for things. And you might not use those words, but some way, shape, or form, that's what a lot of us really believe it is. But prayer is so much more than asking God for things. See, here's what prayer is. Prayer is two things. It's intimacy and authority. Prayer is intimacy with God and it's authority with God. Different words for you: prayer is relationship and rulership. It's relationship with God and it's ruling and reigning with God. Prayer is communion and it's commissioning. It's communing deep with God and it's the commissioning authority that we have to rule and reign with Him in our assignment on this earth.

See, prayer is about intimacy with God first and foremost. Relationship, connection, friendship, talking and listening, authenticity, vulnerability, face-to-face and heart-to-heart where we laugh and joke. Do you ever laugh and joke with God? Where we weep and have sorrow, where we share our secrets and share hearts, when we look Him deep in the face and He looks deep into our soul. It's this sense of intimacy and relationship and depth and beauty. And it's also authority, where we bind and loose and remove and replace and declare and prophesy. The problem is we jump to authority without intimacy. We jump to what God can do through us or for us as opposed to just who God is and wanting Him for Him. In fact, this is why Jesus says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you." Can you see it? Intimacy and authority. And the problem is we jump to authority without intimacy. I mean, think about Moses. Moses had such great intimacy with God that he had the authority to confront Pharaoh. David had such great intimacy with God that he had the authority to take out Goliath. Peter had such intimacy with Jesus that he had the authority to preach the first gospel message. Our problem is that we jump to authority without intimacy. And if you pursue authority, you will miss intimacy. But if you pursue intimacy, you will always find authority. And when we reduce prayer down to just asking God for things, we miss the whole thing and it unravels on itself.

So, we get disappointed with all these unanswered prayers. But maybe it's not that they were unanswered. Maybe it's just: I bypassed intimacy to get to authority instead of choosing intimacy and then allowing authority to flow from that. In fact, here's a great question to ask yourself: Why all throughout the Bible does God say, "Ask whatever you wish, and I will give it to you?" Why does God say that so much throughout Scripture? It's constantly over and over again. "Ask me. Ask me. Ask me. Ask me. Ask me." Why? Why does He say that? Is it so I can have what I want? Is it so my life can be easy? Is it so that things can go my way? No. He tells us to ask for whatever we want because He is empowering us to rule and reign with Him. He has commissioned us as His delegated authority on this earth, and so He has empowered us to ask for things that accomplish His will on this earth. "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Extend my kingdom. The kingdom is within you. Whatever you ask for, bind and loose." All of those things are so that we might demonstrate and declare His kingdom on this earth, an authority that flows from intimacy. And this is why James says, "You have not because you ask not. And when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives that you may spend it on yourself." I think a whole broken thought process of our prayer life is asking God for things that are good for me. And He says, "No, I've empowered you to ask me for things that are good for the world – that bring forth my kingdom and my goodness and my glory because you're my representative on this earth." You have a very important assignment, and you could not do it without this commissioning or empowerment, and you cannot do it without this intimacy. So maybe we need to think about it differently. I mean, okay guys, just think about it like this with me for a second: Imagine if all your wife ever asked you to do was her to-do list, her honey-do list for you. The only time she ever talked to you was, "Hey, I want you to paint the garage, and I want you to clean up the landscaping. And I want you to hang this up. And I want you to fix this. And I want you to take the kids here. And I want you to call my mom at the end of the day." Imagine if – you're like, "I'll do all that. Don't make me..." – imagine if all she ever did was ask you to do things. Paradoxically, you actually want to do those things for her, but you also want her to see you and pursue you and have intimacy with you and ask you questions and actually listen to what you have to say and share the secrets of her heart with you. Moms, imagine if all your kids ever did was ask you for stuff, because that would never happen, but imagine if it did. And all your kids ever said was, "Mom, I need lunch. Mom, I need you to order this on Amazon. Mom, I need you to take me here. Mom, can you fill out this form? Mom, can you get me this?" Paradoxically, you want to do all those things for them, but you also want them to talk to you about their day and what's going on in their life and what they're struggling with and what they're afraid of and what they're celebrating and how their friends are doing. Students, imagine if your parents, if all they ever told you to do was to go and do stuff, right? "Do your homework. Clean this up. Stop doing that. Get a haircut. Don't wear this outfit." Whatever the things are. You don't mind if your parents ask you to do all that stuff. But in your heart, you're like, "But I want you to see me and notice me and value what I have to say. Ask me what I think about that." Are you catching me? There's so much more than just asking God for stuff.

In fact, here's what I would define it for you is: prayer is talking with God about the life we're living together. That's prayer. It's talking with God about the life we're living together because I am not living this life independent from Him, whether I realize it or not, and He has chosen to not live without me. So, prayer is talking with God about this life we're living together. That was Jesus early in the morning, late at night, in the middle of it all, talking with God about this life that we're living together. And that is that big word that I have a love-hate relationship with, and it's the word connection. I have a love-hate relationship with the word connection. Like, connection is so beautiful. If you've ever been deeply connected with someone, it's an amazing thing. Two unique, distinct individuals. They're so different, and yet they come together. And when they come together, there is this profound unity and alignment and agreement. There is this mutual submission, mutual respect, mutual love to the point where the two become one, where life just flows back and forth between two people. One can put a thousand to flight. Two, though, can put 10,000 to flight. So, it's incredibly beautiful, and yet it's incredibly frustrating because the word connection is often very subjective. What makes one person feel connected is not the same as another person's feeling of connected. One person's experience or preference or sense of whether or not we're connected, it can be very different, so it can be very frustrating. Okay, but put this in context with God. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you are forever, for all eternity, connected with God. You are as connected with God in this moment if you're in Christ than you will ever be in your entire life. Why? Because the moment I put my faith in Him, He just grafted me into the vine. The moment I put my faith in Him, He just placed me into His body. The moment I put my faith into Him, the spirit of the living God dwells inside of me. I am in Him. He is in me. We are one. The Father and Him have moved into my life. I have died. My life is now hidden with Christ in God. I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live. It's Christ who lives within me. You are as connected with God in this moment as you will ever be. Prayer then is simply how you experience the connection that already exists. Prayer does not connect you with God. If it was prayer that connected you with God, then it would be on you to connect yourself with God, not on the finished work of Jesus. You are not greater than Jesus. You do not have the ability to connect yourself with God. Only Jesus can do that. And once I realized I've been deeply connected with God, prayer is how I actually experience and feel and open myself up to the connection that He says already exists. It's like a marriage. When a husband and wife get married, in that moment when they get married, the two become one. They are as connected in that moment as they will ever be in their marriage. The two have just become one. But if they want to experience that connection and feel that connection and enjoy that connection, then they have to have communion and conversation and face-to-face living. That's how they access that which is already real. And if we are the bride of Christ, then the two have become one. And for us to practically enjoy the realities of that connection, we have to get face-to-face with Jesus and talk and listen and become aware of His presence in our daily life.

Are you with me on this? See, prayer is not something God demands from you. It's something He longs for with you. It's such a different way of thinking about it. It's so much more than asking God for stuff. I mean, have you ever just stopped to think about what the invitation

actually is? That the Ancient of Days, that the Rock of Ages, that the Great I Am, that the Holy One, that the Eternal One wants to talk to you? That the Good Shepherd, that the Spring of Living Water, the Bread of Life, the Prince of Peace wants to listen to you? That the Lion of Judah and the Lamb who was slain, the one who has fire in His eyes and lightning in His hands, the one whom the mountains melt before and yet who does not snuff out a smoldering wick, the one whose voice is as loud as many waters and quiet as a whisper, the one whose foundation is righteousness and justice and yet is gentle and humble in heart wants to experience connection with you? Have you ever thought about it like that? Maybe prayer isn't a religious duty or asking God for things. Maybe it's the greatest invitation of your life. And maybe – just maybe – that's why Jesus wasn't super worried about who wanted what from Him. He was super interested in experience that connection that already existed with the Father. I mean, do you ever just stop and ask yourself the question, when God made you, why did he make you with a mouth, with ears, and with a heart? Surely, He can't have made you with a mouth so that you can gossip and slander and grumble and criticize and complain and curse. Surely, He didn't give you ears so that you could listen to accusations and condemnations and lies and deception. Surely, He didn't give you a heart so you could spend your life loving the things of this world. No, He gave you a mouth so you could speak to Him. He gave you ears so you could listen to Him, and He gave you a heart so you could give and receive love with the one who is life itself. Prayer is talking with God about this life we're living together. When was the last time you talked with God about the life you and Him are living together? Because He's got just as much, if not more, than you do vested into that life. And when we get that, things change. In fact, as Jesus was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. If when Jesus prayed, He changed, how much more then when we pray, will we change? His face changed. Why? Because when you're face-to-face with the God of glory, you can't help but reflect that glory. When you're face-to-face with the beauty and the holiness and the radiance and the majesty of Jesus, you can't help but become bright and literally reflect and radiate the very beauty and reality of heaven.

Have you ever seen people that really pray? I mean, I'm not talking like the formal King James heavy religious language. I'm talking like they get face-to-face with God. Their face is different, isn't it? You can see it. Why? Because it's the glory of the Lord radiating from God onto them now into the world around us. Because they've chosen to arrange their life around prayer, communion with God, as opposed to people, busyness, activities, work, hobby, school, so on and so forth. You with me on this?

Hopefully, this is creating a sense of repentance, changing thinking in your mind. And let me just try to do this for you; let me build your faith. Okay. Let me build your faith that everything that is required for you to have a powerful prayer life has already been taken care of. Just catch these verses with me. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." We can come boldly to God when we're in need because of what Jesus has done. "In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." Freely and confidently, I can approach God at any time at

any place with whatever is going on in my life. "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer," there it is again, "believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." God wants us to ask. He wants to empower us. He wants to give us authority, to have a faith that what we ask for will bring His kingdom into the world around us. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; He who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." If we ask, seek, and knock, we will receive, find, and the door will be opened in Jesus' name. "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge." He cares. He sees. He's interested in the pain, the brokenness, the disappointment, the sorrow, the heaviness, the confusion, the questions poured out. He cares. "But He listened! He heard my prayer! And He paid attention to it!" You can hear this guy as he's writing like, "Oh, my gosh! He actually listened! He actually heard my prayer! Not that super-spiritual person's prayer, my prayer. And He paid attention to it!" Yeah. He listened to you. He heard your prayer, and He paid attention to what was on your heart. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, yes? Okay, then your prayer is powerful and effective. It might not change what you want out there immediately, but it certainly will change you in here. One more. "We do not know what we ought to pray for," sometimes we just have no idea, "but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Even when I don't know what to pray or how to pray, the spirit is praying in me and through me. So, why can't you pray again? So, what is the barrier of talking to God about the life you're living together? The only barrier is right here.

See, here's the interesting thing about prayer: your prayer life probably reveals your theology more than anything else in your life. If you want to know what you really believe, look at how you pray. Why? Because it reveals what I really believe about who God is, who I am, and how life works. My prayer life reveals whether or not I believe God is available, accessible, close, interested, whether or not He's good and kind or harsh and angry. My prayer life reveals what I believe about myself. Am I worthy? Am I valued? Am I seen? Am I wanted? Does God care about me? And it reveals what I believe about how life works. Because when I don't pray, I'm either saying, "I'm doing my own thing, so I don't care," or I think it doesn't really change anything anyway, so I got to make it happen. But if I do pray, it communicates that God is deeply interested in the details of my life. What does the way you've arranged your life around prayer or the lack thereof show you about your own theology? Because it's so easy to sit in church and say we believe this and we believe that and cheer for this and cheer for that, but then, actually, practically look at it. It reveals what you really believe. And there are two main reasons that I think a lot of us never progress in prayer. Like, wherever we are and we've been at that juncture for 20 years, and we don't progress and go forward. And the two reasons I think are one is I don't think we have a heart for prayer. And two is I don't think we have the patience to practice praying.

The first problem is I just don't think we have a heart for prayer. I just don't think we have a heart for it. We're not interested in it. It's really not all that important for us. Because what I

would say to you is the heart to pray is more important than the ability to pray. What a lot of us will say is, "I don't know how to pray. It's too hard. It's too complicated. I'm not sure how to do it. I'm not sure that..." No, that's not really it. The heart to pray is more important than the ability to pray. That's why the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." Lord, teach us. I have a heart to learn. I don't know how to do it, but I have a heart to do it. Will You teach me? And you will never have a heart to pray until you first have a heart for God. Because why would I have a heart to talk to someone that I don't have a heart for? The mouth speaks of the overflow of the heart, and ears are always tuned to that which they're interested in. So, what are your mouth, your words, and your ears telling you about what your life is really interested in? I mean, have you ever seen a grandparent with a young child? They don't care what words the kid uses. Babbling, goo-goo-ga-ga, making things up. The grandparent is face-to-face with the child, connecting, communing, relating. They don't say, "When you figure out how to say it right, then I'll take you for ice cream. Better go find a friend to figure that one out. Your older brother hasn't figured it out yet either, so don't ask him." But that's what we think about God. That's why Jesus says, "When you pray, you don't have to be like the pagans and babble and use a bunch of words." Father already knows what you need; He already cares. It's not about the right words, the religious words. Look at Jesus' prayer life. You won't find a single religious word He used. You won't see Jesus jumping through any hoops with this desperate pleading like, "Oh, God, please, come, hear us, care." He knew God was right there, so He just talked to God like He was right there, and yet still could say, "Not my will but Yours." And then, the second reason is I just don't think we have the patience to practice it. We want a 30-year relationship in 30 seconds. Well, 30 seconds of prayer, and I want it to equal 30 years of intimacy. It's like a marriage. It's like you don't get to 30 years without 30 years, but you have to have the patience to learn, to talk, to listen, to try. That worked. That didn't work. This experienced connection, this didn't. That I think moved the heart of God, this didn't. We don't have the patience for it. In fact, what I would tell you is if you want to learn how to pray, the best way to learn how to pray is to [pray]. Ah, my gosh. It's not to listen to a sermon series on prayer. It's not to read 17 books on prayer. It's not to podcast. "Oh, I'm going to podcast this great podcast on how-to..." It's just called pray. It's just like, try it. Like learn and grow and fail and make mistakes and get around people who do know how to pray. And you'll find yourself learning how to pray. And read the Gospels on how people talk to Jesus. He is the image of God, so when the disciples ask Him questions, that's an acceptable way to pray. When Nicodemus brings his doubts, that's an acceptable way to pray. When the woman with the flow of blood just interrupts Jesus, that's an acceptable way to pray. When the blind man, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me," it's an acceptable way to pray. You just got to practice.

Listen, like 2019, 2020, somewhere in there, we realized we weren't a praying church. I never shared this with you guys. We just realized like as leadership, we're like, "We're not really a praying church. We're a worshipping church. We're a presence-based church. We're a missional church" – a lot of great things, but we weren't really a praying church. So, we're like, we had it in our heart, "We want to be a praying church." And so, we started Tuesday Night Prayer as the only thing we knew what to do. And at first, they were like these sad little 50-person

gatherings. If you are one of those 50 people, we owe you so much for helping us. We didn't know how to do it. And they were weak and they were struggling, but we were trying. And then, for about two years, we would make our staff meetings – every staff meeting we had – everybody had to stand up in a circle, and we would take about two minutes, and everybody would pray out loud all at the same time. Because half of learning to pray is getting over yourself, is getting rid of the self-consciousness of what anyone else is going to think or what they hear. You're not talking to them anyways. Jesus didn't care what anybody— Listen, when Jesus was praying to the Father, they're like, "Oh, it thundered." That's what they thought. When the Father spoke back, "Oh, it was thunder." It wasn't thunder; it was God speaking. Jesus doesn't care. They're like, "Oh, no." Some people were like, "It was an angel." He's like, "That's not an angel. That's me and God. What? That's fine." We have to get out of our own self-consciousness. And then, serve teams started doing that and Circles started doing it. Then, on the weekends, we started introducing prayer elements. You didn't even know this, and like a frog in a boiling water, we've just been turning that thing up. And now, we can sit here and be like, "Hey, we're praying for back to school. You pray for your family." Not, "here's 19 verses on the slide and a perfect little template for you to pray." And all of a sudden, you've probably seen, if you've been a part of this church, your prayer life has progressed. Why? Because it was something that we had the patience to just practice. To try. To say, "Let's learn how to do it." And now, Tuesday Night Prayers have like seven to eight-hundred people, and they're one of the most important things we do. And now, we pray in service like God is here, like God is real, like God is available. You have to just— you have to practice though. You have to practice. We want to run a marathon before we put our sneakers on. "Lord, teach us to pray." And then, here's what He says.

"This, then, is how you should pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Jesus says, "here's a great template to start if you don't know how to talk to God." It just starts with "our Father." The most important two words in the entire Lord's prayer, "our Father." Who is the "our"? The "our" is us and Jesus, meaning that I have the same access to the Father as Jesus does, that He hears my prayers to the same way He heard Jesus' prayers. That He will speak to me to the same depth that He spoke to Jesus. Our Father. He's with me, He's for me, and He loves me, and He's in heaven. The superior perspective, the superior reality, the higher thoughts, the higher ways. Hallowed be your name – worship, affection, attention. Tell Him who He is and how grateful you are for Him and all the good things that He is and that He does. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, submission, surrender, and trust. God, I choose to submit and surrender my will to Yours, and I trust You that your ways are better and higher. Give us today our daily bread. It's okay to ask Him for things. He already knows your needs before you ask Him, and He withholds no good things from those who love Him. So, if He withholds it from you, it's because it's not good for you or what He's doing right now. It means He might be working all things together for the good behind the scenes. And notice that it's sandwiched

right there in the middle. It's not first and it's not last. It's intimacy that leads to authority. Forgive us our debts as we've forgiven our debtors. In other words, we come to God and we confess and we repent. You don't have to come to God to be forgiven forever; He's already forgiven you in Jesus' name. But I come and I confess and I repent. And I come into agreement and alignment with Him to change the course and the direction of my life. And when I'm receiving His forgiveness, I can't help but forgive others. Listen to me, it's impossible to live with an offended heart when you're a person who has arranged their life around prayer. That's why Jesus was not offended at the people who wanted to kill Him or the Pharisees or Peter or Judas. You would tell the story about Judas for the rest of the day, for all eternity. "Let me tell you about this guy." But He wasn't offended. Why? Because His life was arranged around prayer. And when you get face-to-face with grace and truth, you get face-to-face with love in its purest form. When you get face to face with goodness itself, you don't have the energy even or the interest or the desire to hold on to offenses. And lead us not us not temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Give us victory, God. All temptation, when you're tempted, it's because you believe God is withholding good from you. You wouldn't be tempted to do this if you didn't think there was something good for it in you, so we're praying in a sense, "God, help me believe that what You have is good for me because Satan, the evil one, he has bad will for me. You have good will for me. And so, give me the belief that what You're inviting me to do is for my good."

See, there's so many different ways to pray. Intercessory prayer, contemplative prayer, silent prayer, breath prayer, prophetic prayer, petition prayer. There's so many different ways. But here's what I want to try to pull this whole thing together for you in this: prayer is just simply being aware of God. That's it. In any form or fashion of prayer, it's simply being aware of God. And when I become aware of God, my life becomes full of the realities of God. That's prayer. Just being aware of God. And yes, there is a time to talk and listen. And there's a time to worship and a time to wait. And there's a time to ask and a time to receive. There's a time to give and to take, a time to sing a song, a time to be silent, a time to ask questions, a time to be quiet, a time to bless and a time to be blessed.

But at the end of the day, all prayer comes down to the simple fact of just being aware of God's presence in my life. When the disciples were about to sink in the storm, when they became aware of Jesus, that was prayer. And their life became full of the reality of God and peace took over the storm. When the man with the demon-possessed son who had tried everything to heal him became aware of Jesus in front of him – "Jesus, if You're able, take pity on us and help us." In that moment, his life was full of the reality of the healing of God. The woman with the alabaster jar, when she became aware of God, she poured it out on His feet as a prayer, as offering, as communion and connection with Him. And the whole room became full of the reality of the fragrance of heaven. It's simply being aware of God. This is what Jesus and David did. "I have set the Lord always before me." I'm always aware of Him. And here's the paradox: the more you try to be aware of Him, the more you realize how much of your life you live unaware of Him. But it doesn't defeat me; it inspires me that there are so many more hours

of my day where I can learn to be aware of God's presence in my life. Like Jesus, not just early in the morning or late at night – though those are important – in the middle of the day, in the middle of the business meeting, in the middle of the class, in the middle of the argument, in the marriage fight at home, in the middle of driving the road, in the middle of the confusion, in the middle of all the stuff. Prayer is not, "Oh, God, do something." Prayer is, "Oh, God, I choose to be aware that You're here. And I want to talk to You about this life that we're living together." That's prayer. In fact, this is why it says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you." God's will is for you to pray continually. If prayer was a religious service or early in the morning or late at night or in a quiet room by yourself – if that was the extent of it – then this verse would say, "24 hours a day, you need to sit in a little closet by yourself and petition God to do things on this earth." Is that what this verse is saying? No. It's saying, "God's will is that you would be aware of Him through all of your life, all day long because He is available, He is accessible, and He is good."

A while back, the Lord just challenged me on something in my own life. I'm a thinker, and I'm always trying to think and I'm always trying to make things better. And the Lord challenged me and He just said, "Stop thinking about it and start praying about it." That was really impactful to me because you might think, "Well, stop thinking about it; start praying about it. Does that mean I take all my thoughts and just be like, 'Oh, God, please desperately I need you'?" No, it was like, as I'm thinking, be aware of God and invite Him into those thoughts. Invite Him into those spaces; accept His invitations for what He wants to do. I think for a lot of us, we could take note from that. Stop thinking about it – the marriage, the sickness, the problem, the child, the situation, the finance, the circumstance – and start praying about it. Not petitioning and begging God to do things but talking to Him like He is real, like He cares, and He is deeply involved.

