A DIFFERENT WAY

DO WHAT JESUS DID

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DO WHAT JESUS DID

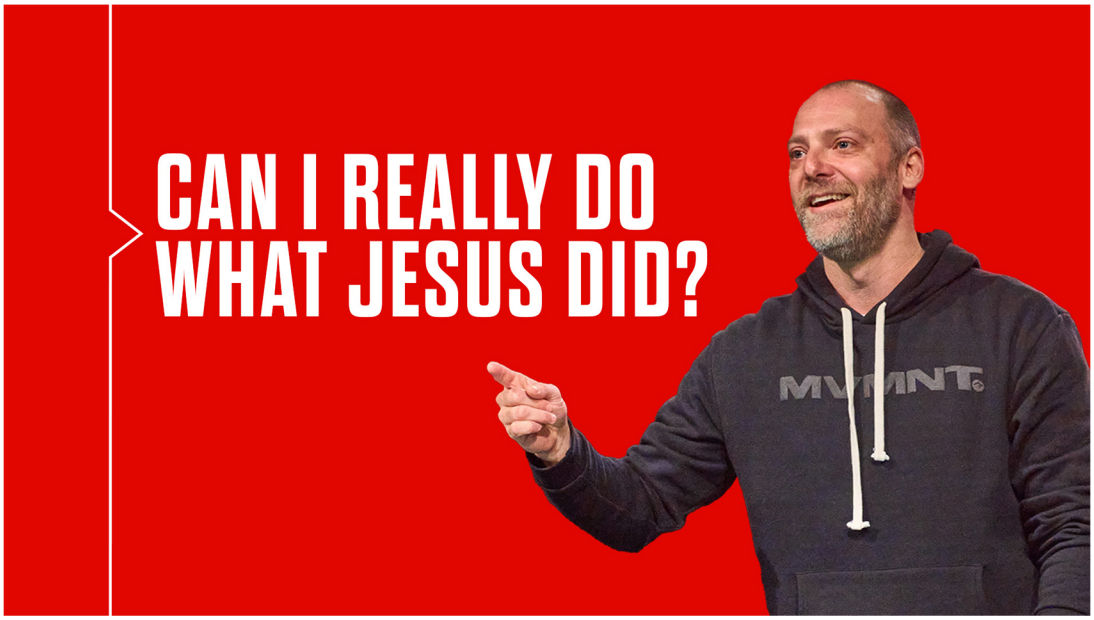
SEASON ONE TRANSCRIPTS

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A DIFFERENT WAY



JANUARY 21, 2024

SEASON ONE, EPISODE ONE

"CAN I REALLY DO WHAT JESUS DID?"

Alight. Hey everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today. And what a great start to the year it's been here at Valley Creek. God is moving; people are responding. There are great things in store for us. And so today we're going to kick off a brand new series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. And this is going to be a big series. It's going to be a long series, it's going to be a deep series. If you were here with us last year when we did Hope Carriers and went really deep and really long in that, that's what we're going to do in this series.

And I'm excited about the series. I've been praying for it. We've been preparing for it. We've been waiting for it. And here's why I want to do this series. I want to do this series because I want to live a different way and do the things that Jesus did. I want to do this series because I want to be a disciple. I want to follow Jesus. I want to know Jesus. I want to walk with Jesus. I want be with Jesus. I want to learn to think like and talk like and act like and live like and believe like Him. I want to go deeper with God. I want to live like the kingdom is real and that I'm a citizen of it. I want to live like I'm a new creation. I want to live like I can actually take off the old self and put on the new self.

I want to live like I can count myself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. I want to live like I'm a partaker of the divine nature. I want to grow in grace and knowledge. I want to grow in holiness and humility and purity. I want to do this series because I am hungry and thirsty for righteousness. And I believe like so many of you are too. You see one of the things that I got to do in November and December is I went to every one of our campuses and I would spend an entire day in the atrium from 8:00 in the morning to 2:00 in the afternoon hanging out in the atrium talking to as many people as I could possibly talk to. And I got to talk to so many people and get a perspective that you rarely get. The perspective you get is, is your service at your campus and the section that you sit in. But I got to go and see everybody at every place and talk to everyone. And here's what I discovered. We are an incredibly diverse church. Like, you may not be aware of it, or you may not even think about it, but we are incredibly diverse.

Like we have people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation speaking all kinds of different languages. We have people of every generation. We have kids, and students, and young adults, and young marrieds, and single professionals, and middle age, and empty nesters, and later in life. We have people of every socioeconomic status you could think of. We have people who are homeless, people who are in poverty, people who are middle-income people who are multimillionaires. We have people on every different phase of their spiritual journey. Seekers and skeptics, sinners and saints and sages. We have people who today is their first time coming to our church, people who have been coming for a few months or a few years, and people who have been here for decades, serving and loving and walking with God. We have this profound sense of diversity. And yet in the midst of that, there's this profound sense of unity.

In the midst of all that diversity, here's what just about everyone told me is how grateful they are for the grace of God in their life and how grateful they are to be a part of this church and

what God's doing in them. Just about every person I talk to told me about how they got invited from someone else to come and be a part of this or invited into a Circle or invited into a serve team. And just about everyone I talked to had this sense of a hunger and a thirst for more of God. You see, I think if we're honest, there is a growing sense of discontent for American Christianity. A growing sense of this understanding that American Christianity just doesn't work, if we can say it like that. American Christianity, consumerism, convenience, comfort, control.

We identify with Jesus. We're a fan of Jesus. We speak the language of Jesus. And we want Jesus in our life. We just want Jesus AND our way of life. Jesus AND the world. Jesus AND my flesh. Jesus and something. And we almost treat Jesus like he's a buffet line. Like we can go through and pick and choose that which we want. Like, I'll take some joy and I'll take some of that peace and I'll take a big old scoop of forgiveness and a whole lot of eternal salvation. But I'll pass on the obedience. I'll pass on the holiness. I'll pass on servanthood and generosity. Those aren't really the things for me. And we have this lack of intent to actually obey and actually follow and actually become like Jesus. And it just doesn't work. Like we've been angry and we've been angry for the last 20 years.

We got so much lust inside of us and we can't even remember the last time we weren't full of lust. It's like every year, we're a year older, but the anxiety and the depression and the fear, it feels like they keep growing. It's like it doesn't work. I mean, think about what we have deduced American Christianity to, we have reduced it to a one-hour-a-week gathering, one-hour-a-week, a one-hour-a-month, a one-hour-a-quarter, or a one-hour-a-year gathering as if that's what Jesus has invited us to. Now hear me, the one-hour-a-week gathering that we're all in right now is incredibly essential to your life, but it is not sufficient. I mean, think about what we do in this gathering. We have the Word of God taught and spoke over our life. incredibly essential in your life. It's just not sufficient. I mean, just think of the last two, two and a half years' worth of series that we've gone through as a church.

Yahweh. Hope Carriers. Holy Spirit. Ancient Future. Heart of a King. Face Your Giants. Kingdom Culture. You remember some of these? Okay, well, if a one-hour-a-week sermon was enough, wouldn't we all be profoundly mature and free and loving? Because man, that's a lot. That's a lot. Essential but not sufficient. Essential. Why? Because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. God says His Word will not return void, but will accomplish the purposes for which He sent it. Humbly accept the Word of God, which was planted. It's essential but not sufficient. Now, think about what else we do. We meet with God in worship. Think of the last two, two and a half years' worth of encounters and moments and experiences where you've heard God, you've met with God, you've felt God, you were around God, God was here and you knew it.

Essential, but not sufficient. But it's essential because God says in His presence is fullness of joy and He inhabits the praises of His people. Surely God is in this place and I was not aware of it. Think of the community that we have when we come into that one hour, whatever frequency

we're at, there's community in this place. But we have reduced that down to talking about the Cowboys and the weather. American Christianity, incredibly essential, but not sufficient. I mean, the Bible says do not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but spur one another on. To each one of you, a spiritual gift has been given for the building and the strengthening of the body. Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. Essential, but not sufficient to just come and go.

