

# A DIFFERENT WAY

DO WHAT JESUS DID

**SEASON FOUR TRANSCRIPTS**

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**A DIFFERENT WAY**



**OCTOBER 20, 2024**  
**SEASON FOUR, EPISODE ONE**  
**“COMMUNITY”**

All right everybody, welcome to Valley Creek and welcome to season four, the final season of A Different Way. I am so glad you are here with us, and we've been in a year-long series called A Different Way, Do What Jesus Did, that we broke up into four different seasons, like your favorite show on TV. There's different seasons of it that we've been following along. And we've taken an entire year to ask questions like, What does it look like to be a disciple? And who am I becoming? And who do I want to become? And is it possible to change? And if it is, then how do I actually change? And what we've been saying all year is that we want to arrange and rearrange order and reorder our life around Jesus and his lifestyle. And we've been using this little thing that we just say that if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to first, and there we go.

We've been listening. Okay. You see, if I want to do what Jesus did on the spot, I have to do what he did behind the scenes. If I want Jesus's health, I have to first take on Jesus's habits. If I want to live the life that Jesus lived, I have to first live the life that Jesus lived. And you say, what does that mean? Well, if I want to do the things that Jesus did, like be a person of love and be free and have joy and peace and have a purpose and be deeply connected with God, then I have to first back up and do the things that Jesus did, like take on his lifestyle and his practices and his disciplines and his habits, things like fasting and prayer, solitude and Sabbath and community, and all the different things that we see Jesus practice in his life. And our theme verse for this whole series has just been simply 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, like train yourself to be godly. If I want to do the things that Jesus did to be godly, I have to first do the things that Jesus did. Train and live like he lived. And we know this is true in every other area of our lives, because we all know we couldn't go out and run a marathon right now, but you could back up and start training for it. We all know we couldn't go play for the Cowboys right now, but you could back up and start training to be a professional athlete. We all know we couldn't sit down and play Beethoven on the keys right now, but you could back up, and for 15 minutes every single day, you could practice piano. In a period of time, you would be able to do things that you couldn't currently do. And that's what we've been talking about. Those are spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines. A spiritual practice or a spiritual discipline is simply doing what I can do now so I can do what I can't do now later. A practice or a discipline is doing something I can do now so I can do what I want to do later.

Like, I can't run a marathon right now, but I can back up and go for a 15-minute walk every single day that builds over time. I might not be able to not be angry on the spot, but I can back up and practice fasting in my lifestyle to practice denying my flesh. Eventually, on the spot, I'll be able to do that, which I actually want to do. And so, as we've talked about a variety of practices, lifestyles, habits, and disciplines of Jesus, what I've been trying so hard to get through to you is that these are not religious duties. These are not religious obligations. These are not things you have to do. They are invitations from God. We enter every practice and every discipline with God and position ourselves to open ourselves up to simply receive his grace to change us from the inside out. In fact, I love this verse that says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Grow in grace."



That's what we've been doing in the series, growing in grace. See, most of us think that grace is just the forgiveness of your sins. It includes that, but you can't grow in forgiveness. You're either forgiven or you're not, right? So, how could I grow in it? No, grace is so much more. Grace is so much more grace as God acting in my life to do that, which I cannot do on my own. And the practices are positioning us to receive his grace, to transform us from the inside out. And what I love about this entire series, this whole year of our church, is what we're talking about. Coming to God, not to get something from him, but to be with him and become like him. So much of Christianity today is about coming to God to get something from him. Salvation, forgiveness, freedom, a breakthrough, a healing, whatever. And there's nothing wrong with that, but there's so much more to it than that.

It's coming to God to say, "I want to be with you and I want to become like you. And so, I want to be your disciple." A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who's fully trained will be like his teacher. Disciples, students, or learners were being trained by Jesus to become like Jesus. We're moving towards him. And our intent of coming to him is to obey whatever he asks us to do. And so, there's been a lot of reflection and contemplation in this whole series where we're having to actually look at our lives and how we're actually living them. And in fact, this is why God says, give careful thought to your, come on, give careful thought to your, come on. "Give careful thought to your ways because you have planted much but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it." This is what the Lord almighty says. "Give careful thought to your ways."

He says, "Think about the way you're living. Is it working? Because maybe you're putting in a whole lot of effort and not getting a whole lot back. Maybe you're stressed and weary and wore out and overwhelmed and broke down and beaten." Maybe, like Jesus says, you're weary and burdened, but he offers us a life that is easy and light. Maybe, just maybe, there is a different way, a different way, a different way to live your life, to take you to a place that you actually want to go, to become the kind of person that you actually want to be. And as we've been going through this year-long series, three seasons are behind us. Now, I'm watching so many people take next steps, move forward in faith. The grace of God is growing in their life. God is transforming them from the inside out. And my hope and my prayer for you have been that you'll get to this place where you say, "I love where we're going. I love what we're doing. I love how it's going in me."

Because what's the alternative to say? I don't like where we're going, and I don't like what we're doing. I don't like how it's going in me. And so, as we enter into season four together, that was the recap to bring everybody else in the game. As we enter into season four together, here's my great concern for you as we go into season four. We have four more practices to go through, and all four of these practices are going to be familiar. And the moment I say them to you, my concern for you is that you will quickly check out because I think we will go to one of two spaces. We'll either be like, "Oh, I've mastered that practice, or I've already decided I'm not interested in that practice." And so, my encouragement for you as we go through these familiar ones is to have an open heart and an open mind. Don't let your experiences determine your expectations. Don't let your feelings determine your future. Believe by faith that somehow

God wants to take these familiar practices that are now external and outward. See, the first eight practices we've talked about have all been about you and God.

These next four require you, God, and others. And they're familiar. And so, we've already made judgments about them. And so, I'm just going to tell you straight up for these four. If you want to come after him, you're going to have to deny yourself and pick up your cross. So, before you decide I'm out, I'm not interested. Just you're going to have to deny yourself, pick up your cross, and maybe just maybe these are the ones that are going to bring the breakthrough that you've been hoping for. So, Holy Spirit, we enter into season four with faith, hope, and gratitude because you're moving in our lives and you're bringing this grace that is transforming us from the inside out. Help us arrange and rearrange our life around Jesus. Help us do the things that he did so we can do the things that he did. You see, the first practice that I want to talk about in season four is the practice called community. Jesus practiced community.

In fact, one of the most interesting things to me is that right at the beginning of his ministry, one of the first things that he does is builds a community for himself. Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed 12, designating them apostles that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and have authority to drive out demons. These are the 12 he appointed, Peter, James and his brother, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon, the zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. So, catch this. Before Jesus goes out and starts healing the sick, casting out demons, preaching the kingdom, revealing the father, and fulfilling the mission for why he was on earth, one of the first things he does is builds a community for himself. He initiates it. He pursues it. He invites them. And he gathers these 12 men into his life to be his community.

And for the next three years, they practice community together. They walk together. They hang out together. They travel together. They eat together. They rest together. The disciples watch Jesus weep at Lazarus tomb. The crowds tried to kill him. They watched his family reject him. They watched the Pharisees come against him. They watched Jesus reach out and touch a leper. They watched Jesus go and befriend sinners. They watched as Jesus walked on water and talked to God. In fact, even when Jesus is on his way to the cross, he says, "My soul is overwhelmed to death. Please stay here and pray with me." Because community was important to Jesus. In fact, even after they all betrayed him and all left him, one of the first things the resurrected Jesus does is go and regather the community, reconcile it, and bring it back because community was that important to him.

And if community was something Jesus practiced, and if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we got to do the things that Jesus did. And this isn't like this vague, random community. These are 12 individual men. I left all these names on here so you can see this. These aren't just historical figures, figment of an imagination, or just a bunch of people. No, these are individual people with personalities and characters and brokenness and backgrounds and experiences and futures and destinies that Jesus went and gathered into his life to practice community. Now I get it. The moment I said community, I knew it. I've lost everyone in the room because all my introverts are like, "We out." This is one, we out. And all the extroverts are like, "Yep, got this. My life is full of it. I don't need it." Okay. Before you go there, just stay with me for a

second. Remember a few weeks ago, we talked about solitude, and we said that introverts practice really isolation and indifference, and extroverts practice crowds and conversations.

The truth is, we need both solitude and community. Because if you do solitude without community, it will make you selfish. And if you practice community without solitude, it will leave you selfish. You say, "What?" Think about this. We're supposed to take what we discover in solitude with God into community with others. And we're supposed to take what's exposed in community with others into solitude with God. I'm supposed to take what I discover, the life with God in solitude with God. I'm supposed to take what I discover, the life with God in solitude and bring it into a community to bless those around me. But then, I'm supposed to take the things that get exposed in my life in community, the brokenness, the sin, the dysfunction, the messiness of my life back into solitude so God can heal me, make me whole, set me free, and deliver me. So, we all need community.

And so, let me go ahead and define it for you because it's probably not how you would define it. The practice of community is building relationships to seek God together. That's a practice of community. It's intentionally building relationships with others to seek God together. Community is not crowds and conversations. It's not acquaintances and activities. It's not proximity and neighbors and the people you are at work with and the people you sit at lunch with at school. It's not the people you're on a team with that are just in your life and in your orbit. No. It is a holy gathering of the people of God who come together for the purpose to be with Jesus and become like him. Community is planting myself in an environment of grace and truth where God's grace, and truth can transform me from the inside out. It's where I know and am known. It's where I love and am loved. It's where I serve, and I am served. It's where I'm vulnerable, authentic, and real.

It's where the real me is exposed to those around me. You see, it's a holy environment where we are shaped and formed into the image and likeness of Jesus. Community is not transactional. It's transformational. Community is not about feelings. It's about formation. It's not about comfort. It's about change from the inside out. And we said a few weeks ago in the practice of prayer that prayer is simply talking with God about the life we're living together. Okay, well, community is sharing the life I'm living with God with others. It's giving other people the gift of myself, and it's them giving me the gift of themselves. And it's in community where I am most able to practice becoming a person of love. And you are made for this. You go all the way back to the garden. The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

This is not a marriage verse. This is a humanity verse that is not good for us to be alone. We were made in the image and likeness of God. Who is God? He's the Trinity. God, the Father, God, the Son, God, the Holy Spirit – three in one. God is not interested in community. God exists in community. And he made us in that image and that likeness. And the moment we put our faith in Jesus, right, we get baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We get immersed in the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit. And you actually get invited to participate in the eternal community of the very Trinity itself. You now live in community with God, and you're supposed to draw others into that community with you. In fact, Psalm 133, I love this. It says, "How good and pleasant it is when

brothers live together in unity." What is community? It's when we come together in unity to seek God together.

How good and pleasant. Doesn't this sound like Jesus? How easy and light is the burden when we live together in unity? It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. What does oil represent? Anointing. The very power of God is given in community. And how do you get oil? You take olives and crush them, smash them, and press them together. The only way you get into community is when you are crushed, pressed, and smashed together. You're like, "I'm out." I know, I know. But that's where the anointing of God is. It's as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. Think of dew when you wake up in the morning. It's on everything. If there is protection and a power when we're in community, we're literally protected from the things of this world for there. God literally bestows and commands his supernatural power and blessing, and the life that we long for is in community. He declares it when we will practice it by faith.

Or how about at the end of Jesus's life? Let me just go through a few of these with you. At the end of Jesus's life, he's on his way to the cross. Here's what he prays. "My prayer is for those who will believe in me, that includes you, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me, may they be brought to complete unity." Jesus prays that we would practice community. Out of all of the 12 practices that we're going to talk about, community is the only one that Jesus prays that you would practice. He doesn't pray that you practice Scripture. He doesn't pray that you practice fasting. He doesn't pray that you would practice Sabbath.

He prays that you will practice community because it is that important and that's powerful in our lives. And if he prayed for it, shouldn't it become important to us? I mean, I can answer Jesus's prayer by becoming one to the same way he and the father are one, where there's one mind and one heart and one accord to seek God and be with him and become like him. And if you can catch this, look at what he says. "I have given them the glory that you gave me." He gives the community of the people of God the same glory that he carried when he was on this earth. Only in community. Are we strong enough to actually carry the glory of God? So, this is telling us, You are not strong enough to carry the glory of God on your own. Only in community. Are we strong enough to carry the glory of God? Only the body of Christ can carry the glory of God because glory means weight.

It's substance. It's the splendor, the majesty, the power, the beauty, and the very life of God. And only the body of Christ is strong enough to carry it. That's why Jesus says, "For the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." And we have seen the glory of the one and only Jesus. The body of Christ carried the glory of God. And now us as the body of Christ in community, are literally strong enough to carry the glory of God. So, if we want to see God's glory on this earth, we practice community, and we come together because only then are we strong enough to carry it. This is why it says one can put a thousand to flight. Two can put 10,000 to flight. A cord of three strands is not easily broken where two or three are gathered. There I am. We think those verses are about a lot of other things, but they are literally saying only in community. Are you strong enough to literally carry the glory of God on this earth? And

we all say, "Wouldn't it be nice to see God's glory cover the earth the way the waters cover the sea?" Well, Jesus prays that we'd get in community so it could actually happen.

You want the glory of God in your life, which is found in the practice of community. In fact, one more long one for you. "Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. The body is not made up of one part, but of many. The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you. And the head cannot say to the feet, I don't need you. Its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. In fact, God has arranged, that word sounds familiar to me, the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." So, you're the body of Christ. And only the body of Christ is strong enough to carry the glory of God on this earth. And the moment you put your faith in Jesus, you become a part of the body. You don't have to ask for it, and you don't get an option to not be a part of it. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you get grafted, bonded, and placed into the body. And if you think about a part of the body, what would make something a part of your physical body?

Well, life would be flowing into it from another part of the body, and life would be flowing out of it into another part of it. So, to be a part of a body, to be connected in a body means there's life flowing into me from another part and there's life flowing out of me into another part. And God has placed, I literally love this, "arranged the part of the body exactly where he wants them to be." Like, God has determined that you would be alive right now in this time in history, a part of Valley Creek Church at whatever campus you're a part of in that space and the place and the life that you're in. He has arranged. He has decided this is who I've created you to be. This is where I've placed you. This is where I've arranged for you. The only question is, are you willing to align with that? And a lot of us will say things like this, "Oh, bro, I got plenty of Christian community." I mean, my grandma, she lives in another state, but she's awesome. And I got a friend from college and like, yeah, they totally go to church and in Massachusetts. And I work with a guy who prays sometimes.

I mean, he's a great guy. That would literally be like Jesus saying, "Hey, I don't need the disciples, guys. I don't need community. Why? Because one of my friends that I grew up with, he's a Pharisee in Rome. He writes me letters. They take like five years to get to me. And a guy I built tables with, actually he goes to synagogue in Athens now. He's awesome. And I mean, come on, I was cousins with John the Baptist. You don't get any more community than that. I know he's dead, but then I still had the community." No, he needed 12 men in the daily reality of his life. And if God has placed you in this church, he's arranged for you to be here because there is something he wants to do in you. So, can I ask you a question? Is there anyone in this church who would invite you to their wedding, to their baby shower, or to their birthday party?

Is there anyone in this church who you've been in their house, who you could show up unannounced on their doorstep and it wouldn't be awkward, or who you could ask to borrow money from? Is there anyone in this church who could correct you, coach you, challenge you, or whom you would feel comfortable to confess your sins to? If the answer is no, then you have an invitation to practice community because you have to ask yourself. If the answer is no, when did God release me from my responsibility as a part of the body of Christ? When did God say, I don't have to be a part of it, and I don't have to be concerned for others? And I no longer have

to be aligned the way God arranged me. Like, was there a time that God came to you and said, I know you're so busy and you have so many things going on, and you're so much better than most people. So, community and the body of Christ is not relevant for you.

And if you do have community, is your community strong enough to carry the glory of God on this earth? You see, here's what's interesting about community. We all enter into it with a different premise. We all enter the community. Remember how I've defined community? It's building relationships to seek God together. But we all enter into community with a different premise or a different reason. Some of us come into the community because there's things we want. It's selfish. We have a motive behind it. We may be aware of it. We may not be aware of it. Sometimes the thing that I want is actually checking off the religious box. Like, I just got to make myself like feel good about having a community. But some of us enter community because there's something we want from others. It goes a little deeper. And some of us enter community because we have needs. We have real needs. We need people to help us. We need people to care for us. We need people to pray for us, counsel us, and help us because our life is broken.

We're falling apart. We're hurting. We have needs that we need others to help us with. When you go a little further, some people enter community because they just want friends. Like, "Man, I just want friends. I want to have people to belong to. I want to be a part of something bigger than myself. I'm looking for some good friends." But then, we get below this line where you're entering in community as a disciple. And I enter it because I'm looking for godly relationships, other people to seek God together with so I can grow. And then, you get to the deepest level. It's like, "I enter into community because I just want more Jesus." And everything above this line is transactional, and it is not strong enough to carry the glory of God. Everything below this line is transformational, and it carries the glory of God. So, my question for you is, if you have community in this church, what was your premise that you entered that community for? Ready? Circle people?