Last verse, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Do not be anxious. Anxiety is the present without God. That's all anxiety is. Anxiety is the present without God. I'm so in my head and I'm so full of thoughts and I'm so stressed and overwhelmed and afraid and heavy. There's so much going on inside of here. It's like I'm living in the present but without God. And therefore, this massive anxiety is induced in my life. When I think about things without God, it creates real feelings in my life – anxiety, stress, fear, a sense of being overwhelmed – and those feelings create physiological responses, like panic attacks and high blood pressure and a fast heart rate and shakiness and the inability to sleep. All those things are real, and they're all tracked back to, I have created a thought life, an arranged life, that lives in the present but without God. Prayer, in a sense, is the opposite of anxiety. It's living in the present aware of God. But prayer is not the antidote to anxiety. The Prince of Peace is. We read this verse and we think prayer is the antidote to anxiety. No, the Prince of Peace is the antidote to anxiety. Prayer just helps me become aware of that which already exists. When I pray, I become aware of the Prince of Peace, and the Prince of Peace guards my heart and my

mind. But when I am not aware of God, anxiety comes and raids my heart and my mind. So, maybe I need to stop thinking about it and start praying about it. Because when I start praying about it, the Prince of Peace comes and guards my heart and mind. This is how I arrange my life differently to go in a different way to become the kind of person that Jesus was. I can't live with peace without the way He arranged His life. And this prayer doesn't connect me to God; in Jesus, I'm already as connected as I will ever be. It helps me experience, feel, believe, understand, embody, have access to this reality that He's always right there. Right there. Jesus never prayed like He was out there. He always prayed like He was right here.

So, here's your practice plan for the week. If you're new and you say, "What's this?" At the end of every one of these practices, we're just doing a practice plan during the week because we don't want to just be people that come to church. We want to be people who are training to be godly. Here's your practice plan for this week. Start every morning and end every day simply by becoming aware of God. I bet you that's not what you thought I was going to put for the practice plan on prayer. You thought I was going to say, "Pray this and do this and ask. Make a prayer list." No. Start every morning by being aware of God. Before you touch your phone, before you yell at the kids to get up, before you look at the homework for that last minute of studying, start your day by just being aware of God. God, I choose to start today by just being aware of You. I acknowledge that You're here, that You're with me. You might want to pray the Lord's prayer, our Father in heaven. You might want to recite Psalm 23. Maybe you sit down and read a few Psalms. Maybe you read the daily chapter that we're going through. I don't know, but start the day by being aware of God before you're aware of anything else. And then, end every day by simply becoming aware of God. Like, before you get in bed and scroll on your phone, put it down, sit down. I'm not talking like an hour. I'm talking like three to five minutes. Sit there and just be like, "God, I just choose to be aware of You at the end of this day." And maybe there's things you want to thank Him for during the day. Maybe there's things you're disappointed in that you invite Him into the life you're living together and you want to talk about. Maybe you're afraid to go to sleep; talk to Him about that. Maybe again, you pray the Lord's Prayer or Psalm 23 or you read a Psalm.

But before you lay down, even when you're become... "God, I'm aware of You that as I go to sleep, You're in my sleep. As I lay down, whatever dreams I have, I'm believing that You're in my dreams. And that when I wake up, You're going to be right here. Because wherever I go, there You are." That's how you fire up a prayer life. Not by trying to pray for an hour with other church people that you feel like we're not even in the same category of conversation here. And as you start becoming aware of God in the morning and the evening, watch as you probably start becoming aware of Him a little bit at the time throughout the day. Just this week, okay? This is all I'm asking you to do for this week. Can we do that? Sort of. Some of us, maybe. But remember, so here's... This is my really nice to you, ready? This is as nice as I can say it. If you're here with us, this spring, we put on our sneakers, we walked around the block, and we learned how to run three to five miles. I told you, you needed to keep your stamina up over the summer because we're going to keep moving to that marathon reality. So, we are now moving

to the five-to-ten-mile range. So, my encouragement for you is there's a number of practices week after week after week that we're going through. Here's where you're lucky. I do not have enough weeks left in the year to split any practice into two weeks. So, this is all you're getting on prayer. We could do a whole series on prayer, but for this, so my encouragement for you is, try this. What if we just did some things that Jesus did so we could do some things that Jesus did? Because I want to become the kind of person that lives and acts like God is real, accessible, and available in every moment of my life.

So, Jesus, thank You that You have given us this great invitation to be in deep communion with You. I pray for every person here. Every person that's in Christ. That they would know that they are deeply connected with You, regardless of how they feel about it. I pray for every person that's here that is not there yet on their journey, that they would call out to You. Because there is a God who wants to be deeply connected with You in Jesus' name. And I pray, Lord, that You would teach us as a people how to be a praying people. That we would experience and feel and access that connection that is so real and so supernatural and so powerful. God, I pray this week that every one of us, we would just have that little bit of faith to in the morning and in the evening arrange the first five minutes of our day and the last five minutes of our day around being aware of Your presence in our life, because You are here, and You are worthy of being arranged around. Teach us to pray. Show us a different way. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



SEPTEMBER 15, 2024
SEASON THREE, EPISODE THREE
"FASTING"

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad you're here with us today. Wherever you are, whatever campus you're at, whatever's going on in your life – I just want to remind you that God is with you, God is for you, God sees you. He loves you. God is alive. God is real. God is here. God is available. And so, may you experience and encounter the love of Jesus today.

You see, we are in this series together just called A Different Way. We're talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. And we're taking a look, if you will, at the lifestyle of Jesus – not just His commands, but His lifestyle. Because Jesus came not just to save us, not just to show us what the Father was like; He came to show us what it was like to be human, what it was like to be fully alive, what it was like to be a man or a woman in relationship with God. He came to teach us how to live our lives. And there's these practices, these disciplines, these habits, if you will, that Jesus lived in His lifestyle that are meant to teach us how to live our life if we want to be fully human and fully alive in Jesus' name. And so I love this verse that says, "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." You see, this whole series is about standing at a crossroads. It's about acknowledging that there is a way of this world, a wide road that leads to destruction with a broad gate. But then there's a narrow gate, a small road, an ancient path that often feels like it is overgrown and covered up, but people of God have been walking it for thousands of years. It is a different way. It is a good way. And it is the way that you will find rest for your souls. And even though it feels like it might be covered up and everybody else isn't going that way, it's the different way that Jesus invites us to. And it's filled with practices and disciplines and habits that Jesus Himself modeled for us, that the people of God have lived for thousands of years. And that's what we're trying to wrestle through together. You see, last week, we talked about the practice of prayer. And we just said prayer is talking with God about the life we're living together. It's simply being aware of God's presence in your life. And that prayer is not something God demands from you; it's something He longs for with you. And that practice leads us perfectly into this week's practice because, without prayer, you can't do this week's practice.

You see, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after 30 years of hiddenness, He's baptized by John the Baptist. The heavens tear open. The Spirit descends upon Him. The Father declares, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." And immediately, Jesus went into the desert and He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. "Then, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil after..." everybody say it, "fasting 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, 'If you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Jesus is baptized. He goes into the desert. He fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. At the end of that experience, Satan comes tempts Him three times. Three times, Jesus finds victory over that temptation. And after 40 days and 40 nights of fasting, "When the devil had finished all his tempting, he left him, and Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit." This is profound. Jesus goes into the desert. He fasts for 40 days and 40

nights. And when we would think Jesus was at His weakest, Satan comes to tempt Him. But in that moment, we find that fasting didn't make Jesus weak; it actually made Him strong. Fasting didn't make Jesus weaker; it made Him stronger. He fasted from food, fasted from the things of this world, fasted from flesh in order to feast on God, to be filled with the Spirit of the living God. And when He tells Satan, "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," in that moment, He is reminding us that we are not sustained by the things of this world. We are sustained by God Himself – that we are sustained by the Word of God, by the grace of God, by the Spirit of God. Jesus is declaring that our life is not about the physical; it's about the Spiritual. That we're not sustained by the visible but by the invisible – not by the temporal but by the eternal. That we are not sustained by the earthly but by the heavenly. And He finds this incredible victory over Satan. And it says, " " He poured out His flesh and He came back in the Spirit. And He starts His ministry almost with this declaration of saying, "this ministry will not be done in the flesh. It will only be done in the Spirit." That this ministry is not going to be about the striving and the strength of the flesh. No, it is going to be about submission and surrender and the power of the Spirit. And for three years, we watched Jesus walk in the power of the Spirit. He destroys the works of the devil. He heals those under the power of the devil. He demonstrates and declares what the kingdom of God looks like. And then, at the end of His life, He goes with the disciples and He has the Last Supper. I don't know if you've ever caught this or not, but the Last Supper is the last time Jesus eats until He is resurrected again.

So after the Last Supper, He fasts from the Last Supper all the way into the resurrection. And He has the meal with the disciples. And then, He takes them to this garden of Gethsemane, where they're going to pray together. And Jesus knows what's ahead of Him. He knows the cross. He knows the trial. He knows for the first time in all of eternity is about to be separated from the Father, so He fasts and prays and He cries out to the Father. "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me – but not my will, but yours be done." And three times He prays that, and He comes back to His disciples, and it says, "Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. 'Simon,' He said to Peter, 'are you really asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. For the Spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'" He comes back to the disciples and they're sleeping. And He says, "Guys, the Spirit is willing, but the body is weak." In other words, He says, "Your flesh has not been trained to live up to your Spirit yet." Your Spirit is willing. I mean, it was just a few short moments before this that the disciples are declaring that they will never deny Jesus, that they will die with Him. So their Spirit was willing. The problem is their body was weak. Their body hadn't been trained to live up to the desire of their Spirit. And so, they quickly cater into temptation when Jesus is arrested, and they deny Him and they betray Him and they all run away. But because Jesus watched and prayed – because He fasted and prayed – He was willing and able to submit His flesh to His Spirit and go to the cross with humility – with holiness, with purity, with submission and surrender. And I think it is incredibly profound that Jesus starts His ministry and ends His life with the practice fasting. And if Jesus did that, how much more so do we need to do it?

Now, I know the moment I say we're going to talk about the practice of fasting I've lost about 90% of you. Because of all the practices we're going to talk about in this series, fasting probably feels the most archaic. It probably feels the most ancient, the most irrelevant, maybe the most religious. Like, for most of us, the extent of fasting is we fast when we have to get bloodwork done or a medical procedure. And we grumble and complain about that 24 hours like nothing else. That's the extent of fasting for most of us. And even though the world has covered up that ancient path, it still is the ancient path and way of Jesus. And if you look throughout Scripture, you will find that the people of God from beginning to end are people of fasting. Moses fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the presence of God. He was sustained by God and God alone. No food, no drink, 40 days – the presence of God kept him alive.

Elijah, it says, feasted on the bread of heaven and then fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. The Israelites fasted from the food of this world and ate manna, bread from heaven, life from above, for 40 years. And it says their clothes didn't wear out and their feet did not swell. Daniel fasted and found the favor of the king. Nehemiah fasted and found the favor of the king. Esther fasted and found the favor of the king. Catch the pattern there. Fasting somehow seems to bring with it the favor of the king. The entire city of Nineveh fasted when Jonah preached a message of destruction and repentance, and they repented and changed their destiny. The Jewish people fasted regularly as a way of life. So the disciples knew what some of what fasting was like. It was a part of their lifestyle. And then, we see it all throughout the New Testament church. It is a way of the people of God. And even though it's an ancient path that might feel irrelevant – that might not be a practice in your life – there's so much to learn if you can just track with me. And if your flesh is already crying out, "This is the one we're not interested in," then this is the one you need to be interested in.

You say, "Okay, so then what is fasting?" Fasting is just simply abstaining from food to seek God. It's choosing to say, "I don't want to hunger and thirst for the things of this world. I want to hunger and thirst for God. I want to bring my flesh into submission to my Spirit. I want to deny myself the things of this world so I can make room for the things of God." Fasting is simply fasting from food to feast on God. And Jesus talks about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, greatest message ever preached, teaching us what the kingdom of God was like. He says, "When you fast..." and this is so important. Jesus didn't command fasting, nor did He dismiss it. "When you fast" – He doesn't command you to fast, but nor does He dismiss it and say, "You don't need to fast." When you fast. Like every other practice we're talking about, these are not necessarily commands from God. They are invitations from God. You don't have to do this for God. There's no bonus brownie points in it in heaven. No, no. This is about opening myself up to the grace of God, entering into the practice with God to experience Him in deeper ways. "When you fast" – not you have to fast and not you shouldn't fast. He doesn't command it. He doesn't dismiss it. He puts it right there with two other things, "when you pray" and "when you give." So, somehow Jesus seems to put fasting in the same category as prayer and giving as if they're important. And He says, "When you fast," coming right off of the

backside of saying, "Don't be a person who has anger in your heart. Don't be a person who has lust in your heart. Don't be a person who doesn't have integrity. Learn to love your neighbor when you fast." And then, it goes right into a whole section on not loving money, not being a person of worry, and not being a person who judges others – as if Jesus is saying this practice is really important if you want to become that kind of person. "So, when you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." In other words, Jesus says fasting has nothing to do with religion. It has nothing to do with what other people think about you. It's got nothing to do with virtue signaling, a perceived sense of maturity, making other people think more highly of you than they... oh, it's like, it's not about them. "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you're fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen." In other words, He says, "When you fast, don't look miserable. Put oil on your head and wash your face. Don't look miserable." Why? Because we're trying to deceive other people into thinking that we're not miserable when we really are? No. He's saying, "Don't look miserable because when you fast, you're not miserable." When you fast, what's happening? You are figuring out that you are not sustained by the things of this world but by God Himself. You are figuring out in that moment that you are sustained by Jesus, who holds all things together. That through His powerful world, all things are sustained. That in Him, we live and move and have our being. It's in fasting that we're not miserable. We're actually becoming stronger because... Why? Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. So, we're discovering that we are sustained by the spiritual, not the physical; the invisible, not the visible; the eternal, not the temporal; the heavenly, not the earthly. This is why Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Unless you eat my flesh and blood, you will have no part in me. For my blood is real drink and my body is real food. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me."

So, you're talking about cannibalism or crackers and grape juice? No, He's saying, "I am the one that sustains you, not the things of this world. And sometimes you have to abstain from the things of this world to be reminded that your life comes from above. And I'm the one that holds you all together." In fact, do you remember the story of the woman at the well? Jesus goes and He sits with this woman. He's been on a long journey. He's hungry, and He's tired. His disciples go into town to get food. Jesus has this whole interchange with this woman, gives her springs of living water. And when the disciples come back with food, they try to get Him to eat. And He says, "I have food you know nothing about." And the disciples are so confused. They're like, "Did someone feed Him? Did she give Him something to eat?" He's like, "I have food to eat you know nothing about. I am sustained by the very presence of God, and rivers of living water just came from me into her. And that sustained every possible need I have."

You don't look miserable because you're not miserable because you're being sustained by God Himself. "And your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." What is the reward for fasting? Yes, there's breakthrough. Yes, there's freedom. Yes, there's victory. But the reward

is more of God Himself. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. That's the heartbeat of fasting. And here's what happens in fasting for this different way life that we're talking about: when you're fasting, what you're doing is you're bringing your flesh into submission to your Spirit. That's what's happening in that moment. You are practicing bringing your flesh into submission to the Spirit. You are practicing choosing what is good over what I want. Like, when I choose to fast from this cheeseburger, I'm practicing denying my flesh in the here and now so that I can deny my anger then and there. But when I fast this lunch, what I'm doing is practicing denying myself – not doing what I want to do – so that I can deny my flesh with that lust later. When I fast for a day, what I'm doing is I am choosing to deny myself – choosing what is good over what I want – so that I can choose to deny my pride later. Because what we've been talking about in this whole series is if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to do the things that Jesus did. If I want to do what He did on the spot, I have to do what He did behind the scenes. The problem is, as we get on the spot and are convinced, we're just going to be able to deny our anger. "Oh, I don't get it. I'm just going to deny my lust. I'm just going to deny that pride. Oh, I just... I will deny the control, the judgment, the resentment, the bitterness, the frustration, the anxiety, the depression, the worry, the fear." Like, "I'll just deny it." How's that working for you? We all know this is why Paul says, "I can't do the things I want to do, and the things I don't want to do, I do." Like, what's going on? The problem is we never practice behind the scenes denying our flesh, so we get to the on-the-spot moments and we can't walk in the Spirit because we've been trained to live according to the flesh. So, fasting is not archaic; it's actually very strategic. It's choosing to say, "I'm going to fast today from something I want – something I desire, something I crave that's really not all that important in the scheme of life – so that when I get to the realities of my life, I'm practicing saying "no" to the flesh so that I can walk in the Spirit." In fact, this is why Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

Here's a great question for you: how do you practice denying yourself? If one of the conditions of actually following Him – to actually do it, not talk about it, but actually do it – is denying ourself and picking up our cross, how do you practice that? I don't know how you practice denying yourself in the area of obedience and holiness and purity and fear of the Lord and submission and surrender and His will not your will without first practicing denying your flesh in the area of food – something I can take authority over to practice saying "no" to what I want so I can say "yes" to what is good. Does this make sense? I mean, think about like this. Think with me for a second. Ready? Think. Think of how much of your life is about satisfying the cravings of your flesh. Just think about it with me. Think of how much of your life is actually arranged around satisfying the cravings of your flesh. Say, what is my flesh? Flesh is life without God. It's yourself without God. It's my life but without God. So, I have this flesh, like the cravings of the flesh. Think of all the desires, the needs, the wants, the comforts, the compulsions, the appetites that we spend our whole life satisfying. It's like, I desire it, so I go get it. I want it, so I take it. I have an appetite for it, so I satisfy that craving. I have a compulsion, so I fulfill that compulsion. I have a comfort; I will get that need met. It's like so much of our life is actually arranged around satisfying the cravings of the flesh. This is why you hear us say, and these are

like... so you got to just come up with me. But this is why you could see the flesh when we say things like, "Oh, I just need that Starbucks." And we're like... It's too close to home to laugh at. "I just got to get a Dr. Pepper at Sonic." That one worked a little more than Starbucks. Right? "I got to have some chocolate. I got to get that cheeseburger. Oh, I need that glass of wine at the end of that. If I could just one glass of wine, and then I'm going to be okay. I just need that beer. I just need that cheeseburger. I just need to go get some ice cream from Braums," or whatever the thing is, right? Okay. There's nothing wrong with any of those things, but think of how much of your life has revolved around satisfying the cravings of your flesh – wants, needs, compulsions, desires, comforts – and we go and we satisfy those things. In fact, if you can actually catch it, think of how much you use food to comfort and numb and cope the deep pain of your life. I satisfy my flesh with quick comfort to cover up the deep pain of my soul. In fact, when we talk about our obsession with food and our overeating, did you ever just stop for a moment and think the reason we do that is because we're led by the flesh, not by the Spirit? And the flesh is loud and demanding and controlling. And the flesh will not stop screaming in your ear until it gets what it wants or until it's crucified. There's only two options.

I mean, look at what John says. He says, "For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but of the world." Cravings of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life. It's the three categories that all sin falls in from Genesis to Revelation. It's the same human struggle we've had from the beginning. And if you go all the way back to Eve in the garden, here's the problem. The problem is Eve was fasting from God and feasting on the world. She was told to not eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And it says, when she saw that the food was good for eating, cravings of the flesh; appealing to the eyes, lust to the eyes; and desirable for gaining wisdom, the pride of life – she took it and she ate it. Instead of fasting from the world and feasting on God, she fasted from God and feasted on the world. And here we all are.

Now, what's amazing is when Jesus is tempted by the devil three times in the desert, it's the same three temptations. "Tell these stones to become bread." Cravings of the flesh. "I will show you all the kingdoms of the world. And if you bow down, I'll give them to me." Lust of the eyes. And he takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and says, "Throw yourself off, and the angels will catch you." In other words, "Do something spectacular to put yourself in the middle of all of it." Pride. But because Jesus was fasting from the flesh and feasting on God, He had victory. Maybe we would have more victory of temptation in our life if we would practice fasting from the world, fasting our flesh, in order to feast on God. You're with me on this?

It's okay if you have a Starbucks and a Braums. I know some of you are still like, "Oh, ah." It's okay. But just think about how much of your life is built around getting your cravings met. See, track with me for a second. If I'm in Jesus, I'm a new creation. The old is gone; the new has come. I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live; it's Christ who lives within me. Count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. You're a partaker of the divine nature.

So, I'm a new creation. There's this whole new reality. I'm the righteousness of God. So, then the question we have to ask is then, "Well, then why do I struggle? Why, when I do things on the spot, is it not just easy? Why can I not do the things that I want to do?" Well, the problem is because I haven't trained behind the scenes to now live according to this new life that I have. And this is why all throughout Scripture it says, "Take off your old self and put on your new self. Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature." Like, "This is me and God working together to step into this new reality that He says now exists through Jesus."

Okay. You're with me? So, let me show you a few verses. These are a little bit longer, but these are really important to catch the construct of this. "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." He says there's the flesh and there's the Spirit, and they are in conflict with one another. You can't walk in the flesh and the Spirit at the same time. They're in competition with another. The flesh is loud, aggressive, demanding, and bossing, and the Spirit is patient and gentle and kind. The flesh will always demand to be satisfied. The Holy Spirit will always peacefully stand by until you're interested in Him. And I love that it says, "Those who are in Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and its desires." In other words, we have to choose to allow our flesh to be crucified. And we have to participate in that. Now, the interesting thing about it is, it's you choosing your will. Jesus was not forced by the Father to go to the cross. Whenever the Bible talks about the cross and crucifixion, there is no forcing. It's always a choosing of the will. Do I want to crucify so I can be resurrected? And what's interesting about being crucified is you don't have enough hands to actually pull it off. Okay. What is that a picture of? That I have to do my part and say "I will this. Holy Spirit, I open myself up to this. I want to practice denying my flesh, but I need You to help me fully be crucified that I might live the new life I have in Christ."