And then think about the things we do in the rest of our Christian life, our quiet times, our devotions, our podcasts, our Bible studies, our influencer algorithms, our little quotes, our quips, all these different kinds of stuff. Nothing wrong with all of that stuff. Here's just what I'm trying to tell you. It just doesn't work, does it? I'm just trying to draw attention to some, maybe some things that you have been experiencing. American Christianity doesn't work. Why? Because it's a form of godliness without any power. It doesn't have any intent to actually obey or follow Jesus and become like Him. And what we would call the deeper life, the Bible would just call normal life. What we would call radical, the Bible would just call being a disciple. What we would call extremism, the Bible would just call a new creation in Christ. And so what we macro, this isn't pointed at anyone or anything, it's just macro, would call American Christianity, the Bible would call just being a part of the crowd.

In the Bible, there's the crowd and there's disciples. There's no in-between. There's people who identified and liked and were interested in Jesus, inspired by Him and loved the bread and the fish. And then there were disciples who had an intent to obey, an attempt to follow and wanted to become like Him. American Christianity as we know it and as we've done it, it just doesn't work. And there is a hunger and a thirst for a different way. A way to do the things that Jesus did so we can do some of the things that Jesus did. You see, the question I want to ask you is this really simple question at the beginning of this year is like, who are you becoming? Have you thought about this in a while? Like, like, like who are you becoming? Not what are you accomplishing? Not what are you doing? Not what are you acquiring?

Like, like you. Like what kind of person are you becoming? Are you growing? Are you changing? Are you becoming more loving and free and healthy and whole? Like are you different than you were two years ago? Who are you becoming? And maybe a better question is to ask you this. Who do you want to become? Have you ever just thought about that? Do you have any vision for your life of like, who do I want to be two years, five years, 20 years from my life? Who do I actually want to be become? And then you have to ask yourself this question. Does the current lifestyle you're living, will it allow you to become that kind of person? Who do I want to be 20 years from now? Well, if my life is just a result of my lifestyle, is the lifestyle I've chosen going to help me become that person I want to be in 20 years? And do I even think I can become that kind of person?

Or am I just sitting around waiting for God to throw a lightning bolt into my life, boom and just magically make me loving and peaceful and kind and gracious? Who are you becoming?

Because you're being shaped and molded and informed by something or someone. You're a disciple, a learner, a student, a follower of something or someone. Like we've got the Swifties, and we've got the Trumpers, we've got the Never-Trumpers. And then we've got the celebrities and the influencers and the bloggers and all these people that want to shape and form and mold us into some, but like, like who are you becoming and who is shaping and molding you? And so maybe it's time for a different way because whether you realize it or not, you have a way you live your life. You have routines and rhythms and patterns and attitudes and behaviors and perspectives. You have a way that you live your life. And a lot of the people that I talk to, if we're really honest with ourselves, we don't really like the way we live our life.

Stressed, anxious, afraid, worried, overwhelmed, always busy, chronically tired, chronically sick. It's like all of it, all the time. And we're exhausted and we're overwhelmed and Jesus sees that. And so He invites us to a different way. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble and heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." We in American Christianity, read this verse as, when you've got problems, situations, storms, circumstances in your life, crowd to God, let Him fix it. And then you can go right back to the way you were living your life. But what He says is, "Come to me. Come one, come all. Wherever you've been, whatever's going on, whatever your life looks like, whomsoever will may come. All you who are weary, weary, tired, wore out, broke down, beat down, discouraged, defeated, exhausted and burdened, full of cares and worries and anxieties and fears and doubts. And I will give you rest."

He offers to give you rest, not circumstantial rest out here, but a deep inner peace where your soul and your mind and your heart can be at rest. And He says, "I will give it to you," meaning that rest won't be found with your counselor or your medication or your self-help programs without Jesus. Because it's only found in Jesus. "Take my yoke upon you." You say, what's a yoke? A yoke is like a wooden thing that they would put on two oxen that would strap them together so they were forced to go in the same way. Whichever way those oxen were going, they couldn't go in different ways because they were yoked together.

So they had to take the same way. And Jesus is saying, "Take my yoke upon you like come take my way of life upon yourself. Come do your life my way, the way that I do life. Yolk yourself in with my way of life and watch what happens. But to be yoked in with me, you first have to unyoke yourself with the world." You have to first take off the yoke of self, off the yoke of flesh, off the yoke of the world. Why? Because you can't be yoked to two things at the same time. You can't take two ways at the same time. And the reason so many of us have this divided tearing in our own soul all the time is because we have yoked ourself to the world and to Jesus at the same time. And it's pulling us in two different ways. So our soul is never at rest. It's always being torn apart because you can't walk in two ways.

"Take that way off and come with me on my way and learn from me. Let me be your teacher. Let me be your leader. Let me be your Rabbi and show you how to actually live your life and your circumstances and your situations. For I am gentle. I am kind. I'm patient. I'm gracious and compassionate and loving and I am humble. I'm not arrogant and narcissistic and prideful. I'm a servant and I'm submitted and surrendered to the Father. So the kingdom can flow through my life into your life and you'll find rest for your souls." Remember when the Bible says something twice in the same section, it's really trying to emphasize it and not just rest, but rest for your soul, the deepest part of you. "For my yoke, my way is easy and my burden is light." Easy and light. Not hard and heavy. A lot of us are convinced the way of Jesus is hard and heavy. And the reason it feels hard and heavy to us is because we've tried to be yoked to Jesus and the world at the same time.

If you've ever really fully taken off the yoke of the world and the yoke of self and the yoke of sin and really gone in Jesus' way a hundred percent with everything that you've got, He promises you'll see that it's easy in light. You know what's hard and heavy? The world, religion, your way of life is actually very hard and heavy. And you know what's easy and light? Not worrying, not being greedy, being able to love your neighbor and forgive those who hurt you and trust in God in all things, that's easy and light. You know what's hard and heavy? Idolatry, immorality, anger and lust and greed. The love of money, the love of self, that is a hard and heavy way to live. And Jesus invites us to a different way.

He says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." In other words, He says, "Arrange your life around me. Arrange your life, rearrange your life. Order your life. Reorder your life around me and my way and I will take care of everything else." Can I ask you a really honest question? At the beginning of this year, what is your life arranged around? What is your life ordered around? Like, what's the thing that you arrange everything else in your life? Is it finances? Is it work? Family, relationships, yourself? Because make no mistake about it, you seek first something, something is in the center, and you arrange your life around it, believing that if I arrange my life around that thing, it will take care of everything else. Jesus promises that if we arrange, rearrange, our life around Him, He will take care of the rest of it.

In fact, do you remember when Jesus says to Peter, "Come, follow me." Come follow me. What? What's He saying here? See, we've Americanized this and what we're saying is, "Come receive forgiveness for your sins and eternal salvation and go right back to your life." No, He says, "Come. There's an invitation to respond and move and follow me." It's very literal like, "Follow me." Like, "Be with me. Wherever I am, that's where I want you to be. I want you to do what I do, and go where I go. Learn to live how I live. When I stop, you stop. And when I move, you move. And the lifestyle that I've embraced is the lifestyle I want you to embrace." What He's saying is, "Come and let me be your teacher. Let me be your Rabbi. Let me show you how to live your life in this broken world. Let me teach you how to walk with the grain of grace. Let me teach you how to flow with the current of creation. Let me show you a different way."

And what we think is that Jesus invited Peter to come and learn how to do church work and preach the messages and eternal salvation. So we hear this and think, okay, I come. I follow Jesus. I'm saved. I'm forgiven. I'm good, we say. "Come be my disciple and let me show you a different way to live your life." In fact, this is why He says in the Sermon on the Mount, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road" – a different way – "that leads to life, and only a few find it." Jesus says there are two ways. There is a wide and broad way. And that is the way of the world. Come one, come all. Do what you want, when you want, how you want. Take any way that you want. You can combine ways, you can do it your way. You can have religion; you can have all religion. You can have the world; you can have all of the world. You can do whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want.