If you're in a circle, why are you in a circle? Are you in a circle because you want Jesus, godly relationships, and growth? Or because, really, I just wanted some friends or some needs or someone? Because here's the problem. If you enter a community above this line, the moment things get hard, somebody does something you don't like, somebody says something offensive, you're like, "Peace, I'm out." And I always laugh when people tell me they're leaving their community because somebody offended them or sinned or did something they didn't like. And I'm always like, "That's the whole point. The entire point of community is to practice being offended and dealing with it." Like, think of the one another verses in the Bible. One another. These are the things. Strengthen one another. Forgive one another. Confess to one another. Be compassionate with one another. Accept one another. Wash one another. Submit to one another. Listen, do any of those sound easy and fun and free?

They imply brokenness, messiness, and problems. I mean, wash one another. You know what that means? That means you're dirty in the way that you live your life. Not in Jesus. In Jesus, you're holy. But there are whole kinds of broken, dirty, worldly, sinful things in our lives. We get so confused that we get offended in the church, offended in community. We get offended because we're more concerned about our opinions than one another's. And the whole point is

to get here, to become really good like Jesus and forgiving people. If you were perfect, I wouldn't have to accept you. You would be everything I ever wanted in a person and this world. Fair? It implies that there's things we're going to have to work on. So, it's a gift from God. Here's your practice plan. It's practicing before the moment.

That's what community allows me to do. In fact, it's where you learn to be a person of love. Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It's not proud. It's not rude. It's not self-seeking. It's not easily angered. Man, it keeps no record of wrong. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It protects, it trusts, it hopes, and it always perseveres. Again, just listen to how love is defined. It implies that the people you're going to love have things going on in their life and that they're a person in process, that they are not yet fully who God created them to be. And so, it's in community where I get to practice becoming a person of love. Did you ever just stop and think, how did Jesus on the cross say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?" Maybe it's because in community he had three years of practicing, not keeping a record of wrongs because there were a whole lot of wrongs he could have kept with the disciples.

Do you ever wonder when they were beating him, he was able to turn the other cheek? Well, maybe it's because for three years in community, he practiced patience. Did you ever wonder how he picked up his cross and laid down his life? Well, maybe it's because for three years he practiced not being self-seeking. So, he was able to do what he wanted to do on the spot because he had been practicing behind the scenes. See, if we would get into community, it is the environment that helps us learn to become a person of love. And the reason we probably can't love the people in our life on the spot is because we never practice behind the scenes. If you can actually think about it, community is your practice. It's your practice squad, if you will. Real life is your family, your coworkers, the people on the road, your neighbors, and the other people you interact with. And the reason I can't love them on the spot is because I don't have people that I practice with behind the scenes. Because when I get in a community and they irritate me, I just leave.

I know, but they're supposed to irritate you so you can practice here so you can do it where it really matters. Maybe the reason we can't be patient with our children, forgive the people who hurt us in our lives, or persevere in our marriage is because we don't practice being a person of love in a godly community. Making sense to you? Because, see, here's what happens. Just think with me, wherever you were in this whole, people that were in COVID, people that experience a leadership failure in the church, people that experience change that they don't like, or anyone who is above this line, when COVID, a leadership failure or a change happens, they're gone. You're like, "Where'd they go?" No one really knows. The problem was they weren't there as a godly relationship to become like Jesus. And they weren't there really for Jesus. They were there for transactional. And once the transactional no longer brought them what they wanted, it's gone.

People below the line don't like it. I don't know anybody that was like, "I loved COVID." But people that came into community before COVID, you're like thinking, "Does anybody like COVID?" But people that got into community before COVID below this line, guess what? God used it to help them become more like him. This is why in the church, totally, and I don't have

time for this, there's so many leadership failures. I get all that stuff. But when the body of Christ enters into the body of Christ for godly relationships or Jesus as a disciple, they don't like it, but they know God is using it for their good and his glory. And because they are in community, they are strong enough to carry the glory of God, even in hurts and brokenness and disappointments and so on and so forth. And the paradox is this. If you will enter into community for Jesus, he will give you godly relationships and friends and meet your needs and give you the desires of your heart.

Whichever level you enter, God gives you everything above it. You can't enter for once and expect to get Jesus. You can't enter for friends and expect to get godly relationships. But if I come for godly relationships, I'll get friends and my needs. Does that make sense? So, the question then for you is, Where do you enter? Do you have it? And where have you entered? Listen, one of the things that you, if you've ever heard us say, we've said this for years, we say, we want to do this a long time together. It's been really important to us. Basically, for 20 years, we've had the same leadership core team. For almost 20 years, we've been together. Ben, Becca, Brad, Don, Justin, Jason, Chris, Chris, and Cindy. For, like, literally, two decades, these people have been together. And then, the next ring of people has been like for 10 to 15 years. Dave, Sebastian, Heather, Ashley, Todd, Kristy, Ryan, Brian, Rob, Trip, Fred, and Joy. And we've been together. And then, the next group has been like five to 10 years.

We've been together so long, and we've hurt each other, frustrated each other, and we've offended each other. I just offended one of them that I forgot their names. But because they know we're here for this, they're like, "That's God's using it. John did that on purpose to help me grow and become more like Jesus." Right. And sometimes, just sometimes, I wish you would appreciate that because I don't think we as a church appreciate it. Because my thought for you is this, If the leadership is like the organs of the body, how many organ transplants can one body take and survive? So, this whole transactional churchstuffing.com things out, how many organs can a body have transplanted and survive? How many times can one part of the body be transplanted and survive?

But if you don't appreciate transformational in your own life, you won't appreciate transformational in your church. If you're looking for transactional, all you want is transactional. And the reason we don't get into community is time and pride. Time. I don't have the time for that. I'm too busy. And pride. I don't really need it. I'm doing pretty good. Okay. What are you doing that's so important that you don't have time to be a part of the body of Christ? And then, what makes you so much better than everybody else that you don't think you need the primary environment that God transforms us in? It's a great question to ask, isn't it? I mean, look at what Jesus says, "For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them." Do you understand Matthew 18 when he says this? It's in a run. I'm talking about dealing with sin in church, not talking about football games and picnics and fun. He's talking about where people are sinning and there's brokenness and there's pain when two or three come together in that hardship because they want me. There I am.

There is a facet of God's presence in your life that you will never experience if you don't practice community. Solitude, we meet with God in the secret place. Community, where two or three are gathered, there he is also. Worship, God inhabits the praises of his people. You need



all three. We pick one we really like. Me and Jesus, we're doing great. Oh, I love the gathering of the people of God in worship. Community, where two and three gathered, there I am also. I need all three. If I come to the practice of community just because I want more Jesus, and he says that's where he is, that changes everything, like everything with me on that. See, one of the most practical ways that we do this in our church is just call it circles. It's one of the ways we practice community. You hear us say, "Get in a circle. Join a circle. You should be in a circle." You're like, "No, no, no."

Okay. Community doesn't mean circles. Circles is just the most strategic way we could do it for a lot of people in a large church. Circles is just three or more people that get together to discuss the weekend message, engage the Scriptures and pray. And it comes from Mark chapter four, one of the most important parables Jesus tells us. He says, "A farmer goes out and sows his seed. Some falls on hard ground. It's quickly snatched away. Some of that seed falls on rocky soil. It springs up, but it quickly withers and dies because it had rocks and it never got rooted. Some of that seed falls on thorny soil. So, it grows up, but the thorns and thistles choke it out and it never bears fruit. Some falls on good soil and produces 30-, 60-, and 100-fold return." He tells the parable, the disciples are confused. Then Jesus basically explains it to them. He says, "The farmer goes out and sows the seed. The seed is the word of God. And it falls on four different types of soil, four different types of heart. And when it falls on the hard heart, it's snatched away. When it falls on the rocky heart, we get excited, but it never roots and it never does anything.

It falls on the divided heart, the distracted heart. Everything else chokes it out. But when it falls on the good heart, 30-, 60-, and 100-fold return. And in the parable, it's the same farmer, the same seed, the same environment, the same circumstances, what's different? The condition of the soils. It's the only difference between snatched away and grow. And what Jesus is teaching us is that it's in community where we cultivate the soil of each other's lives. Who is cultivating the hard parts of your heart? Who is removing the rocks that is keeping God's word from getting rooted? Who's telling you you're distracted and divided and uprooting those thorns and thistles to create good soil where it can grow? Scripture says some plants, some water, God makes it grow. Listen, every week you're getting a planting and God says he wants it to grow. The only question is, Is anybody watering it?

Same seed, same God who wants to make it grow. Is there anybody watering it? Working the condition of the soil of your heart. Community is like an environmental greenhouse that just brings things to life. And I just want to say to you, listen, some of the most wealthy men in our church are in a circle. Some of the most influential women in our church are in a circle. Some of the coolest students are in a circle. Some of the people who have been here the shortest and the longest are in a circle. Some of the people who are just getting started with God and who have been walking with God for years are in a circle. Some of the people who are the hardest working and have the most full busy lives are in a circle. What are you doing that's so important that you can't? And why do you think you don't need it? That's just a question for you to wrestle through. I mean, think about this. Are you still with me? Just hang with me a few more minutes.

That was good, but we'll skip it. Jesus, look at in the Sermon on the Mount, life in the kingdom. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Listen, Jesus literally says, the point of entering in the community is not to point out the speck and your brother's eye. The point of entering into community is to show up with a giant log sticking out of your face. And when I go into community, knowing there's a log, a blind spot sticking out of my face that I don't know what it is. And I get in there and I start moving around. I start sweeping this giant log, knocking everybody down talking. People are dodging. They're ducking. They get hit. They're bruised. The entire point of community is to get in it so that your log will be exposed because it's in community where the real you get exposed.

Because you can have a woman who looks like she's really kind and then you wash your talk to customer service and you're like, "Whoa." You can have a guy who everybody thinks is a great dad, but then behind the scenes, he's got a rage problem. You can have a student who everybody thinks is so wow, but they're incredibly narcissistic. You get in community, not for a day, but community where you practice it. You can't avoid the sweeping log, knocking all the people around you out. We get into community and we think we're there to pull their speck out. And then, we get offended by their speck. And we're like, "We're out." You're like, "Do you not know how many times you've knocked all of us over?" Here's the paradox. You get into community, you start knocking everybody over with your brokenness that you're unaware of. And just about the time the people in your community have the courage to speak truth and love to you, you get offended by their speck and you're out.

Here's the question. The last time you left a church, community, a serve team, pick your thing, a pod, VCLA, student leadership, whatever your thing is. Last time you left one, my question for you is this. Was the work of God complete before you left? Was whatever God was trying to do in you, in that community, was it complete? If the answer is yes, then you can move on. If the answer is no, then there's still more he wants to do. He wants to remove the log so you can see clearly, not just to take out their speck, but to live your life as a person of love. Was the work of God complete? I think we almost always leave before the work of God is done because we're not even aware God's doing a work because we're so offended by their speck.

It's in community where who you really are gets exposed. And to stay in community, you have to deny yourself and die to yourself because their speck is real. But you're not there because God needs you to remove it. You're there because God wants to help you discover this log that's knocking everybody out. Because it's the same log you knock your community out with. Just so you're clear, it's the same log you knock your spouse out with, and knock your children out with, and knock your parents out with, and knock your friends out with. And that's the reason you're not getting a promotion. They just don't have the courage to tell you. But it's that log that's just... So, again, here's a practice environment to do the things behind the scenes. So, when I'm on the spot, I live like a totally different person. See, community shapes you, holds you accountable, and reminds you of what's good, true, and right. The community will shape you, form you, and mold you. He who walks with the wise becomes wise. Companion of fools suffers harm.

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. I mean, you get into a community for the purpose of becoming elite. No athlete that wants to be elite trains alone. They know they need other people to train with to become who they want to be. No great musician plays alone. Nobody who can speak fluently in a foreign language speaks to themselves. They get around other people who are going in the same direction. Do you want to be an elite disciple of Jesus? Actually, that's a great question for you to ask. If you want to be an elite disciple of Jesus, you actually need community. If you don't want to be an elite disciple of Jesus, you don't need it. And you can keep practicing good American church and call it a day. The community holds you accountable. Listen, accountable, the ability to give an account for that which God has created and called you to do. We get in community to be held accountable, to have other people actually call us to account for the life that we're living.

You say, "That's why I don't like it. I don't like it because no one's supposed to judge me." You're right. We're not supposed to judge you. But Jesus says we are supposed to inspect your fruit, speak the truth in love and correct and rebuke each other when we're not living the life that God's created and called us to live. In fact, catch this one another that says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love, and good deeds." Does to be spurred feel good? You spur a horse. Is the horse like, "Ha ha ha?" I don't know. I don't have a horse. I don't ride horses, but I wouldn't think the horse is like, "Oh, it's like a massage." It doesn't feel good. Listen, in my community, my community has looked me in the face and said, "You're being harsh. You're being arrogant. You're moody. Fix your face. That was wrong. That was sin. You need to make that right. Your perception is off."

You're like, "That's why I'm not in community." I know, but maybe that's also why you're not growing. Because is there anyone that can challenge you, correct you, coach you, and spur you? See, we think we get into community to feel good. The point of community is to become the kind of person who naturally does good. There's a big difference. And then, it reminds me of what is good, true, and right. Like, it lifts my head in a world of brokenness and pain and lies and deception and deceit. It reminds me of who I am, who God has created me to be, and what I'm created to do. And if you actually want to practice community, community, I'm done. Stay with me. Community is your responsibility. I guess not on anybody else. Responsibility. God has given you the ability to respond to that, which he has invited you to do. We have got to move past thinking it's everyone else's responsibility to create community for me.

Jesus went and invited. He pursued. He made it happen. It's no one else's responsibility to help you practice fasting, Scripture, meditation, silence and solitude, or Sabbath. It's no one else's responsibility to help you practice community. You must, you must, you must if you want to take the initiative and step into it. Say, How do I do that? The 400 times a year that we tell you, join a circle, do that. That would be one way. Another way would be saying, you see a couple of people in your life that you want to pursue them and say, "Hey, would you be interested in being godly relationships and practicing community and seeking God together?" Reach out to someone and say, "Hey, would you be a mentor in my life? I need someone to practice this community with." Like, you could take responsibility and you'd be amazed at what happens. In fact, if you can catch this, the highest form of discipline in the New Testament is

de-fellowshipping. The highest form of discipline when somebody did something wrong in the church was to remove them from the fellowship.

Isn't it interesting that we apply the highest form of discipline to ourselves by choosing not to practice community? In fact, if you can catch this, do you know what hell is? Hell is the eternal separation from God and his people. Isn't it interesting that we choose to practice hell on earth by separating ourselves from God and his people in our practical daily life? And then, we say things like, "But I want to go to heaven when I die." Do you, though? Like, think, if you don't want God and his people on earth, why do you think you would want them in heaven? If I'm not interested in God and his people now, why do I think in 50 years when I die, I will want God and his people then? That would be something to reflect on. Community takes time.

If you think you can show up to two circles or two conversations or two coffees a year, and if you get upset because you jump in, you're like, "Oh, these people are so cliquish. They all know each other." They've been on a journey together. If you join my circle right now, it would take you a while to feel like you're in it. Why? Because I can look at their face and I know exactly if they're having a good day, a bad day, or what's going on. What do I need to ask this guy? What do I need to talk about with this guy? Why? Because we've been on a journey together. So, when you're entering in, you will catch up, but you have to acknowledge. It takes time to build history, his story in your life with these people because they already have a history, his story in their life together. So, you have to push through a little bit of awkwardness. Remember, deny yourself. Pick up your cross. Remember what I told you, so at least you don't like it. I told you in the beginning, you weren't going to like it. And then, it requires vulnerability. Like, you actually have to be honest and real and humble and authentic because nobody cares about your victories. Does anybody in this church know your story? Not the highlight reel of your story, like your story.

Like, could anyone else here's could anyone else in this church tell your story, the good, the bad, and the ugly? If not, maybe there's an opportunity to practice community because it's through that brokenness that we actually connect with each other. And when you start acknowledging to me your log, or you start acknowledging to me your past life, I now understand why you have the log you have. I now have compassion for your log that keeps whacking me in the head because I know the last 20 years of your life and why you are the way you are, but now I'm going to love you enough not to leave you where you are, help you remove this log so you can see clearly to continue to become the kind of person God has created you to be. But you see this, community is not responsible. No one else is responsible for your practice of community. You are. Okay. So, that was good too, but we'll go to this. So, every week on these practices, we're ending with a practice plan. Okay. You can do it. You don't have to do it.

It's been totally optional. Here's your practice plan for this week. Reflect on your community at Valley Creek and take one step towards strengthening it this week. Reflect on your community at Valley Creek. It would be like this. Like, number one, do I have one? According to what we discussed today in Scripture, do I have one? And if I do, is it healthy? And is it strong? And does it carry the glory of God? And how could it be improved? Do I know the names? Like, reflect on your community. Yeah, yeah. I got community. Okay, if I just said to you then, what

are their names? Jesus could very quickly tell you, Peter, James, John, and Matthew, right? Could you actually say the names? Like, if you're in a circle with people and you don't know their name, that's not community. For a bunch of you, that meant nothing to you, but for some of you, that was really impactful right there because you're giving yourself the checkbox of I've got community. See, we're familiar with it, so we think we've mastered it, but you don't even know the name of the guy that sits across from you every other week in the coffee shop.