See, your flesh will either be satisfied or crucified. There's no in-between. Your flesh every day is either more satisfied or more crucified. It's either dying or it's actually strengthening. And we get the choice of whether or not we're feeding it or partnering with the Holy Spirit to crucify. And that's why it says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." He's going back to the finished work of Jesus. You're now in the Spirit. Now, live according to this new reality. You used to live in the flesh; the flesh was all you could do. But now you're in the Spirit, so now walk in the Spirit. And if you actually catch it, the Spirit – the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. – it's not a work of the flesh. It's a work of the Spirit. So, I can't even control my own compulsions to the flesh. What I can do is open myself up and say, "I want to take off the old self and put on the new self. Holy Spirit, I need You to help me." And the problem for a lot of us is we start saying things like this. "Yes, I don't do the things I want to do." We said, "That's just my personality. That's just my Enneagram number. I mean, I'm just an eight. This is just how eights act. I'm an eight. That's just how eights act." Right? No, that's just called uncrucified flesh. And when that flesh gets

crucified, you will now walk in the character of the Spirit. Or how about this one that says, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body – your body – so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master because you are not under law but under grace." I mean, mind-blowing verse, but just, "You're dead to sin and alive to God in Christ." So, don't let sin reign, have the highest influence in your body. Why? Because you've spent so much time in the past offering the parts of your body as instruments of wickedness. But Jesus has now broken that power of sin. It's not your master, so you can now offer the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness. The reason I can't do what I want to do on the spot, even though I'm in Christ, is because for years, my body has been trained to live like this world. My feet have been trained to stand in pride. My hands have been trained to control. My gut has been trained to feast on the things of this world. My eyes have been trained to lust. My mouth has been trained to curse. My ears have been trained to listen to gossip. My mind has been trained to be anxious. My face has been trained to be judgmental or ashamed. And so, we jump in the spot and think we're going to be able to do it different because we're now in Christ. No, just like you trained to write right-handed or left-handed, you couldn't just today pick it up and do it, but you could start training and practicing. Because the world has trained me to have a certain attitudes, habits, behaviors, perspectives. There's literally sin – we talked about this in season one – trapped in the parts of your body. Is this what it's saying? Because you've been trained to live like the world. Fasting is how I offer my whole body back to God to say, "I am now training to be a person of righteousness. And I want everything from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head to be an instrument of righteousness. I am retraining my feet to walk by faith. I am retraining my hands to be servants. I am retraining my gut to crave the things of God. I'm retraining my eyes to look with love. I'm retraining my mouth to bless. I'm retraining my ears to listen to God's voice. I'm retraining my face to show the love of God to the world around me."

Are you catching what I'm saying? And this is the practice of saying "no" to what I want so I can say "yes" to that which is good so my body can be used for the goodness and the glory of God. Or how about this one? Paul says, "Do you not know that in a race, all runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training." Can you see it from our theme verse all year? Train yourself to be godly. "They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." Can you see it? For physical training is of some value, but godliness has training for both this life and the life to come. "Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so after I have preached to others, I myself might not be disqualified for the prize." In other words, Paul says, "I got a race to run. I got someone to become, and I refuse to be a slave to my body. I refuse to let my body call the shots. I am not enslaved to this body. No, this body is meant to give expression to my soul. And my soul is healed and free in Jesus' name. And so, this body is now

going to be retrained to now give expression to the reality of God that's now inside of me." So many of us, our body is our master. Our entire life is arranged around satisfying the cravings, the desires, the compulsions, the appetites of our flesh. And there's nothing wrong with you. You've just been so deeply trained in the ways of the world to satisfy the cravings of the flesh. We have to break that training and retrain in Jesus' name so we can do the things that He did. That's where fasting comes in. I'm denying myself that cheeseburger so I can deny that anger later. I'm denying myself that day of food because I'm so tired of living as a person of pride and on the spot, I can never be humble. I can never not be greedy. I can never not be controlling. And my wife or my children or my husband or my parents, everybody knows it. And I know it, too. And the more I try, the more I fail because I keep trying to do it on the spot without training behind the scenes. So, I got to bring my body into submission. One more big one. "Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction. Their god is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by power that enables Him to bring everything under His control will transform our lowly bodies so they will be like His glorious body."

Here's a question for you. Did you ever stop and ask yourself the question, how often is your stomach your god? You say, "I don't eat a lot of food." It's not – how often is your cravings, your desires, your needs, your appetites, your compulsions your god? You got to buy it. You got to say it. You got to do it. You couldn't help yourself. You got to eat it. You got to get it. Your god is your stomach – your flesh, your cravings, your appetites, your desires. And that's an enemy of the cross. Why? Anything that rejects the crucifying of the flesh is an enemy of the cross. The entire message of the cross is the crucifying of the flesh. Christ was crucified on my behalf as me, and now, I get to choose to crucify my flesh with Him by the power of the Holy Spirit – that I might live according to the new life that He has given me. So, when I resist the crucifying, the denying, the saying "no" to my flesh, I'm actually an enemy of the cross. It's a destructive destiny. There's a shame in my life because my mind is on earthly things. The temporal, the visible, the here and now. But our citizenship is in heaven. We are people of the Spirit with life from above when the kingdom of God. And one day, Jesus is going to take this lowly body, and He is going to resurrect it and give me a glorious new body. In the meanwhile, I am making sure that this body is continually being submitted and surrendered more and more to the Spirit within me so it can be an extension of the kingdom of God in the here and now. I would clap for that. I think that's good, but that's okay. This is why he says, "I urge you, brothers." I know this is a lot, right? Like I've been thinking about this all week. "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices." Like you have a sacred body. You are not a soul trapped in an evil body. God has given you a beautiful body and a beautiful soul. And this is the place He's empowered you to rule and reign. Like, this is your kingdom, if you will. And fasting is like offering our whole body to God, my whole self to seeking God, saying, "God, I don't want any of my anything – my body, mind, soul, Spirit. I don't want any of it to be of the world. I want it all to be of you. So, I offer all of this to you, that this would become a holy temple of the Lord that it already is, but that it would function like that – a place of prayer, a place of awareness

with you. I want to submit and surrender it all to you." And last one here, "I humbled myself with fasting." There is this humility that takes place when we fast because it breaks our pride. It breaks our self-sufficiency. It breaks our control, and it reminds us that we are not sustained by this world but by God Himself.

Okay. You're with me on all that? So, here's the question. When you fast, what happens? When you fast, what happens? For a lot of us, the answer is, "We get hangry." You didn't see that coming, did you? But that's what happens. We fast; we get hangry. And as we're fasting, we tell people, "We're just angry because we're fasting, and we're hungry." No, the truth is anger is already inside of you, and just denying yourself some food for maybe one lunch brings it all to the surface – the resentment, the pride, the lust, the greed, the control, the judgment, the jealousy, the edginess, the resent, the sarcasm. We say, "Oh, it's because I'm fasting that I..." No, it's already in there. Fasting just exposes what the god of your stomach really is. And it shows us a reality that maybe we don't want to see. That's why it's humbling. And when you fast and you're denying your flesh, your flesh is like a little spoiled brat. It's like an angry kid. It's loud. It's aggressive. It's obnoxious. It beats. It bangs. It rings bells. It shouts out all kinds of things and obscenities to you. And it's unsettled. And it's not... until your flesh, your flesh will keep screaming and crying and yelling until it is satisfied or crucified. Now, paradoxically, what happens when you deny the Spirit? Fasting is denying the flesh, right? See, "God, what happens when I deny the Spirit?" I would say you get dreary. You say, "What is that?" Dry and weary. You ever see people who deny the Spirit? Their life, even if they are a follower of Jesus, a Christian, whatever, they're dreary. They're dry. They have no rivers of living water flowing through them. And they're incredibly weary because they're not feasting on the bread of life. So, we get dreary. Now, here's what's interesting. When we deny the Spirit, the Spirit never gets aggressive. He is patient, kind, and humble. And He's waiting and He is whispering. And He's waiting for you to get to the end of yourself so you look back to Him as the only source of life. So, if you're waiting for the louder voice, the flesh will always win because the Spirit has no need to throw himself off the highest point of the temple, to put himself in the center to do something spectacular. He's already shown us that's not His play. His play is to wait for you to get to the end of this and look to Him. And what's interesting is every one of us, me, every one of us, we're already really gifted at fasting. You know this? You're already really gifted at fasting. We're really good at fasting from God and feasting on the world. So, we already know how to do it. It's like how to... Because that's what, "How do I do?" We already know how to fast from God – deny God, reject the Holy Spirit, ignore Him, not be interested in Him, push off His convictions, His counsel, His guidance, not going to do that, and feast on the things of this world. So, fasting is just flipping it and denying my flesh and my cravings and saying "no" to the things of this world and acknowledging that I need the Holy Spirit's help with it in order to feast on Him. And when I'm fasting, what you're doing is you're making a declaration – not to the spiritual realm. Don't give Satan more credit than he deserves. "Oh, I'm fasting. I'm telling all of the kingdom of darkness that I..." you're telling your flesh that your flesh is no longer in charge. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. That's not Satan. Don't give him, "Oh, we're declaring to the dark powers that we're fasting and we..." You're declaring to

your flesh. "Hey, buddy, you're on notice. I know you're going to be loud and I know you're going to be aggressive. And I know this isn't going to be a fun day, afternoon, lunch, couple of days, whatever. But you're on notice that I'm no longer living according to the flesh because I'm dead to you and I'm alive to God in Christ. I know you're going to be loud, but I'm just letting you know that this body is getting trained to live according to the Spirit that is now within me as instruments of righteousness, not instruments of wickedness."

And there are some things that will just never happen without fasting in your life. Let me pull it all together real quick. Do you remember the story when the demon possessed boy? The father brings demon possessed boy to the disciples, they can't heal him. They're so confused. The dad's defeated. He brings the boy to Jesus. Jesus in one word heals the boy. And the disciples are so confused. They're like, "Jesus, we did every trick, everything, every thought, every prayer. Everything. And it didn't work. Why?" Jesus says, "This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting." In other words, there are some things that will only happen through prayer and fasting. There are some breakthroughs. There are some victories. There are some healings. There are some parts of your flesh that need the practice of prayer and fasting to crucify it so you can become all that God has created and called you to be." And my favorite part of this story is in the moment, He doesn't pray or fast. He just rebukes the demon and it's gone. So what He's really saying is, "If you want to do what I did on the spot, you've got to first do what I do behind the scenes. And behind the scenes, I live a life of denying myself so that I can walk in the Spirit on the spot. We struggle walking in the Spirit on the spot because we don't practice denying our flesh behind the scenes." Listen, for years in my life, the only time I would fast is when we would do like a church-wide fast. And those things are great. They move us. They have favor. They bring us together. But in this last season of my life, as I'm learning and I'm learning, learning this practice of fasting, I'm learning that it is so much more than just this encounter and this moment with God. It is literally about bringing the flesh of my life that I've been trained, pride and greed and lust and control and all these things – It's helping bring them into submission to my Spirit because by saying "no" to this food today, I can say "no" to that piece of the flesh tomorrow. That's why it's worth it. And I get it. Some of you, you're like, "Totally. I get it. I get it." I told our team this week, I said, "Of all the practices we're going to cover, this is going to be the one that if you don't have a vision for who you want to become, this is going to be the one that you're going to be like, 'This is just archaic. It makes no sense to me.'" I understand that. But if you do have a vision for who you want to become and you realize the victory you have in Jesus, this is the way. We break the power of the flesh so we can stop as a 20, 30, 40, 50, 80-year-old person saying, "I do the things I don't want to do, and I don't do the things that I do want to do." Maybe, just maybe, He shows us if He did it going into His ministry and on His way to the cross, how much more should we?

So, here's your practice plan for this week. Fast and pray one day this week. Just try it. Just pick one day. One day where you're going to fast and you're going to pray. Fasting without prayer is just dieting. That's not what we're going for. Fasting and prayer is denying the flesh so I can walk in the Spirit. If prayer is being aware of God, then I'm fasting from food to feast on God.

Pick one day. Just pick one day, one day this week. And if you have health challenges, whatever, don't, it's fine. You don't have to do it. Ask God for something else. But pick one day and pre-plan it the night before. Tell whoever's going to be impacted by it, "Hey, I'm just practicing something in my own faith journey." Wow, didn't see that coming. You're like, "There's a lot of hangry about to be coming out. So just, if you could be aware, I'm trying to kill that thing."

Give people a heads up, and then try it. And then, when you are hungry, turn your attention to God. And when you do get grumpy, become aware of how much of your life has revolved around the flesh. And when you do find yourself with a headache or struggling or irritable, whatever, acknowledge, "Maybe my stomach is my god more than I realize. And it's not really about food. The food is just showing me that I spend so much of my life satisfying the cravings of my flesh, which might be pride, greed, sexual immorality, lust, anger, control, judgment, whatever." It shows us so much more. And it shows us that there's so much more of God that He wants to give to us. Just try it. Just try it. And even if you can't do it, you say, "I'm going to do it all day." And you make it to 11 in the morning, and that's it. It's all you can do. Great. When you eat, give thanks to God for that food and acknowledge God. "Maybe my flesh is weaker than I even realize. I need your help to put even the first nail in because I can't get to even the third. I need you to actually help me here." He will so meet you there when you have a heart desire to say, "God, I want to feast on you." This is part of what the journey looks like. So, Jesus... Jesus, I don't want to live according to the flesh. I want to live by the Spirit. Thank you that in You, we have been crucified and our old self is dead and gone. We're dead to sin but alive to God in Christ. And sin is no longer my master, but my body has been deeply trained in it. And so, Lord, show us how to use this practice. Show us how to use this practice, not to worship this practice or to put our hope in a practice or to make this practice our God. No, just show us how to use this practice, this piece of Your lifestyle in our lifestyle, that over this next season, as we continue to walk with You, we might be able to bring more of our flesh into submission to the Spirit. Help us practice saying no to what we want so we can say yes to what is good, so that over time what we want is that which is good. I pray for every person today, Lord, may they just see and experience Your love and Your graciousness and Your invitation. May this not be religion and information and knowledge in our head. May this be something that speaks deeply to our Spirit by the Spirit who gently whispers with kindness, with patience and humility to lead us to a life of freedom. Thank You, Jesus, for the life You offer us. In your name, we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



SEPTEMBER 22, 2024
SEASON THREE, EPISODE FOUR
“SABBATH”

Hey, so once again, let me welcome you to Valley Creek at whatever campus you're at today. We are so glad that you are here with us. And we are in this series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. And we've just been talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. Living the life that Jesus lived so we can live the life that Jesus lived. And we're looking at Jesus's practices, His disciplines, His habits, and we're allowing Him to teach us and show us what it looks like to be human, how to be fully alive. We're allowing Jesus to teach us how He would live our life if He lived our life. And I know over these past seven, eight weeks, it's been a lot. We've covered a lot of ground together. There's been a lot of content. And I know a lot of you, you're up to here. You're like, "Oh, my gosh." It's been a lot of thinking, a lot of contemplating, a lot of reflecting, a lot of content that we've been going through.

And I see that and I acknowledge that. And so, what I want to do today is come up a little bit and change the tone for these next few weeks. And it's perfect timing for it because the next three practices we're going to talk about are sabbath, silence and solitude, and simplicity. So, breathe in, breathe out, and receive a little bit of the rest of Jesus in your life. You see, what I love about the life of Jesus is, when you look at it, when you read it in scriptures, and you look at the gospels, the thing that's amazing is you will discover that Jesus was never in a hurry. He was never busy. He was never stressed out and anxious and overwhelmed and frantic. He had this incredible life of rest, which in and of itself is paradoxical if you think about it. I mean, if you had three years to change the world and only three years to save the world, don't you think you'd be a little busy?

Like, if you only had three years to destroy the works of the devil, three years to reveal who the Father was, three years to demonstrate and declare that a kingdom, three years to develop those 12 disciples, I think you'd be a little busy. He'd be running around, "I've got to get to this town. I've got to go here. I've got to heal this person. I've got to go preach this. I've got to film all these videos so no one forgets that which I've been trying to say and do." I mean, you would think He would be busy everywhere He went, but He was never in a hurry. In fact, this is why He says to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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." He says, "Hey, I offer you rest. Come to me if you're weary and burdened. Come learn from me. Come follow me. Come be my disciple. Let me teach you how to live your life because my life is easy and light and you're weary and burdened and I want to give you rest."

And the reason Jesus can offer us rest is because He had rest to give. You can't give something to someone that you don't have. So, the fact that He offers us rest declares that He had rest. And we see He had this deep internal rest, not just this external rest. He had a deep internal peace, not just an external peace. And He offers it to us. In fact, the Old Testament version of this scripture, "This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.' You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.' Therefore, you will flee! You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.' Therefore, your pursuers will be swift."

God offers us repentance, rest, salvation, quietness, trust, and strength. The only question is, will we have it? Will we have what He offers us? The challenge is for many of us, we say, "No, we're good. We're going to do our life like everybody else in this world. And we're going to run." And He says, "That's fine. If you want to run, you can run. But just understand the faster you run, the faster the world will chase you. The faster you run, the faster the world will take that dial on your treadmill of life, and we'll keep turning it up and you will go faster and faster, never getting anywhere." You see, if we're honest and we look at our lives, it's radically different than Jesus because we are often always busy, always in a hurry, always in a rush. We're stressed, we're anxious, we're frantic, we're overwhelmed. There's so much going on in our lives, and we live in a world that wears busyness as a badge of honor. It's like, the busier I am, the more important and successful and significant I am. And so, we hustle for our identity and we hurry for our significance.

The only problem is it's impossible to be a disciple of Jesus if you're always in a hurry. It's impossible to live deeply in the kingdom if you're always in a rush. It's impossible to bear the fruit of the Spirit if you're always frantic. It's impossible to become a person of love if you're always busy. See, we think busyness is a sign of success, but busyness is really an indicator that you're failing at that which really matters. Busyness is not a sign of success. It's an indicator in your life that you're failing at that which really matters. Why? Because the kingdom and the world operate at different speeds. And if I'm always in a hurry, then I'm probably failing at abiding in Christ.

And if I'm always in a hurry, then I'm probably failing at becoming a person of love. And if I'm always busy, then I'm probably failing at living deeply in the kingdom. If I'm always in a hurry, I'm probably failing at walking in the spirit and bearing His fruit. It is not a sign of significance; it's an indicator that you're actually failing at that which your life is supposed to be about. And the paradox is, is our flesh loves to be busy. Our flesh loves to shout and scream about how important we are and how significant we are and how successful we are because we're so busy. And all the while your soul is in there whispering, saying, "I'm tattered and worn out and broken. Can we please have some rest?" And so, when we look at Jesus's life and we see Him live a life of rest and never at a hurry, then we know it's possible. We just have to do the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did, and arrange our life differently.

And the way Jesus arranged His life was, Jesus practiced the sabbath. Now, let's talk about this a little bit together. Jesus literally, every week for 33 years, took a literal 24-hour sabbath. Once a week for 33 years, He took a literal 24-hour sabbath. An entire day, once a week, where He would stop to just enjoy God. Stop to enjoy His friends. Stop to spend time with the Father. Stop all of His work, all of the things, all of the demands that everybody else had on Him. And He would reflect and feast and contemplate and go to the sabbath with the other people of God and enjoy the life that He has been given. And if Jesus could stop for once a week for 33 years, that means that he sabbathed one-seventh of His life. I want you to think about that. Jesus literally sabbathed one-seventh of His entire life while He was on earth.

Jesus, the most important, the most successful, the most significant, the most needed man that has ever lived spent one-seventh of His life sabbathing. What are you doing that's so important that you can't sabbath? You see, one day Jesus was walking through the grain fields on a

sabbath with His disciples, and His disciples were picking some grain and they were rubbing it together and they were eating it. And the Pharisees saw this and they got really upset about it because they thought they were violating the sabbath. And so, Jesus said to them, "The sabbath was made to meet the needs of the people and not people to meet the requirements of the sabbath. So, the son of man is Lord, even over the sabbath." Now, this is fascinating. What we don't understand is the entire Jewish culture was built around the sabbath. The entire community once a week shut down everything they did. There was no commerce. There was no buying. There was no selling. There was no trading.

There was no cooking. There was no cleaning. There was no working. There was no traveling. It was a day of rest with God. The problem was, over time, the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders, started to become very religious about what you can and can't do, what you should and shouldn't do, what you're allowed and not allowed to do. And so, when they're getting on the disciples for picking some grain and popping it in their mouth, Jesus is saying, "Hey, guys, let's remember that the sabbath is not a rule to follow. It is a gift to receive." People weren't created to fulfill the sabbath. No, the sabbath was made to bless the people. The problem is, for us, we're on the total opposite cycle. The Israelites, they spent so much time trying to hit the rules and regulations of the sabbath. We forget that the sabbath was even created and that there's even value in it in and of itself. And so, what I want to tell you about the practice of the sabbath right out of the gate is the sabbath is not a rule to keep; it is a gift to receive.

And of all the practices that we're going to talk about, I told you last week, fasting is the one that probably seems the most archaic. Sabbath is the one that you probably, the moment I say it, feels the most impossible. It's like, "I can't do that. I can't take a day every single week and rest and enjoy time with God." It's not that it's impossible. It's just that your life is not arranged in such a way that currently allows it. And the sabbath isn't about adding something in. It's about taking things away to create space in order to rest with God. Are you with me on this? You see, the question you then have to ask is, what is the sabbath and where did it come from? Well, the sabbath is a literal 24-hour day, once a week where you rest, where you stop all your work and you enjoy God and you enjoy your life and you enjoy the people around you. Where you worship God and turn the attention and affection and the focus of your heart towards Him.