And all it sounds so good and many go. But look what it says, that way leads to destruction. It's not a threat from Jesus. He's just telling you how it actually is. He's not threatening you saying, "If you go that way, there will be...!" No, He's telling you, "Hey, if you go that way, just so you know, at some point in time, like a bandit, destruction will come upon you when you least expect it, on your family, on your health, on your finances, on your soul, on your mind, on your spirit. But there's a different way, a narrow way that leads to an ever widening life. And only a few go on it." Which means, a different way means you are going to feel different than the people around you. If you take a different way, you decide to go the way of Jesus, not everyone's going to like it. Not everyone's going to get it. Not everyone's going to appreciate it. Your family, your spouse, your friends, your co-workers, the other kids at school. It's not going to make any sense to them, but it's a narrow way. And only a few find it. Jesus was a radical, a revolutionary, and a pioneer. So if I take the way of Jesus, I will be perceived by the people around me as radical, revolutionary, and as a pioneer, of which the Bible would just say is "normal."

Are you with me on this? I mean, think about it. You've been set apart. You are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You have a new nature. You're dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. You're a partaker of the divine nature. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. How in the world do you think you could live like everyone else and not stand out and not be set apart and not be a little different? We got to stop being afraid about other people thinking we're different. You are different because you're included in Christ, that's pretty different, in Jesus' name. One last verse for you. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, 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 the Gospel will save it." See, we want Christianity without the cross.

We like Christianity with Jesus on the cross. We just forget that He also has told us we have to take up our cross. We want to be fans of Jesus without actually following Jesus. And we forget that to be a disciple means I actually have to deny myself, and I have to deny my way, and my flesh, and the world that screams and calls and begs me to come with convenience and

comfort and say, "I know, but I have to deny myself here because there is a different way. There is a way of Jesus." And we spend so much time trying to save our life, control it, hold it all together, put it together, be successful, be affluent, be prosperous. And the more I try to save my life, the more I lose it. But if I would just give it up and say, "God, I'm going to entrust all of this to You and take Your way," He promises that, "I will save it." Maybe it's time for a different way in Jesus' name. Okay, you ready for this? Here's what we're going to say all through this series.

If you want to do the things that Jesus did, you first have to do the things that Jesus did. Say, what does that mean? That means if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to first do the things that Jesus did. It means if I want His life, I have to take on His lifestyle. If I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, I have to be willing to do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. If I want to do His works, then I have to be willing to take on His way. Say, what does this mean? Here's what it means. If you want to do the things that Jesus did, which we all do, like, heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cast out demons. You're like, "Those are big kingdom things." Like, okay, but how about just this? Like love your neighbor, and live free from money, and not be afraid, and have joy, and peace, and hope, and be full of faith, and deeply connected with God, and be free, and know what your life purpose is, and where you came from, and why you're here, and where you're going?

Those are the things that Jesus did, okay? But if I want to do those things, I have to first do the things that Jesus did, which are what? Things like, engage the Scriptures, and fast, and pray, and silence and solitude, and Sabbath, and celebration, and confession, and generosity, and service. You're like, "I don't know that I want to do what Jesus did anymore." It's foolishness to think I can do what Jesus did on-the-spot without doing what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. And so we have to look differently at the way He lived His life if we want to do the works of His life. I mean just, just look at this. This is just to try to bring everybody into the game. These are just some of the things that Jesus did, right? You read the Gospels and these are the things that we want.

Like, He had peace and chaos. The boat sinking, the storm is raging, everyone's panicking, He's sleeping. No matter how chaotic it got, Jesus had peace. How about self-control in the face of temptation? When the devil himself was trying to tempt Jesus, He had victory and walked in authority. He had joy in every circumstance, no matter how much grief or sorrow or pain or hardship. He had a sense of wellbeing with God. He had purpose in the mundane, whether it was serving as a carpenter, being hidden for 30 years, washing the disciple's feet, walking down the road, He saw purpose in the routine details of His life. He had hope in the midst of despair, right? When everything has fallen apart and Lazarus has been dead for three days, the little girl is dying, He's on his way to the cross, He still had a sense of the confident expectation of the goodness of God in the here and now.

He had wisdom in life. He didn't live down to the world's foolishness. He thought the very thoughts of God. He knew what was good, what was true, what is right. He had love in every relationship, whether it be difficult Peter, rebellious Judas, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery. He had freedom from the world. There's no anxiety in His life. There's no depression, there's no fear. He wasn't controlled by anyone or anything. And He didn't try to control anyone or anything. He didn't love money. He was free. He had security. He forgave no matter what. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And He had this profound connection with God in a disconnected world. These are just some of the things that Jesus did. Aren't these the things you want in your life? Without sitting down and talking to you, my guess would be most of your life is spent trying to pursue these things.

This is what we actually want. The question is, how are you trying to get this? Are you trying to get it through counseling, medication, self-help? Are you trying to get it through striving, performance, struggling, earning, succeeding, acquiring more resources, controlling the things around you? Through hot baths and long walks? My guess would be this is what you want. But if these are the things that Jesus did, then I first have to do the things that Jesus did to access them. Because these are the things that are found on a different way, down the narrow road, through the small gate. I mean look at, this is going to basically be the theme verse for this series. "Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." Train yourself to be godly. It's a command, not a suggestion. It's not an idea. It's not a good hope or wishful thinking.

And notice it doesn't say "try" to be godly. Train yourself to be godly. What's your plan to train yourself to be godly? Do you have one? Because ironically, in every other area of life where we want to succeed, we know we need a plan and we know we need to train. Ain't nobody in this room thinks that if you want to play Beethoven, you can just sit down at the piano and try, try and boom, you got it. No, you know you have to train, you have to practice. And for two years you have to sit down at that piano every single day and practice chords, and practice charts, and practice reading music, and practice moving your fingers. But if you train yourself and you practice, two years later, you could probably play Beethoven pretty well.

Ain't none of us think that we could just put on a Cowboys helmet and a jersey and run out on the field and be a part of the game. I know they need some help, but, but ain't none of us think we can do that. We get smashed. What do we think? We think, well, if I really want to do that, what do I need to do? I need to train. I need to train like those professional athletes. I need to eat like them, and sleep like them, and work out like them, and push myself, and I need to learn the plays, and I need to get in a practice squad, and I need to practice, practice, practice. We would never think we could just show up to the game, put the helmet on the jersey and go out and catch a touchdown pass. You would train yourself. Okay? Ain't none of us think that we can just fly to Beijing and just walk down the streets and speak Mandarin and connect with everybody in China. No, you would starve to death. You'd be so hungry you wouldn't be able

to communicate. But if you actually want to do that, you could train yourself and for the next however many years, sit and learn the language, and learn the alphabet, and learn how to speak it, and how to listen to it, and how to hear it. And you could train yourself to do it.

Ain't nobody think that we could just decide one day to be a doctor and just look at somebody and say, "Hey, I've diagnosed you. I think it's your appendix. Why don't you lay down? We'll take it out right now." No thank you. But if you go through a lot of training, I could actually become a doctor. So why then do we think we don't have to train ourselves to be like Jesus? We just think we can just try on-the-spot, or that somehow God will magically do it because I'm saved. And here's what we do. We try to jump into the things Jesus did on-the-spot without doing the things He did behind-the-scenes. And we fail and we get defeated and we say it doesn't work. It's like, we leave church and we're going out here and we've committed we're not going to be angry anymore. And then someone, before we even get out of the parking lot, cuts us off. And there is a reaction with both words and gestures that just come out of us.

And you're like, where did that even come from? I said I wasn't going to do it anymore. Well, the problem was is you tried to do it on-the-spot without doing the behind-the-scenes, like engaging the Scripture to wash my mind, or practicing servanthood where I give up control of my life. We say, "Hey, I'm not going to be lustful anymore. I'm not going to look at that thing." And so we've committed to do that and then all of a sudden, here we are in the moment, on-the-spot, and we look at the thing, and we do the thing, and then we are so defeated and embarrassed and all this stuff. What was the problem? The problem was we didn't practice. We didn't train ourselves back here by doing things like fasting, which is a practice of denying yourself and bringing your flesh into submission to your spirit.