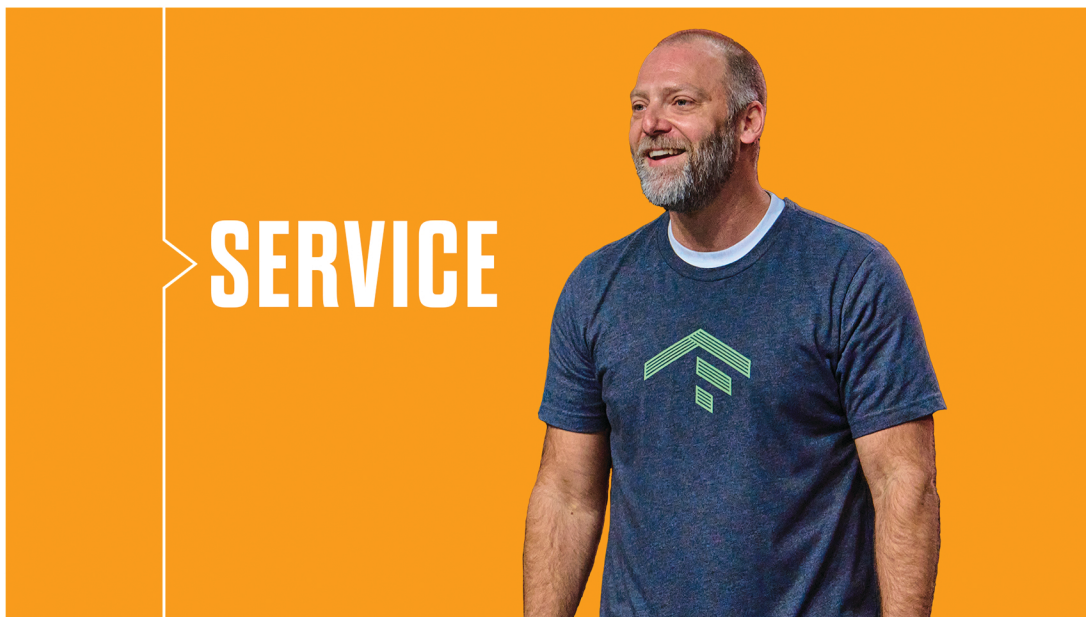
So, reflect on it and take one step towards strengthening it, which might be like, "Hey buddy, I'm embarrassed. We've been in this for three years together. I don't know your name. So, I'm going to humble myself right now and just tell you, I haven't valued you in this enough to know your name. That changes today though. Would you tell me your name and a little bit about your life?" It might be, you have a great community and you need to write everyone a note to thank them or bless them. It might be you acknowledge as a circle. Is this going the way we want? It might be you sit with a mentor and say, "I want to invest in this." It might be vulnerable. And you tell your story. Like, this is where you trust the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, I reflected on my community. Here's how I see it. Is that accurate? And then, what's one thing I can do to strengthen it? That's called doing what Jesus did. So, I can do what Jesus did. And I get it. And I know I went long. I'm done.

Listen, if you don't want it, I get it. We're at this point in the year. We've outran our willpower. We're training, right? We use the example all year. At this point in the year, you've outrun your willpower. So, you've run further than yourself. Try, strive can take you. That's why if you feel like this feels fast and these practices are stacking, you've outrun your willpower. Don't do this in your own will. This isn't trying. This is training. And this is opening myself to God's grace. And we spent literally probably three months at the beginning of the year talking about a vision. If you do not have a vision to do what Jesus did, you have no interest in doing what Jesus did. Okay. So, if that's you and you're like, "I'm just not there." Here's the good news. We've got three practices left, a wrap-up of season four, and then we're moving on with this as a normal part of our life. Community, something Jesus, we prayed that we would practice so his glory could be manifested in our lives to the world around us.

And that we would become the kind of people that are able to love our enemy because we've spent so much time practicing, loving the brothers and sisters, the other parts of the body of Christ. That's what this will do for you. So, Holy Spirit, I just trust that you will move in our lives the way that you want to move. I pray for great community in this church, in this church, in this church, like the 12 disciples in Jesus's life. Help us be the body of Christ that is strong enough to carry your glory. I pray for every person who has a past experience, every person that has a brokenness, every person that has an objection, every person that has an obstacle, and every person that has nine reasons why this is not possible in their life.

I just submit and surrender them to you, Lord, the Holy Spirit. You would help us as individuals. Work these things out in our lives not just for community, but because you're leading us to be disciple of Jesus, living free as a person of love. In your name we pray. Amen.

**A DIFFERENT WAY**



**OCTOBER 27, 2024**  
**SEASON FOUR, EPISODE TWO**  
**"SERVICE"**

All right. Everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today. Whether you've been here with us all year or you're newer with us on the journey, we are so glad that you are with us because we've been in a year-long series simply called A Different Way, Do What Jesus Did. And we've taken an entire year to kind of stop and ask ourselves the question, maybe there is a different way to live our lives? Maybe there's a better way to live our lives. We've taken an entire year to just talk about what does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus, to be the kind of person that lives like Him and acts like Him and talks like Him.

And maybe Jesus knows a better way than the way that we tend to live our lives. And so, we've been coming to Jesus in this series, not just as Savior, but as Teacher. Too often, we just relegate Jesus to a Savior, the One who forgives our sins and gives us life after we die. But He also wants to be our Teacher in the here and now. To teach us how to be human and how to walk with God. How to live in the Kingdom. How to live our lives a different way. And so, we've been saying all series that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to do the things that Jesus did. If we want to live the life that Jesus lived, we have to first live the life that Jesus lived. So, we've been looking at His practices, His habits, His disciplines. And then, arranging and rearranging our life, ordering and reordering our life around Jesus and the way He lived his life, which is the heartbeat of a disciple.

In fact, I love that Jesus says, to those who believed in Him, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples." To believe is to obey and to obey is to be His disciple. The entire heartbeat of this series has been coming to Jesus with the intent to obey. With this intent to say, I want to be your disciple. I want you to teach me how to live my life. I want to, in a sense, believe that you're my teacher and that you know how to live my life better than I know how to live my life. And I'm tired of being weary and burdened in this world. I want things to be easy and light. So, Jesus, I've come to you to learn how to live a different way. To be a disciple is to obey and we obey because we truly believe. And so, what I've told you is that as we've entered into season four. We broke the series up into four different seasons, just like your favorite show on TV. As we've entered into season four, my great concern for us is that these last four practices that we're talking about have familiarity to them.

And so, the moment I say them, a lot of us will quickly decide one of two things. We'll either think we've mastered them or we'll have already decided we don't need them in our lives. And so, I'm just asking you to be open to that which God might want to say in your life. See, all the practices we've talked about till now required you and God. These ones now require you, God, and others. And that's why they're hard. That's why we've already decided we don't need them because they cost something from us. If anyone would come after me, Jesus says, "He must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it." What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? This almost feels out of order, doesn't it? You would almost think that Jesus would say, "If anyone wants to follow me, then along the way, he will have to learn how to deny himself and take up his cross."

But that's not the order he says it. He says, you're going to have to deny yourself and take up your cross if you actually want to follow me. I'm going to have to deny myself. My pride, my rights, my opinions, my preferences, my sin, my flesh, and I'm going to take up my cross. I'm

going to have to die to myself if I actually want to follow Jesus and go where he is going and live like He is living. Because whoever wants to save his life will lose it. Did you ever notice that the harder we try to save our life, the more we lose it? The more we try to control and hoard and hide and force and manipulate and hold on to it like sand, it feels like it slips through our fingers? But if we will lose our life, He says we will save it. If we will simply submit it and surrender it to Him and His ways, we will save it. We will find it. And if we will simply just let go of world, He will give us a healthy soul. He will give us not just life when we die, He will give us life in this life.

And so, so often as we talk about these things, we get so lost in what it costs to follow Jesus. And yes, there is a cost to follow Jesus. Deny yourself and take up your cross. But have you ever stopped and asked yourself the question, "What does it cost you to not follow Jesus?" To follow Jesus will cost you sin and time and pride and flesh, but to not follow Jesus will cost you joy and peace and life and freedom and love. Which cost are you willing to pay? So, Holy Spirit, as we enter into this season four journey together, would you just come and speak to us? Would your word have a deep effect on our lives? Would it transform us from the inside out? Would you give us courage and faith to learn how to live a different way? May we believe and obey and become like you, in Jesus's name.

You see, after three years of walking with the disciples, it was time for Jesus to go to the cross. And so, as He was getting ready to go to the cross, He led the disciples to the upper room where they were going to have the Last Supper. It was going to be Jesus's last time with the disciples. He was going to give them His last words, the final impartation. It was going to be a sacred moment, a holy moment, a profound moment. And because the upper room was a secret place that no one else knew about, when Jesus and the disciples get there, there was no servant to wash their feet as they entered into the upper room. You see, in Jesus's day, all the roads were made of dirt. And so, as everyone walked along the roads, their feet would get dirty. They would get muddy. They would get sticky with all the things that they walked through. So, there was often a servant at the door there to take off people's sandals and wash their feet so they could go in. But because this was a secret place, there was no servant.

And as the disciples got there and realized there was no servant at the door to wash their feet, they immediately understood that someone was supposed to do something about this. It was so normative to their custom and to their culture that they immediately realized that something was missing. Something was wrong, but none of them had any interest in washing each other's feet. So, they walked right in the door as if everything was normal. They walked right in, began engaging with each other. Just kind of ignoring, pretending, waiting, assuming that someone else was bound to take care of this problem. And the paradox is scripture tells us as they were sitting there, they actually began arguing with each other over which one of them was the greatest. They were arguing of which one of us is the greatest disciple of Jesus. Who's done the most miracles and who's raised the most people from the dead? Who is the best communicator? Who's Jesus's favorite? And as they're arguing over which one of them is the greatest, Jesus quietly gets up, takes off his cloak, wraps a towel around it. Grabs a basin and a water pitcher and fills it up and gets down on his knees and washes the feet of His disciples.



Jesus takes off their sandals and He washes the muck, and the dirt, and the grime, and the filth. He washes in between their toes and around their ankles. And He washes the muck off of their calloused, hard feet. He washes Peter's prideful feet. He washes John's angry feet. He washes Thomas's doubting feet. He washes Matthew's greedy feet. He washes Judas's betraying feet. And when He had finished washing all of their feet, He went and cleaned himself up, put His cloak back on, came and sat down. And you could have heard a pin drop.

And He says, "Do you understand what I've just done for you? Now that I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also must wash the feet of one another. I have set you an example for how you should live. No servant is greater than his master. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." And in that moment, we are reminded that Jesus practiced service. That his entire life was a life spent practicing service. And if we want to do the things that Jesus did, like have humility and security and freedom, then we have to first do the things that Jesus did, like practice service. I mean, can you even imagine this? And this is Jesus, the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings.

The Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer of all. The Alpha and the Omega. The Great I Am. The Good Shepherd. The one in whom life exists, getting down and washing the muck off His disciples' feet. And the truth is we actually can understand it because Jesus has washed not only our feet, He's actually washed our souls. He not only has washed your feet. He has washed the muck off of your souls so you have been cleansed once and for all in the name of Jesus. In fact, in John 13, where this story is told to us. It says, "He now showed them the full extent of His love" right before He washes their feet. It says, "He shows them the full extent of His love." So, here's what service is. The practice of service is love expressed. Service is love expressed. See, love is not an emotion or a feeling. Love is goodwill. Is that my will, my desire, my choice, my usage of my kingdom is for your good.

And I'm going to use everything that I have for your good. And so, goodwill is not an emotion or a feeling. It has words and actions with it that actually express love into the atmosphere. The practice of service is giving your life away with no strings attached. It's literally giving my life to you with no strings attached. No expectation of anything in return. I'm giving you my life. My time, talent, my treasure, my resources, my energies, my words, my actions with no strings attached. With no sense of the need to be thanked, to be appreciated, to be valued, to be seen, to have that service be received. Service is laying down my life to lift someone else up. Literally laying down my life for the good of others and the Glory of God. And the practice of service is not just meeting needs, it's blessing a life.

We have reduced service to meeting needs that we see when we feel like meeting them. But the practice of service, yes, it meets needs, but it also blesses people's lives. It lifts them up. It helps them become who they were created to be. It lays down your life so they can elevate into the life that God has for them. And I would say that service in a lot of ways is just simply using wisdom and compassion to release God's Kingdom into the world around you. And if you can think about it like this, service is both a practice and a gift. It's a practice that we practice, but it's also a gift that we receive. Because when we practice service, God is doing something in us. And as He does something in us, He does something through us. And that is the gift that we receive. We get to be a part of His Kingdom on this earth. That service, God is doing

something in you as He's doing something through you. And it goes on to say that Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power. That He had come from God and was returning to God.

See, Jesus could serve because He knew where He came from, why He was here and where He was going. He knew where He came from, from the Father. He knew why He was here on mission with the Father. And He knew where He was going to be with the Father. So, He could practice service because He knew that. And every time you and I practice service, it reminds us of where we came from, why we're here and where we're going. Every time I give my life away with no strings attached, I'm reminded where I came from, from the Father. I'm reminded why I'm here to be on mission with the Father. And I'm reminded where I'm going. I'm going to be with the Father. But every time I practice selfishness, it's like I forget where I came from, why I'm here and where I'm going. And the more I practice selfishness, the less I know where I came from, where I'm going. And so, then all I got left is why I'm here. And then, why I'm here now has to become about me, myself, and I. Some of us, because we've arranged our lives around ourselves have no concept of where we came from, where we're going, or why we're here.

And then, after He washes their feet, He says, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth. No servant is greater than his master. Nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." It doesn't really need commentary, does it? It's incredibly sobering, incredibly humbling. That's incredibly convicting. Lord and Teacher, He's our Teacher, the one teaching us how to be human, how to be alive. And He says, "Because I've washed your feet, you're supposed to wash each other's feet." We serve because He first served us.

We do what He has done for us and we're not greater than Him. And we're blessed if we learn to live our lives in this way. The only question then is, are you blessed? Are you blessed? You see, Jesus didn't just serve. He was a Servant. In fact, in Philippians chapter 2, it's this beautiful hymn of the supremacy of Christ. And it's a passage that 700 leaders in our church have committed to memorize. Philippians 2:1-16, by the end of October, as a way of practicing a different way, scripture and meditation and allowing God to do a deep work inside of them. And there's this beauty of talking about the supremacy of Jesus. And it just says, "In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage." Rather, He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.

And being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Jesus chose the nature of a servant. Not in spite of the fact that he was God, but because he was God. See, the nature of God is the nature of a servant. The nature of our God is that of a servant. At the core, at the foundation, at the very heartbeat of who He is, is a servant. Jesus didn't choose to be a servant in spite of the fact that he was God. No, no. It's because He was God that He chose the nature of a servant, because that is the very nature of God. And He made Himself nothing. We spend our whole lives trying to make ourselves something. And Jesus in one moment made Himself nothing and became everything.

And humbled Himself and became obedient even to death on a cross. And what I love is that if the nature of God is the nature of a servant and we were made in the image and likeness of God, then the nature of humanity is that of a? It's our nature. So, every time you refuse to be a servant and you choose to be selfish and make it about you, just understand you're going against your nature. You're going against the current of creation, the grain of grace, the very way God has made you. That's why it doesn't work well when we spend our whole lives trying to make ourselves something. It doesn't work. But if we will give our life away, we will find it in Jesus's name. And it's interesting that Jesus didn't think equality with God is something to be grasped or taken advantage of. How often do we think we are not only equal with God, but that we're above God? And that He's there to serve me. And it says in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset of Jesus.

Do you know how different your relationships and mine would be if every day we woke up and said, "How can I serve the people I interact with?" That's how Jesus woke up every day. Every day, my nature is here to be a servant. I've already given up my pride, my opinions, my rights, my preferences, my time. I'm here to lift other people's lives up and give my life away with no strings attached. How different would your life be? How different would your relationships be? Or how about when Jesus says – He calls the disciples together and says, "Those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them," but not so with you. You live a different way. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. If you can understand what Jesus is saying here, he's basically saying, "Hey, I've arranged My entire life not to be served, but to serve."

That's why I've come. My entire life has been arranged. My choices, my calendar, my time, my money, my daily activities, my life, my march. My entire life has been arranged and organized not to be served, but to give my life away and serve others. That they might be ransomed, liberated, set free, and lifted up. Whoever wants to be great must become your servant. Can I ask you a question? In your plans for greatness, does it include the practice of servanthood? And then, the question you have to ask yourself and I have to ask myself, and you only have to do it right now for 30 minutes. I have to do it all week. Is my life arranged around being served or serving? Is your life arranged around serving or around being served?

Your time, your calendar, your money, your daily activities. See, if we're honest, most of us, if we're honest, our lives have been arranged around being served. We want to be in control. We want our needs met. We want other people to do for us. We want other people to express their love for us. We want other people to give their lives to us with no strings attached. We want other people to lay down their life to bless our life. We want God to do something in them as He does something through them into our life. But my life is probably arranged around being served, not serving. And this is why we get so angry when we don't get what we want. This is why we become so upset when our fast-food order is wrong because you expect to be served. This is why we're angry when we get to the pickup grocery thing and it's not ready because you expect to be served.