It's a gift to help us enjoy the life we've been given. We rest from our work so God can do His work deeply inside of us. And the sabbath isn't an Old Testament thing or a New Testament thing. It's not a law thing or a grace thing. The sabbath comes all the way from creation. See, for six days, we watch God create the sun, the moon, the stars, the plants, the animals, us. And then, on the seventh day, "By the seventh day, God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day, He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because He rested from all the work of creating that which He had done." God worked for six days. He rested on the seventh, and He called the seventh day the sabbath, and He blessed it and made it holy. He said, "it's holy." It's different than all the other days of the week. And there is a blessing upon it. There is a supernatural source of life that flows into the sabbath.

So, right from the very order of creation, God created the rhythm of this... created universe to have a sabbath built within it. It's in the very created order of our DNA, of humanity, of creation. Just like there are days and weeks and months and years and seasons, there is sabbath. So, to fight the sabbath is to fight creation itself. To not sabbath is to go against the grain of grace. To say, "I'm too busy to do that," is saying that you're too busy to go in alignment with how God actually created all of creation to work. It goes all the way back to creation. And I think what's fascinating to me is that there are two things in particular that God has given His people. Two external things that are designed to be declarations of trust to show the world around us that we are radically different than them. And those two things are the sabbath and the tithe. There are two things God has asked His people to do that make them radically different than the world around them.

It's the sabbath and the tithe. The sabbath is giving God one day a week where you actually rest and you cease from your work. And when you're sabbathing, you're declaring that God can do more in six days than you can do in seven. And then, the tithe. The tithe is giving God the first, best 10% portion of your income. It's literally a declaration to say that God can do more with 90% of your income than you can do with 100% of your income. And they are these external declarations to the world around us that we are radically different than them. We live trusting God as the provider and the source and the sustainer of our life. And I think it's fascinating that those two external things He asks us to do go right at the heart of time and money. The two things that deeply grip our hearts. The two things that we probably worship more than anything else. The two things that are deeply embedded into our soul as idols.

We don't want to give up our time and we don't want to give up our money. "I don't want to give You my time." Why? Because time represents freedom. I want to own my own time so I can do what I want when I want, and how I want. And I don't want to give you my money because money represents security. And I want to be able to get what I want when I want, and how I want it. So, isn't it interesting that God has given His people the practice of the sabbath and the tithe to set us free from time and money controlling our hearts? And what is that? It's trust. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight." Like, even if you don't understand it and you don't get it, can you trust Him enough to believe that God doesn't need your time or your money? He just wants to keep you free. In fact, think about this with me for a second on the sabbath. When you give God time, you are giving Him the most limited resource of your life.

Time is the only thing you can't get more of. When I give God time, I'm giving Him an offering that actually costs me something. I can get more money. I can get more possessions. I can get new relationships. I can get new things. I can get a new job. I can never get more time. So, when I show up on a Sunday and come to church, I'm giving God time, an offering that costs me something. When I join a serve team and make a commitment to be on that, I'm giving God an offering, something that actually costs me something because I'm giving Him time. When I go to a circle and I go even on the weeks that I don't want to be there, I'm giving God an offering, a time that actually costs me something. When I sabbath once a week and rest, I'm literally giving God an offering that costs me dearly because it's time that I can never get back. Are you with me on this?

I think we talk a lot about giving God great things and we sing all these songs about how much we want Him. But the question is, "Will I give Him the one thing that I can never get back?" That's what the sabbath is. It's an offering that I will never get back. And it's a paradoxical trade because we give God time and He gives us eternity. We give God a sabbath once a week, and He gives us back a healthy soul. Maybe it's actually a great trade. And when you read through scripture, sabbath is all over the place and you find all these amazing things that God says the sabbath will do in our lives. And there's two things that I just want you to see that it says the sabbath is a sign of. "I gave them my sabbath as a sign between us so they would know that I, the Lord, made them holy." In other words, the sabbath is a sign that reminds us of who we are. When we sabbath, it's a sign declaring that we have been made by God and no one else.

It's a reminder that I don't work to become; I work because I am. That I am not what I do; I am what Jesus has done. When I sabbath, it's actually tangible faith, tangible trust saying, "I am not my performance, my achievements, my success, my failures, my efforts. I am not what I do. I am what Jesus has done. So, I don't have to hustle for identity. I don't have to hurry for significance. I already am all of those things in Jesus' name." And when He says, "I, the Lord, made them holy," it's language of creation that not only did God create us, but He made us a new creation in Christ that we are holy and righteous and forgiven and set free – beloved sons and daughters. So, once a week when we practice the sabbath, there is a sign declaring who we are in Christ. Reminding us that we don't have to live like everybody else because we already are who God wants us to become.

And the second thing is, He says, "Keep my sabbath holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God." In other words, sabbath reminds us that He is God and we are not. That He is in control and I am not. sabbathing reminds me that He holds it together and I do not. Do you know why a lot of us say we can't take a day off of sabbath, of rest with God? Because what we're saying is we hold it all together and we're in control and we're in the center. And if we don't hold this marriage together, nobody else is. And if we don't keep this business going, no one else is going to make it happen. And if we don't keep this team together, it's going to fly apart. And all of a sudden, we place ourselves in the position of God. We're in control. We're in the center. We're the one that makes it happen. We're the one that holds it all together. So, when we sabbath, what we're doing is we're humbling ourselves and saying, "I am not God."

I am reminded that you are the Lord, my God, Yahweh, the Great I Am, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love. When I stop to sabbath, what I'm saying is, "God, you are compassionate and gracious. And you are the one that is in control, holding it all together. So, I stop by faith and trust in You and give You back the rightful authority over my life that I may have taken back over these last six days." Come on, how different would your life be if once a week you had a reminder of your identity and the fact that God is in control and you are not? Your life would be so different because we forget who we are and we forget that God is in control. And what I think is so interesting is that out of all the practices that we're going to talk about in the series, the sabbath is the only one that's actually a command. Out of all the practices we're going to look at, the sabbath is actually a command. Like, do you realize that the sabbath is one of the 10 commandments?

Are you with me today? Let's ask that question again. Do you realize that the sabbath is actually one of the 10 commandments? Sandwiched right in there between, "You shall have no other gods" and "Do not commit murder." Sandwiched right in there between, "You shall not make any idols" and "Do not commit adultery." Sandwiched right there in between, "You shall not misuse the Lord's name" and "Do not steal." Sandwiched right there in between, "Honor your father and mother" and "Do not lie," is the commandment of sabbath. Now, isn't it interesting how that's the one that we excuse and explain away and just completely remove from our conscious thought process? Like, none of us would ever say, "Hey, if you're really, really angry, it's okay to kill somebody." None of us would ever say, "Hey, if you really like her, it's okay to commit adultery with her."

None of us would ever say, "If you really, really need it, it's okay if you just go and take it." None of us would say, "If you're really in trouble, it's okay to lie to get yourself out of the trouble. It's really... only if you're really in trouble." And yet, for some reason, we say, "If you're really, really busy, it's okay to dishonor the sabbath." Isn't that interesting? Maybe because time is a greater God in our heart than we have any idea of. I mean, look with me when God gives the 10 Commandments. This is fascinating. Out of all the 10 Commandments, the sabbath is the one that has the most language around it. The other ones are actually very short. I mean, there's the most language around this. And here's what God says in the 10 Commandments. "Remember the sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son, or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them. But He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

One of the 10 Commandments, keep the sabbath. And He gives us these things. He says the sabbath is a day of rest and it's a day of worship. It's a sabbath to the Lord your God. So, it's a day when we rest from our work and we worship God. You say, "Does that mean it has to be 24 hours a day of music and singing in a building? Because I want nothing to do with that." No, it means it's a day where your heart and your attention and your focus has turned towards the Lord and you rest to be with Him and to enjoy the life that He has given you. And it says that the sabbath is holy and blessed. It's holy, it's set apart, it's different than all the other days of the week, and it's blessed. There is a supernatural life available to anyone who will align themselves with the created order of creation. And the logic He gives is because six days God worked and on the seventh day He rested.

So, He's saying that's who God is, that's what God is like, that's what God did. And so, if we want to train ourselves to be godly, then we got to do the things that God did. And God worked for six days, and He rested on the seventh. It's an invitation to align ourselves with the very created order of creation to bring ourselves into the current of grace and to how God designed things to function. Now, 40 years later, He gives the 10 Commandments again to a different generation of Israelites going into the promised land. And it's still the same commandment, but there's a slightly different adjustment He makes into helping us understand the why. So, look at this now with me. It's about 40 years later, same thing in the 10

Commandments, second time it's given. And it says, "Observe the sabbath." Pause. Observe the sabbath would be like saying observe holidays. Observe the vacation days.

And isn't it interesting how so much of our life is arranged around observing government calendars? Like, we observe the government vacation days, yes? Labor Day, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Martin Luther King Day, Fourth of July Day. Like, we observe the government's calendar and we observe the school's calendar of the days off. Why is it then that we don't observe God's calendar? Most of you in this room, you get so angry when someone asks you to do something on one of your government days off. "You can't possibly expect me to come into work on Labor Day. You can't possibly expect me to go to practice on Columbus – I mean, it's Columbus Day." I mean, fair? And yet, for some reason, we think God's calendar is completely subjective. And maybe completely irrelevant.

In fact, if you look at how the American structure, how we've built our calendaring system, we say... This is basically what we do. Five days you do a job and then you get two days off. Okay? Five days you do a job and then you get two days off. God's calendar is we work for six days, and then we get a day of sabbath. Those are very different things. Job and work are not the same things. A job is something you do for your own benefit in order to get paid. And then, I want two days off to do whatever I want to do. God says, "No, I created you to work with me and for me in your divine purpose. And then, we take one day where we rest together." That would be worth thinking about. To your five days, is it a job or is it work? I don't know if you need more. I can't get any more restful than this, guys. I mean, I'm trying. You have no idea how bad I want to stand up.

"Observe the sabbath day by keeping it holy as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter." So, not just you, but your whole family. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt." Here's what's different. "You were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day." Can you see the difference? He still says the sabbath is a day of rest, a day of worship. It's holy and it's blessed. But then, He says, "It's not just about the created order." It's, "you were slaves in Egypt and I set you free." So, a sabbath is a day to remind myself that I am no longer a slave to this world. I am a son of God. Slaves don't get rest. They work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, making bricks for a taskmaster named Pharaoh.

God says, "That's not who you are anymore. You are now a son. In six days, we work together, ruling and reigning over creation. And on the seventh day, we sabbath, and we rest together. And I want you to sabbath so you remember that you are not a slave anymore." It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. If you hold to my teachings, you are my disciple. And then, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. See, the sabbath reminds me that I am not hustling for my identity or hurrying for my significance because I've already been set free in Jesus' name. So, I need to stop long enough to remember that. Because probably just about most of us sitting in this room live our life exhausted, longing for a day off.

You don't need a day off, you need a sabbath – a day of rest with the Lord. And they're two very different things. See, what I love about Jesus is, when you look at the gospels, one of the things that you will discover is how often He's doing amazing things on the sabbath. It's like He's validating its significance for our life in the kingdom. You watch Jesus all through the gospels. You watch Him rest. You watch Him teach and you watch Him heal. Do you know how many of Jesus' healing miracles happened on the sabbath day? The man with the shriveled hand, the guy with dropsy, the paralyzed man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, the blind man, the woman who had been bent over for 18 years from Satan. He healed all those people on the sabbath as a declaration to say the sabbath day is a day that heals you and keeps you free in Jesus' name.

In fact, when He healed that woman who had been bent over for 18 years, they got all upset at Jesus. They were always upset when He healed people on the sabbath. It says, "Indignant because Jesus had healed them on the sabbath. The synagogue ruler said to the people, 'There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the sabbath.'" I'm just saying, I don't think you want to be a part of that synagogue. Jesus said, "Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, who Satan has kept bound for 18 long years, be set free on the sabbath day from what bound her?" Jesus says the sabbath is a day of healing. "Should not this woman," should not you, "be set free on the sabbath day from what is bound you?" The reason so many of us never experience mental, physical, emotional, relational, spiritual healing and freedom is because we don't sabbath.

And on that day of rest with God, He heals things inside of us that we don't even know need to be healed. It's a six, every six days, He builds in a day of healing and restoration to bring you back life and vitality and freedom and restoration, in Jesus' name. And I love that it's not just for the Old Testament. "There remains, then, a sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rest from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest." Paradox, make every effort to enter that rest. In other words, you have to work so you can rest. You have to work so you can rest. And if you never work so you can rest, eventually you'll start to hate your work. And when you hate your work, you'll hate your purpose. And when you hate your purpose, you'll hate your life. And there's a lot of us that hate our life because we hate our purpose. And we hate our purpose because we hate our work. And we hate our work because we never work to rest.

You say, "What does that mean?" Well, that means if you're actually going to take a sabbath day, a day of enjoying God, a day where you're not working once a week, you can't go 100 miles an hour all six days and then just hit the brakes going into the seventh day. It's too disorienting. It's too jarring. And you have to think about what you're going to do on that seventh day, which means I actually have to think about how I spend the time on those other six days. I can't let work projects and mowing the yard and the side hustle and the house renovation all come into the sabbath day. No, that means I have to think differently about how I use the six days. It means I probably can't spend three hours doom-scrolling at night or watching that Netflix series or just wasting time. Why? Because I won't be able to sabbath because it will carry work into the sabbath day. So, I have to think differently about organizing,

arranging the other six days, which is, "teach us to number our days," all right, "that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

In other words, the sabbath helps you live the other six days better because you have to work so you can rest and do those things so you don't bring it into the sabbath day. In fact, the Israelites, they would get manna from heaven. Right. For 40 years, manna from heaven. Every single day, they'd go out, they'd gather it, except on the sabbath day. On the sixth day, there would be twice as much. They'd have to go in and bring – to prepare for the day to come. "Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the sabbath." Like, pay attention. You've got to think about this. You've got to work so you can rest. "'That is why on the sixth day, He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day. No one is to go out.' So, the people rested on the seventh day." It says, you've got to think ahead. You've got to live your other days differently. You've got to go out and make courageous, faith-filled decisions and go get twice as much on the six days. And then, He says, "Bake it, boil it, however you want to cook it." In other words, there is so much freedom of what you can do on the sabbath. It is not a rule to keep; it's a gift to receive. But you've got to think ahead so your projects don't carry over into the day of rest with God.

See, I got to stand up. I'm still going to try to keep it at rest. But because I want you to get this. A sabbath is not the same thing as a day off. A day off without God will make you more exhausted than you already are. A day of rest without God will make you more exhausted than you already are because there is no rest without Him. He is rest. And so, I can't rest without Him. So, if I want a day off so I won't be exhausted, I actually become more exhausted than I already am if I don't do it with God. And we've had to help our staff figure this out, because sometimes when you work at a church or you're in a faith-based environment, you can be like, "I just need a day off from God. Like, I do this. Oh, I just don't need any, God." It's like, no, there is no rest without God. You become more exhausted than you already are.

And what happens to a lot of us is we live our lives with such exhaustion that we start saying things like this. Like, "I can't wait for Columbus Day. When is Thanksgiving? Is it here yet? Has the summer come? I can't do this anymore." What a sad way to live your life. What a sad way to live your life. God gives us a built-in sabbath once every six days to rest, to enjoy Him, to be refreshed and refilled so we can go back and live our life. And here's what you have to understand. Meaningful work comes from meaningful rest. And the reason a lot of us don't have meaningful work is because we don't have meaningful rest. So, we hate our job. We hate our week. We hate school. We hate our life because we don't have meaningful rest. But when I have meaningful rest, a day of sabbath with God, I'm actually looking forward to my week of work, not a job, a week of work, because I'm created to do this with God.

And there's these two extremes. There's over here. I work seven days a week, everything all the time. And then, there's some of you sitting here. You're like, "Sweet. If sabbath is for me, then let's sell everything, buy a camper, travel around the country, and take pictures, and post them on social media." Okay, no, neither of those are healthy. Do you realize, before God made the sabbath, He gave us our commission to work? In Genesis 1, He says, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." And then, in Genesis 2, He talks about the sabbath. In other words, He gives us meaningful work and meaningful rest that are meant to go together. But

you can't have one without the other. They flow together in this way that allows us to be free. And a lot of us, we want to work all the time or we don't want to work at all. But you've been given a garden to tend, in Jesus' name. You just can't tend it seven days a week. Listen, maybe this will help you. When I first started in this role, like 14 years ago, I'd preached maybe a handful of messages in my entire life. I didn't know how to preach.

And we had Saturday night service then. So, like Monday through Thursday, I'd work on a message. I work in the office, all the leadership administration stuff. And then, Friday was supposed to be our day off. But on that day, I would always come up to the building and I would practice preaching the message probably five, six, seven times. And then, Saturday was the day I would do it all again. And then, we'd have service. We had service on Sunday, and then we'd start it over. And for years, I lived like that, the seven-day cycle. And it was interesting because, in that season, the church was growing like crazy. We were reaching so many people. And on the external, it looked awesome. But internally, I was dying. I damaged my vocal cords. My soul was getting tattered. I was exhausted. I was worn out. I started resenting you. Like, I got so tired of just getting up here and giving another message that I felt like nobody was going to do anything with anyways. It damaged the relationships around me. And so, eventually, I had to get to this point of taking heed, God's counsel, the invitation, the actual command of sabbathing in my life.

And so, for a number of years now, I take a day of sabbath. You say, what does that mean? It's just the day where I enjoy God. I rest. Here's what I don't do on sabbath. I try not to think, I try not to read, and I don't work on messages. You're like, "You don't think or read?" Yes. I think so much during the week and I read so much that it's actually work for me. It's actually tending a garden. So, I have to lay that aside. And now, I watch God do more in my life in the six days than I was able to do in the seventh. But even if it was less productive, I'm healthier in my soul and I enjoy my life significantly more than I enjoyed it then. In fact, I love this verse that says, "Observe the sabbath because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death. Whoever does not work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days, work is to be done. But the seventh is a sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord."

You're like, "What does that mean?" Here's the deal. We don't have to put anyone to death or cut anyone off. Because when you don't sabbath, you're killing yourself. And we don't have to cut you off because you're cutting yourself off from the people you love the most. You're killing your mind, your soul, your body, your spirit. And if you pay attention to it, you know it's true. And you're cutting yourself off from your people. This is why there's so much disconnection and detachment in our lives. We're disconnected in marriage. We're detached in parent-child relationships. We're disconnected as siblings. We're detached as friends. We just end up getting cut off from everyone and everything. Why? Because we don't take one day to align ourselves with the created order of creation, to remind ourselves of who we are, that we're not in control. And we remind ourselves that we are not slaves in Egypt, but it is a day that is holy and set apart to the Lord. I can tell we love this practice.

Last verse. "If we refrain from the trampling of sabbath... if you refrain from the trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and a holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own

interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights." In other words, if I will trust God and practice the sabbath, He says I will delight in Him. I will have a new level of my relationship with Him. And He will lift me up out of the chaos and the hustle and the franticness of which American culture lives day in and day out. So, here's your practice plan for the week. Take a sabbath day. Take a sabbath day this week. And if you can't do a day, take a half a day. And if you can't do a half a day, take an hour. And if you can't do an hour, take 30 minutes. And you say, "Well, what do I do?"

You don't work and you enjoy God. That's it. You enjoy God. You enjoy your family. You enjoy creation. You enjoy what God has designed this world to be. You turn your heart, your attention, your emotion – It's not a day off. It's a day of rest with God. And you say, "Well, what should I do?" Here's what you should do. This is what this... Like, some of you probably didn't listen to anything except now. All you want is the rule. It's not a rule to keep; it's a gift to receive. So, I'm not giving you a rule. Here's what I would encourage you, though. Whatever garden you are responsible to tend, don't work it on the sabbath. God put Adam and Eve in the garden and He gave them a garden to tend. Work to do, not a job. It wasn't for them to get paid. It was work, their created purpose of ruling and reigning with God. So, whatever garden God has given you to tend, on the seventh day, on the sabbath day, don't tend it. So, what does that mean?

It means, if you're a teacher, on the sabbath day, don't grade papers, don't create curriculum plans, don't work on studying. If you're a contractor, you build things with your hands, on the sabbath day, then don't build anything because building is part of the garden that God has given to you. If you're a business person and you do sales and e-mails all week, then on the seventh day, that's part of your garden. Don't do any sales calls. Don't do any e-mails. If you're a student, part of your garden is school right now. So, on the seventh day, don't do homework. "Well, I have to do it." No, you don't have to do it. What you have to do is manage your other six days better. That's what it forces you to do. So, the sabbath is actually God's gift to help us think differently about how we live our life. That's why I can't read or think or work on messages on my sabbath day because that's part of the garden God's given me to tend. And so, you have to actually spend time talking to God. You say, "Well, what do I do? I'm just going to like... it's an endless church service. I sit there, twiddle my thumbs?" Go for a walk. Take a nap. Read a book.

Go play pickleball. God loves pickleball. Do you know this? Go with Him, though. Go have a good cup of coffee. God loves good coffee. He made it. But go with God. Do you understand what I'm saying? This is a day where you enjoy the life that you've been given. Imagine how different you would be if, like Jesus, you took one day for every one-seventh of your existence on this earth was spent enjoying the life you've been given. How different of a person you would be. And we listen to a message like this. And I think here's the thought. I think it's one of two things. Actually, it's one of three things. One is we idolize time way more than we realize. I tried to go a different route. I don't think it worked for today. Maybe I'll do part two of this next week because we idolize time way more than we realize. That's why God has asked you to sabbath. You worship it. So, I don't want to give it. It's my time.