We say things like this like, "I'm not going to blow up at my kids anymore. Oh, I really want to be a patient parent." And then they come home, you've had a long day at work, and they've had a long day at school, and they're rowdy, and bang! You just respond. And you lash out at them and you can't even believe it. And you're so disappointed in yourself. What happened? You tried to do something on-the-spot that you hadn't practiced behind-the-scenes. Like take a weekly Sabbath to rest and reorder your life and remind myself that God is in control. Or we say, "I'm not going to be gossiping and judgmental at school at lunch tables. I'm not going to do that anymore. I don't want to be that kind of student." And then we get to lunch and we find ourselves engaging in all of it. And we're not even sure how that-- Why? Because I tried to do something on-the-spot that I didn't practice behind-the-scenes and I failed miserably. Why? Because maybe I didn't practice any silence and solitude like Jesus does, to help me learn how to not speak and be in tune with God. Are you catching me on this? If I want to do what Jesus did, I have to first do what Jesus did. And any person that excels in anything in life knows that to do something with excellence in that space requires a tremendous amount of training and practice and discipline.

And yet, we get to our spiritual life and that logic goes out the window. This is why Jesus says, "Follow me." We think He means "follow me on-the-spot." He really means "follow me behind-the-scenes," and you'll become the kind of person who does the right thing on-the-spot. "Follow me in my lifestyle and you'll learn how to live my life." Because just so you know, your life is a direct result of your lifestyle choices. So if I don't like my life, don't get mad at your life. Look at your lifestyle and say, what do I need to think about differently? I mean, think about this. What is he talking about, Paul in this, in this passage, he's giving us this example of our spiritual growth in terms of physical training. He's talking about like, like your physical body. Like if you could use an example of like, a marathon. If you want to run a marathon, you've probably got to train. Yes. Like, if you just decided today you're going to run a marathon and you're going to like, practice by running home from here. Most of you would blow a lung before you even got to the road.

But you could actually run a marathon. You probably just have to start by doing what? Buying a pair of sneakers. And then the next day, putting them on and walking to the mailbox. And the day after that, one loop around the block. And the day after that, two loops around the block. The day after that, a mile walk. The day after that, a two mile walk. The day after that, a three mile walk. The day after that, a one mile run. The day after that, a two mile run. Are you catching me? This is true in our spiritual life. These are called disciplines, practices. That's what we're going to talk about in this series. You say, what is a discipline? The discipline is doing what I can do now so I can do what I want to do later. A spiritual discipline is doing what I can do now so I can access God's grace in a way that forms me and shapes me so I can do what I can't do later.

This is what we're going to talk about in this series, doing the things that Jesus did so we can do some of the things that Jesus did. Because the amazing part about Jesus is when He was on-the-spot, he never had to try. Why? Because he was so well trained. He didn't have to try to not be angry. He didn't have to try to not, He didn't have to try to forgive. He didn't have to try to love his enemies. He didn't have to try to not love money. Why? Because He was the kind of person that those things didn't even exist in. So we'll get here, but it was actually easy for, easier for Jesus to say, "Father, forgive them" while on the cross than, "Father, get them good." Because He was the kind of person that, "Father, get them good" didn't even exist in. So could you become the kind of person who, when you're on-the-spot, doesn't have to try.

Because you've been training where you become the kind of person that like, if right now, if I handed you a pen, you're right-handed or left-handed, you wouldn't even think about it. You would grab it and just start writing. Why? Because you've trained yourself to write. If you know how to drive a car, you don't have to think about it. When you get in the car to go home, you've trained yourself to drive. It's automatic. You're the kind of person that can drive a car. If I throw something at you, you probably will dodge or flinch. Why? Because you've been trained to be the kind of person that sees things coming at you to get out of the way. Could we train ourselves in such a way that we become the kind of person that naturally and effortlessly just

does the things of Jesus? Because I'm a new creation in Christ. I'm dead to sin. It doesn't control me. I'm alive to God in Christ. I'm a partaker of a divine nature. I'm a beloved son. I live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

And so, if I'm not able to do the things that Jesus did, the problem isn't on the finished work of Jesus or the kingdom dynamics or realities. Maybe just the problem is, I haven't trained myself back here in the lifestyle of Jesus so that God can form my spirit here to become the kind of person that does what I want to do here. And so we're going to ask God and we're going to pray, show me Your ways and teach me Your paths. Show me a different way. God, show me a different path. And we've made journals for you in this series, A Different Way journals. They're available today. They're just at-cost. We made them as cheap as we possibly can. Here's my encouragement for you. Get one of these. And you say, well, why aren't you just going to give them to us? Because I think there's something that, that's like, $7. The point is though, there's something about having something vested to say, I actually want to buy the pair of sneakers because I'm ready to go learn how to run a marathon. So I gotta have something vested in it.

And, and my hope for you is, is this is going to be like, we're going to do this series like, a long time. So I will get one of these so you can have all your notes and all your practices and all the things that God is going to be saying to you. And watch what God is going to do along the way. Because these are the kinds of things that Jesus did. And these are the kinds of things I know you want in your life. The question we have to ask is, is then how do we become this kind of person? Could you become the kind of person who doesn't worry and who doesn't love money and forgives those who hurt them and has hope in despair, and joy in grief, and lives this posture of love? Can you become that kind of person? I'm genuinely asking you that question. You don't have to answer out-loud, but can you become that kind of person?

Can you become this kind of person? Jesus seems to think that you can, but it's only possible if I'll go a different way. And the prayer that I want to invite you to just start is, Jesus, help me be open to a different way. Don't decide today whether you're going to take this way or not. Don't say, "Nope, I'm good with my life. I'm great. I like what I got going." And don't say, "Yeah, yeah, I'm going to do all of it." Like, we need to actually start this whole process with a sense of humility. Like Jesus, help me be open to a different way of doing my life. Because I've been so formed and conformed, and shaped and molded in my mind and my heart, in my soul and my body that I just kind of, do my rhythm and my routine and my patterns and my attitudes and my habits. And I don't even know why I do them all. I just do.

And some I like, and some of them I don't. But I need You, God, to search my heart and show me a different way, a way that leads to life. But I first need You to help me be open to it. See, Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened. Take my way upon you for it as easy and light." Here's the invitation for this series, for this season. Jesus says, "Hey, do you not like the way your life is going? Are you tired, and worn out, and stressed out, and burned out, and anxious, and depressed, and afraid, and feel like everything's outta control while

you're trying to control everything? Just, is it not, if you're honest, is it not working? Then come to me and I will show you a different way. And that way is easy and light."

But when we start on the different way, it will feel awkward and uncomfortable and unfamiliar and it will be unknown and it will not be what you want, but it will be exactly what you need. And in that way, you will discover immeasurably more than you can even ask or imagine. Jesus invites you to a narrow road a different way. If you like your life and you think it's going great and you want to keep going, then go for it. This is the cool part about this series. This is the cool part about Jesus. There are no expectations. There are only invitations. And Jesus would just say, "Think about the trajectory of this way and where it ends up." Because destruction will come like a bandit. It's not a threat, it's just the way things are.

Or you can try a different way that's a little more narrow, but it leads to an ever-widening life. Because as I follow Him on His different way, He will take me through dark valleys and green pastures, and He will prepare tables for me in the presence of my enemy, and lead me beside still waters. And while I follow grace and truth into the future, goodness and mercy are following me into the present. Maybe, maybe, maybe it's time for a different way in Jesus' name. Maybe we can do the things that Jesus did if we just start by learning, because we gotta learn how to do the things that Jesus did. So close your eyes.

What do you feel like the Holy Spirit is just inviting you towards today? What's He speaking? What's He saying? Is there anything in your heart that was stirred? Anything in you that caught your attention? Anything in you that made you think, man, there's more and there's a deeper life and, and there's a different way. And hear me, saying, "I want to take a different way." I'm not, it's not questioning your salvation or your forgiveness or your eternal security. I'm not. I'm talking about saying, "I want to be a disciple of Jesus," and actually follow Him and let Him teach me how to live my daily life. And so, Jesus, I just, I just want to invite You into this series and the season of our church.

Thank You that You are gentle and humble in heart and in the way that you deal with us. Come with that gentleness and that humility and be our teacher and help us learn how to live differently. Jesus, come and help us have courage and faith to take off the yoke of the world, the way of religion and self. And take Your way. Show us that it is easy and light. Come lead our church into deeper places. Come teach us how to be disciples of Jesus in a broken and lost world. Come stir up a hunger and thirst for righteousness in the deepest parts of our soul.