It is why we get upset at our families or our spouse or our children or our parents when they don't do what we thought they were going to do. This is why we get upset when we come to an environment of any kind. And we think it should be prepared meticulously for me exactly as I want it. And when it's not that way, I get upset. I get irritated. I don't like it when I don't get what I want. Why? Because my life has been arranged around being served. And I don't have the margin, the space, the interest or the mindset to serve others. That's why you get so upset when it doesn't go your way. Does that make sense to you? And for those of you that are sitting here, you're like, "No, I serve people all the time." Okay. I would just say that most of us, when we serve, it's actually self-serving. I think we serve people, but I think we serve to get something from them. I think we serve because I think if I serve you, then you're going to give me back what I want. So, I did the dishes and I hope my spouse sees it and now does something for me.

Or I mowed the yard and now I hope that my family sees it and does something for me. Or I did this at work and I hope my boss sees it and gives me a promotion. Or I signed up for student council, not because I like student council, but because I hope that in serving that I'm going to get something back. Let's call it a resume builder, students, right? It's not the heart of serving, I'm hoping to get something back. I serve on a team because I hope the coach sees it and gives me more playing time. Are you with me? Did you ever just notice how much attention we draw to where we've served? Did you see what I've done? Did you see the dishes I've done and that the yard is mowed? And I fixed that and made that and bought this and went here and went to that thing for you. And I did this and I did the laundry and I did this at work and I stayed late and I came early. Why do we have a need to drop back to ourselves? Because it's self-serving. It's not the practice of giving our life away with no strings attached.

See, a great question to ask yourself is, what's your motivation of serving? Think of the places that you serve in your life. Why do you serve? Why? I serve because I think if we're really honest, this is the main one, because I want to be served. It's manipulative. It has a motive to it. It's selfish. It's, I serve because I want you to see it and do something back for me. And then, I go a little deeper and then I have served because I feel obligated to. It's duty. It's religion. It's performance. I don't want to do it, but I feel like I don't have a choice. I have to do it. We move a little farther. I serve because I was asked to. I have no interest really in doing it on my own, but someone asked me to do it so I'm willing to do it for them. Or we go a little farther because I get something out of it. This is the person that says, "I like serving because I want to give back," or "I want to be a part of something bigger than myself," or "I feel good when I do it," but it's still about me. But then, you get below this line and you say, "I serve because I'm a disciple." And Jesus is my Lord and my teacher.

And He washed my feet and He's teaching me how to wash the feet of the world around me. And if I'm really going to follow Him, I can't not serve because that's who He is. But then, the deepest level is I serve because I want more of Jesus. Because Jesus says, "Whatever you've done for the least of these, you've done for me." So, do you understand there as a facet of Jesus, you will never discover in this life outside of servanthood. "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for Me." He says, we will find Him when we're willing to give our life away in a unique way that's different than our worship services or in community or in silence and solitude. So, my question for you is the places you serve, what's your motive? See, above

this line, I would call it self-serving. Below this line, I would call it Kingdom serving. Above this line, I would call it volunteering. Below this line, I would call it the practice of service. And a lot of our life is volunteering, self-serving.

We say things like this, "I serve for my kid's sports team." The only reason you're doing that is because you're getting something out of it. The question is, do you keep serving on that team even after your kid graduated from it? That would be giving your life away with no strings attached. Does that make sense? I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. I'm saying you just have to acknowledge what it actually is. Did you ever notice how in scripture Jesus often serves in the hiddenness? He doesn't draw attention to it. He does the opposite. He heals the leper and says, "Don't tell anyone." He heals the blind man and he says, "Don't go tell anyone." What? He shows up in the dark at night in secret places and serves people. Why? Because he had no need to draw attention to Himself because He was secure and He was humble and He was free. So, He didn't need anything from anyone else. He was free to give His life away, whether they accepted it or rejected it. It was totally up to them. And He was totally great one way or the other. I think we spend so much time trying to be appreciated for the little bit of serving that we do.

In fact, Jesus tells us this fascinating parable, this little parable. And a couple of years ago, I shared this at our staff Christmas party. Every year we have a staff Christmas party, we bring all the spouses and the children together. And I usually give a little word. And a couple of years ago, this was the thing that I chose to talk about at our staff Christmas party. Jesus says, "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, come along now and sit down and eat?" Would he not rather say, prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you may eat and drink. Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So, you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants. We have only done our duty." Merry Christmas. That was probably our staff's spouses least favorite Christmas party we have ever had.

But here was the thing, that year I could see entitlement creeping up. I could see this sense of this need of being appreciated, being validated. Being seen that my sacrifices, that my efforts need to be noticed and acknowledged by others. But Jesus says, "You're a servant." A servant has already given his life away. A servant doesn't need to be noticed. In fact, being a servant is actually your duty. It's your privilege. It's your responsibility. We're the people of God. We tend the fields. We look after the sheep and we wait on tables and we expect nothing in return. Why? Because that's what our Lord and Teacher did. When we bring it back to Savior, it's forgiveness of sins. Life after I die. Teacher is this is how you actually live in this life. And if my Lord and Teacher worked the fields, tended the sheep, waited on tables without expectation of anything in return, then I should not need to be thanked, appreciated, noticed, or blessed by other people for the acts of service I release into their life.

This is the difference between someone who serves and a servant. A servant is not offended when they're not thanked. But someone who serves is. Oh, hang on. I need to drink. Did you notice I brought the monitor out today? I mean, if Marian needed to get up here and say, "Hey, I just want to stop the service just to let everyone know I worked really hard to bring this

out and I got it right. It's on the marks." Why then do we need to tell people we did the dishes? Did the laundry, cooked the meal, picked up the garbage, fixed the thing, stayed late, came early. Can you imagine Jesus doing that? Hey guys. In fact, there's this fascinating passage in the old Testament that if you read it, you would probably just rip right through. You wouldn't even notice it, but it's incredibly profound.

It says, "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he has to serve you for six years, but in the seventh year, he shall go free without paying anything." But if the servant declares, I love my master, I love my wife, and I love my children and do not want to go free, then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then, he will be a servant for life. You say, yep, if I was reading through the Bible, I would just go right through that. Wouldn't make much sense. What it's saying here is when somebody is a Hebrew servant for six years, they're a servant. They're a slave. They don't have freedom. Their life choices have brought them to this place where they're enslaved in a sense. They're a servant. But on the seventh year in God's goodness and grace, the person is set free. The only challenge is, is if they're set free, they don't necessarily get to take their wife and their children with them. Because their wife and their children are on a different rotation of being servants.

So, they can leave, but they'd have to leave empty handed. But if the servant looks at his situation and his reality and says, "You know what? I actually love my master. I love my wife. I love my children. Actually, I want to stay here with them." What happens is they take them before the judges witnesses and they take them to a door or a doorpost and they pierce his ear with an awl, a permanent scar to show forever and always that he is a willing servant for life. So, no one is ever confused. So, no one ever misreads it. So, no one ever misunderstands it. The scar in his ear, the hole in his ear will show everyone, including himself, for the rest of his life, that he has chosen to be a willing servant for life because he loves his master, his wife, and his children. Okay? This is not a passage about Hebrew servants. This is a passage about Jesus. The New Testament is Jesus revealed. The Old Testament is Jesus concealed. Jesus came as a Hebrew servant, a Jewish man, the Son of Man, and He completed His work.

Before He goes to the cross, He says, "Father, I have finished the work, which you have given me to do." He was free. He could have left. He didn't have to go to the cross. Even when they arrest him, He says, "Do you not think I could call 12 legions right now to come and rescue me?" He was free to go. But He loved His master, His wife and His children. He loved the Father, the Bride of Christ and the beloved sons and daughters of God. Enough to say, "Take me before the judges." And He was judged on the cross. Even though He was innocent, He was found guilty. The righteous for the unrighteous once and for all to bring you to God. And they took him to the door, the cross, the door. The gateway into heaven, the door into the Kingdom. The door into a different way, the door and to be included in Christ. And He was pierced hands, feet, and side. Permanent scars once and for all that the resurrected Christ wears as a declaration to say, "I am a willing servant for life because I love my master, my wife and my children."

That's Jesus. That's your Jesus. He loved the Father and He loved this church. And He loved you as His children that much. And when it says, "He was taken before the judges," do you know what that word actually means? In the original language, it's the word Elohim. Elohim,

lowercase G gods. He was literally taken before the powers and principalities that rule and govern the spiritual world to make a declaration once and for all to say, "I love the Father. I love my bride and I love my children. And I am a willing servant for life." And in that moment, he defeated all of the Elohim, the powers and principalities once and for all through giving his life away with no strings attached. The question is, has your flesh been pierced so you could walk through the door into a different way future as a willing servant for life?

The difference between someone who serves and a servant is servants are not offended when they're asked to serve. In fact, in Psalms, prophetically talking about that passage and what Jesus was going to do. This is really a prophetic thing of Jesus's sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but my ears, you have pierced. Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require, but Jesus said, "Here I am. I have come. It is written about Me in the scroll. I desire to do Your will." Oh my God, your law is written within my heart. Question is, have you positioned your life in such a way where you can say, "Here I am, I have come. I desire to do Your will, to express Your love, for You to do something in me as You're doing something through me." To give my life away with no strings attached. Is His law written in your heart, which just simply means you naturally and effortlessly do the things God would long for you to do like serve.

And you don't even have to think about it. It's just naturally what you do because you've spent so much time doing the things that Jesus did. You can't help, but do the things that Jesus did. Okay. So, here's the question. Ready? Where do you practice being a disciple? Where do you practice service? Now, if I asked you, because you want to be a professional football player, if I asked you, where do you want to be a professional football player? You're going to tell me, "Well, I'm on this team and we have practices at these times and these days, and these are the drills that we run." It would be very clear. It would not be subjective. If I asked you because you want to be a professional musician and I said, "Well, hey, where do you practice being a professional musician?" You'd tell me, "I'm in this band and we rehearse at this time and we rehearse in this location. And these are the songs that we were working on." It wouldn't be subjective. It would be very clear. If you were trying to run a marathon and I just asked you, "Hey, tell me where you're practicing training for that marathon."

You would tell me, "Well, I run with these people and we run on these days and this is the plan that we're working on to build up my strength and my stamina." Okay. So, when I ask you, "Where do you practice service?" Do you have an answer? Do you have a time, a place, a location? Like, "No. No, I just serve people throughout my day." Imagine me telling you, "I'm going to be a professional football player as I feel like it. I'm growing into that." Where do you practice? Where do you practice? If you struggle with pride, control, narcissism, judgment, selfishness, the greatest thing you could do is make a choice to be on a weekly serve team. Join a kid's team, a student team, a worship team, production team, admin team, ops team, guest experience team. Join a team. You say, "I don't want to join a team." I know, that's the problem.

Because if you struggle with control and pride and selfishness and narcissism and judgment, you think you're better than it and beyond it. So, what do I need to do? I actually need to join a team where I come under a leader that I think I'm better than. And I need to be asked to do something that I don't feel like doing. And I need to show up at days and times when I don't

really want to be there. And I need to come on time because that's what's been asked of me. And I need to do it in the way that it's been asked of me, even though I think I'm so smart and I know 12 ways to do it better. And that might be true. But the point of that is not to make it better. The point of that is God to do something in you as He does something through you. This is discipline where we've used the whole – right? Discipline, doing what I can do now so I can do what I can't do now later. Discipline, doing what I don't want to do now so I can do what I do want to do later.

I don't know anybody, even the best of people who are servants at heart that wake up every day and say, "I just can't wait to practice service today." But they do what they don't want to do now so they can become the kind of person that can do what they want to do later. So, here's my question for you. Where in your life are you ever not the one in control? Where are you in life ever the one who doesn't make all the choices? Where are you in life where it doesn't all arrange and revolve around you? The more successful you are, the more gifted you are, the more people you lead, the more influence you have, the more conscious you have to be aware of this principle. And the more you have to find places that you have committed to showing up and actually practicing, because how else are you going to become like Jesus? Here's the question. Where do you take off your cloak and put on the servant's towel? Where do you take off your cloak of finances and influence and pride and idolatry. And it's my time and my life and all these.

Where do you take off that cloak and put on the servant's towel regularly as a practice to become a kind of person that you sit here and say you want to be? It's time and pride again. Just like community, time and pride. I don't have the time for it and I don't think I need to do it. What are you doing that's so much more important than becoming like Jesus? And why do you think you're better than Jesus who washed Judas's betraying feet? You're like, "I'm better than that." I mean, really? Sometimes I just want to say, "Really? Is that where we are?" Here would be a good question for you. Ask the people in your life that know you, just say that, "Do you think I'm humble, secure, and free?" And give me your honest answer. Do you think I'm a humble, secure, and free person?

Do you think I'm a servant? Because that's the kind of life a servant gets to live. They're humble. They're so secure. They don't need anything from anybody. And they're free. We think a servant means you're in bondage. No, servant means I'm actually free because I walk with God. I know where I came from. I know where I'm going. And I know why I'm here. The person that doesn't serve is the person in bondage because they don't know where they came from. They don't know where they're going and they have no idea why they're here. In fact, this is why it says, "God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. When I serve, I position myself in humility and humility opens me up to the grace of God." This is how these practices work. Are you with me on this? It's sobering, isn't it? And just for some of you that are like, "Wow," it's taken us 10 months for me to be able to say these kinds of things to you the way that I'm saying them because it needed 10 months of context. Because the 10 months of context are not, be religious and be a church person and do all this junk.

No, the 10 months of context is, do you have a vision to be a person of love? Do you have a vision to do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did? If not, I get it.



Don't do any of this because you don't have a vision for it. But as you get a vision for who you want to be, it changes your life. In fact, two more things. You are the Body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. To each one, the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good. You're the Body of Christ. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you get grafted, adopted, transplanted as a part of the Body of Christ. Now, if you can catch this with me, you're the body. Jesus is the head. Yes? Okay. 2000 years ago, Jesus, because He loved His master, His wife and His children was judged at the doorpost and his ear was pierced declaring, I am a willing servant for life. So, 2000 years later, Jesus's head still declares, I am a willing servant for life, which means His body has given up the choice of, do I want to, or do I not want to be a willing servant for life because the head's already made the choice?

If you're a Christian, if you're a disciple of Jesus, you don't actually even get the choice anymore of whether or not you want to be a servant. You say, "What?" You're the body. He's the head. The Head made the choice 2000 years ago. You can say, "I don't want to be a part of the body." You can say, "I refuse to live like that." But just so we're clear, the choice has already been made of what the Body of Christ is going to do. And it's to wash the feet of the world around them. How different would that be if you saw yourself as a part of the body and every day that you don't want to serve, you just picture the head of Jesus already pierced, saying the choice has already been made. This is not something to negotiate or argue because I have chosen to be in your body, included in Christ. It's no longer I who live, it's Christ who lives within me.

I've been crucified with Christ. His life is now my life. Are you catching me? Wouldn't that change it? He already made the choice. We don't get to make it. We can say, "I don't want you." Or we can say, "I want to be in it, but I'm still going to live like I want." That's fine. But the identity has already been secured of a servant. And to each one, to you, a manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good. God's given you gifts, passions, talents, abilities to make your life amazing. That's what it says, right? He's given you all your gifts and abilities so you can make a lot of money and have a lot of free time. That's totally what the heartbeat of the scripture is, right? I mean, Jesus totally washed your feet so you could just run and be free and never think about anyone or anything ever again. I'm trying to bring some sarcasm to you so you know. No. Why did He give you those things? For our good. He's given you His gifts and His talents and passions so that you can be His hands and His feet in the people and the lives and the places that He has placed you.

In fact, one more big verse. It was He who gave – Jesus gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists. Some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people, you, for works of service. So, that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature. Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the – that is Christ. From Him, the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. Catch it. You're God's people. You're supposed to do the works of service and you're supposed to do your part, your work. So, my question for you is, in the Body of Christ, where are you doing works of service? And are you doing your part to build us up? If you say you're a disciple, a

follower of Jesus, a Christian, this is your church. We should be able to just ask each other. According to scripture, we should just – without the defence of who are you? No, no.

Hey, where are you doing the works of service to build us up? And where are you doing your part so we can grow and be built to become a body that's worthy of the head? I guess it's a great question. I don't like the question. I know. But where are you expressing love in this place? Where are you living? You know where you came from and where you're going and why you're here. Where are you washing our feet because Jesus washed your feet? Where are you serving us because Jesus served you? You say, "I do it out there in my family, in my work." You've lost the right for that choice because this is talking about the Body of Christ. Literally, the people sitting next to you. It says that the church leader's job, pastors, teachers, prophets, evangelists. My job is to prepare you for the works of service. Do you know that word prepare means to mend and repair tears in your soul? What I'm trying to do is mend and repair the tears in your soul so you can do the works of service so we can become the body we're called to be.