It's not your time. You were made by Him and you've been redeemed by Him. You actually belong to Him. You're a temple of the Lord. You don't get to set the hours of operation. And if you're... don't clap. If you're resisting... You had lots of chances to clap. You missed it. If you're resisting and you're irritated by it, it shows you how much you idolize it because idols scream the loudest when they're being challenged. So, I think I think there's an idolization of time, even more so than money, which I've watched flip since COVID. People used to be willing to give time to God and not money. Now, I think a lot of us would rather give money than time because we want to be free to do what we want when we want, how we want. I'm just saying I am a son, but I'm a slave to righteousness. So, I no longer... I've been bought and paid for the price and no longer get to decide how it goes. So, I think we idolize time more than we realize. The second thing I think that's happening in today is we think this is impossible.

We listen to it and we say, "That's great. I mean, there's no way I can do that. I mean, I have to mow the yard on my Sunday or whatever, sabbath day you have because I can't..." It's like, no, it's very possible. You've just arranged your life like the world. So, there's not a lot of space left because it's been ordered and so filled. This isn't added... sabbath isn't adding something in, it's taking something out. And it's not taking out a day. It's taking out other activities, duties, commitments back here so that when I get to the sabbath day, I can actually be free. So, I think some of you, listen to this, and it just... it feels absolutely impossible. God can't command you to do something that you can't do. It's not that it's not possible. It's just you haven't ordered your life in the way that actually would make it work. And then, third is I think some of you are sitting here and you just want to know the rules. Like, "How do I actually do it?" That's what I'm telling you. I can't tell you. It's not a rule to keep; it's a gift to receive. And for most of you, Sunday is your sabbath.

This is my last – this is my opposite of sabbath. For you, this is probably, most likely unless you work on Sundays, your sabbath. You say, "What does that mean?" That means don't go home and mow the yard today unless mowing the yard brings you great joy and you do it with God. Don't go home and cook and clean today if you're a stay-at-home parent. Why? Because that's the garden you tend. So, unless it brings you great joy, don't go home and do that. You got to do it in the other days. Don't go home and do homework. Now, some of you are panic. Like, "I didn't manage my time. I have homework." You can do it today. Hear me. "Mom, John said I can't do my homework. I'm not doing it. I'm sabbathing to the Lord." Let's work on the other six days of arrangement. Then, we'll get there. Do you understand what I'm saying? And here's why we don't like this third thing that I'm saying is because it requires you to talk to God about your life.

And you don't... Most of us don't want to talk to God about our life. We just want to make choices for our life, and then cry out to God when they don't work. As opposed to him saying, like you said, "God, do you want me to mow the yard today?" I think Jesus probably say things back to you like, "Would it give you great joy? And would we be connected in it? If the answer is no, then no. Let's not do that today." "I know, but the HOA is going to..." It probably means I can't watch as much college football on Saturday. See? See? See? So, try it. You probably... Most of our lives are arranged so like the world that we couldn't probably take a full sabbath day this week. That's okay. Try a half a day. If you still can't do a half a day, try an hour. If you

genuinely can't do an hour, do 30 minutes where you're not on tech and you're not doing work and you're just enjoying God.

Enjoy your family. Have a good meal. Go for a walk. Take a nap. Listen to me. If Jesus was the most significant, successful, influential, powerful, most needed person who ever walked on the face of the earth and He spent one-seventh of His life in sabbath, what are you doing that's so important that you can't do? So, maybe it's not that I can't. Maybe it's just that I don't want to. And that's okay. Then, say that and talk to God about that, because that helps you keep moving forward and starts confronting the idol of time in our heart. So, Jesus, thank You for the amazing, beautiful practice of sabbath that is so radically different than the world around us. Jesus, our souls crave rest and built into the created order.

You have given us a rhythm of rest. That's not a day off. It's a day where we stop working with You to just rest and delight in You. Holy Spirit, I just invite You to challenge the idol of time in my heart, wherever I worship time and don't want to give it to You, would You expose and heal, reveal, and replace that idol with trust that You want to give me a day every week to enjoy this beautiful life that I have been given. I pray for all my friends here today.

I pray that they would enjoy the beautiful life that You have given them. The beautiful family, the beautiful purpose, the beautiful creation, the beautiful church, the beautiful relationships, all the beauty of the gifts and passions and talents, the beauty of your spirit, the beauty of the air we breathe. May we be able to stop long enough to enjoy Your goodness and Your grace and have a healthy soul in Jesus' name. We want to do what Jesus did so we can do what Jesus did. In your name, we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



SEPTEMBER 29, 2024
SEASON THREE, EPISODE FIVE
"SILENCE & SOLITUDE"

All right. Hey, everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today. And we are in a series called A Different Way. And we're simply talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. We're talking about living the life that Jesus lived so we can live the life that Jesus lived. So, we're looking at His practices, His habits, His disciplines, His lifestyle, if you will. And we're allowing Jesus to teach us how to live our life. And we're almost done with season three of A Different Way. It's only four seasons of this whole thing, and we are almost done with season three. And I know as we've been going through season three, we've been looking at a lot of different practices. And I just want to stop to remind you that these practices are not religious duties. They are not expectations. They are not demands. They are not things you have to do for God.

They are simply invitations of grace. They are invitations of ways that you can do some things with God to open your life up to God to allow God to do some profound things within you. And I was praying for you this week. I was reminded that all of these practices will feel like religious duties, and obligations, and expectations unless you have a vision to be a disciple of Jesus. If you don't have this vision to follow Jesus, to become like Jesus, if you have not been captured or captivated by who Jesus is in the life that He offers you and you do not want to become like Him, then yes, all of these things are going to feel like duties and expectations and religion and responsibilities. But once you get captivated by Jesus, these are invitations to live.

You see, every one of us has to decide whether or not we believe Jesus knows what He's talking about. Every one of us, like you have to decide whether or not you believe Jesus actually knows what He's talking about. Like, does He know what is good and true and right? Because Jesus can't be right about some things and wrong about other things. He's either right about everything or He's wrong about everything. Like, Jesus can't be right about death but wrong about life. Jesus can't be right about eternity but wrong about today. Jesus can't be right about salvation but wrong about how to live your season in your life right here and right now. So, you have to decide whether or not you believe that Jesus knows what He's talking about. Like, do His practices actually work? And so, last week, we talked about the concept of sabbath, the practice of sabbath.

And we just talked about how sabbath is not a rule to keep; it's a gift to receive. That it is a gift to help you enjoy the life that you've been given. And we talked about how it's not a day off; it's a day of rest with God. And if you were here last week, clearly, what happened is the idol of time got exposed in our life. I didn't see it coming. I knew it was going to be something, but I didn't think it was going to be like it was. And so, clearly, the idol of time got exposed in our lives. And I'm not going to spend a bunch of time talking about that today. I'm just going to leave you with this simple question. Like, have you ever given your time to Jesus? Because Jesus can't be right about salvation but wrong about sabbath is what I'm trying to tell you. Like, it's not possible. Like, "Well, I trust Jesus for eternal life and salvation, but He's clearly wrong on this sabbath thing." That's actually a paradox in nature. So, have you ever given your time to Jesus?

The God who said, "Let there be evening and morning on the first day." The God who has given you your number of days. Have you ever taken your time and said, "This belongs to

you?" Because "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?" What good is it for you to keep all your time to do what you want, when you want, how you want, but lose yourself in the process? You see, when we look at Jesus's life, what's amazing about Jesus is He lived this incredibly restful life. He was never busy. He was never in a hurry. He was never rushed. He was never frantic. He was never stressed out. And yet, if we look at our lives, our lives are constantly in a busy, in a hurry, in a rush, frantic stress. And we have bought into this reality, this culture that we live in, that busyness is a sign of significance. And we hurry for our identity. We hustle for our significance. And we think that if I'm in a busy, if I'm in a hurry, it is a sign that I am successful.

But busyness is not a sign of success. It's an indicator that you're failing at that which matters the most. Because if I'm busy, it's impossible to abide in Christ. And if I'm always in a hurry, it's impossible to live deeply in God's kingdom. And if I'm always frantic, it's impossible to walk in the spirit. If I'm always in a hurry, it's impossible to have really healthy, really loving, really deep, and profound relationship. And so, we have to look at Jesus's life and ask ourselves the question, "Does He know what He's talking about? Does He know how to live life?" And when we look at the rest and the peace and the joy and the contentment of His life, we then have to look at how did He get those things. That's what Jesus did. But what did He do behind the scenes to order to become that kind of person? And the practice we're going to talk about today is silence and solitude. See, Jesus practiced silence and solitude, and that's why He was able to not be in a rush and be a man with peace, quiet in His soul.

And when I say silence and solitude, what you could think about is the evangelical church has picked that practice up over the years and just called it quiet time. If you've ever heard the term quiet time, quiet time is a play off the practice of silence and solitude, but it is so much more than the quiet time that you think of. And we see it all throughout Jesus's life. I mean, right in the beginning of Jesus's ministry, "At once, the Spirit sent Him out into the desert and He was in the desert for 40 days." Silence and solitude, a quiet place, a lonely place, the desert. He withdrew from people in order to be with God and quieted everything down. He gets back. He does a little bit of ministry. And then, very quickly, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place where He prayed. He didn't do much ministry, and He quickly went back to silence and solitude. Then we see, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

It wasn't a thing He did here or there. It was literally how His life was arranged, how His life was ordered. "Then," one day, "because so many people were coming and going that they did not have a chance to eat, He said to his disciples, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" He's trying to teach them how to live silence and solitude. "So, they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place." They withdrew to be alone, to be with God, to have some silence. But the crowd found them and the crowd came and Jesus fed the 5,000 with the bread and the loaves. And then, He dismisses the crowd. And it says, "After leaving them, He went up on a mountainside to pray." He's like, "I didn't get my silence and solitude. I'm glad you all ate, but I still need my silence and solitude." And then, even at the end of His life, "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and His disciples followed Him on reaching the place... He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed."

It was His normal practice to withdraw from the crowd, from humanity, from the silence, from the noise, and get alone with God. Jesus practiced silence and solitude as a way of life. And if we want to do the things that Jesus did, like have joy and peace and contentment, then we have to do the things that Jesus did. Practice silence and solitude. Now, I know when I say silence and solitude, many of you are like, "I don't know about that, but I'll take some peace and quiet and some R&R." Yes. The only problem is a peaceful and restful soul doesn't come without silence and solitude. And all my extroverted friends, you're sitting here right now and the panic thing is going off in your head. You're like, "This was the week to miss. Why am I here?" And all my introverted friends are sitting here thinking like, "I got this. My whole life is one big moment of silence and solitude."

Well, let's talk about this for a second, okay? Extroverts, you are terrified of silence and solitude because you love crowds and conversations. You love crowds, people, energy, adventure, activation, all kinds of stuff and conversations. You will talk to anyone about anything at any given time. And all our introvert friends, what we think is we've got silence and solitude down. But the truth is most introverts I know don't practice silence and solitude. They practice isolation and indifference. Introverts are like, "Bro, this is our one. Don't ruin this for us." I know, but we don't practice silence and solitude as introverts. We choose isolation, which is withdrawing from the world to be by myself and indifference. "I would rather not know. I would rather not hear. Because if I hear, then I'm responsible to do something about it." In fact, just the other day I was sitting on the couch.

It was like Saturday morning or something with a cup of coffee, and Colleen was doing a bunch of stuff. And she kept talking to me, and she kept saying a bunch of stuff. And I wasn't really responding, wasn't saying much. And finally, she stopped and she looked at me. She said, "Hey, are we going to practice silence and solitude all day or just for like an hour this morning?" And I thought about it later. It wasn't silence and solitude I was practicing. I was practicing isolation and indifference. I was withdrawing to be by myself. And I was indifferent to what she said. I really didn't want to hear it. You see, there's something about silence and solitude that is incredibly challenging for us to practice, even if you pretend in your mind that you already like it. In fact, one of the things that we've been doing this year as a staff, for the last year, we've had something called Transformation Tuesdays. Every Tuesday from 10:30am to 11:15am, our entire staff gets together and we take one of these practices that we've been talking about and we practice it together. I give them a little five-minute setup and we give them some direction. And then, they take 30 minutes to practice it.

And then, we get back together and we talk about what we've experienced and what God was doing. We've been doing this for a year and we've practiced prayer and Scripture and meditation and confession and celebration. And out of all the practices that we've tried, silence and solitude has been the hardest one for our entire staff. Why? Because our lives are not arranged around it. It's uncomfortable. It's awkward. We're terrified to do it. We don't even know how to do it. And yet, Scripture tells us, "In quietness and trust is your strength." You say, "So what then is silence and solitude?" Well, silence is quieting down the noise, both the external noise and the internal noise. Silence is choosing to shut everything down, to quiet it all down, in a sense, position and prepare myself to be able to be an active listener to that which

God wants to say. I'm turning down the external noise, all of the media and the technology and the sights and sounds and all the things, but I'm also turning down the internal noise.

And then, solitude is withdrawing, not to be by myself, that's isolation. Solitude is withdrawing from the world in order to be with God. I remove myself from everyone and everything in order to be with God. And when I come into silence and solitude, I come with no agenda. I come and I am present and I present myself to God to allow Him to do a deep work within me. That's silence and solitude. It's I am present and I have presented myself to God, and asking Him to do a deep work within me. And the interesting thing about silence and solitude is it requires faith. Because when I enter into silence, what I'm saying is that God is about to speak to me. And when I enter into solitude, what I'm saying is God is here. So, silence and solitude in its own way is a declaration that God is speaking and that God is here.

It's a declaration of faith that I am present and I have presented myself to God in order for Him to do a deep work within me. And so, I love this verse that we started service with today. "Of one thing I am certain: my soul has become calm, quiet, and contented in you. Like a weaned child resting upon his mother, I am quiet. My soul is like this weaned child." Can I ask you an honest question? Is your soul calm, quiet, and contented today? Like a child that sleeps on his mother's chest? Is your soul quiet, peaceful? That's why we need silence and solitude because this is where it takes us. The problem is, if we're honest, our lives are not arranged around silence and solitude. Our lives are arranged around noise and chaos.

If you actually want to look at your life and how it's ordered, how it's arranged, your life, much like mine, is probably ordered, arranged around noise and chaos. Think of how much noise is in your life. Think how many voices, think of how many sites, think of how many sounds, think of the technology, think of the social media, think of all the conversations and all the information and all the podcasts and streaming services and games and music. I mean, it is like noise 24/7 coming at us. And then, think of the chaos, the commitments, the activities, the duties, the responsibilities, the drama that we have literally arranged our life around it. And we've chosen it. A lot of you are sitting here. You're like, "I hate the noise and the chaos, but it just comes at me." Okay. If you carry a phone, you have chosen to arrange your life around noise and chaos. What is a phone? A phone is a device that will allow any voice in the world to get ahold of you at any point in time.

And so, all of a sudden, noise starts coming at me. And noise is screaming, and every notification and every sight and sound and thing. And then, all the chaos, the drama of that person from high school and homecoming drama and what's happening in the election and all these things, I literally set notifications so I can be arranged around noise and chaos. Bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing. Yes. Like, literally. So, I don't have a problem with the phone. I'm just trying to tell you what it is. When we carry it around, you are literally saying, "Noise and chaos, I have arranged myself around you." This is why it's so hard. We're always like, "Where's my phone? Where's my phone? Where's my phone? I can't put my phone down." Because the moment I don't have a phone, my life is moving towards silence and solitude. And that is very awkward and very uncomfortable. And we start backing up like, "I don't know what you're talking about today, bud, but I don't like it."

See, to practice silence and solitude is literally a holy rebellion. It's a divine resistance. It's a heavenly defiance against the order of this world. You don't defeat noise and chaos by just choosing less noise and chaos. You defeat noise and chaos by the opposite spirit of silence and solitude. So, when I choose silence and solitude, when I quiet things down and withdraw to be alone with God, it's literally a holy rebellion, a divine resistance, a heavenly defiance against the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of noise, if you will, that I am choosing to remove myself from, saying, "You can be chaotic, you can be noisy, you can go as fast as you want, but I am choosing to step out of that stream and I am quieting things down and I am withdrawing in order to be alone with God because that's where a healthy soul is found." See, an analogy, you can think about of your life and mine is I think our lives are like a giant snow globe.

You know those snow globes that you see at Christmas time, and there's a picture or a scene inside of here and you shake it up, and all the snow starts going everywhere. I think our lives are like this giant snow globe, and it's noise and chaos floating around all over the place. But the moment you set that thing down, the noise, the chaos, all comes down, and all of a sudden, there is the silence and the solitude. And when all the flakes come to the bottom, you can actually see what the scene is all about. See, if you look at people in the Bible who practice silence and solitude, they had this divine clarity. They had this heavenly vision. They could literally see into the open heaven. They could fix their eyes on Jesus. They could see the invisible in midst of the visible. Moses in the burning bush, David in the pasture, Jesus in the desert place, Paul in the lonely places.

They have this divine sense of clarity. Why? Because they got out of the noise and the chaos and allowed everything to quiet down to see what was really there. Can I ask you a question? Do you even know what the scene of your life looks like? Do you even know what the picture in the snow globe is? Or is there so much noise and chaos that you like, "Noise, chaos, noise, chaos, noise, chaos." You know all the noise and the chaos and why you're annoyed at everyone and everything, but you actually have a clarity of what your actual life is. And the paradox is we're the ones shaking it all the time because we're the ones who have chosen to arrange our lives. So, sometimes you just got to set it down. And people who practice silence are able to step back into noise with peace in their soul. And people who practice solitude are able to step back into chaos with power in their soul.

This is why Scripture tells us, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him." Sometimes you just got to be still and wait on the Lord. Are you with me so far? Shh, we're practicing silence and solitude. Why is it that we don't like it? There's lots of answers. And I would actually encourage you this week. That would be a great question for you to wrestle. Why is it that your life, when Jesus invites you into the quiet place, why is it that your life is not arranged for it? There's lots of answers. And a couple I would give you is like, just one is, I think the reason we don't like it is we like control. And the moment you enter into silence and solitude, just to be super clear, you give up all control. The moment you go into solitude and it's just you and God, you understand you've given up all control. There's nothing to hide behind. There's no distractions left. There's no mask you can wear.

There's nobody else you can blame. It's just you and God alone. So, you have immediately given up all control. And when all the noise comes down, all of a sudden, there's this silence

that reminds me, "I am not in control. He is." And what you'll hear from people when they talk about silence and solitude, they'll say things like this, like, "Oh, I don't have time for silence and solitude. I feel so unproductive when I'm in silence and solitude. I have so many things to do. I have so much of my life I want to live, and silence and solitude feels so pointless and purposeless." And this is where theology comes into play. Because you're either what you do or you are what Jesus has done, but you're not both. So, your identity is either defined by what you have done, or your identity is defined by what Jesus has done. And if you are what you do, then silence and solitude is failure. But if you're what Jesus has done, then silence and solitude is strength.

In fact, even the quiet times that we say we have, just so we're clear, they're like a picture of control. You pick the time that you're going to meet with God and you go in and you have your little agenda of how you're going to do it. "And I'm going to read this chapter. Oh, I like this. And then, I'm going to make a little Instagram thing and make it cute and make it motion graphic while I'm meeting with God. And then, I'm going to post it. And while I posted it, I got a little distracted. So, I'm looking at my other friends. And then, I got to follow up with this person. And then, I'll flip on that music in the end and then ask God for a few answered prayers." That's control, yes? But silence and solitude is to come without an agenda, without any control, and to present ourselves to God and allow Him to do what He wants to do within us. So, I think we're terrified of control. The second thing, the reason I think we don't like silence and solitude is because we have a lot to say about everything. We have a lot of opinions and judgments and criticisms and gossip and slander. We have a lot that we want to say about everything.

And we feel like every emotion, every feeling, every idea that we have ever had must be spoken into the atmosphere for everyone to hear. "So, I don't want to go into silence because I got a lot to say about you." This is why James says, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry." This is a great picture of silence and solitude. Silence and solitude is where I'm quick to listen and slow to speak. That I have quieted things down, and I'm actively listening to God and what He wants to say. And as we're quick to listen and slow to speak, it becomes slow to get angry. If you struggle with anger, silence and solitude is one of the best practices you can introduce into your life. Why? Because what is anger? Anger is my will has gotten violated. So, I feel out of control. And now I'm angry because I didn't get what I want. And now, I feel the need to tell everyone why I didn't get what I want and why it was their fault.

And all of a sudden, if I get into silence and solitude, I start learning how to be quick to listen and slow to speak, and my anger starts subduing. Why? Because the snow globe of my life has calmed down so I can actually see what's happening and what God is doing. Or how about this verse that says, "We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths." I could have just done that one sentence for the day, said, "Bless you, have a great week." "If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you would have a perfect person in perfect control of their life. A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything or destroy it." It says our words lead our life. And silence and solitude help us take control over our words

because we let so many words fly that we ride our horse off a cliff and we take our boat and we smash it into a rock.

But if we will learn to practice silence and solitude, we actually learn to bring our life into submission and to surrender with Jesus. And then, I think we don't like silence and solitude because we prefer to be absent over being present. If you look at where we're most comfortable, most of us are the most comfortable when we're absent. We're the least comfortable when we're present. And you say, "What does that mean?" It means like, wherever you are, that's not where you are. So, your body is here. Like today, you might be absent. You're here, but where are you? In fact, if you think of a phone, and this isn't a knock on phone days, it's just acknowledged for what it is. What is a phone? A phone is a portal. And every time I'm on my phone, I'm entering a portal and I'm going somewhere else. So, my body is here, but my spirit is now somewhere else.

And I would rather, most of us would rather go through the portal into my fantasy or into that friendship or into that connection or into social media or into that drama or into that news story, into that hobby, into that sports score. It's like I go in and I go through and I'm here, but I'm not really here. And this is why parents get so upset with students when they're on their phone and they're trying to talk to them. And this is why students get so upset with their parents when their parents are on their phone and they're trying to talk to them. And this is why every guy in this room knows that when he's watching sports and his wife is trying to say something to him and he's saying, "Uh-huh, uh-huh." And she says, "You're not listening to me." Every one of us know you are not listening. You're not there. You are absent. You've gone through the portal. And most of us would rather be absent than present because it's too awkward and uncomfortable to be present in our life. So, we would rather be absent and live someone else's life. What a sad way to live.