And we can't shake that. We can't shake. It can only be satisfied in You. I pray for every person that's a part of this church, myself included, that we will hear Your voice, that we will follow You by faith and that You will do a new thing in us as we take an ancient path towards the green pastures and still waters that You offer all of us. Jesus, help us be open to a different way in Your name. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



JANUARY 28, 2024

SEASON ONE, EPISODE TWO

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE AGAIN?”

All right, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today. Last week, we kicked off our big new Spring series, A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. I'm really hopeful for how God is going to move in this series and in this season. We started by just calling out for God's grace. All week, we've just been praying together as a church of Jesus, help me be open to a different way. The reason we want to do this series is because there is a growing sense of hunger and thirst for righteousness. There's this growing sense in our church of people longing for more, longing for the deeper life, longing to walk in the Spirit, longing to know God and to become like Him and to really be His disciple.

There's this sense of, I want to learn how to live in God's kingdom and do life with Him. And so what we're doing in this series is we're just acting like we're a new creation in Christ. We're just trying to act like we can actually take off the old self and put on the new self. Like we actually can count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. We're acting like we're partakers of the divine nature, that we live in God's kingdom, and we're actually acting like we can actually do the things that Jesus did. You see, if we're honest with each other, there is a growing sense of discontent with American Christianity. All you have to do is look around. You might feel it. The people around you are experiencing it. The people in the world are experiencing it. I'm like, there's this growing sense of discontent in American Christianity and partially because it just doesn't work.

I mean, if you look at what we've reduced American Christianity down to, it's a one-hour-a-week, one-hour-a-month, one-hour-a-quarter gathering. We've made American Christianity comfort, convenience, consumerism, control. We identify with Jesus. We're a fan of Jesus. We believe in Jesus. We can speak the language of Jesus and we want Jesus. But we just want Jesus... and the world. Jesus and our flesh. Jesus and our way of life. We want Jesus and something else instead of just Jesus. And so, it's almost like we've made Jesus a buffet line, and we go through and we want some joy and we want His peace and we want forgiveness. And man, American Christianity, we want a super scooping of eternal salvation.

But then, we don't want any obedience. And we'll pass on the holiness. And servanthood, that's not really for me and my meal right now. And so, we claim Jesus, but we have no intent to actually follow Him or obey Him. And the problem is, it just doesn't work. It's a form of godliness without any power. And what happens is we just never change. We don't grow. We don't become healthy. We don't become free. It's like some of us have said we're an American Christian for 20 years, but we still worry as much today as we did when we got saved. Every year we're a year older, but our anxiety and our fear and our addiction and our sin patterns, they don't seem to be getting any smaller. In fact, they feel like they're getting bigger. And the sad part is, is at some point we've come to this conclusion where we no longer even expect to change. We no longer even believe that it's possible to grow. And we don't expect the people around us to change or grow.

And so, it's like we've reduced Jesus to the forgiveness of our sins and eternal salvation when we die. We've reduced Him to taking care of our past and our future somewhere way off there. Which means He has no relevance to our life in the here and now. And we forget that in Jesus, He calls us to go from glory to glory. Not in the way back there and not in the way out there, but in the here and now. So maybe, just maybe, it's time for a different way. You see, what we said last week is that if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to first do the things that Jesus did. If I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, I have to first do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. If I want to live the life of Jesus, I have to take on the lifestyle of Jesus. If I want to do the works of Jesus, I have to first walk in the ways of Jesus.

And you say, "What does that mean?" Well, it means if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to first do the things that Jesus did. If you want to do the things that Jesus did, like heal the sick and raise the dead and cast out demons. And live free from the love of money. And live free from anxiety and fear and worry. And love your neighbor and be deeply connected with God, and have a sense of internal security. And have joy and peace and hope in your life. Then you first have to do the things that Jesus did. His lifestyle. Things like prayer, and fasting, and Scripture, and silence, and solitude, and Sabbath, and confession, and celebration, and generosity, and servanthood. We have to take on His disciplines, His habits. We have to practice the way of Jesus so we can live the way of Jesus.

You say, "What are the things that Jesus did?" Well, we showed you this graphic, and we just said this is just a great example of the things that Jesus did. You read the Gospels. This is what you see. Jesus had peace in chaos. He had self-control in the face of temptation. He had joy in every circumstance, purpose in the mundane routine of His life. He had hope in the midst of despair, wisdom in life, love in relationships. He was free from the world. He was able to forgive no matter what. He had this deep connection with God. These are the things that Jesus did. And isn't this what you want in your life? Without even knowing you, I know you spend most of your life pursuing these things. Why? Because this is what we long for as humans. The only question is, how are you trying to get this? You're trying to get this primarily through counseling, medication, self-help, striving, performing, earning, success, control, the hot baths, long walks.

We said all that last week. How are you actually trying to get this? Or are you trying to do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did? See, in Mark 9, there's this really interesting story. Jesus goes up on the Mount of Transfiguration, and this man brings his demon-possessed son to the disciples and he asks for their help. And the disciples do everything they know to do to cast out this demon. Everything they've watched Jesus do. Everything Jesus has taught them. They know it's possible and they throw every trick they have at it, but they can't cast out the demon. And Jesus comes back down off the mountain and the exasperated father brings his boy to Jesus and says, "Jesus, I brought my son to your disciples. They couldn't do it. If you can, will you take pity on us and heal my son?" Jesus says, "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes."

He says, "I do believe, but help me in my unbelief." And with a single word, Jesus casts the demon out of the boy. He's completely healed. Everyone is amazed. And then, later when Jesus and the disciples are alone, they asked Jesus, "Jesus, why couldn't we cast that demon out? We did everything we knew to do and we couldn't cast it out. Why?" Jesus looks right back at them and He says, "This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting." Now, if you're familiar with the story, the most interesting part about the entire thing is nowhere in the story does Jesus pray or fast. So, they're a little confused. This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting. What is He talking about? He's saying, "If you want to do what I do on-the-spot, you got to do what I do behind-the-scenes." There was no prayer and fasting on-the-spot.

There was just a healing. There was just the power of God. There was just life. But Jesus lived a lifestyle of prayer and fasting behind-the-scenes. This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting. These are the kinds of things that can never happen on-the-spot. They only happen first behind-the-scenes. If I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, there's a word for this, I first have to be His... disciple behind-the-scenes. So, you ready to talk about this? Okay. The word disciple. It's a word we're familiar with and yet it's foreign to us at the same time. We know Jesus had disciples. We know we're called to make disciples. We use words like discipleship. But if we're honest, the word has a lot of mystery to it. We kind of keep it at a distance. If we're honest, it's a little bit intimidating. So, let's just redefine what a disciple is.

Again, a disciple is simply a learner, a student, a follower; one who becomes like the one they're following. A disciple is someone who has considered their ways and counted the cost and decided they want to follow Jesus. They want to be with Jesus. They want to be like Jesus. They want to learn to think like Him and talk like Him and act like Him and live like Him. They have decided to arrange and rearrange their life around Jesus. To order and reorder their life around Jesus. They have decided to come to Jesus with an intent to obey, an intent to follow. And they've submitted and surrendered their will to Him. And they aren't perfect, but when Jesus shows them where they're off, they're quick to repent to get in alignment with Him. And they have decided that Jesus is going to say things like, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." And they have decided that whatever Jesus says is what is good and what is true and what is right.

So, they want to actually become like Him, not just identify with Him. In fact, Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." A disciple is someone who is training and being trained to become like their teacher. It's a disciple. It's someone who is training and being trained to become like their teacher. Now, whether you realize this or not, you currently, in this moment, are a disciple of someone or something. The only question is that you choose that thing intentionally or unintentionally. You're a disciple of something. You're a learner, a follower, a student of someone or of something. Make no mistake about it. There is something that is forming and shaping and pressing and conforming your life into alignment with it.

The only question is, have you chosen it intentionally or have you unintentionally allowed it to form and shape your life? Like you might be a disciple of Fox News. You might be a disciple of social media. You might be a disciple of the algorithm. You might be a disciple of ChatGPT. You might be a disciple of Hollywood, Silicon Valley, Washington DC, Wall Street. You might be a disciple of Netflix. You might be a disciple of that celebrity or of that influencer, but make no mistake about it, someone or something is teaching you how to live your life. The only question is, did you choose it? Or did it choose you? And you say, "Well, how do I know what I'm a disciple of?" Well, you have to ask questions like this, who defines what is good and true and right in my life? Who do I submit and surrender to? Who defines what success looks like?