And if you can catch this, that word also means to arrange and order. Boom. If you've been here for 10 months, that should blow your mind. My job is to help you arrange and order your life so you can do the works of service so we can become who we're supposed to be. Wow. Do you come to church to have your life rearranged and reordered? You would like me a lot more if that was your premise. Because you have a responsibility to build up this body? Do you know the biggest delta between where we are and where we want to go is just not having enough servants? Everything we need to serve this body and reach the city is in the house, sitting in the chairs right now. Every gift, every passion, every talent, every ability, the gifts of healing.

Every prophetic word, every word of knowledge. All the finances, all the passion, all the worship leading, all the investment into the next generation. I mean, it's literally sitting in your seat and in the seat right next to you. The only question is, have you decided to be a willing servant for life? One of the hardest things for us as a leadership team in this era of time right now is we have more vision than we have servants who are willing to walk it out. We have so much vision. And some of you are asking questions like, "When are we going to do Argyle? When are we going to do university? When are we going to do adult VCLA and take Serve The City to the next level?" There're so many things we feel like God has called and asked us to do. We don't have enough servants who are willing to work the field, tend the flock and wait on tables. Because of time and pride. See, this is the practice. The game is out there. We think serving in church is the pinnacle of servanthood. I ushered someone today.

I held a baby. Thank you. This is where you practice. This is where you practice dying to yourself and your flesh being pierced and giving up your pride and your rights and being asked to do things you don't want to do. But because you're learning to be a servant, you're not offended by it. And because you're learning to be a servant, you're not upset that you weren't thanked over it. This is not the pinnacle. This is the practice field so I can go out and do it. If you can catch it, Jesus washed the disciples' feet before he went to the cross and washed the world. The order matters. You can't be a hope carrier out there if you're not first a disciple in here. This is what I've been trying to tell you for years now. This is a training center. This is a training center. And if you come to be prepared to be the kind of person you were created to

be to build a body that is worthy of its head it changes your whole premise of how you walk in and out of these doors. If you're here to say, "Just feed me though and make me happy," I get it. You're probably starting to not like me. I fully acknowledge that, but I can in good conscience back up and not do what I'm going to stand before the Lord and have to give an account for.

Because you say, "Can we just tone it down?" I want to say tone what down? Living a life of purpose and freedom and security and humility? I don't know. All right. Let me close with this story. I started with a story. Let me end with a story. Help everybody come back up. One day Jesus is teaching the crowd and they're hungry. Servants notice what's going on in other people's lives. And they have compassion and empathy. So, He noticed they were hungry and weary and tired. So, He tells the disciples, "Hey, let's give them something to eat." They panic. We ain't got that. We got five loaves, two fish. So, what do you have? Five loaves, two fish. Jesus never asks you what you don't have. He only asks you what you do have and what you're willing to do with it.

They take the five loaves, the two fish. They give it to Jesus. Okay. And He prays for it and He breaks it because things can't be used in the kingdom until they're surrendered and broken. And He gives it back to the disciples. He hasn't multiplied it. He gave it back, five loaves, two fish, right back to the disciples. And they're supposed to go out now and serve the groups, the 5,000 people. And they start with these little crumbs because they're thinking Jesus has lost his mind. Ain't no way, this is feeding everybody. But as they get through the first group, there's more in their hand than when they started. And they get through the second group and there's more in their hand than when they started. And all of a sudden they go from giving croutons to giving full steak dinner kind of loaves of bread and fish to the people. Everyone gets it and it says they all ate and were satisfied. They all ate. They all ate. The crowd, the disciples and Jesus. They're included in all. They all ate and were satisfied. And when it was over, the crowd left and they went home having had a good meal and were satisfied.

But because the disciples also served, they were transformed. And they left completely different. The question is, are you the kind of person that eats and is satisfied? Or are you the kind of person that serves and is transformed? That's the difference in the story. Everyone had the same meal. The servants had a radically different experience. God did something in them as He did something through them and their life was forever changed. This is why sometimes we can come to church for 20 years and never change because all we do is eat and are satisfied. We never move to serving so we don't experience transformation. So, we eat really good meals, but they never change us. They never shape us. They never mold us. They never help us become something beyond who we are. And if we would just simply practice service.

And if you're sitting here, you're like, "I got no interest in any of it." Totally. Here's my thing. Then, you've lost sight of the fact that Jesus has washed your feet. This is the Jesus-focused dynamic. We serve because He served us. We wash feet because He washed our feet. So, if I don't want to wash feet and I don't want to serve, the problem isn't my motivation. The problem is, I need to get Jesus focused again and be reminded that He washed the muck off my feet. And that He served my life and changed me in every way, shape and form. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Your flesh has to

be pierced if you want to walk in the spirit. That's what this verse is teaching us. Take up your cross. Your flesh has to be pierced if you want to walk in the spirit. If you will let go of your life, He will give it back to you. And we are never really more like Jesus than when we're practicing service.

So, here's your practice plan. You can do it. Even don't. There's grace. We've said these are up to you. Wake up every morning this week and ask the Holy Spirit before you even get out of bed to give you opportunities to serve throughout the day and then do them. Every morning, just Holy Spirit, give me opportunities to serve today and then do them. And here's my guess, is you will come to face-to-face reality with how arranged and ordered your life is around you being served. What a gift from God to discover that reality so I can then do something about it. The practice of service is God doing something in me as He does something through me. If we want to be a church and a people that go to the next level of being the Body of Christ, worthy of His head then service must go up in our culture, in our environments, in our lives, and in our homes because our body is a compilation of us as individuals.

We will never be more servant-hooded as a group than we are as individuals. But when we bring our service as individuals into the Body, we can become the kind of body that Jesus had of literally washing the world, saving the world, and being a movement of hope for the city and beyond. So, Holy Spirit, everything in our flesh craves to be served. And yet You, our Lord, our Teacher, came to show us that life is not found in being served, but in serving.

God, I believe my friends today, so many of us are hungry for security and freedom. All we long to know where we came from and where we're going and why we're here. Thank you that the gift and the practice of service helps us step into that reality. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you are the counselor, the comforter, but you're also the convictor. And you help us when our lives are off track to realign. You help us move from the way of the world to the way of the kingdom. Jesus, may I and my life be overwhelmed because you washed my sinful feet. May I never forget what you did for me. And may that be the Genesis of how I live with you.

Giving my life away with no strings attached to the people around me. Help us become a people who practice service because we want to be a disciple of Jesus. In Your name we pray. Amen.

**A DIFFERENT WAY**



**NOVEMBER 3, 2024**  
**SEASON FOUR, EPISODE THREE**  
**"GENEROSITY"**

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us. And I don't know about you, but I am so proud, Bill. For the last three weeks, we've been watching Bill's journey and he has come a long way. He used to be lost, lonely, and broken without hope, without God in this world, an enemy of God. And yet God through his goodness and his grace, reached into Bill's life through the grace of God, the spirit of God, the word of God, and the people of God. And he captured Bill's heart, and he changed his life, and he turned everything upside down. And Bill started taking one next step at a time on this journey. And through things like the weekend experience, and circles, and serve teams, and spiritual practices, and transformational experiences. Bill has been growing and changing.

He's learning what it looks like to live in God's kingdom, how to live a spirit-filled life, how to be a disciple of Jesus. And so Bill is becoming a hope carrier. A disciple of Jesus living on mission to change his world because Bill has a vision to be a disciple of Jesus. So he has intent to move his life in that direction. So he's taking advantage of all the means that are available to him. He's arranging and rearranging his life around Jesus and the way Jesus lived his life. And he's experiencing spiritual formation, the process of being formed into the image of Christ to become a person of love. And Bill loves what we're doing. Bill loves where we're going. And Bill loves how it's going in him. And the story of Bill is really, I hope, your story. Because see, you used to be lost, lonely, and broken. Without God, without hope in this world, you were actually an enemy of God, the Bible tells us.

But through the spirit of God, and the grace of God, and the power of God, and the people of God, God reached into your life, and changed your heart, and captured your life, and turned you towards him, and you're on a journey. A journey of next steps, one step at a time, and through things like weekend experiences and circles and serve teams and spiritual practices and transformational experiences you're growing. And you're learning how to be a disciple of Jesus, a learner, a student, a follower. You're learning what it looks like to live in God's kingdom. You're learning what it looks like to live a Spirit-filled life, and you're arranging and rearranging your life around Jesus, ordering and reordering your life around Jesus. And you have this vision, at least I hope you do, to become a disciple of Jesus, a person of love. And therefore you have intent. You're willing to do whatever it takes to become that person that you feel like God has shown you, you can become. So you take advantage of the means that are available, and I hope you love where we're going, and I hope you love what we're doing. And I sure hope, you got a big old green heart, and you love how it's going in you because you're a hope carrier, a disciple of Jesus living on mission to change your world.

You see, our vision as a church is to be a movement of hope for the city and beyond. And our main strategy to do that is to raise up generations of hope carriers, disciples of Jesus who live on mission to change their world. So if you haven't pieced it all together yet, this year-long different way series that we're in isn't just the series and a good idea for all my strategic people. This is one of the most strategic things we've ever done because we took a year to help you grow as a disciple so you can actually live on mission to change your world. Oh, my gosh! They actually think about what they're doing at this church. Yes, they do. This is helping you become a hope carrier in Jesus' name. And what a great opportunity you have this week to be a hope carrier.

See, I don't know if you know this or not, but there's an election coming up. I don't know that you've heard that anywhere else in the world, but let me just make you aware that there's an election coming up this week, and you have a great opportunity to live a different way. We've been talking a whole year about doing the things that Jesus did behind the scenes so we could do the things Jesus did on the spot. So what a great week to do the things that Jesus did on the spot because you've been spending a year doing the things that he did behind the scenes. So what if this week you just engaged with the people you disagree with the way Jesus would? And what if this week you just put your hope in the things that Jesus would? And what if just this week you just used your words and actions and social media the way that Jesus would? Because our hope is not in a person or in a party or in politics. Our hope is in Jesus and his kingdom, right?

The kingdom of God is a movement of hope. And we want to see the kingdom of God in the area of government. We want to see the rule and reign of God in government. The problem is, is so often the people of God think the kingdom of God comes into government when the candidate they vote for gets into party. But if you notice the lines on the area of life, they're actually very important. The kingdom of God flows through the church. You, the people of God, set apart by God, for the purposes of God. And when the church engages as disciples of Jesus living on mission to change their world, that's when the kingdom of God comes into the areas of life in the world around us. You see, we live in a country that has a government by the people, for the people, of the people. And yet for some reason, we put all our hope into this external election as if the right person gets elected, then the kingdom of God will come into government. No, no, no. The kingdom of God comes into government when the people of God live as hope carriers.

And every time you are a hope carrier, and you engage, you interact with, you move around in the space of government, you literally just brought God's kingdom into that space in that moment. And what we do as the people of God is we just sit around often and wait for someone else to bring the kingdom over there. Instead of asking the question, has the kingdom of God come in here? Because the kingdom within me will become the kingdom around me. And so the question is, is are you as concerned with your levels of obedience as you are with who's going to get elected on Tuesday? Are you as concerned with your submission and surrender to the Word of God, the spirit of God, the kingdom of God, as you are with what's going to happen this week? That's when the kingdom of God comes into this space. See, God isn't waiting on an election. God is waiting on his people to become who he has created them to be. And so, regardless of what happens this week, here's two things that we do know.

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. And those who do so will bring judgment on himself. New Testament, real clean, real easy. God is not going to be surprised on Tuesday. You might be, but God won't be. Okay? His kingdom is unshakable. So if you feel shaky, that's okay. His kingdom is not shaken. And no one gets into authority without God. And whoever has been established in those authorities is, as the people of God, we submit, we come under, and we honor as the people of God,

because we're doing so as a way of submitting and honoring to God, who is not surprised about who is in positions of authority because they don't get there without Him. And the second thing we know is, is that I urge, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God, our savior.

Here's what we know. Regardless of what happens this week, we don't need to criticize, complain, or celebrate. We pray, we intercede, and we give thanks for those in authority because that is a life of godliness and holiness and pleases God and releases the kingdom into the world around us. It's a great opportunity to be a hope carrier in Jesus' name, which is really what this whole series has been about all year. We've been in a year-long series, if you're just joining us, called a different way, and we spent all year talking about doing the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did. We've been talking about living like Jesus lived. So you can live like Jesus lived. You got to do what he did behind the scenes if you want to do what he did on the spot. So we've talked about his practices and habits and his disciplines. And we've said that we're coming to him with the premise of being a disciple, a learner, a student, a follower, saying, I believe that you know what is good and true and is right.

And so teach me how to live. Help me arrange and rearrange my life. Help me order and reorder my life that I might experience the life that you say is available to me as a man or woman made in the image and likeness of God invited to live deeply in your kingdom, and we've gone through uh 10 of 12 practices. And we're giving you these practices that Jesus said, we've gone through 10 of 12 and we're in season four, we broke it up into four different seasons. There's only two more practices yet. I know for some of you, that's sad. Some of you are like, praise the Lord. Either way, we've gone through 10 of 12, and we're in season four. And season four is the external practices. For most of the other seasons were you and God. This is now you, God, and others. They're external. They're outward. And if we're honest, these are probably some of the hardest ones to do because these ones in season four require this. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man? It's again the whole world and forfeit his soul. These practices that we're talking about in season four require you to deny yourself, give up your pride, your rights, your opinions, your preferences, and they cause you to take up your cross, to allow your flesh to be crucified, your flesh to be pierced so that you can live a spirit-filled life. They cause you to let go of your life that you might find it to give up the world so that you can get a healthy soul. And a great question for you to wrestle with on this verse for yourself is, when was the last time you know you denied yourself and took up your cross? When was the last time you gave your life away to find it? When was the last time you let go of the world so you could have a healthy soul in Jesus's name? And so as we get into the practice for today, today's practice is the practice of generosity. It's the practice of generosity.

And I've told you my great concern in season four is that the moment I say the name of the practice, a whole lot of us are going to check out because of the familiarity too. We're either going to say, yeah, yeah, yeah, I got that. I do it. I'm good. Or yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've already decided I have no interest in that in my life. So I'm good. I've made that decision



already. And my prayer and my hope for you in season four is that you will just, at least, be open to that which God wants to see. So you can't deny that Jesus practiced generosity. You see it all through his life. You see it all through the people of God for thousands of years. And if we want to do the things that Jesus did on the spot, like be able to forgive those who hurt us, to be able to love not only our neighbor, but our enemy, to be able to bless not only our family, but those who persecute us, then we first have to do the things that Jesus did, like the practice of generosity.

I would define generosity to you as this. I would just say the practice of generosity is giving God's resources to others in a way that releases his kingdom in their life. The practice of generosity is giving God's resources to others in a way that releases God's kingdom in their life. It's giving God's resources away, in a way that's for the good of others and the glory of God. And I know some of you think I misspoke when I said giving God's resources away. It's God's resources because you don't have any. You don't have it. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who dwell among it. He is the Lord of all. Every good gift comes down from the father of heavenly lights. You and I don't have any resources. We've been entrusted with God's resources, and we've been entrusted to steward them. We've been entrusted to use them.

We've been trusted to manage them for the good of others and the glory of God. But it's giving away that which belongs to God to release his kingdom in the world around us with no strings attached. And there's a huge difference between buying and giving. Buying is I give to get. Giving is I give so you get. And I know the moment I say generosity, a wall goes up in a lot of our hearts and in a lot of our minds because we live in a region where the prevailing power and principality that lives in the spiritual realm is the love of money. We literally live in a city where the demonic spirit that rules and reigns in this area is the love of money. The love of money is like a cancer that grips our heart. It's like a fog that clouds our vision. I mean, just look at how we engage money in this city, the greed, the hoarding, pride, the flashing it, the pursuing it, the making our life around about it.

See, I think a whole lot of us, whether we realize it or not, actually, arrange and rearrange our life around money more than we arrange and rearrange our life around Jesus. And so the only way you come against the power and principality is coming in the opposite spirit. So in a city of greed, you have to be a person who practices generosity, if you want to live free from that influence. And here's what I want to say to you. I don't think there's anything I can say to you to help you practice generosity. I literally don't think there's anything I can do, say, teach, inspire you today to move your heart or your mind in the direction of generosity. So I'm not even going to try to. You see, Jesus tells this fascinating story in Luke, Chapter 16. It's a story we don't talk a lot about, but it's profound.

He tells this story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. He says there's this rich man who lives this life of luxury, has this massive estate and enjoys this life of wealth and prestige and power. And then there is this man named Lazarus who is a broken, sick beggar who lives at the man's gate, just hoping for the crumbs that fall from his table. And over the course of time, both of them die. The rich man dies and goes to hell. Lazarus, the poor beggar, dies and goes to heaven. And Jesus says, one day in the afterlife, the rich man looks up and he sees Father

Abraham with Lazarus. And so he cries out, Father Abraham, send Lazarus over here to just dip his finger in some water to just bring me one drop to relieve me from this agony. And Abraham looks at the man and says, I'm sorry, son. He says, there's a great chasm between you and I. So you can't come here and we can't go there. And in your life, you had good things, and in Lazarus's life, he had bad things. And your heart never turned to God, but Lazarus's heart did.