That I would rather not live my life, I would rather be in someone else's life. When all the while God is saying, "Hey, just be present. Just be here." I mean, if you think about Jesus, He says, "Your kingdom come," this is what we should pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God's kingdom is where His will is done. It's the rule and reign of God, right? Wherever God's will is done, that's where His kingdom has come. And God rules His kingdom through words and actions. Like any king over a kingdom. How do they rule? Through what they say and what they do, words and actions. So, if you can catch this, when I practice silence and solitude, the absence of words and the absence of action, what I'm saying is, "God, I am through the absence of words and actions, submitting and surrendering myself to you because I want your words and your actions to become my words and my actions. So, in this quietness and in this withdrawing from the world, I am taking my kingdom or queendom, and I am submitting it and surrendering it to you that I might hear your voice and be around your actions. That those might become the things that have gripped and captured my heart."

Does that make sense to you? I know, it's silence and solitude. It's uncomfortable. It's awkward. And so, I'm just taking you on a path here a little bit and just pointing out some things that you'll be able to figure out. And I want you to just see these couple of things of what silence and solitude really does in the end. See, silence and solitude will remind you that you're never alone. We live in a world that has an epidemic of loneliness. Rejection and abandonment are

rampant. We're lonely. We're lost. We want to be seen. We want to be known. We want to be loved. We want to be validated. So, we spend most of our lives trying to earn the approval and the affirmation and the affection of the crowd in order to deal with this deep-seated loneliness within us.

But the paradox is this. It's only in solitude where you will discover that you are never alone. It's only when I withdraw from the world and get alone with God that I realize I have never been alone, and I am not alone, and I will never be alone. Why? Because it's in solitude where I realize that He is with me. "Never will I leave you; Never will I forsake you. Do not fear, for I am with you." It's only in silence and solitude where you actually discover that you have never been alone and you will never be alone. Listen, I don't know about you, but in my life, I feel the most lonely when I'm in big crowds. I feel the most lonely at a football game, at a school event, at something out in the city. That's when I feel alone. I feel the most connected and alive when I am alone with God. In fact, this week, as I've been practicing and preparing for you, I've been practicing silence and solitude in my own life.

And literally, like every morning as I've done silence and solitude in my office, it's like, "Boom, He's there. He's real. He's alive." And just the fact that I'm willing by faith to say, "Silence, you're going to speak solitude. Solitude, you're here." Boom. He comes in and I realize I'm never alone. So, many of us never experienced the love, the acceptance, the life, the favor that we deeply long for in our souls because we never get alone with God because we're afraid of ourselves and I'm terrified of what's in my own head. And I'm terrified of what's in my own soul. And I am terrified to see what the picture of the snow globe actually looks like. So, I would rather arrange my life around noise and chaos to take the edge off of loneliness instead of getting alone with God to realize I have never been alone.

It's in silence and solitude where you figure out you're never alone. Second thing is silence and solitude. Listen to me. It exposes your soul like nothing else. When you get into silence and solitude, it's just your soul and God. That's all there is. There's nothing to hide behind. There's no distractions. There's no one to blame. There's no information. There's nothing to point out. There's nothing to make it about. There is no mask you can wear. When you get into silence and solitude, it exposes your soul. And there you are. It's Adam and Eve in the garden, when they take the fruit and they sin and they violate what God asked them to do. And then, it says, "They heard the sound of God walking through the garden." It was so silent that they could hear God's footsteps on the leaves. And they were alone.

And in that silence and solitude, they were exposed when God says, "Adam, where are you?" And Adam comes out and he says, "I was afraid. When I heard you, I was naked and ashamed. And so, I hid." And He says, "Who told you, you were naked? Did you eat from the tree I told you not to?" And in that moment, there is nothing for Adam to hide behind. He is fully exposed before God. This is why we're terrified. I mean, if I asked you the question, if I just said to you, "Hey, how's your soul?" How would you answer that question? Most of us would start talking about the things that we're doing, the activities, the adventures, the accomplishments, or we would start complaining about the people in our life while they're messing everything up. That's not your soul. How's your soul? Do you know what a soul is? Do you have one?

Have you ever seen it? Do you know what condition it's in? See, it's only when we get in silence and solitude where our soul actually comes out because your soul is not loud and demanding. So, if you arrange your life around noise and chaos, your soul, like a turtle, will withdraw. It will pull inside of there in order to protect itself. But when things get quiet enough, it might poke its head out and you might actually see it. And when it gets exposed, God can actually do some healing and some freeing, and some restoring. I mean, just think of the woman at the well. Remember that story? You probably read it totally different from now on when you see it as a picture of silence and solitude. It's just her and Jesus at the well, silent and alone. And Jesus starts talking to her, having a conversation with her. And He says, "Why don't you go get your husband?" She says, "I don't have a husband." He says, "You're right. You've been married five times and you're living with a sixth man."

Exposure. She's got nothing to hide behind. Why? Because it's silence and solid. There's no one else to blame. There's no distraction. There's nothing to make it about. She is literally fully exposed before Jesus. And because her soul is exposed, because all of the snowflakes come down and He can actually see, she can actually see the reality of what's there. He is able to do a deep work in her soul because she is present and she has presented herself to Him to do a deep work inside of her, that He does this deep work inside of her. She leaves her pale, runs back to her town with this restored, alive in the soul. And I think that is such a great picture of silence and solitude. We get quiet before God. We get exposed, and He does amazing work within us that gives us this profound sense of strength and healing and restoration that most of us never experience in our life. Because we keep it so noisy and so chaotic that our soul doesn't come out.

I mean, just think about what we do when we do quiet time with God. We get quiet time with God to ask God for things that are very practical and shallow. "I get alone with God because I have some things I need Him to do that are practical and shallow." Like, "Should I buy this car? Should we buy this house? Should we move here? Should I do this sport? And should I marry this person?" Very practical, very shallow. But if you get quiet enough when you ask those questions, God doesn't seem to answer them, does He? Like all those times you do quiet time for the practical and the shallow, how effective are those answers? My guess would be not in a way that you're satisfied with. And God doesn't answer them because He's trying to get us to this place of silence and solitude where He can ask us questions that are deep and profound. He doesn't give us shallow and practical answers. He asks us questions that are deep and profound.

Like, "Where are you? Who do you say that I am? And why are you so afraid? And who told you that? Who is it that you're looking for?" And all of a sudden in this exposed soul, God does this deep work. He starts healing and restoring and freeing all because we were willing to turn down the noise and get rid of the chaos for a few moments. And then, it allows us to hear God's whisper. See, we all say we want to hear God's voice, but we arrange our lives as if we never wanted to hear God's voice. "I want to hear God's voice. I just need him to speak louder." Well, God is not interested in competing for your attention. He's very secure in Himself, so He doesn't need to do all these things to get you to arrange your life. He's pretty good. He's just waiting for you to quiet it all down.

And God doesn't speak in the spectacular. He speaks in the whisper because the whisper causes us to lean in. In fact, do you remember the story of Elijah? "The Lord said, 'Go out and stand in the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord wasn't in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elija heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him." You see, God's voice is not in the spectacular, it's in a whisper. Is your life arranged in such a way that you can actually hear the whisper?

What does God want to say to you? What has he been trying to say to you? The problem is our life is so noisy and so chaotic we can't hear Him. Then we say He doesn't talk. This is why silence and solitude is a declaration of faith. Because when I quiet my life, I'm saying God will speak. And when I choose solitude and withdraw from the world to be alone with God, I say He is here and I expect Him to speak and to be present. In fact, I love the psalmist that says, "Be still, and know that I am God." There is some knowing of God that can only be found in the stillness. There are some experiences, encounters, revelations, relationship that you can have with God that will never be found in the spectacular, not in the earthquake, not in the wind, not in the fire. As much as we love all that, it can only be found in the stillness. The question is, is your life arranged in a way that ever allows you to know the part of God that is only found in the quiet?

In fact, last verse, Psalm 23 that we memorized earlier this year, another practice. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul." Do you see it? Silence and solitude are the way we position ourselves to be present so He can do a deep work within us. He leads us to green pastures where we're alone with Him, withdrawn from the crowd. And He brings us beside quiet waters. He turns down all the noise out there and all the noise in here so that we can be present and present ourselves to Him so that he can do a deep work in here. So, here's your practice plan for this week.

Wake up early every day this week and practice silence and solitude for 10 minutes. Just try it. Just try it. This is it. I'm not asking you to add anything into your life. I'm asking you to take 10 minutes of sleep out of your life. Every day this week, 10 minutes, wake up earlier and practice silence and solitude. You say, "Well, what do I do?" You find a quiet place in your house or on the back porch or on the park, and you set a timer and you put it in another room. You put it away from you so you're not by your phone and you set timer for 10 minutes and you then present yourself to God. You say, "God, I've turned down all the noise out here. I'm working on turning down the noise in here. I have withdrawn from my family, my friends, my responsibilities, the crowd, this world, all the things that need my attention today. I've withdrawn from them to be with you. God, I am trying to be present and I want to present myself to you so that you can do a deep work within me."

You say, "Then, what do I do?" Then, you sit there and you wait on the Lord. And you let Him do what only He can do. And if you practice this, what you will find very quickly is your mind has been trained for noise and chaos. You will literally feel like you're going like an addict. You

will be going through withdrawal because you are. You're addicted to noise and chaos. The way an addict is addicted to alcohol or drugs. You will literally start feeling yourself going through withdrawal, getting antsy, getting anxious, getting overwhelmed, getting stressed. You will literally realize how untrained your mind is because it starts going like this and running 10,000 things like a giant balloon blown up with all this stuff in it. Silence and solitude let it all come out for it to be blown back up of what we're actually supposed to be thinking about and meditating on and focusing on. And what you'll probably figure out for most of us is it's going to take you, the reason I'm asking you to do this every day this week, is it's going to take you almost every day this week to just get to zero so you can have a moment with God.

And when you realize that it's going to take you every day this week to just get to a place where your snow globe is settled enough to actually see what's there to actually hear from God, my hope is, is that that terrifies you and causes you to rearrange your life in some way. Because at some point in time, here's what I want to say to you. If you can't do 10 minutes, do 5 minutes. If you can't do 5 minutes, you need to reconsider how you're living your life. Nicest way I can say it to you. You're like, "But I like it when you do that. If you can't do 10, do 5. If you can't do 5, do 1." No, if you can't do 5, if you can't do 5, you literally need to consider how your life is ordered because you're scrambling your own life. If you can't sit in a drive-through window to get a fast-food meal without getting on your phone, what is that? That's the terrifying nature of silence and solitude.

Can you go for a walk without AirPods? "Who does that?" Exactly. AirPods, do you realize that it is a constant stream of noise in your head? Have you ever just... And you're like, "But I listen to good things." I don't care what you're listening to. You're listening to noise. Everything that you listen to and you put in your head is the noise of someone else's head that has been declared into the atmosphere. So, if you're overwhelmed by the noise in your head, just think about the fact that you're choosing to fill your head with the noise that's in someone else's head. It was the noise in here that created that social media post or that song or that podcast or that TV show or that gossip channel or whatever the thing is, right? Someone else's noise got released and you're not choosing to listen to it. Now, there's great things to listen to. That's what you need to figure out, but just acknowledge what it is. So, if you're like, "I can't do any of this," then great. First thing would be, "Can you drive to work or school without the radio on?"

"I have a radio." Okay. I know. That's archaic. Okay. Spotify, a podcast, something like pick your... I know sometimes I show you how un-techy I am. Can you do that? Can you literally, when you find yourself sitting on the couch with your children, can you just not have be on your phone? "I'm not on my phone. I'm on my computer and I'm doing things for the family." Oh my gosh. Just acknowledge... I should have brought a snow globe. It's you. It's you're shaking it. And then, you get mad at everyone else. But here's the deal. The world isn't shaking your snow globe. You're shaking it. And Jesus could have said He was the most important, most significant. The crowds wanted Jesus... Just hear me for all of us. The crowds wanted Jesus a lot more than they want you. And the religious people wanted to ruin Jesus's life a lot more than anyone wants to ruin your life.

And Satan wanted to get Jesus a lot more than He wants to get you. So, if Jesus could do silence and solitude and say they don't have the ability or the authority to shake up my life, then how much more so can I? You say, "They don't have the ability or the authority to shake up my life. I have to arrange it differently, though. And I have made so many choices that have arranged my life." And this is the challenge. When we talk about in this whole series, train yourself to be godly, we've trained ourselves for noise and chaos. This is why when you put your shoes on and you walk to the mailbox to train for that marathon, it's exhausting the first time because silence and solitude is literally for most of us like, "Man, I don't even know that I'm going to make it to the mailbox and back." Why? Because I've been trained to run triathlons of noise and chaos. So, I am so trained to do... Oh, I can do the two-mile swim and the bike thing and the Ironman. Yes, of noise and chaos.

Can you get around the block in silence and solitude? It's a great question, isn't it? You're like, "I didn't like this." I know. I don't like sitting and teaching either. I'm trying to prophetically demonstrate what we're talking about. I'm not sure it's working for any of us. But you can't use your personality wiring or your lifestyle as the excuse of why this doesn't work for you. And you have to decide how interested you are in having a quiet and peaceful soul. If that doesn't captivate you as a vision of who you want to become, then pass silence and solitude. Don't do this this week. Come back next week as we go on to the next one and just keep moving forward.

But if there's this part of you that longs for Jesus's invitation to have rest in our souls, then this is part of the pathway to get there. Just don't expect the world or your spouse or your children or your parents or your friends to celebrate this because their life is arranged around noise and chaos, and they want to suck you into it. But if you'll practice silence, you can enter into their noise with peace. And if you'll practice solitude, you can enter into their chaos with power. And so, maybe, just maybe, we could try this this week. If you can't do 10, try 5. If you can't do 5, look at your life. And maybe, just maybe, God will show you what your life actually looks like as the noise and chaos comes down. And maybe, just maybe, you'll hear or see God's voice in some profound way because you're making a declaration of faith that God is speaking and that God is here.

Close your eyes with me. It's amazing how uncomfortable we get even with 15 seconds of silence together. The gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit I believe is speaking to all of us and inviting us to a holy rebellion, divine resistance.

The heavenly defiance against the noise and the chaos of this world. Jesus wants to quiet and calm your soul, not just a day off and not just a day where there's no homework and not just a day when your family doesn't irritate you, but actually a heart posture that has peace and quiet, regardless of what's happening in the snow globes of anyone else's life. And so, Holy Spirit, give us courage and faith to enter into the quiet place with You this week. Help us not be afraid of the desert, the lonely place, the place without noise and crowd that we might hear You and see You.

Jesus, thank You that You are so compassionate and tender. That You know our struggles and You know how hard this will be for some of us. And yet, You promise to meet us in those

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places. That this isn't a duty to perform or an obligation to fulfill, this is an invitation to come away with You by ourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. If you fall asleep this week trying and silence in solitude, that's okay. Shows you how tired you are and God wants to bring you rest. If you feel like you fail and you can't do it, that's okay. You're moving towards God, and He is showing you there's a different way to live your life. So, Jesus, teach us a different way. Help us do the things that You did so we can do the things that You did. In your name, we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



OCTOBER 6, 2024
SEASON THREE, EPISODE SIX
“SIMPLICITY”

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us. Whether this is your first time or you're here every week, we are so glad that you are here. I'm glad you're here because Jesus is here and you can feel Him and you can experience Him and you can encounter Him and He's real and He's alive and He's moving and He is here to meet with you. And so, come on, whatever campus you're at – whether you're in Denton, Flower Mound, Gainesville, Lewisville, or Online – can we just welcome each other together for a moment? We are one church that meets in multiple campuses that carries the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. Hope is here. Everyone is welcome. Jesus changes everything. We are a Jesus-focused, Spirit-filled, Life-giving church. And sometimes you just need to be reminded that you are a part of something significantly bigger than yourself.

You see, we've been in this year-long series together called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. And we're taking basically an entire year to answer the question, "Who are we becoming? Who do we want to become? And what does it look like to actually be a disciple of Jesus?" And all year, we've been using this little phrase. We just keep saying that if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to do the things that Jesus did. If I want to do the things that Jesus did, like have peace, contentment and joy and passion and life and healthy relationships and deep connection with God and a life of purpose, then I first have to do the things that Jesus did – the practices, the lifestyle, the disciplines that He took on, like prayer and Scripture and meditation and confession and silence and solitude and sabbath. If I want to live the life that Jesus lived, I have to first live the life that Jesus lived. If I want His health, I have to take on His habits. If I want to do what He did on the spot, I have to first do what He did behind the scenes. And so, we're taking a look at the lifestyle of Jesus – His practices, His habits, His disciplines – and allowing Him to teach us how to live our lives. And we've just used this verse that says, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't try to be godly. Don't wait around and hope one day you'll be godly. Don't allow the world to train you to be worldly. No, train yourself. Take on practices and disciplines and habits. And then, what we've said is that these spiritual practices, these spiritual disciplines, are simply doing what you can do now so you can do what you can't do later. A discipline – a practice – is just doing what I can do now so that I can train myself to become the kind of person that can do what I want to be able to do later. Like, if I can't play the piano now, what can I do? I can back up and practice or train myself every day, practicing the piano. And eventually, I will learn how to do that. And so, as we've looked at these practices in season three, we've broken this up into four seasons to get through the whole year. We're in season three. We're just about done with it. We've gone through a lot of practices and what I just want to keep reminding you, I've tried so hard in this series to just remind you that these practices are not religious duties. They are not religious expectations. They are not have-tos. They are not obligations. These are invitations from God – means of grace, ways of opening yourself up to the life of God to flow through you and to move through you. You don't have to do any of these. They're all invitations from God to train yourself to be godly. And so, as we've gone through these, if you've struggled, if it's been hard, if you've not been able to do it like the way that you've wanted to do it, that's okay. We're all learning and growing together. And even though I'm the one up here every week teaching these to you, I don't have

it worked out in my life either. Some of these I've been practicing for years. Some of these in the last few seasons. And some of these I'm learning how to apply in my life in the here and now. And so, my hope for you in this whole series that we've been in is that you will be able to say, "I love what we're doing, I love where we're going, and I love how it's going in me." Which brings us to the last practice for season three, and it's the perfect practice to pull all of season three together. And it is the practice called simplicity.

Simplicity. You see, Jesus practiced simplicity. When we look at Jesus' life, one of the things that we discover is that His life was very simple. It wasn't complicated. It wasn't complex. Jesus wasn't overextended or over-committed. He didn't fill His life with a bunch of possessions and materialisms and commitments and duties and responsibilities and obligations. He had this incredibly simple life that allowed Him to seek God's kingdom first. In fact, Jesus says about Himself, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can only do what He sees His Father doing because whatever the Father does, the Son does also." In other words, Jesus says, "I only do what I see the Father doing. If you want to know what my life is about, my entire life is doing what I see the Father doing, going where I see the Father going, and saying what I hear the Father saying." He says He'd arranged His life – He's ordered His life – in such a way that there is margin and space for Him to be able to respond to whatever the Father was inviting Him to do, go where the Father was going, say what the Father was saying, do what the Father was doing. He practiced simplicity. And when I say "simplicity," simplicity does not mean boring, mundane, routine, purposeless, lack of adventure. No, this is Jesus, the most significant, powerful, needed, influential, adventurous person who has ever walked on the face of the earth. Jesus, the creator and redeemer and sustainer of all things. Jesus, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Ancient of Days, the Rock of Ages, the Good Shepherd, the Prince of Peace, the one in whom life exists in Himself. He did not complicate His life by bringing a bunch of worldly things into His life. He practiced simplicity by arranging His life in such a way that He could seek God's kingdom first. Now, imagine if Jesus arranged His life the way most of us arrange our lives. Imagine if Jesus was not only a carpenter, but He was also a fisherman and had a tax collector business on the side. Imagine if Jesus on the side was part of an MLM olive oil business adventure that promised one drop will make your child a genius, will cure all your sicknesses and allow you to sleep well every single night. Imagine if Jesus had a house in Galilee, a house on the Mediterranean coast, and a house in the mountains. Imagine if Jesus consumed Himself with keeping up with the latest fashion coming out of Greece. And all the while, He was training to be a Roman gladiator. Imagine how different the Gospels would read. They would read very different because Jesus wouldn't have any time to do what the Father was doing or go where the Father was going or say what the Father was saying. He practiced simplicity. And simplicity does not mean poor. I know some poor people whose lives are incredibly complex, and I know wealthy people whose lives are incredibly simple. Simplicity does not mean poor. Jesus was not poor. We think of Jesus and we put Him in this poverty mindset. Jesus wasn't poor. He was a successful carpenter. His ministry was so significant that wealthy women funded it. His disciples carried around a money bag, which means they had stuff to be able to do the things that they were doing. He often ate at fancy banquets and

elaborate dinner parties. In fact, when Jesus dies, the Roman soldiers gamble for who's going to get His clothes because they were so valuable. So, simple does not mean poor. Simple means "my life is arranged in such a way that I can seek God's kingdom first." In fact, one day it says, "As Jesus was walking along with the disciples, a man said to Him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.'" In other words, Jesus says, "Hey, your life is way too complicated to actually be a disciple. My life is way too simple for you to follow me because I have practiced simplicity from the very beginning." You see, if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to do the things that Jesus did. And I don't think there is a person in this room that doesn't want to do the things that Jesus did, like live under an open heaven and have a Mount of Transfiguration experience and hear the Father speak directly to them and have stories to tell like the woman at the well and raising Lazarus and Zacchaeus and the blind men and the lepers. But if we won't practice simplicity, our life will not be arranged to be able to do those kinds of things. In fact, because Jesus practiced simplicity, His life was arranged that He had the margin to take on all the other practices of His life. When we don't arrange our life around simplicity, that's why we don't have the margin or space to do all the other practices we've been talking about.