And how I should live my life and how I make decisions and how I should be a mom or a dad or a student or a worker? Who defines what's normal? You want to know how you know who you're a disciple of? Whose thoughts do you think? Whose words do you speak? Whose truths do you believe? Whose actions do you emulate? And whose ways do you walk in? That is who you are a disciple of. So, the question I have to ask myself is, am I a disciple of Jesus or of something else? Am I training and being trained to be like Him or to be like something in this world? Because Jesus says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you." In other words, Jesus says His disciples arranged their entire life around Him. They order and keep reordering and rearranging their life with Him at the center. And when they have chosen to arrange their life around Him, it impacts every other thing in their life.

Whatever you arrange your life around is who you are a disciple of and it impacts every other area of your life. The question is, have you arranged your life around the right thing? Now, do you remember the story of Peter? Peter's a fisherman. He's married. He's got his life. He's living his way. And then, one day Jesus comes walking down the shore of the Sea of Galilee and completely interrupts Peter's life. And He comes to Peter and says, "'Come follow me,' Jesus said, 'And I will make you fishers of men.'" Come and follow Me. It's an invitation to move, an invitation to respond. And when He says, "Follow Me," this is not figurative, flowery, subjective language. This is not Jesus saying, "Hey, stay where you are. Keep living your life, but just think about Me every once in a while. And put one of My little fish things on the back of your boat. And go to church when you can, and do some good in the world. All right. Take it easy." No.

This was very practical and very literal. "You follow Me now. You come where I go. You stay where I stay. You live how I live. You learn to do life the way that I do life. Come and follow Me. Be with Me in relationship. And I'm going to teach you how to live your life. I want to be your teacher. I want to be your Rabbi. And I want to teach you the best way to do your life and I will make you. You don't have to change yourself because you can't. But if you come and follow Me, I will shape you and form you and mold you into My image and My likeness." And it says, "At once they left their nets and followed Him." In other words, Peter considered his ways. He

counted the cost and he left everything. He left all of the way he was doing his life to say, "I'm going to learn how to do it Jesus' way." Now compare that to the rich, young ruler.

He's rich, he's young, and he's a ruler. If we're honest, it's the life we want, but what a burden to bear. What a hard way to have to live your life as a young person. And he comes to Jesus and he says, "Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" In other words, he sees value in Jesus. He's inspired by Jesus. He sees good in Jesus and he wants what? Forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. And Jesus says, "You know the commandments, keep them." And the man says, "I've kept all of them since I was a boy." And then, look what it says. Jesus looked at him and it says, "He loved him. 'One thing you lack,' He said, 'Go sell everything you have and give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow Me.' At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth." Here it is again, come follow me. Not figurative, subjective, flowery language.

Very practical. "You, come follow Me right now." And Jesus loved the man, which means He had good will towards the man. His will for the man was good. And He says, "One thing you lack," what was he lacking? Jesus. See, this man was a disciple of money. Money was his teacher. Money was his leader. Money was his Lord. And Jesus is saying, "Hey, if you want to be My disciple, you can't be a disciple of money. And so, the thing that you lack is Me. And the greatest barrier between you and Me right now is your money. And so, I don't need your money. In fact, I'm asking you to give it to the poor. I'm going to free you from the love of money and teach you how to do your life." But the man didn't want to walk in the way of Jesus in the area of finance. He wanted the way of Jesus in the way of forgiveness and eternal salvation, but not in the way of finance. So, his face fell, fell sad, and he went away because he had great wealth.

The more success you have in the things and the ways of this world, the harder it is to submit and surrender those things to Jesus and choose His way. So, can I ask you a question? Are you more like Peter or like the rich, young ruler? At once, when He points something out, are you willing to change your way? Or do you often have your face fall sad and go away in a different direction because Jesus invited you to take His way in a way you didn't want to take? And what I love about Jesus is He doesn't violate the man's free will. He has given you the ability to choose who you want to be your teacher, who you want to be a disciple of, and He will not violate it. He will not force you. He will not convince you. He will not lower the standard though either. And so, He loves you. And He says what you need to hear. And He invites you to come and follow Him. The only question is, will you choose to be His disciple?

I mean, Jesus says, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" That's a really fair question for Jesus, isn't it? Like, come on. Like, "Why do you call me Lord? Why do you call me master? Why do you call me God? Why do you call me Savior? Why do you call me teacher and then do not do what I say? It's a little paradoxical, isn't it? Because to be Lord means I know what's best, so come and follow Me." And so, every place where I know what God asked

me to do, but I choose to do it my way is a place that I'm saying, "I know better than you, Jesus, in this area." We just kind of got to say it like it is. It's like when I do it my way, what I'm saying is, "Jesus, I know more about sex and money and time and mental health and my life and relationships than you do. That's why I'm taking this way instead of Your way."

And we have to acknowledge the paradoxical nature of which American Christianity exists in. We trust Jesus, just catch it, for our eternal salvation, but not our daily life. I trust Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins, but not for the freedom of my current struggle. I trust Jesus for the next breath of air I breathe. Like that one. But not for the financial provision of my life. So, we have to acknowledge that many of us build our lives on an unstable paradoxical foundation in and of itself. I mean, it says, "Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did." If we say we're a follower of Jesus, then we actually got to do the things that Jesus did because we're following and learning and becoming like Him. This is why Jesus says, "If anyone" – that includes you, yes? – "would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

We love the cross of Jesus that was for the forgiveness of our sins that offered us the resurrection life. We're just not so sure we want our own cross. And so, we're a fan, but not necessarily a follower. And we forget to be a disciple means we have to deny ourselves. He says, "If you're going to come and follow me, you're going to have to deny yourself and pick up your cross." What does that mean? It means you have to die to your way of life. You have to die to your pride and your opinions and your rights, and you know better, and you want to do it like this and your feelings. That might be the hardest one for some of us to be crucified on. But if we want to experience a resurrection, there has to be first a crucifixion. So, could it be that we never experienced the resurrection life of Jesus because we're unwilling to first experience the crucifixion of our own flesh nature?

If I'm not willing to pick up my cross and die to myself, I can't then step into the resurrection life that He offers me. Which is why He says, "Whoever loses his life will save it." If I will deny myself and be crucified with Christ, I can rise to new life in Jesus. You see, every one of us at some point in time has to make a decision of whether or not Jesus is worth following. Just think about this with me for a second. At some point in time, you have to decide, is Jesus worth following? Like, does He know what He's talking about? Is He smart enough to follow? Is He wise enough to follow? Does He know what He's talking about? Does He have any clue? Is He good enough to follow? Because Jesus is either right about everything or He's right about nothing.

He's worth following in every way or in no way. He's either right about it all or He's right about none. He's either Lord of all or Lord of none. He either is worth all of my life or He's worth none of my life because He can't be mostly good. Usually true. Often right. For the most part, pretty good. Hence the paradoxical nature again. He's either worth following with all my life or with none of my life. And what we forget is that Jesus came in many ways to just show us how to be human. Right? Stay with me on this. Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. What's

amazing about Jesus is when we look at Jesus, we see exactly who God is like, and we see exactly who humanity was created to be.

Jesus says, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father. You want to know what God is like? I am the Son of God. I'm the exact representation of who God is. But you know what else I'm also like? I am the Son of Man. And I poured Myself out and I took on humanity and I moved into your neighborhood to show you a new way to be human." In fact, this is why it says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth," – this is His humanity; this is Jesus, the man – "with the Holy Spirit and power and how he went around doing good, healing all who are under the power of the devil because God was with Him." Jesus, the man, showed us what it was like to be a man in relationship with God and what that life could be like. Jesus showed us what it's like to live in right relationship with God and what this life actually looks like. This is why He says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." We literally read this and think, Jesus is the only way to heaven.