And so the rich man says, fine, then will you send Lazarus back from the dead to tell my five brothers about this reality so they don't come hear also. Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them." "No, Father Abraham," he said. But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent. He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." He says, "There are some things that if you don't listen to scripture, Moses and the Prophets, if you don't listen to the scriptures, even if someone rises from the dead, you will not be convinced. If we won't repent when the Word of God is spoken into our life," he says, "we will not repent even if someone comes back from the dead." She makes total sense.

Because if I don't value the Word of God, why do I think I will value the action of God? If I don't value the voice of God, why do I think I'll value the hand of God? If I don't value the wisdom of God, I'm not going to value the power of God. And so if I have no interest in repenting, because you say so, Lord, I will do it. I have heard it said, but you say to me, if I do not have the sense of tremble to the Word of God, and the sense of awe, and reverence and wonder the sense of fear of the Lord, the sense of this is the authority of my life. This is my king, whatever he says, I must align my life to it. If I will not repent, according to scripture, I will not repent even if something spectacular. And so I don't think today, even if we could have an angel from heaven show up, even if Lazarus himself rose from the grave to come and preach the message, if heaven was open, if there was a tear in the time and space continuum, if I could put together the most funny, relevant, practical, inspiring you've never heard it before, here's a passage in the Greek and the Hebrew language, Papa, I don't think it would change your heart. It's when I'm not going to try. In fact, as I prayed for you all week, I feel like this was the story that the Lord just kept bringing me back to.

And so here's what I want to do. I'm just going to read you 18 scriptures on generosity. I'm not going to teach them. I'm not going to give you commentary on them. I'm not highlighting anything about them. I'm just going to literally read you 18 scriptures, and give you the opportunity to hear the Word of God in your life and decide what you want to do with it. Because I don't think even if Lazarus himself showed up, it would make much difference, if I haven't said I tremble at the Word of God. Now, if you're here and you're like, hey, that's a lot. I know, but remember what I keep telling you, put it back in context. This right now is a message of context of 10 and a half months of journeying together, of learning to value God's Word. Because remember, the first practice was scripture. And so here's what I want to encourage you to do. Don't take notes. Don't write anything down. We'll post it all. I want to invite you to just sit there and maybe open up your heart, open up your mind.

And as I read these, if you don't like it, ask yourself why. If you're offended, ask yourself why. If you have a hard time focusing, ask yourself why. If you feel convicted, ask yourself why. If it bothers you, ask why. I've been trying, I try to teach you all the time to think, to think God gave

you a mind to think, to contemplate, to reflect. I want to think with him, not like the world. Faith comes by? Hearing. And hearing by the? Word of God.

So the greatest chance we have to combat the power and principality of our region is not me inspiring you or bringing out someone who rose from the dead. It's just literally to read the Word of God over your life. So Holy Spirit, we just invite you in. Thank you that your Word does not return void, but accomplishes its purpose. Thank you that your Word is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword and penetrates our soul and our spirit.

Thank you that all of your Word is God-breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness. Thank you that your Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Thank you that you show us your ways and teach us your path. So may we now humbly accept your Word as a practice that will set us free in Jesus's name.

The practice of generosity, according to scripture. For, you know, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and God blessed them humanity and said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it using all its vast resources in the service of God and man."

You may say to yourself, my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. If there is a poor man among you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother. Rather, be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs. Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart. Then because of this, the Lord, your God will bless you in all your work, and in everything you put your hand to.

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be open-handed towards your brothers and towards the poor and needy in your land. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this. Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. Oh, Lord, our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your holy name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent, and now, I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. The world of the generous gets larger and larger. The world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller. The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed. Those who help others are helped. I, the Lord, do not change. Ever since the time of your forefathers, you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. "Return to me and I will return to you", says the Lord Almighty. But you ask, how are we to return?

Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, how do we rob you? In tithes and offerings. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. "Test me in this", says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. So when you give to the

needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets to be honored by men. I tell you the truth. They have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret. Then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures 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. No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Freely you have received. Freely give. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap, for with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much. And whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jesus himself said it is more blessed to give than to receive. And now my brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability, entirely on their own. They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. You'll be made rich and every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with it. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs. Command those who are rich in this present world, not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich and good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. It's the Word of God. From Genesis to Revelation, the law, prophets, the gospels, the epistles,

scripture after scripture after scripture communicates to us that the way we live in God's kingdom is part of this set apart people on this earth is through this practice of generosity.

The only question you have to answer is, do you believe Jesus knows what he's talking about? Because the verses aren't confusing. They don't need commentary. They're not unclear. You don't get to say, I don't understand. They're very clear. They're very direct. They're very open. The question is, is do I believe that Jesus knows what he's talking about? Do I believe that Jesus knows what is good and true and right? Because Jesus can't be right about some things and wrong about others. He's either right about everything or he's wrong about everything. Jesus cannot be right about salvation, but wrong about money. Jesus cannot be right about eternal life, but wrong about generosity. Jesus cannot be right about the forgiveness of sins, but wrong about finances. So the question you and I have to answer is, does Jesus know what he's talking about? And I think sometimes, we think Jesus knows what he's talking about here, but not there. I would just say, do you really want to trust a guy that is 50% of the time wrong with your soul? It's a great question to ask. I trust Jesus with salvation, but not with the practice of generosity. Why? Because I think he's wrong in this.

I don't. Okay. But just think, do I really want to trust my soul to a guy that I don't think knows how to use money? It's a great question. Because Jesus himself says, "If you don't know how to handle money, you won't know how to handle true riches, spiritual revelation." So if he's wrong on money, he's already telling you, I'm wrong about revelation. I'm wrong about eternal life. I'm wrong about salvation. So it's a question we have to ask. And if you answer the question no, Jesus knows what he's talking about. Then I have to actually wrestle with the -- because you say so I will do it then. Yeah. Yeah. He knows what he's talking about, but ba-ba-ba-ba, but I don't get it, but I don't like it. And I have all these reasons. And this is why I can't. And this is why I don't. And da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, or like Peter, because you say so. I don't like it. I don't appreciate it. I don't understand it. I don't feel like I can do it. I don't feel like you get where my life is at. I don't feel like all the things feel, feel, feel, get it? Feel, feel, feel. But because you say so, because if I won't repent to His Word, I won't repent according to his action. If I won't repent because of the scriptures, I won't repent even if someone does something spectacular and rises from the dead. I have heard it said, but Jesus says to me, you know, when he says that? You have heard it said, but I say to you, I have heard it said, but he says to me. I have heard it said, do you know I hear I said from? Myself, myself. Myself tells me, I don't need to do this. It applies to everyone else, but me. I have heard it said, but he says to me. So a disciple says, because you say so, because I can't live my life with a God that is wrong about money, but I believe is right about salvation, because I now have arranged my life in a way that is on shaky ground.

Now, when I live my life and when I take my last breath, I'm left wondering what on earth is life all about. And it's proven to you, in the fact, that you will say, I trust him with this, but not with this, because you trust somebody you believe is right, that is good and is trustworthy, faithful. This is why Jesus says, "To those who believe in him, if you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples. And if you know the truth, the truth will set you free." If we believe we will obey. If we obey, we're actually his disciple, learner, student, follower, becoming like him. I've given him the authority to decide what is good and true and right. And when I live as a disciple, I now live in truth. And when I live in truth, I actually am free. So if I want to live free, I have to know

what's true because to believe a lie is to live in bondage. So if I want to be free, I have to know what is true. And I can only experience truth if I follow the way, the truth and the life, and become his disciple.

And he says, "I'm only his disciple if I obey because you say so, I will. And I will only obey the things I actually believe." So it's a great reference point to just check your heart, check your life, check your mind, and your spiritual journey. Remember, like, Bill, we're all on a journey. We're all moving forward. We're all in different places. Nobody's telling you, you need to go from zero to a hundred. What I'm trying to bring to you is the Word of God, and let that change your soul because there ain't no message in the world. If somebody can't rise from the dead to convince you and me, there ain't no message in the world that can be preached. Only the Word of God has the authority to do that. So here's your practice plan for this week.

Give some actual money to God, and at least, one person this week. Every week at the end of the practice, we have a practice plan because, we as a church, are training to be godly right now. That's what we're doing. We're training to be godly. So we need a practice plan. And every week I give you a practice plan, and every week I tell you the same thing, you don't have to do it. You don't have to do it. If you're like, I'm not interested. Great. No problem. If you want to do it, we enter into these practices, not religious, not to get something from God, but with God to open ourselves up to his grace that changes us from the inside out. I'm doing the things that Jesus did behind the scenes, generosity. So I can do the things that Jesus did on the spot, like, become a person who can forgive those who hurt me, who can love his neighbor and his enemies, and who can bless not only his family but those who persecute me. That's the kind of person I want to be.

So I want to do the things that Jesus did to train to become like that person, which means, I actually have to put my faith in action and move. You don't have to do it, but if you want to train, here's how I'm training this week, and here's how thousands of people in our church will be training this week. Give some actual money to God, actual money. When we go through these notes on Thursday, the team laughed at me. They said, "Do you really need to say, like, actual money there? Like, yes, because we justify, and here's what we do. We give leftovers. We give hand-me-downs. We give junk that we don't want, and then, call ourselves generous. I'm going to give you my leftover clothes that I don't wear anyway. I'm not going to say that, but boy, I'm so generous. I'm going to give you furniture that's been in the garage that I want and the garbage man won't take, but I'm going to give it to this young family, and they got to pick it up, like, oh my gosh, I got rid of that thing. And then we call ourselves generous. So it's actual money because the love of money is the root of all evil. And it's -- you can't serve both God and money. So it's actually money, money, breaking the cycle in my life. And I'm not telling you how much, \$10, \$100, \$1,000, \$100,000, a million dollars. You process with God, give some actual money to God.

How do you do that? Through his local church. You can do it in our church at the boxes at the doors or online, or if you're a part of another church, do it however they do it. I don't know, but give some actual money to God. You say, I've never done that. I know this is trying to break through that thing that's holding you back to say, I'm coming against the power and principality. I don't want to live like that. My hope is that this week there are hundreds of

families. They give for the first time to God as a step of faith. I'm not telling you what or how. I'm just saying train, man. And if you're sitting here and you're like, yeah, I give every week. I have the auto thing and I tithe and all that stuff. Okay, for you and me, when was the last time that we stopped to actually look at what we're giving to God and said, when was the last time I gave God an offering that cost me something? When was the last time I considered my financial reality and moved my heart towards God? I want to give to you because I love you.

So think about that this week and then give some money to one actual person, not your leftovers, not your hand-me-down, not your junk in your garage. Some actual money to one person. So you say, like, to who and to what? I don't know. A student that's trying to raise money to go on a mission trip this summer. A VCLA student that's working hard, that's paying for their training to be a hope carrier and to get their college education at the same time in VCLA. Help them. A young family who's struggling, and you just see an opportunity to bless them. A single mom, a widow, an orphan, an older couple that is later in their life, and you see an opportunity to bless them. Somebody that is wealthy that you love, that you just want to bless. Because what is generosity? It's not just meeting a need. It's releasing God's kingdom into people's lives. It's giving in a way that is no strings attached, good of others, the glory of God.

And like, I want to see God move in their life. I love what God's doing in their life, and actual money, not junk. And if I told you to give away junk, but called it nice stuff, you'd be like, I can do that practice this week, which shows you how much of a cancer it grips your heart. If you're offended, if you're frustrated, if you're annoyed, if you're already telling yourself why you're not going to do it, I'm proving my point to you. I'm just telling you, I'm not preaching against it. I'm just going to share with you the Word of God and let you decide. And you say, but I don't know a person. I know this is why these practices matter. If I practiced community and service, the last two, I would be surrounded by so many people that I could bless. I would be asking the question, which one is God asking me to do it to? Not I need to find someone, but if I don't do service, and I don't wash feet, and I don't practice community, I don't build relationships to see God, I'm probably looking around a little bit, like, okay, giving God, that might be easier than giving to a person because I don't know the person. So great.

So what an opportunity to ask God to speak, to move, to open up your heart. I want my heart to be open. I want my heart to be open because I want to be like Jesus. Like Bill, I have a vision to become a person of love. I have a vision to be a disciple of Jesus. I want to live deeply in God's kingdom. I don't want to not do practices because they're hard, or because I think I can't, or because of decisions in the past, or other things that other people have said, I don't care, because you say so, Lord. I want to be a kind of person that did what you did so I can do what you do. I want to do what you did so I can become who you are in my daily life. Yes, I am already that included in Christ, but I want to live like that. So I got to train in Jesus's name. You don't have to do it.

Practice 11 of 12. Next week, we'll hit 12. We'll pull it together. But if you're training, maybe it's just this week. Maybe you just even ask God, bring your struggle or your doubt or your rest. Maybe you read back through those 18 scriptures on your own, or maybe one jumped out at you and you meditate on it, memorize it. It's not that it's not clear. It's not that it's not available.

It's not that it's not right in front of us. It's just, do I want to want it? And do I believe Jesus knows what he's talking about? This is why I would hope you would trust this because where else are you going to go that I'm telling you? Like, if you don't trust what Jesus says here, don't trust him here. Go find a God who you believe in 100% of what he says. Why would I follow a God that I trust 50% of the time or believe is right 50% of, that's bad odds.

I'm flipping a coin, I'm alive. Some of you are like, I'll take those odds. Totally. That's okay. It's your choice. I'm just trying to say with Jesus, it's always heads. So I don't ever have to worry about – yeah, flip it, flip it. It's always heads. It's always heads. Why? Because he is the head of the body of Christ, and he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. So he's always the head. He's never on the tail. He's never underneath. So Holy Spirit, would you speak? Would you move? No. Holy Spirit, you are speaking, and you did just speak, and you did just move. So would you breathe fresh wind into our soul? Places that we doubt, may we have the courage to trust. Places that we're afraid, would you give us the courage to have faith? Places that our mind and our heart and our soul are aligned with the world, would you break those free that we might be aligned with your kingdom? Thank you that we're on a journey. May we be people who tremble at your Word. And because we tremble at your Word, we see dead things come to life. We don't need dead things to come to life to tremble at your Word because we tremble at your Word. We see dead things come to life. May we practice generosity in a city of greed. In Jesus's name, we pray, Amen.



**A DIFFERENT WAY**



**NOVEMBER 10, 2024**  
**SEASON FOUR, EPISODE FOUR**  
**“CONFESSION & REPENTANCE”**

So Jesus, thank you for being our one thing, our main thing, and our only thing. Holy Spirit, we invite you in to touch our hearts. You see, I want to start by just simply telling you three simple stories. The first one is about King David. King David is a man after God's own heart. David loves God. He follows God. He walks with God. His heart is turned towards God. And as the king of Israel, he made sure God's kingdom was able to come and that his will was done. But one season when the kings went off at war, for some reason, David stayed home in his palace. While he was supposed to be off at war fulfilling his purpose, living out his destiny, being on a mission with God, tending his garden, he decided to stay home in the comfort and the convenience of his palace.

Now, we don't know if he was tired. We don't know if he was weary. We don't know if he was bored. We just know he wasn't where he was supposed to be. And day after day, he saw this beautiful woman, and every day, he looked at her. And the more he looked at her, the more the lust in his heart began to grow because lust grows in the eye. And eventually, that lust grew so much in him that his flesh became stronger than his spirit, and he took this woman, he slept with her. And he thought everything was fine until she sent word to say, "Hey, I'm pregnant." David panics. He's afraid. He doesn't know what to do. He's got to take care of this mess. So he ends up having her husband killed. And just about the time, he thinks he's covered up his mess and everything is resolved, he's free and clear in his mind, the Prophet Nathan comes to him and says, "Hey, David, I want to tell you a story."

He says, "You see, in a certain town there were two men. There was one man who was incredibly wealthy and lived in luxury, and he had large flocks and herds. And there was another man who had nothing except one small lamb. And he loved this lamb so much, he treated it like a child in the family. And one day, a traveler came to town and the rich man wanted to throw a banquet for the traveller. But instead of using his own flocks and herds, he took the one lamb of this one man, killed it, and served it at the feast." And as David hears this story, it says that -- he has this righteous anger rise up. He gets all riled up. And he says, "That man deserves to die for what he has done." And Nathan looks right at him and he says, "You are that man." The Lord God says, "I gave you a kingdom and a family and wealth and riches and honor. And if all that wasn't enough, I would have given you even more. And yet you took this one wife from this one man all he had and did what you did."

And David's response is to hit his knees And he says, "I have sinned against the Lord." He doesn't justify. He doesn't explain. He doesn't make excuses. He doesn't try to push it away. "I have sinned against the Lord." And in brokenness and humility, he cries out, "God, restore to me the joy of your salvation. God, do not take your spirit from me. God, cleanse me. God, I was wrong. God, I am sorry. God, I am broken. God, all I want is you."

The second story is the story of Peter. You see, long before Peter became a disciple of Jesus, Peter was a fisherman. And one day, Jesus came walking along the shore after a long night of Peter and his guys out fishing, and he sees Peter, and he says, "Hey Peter, can I borrow your boat?" Peter says, "Sure." Jesus gets in the front of the boat. They push out a little bit, and Jesus teaches the crowd for an extended period of time. And after he's done teaching the crowd on shore, he looks at Peter, and he says, "Hey Peter, put your boat out a little further from shore and let your nets down for a large catch." And Peter looks at Jesus and says,

"Jesus, you're a carpenter. You don't know anything about fishing. This isn't the time of day you fish. This isn't where you fish. And besides all that, we've cleaned up everything. We've put all the nets and the tackle away. Jesus, this isn't really a good idea. But because you say so, I will do it. And he pushes his boat off from shore, let's down the net.