Are you with me on this? Okay. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler? He's rich, he's young, and he's a ruler. Which means he's youthful, he has great wealth, and he has power and influence. What a hard hand that man has been dealt. What a burden to bear. The hand that he was dealt is the hand we all think we want, but we don't realize how hard of a hand that actually is to play. It is a burden to bear because it takes profound character to play that hand well. So many of the young people that we know that are in our church have been handed that same exact hand, and it is a burden to bear because it takes great character to play it well. And he comes to Jesus one day, even though he is rich and he is young and he is a ruler. And he asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In other words, the man realizes there's more. He's hungry. He's thirsty. He's got this deep stirring in his soul. He has this intention for more of God. And so, he asked Jesus that. And Jesus says, "Well, keep the commandments. Do not lie. Do not steal. Honor your father and mother. Do not commit adultery." The man says, "All these I've kept since I was a boy." "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Remember, love means goodwill. So, in this moment, Jesus' will for the man is good. "'One thing you lack,' He said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'" With goodwill, Jesus looks at him and He says, "Go, sell everything you have, give to the poor. Then come, follow me." In other words, here's what Jesus is saying. He's saying, "Hey, your life is too complicated to actually follow me. You've got too much stuff in your life, too many possessions, too many activities, too many duties, too many materialisms, too many side hustles, too many side businesses, too many things that you are worried and concerned about that you have great care for." Look what He says. "Go, sell

everything you have," which doesn't just mean the man has piles of cash in the bank. It means he's used that cash to acquire a bunch of stuff that has incredibly complicated his life. So, what He is saying is "you got to get rid of some of the complications. You got to simplify some things and give to the poor." Notice, He doesn't say, "Give it all to the poor." He's not telling the man He has to be poor. He's saying, "You need to simplify your life because all these complicated things that you've acquired and taken on and are responsible for, that you're concerned about, are keeping you from following me." But the man went away sad because he had great wealth. He had a life full of complicated things that he had acquired over his life. And Jesus looked at the disciples and says, "How hard is it for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." See if you can catch this. In any area that you are rich, that is the place that it is hardest for you to enter the kingdom of God. In any place that you're rich – wealthy, don't think money, any place where you have an abundance – that is the place that is hard for you to enter into the kingdom of God. Why? Because the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God. It's where His will is done. And when I'm wealthy in an area, it means I have to submit and surrender my kingdom and my will to His. But the more wealthy I am in an area, the harder it is to do that. Like, if I'm wealthy with money, it's the hardest place for me to enter into the kingdom of God. If I'm wealthy with family – I have this abundant, prosperous family – that is a place that is hard for you to enter the kingdom of God. If you're wealthy and influenced, that's a place that's hard to come under. If you're wealthy in time – you own your own time, you have an abundance of time – that is the hardest place for you to submit and surrender to the kingdom of God. This is why Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the kingdom of God." In other words, in whatever area you're poor and you don't have a lot, that's the place that's easiest for you to come into the rule and reign of God. I mean, think about this. Have you ever heard anybody sit there and say, "I'm just so wealthy that I've decided I need God. My life is going so well, I've decided I just need to arrange my life around God. My family's crushing it. I'm successful. I have so many followers on social media. I just need more of God." No. What do we hear people say? "My life is broken. My spouse left me. I lost my job. I'm sick. I have nothing. I need Jesus." Whatever area you're wealthy in, that's the place that's hard for you to enter the kingdom of God. So, can I ask you a question? Where are you wealthy? Not finances. Maybe that's one of them, but wealthy – prosperous, abundance – that is a place you have to work 10 times harder to submit and surrender to the lordship of Jesus because that is the place that Jesus says it's hard for you to enter into life from above. In fact, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich, a wealthy, person with abundance to enter the kingdom of God. And I tell you this story because as I was studying and praying for you this week, the Lord showed me the story. And I was like, I think this story is so many of our lives in the different way journey. I think so many of us hear the invitation for A Different Way and the rich, young ruler – we have this heart, this interest, this excitement, this longing, and we come. And as we've been sitting through the course of this year, if you've been here with us, hearing about A Different Way, what I think Jesus has been saying is, "Hey, your life is too complicated. You got to simplify it. If you actually want to follow me, you got to create some margins, some space. You got to rearrange some things because you've taken in too many responsibilities, duties, materialism, possessions, things, stuff, commitment, and you got to create some space

in order to be able to follow me." But because we have taken on so many things in our life and are so wealthy with the abundance of worldliness, our face falls and we go away sad. Because it's hard for when I have a lot of things to enter into the kingdom of God. And so, we're trying to take all of these things and yank them through the eye of a needle as if somehow I can bring all the complicated realities of the world that I have chosen and yank them through into the kingdom and live a different way. This is what I think is happening to so many of us. If it's been hard for you to do any of the practices, if you've been inspired, but then not able to move forward, maybe just maybe it's because Jesus is saying your life is too complicated to actually do it. In fact, Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Think how much of our life is storing up treasures on earth – storing up the things, materialism, possessions, commitments, activities, influence, all these things – we gather it all up, and moths eat it, rust destroy it, thieves break in and steal it. So, we spend much of our life repairing the holes that the moths have chewed, getting the rust off of the things that corrode over time, and spending a whole lot of time, energy, and money on insurance and security systems to keep things from being lost, stolen, and broken. And because that's become the consuming thing of our life, that's my treasure. That's where my heart will be also. This is why Jesus goes on to say, this is the Sermon on the Mount. This is why there's so much worry and stress and anxiety in our life because we have chosen to complicate our life by taking the things of the world and bringing them into our life in a way that just eats us from the inside out. Or how about this that says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." If I want to do the things that Jesus did, I got to first do the things that Jesus did. So, if I want contentment, I have to choose to be godly to be like God, to live like Him, simply. "Godliness with contentment." The problem is a lot of us this phrase would read "worldliness with discontentment." We've arranged our life around the world, and therefore it's discontent. We've taken all the things of the world. We just keep trying to acquire and accumulate. And I'm just not talking about stuff and money. I'm talking activities and select sports and business travel and vacations. I'm talking about all of it. We complicate our life. We bring all this worldly stuff in. We have this deep discontentment, and we wonder why. Did you ever notice how interesting it is? Whatever you have, you want more of that thing. Whatever it is that you have, you want more of that. You have money, you want more money. You have influence, you want more influence. You have time, you want more time. You have possessions, you want more possessions. You have God, you want more of God. So, here's my question for you. What is it that you have that you want more of? "People who want to get rich" – don't think money, think complicated life, worldly influence, and significance – "fall into the temptation and a trap into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men and women into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." This is a passage worth really meditating on in your own life because He basically says, "People who want to complicate their life, who want to take in all the things of the world, fall into a trap. They experience ruin and destruction." The love of money" – right? The love of money,

goodwill. The love of money is my will is for the good of my money when my will is supposed to be for the good of God and the good of humanity. That's what it is. Money is not the problem. The love of money, my will, goodwill, is for the good of my money over the good of God and the good of humanity. "Will ultimately cause me to wander from the faith and I pierced myself with many griefs." In other words, I complicate my own life, and then I get mad at everybody else for how hard it is. That's what He's saying. Now, this is really important to say. Simplicity does not mean poverty. Okay. God does not care if you have stuff. He cares if stuff has you. So, we're all real clear on this. God is wealthy. Psalm 24 says, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who dwell among it." So, it's all His, but ain't none of it have a hold on Him. So, God doesn't care if you have stuff. He cares if stuff has you. I know a lot of poor people who have nothing, and that nothing has a hold on them. And I know a lot of wealthy people who have everything, and that everything has no hold on them. So the question is, "What do you have, and does it have a hold on you?" That's the difference between a life of simplicity and a life of complication. In fact, I love this. "But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things, come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful." In other words, all these worldly things that I pull into my life, the desires, I pull all this stuff in to think "this is going to make a good life" actually becomes the very thing that chokes the life of God out of my life and causes my life to become unfruitful.

Think about this with me for a second. Think about how many of us, this is how we live, right? I live like this at times in my life. Just think about it. We dream about getting the thing. Whatever your thing is, you dream. We dream about getting the thing. And we plan for the thing. We save for the thing. Then, we buy the thing. Now, we've got the thing, and so we use the thing. But now, we have to store the thing and fix the thing because the thing always breaks, and rearrange our life around the thing. And then, eventually, we end up complaining about how much time, energy, and money the thing takes from us. Or how about this? We dream about the activity. Whatever your activity is, we dream about it. We plan for it. Then, we sign up for the activity. Then, we pay for the activity. Then, we start doing the activity. Now, we got to rearrange our entire family life around the activity. Then, we get exhausted by the activity. And then, we blame the leaders of the activity for leading it poorly and say, "It's not going well." Why do we do this? Because there's an orphan spirit still alive in a lot of us that wants to hoard all the things of this world. We're still convinced that we are what we have and what we do. So, this pride and this insecurity takes in all the things of the world. I mean, did you ever just... did you ever just stop to think about it like this? The more you take, the more you lose. The more you release, the more you gain. This is why Jesus says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Because if you try to save your life, you'll lose it. But if you lose your life, you'll find it. In fact, Jesus says, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required." Did you ever stop and just realize that whatever God has given you, there is a requirement to steward that, to be responsible for it, to oversee it, to use it wisely for his purposes on this earth? And you can get overwhelmed with, "Well, I'm required to do something with the things that God has given you?" Yes, the things God has given you, He's giving you a grace to oversee them, to steward them, to use them wisely. But what about the

person that takes much? What about the person who goes beyond what God has given them and takes things of the world? Are they prepared for what will be required from them? Because there's no grace given for the things we take that are outside God's design for our life. So, when I go take a bunch of things and bring them into my life, I have to ask myself the question, "Am I prepared for what it's going to demand of me? Am I prepared for what it's going to require of me?" And the answer is no. And this is why we're burned out, stressed out, anxious, irritated, frustrated, defeated, because we take things into our life that complicate our life that there's no grace to actually live out.

This is why Jesus says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed"—this constant sense of more, more, more. I have a house, but I need a bigger house. I have a car, but I need a better car. I have this in the bank; I need that in the bank. I got this for travel; I need that for travel. I'm on this team; I need to be on that team. This constant thing of greed. "Because a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." In other words, Jesus says, "You are not what you have and what you do. You are who has you and what has been done for you." You are who has you. Who has you? In Jesus, I'm included in Christ. He holds me in the palm of my hands and He has given me His name. And I am what He has done for me – the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. I am not what I have and what I do. That is a broken thinking of the world that thinks my identity, my relationship, and my purpose is what I have and what I do. No, my identity, my relationship, and my purpose is based on who has me and what has been done for me in Jesus' name. In fact, that's why I love this verse that says, "This, however, you must know: I find that God made man simple; but man's complex problems are of his own devising." God created you to live a very simple life. And if you will arrange your life in such a way that you can seek His kingdom and do what He is doing, you won't have complex problems in your life. But if I take in all the things of the world, just understand, God is not mad at you. He's not out to get you. He's not trying to shame you today. He's just saying, "Hey, all those complex problems are of your own creating." It's not spiritual warfare. It's not if your spouse would just get their act together. It's not if your parents would just let you do what you want to do. No, you chose to bring it in your life. In fact, in the Old Testament, God even had a law that had people arrange their life around simplicity. "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your fields or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over the vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I'm the Lord your God." You say, "what?" He says this, "Don't live to the edge of your life. You need to leave margin." Margin for what? Margin for the move of God, the work of God, the Word of God, the people of God, the mission of God, the life of God, the grace of God, the Spirit of God. Our problem is not only "do we not leave margin" – we live to the edge and we live way beyond the edge in such a way that complicates our life because we're trying to take that which hasn't been given to us and much is required, demanded from those who take that which does not belong to them. And you are not ready to pay on that payment. You're like, "I like silence and solitude better." Fair.

"So, what then is simplicity?" you say. "Well, simplicity is simply arranging your life in a way that you can seek God's kingdom first. That's how I define simplicity to you. It's just arranging the reality of your life in a way that you can seek God's kingdom first. "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you." This is Jesus in the center of the Sermon on the Mount. This is like the thesis statement. Seek first His kingdom, His rule and reign, His will in your life, His righteousness, His goodness. So, seek first God's will to be good to you – His good rule and reign over your life – and everything else will be added unto you. The problem is we arrange our life around everything else and hope to find Jesus in the process. Simplicity is arranging my life that I can do what the Father is doing, say what the Father is saying, and go where the Father is going. So, my question for you is, like Jesus, He can only do what He sees the Father doing. Do you know what the Father is doing in your life right now? If I just said, "Hey, what's the Father doing in your life right now?" Do you have an answer? Do you know? And if you know, can you actually do it? Have you actually arranged your life in such a way that you're free to respond to that which God is doing and saying and where He's going? One of the things that I can tell you God is doing in your life right now is A Different Way. You say, "No, that's what He's doing in your..." No, if you're a part of this church, that's what He's doing. So this is something that God is doing. Do you see it? Number one. And then, number two, have you arranged your life in such a way that you can do it? Because if you get to the end of this year and you don't do any of the things that we've been trying to do as a people, you've missed a year window of your life where God was trying to do a profound thing in you because your life was too complicated to have the margin and the space to actually do it. And this is our problem: I think our life is too complicated to actually be a disciple of Jesus. And we're too exhausted to actually follow Him. So, we have to simplify, and to simplify requires humility. So, the question is, "Do you have the humility for it?" And you say, "Well, how do I do it?" Well, because our lives are also complicated in so many different ways, I think there's these simple principles that you can apply to your life. So, are you ready for this? Everybody take a breath and say, "I'm ready." Okay. If you're going to actually practice simplicity, you got to slow down. We live way too fast – busy, hurry, stress. We talk about it last couple of weeks. We think busyness is a sign of success. Busyness is an indicator that you're failing at that which matters most. We spend way too much of our life being in a hurry, being in a rush, running around. So, we got to slow down. Listen, I'll tell you a story that I didn't really want to tell you, but I'm going to tell it to you. That's a good start, isn't it? Last year, my son turned 16. And like any 16-year-old, he was very excited about his first car. And so, he saved up money and we were talking about what we were going to do. And we weren't sure, and the school year was starting. And so, it was one of those deals where I was like, "Well, what if every once in a while, just to start, I'll just let you take my truck and I'll have mom drive me to work and it'll be fine, whatever." And so, that happened a day or two. And then, one day I was studying and it was the day he was going to take my truck, and I assumed Colleen was going to take me to work. So, I was studying and doing all my stuff, and then, I got ready and I came out and no one was home. And so, I was like, "Well, all right." I grabbed my little backpack, and I walked to work. I live a couple of miles from the Flower Mound campus. And so, it's about 25-to-30-minute walk. And I walked, and it was hot. And I got to the office,

and I was all sweaty. And everybody's like, "What? You did what? What?" And I was like, "It's okay. I just walked here." It's like, "It's no big deal." And so, that night, we laughed about it at home. Whatever. A couple of days later, it was one of those like, "Hey, can I take the truck again?" And I was like, "Yeah. I'll walk to work again." And my son, "What? Who are you? What?" And I was like, "Yeah, it's fine. I actually enjoyed it. It wasn't that bad." So, long story short, for about nine months last year, two to three days a week, I would walk to work. Now, if you know at Flower Mound, it's 407 and 2499, six-lane, double-lane roads. I had to press the little crosswalk button there and stand there every time. And I often wondered if you drove by and saw me what you would think. And a couple of times, my neighbors would pass me and they would stop and back up, be like, "You okay?" I'm like, "Great." And then, I'd have to rely on other people for rides. And I'd have to ask Jason or Ben or Justin, "Hey, could you give me a ride home?" And I'd have to wait for Colleen to come and get me. Okay. And I tell you that... I didn't want to tell you that story, but I tell you that to this. It was a practice of slowing down for me. When I would walk 25, 30 minutes to work, my blood pressure would go down. My heart rate would lower. I would talk to God. I would be at peace. It's like on the days I walk to work, I feel like I noticed more fruit of the Spirit in my own life the rest of the day because I had chosen to slow my life down along the way. See, we live 100 miles an hour and we brag about it. "I'm going 100 miles an hour." Jesus lived at three miles an hour, literally, because that's the speed that a human can walk, three miles an hour. He walked everywhere. So, somewhere you got to figure out how are you going to downshift from 100 to 3. And you say, "Well, how do I do that? I have to walk to work?" Please don't. Do things like this: When you get to a red light, pick the longest line to get behind, not the shortest. Just trying to help you. Actually drive the speed limit – not because you're worried about getting a ticket but because you're practicing slowing down. When you park in a parking lot, don't pick the closest spot; pick the furthest one away that will require you to walk in. Don't do a mobile order; actually go in and order your thing. Have to talk to a human and wait for it to be prepared for you. When you check out at the grocery store or the Lowe's or whatever, don't use self-checkout; find the longest line to get behind and wait. You say, "That's ridiculous." No, what's ridiculous is living your entire adult life complaining about how busy and tired you are. That's ridiculous. So, if we're going to practice simplicity, we have to practice by starting to slow down.

Second thing is give it away. You say, "Give what away?" Yes. Think of how much stuff we've acquired in our lives. Think of how much stuff you have. Think of how many clothes you have in your closet you haven't worn in the last two years. Think of the 50 pairs of shoes you have. Think of the 25 rifles that you have that literally you never shoot. They're still in the box. Think of once a year you have to undo your entire garage with all the junk, and reorganize it, and put it all back in there. Think of all the closet space that you have, full of storage things that you're just saving for one day. And then, guess what? You're consumed with it. It's complex. You have to have insurance on it. You're managing it. You're trying to take care of it because the moths are eating it and rust is destroying it. So, what if I just started giving some of that stuff away to un-complicate my life? Jesus says it's more blessed to give than to receive, right? Do you ever ask yourself why? See, I think one of the dumb things we do is we just, "Okay, it's more blessed

to give." Jesus, why do you say that? Do you ever ask Him that? I mean, I don't know about you, but I've been blessed by so many people who have given me something from their life, but they were more blessed than I was. Why? Because the moment they gave it away, they just simplified their life. That's why it's more blessed because you uncomplicate your life and you detach yourself from this world, and you free yourself from all these things you have to manage and oversee and take care of. I mean, what if you only kept things in your life that you found purposeful, meaningful, or beautiful? And everything else you got rid of? What if you only kept it? It's purposeful. It's accomplished as a purpose in my life. This is meaningful. This was like a childhood memory. I want to keep this. Or it was beautiful. Like, it inspired you in some way. What if you just got rid of everything else? How different would your life be? See, we ask questions like when it's time to get something, we ask questions like, "Can I afford it?" We think about it just in terms of money. Money is important, but you also have to ask if you can afford it in terms of time. See, when I take things into my life, I have to ask, "Can I afford it?" And here's the problem. We live in a world that teaches us to live in debt as if debt is normal. The Bible tells us that the borrower is slave to the lender. In other words, the moment you take debt, you're a slave to someone else that immediately complicated your life. And think of the word we use, "consumer debt." So, I have enslaved myself to someone else to consume something of this world. Now, I realize this might be the most radical thing I've said in the entire thing. You'd be hard-pressed to find a single verse in the Bible that supports taking on debt. Now, I'm not telling you there's not a place for a mortgage or a business loan or a car that you need to get to work. I'm saying before you take any debt, you need to seek God to make sure this is a part of your life and purpose in this season because we become slaves to the lender and therefore, we can't be servants to God. Why? Because my life is now too complicated. "Sorry, God, I can't do what you're asking me to do because I got to pay back the lender." Who's my God then? So, it's a choice. So, I have to ask that. And I know that's not a fun conversation because debt, it just crushes people. And so it hurts and it's offensive and it brings it up. And if you're there, then you got to start backing out and you start by simplifying the rest of your life. And you say, "I don't want to live that way. I don't want to live in a rush, and I don't want to live as a slave to some bank." Okay. But then, you also got to ask, "Do I have the time for it?" We might be able to afford it financially, but do you have the time for it? If it's going to take you away from tucking your kids in every single night, you don't have the time for it. If it's going to take you, if the only time you can use that thing is on Sundays, you don't have the time for it because you can't neglect gathering with the people of God to worship God. Do you ever ask yourself the question, "Can I afford this via time, not just money?" Significantly important.