That is so true and so what this means, but it means more than that. It means He is the way to be human. He is the way to live your life. Do you know that the Bible says that Jesus, if you can catch this, is both the firstborn of creation and the firstborn among the dead. The word firstborn in the original language is the word prototype. He is the prototype of the resurrection life. In other words, He is the standard and the source of a new way to be human. I mean, think about it. When God made Adam in the Garden, we knew how to be human. We knew how to walk with God and live with God and what we were created to do and what it looked like to be human. But when we sinned, we lost the ability to be human. We were lost. We were lonely. We were broken. And then Jesus came as the firstborn among the dead, the prototype, to show us a new way to be human. A new way to live our life.

Are you with me on this? For six days in creation, God creates all things. And then, on the seventh day, He rests. Do you realize after those first six days of creation, He doesn't create anything again until you are a new creation in Christ? And He created an entirely new reality for those of us who, by faith, have chosen to be crucified with Christ and rise to a new life. And so, Jesus is now the standard and the source of what it looks like to be a new creation, how to live as a human in a new way. You say, why am I telling you all this? Because if you don't believe that, you will think, all the things that Jesus did, He did because He was Messiah and Savior and Lord. No, He did all the things that He did to show us what it looked like to be human. That if you want to be free and full of life and vibrant as a human, you got to do the things that Jesus did – His lifestyle – so you can do the things that Jesus did.

See, every place that you decide to do it your way instead of God's way, you're saying, you know how to be a human better than Jesus. So, when you do your sexuality in any way that's outside of one man and one woman in a covenant of marriage relationship, what you're saying is, you know how to be a human better than Jesus who created, redeemed, and blessed sexuality. When I do my finances in any way other than tithing, giving my first best 10% to God and refusing to live with the love of money and refusing to live in constant and chronic debt,

what I'm saying, just acknowledge it, I'm saying, I know how to be a human better than Jesus who created, redeemed, and blessed money. When I do my relationships and I hold on to offense and bitterness and anger and wrath and trying to get people back, what I'm saying is, I know how to do humanity, relationships, better than Jesus who created, redeemed, and blessed relationships.

When I do my time and I work seven days a week and I don't take a Sabbath and I'm always busy and I have no margin and I fill my life to max-capacity, what I'm saying is, I know how to be a human better than Jesus knows how to be a human, who is the one who created, redeemed, and blessed time. This is why it says, "The Lord Almighty says, 'Give careful thoughts to your ways.' You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but you 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.'"

When it says it twice, it's trying to get our attention. Consider, give careful thought. Put some time into thinking about the way you live your life. How's it going? Do you feel like you plant, but never harvest? Do you feel like you eat, but you're never satisfied? Do you feel like you drink, but never have your fill? You put on clothes and you're never warm? You go and acquire all this stuff, but it feels like it's fleeting and running away from you? Like, consider your ways. How's the way of your marriage going? How's the way of your mental health going? How's the way of your emotions and your time and your finances and your family? Like, have you given any thought to the way you live your life? What I think happens to a lot of us is we live life our way, but we say it's in the name of Jesus. And then, when it doesn't work, we get disappointed and mad at God.

So, I do my life and I claim the name of Jesus over it. But if we're honest, that way doesn't look anything like the way Jesus lived His life. And then, when it doesn't work, we get mad and disappointed and offended at God. I think a lot of American Christianity has a lot of offense to God because we've confused His way and our way. We've put His name on our way. And then, when it doesn't work, we think it's His fault. See, a great question that every one of us has to answer is, what is it that you want from God? Do you ever think about that? What is it that you want from God? Why do you claim His name? Why do you gather in a room full of people that are gathered around the name of Jesus? Why do you call yourself a Christian or a follower of Jesus? Like, what is it that you want from God?

One day Jesus was walking along and two of John the Baptist's disciples, because disciples can be learner students of anyone or anything, but these two men are disciples of John the Baptist. And as they see Jesus walk by, He catches their attention and they start to follow Him. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" It's the question He asks every one of us to the depths of our soul. What do you want? What do you want? What do you want from Jesus? You want forgiveness? Eternal salvation? You want comfort? You want

religion? You want Him to alleviate some guilt in your soul? You want Him to bring some peace to the chaos of your life? Do you want other people to think well of you because you claim the name of Jesus?

Do you want bread and fish – what He can do for you? Or do you want Jesus? And do you want to be a disciple and be with Him and become like Him? What do you want? It's a very kind, very honest, very authentic question. And they said, "Rabbi," which means teacher, "Where are you staying?" Remember, following is not subjective. It was very literal. Where are you staying? Like, "Jesus, we want to follow You. We want to know You. We want to become like You. And we want to learn how to live in your way." "'Come,' He replied, 'And you will see.'" Whatever answer you answer to His question, what do you want, He will always respond with kindness and compassion. And He will always invite you to come and see who He is and what He offers.

And I think a great problem that happens in our lives is Jesus invites us to come and be His disciple and we come wanting something different than that. So, we come into our relationship with totally different premises. And when it doesn't work out, we get mad at Him and say it was His fault and we're disappointed and it didn't work. But Jesus doesn't invite you to a life of bread and fish. He invites you to a life in His kingdom as His disciple, learning how to be a human. And I get it. Some of you right now, you're like, "Dude, I hate this message." I get it. Because some of you, you're probably sitting here and you're like, "This whole disciple thing, I don't want to be a disciple. I'm happy being a Christian." Totally. Do you know what a Christian means though? Christian just means "little Christ." So, I'm going to be a little Jesus like learn how to do the things that He did so I can do the things that He did. In the Bible, they're not called Christians. In the first century, they weren't called Christians. They were called "Followers of the Way."

Which means the way they lived their life was learning how to live their life the way that Jesus did. And I think sometimes we forget that Jesus is so clear. I don't preach enough on this and so, I repent and apologize to you for this. But we don't talk enough about Jesus saying, "Count the cost to follow Me." Like, "There's actually a cost to following Me and you got to count it." In a run on talking about what it means to be a disciple, He tells the story and He says, "Which of you would build a barn without first sitting down and considering whether or not you have enough money to actually do it? And which of you is a king? If you are going to go to war with another king, would you not first sit down and think, 'Can I actually win this battle?'" You would count the cost. You would consider it. And then, He says, "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything He has cannot be my disciple." You say, "So, I have to give up everything and live in poverty to be a disciple of Jesus?" No. He's saying, "You have to be open to my way in any and every area of your life."

And we get so lost in counting the cost. I have to die to myself. I have to give up my pride. I have to give up my rights. I can't do my sin. I can't do the – it's like, so hard. It's all this stuff.

Yes, count the cost. But what does it cost you to not follow Jesus? What does it cost you to be a disciple of the world instead of Jesus? You know what it costs you? That. Is this a cost you're willing to pay? Is that the cost you're willing to pay for your family and your relationships and your life and your soul? Because that's a high price.

And what we forget is that the way of Jesus is not hard. This is love for God, to obey His commands and His commands are not burdensome. His way is easy and light. It's not hard and heavy. Yes, there is a cost. The cost is dying to my way and taking His way as a disciple. And what does He give me back? He gives me back this. He gives me back this. See, we forget and we think Jesus invites us to forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. But what He really invites us to is life in the kingdom with Him. That's why His main message was, "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand," and why He went around preaching the good news of the kingdom, the Gospel of the kingdom. And what is that? It's just simply that He came to restore your identity, reconcile your relationship, and redeem your purpose. That He's come to make you like Him, forgiven and free, included in Christ. He's invited you into this ongoing relationship with Him where He literally invites you into the eternal loving community of the Trinity.

If I'm included in Christ and Christ is in the Trinity, I have now just been invited into the loving eternal relationship of the Trinity itself. And then, He invites me to do the very things that He did. This is the gig. This is what He – this is a disciple. This is the kingdom. This is what He invites you to. We've used this language for years. Let me give you a different language for this series. He invites you to become like Jesus, to be with Jesus, and to simply do what Jesus did. Doesn't mean perfect. Doesn't mean you got it all figured out. I mean, have you read the Gospels? When those disciples got invited to follow Jesus, they were a mess. But they had made the intent to say, "He is the one I will follow." And when He shows me that my way is different than His way, I don't want to live in a paradox of life. I want to, by faith, say, "Jesus, I don't get it. I don't like it. It doesn't make sense. But because You say so, Lord, I will do it."