It's so full of fish, it begins to break, and Peter hits his knees, and says, "Away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." In that moment, God's kindness led him to repentance. And Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you won't fish for fish. You're going to fish for men." And in that moment, Peter left his entire fishing business behind to go and follow Jesus. The third story is a story of Ephesian sorcerers. You see, when Jesus resurrected from the grave, the gospel began to spread in word and in power, and it went to cities and nations. And most people rejected it, but many received it. And when it got to Ephesus, there were a group of sorcerers. People who spent their lives practicing the demonic, living in witchcraft. And when they heard the gospel, they were cut to the heart. And it says they openly confessed their evil deeds, and they came into a public place, and brought all of their scrolls, and all of their idols, and all of their black magic, and they put it in a big pile, and they lit it on fire.

It says it was worth 50,000 drachmas. A drachma was one-day wage. The average man in his life works 10,000 days. So they burned five lifetimes of wealth, of demonic scrolls and idols and black magic, openly confessing their evil deeds, and they held the name of the Lord Jesus in high regard. I don't know about you, but I want my heart to be soft and responsive to Jesus like that. And I tell you those three stories because those three stories beautifully demonstrate our twelfth and final practice, the practice called confession and repentance. You see, confession and repentance is more caught than it is taught. It's more seen than it is heard. It is modeled and experienced.

And if you want to know what confession and repentance looks like, you're ready for a really spiritual answer? You just know. You just know. You just know when David says I've sinned against the Lord with no excuses and hits his knees. You just know when Peter says, because you say so Lord, I will do it. You just know when sorcerers openly confess their evil deeds and light their past on fire. You just know. And out of all the twelve practices that we've walked to maybe, just maybe confession and repentance is the most important one that we will talk about. You see, for a year, we've been in a series. A year, a year. This is mid-November. We started this the first week of January. For a year, we've been in a series called A Different Way, Do What Jesus Did, and we've spent an entire year Just saying that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to first do the things that Jesus did. That if we want to live the life Jesus lived, we have to first live the life Jesus lived.

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've spent a year talking about, what does it mean to be a disciple, a follower, a learner, a student, one who becomes like the one they're following. We've talked about Jesus's practices and his habits and his lifestyles and his disciplines that Jesus came to teach us, to show us, not just what the father was like, not just what life in the kingdom was like, but what it meant to be fully human and fully alive. And we've been talking all year about arranging and rearranging our life around Jesus, and the way that he lived and the way that he's trying to teach us to live a way that is good and true and right. And we've said all year that if you want to do the things

that Jesus did, like, have peace in chaos, and joy in every circumstance, and hope in the midst of despair, and love in your relationships, and this deep connection with God and the ability to forgive other people, no matter what if you want to do all those things on the spot. In your life, you have to first do the things that Jesus did behind the scenes.

And so these are the twelve practices that we've just methodically walked through together. If you're new and you're joining us, it's been a long journey. And you really get to see the heart of who we are as a people, and if you've been here, you've walked through all of these. And what I want you to see is that we started with Scripture, and we're ending with confession and repentance. Scripture shows us what the different way is like. Confession and repentance is how we move from our way to the different way. Scripture and only Scripture can show you the narrow road with the small gate that leads to life. Confession and repentance is the only way you get off the wide road with the broad gate that leads to destruction, to get on the narrow road with the small gate that leads to life. Scripture shows us what the different way is like. Confession and repentance is how we actually step onto that different way, and begin living the life that Jesus offers us.

And you say confession and repentance. Okay, what does that mean? Big words. There's a gravity to it. There's a weightiness to it. There is. Confession and repentance is simply agreeing and acting with God. So confession and repentance is, it's agreeing and acting with God. Confession is agreement with God. It's coming into agreement with God. It's this sense of humility and honesty and vulnerability. It's taking things out of the darkness and into the light. It's acknowledging the reality of who I am and what I've done and what God says is true and is good and is right. In fact, confession actually means to acknowledge joyfully and willingly and openly. Just agreeing with God. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness. When we confess our sins that we've missed the mark that we're off, that what we're doing or how we acted or how we behaved or how we think is wrong, it's broken, it's not right, and we agree that what God says is good and true and right.

If I will confess, it's how I receive the forgiveness he's already given me. Forgiveness is a decision God has already made on the cross 2,000 years ago. Confession is how I open myself up to receive that reality. I come into agreement that I was off and I needed your forgiveness. That I was doing my way and I want your way, and so I open myself up to receive that which God Has already given me. Or how about therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. When we confess and we acknowledge and we agree with God and we bring things out of the darkness into the light, there's this profound sense of healing that takes place. I think there is so much sickness in our bodies, in our minds, in our emotions, in our heart, in our soul, in our relationships, in our spirits because we don't do what Scripture tells us to do. You say I confess my sins to God. Great. God says confess your sins to each other so that you might be healed.

Why? Because God opposes the proud. He gives grace to the humble, and there's a humility, it being broken, like the Ephesian elders openly confessing their evil deeds, "I was a sorcerer. I was lost, lonely, and broken. I've found Jesus and my life has changed." And then repentance. That's confession. What's repentance? Repentance is acting with God. Repentance is literally

changing my thinking. You change your thinking, it'll change your living because your thoughts lead your life. And repentance is literally to turn from something towards something else. That's literally what it means. It means, I was going this way, repentance literally means, but I've turned, and I'm now going this way. Repentance from dead works and of faith towards God. It's not just feelings and emotions and wishful thinking. No, it's like actually, I was going this way the dead works, this way of destruction, but I'm turning towards God. Repentance is an actual acting with God. Confession is agreeing with God that this is the way that's right. Repentance is actually acting with God and turning and aligning my life with that which I have agreed is good and true and right.

It's why it says repent then and turn to God so that your sins might be wiped out. The times of refreshing may come from the Lord. Repentance is turning from the world towards God, and every time I do, there is a refreshing that takes place. There is the current of grace. There is the stream of love. There is the springs of living water that refresh my soul. This way is weary and burdensome. This way is easy and light. And when I return, there is a refreshment that takes place. From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent For the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You realize Jesus only had one message. And it wasn't repent angry, harsh, religious. It was repent. My kindness is leading you towards repentance. The way you're on is heavy and weary and burdensome, but the kingdom of heaven is at hand, within reach. It's right.

"It's one step away," is what he is saying. The kingdom of heaven is one step away. If you will turn from that towards this, you can access and grab and bring a hold of the realities of heaven into your life and the here and now. And repentance is how we get into the kingdom, but repentance is also how we live in the kingdom. A lot of us repent enough to get in the kingdom, but not enough to live in the kingdom. We repent enough for the forgiveness of our sins but not enough to experience eternal or abundant life, if you will, knowing God in the here and now. We repent enough to become Christians, but not enough to become disciples. And so we miss the very life that God offers us. In fact, this verse That we've been using in season four of A Different Way, then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me in the gospel will say that what good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul. Can you see it? Confession and repentance. Confession denying myself, coming into agreement with God denying my opinions, and my perspectives, and my feelings, and my beliefs to come into agreement with what he says is good, true and right regardless of how I feel and take up his cross. There's actually an action. There's an agreement. And then there's an action that takes place to follow him. And I love this that if we're going to come to him and we're going to follow him, we're going to have to live a life of confession and repentance. In other words, confession and repentance is how you get into the kingdom. Confession and repentance is how I live in the kingdom. This is not a one and done. A lot of us think confession and repentance is you're a sinner in need of a savior. You did it, you're in. No, Jesus says that's how you come to him, but now to live with him is a constant lifestyle of confessing and repenting, agreeing and acting.

I can only come to him with an agreement and an action, and I can only walk with him with agreement and action. You see, confession and repentance has two dynamics to it. It has sin, confession and repentance, and revelation, confession, and repentance. Sin, confession, and repentance is the one we're familiar with. I'm walking this way. I'm living my life and through the Holy Spirit, conviction, the word of God, the people of God. Somehow, something in my life is exposed that there is sin in my life. I'm living contrary to how God created me to live in his kingdom, and so confession would be an agreement that I have been a judgmental person. Repentance is, I'm now going to start practicing blessing people in my life. Confession would be I'm walking along and I realize I've been disobeying my parents. Repentance is I'm going to start obeying my parents regardless of what they ask me to do. I'm walking along and I realize I don't do the good I know I'm supposed to do.

Confession, repentance is, I actually start doing the good I know I'm supposed to do. Does this make sense? There's an agreement but there's an action. That's the sin side of confession and repentance. But then there's the revelation, confession, and repentance. Revelation is something you didn't know. It's something that was hidden from you. You had no idea it existed, but once it was revealed to you, everything changes. And you're walking along in your life and you think everything's fine, and all of a sudden, something you didn't know was revealed, through the Holy Spirit, through God's word, through the people of God. All of a sudden, you have this revelation and you realize my whole life I thought I was a sinner just barely saved by grace confession. But now I realize I'm actually a beloved son or daughter in whom the Father is well pleased. So now I'm going to live like it. Action. I'm walking along, and I thought, man, I always thought there was going to be this distance between me and God, but now I have learned that I can be as close to God as I want to be confession, and now I'm going to live like I can actually be close to God. Action. Make sense?

I lived my whole life thinking I had to do it. I had to make it all happen, but then I've now realized his divine power has given me everything I need for life and godliness. So I'm going to start acting like His divine power is actually making me godly and giving me life. I've spent my whole life thinking I just had to be a Christian and go to church, but now I have a revelation that I can be a disciple of Jesus, and so I've come into agreement with that and now I'm going to act and actually start living like I'm a disciple. That's revelation. Does that make sense? So there's the sin side and there's the revelation side. They're both incredibly important in this journey. And if you've been tracking with us for this year, you're probably sitting here and you're like, hang on a second. The whole thing you've told us all year is that if I want to do the things that Jesus did I have to do the things that Jesus did. But Jesus was perfect and he's the living word of God. So he didn't have any sin to confess and repent of, and he's the word of God so he didn't need anything revealed to him. You're right.

He didn't have any sin and he didn't need any revelation, but he shows us the heart posture of how we're created to live with an ongoing dynamic practice of confession and repentance. You see, when Jesus was heading to the cross, he had the last supper with his disciples. After that was over, he went into the garden of Gethsemane with them. He knows he's about to go to the cross. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Confession. Acknowledgement. Agreement with God about what is real and

what is actually taking place in the moment. Stay here and keep watch with me. Going a little further, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." Yet not as I will but as you. Repentance.

Jesus shows us the heart of confession, joyful, willing acknowledgement to both God and his godly relationships. And the heartbeat of repentance which is not my will but yours. Not my thought, God, but Your thoughts. Not my desire, God, but your desires. Not my feelings, God, but your feelings. Not my kingdom, God, but your kingdom, God. God, not my will, but your will. Not what I want, God, But what you want, God. That's the heartbeat of repentance. This honest acknowledgement, agreement, but an acting to say, not my will, but yours. So can I ask you a real honest question? This year as we've gone through this journey, has this been the heart posture you've taken? Joyful acknowledgement, agreement about the realities in your life? Vulnerability, humility, honesty to both God and others with this spirit of not my will, but Yours. The question I've been asking you all year is who are you becoming and who do you want to become?

Have you become anyone different in a year? Have you grown? Have you changed? Have there been any points along a year of your life that most of us only get 80 or less of? Where you have said, Not my will, but yours be done. Because Jesus shows us how to live. IF we want to do what he did when He went to the cross and forgave the world and gave up his spirit and resurrected with hope, then we got to do what he did. Have this kind of heart posture in our life. In fact, this is why Jesus says, "Pay attention to what you hear." By your own standard of measurement, that is to the extent that you study spiritual truth and apply godly wisdom, it will be measured to you and you will be given even greater ability to respond. And more will be given to you besides.

For whoever has a teachable heart to him, more understanding will be given, and whoever does not have a yearning for truth, even what he has, will be taken away from him. You say what does that mean? Here's what it means. What have you done with what we've talked about this year? Jesus says, "Pay attention." Another translation says, "Consider carefully." Have you paid attention and considered carefully what God has been speaking to you this year? Have you studied the spiritual truth and applied that godly wisdom to your life? Have you had a teachable heart and a yearning for truth? And if so, the grace of God is giving you ability. This internal transformation you're experiencing spiritual formation, the process of being formed into the image of Jesus to become a person of love, or have you just kind of let it all go? See, I want to be the kind of person that has a soft and responsive heart to the Lord. I don't want to be like the Israelites when God calls them, they are stubborn and stiff-necked.

Stubborn, obstinate, difficult, resistant, stiff-necked. It's a weird phrase, like, what does that mean? Stiff-necked means unrepentant. My neck is so stiff that I can only look in this direction, and I refuse to have a soft and flexible neck and allow God to lead me where he wants me to go. I don't want to be stubborn and stiff-necked. In fact, Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Listen to me. You listen with your ears, but you hear with your heart. And when I hear with my heart, I'm hearing to obey. Did you listen with your ears through these 12 practices, or did you hear with your heart? See, here's what I want to say to you. You are exactly

where you want to be spiritually. Like, right now, in this very moment of your life, wherever you are, you are exactly where you want to be spiritually.

Your level of maturity, your level of discipleship, your level of becoming like Jesus, you're exactly where you want to be. And I know when I say that it's almost like this, like, whoa, hang on a second. And we have all the reasons and all the excuses and all the justification and all the blame and all the why it's not, and my spouse does this, and it doesn't allow me to do that, and my children require this from me, So I can't do that. And my parents do this and I have this job that won't let me do that. And I have all these bills that I have to pay, all these different kinds of things, and we say it's all their fault that I'm not where I say I want to be but none of them have authority over your heart. You've been given a free will by God. So the paradox is this, most of those things you've chosen, you've chosen that job, you've chosen to buy those things, and therefore, you have to pay for them. You've chosen to bring those activities and commitments into your life. You probably chose to marry that person, or have those children, like, most of those things you've chosen your life so that's your responsibility.

But even the ones that you didn't still don't have authority over your heart. Because no one has authority over your mind or your heart or your spirit except you. He's given you free will which means your life is arranged exactly how you want it to be arranged. Your life is ordered exactly how you want it to be ordered. And the moment we take responsibility for that reality, that's when we can actually get where we say we want to go. You're exactly where you want to be spiritually. You say, no, I'm not. But the verse we used all years train yourself to be godly. Don't wait around to be godly, don't hope to be godly, don't just assume one day poof magic will happen and you will be godly. Hope is not a strategy. Hope is a great heart posture but it is not a strategy. Train yourself to be godly. Have you been training yourself? Have you been practicing and disciplining? Why? Because you don't like where you are and you want to get somewhere else, and so you've been working on it.

Ask any coach, any instructor, any teacher that trains or instructs or teaches anybody, they will tell you people are exactly where they want to be. Why don't I train? Because I really just don't want to. Why don't I put in the work? Because I really just don't want to. Why don't I do extra? I really just don't want to. The analogy we've used all year is running a marathon. You can't start at zero and run a marathon, but you can put on your shoes and you can walk to the mailbox the next day. And the day after that, you can take a walk around the block. Day after that you can take two walks around the block. Day after that you can go for a one-mile walk. Day after that you can go for a two-mile walk. Day after that you can go for a one-mile run, right? Okay, so have you had a plan to train to be godly? Because if you don't have a plan, you know you're not training. See, I think a lot of us like the idea of running a marathon more than we like running a marathon. We like the idea of being a disciple of Jesus more than being a disciple of Jesus.

I like the idea of being godly more than I actually like being godly. And so I'm exactly where I want to be spiritually because if I didn't want to be here, I would train and I would move. Listen to me, we have professional athletes in our church that their bodies are like a work of art. Why does my body not look like their body? Because at the end of the day, I just don't want to do it. There are professional musicians in our church that can play amazing music. And I will tell



you all day long that I want to play the keys. Why don't I play the keys? What's stopping me? Me. Because at the end of the day, I just don't want to practice. There are so many people in our church that are bilingual. I wish I could speak another language. Why can't I speak another language?

Because at the end of the day, I just don't want to do it. So I'm exactly where I want to be. I asked a young leader in our church about halfway through this series, hey, tell me what you're hearing. Tell me what you're seeing. Tell me what the young adults are experiencing in this journey. And he said, "Well, I think the reality is this is that we don't want it as much as we think we do. I've super appreciated the honesty. We don't want it as much as we think we do. We say we want it, but at the end of the day, do we really? I mean, just think about this, like, if you wanted to do these practices, you could. If you wanted to memorize Scripture and meditate on it, you would. If you wanted to Sabbath, you would. You'd start arranging your life that way. If you wanted simplicity, you would actually have gotten rid of some things in your life. If you wanted community, you'd move towards it. If you wanted to be generous, you would have given something away. If you wanted to fast, you actually would like just deny yourself some food in that moment. Does that make sense? Like, if you wanted to do it, you would. But here's a great question for you just think through.