Third thing, quit the right things. Quit the right things. Here's what happens. We get so complicated, so busy, so overwhelmed. We just break. And we're like, "I got to eliminate some things. I got to quit some things." And we quit all the wrong things. We quit going to church because "I just need to sleep in on Sunday mornings because I'm so exhausted." We quit our Circle because "I just don't have time for that. My life is just too busy." We quit our serve team because "I just got too much going on with all the other activities. I can't make that

commitment." We quit engaging Scriptures because "we're just so exhausted in the mornings. We can't get up and do it." We quit engaging, having meaningful conversations with our family because "we just need five minutes to veg out and watch some shows on TV." Okay. I would just encourage you to define what you're actually quitting. What you're saying is you're so busy in your life, so complicated, you don't have time to worship God, to grow as a disciple, to be a part of the body of Christ and serve, to pursue the wisdom of God, and to engage in the relationships that matter most in your life. Just call it then what it is. Fair? Okay. You still all like me? Okay. So, parents, ready? This one's really significant, and I would like you to give me permission for two minutes to talk to you as a pastor. I never say stuff like this, so just try to hear what I'm trying to say, okay? I've been here almost 20 years. In the almost 20 years that I've been here, conservative estimate, we've had more than 20,000 teenagers be a part of our church in some way, shape, or form, okay? Conservatively. It's probably way more than this. I went conservative on all these numbers. 20,000 teenagers. And I'm not saying like showed up for one event one time. I'm saying they were a part of our church in some capacity. Out of those 20,000, there are less than 50 that we are aware of that went on to get a significant scholarship in athletics, music, theater, dance, sports, academics, whatever it may be. And of those 50, there are less than five that we're aware of that went on to go pro. Okay. I want you to think about this, 20,000 to 50 to 5. And what happens in the area that we live in is we have been taught that you need to arrange your life around the select sport, music, academic, theater, whatever the thing is, and it becomes all-consuming. So, we take a decade of the most formative years of our students, and we pivot the arrangement, and we say, "We're going to arrange our life around this thing and hope we find Jesus in the process." And 10 years go by, and what we all forget is after that sport, that theater, that music, that dance, that thing ends, they still have a soul. And they will have a soul for the rest of their life, and they will have a soul for all of eternity. And so, what we've done is we've trained our children to arrange their life around the world and hope to find Jesus in the process. Now, if that's what you want to do, that's fine. My encouragement to you would be then call it what it is. Don't say, "We're Christians. We're disciples. We're people of the kingdom, but my entire life is arranged around the world." No, just tell your child, "We're arranging our life around baseball or music or academics because we think that's most important. And we hope when you grow up, you will find Jesus somewhere along the way." Say it what it is because what happens is the church is left with the 35-year-old version of your kid who has been trained to think being a disciple of Jesus is to go to church on Christmas and Easter, live like the world 363 days of the year, and call themselves a disciple. Don't clap. Don't clap. Don't clap. No, because that's hurtful to people. I get it, but it's very important. And probably, those of us that would clap, it's like we participate in this dysfunctional cycle. My point is we've got to call things what they are because otherwise, we set a worldview and people that is almost impossible to break down the road. The rich, young ruler, he's handed a really bad hand. We think it's a great hand. You're like, "I'm doing everything to help my kid be a rich, young ruler." That's terrible parenting. I actually want to help my kid be like Jesus. Now, hear me, if you're like, but... Okay. Again, I don't like talking about myself. Listen, I played college lacrosse. I had a scholarship. I played international lacrosse, the highest level of lacrosse in my generation. I was on those teams. It's

possible. But what you have to do is you have to eliminate everything else. So, you put Jesus first. Then, you say, "We're called to do this. We're going to be called to go after this sport or this thing or this whatever." But it means you can't do football and baseball and basketball and bowling all and be an excelled triathlete in the midst of that. You literally have to say, "Jesus has to be first. But then, we're acknowledging that this thing is so significant because we think it's part of the purpose of your life." David only served God's purpose in his generation. You know what that means? That means David didn't go fight any battles, build any buildings, acquire any things, go do anything that wasn't outside of his purpose for his generation. Do you know what your purpose is for your generation? Just make sure, however, whatever you're quitting that you're quitting things that are outside of that purpose. And you say, "Well, that's like a boring, insignificant life." If you've read David's life – Jesus did more in three years than you'll do in your entire life by practicing simplicity. It's not boring and irrelevant. It's adventure and freedom because now I'm available to be used by God. Are you with me? Y'all still like me? Just think about it. You think about your kid and why your kid's going to break the mold. That's fine. I'm just telling you, this is the mold. And 20 years and where we live, this is how the game goes. 20,000, it's less than 50, and it's less than 5. I'm being generous and giving you some hope. Fair?

Re-evaluate often. You gotta re-evaluate often because life doesn't move towards simplicity; it moves towards complexity. At the end of every quarter, month, year, season, school year, whatever it is, sit down and ask yourself the question, "Are all the things we've taken into our life, are they helping us become the person we want to be?" At the end of every single year, Colleen and I sit down and we re-evaluate education for our children. Every single year. We do not have a set-it-and-forget-it mindset on it. And we've done homeschool. We've done public school. We've done private school. We've done faith-based, and we've done secular. Because every year we ask the question, "Is this helping us and our children accomplish God's purpose for their life?" When was the last time you sat down and reevaluated all these things, that car you bought 10 years ago and are just sitting on? That investment, that side hustle, that business, that desire for the next house, the third house, the next thing, the closet of hobby mementos that you've kept? Do you ever just ask, "Are these still helping me have the freedom and margin to follow Jesus? Or do I need to release some things and trust God and move forward?"

And the last thing is ask God first. Do you know how much pain you would eliminate from your life if you just ask God? "Should I buy this? Should I sign up for this team? Should I take on this promotion? Should I travel for work? Should I be a part of this activity, this club? Should we move?" We just don't ask God, and then we do it. And then, we get mad by how overwhelmed we are. Because why? Because to whom much is taken, much will be demanded. So, I took something that wasn't for me and it demands a lot. God doesn't... Just so we're clear, to whom much is taken, whoever takes much, much will be demanded. God doesn't demand it from you. It demands from you. And it is a terrible master. And it's exhausting. And then, we burn through our life and we get grumpy and cynical and skeptical and jaded. And it's everyone

else's problem that made – no one else makes you choose the job you have. So, don't complain about your work. Has anyone ever told you, "You have to have this job?" Maybe a 15-year-old that his parents make them work at McDonald's for a year. But I'm serious. Think of how much you complain. We complain about our job. You chose it. Don't complain about your house. You chose it. Don't complain about your payments. You bought the stuff. This is complexity versus simplicity. Fair? Last verse. "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands." Do you know that verse is in the Bible? It's a shocking one, isn't it? Because in evangelical circles, we've been taught for so many years, like, "Life with God is an adventure." And then, it feels like this flies in the face of killing giants. What I think this is saying is make sure your ambition is to have a simple life that is arranged in such a way that you can tend the garden that God has entrusted to you. See, there is apathetic life, there's quiet life, and there's busy life. There's non-existent life, there's simple life, and there's complicated life. And for most of what I've been talking about is people that have chosen complexity and busyness in their life, that it's an exhausting, dysfunctional way to live that prevents you from being who God's called you to be. So, the practice of simplicity is simplifying so you can move to simple and quiet. But then, over here, there's some of you that have been sitting here this whole time. You're like, "This is great. None of this applies to me." Because you've chosen a non-existent life. You're right. You don't have anything to oversee, anything to manage, anything to take care of, any job to pursue, any things to arrange, any things to pay for or take responsibility for. You have chosen a non-existent life, and that is just as dysfunctional as the complicated life. That's why he says quiet life, work with your hands. You were created to tend a garden, a garden that is beautiful and purposeful to take dominion over this earth. No, this is a lot of young people. No, you don't need to live like the generation before you that you saw overwork and workaholic and overcommitted, but you also can't live like you're your own God and your job is to sit around and eat grapes all day. You have a garden to tend, a life to pursue, a purpose to fulfill, and only you can accomplish that which God created you to do. You are a part of the body of Christ. And so, some point in time, you have to wake up to be like, "My ambition is what?" Is to live a different way and do the things that Jesus did so I can do the things that Jesus did.

So, here's your practice plan. Your practice plan this week. If you're new, every week we do one of these. Ready? You're not going to like it. Refuse to be in a hurry and... You're like, "Oh, there's an 'and' to this week?" There's an "and." Give one significant thing away. Okay, ready? Your practice plan this week is refuse to be in a hurry. What does that mean? That means don't be in a hurry. Don't rush. So, this entire week, have a mindset to say, "I'm not going to be in a hurry." And you will start hurrying. And then, you will catch yourself hurrying. And then, you will remind yourself, "Okay, don't be in a rush." Think of things we say. "Oh, just pull me up. I just got to run in quick. Oh, I'm just going to do this real fast." I mean, just the language we use implies hurry and rush. Okay. Can you just not be in a hurry this week? What does that mean? It means don't rush to work. Don't rush in the morning. Don't rush to get your kids. Don't rush, run down the halls. Can you just be at peace? And if you're like, "I actually can't," what that'll show you is that your life is arranged in such a complicated way that you don't have margin for

the life that God wants to give you. And I hope that leads to healthy repentance that says, "Okay, I need to do some things different." And then, give one significant thing away this week. If we're talking about simplicity, then I have to uncomplicate my life. And it only comes by giving something away. You say, "What is that thing?" I'm not talking about garbage that you don't want. Like, don't ever give a hole, pitted-out shirt to CCA or something like that. Just no. No. Something significant, something that costs you. It might be a hobby. It might be a side hustle. It might be an investment. It might be that third car, that fifth car, that eighth car. It might be saying "we're not going to upgrade on the house." It might be saying "we're not going to do this activity anymore." It might be saying, "Hey, I've got this hobby collection. It's been great. I'm going to move on from that." And I'm not saying you need to give it away at a loss. Maybe God tells you to sell it. I'm just saying, if you don't actually remove something from your life, are you moving towards simplicity? Otherwise, we just nod our heads. We're like, "Wow, that was a lot. Let's go get some lunch." But if we actually want to live a different way, which is what God is doing in your life right now to align with it, I actually probably need to take a step of faith. And it will take faith. It will take faith and it will take trust to believe that God has more for you than what you're giving away. Remember: the more we take, the more we lose. The more we release, the more we gain. So, what am I gaining by releasing more of God, more of your life purpose, more margin to hear His voice? You're gaining a healthy soul. A healthy soul. If you're really wealthy, you need to make sure you interpreted everything I said but God is not against wealth. He's against wealth having you. And if you're really poor and you're offended and frustrated by all this stuff, you need to rethink about what resting and depending and walking with God looks like. If you're offended about anything else, just give it the benefit of the doubt and say, "God loves me enough to poke on the places in my heart that I would never poke on myself. And that's why I'm a part of a church because God moves among us to take all of us on our individual journey and our collective journey to where He's leading us."

So, Holy Spirit, thank You for moving and speaking in our lives. Thank You for the invitation to simplicity. Jesus, I don't want to live a complicated life full of the things of this world. I want to live a simple life that has margin to do what I see the Father doing, to go where I see the Father going, and to say what I see the Father saying. Holy Spirit, I just ask that you'd release courage and faith and wisdom this week. You are the great counsellor, and You promise if we need wisdom, You will give it to us. And You promise that You instruct us and counsel us and You will watch over the way that we will go. So, may... Let me just free you. If you feel any sense of religious obligation to do either of these, in Jesus' name, you're free. Don't do them. Only participate in the practice plan if your heart is longing to live a different way and move towards Jesus in this direction. It's okay. There's no pressure. You do not have to do it. I've told you from the beginning, you do not have to do this, but reflect on the rich, young ruler passage who didn't have to give away everything. His life was just too complicated to actually follow Jesus. Holy Spirit, may simplicity be a practice that becomes a main reality in our lives as, again, a holy defiance in a world of busyness and complexity. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



OCTOBER 13, 2024
SEASON THREE REVIEW

So, let's do a cry of our hearts. That's our prayer. It's only you, Jesus. It's only you for our lives, for our families, for our work, and for our church. You're the one we seek. You're the only thing we're after. You are our one thing. We love you. Let me invite you to go ahead and take your seats. Let me welcome you to Valley Creek Church. It is good to be together. It is good to be in church, and it's good to be the church. And my name is Jason. I get to serve as the campus pastor here. If this is your first time with us, or if you've been here a while, I just declare over you; hope is here. Everyone is welcome. And Jesus changes everything. And He changes everything about our life. And so, there's hope for you today because we're having a season three recap today.

You see, we've been in a series all year long called A Different Way. And we're just finishing up season three. Kind of like your favorite TV shows have multiple seasons to them, we've been experiencing that all year long. And season three has been a season of simplicity. Season three has been a season of removing. It's been a season of focusing on Jesus as the one thing. And it's been beautiful. He's shown us and done profound things among us. And so, we'll continue on and have just one more season after this, season four. But today, we're going to focus on the goodness of God and all He's spoken to us during these past six weeks. I just want to start by just sharing some stories to build your faith. Can I just tell you? Hope is on the move at Valley Creek Church. Jesus is doing amazing things among us. I've heard so many stories of people stepping into the practices. Things like people saying, "I'm fasting for the first time ever. I'm practicing silence and solitude by doing things like turning off the radio, turning off podcasts, and driving to work just trying to be aware of Jesus."

I've heard people rearranging their life to try to practice sabbath. Things like spouses trading the jobs, like the wife doing maybe the lawn and the husband doing the laundry, so they can create space to actually have a sabbath week in and week out. Just that by itself is profound. Just that by itself is great. But man, I've got some stories for you today. So, here's one for you. I've heard stories of people doing all kinds of rearranging during season three. I love this one. One of our leaders got a text from someone that said, "I just canceled Netflix. It asked me to tell them why I'm canceling. And so, I typed, I'm simplifying my life to be more like Jesus." He goes, "Boy, I hope somebody in the company reads that." Me too. Here's a story for you. This week, we were asked to consider giving away something significant. And I know that's not easy.

But man, it's a great practice to simplify. And so, we heard a story of somebody who gave away an AR rifle because it was sitting on the shelf just collecting dust. Now, if you know anything about that, that's a big giveaway. But here's the profound part. The reason he chose to do it is because he remembered that he bought the rifle right around the time of COVID. And he bought it based out of fear and a sense of protection. And over these past few weeks, he's even realized that Jesus is speaking to him and saying, "I am your protection. I am your security. I am your strong tower." And so, he just decides, like, "Yeah, I don't need to hold on to something that makes me think back on fear. I don't need to be bound by that anymore." And so, he gave away his rifle. That's awesome. He says, "Not a gun, God." That's beautiful. And so that's just one of the ways that we're hearing people stepping into giving away things. Here's another one for you. This is one of my friends this week. They're familiar with a couple

here, there's a younger couple, that's been in really difficult financial straits. I mean, it's everything from like car troubles to foundation repair to medical bills.

And so, they decided to give away something significant by giving them their car. So, they gave them their very new Honda CRV, and it's going to be a huge blessing to them because they have the means to do that, and they knew that they could be the church to somebody who really needed it. And all these stories are leading to things that are even kind of more miraculous. We heard a story recently of parents that were given basically a medical diagnosis for their baby, that the baby missed a hearing test in one ear, so basically didn't pass the hearing test. The baby did that six times over two different sessions where it did not pass the hearing test in the one ear. And so, the parents just decided, "Well, we're not going to pray that they are not deaf. We're just going to pray that Jesus is going to heal them." And so, they began to pray exactly that, that there would be a miraculous healing. And maybe the most beautiful part of the story is that the dad, just by faith, just started declaring over the child, "He who has ears, let him hear. He who has ears, let him hear."

And so, on the seventh test, lo and behold, the nurse was like, "Well, I don't know what happened on the other ones, but they passed the hearing test." So, let's go. Let's go. One more, one more. There is a couple that was here for about two years, just greatly impacted by what God did among them. Just a beautiful journey with Jesus. So much to celebrate. And they knew that they'd just been richly blessed. They knew that they wanted to be a blessing. And so, they're trying to ask the Lord for a way to be generous. Well, it turns out that the couple that had been discipling them was a couple that was really trying to rearrange their life, to get out of debt, to shrink down their expenses, literally like sold a house, moved into a smaller house. A lot of things they're trying to do to prepare themselves for the next season. They believe their next season is that God may be calling him the dad into full-time vocational ministry. Okay.

So, you have to prepare a lot to be able to say yes to that. So, the couple that had been discipled by them said, "Well, maybe it's them." So, one day they were together helping to basically clean up their yard, and they're helping them with some yard work. And at the end of like an afternoon of yard work, the one couple says, "Hey, can I just ask you, how much, like, consumer debt do you guys still have? Like, what do you have left?" And they were like, "Like, you really want to know? Because it was like a lot. We're fighting through it. We're scrapping." They're like, "Yeah, we want to know." They're like, "We have \$24,000." And so right then and there, the couple that had been discipled by them, the one that had been impacted over these two years in the Valley Creek family, pulled out a checkbook and wrote a check for \$24,000 and completely cleared all their consumer debt, setting them on a path of freedom in this next season. So can I just tell you, Jesus is doing some amazing things. He's changing hearts and minds.

He's freeing. He's renewing. Those are some of the stories of what he's doing among us in this family. But you know what? He's writing a story in your life. He's doing something amazing inside of you also. You see, season three was very intimate. It was personal and it was powerful and it was profound. And so, to have a date like this where we just simplify, where we had this personal moment with Jesus, the reason we're doing that is because if you want to live this

powerful and profound life, you must choose to lean in and have these intimate and personal moments with Jesus. That's the way Jesus did it. He would go away. He'd have these personal moments with the Father. And man, did he live a powerful and profound life. So today, during this season three recap, we want to just look back on some of the things that Jesus has spoken to us. So, here's what I want to do now. I want to give you six to seven minutes to look back on your notes that you took over this season. You might think, "Well, I've only been here two weeks." No problem.

We got you covered. On the seat back in front of you, if you scan that QR code, you can scan that with your phone and you can click season three notes. All the notes from all the weeks that we're talking about are in there. We'll give you about six to seven minutes to just look back on what the Lord has already spoken to you. Some time to let Jesus speak to you about what He's already been speaking to you. Go ahead and take this time. Let's read back and reflect and hear from the Lord.

Now, they've taken a few minutes to reflect on what God has spoken to you. I want to invite you to another step, which is to ask the Holy Spirit what He's been speaking to you personally. What's He been saying to you? How has He been moving in your heart and your mind? What is He revealed over the last few weeks in your life? See, the Holy Spirit has a lot to say. And if we quiet ourselves to listen, He will speak. Holy Spirit, would you tell us what you've been saying to us?

If you haven't already done it, go ahead and write down in your journal or in your notes that you're taking, maybe what you think the Holy Spirit's been speaking. You want to have that and you want to hold on to that because one word from God can change everything in our life. Then the last invite that I have for your invitation, is that now that you've looked at some of the notes, now that you've looked through some of the weeks of season three, what's the summary statement? What is your season three summary statement? We've been doing this all year long. We've been asking the Lord to reveal to us a way to bring together all the things He's been speaking. He speaks to each one of us individually. But what's your summary statement? What's it been like for you? Take about three minutes and write that down and try to bring it all together. We're learning more and more that deep things require deep thinking. So that's what we're practicing right now. Go ahead and write that down, your season three summary statement.

So, as we think about these practices of Jesus, I just want to remind all of us this is not trying harder. It's not doing more. It's not trying to check the box or be a "good Christian." These are means of grace. These are means of the goodness of God. It's always about the grace. It's always about the grace of Jesus just flowing in our life. Look at this out of Titus, "for the grace of God has appeared and offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." His grace, it reaches us. It teaches us. It reaches out and grabs ahold of us and it helps pull us into the life that Jesus has called us to. And this verse is really special because it actually just was the memorization verse for our student leadership for this first part of their semester. They did it. They knocked it out. They are hiding God's Word in their heart.

But why do we start with a verse like that for them? Because it's all about grace. Why do we start with a verse like that and let that be the first one they memorize this year? Because it's not try harder, do better, work, work, work more. It's the grace of Jesus that reaches us and teaches us. It transforms us. And so, we want to take today communion together as a reminder of the means of grace of Jesus so our teams can come forward. And as they do and as we take the elements and we get ready to take communion, I just want to remind you. When we take communion as a church family, it's like fresh grace just poured all over our church, over our lives. Communion for anybody who has placed their faith in Jesus and said, "Jesus is Lord." If that's you, you are welcome to take here at Valley Creek. And every time we do, every time we have communion, we're reminded of grace.

We're reminded that what Jesus has done and what He continues to do in our life is give us more of himself, more of his grace. You see, communion, the finished work of Jesus, His broken body and His shed blood is something we could have never achieved or done on our own. There's only one way we were ever going to get it. It was through what He did, who He is, His grace in our life. And so even as we prepare to take it, I just want to remind you what makes something like communion so beautiful is it's just like this reminder of how much we don't get to just control everything. We don't get to do it on our own. We don't get to make our own way. Jesus has made a way. Jesus has done it for us. He's finished everything that had to be finished to bring us back to God. That's the beauty of communion.

I'll tell you on just a personal level, this season's been interesting because I've heard so many people that I feel like are playing like the shame game in their own minds. Like, "Oh, I didn't do it. I didn't have enough time. My life's not arranged this way. And I don't think I can." So, I just want to take a second even before we move forward to just say to you, in Jesus' name, receive His grace. In Jesus name, receive. The fact that we can't do anything in the first place. So, when we practice His ways, when we try to learn to become more like him, when we do the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did, that's by grace. That's all it is. And any little whisper in your ears or your mind that says, "You're not enough, you can't do enough, you haven't done enough, you haven't made it," that's got to go.

And it's got to be replaced with like the love and the grace of Jesus just pouring all over your life. It's Jesus. It's always been Jesus. It always will be Jesus. So, in your life, it's Jesus. It's His grace. Any part of you that lives in any kind of shame and condemnation or lives with a performance mindset, I just declare that's being removed and today it's being replaced with Jesus. It's being replaced with a reminder of who He is and what He's done for us. So, the scriptures are really clear that on the night He was betrayed, Jesus grabbed a hold of the bread and He told His guys, He said, "This is going to be my body broken for you." That is, "I'm going to be broken so that you're going to be made whole. I'm going to do the work so that you can stop working."

I'm going to face the hurt so your heart can be healed. I'm going to sweat, strive, and be in pain so that you can live like this life of ease, freedom, and joy. It's all about Jesus. Let's take the bread together. The same way, grabbed a hold of the cup and He said, "This is a cup of a new covenant, and a new agreement between God and man. No longer will your life or your

perceived worth or your forgiveness be based on what you have done, but be based on what I have done and I'm going to do this. This is a cup that represents the fresh grace of Jesus."

Let's take it together. So, Jesus, thanks for all of it. What you're doing, how you're moving, this profound experience that we've experienced as a church, doing things a different way. You are rearranging us so that we can experience more of you. You are showing us a different way. Man, may we just continue to walk in it faithfully through obedience by grace what you have done. Thank you, Lord, for the beauty, the simplicity, the intimacy, and the profoundness of the season of time. We know it was a gift from you and we know you are a gift for us. We love you Jesus. Amen.