This year have you made it a priority to be here on Sunday every single week as we've gone through this series? And if not, on the weeks that you missed, did you go back and watch online to catch up? And every week when we did one of these, did you do the practice plan that I made so accessible for every person, knowing we're all from different places and different dynamics, at different places. So I tried to make, did you do everyone that we talked about? If not, that's okay. I just want to help you understand. Then you are exactly where you want to be spiritually, which is actually very free. Because if I can believe and acknowledge and admit that I'm exactly where I want to be spiritually, then now I know I can get exactly where I want to go. But I will never get where I want to go until I first take responsibility for where I am, and it is no one else's fault. It doesn't matter what childhood you experienced. It doesn't matter what your spouse is like, It doesn't matter what your parents are doing. It doesn't matter what job you have. It doesn't matter what sickness in your body. It doesn't matter what hardship. It doesn't matter what circumstances or situations. I can give you a thousand examples in Scripture.

You are where you are because this is where you want to be. Repentance starts where excuses end. And you can make change or you can make excuses but you can't make both. And I know some of you are like here you're like about to panic in your chair. You're like, I am not where I want to be spiritually. I'm doing my best and I'm not where I was but I'm not where I want to go. Then you're exactly where you want to be. You're not where you were and you're not yet where you're going so you have a vision which means you are a person in progress, a person in process. You are exactly where you want to be, which is exactly where I want to be. I am not where I was. I am not where I'm going. I am a person in process, a person in progress. It's why Paul says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am and his grace to me was not without effect." No, I worked harder than all of them yet not I but the grace of God that was within me. We can't change ourselves but God's grace can. And when I agree and act with God's confession and repentance, his grace starts to change me from the inside out.

This isn't just to get in the kingdom. This is to live in the kingdom and become a person of love. See, the whole thing. We've said this whole year is that vision intent means, right? How do you change? You have to have a vision. You have to have intent. You have to be devoted with tenacity and effort. Then you have to have means, next steps, opportunities, pathways. And all year, my job was to cast vision for you and try to equip you with means. But I can't touch your intent. I can't touch your intent, your tenacity, your desire, your devotion, what I actually want my life to look like. We've casted a vision. Do you have one? And there are means everywhere. Have you been using them? But the real question is, do you have intent? See, I think when intent develops, the means will appear. Remember that old saying that says when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. When intent develops, the means will appear.

There are so many means we present to you every week that I honestly don't even think your spirit hears. They just go right through you. Why? Because there's not intent there. So you don't even notice the means. And I think a lot of us have good intentions but no intent. And there's a big difference. Good intentions, I have good intentions to look like some of my friends in this church, and to play the piano, and to speak another language. I don't have intent though. I wish I could do it. I'd like to do it. I'd like to talk about it but I don't actually have intent to make the effort, to agree and act, to turn from how I live my life to a different way of living my life. Fair? See, if you can catch this. A king rules his kingdom through words and actions. I've tried to teach you this the last couple years. A king rules his kingdom through words and actions. What he says and what he does? He has a domain. He's a king. He has a will. And whatever submits to his words and to his actions is a part of his kingdom, his domain.

Because it's responsive to his will that he expresses through his words and through his actions. Okay. Well, you have a kingdom, a place where you have free will. And your kingdom is your body. If you're a student, it might be your room. If you have a house, it's your house. If you have a business, it's your business. If you have a place that you tend to garden, it's your garden. You have a domain, a place where you have free will. And through your words and your actions, your will is expressed into that space and it is done. Confession and repentance. Confession is words, repentance is action. Confession and repentance then is how I submit and surrender my kingdom to his. Confession and repentance, words and action is how I submit and surrender my kingdom to his.

The reason confession and repentance is such an important practice is because confession and repentance is where I take off my crown and I lay it at his feet. And I say, your kingdom come. Your will be done, in this body, in this room, in this home, in this business, in this church, in this life. Your kingdom through words and actions I rule my kingdom what I've been given authority and domain, and no one has the ability to violate your will. God won't even do it. So when I confess and repent, it is how I submit and surrender my life to come into alignment with his kingdom through agreement and action. That's how you get saved, right? If we confess with our mouth, that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart's action that God raised him from the dead, we shall be saved? It's why it says that at the name of Jesus, every tongue will confess and every knee will bow, words, actions. At the end of all things, the only question is, is do I want to in this life acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and bow my knee to his supremacy and say, not my will but yours, not my kingdom but yours.

Every time I confess and repent, I'm deciding I am not the king you are. And every time I refuse to confess and repent, I am saying I am the king, you are not. I am the king and you are not. I'm the king and you are not. You take off your crown and you submit to my words and my actions. This is why it matters. If you're where you want to be spiritually, then it also means that we as a church are right where we want to be spiritually. Because we're the body of Christ, and we've been assembled together, as in a sense, one person. And if we don't like where we are then we have the free will to change that. We're the kind of church that you want it to be. Because if we wanted it to change what we would do, confess and repent. We would pursue community and serve and give and invite and create culture and live on mission and move forward in our own life.

So we're exactly where we want to be, is this the kind of church we want to be. And some of you are like no, no, no, this is not the church. I want to go further. And some of you are like we've gone too far. I need us to slow down. And while we each as individuals have our own thoughts and feelings together corporately, we are exactly where we want to be. So if you wanted to move forward, then you don't worry about anybody else. You just make sure your words and your actions are submitting and surrendering to the lordship of Jesus because as the more and more of us as individuals live that way, the body starts to live that way. Is this who we want to be? See, my heart for you in this whole series is that in some way, say, perform, you will be cut to the heart. I've said it in January, February, saying that now here is where we're ramping up. Oh, I want you to be cut to the heart.

I mean, when the first gospel was preached in the name of Jesus was declared, it says when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, watch how we do." Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized. They acted. The name of Jesus was lifted up, they were cut to the heart. When you're cut to the heart, how do you know? You just know. Why? Because your immediate responses to confess and repent, to agree and to act. It's not just agreeing, it's acting. And every time we confess and repent, there is wave of forgiveness and a wave of freedom that is released into our life. Every time you confess and repent, there is wave of character and a wave of power that is released into your life. Every time you confess and repent, you save yourselves from a corrupt generation, a wide road with a broad gate that leads to a destruction, and you move your life towards the roads, small gate that leads to life. There is an action though that takes place. It's not just words. I'm actually moving my life which is what a different way actually looks like, and so the question that I have for you is just, have you been cut to the heart at all of this year? I cut to the heart of the ongoing unrepentant sin in your life. Have you been cut to the heart over the lack of personal holiness that you have? Have you been cut to the heart over the thoughts you think, where the words you say? You've been cut to the heart over the pride of life and the cravings of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. Have you been cut to heart over your addictions in the way you treat you people and how you live your life have cut to the heart over your lack of awareness, of God's goodness and his glory, and you're like has there been any level of cut to the heart that has caused you to agree and to act with God.

Because confession and repent isn't just salvation. It's kingdom love for you. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fool's despise, wisdom, and discipline, the fear of the Lord, all one wonder reverence, respect, his grandeur, his greatness. The fear of the Lord should be the thing that causes us to confess and repent. Because you say so, Lord, I will do it. I have sinned against the Lord. I am openly confessing my evil deeds and burning my past. I don't even want to sell it because I don't want anyone else to have access to it. I'm burning it. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. It says, knowledge, interactive relationship. When I have the fear of the Lord, I know what a different way is, why I should live a different way, and how to live a different way. But when I don't have the fear of the Lord, I'm a fool and I despise discipline. What have we been saying? Discipline is doing what I can do now so I can do what I can't do now later.

Fools don't care. Fools do what they want, when they want, how they want. They don't care at all about the future and who they're becoming. But people who fear the Lord care deeply about who I'm going to become so they have discipline. And they do what they can do now so they can become the kind of person that can do what they can't do now but want to do later. So they're moving their life exactly where they want to be. So here's your Practice Plan for Practice 12. By grace and through faith, confess your sins to someone, and then, share with them your plan to repent. Remember, you don't have to do any of these. I've left them all open to you, but what I'm trying to show you today is you're exactly where you want to be spiritually. So by grace, through faith, by grace, it is the grace of confession and repentance opens us up to the grace of God. By grace, by the power of God working within me that I can't do on my own, and through faith, not feelings, being sure of what I hope for, certain of what I do not see, confess your sins to someone that you trust and share with them your plan to repent. Because often we're quick to confess, but we have no plan to change. You say, what does that look like? Confession would be, hey, I've been looking at things I shouldn't look at. Repentance is, and I'm going to delete those accounts. Confession is, hey, I've realized I love money. Repentance is, and I'm going to start tithing. Confession is, I worship the idol of time. Time is my God, but I'm going to repent and join a serve team. Does that make sense to you?

When was the last time you did that? I've told you that every Thursday, we come in this room and we walk through all the slides. And when I got to this Practice Plan, I felt like I took the breath away from our staff that was in here. Like, we're really going to ask people that. And it made me really sad to be honest with you because this is one of the greatest gifts God gives you in your life, is the ability to come into agreement with him and act with him in a way that opens my life up for his grace to change me from the inside out. One of the greatest gifts that God gives you is to get you off the wide road, the broad gate that's weary and burdensome, and get you on the narrow road with the small gate that leads to life. And it's his kindness that leads you to repentance, and this shouldn't be an awkward, hard, uncomfortable thing for us. And if you don't want to, if you're instantly, like, I'm not doing. Okay, great. But why?

Just ask yourself, just why? Spend a little bit of time contemplating and reflecting, why, why don't I want to do that? What am I afraid of? What am I worried about? Why don't I think it's important? Why am I finding myself resistant to it, like, by grace, through faith? Listen, a lot of us think confession and repentance. Some of you are literally sitting here and you're like, I don't need, I did this. I did it 20 years ago when I got saved. Yes, you're a sinner in need of a savior.

So you confessed and repent. But now, you're a beloved son or daughter in need of discipline. So you confess and repent. Or you're a believer in need of training. So you confess and repent. Or I'm a Christian in need of discipleship. So I confess and repent. It's not only how I get in the kingdom, it's how I live in the kingdom, it's how I advance in the kingdom. Both sin, missing the mark, and revelation, things I do not know. If this is like something that's like totally foreign in your life, it means you think you know everything.

Because you don't ever need to change because you have the perfect course of life, and you know all things. Then you're God and he's not. I mean, look at this. When Jesus says, from that time -- now, if you've been with us, I have never done a slide after a Practice Plan. Fair? That's how important these next three verses are. From that time, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When did that time end? When did that time end? From that time, that was his message. When did he stop preaching that message? That's still the only message he preaches. Change your mind, change your direction, change your life. Come into agreement with me because the kingdom of heaven is one step away. More of heaven is one step away. It's at hand, it's in reach. It's one step, it's right, it's right. It's not way, it's not, it's right here.

But you have to agree and have to act to position my heart, my will, take off my crown through words and actions. Your kingdom, not mine. "Therefore, go and make disciples, the resurrected Jesus says, "Of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything, I've commanded you. Make disciples and teach them to obey." Make disciples, learners, followers, students, those who become like the one they're following. Help people count the cost and consider their way, and decide if that's the way they want to keep going, or if they want to take the way of Jesus. But if I have chosen the way of Jesus, then I'm learning to obey, which is confession and repentance. Obedience is confession and repentance walked out. That's all it is. Obedience is confession and repentance walked out. And if I say I'm his disciple, that means I'm saying, you know, what is good and true and right.

So when you tell me to turn this way, every time I don't, I'm saying you don't know what is good and true is right. You know what is bad and you tell lies and you know what's wrong. And I know what is good and true and right. So I actually have to decide at the point of confession and repentance is, do I believe Jesus knows what he's talking about? Because if not, there's nothing I can say. There's nothing your friends can say. There's nothing the world can say that's going to move you. If you don't think Jesus knows what he's talking about and he's worth following, then you'll never live a life of confession, repentance, obedience, because you think you're the king and you know better. And this is why God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. It's like we are living in direct opposition to God because we're trying to make our name above his name. But when I'm humble, I confess and repent, and there's grace that flows through my life. And Jesus says, if you love me, you will obey what I command.

Listen, we confess and repent, not out of duty, not out of fear, not out of religion, not out of obligation, but because I love Jesus. And I love Jesus because Jesus loved me first. We love because he first loved us. I was lost, lonely, and broken on a road, wide road, broad gate, on destruction. I was blind. I couldn't see nothing. And his kindness led me to repentance. It

opened my eyes. It turned me this way. It's now his love that is giving me love back in my heart to him. And I want to love him. And he says, if I will obey, if I will confess and repent, and do the things that he invites me to live a different way, that's how I show love for him. And paradoxically, his love, the love that he wants from us is actually his love for us because he knows this is what's good for us. So confession and repentance isn't hellfire and brimstone. It isn't weeping, gnashing of teeth, heavy, and this dark religious gravity.

It's God's love in your life. It's God's love in your life. It's God's love in your life. By grace through faith, confess your sins to someone because you want to move where God is inviting you to go and share with them your plan to actually repent. Don't just say it, do it. Confession and repentance is how we actually live a different way, which was the entire series. If you finish this year and there's nothing different in your life, you're exactly where you want to be spiritually. And here's the thing, how will we know if you're living a different way? How will you know if you're living a different way? You'll just know. Because confession and repentance is proved by her deeds. There is a fruit that is born. There is a life that has changed. And it doesn't mean you're perfect.

It means you're quick to confess and repent. Every time I'm quick to confess and repent. If there was one practice, if you're like, I don't like this whole thing, I'm glad we're almost done of the series, if there's one practice that you would take with you, if I could just give you, it's confession. Become an expert at confessing and repenting, your life will change. You're like Sabbath, solitude, simply didn't get any of it, great. Get confession and repentance and your life will change. Why? Because it means I'm agreeing and acting with God whether I get it or not, whether I like it or not. I've told you my heart for you is that you can say, I love what we're doing. I love where we're going, and I love how it's going in me. The only way you will be able to say that is through the practice of confessing and repenting because I've moved from the world's way, from my way to his way. And when I'm living his way, I can start saying, I love where I'm going.

And I love what I'm doing, and I love how it's going in me. So we close our eyes. What does the Holy Spirit say to you today? For some of you, today is the day of salvation for the first time. Say, Jesus, I confess and repent that I've lived my own way, broken, lost, sinful, evil, but I see your kindness and your goodness and your grace. So I turn to you and receive refreshing forgiveness in the Holy Spirit.

For some of us, my sense would be you're sitting here, and you're like, I want this in my life. I want more of this in my life. Keep going. Take a step of faith this week. Confess and repent to somebody. And if somebody confesses to you, here's my encouragement. Just look right back at them. No counsel. Don't give them a correction. Don't tell them what they should do. Just look them in the eyes and say, "In Jesus's name, you are forgiven and free. And may his divine power give you everything you need for life and godliness." That's all you say. That's all you say because it'll change their life. And then some of us, we're trying to decide. What do I want to do? And that's okay. That's why you're here. It's great. Be here, seek, think, wrestle. Just don't deceive yourself into saying you're one thing when your life is pointed in a different direction.

That's the beginning of confession is acknowledgement, joyful, freely, open, acknowledge. I've told you all year, just say, hey, I'm just not there. I don't want to do it. So I am exactly where I want to be spiritually. That's great. That's better than pretending and lying and deceiving and covering things up in the darkness. Do you know our first practice plan that we gave you was "Jesus, help me be open to a different way?" That was the first practice plan was just praying because I know my heart too. We get so lost in the things of this world. We're not actually even, oh, we don't even want to want it. The prayer was, Jesus, help me want to want it. And maybe some of you, that's your practice plan because you're not at this week's practice plan. So maybe your practice plan is, Jesus, help me want to want it because I don't. So Holy Spirit, do what only you can do. Thank you that your kindness leads to repentance. Thank you for the grace and the love of Jesus that is trying to set us free.

Thank you, God, that you are not mad at us. You are not trying to get us and you are not trying to make our lives religious or difficult or hard. You say, come 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 way is easy, and my burden is light. May confession and repentance be a practice of the people called Valley Creek Church because we long to live a different way. In Jesus's name, Amen. We're so glad you're here with us today. And just remember, these practices are ways were formed more in the image and mightiness of Jesus, and so I hope that you except his invitation as we follow him together.

And if you like to serve or financially support what God is doing through Hope on the Move groceries, this is [valleycreek.org/groceries](https://valleycreek.org/groceries) to learn more today. And as a church, we believe that giving tithes and offerings is just what disciples of Jesus do, giving back to God what's already his. And so if you'd like to give, you can do so online anytime at [valleycreek.org](https://valleycreek.org). And we would love to hang out with you at one of our Hangouts. Remember, Hangouts is just a relaxed Zoom meetup with people from our online campus where we talk and connect. And so no matter where you are in the world, it's a great next step in the community here at Valley Creek. And so just head to [valleycreek.org/Hangouts](https://valleycreek.org/Hangouts) right after we wrap up today. But hey, before we go, let's go knowing and declaring these four core truths out together that God is good, that Jesus has forgiven me, that I am loved, and that everything is possible. We love you guys. Have a great week.