You with me on this? Let me try to pull it all together real quick on this. Jesus basically summarizes all of what it means of being a disciple to two things. Two things. The first is obedience. "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples." He says to be his disciple, I have to obey. Because you say so, Lord, I will do it. I don't have to like it. I don't have to get it. It doesn't have to make sense to me. It doesn't have to be what anyone and everyone else is doing. It usually is not what everyone and anyone else is doing. But if I have set my attention to be a disciple of Jesus, I actually have to live a life of obedience. So, obedience and love. "A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

He says, "If you're really My disciple, you will live a life of love. You will become a person of love and you will walk in the way of love." So, hear me. Obedience and love are both the intent and the result of being a disciple of Jesus. Obedience and love are both the intent and the result of being a disciple of Jesus. If I'm a disciple of Jesus, I enter into that with the intent to

obey Him and the intent to become a person of love. And as I walk with Him and follow Him, the result is, I become a person of obedience and I grow into a person of love. And you've been invited by Jesus to be His disciple.

This is why that big verse at the end of Jesus' time on earth, when He is ascending to heaven, "Therefore, go and make disciples" – that would be you – "of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you and surely I am with you always." Can I just tell you? This is what I want from God. This is what I want. This is my premise. This is why I come to the table. This is why I'm here. This is why I do this. This is what I want for you. But if you don't want it, that's okay. This is what I want. I want to be a disciple, a learner, a follower, a student of Jesus. I want to be baptized, not just into water, but I want to be immersed into the name or the reality of the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the power of the Spirit. And I want to learn to obey Him in every area of my life and be with Him and learn how to live in His kingdom. This is what I want.

But it's not what I always wanted. And so, you might be here today and you're like, "I don't really want any of that." That's okay. You can call out to Him and ask Him to change the desire within you. To say, "Jesus, please change my appetite from the things of this world to You. Because Jesus, I really want to do the things that You did. I really do. And I chase these really hard in my life. But if I'm learning that if I want to do the things that You did on-the-spot, I have to choose to first be Your disciple behind-the-scenes. Because I can't do what You did if I don't first learn how to do what You did." Because this kind can only come out by prayer and fasting. Or what Jesus did behind-the-scenes before the moment.

And so, here's my really honest, really genuine question for you today. Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? Not, are you a Christian? Not, have you prayed a prayer? Not, have you raised your hand or experienced salvation? Not, are you a good person? Not, are you trying to do good things? Have you ever decided to accept Jesus' invitation to be one who is training and being trained to be like Him in the here and now? Like, have you ever accepted, "Come and follow Me"? "Come and follow Me and be with Me and let Me form you and shape you and mold you." Have you ever come to Jesus with the intent to say, "My intent is obedience and love. And I know it's so far away from the reality that I'm currently living, but Jesus, You say that You will make me. And so, I need that grace because I can't make myself."

See, I think you can go to American church for 50 years and never make the choice to be a disciple. And nowhere in the Gospels do we see Jesus offer easy and cheap and free salvational moments and then say, "Now, go back and live your life exactly as it was." The grace of God was available to anyone and everyone, but it always was an invitation to a new way of being human. To a new way of life. To a new existence in God's kingdom for what you were created for in the first place. The standard is not the world. That is not the way to be human. That is the way to be dead.

Jesus is the prototype of being human and being alive. The only question is, will I accept that invitation? And some of you, hear me, you're sitting here and you're like, "I'm too young or I'm too old to be a disciple. I'm saved. I'm good." You're not too young. Students, hear me. The greatest decision you will make in your life is not to raise your hand and pray a prayer, be a Christian, identify with the church. It's to say, "I have decided to be a disciple of Jesus. And I will learn to live my life the way He lives His life." Listen, because most of his disciples were teenagers when He invited them. So, you are not too young. And if you think, "I'm too old. I'm 50 years, living my way, doing the thing. I'm saved. I'm good." Listen, Nicodemus was an old man. And when Jesus showed up, he was confused and disoriented and a little frustrated with the sermon series that Jesus started. Okay. It's like, "Don't be talking to me about a different way. I got a good way going here." And he didn't like it and he didn't get it.

But three years later of wrestling and struggling and seeking God, Nicodemus buries the body of Christ as a disciple of Jesus saying, "It doesn't matter how long I've walked in that way. I can change today in Jesus' name. And He has drawn me to a new life and a new reality and a new experience." Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? And so, here's the practice for this week, right? Every week in this series, there's something to do. Jesus, give me a desire to be Your disciple. That's it. Could you pray that this week? Not, "Okay, I'm a disciple. Okay, here I go. Okay, I'm going to do it." It's probably not going to work out all that well for you. Because we can't do it. So, I'm trying to – this whole series is, we can't do it, but we can position ourselves in ways that open us up to God's grace.

Jesus, my heart doesn't feel it. Jesus, if I got to give up this, this, and this, I don't know that I'm in. Jesus, I got no idea how You're going to take care of that, that, and that. But I guess I can just say, "Would You give me a desire to be Your disciple?" Because if I'm honest, there is an aching and a longing in my soul for more. I don't think that more is found in You, Jesus. I think it's found in sex and money and control and comfort and travel and feelings and family and friends and parties and activities in my life. But the more I do those things, the even emptier I feel and even less there is in my soul. So I'm losing my soul while I'm trying to find those things, which is something You actually just told me. So, maybe, just maybe, You are actually right. And I acknowledge my life exists in this continual paradox.

And I don't like being a duplicit person. And I don't like to be divided in my own self. So, maybe, just maybe, Jesus, You could give me a desire to be a student of You and start doing some things that You did so I can do the things that You did. Close your eyes. Have you ever made the choice to say, I want to be a disciple of Jesus? It is really hard to live a different way without starting there? What's the Holy Spirit been moving or speaking or stirring in your heart?

Let me remind any and every one that's listening, the beauty of Jesus is there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Nothing that Jesus is saying to you today is condemning in any nature. He's trying to show you what is good and what is true and what is

right. And like the rich, young ruler and like Peter, He's looking at you and He loves you. And He is trying to show you some things in your life that are keeping you from Him. And He's asking you to trust Him in that way, that you might experience the life. The life of the kingdom. Not in the past or in the future, but in the here and now.

So, Jesus, give me a desire to be a disciple of You. Give us, as a church, a desire to be a disciple of You. I pray Jesus for the questions that were posed today, that they would lodge in our ears and in our mind and in our heart. And that this week they would come back up through the grace of the Holy Spirit. And we would work through some of those things with You because You're not asking us questions to hurt us. You're asking us questions to free us. Because You are the way and You are the truth and You are the life.

Don't let religion, the world, or your flesh keep you from the resurrected life of Jesus Christ in His everlasting kingdom. That is not then and there, but is here and now and offers you all the things you really want. You just access them in a very different way than the world around you. Thank You, Jesus, that You give us the chance to be disciples. What a gift. In Your name we pray, amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



FEBRUARY 4, 2024

SEASON ONE, EPISODE THREE

“CAN I ACTUALLY CHANGE?”

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today and we are in a message series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. And if you've ever wondered, why do we preach in message series, it's because we want to take one big idea, one concept, one thought, one word from God and we want to take it deep. And we want to give ourselves time to understand it, time to get revelation from it, time to respond to God, and move forward in faith, to wrestle through it and what it means for us in our lives. And with so many people coming and going every single weekend, we want to give everybody the chance to be able to grab this one big idea that we believe God is speaking to our church over a season of time. And so, if there is ever an individual message in a message series that you don't like, don't understand, aren't really enjoying, just think about it in terms of your favorite Netflix series.

There are some episodes that aren't your favorite, but if you put it back into the context of the series, it all makes sense. So, we are in a series called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did, and we're talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. But we're saying that if we want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot we have to first do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. That if we want to do the works of Jesus, we have to first walk in the way of Jesus. That if we want to have the life of Jesus, we first have to take on the lifestyle of Jesus. And you say, "Well, what does that mean, do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did?"

It means if you want to do the things that Jesus did, which we all do, like heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cast out demons, but more practically in our daily life, not be angry, and not be anxious, and not be overwhelmed, and have peace, and have joy, and forgive people, and love one another, and not be trapped in the things of money in this world, then we first have to do the things that Jesus did, like prayer, and fasting, and Scripture, and silence, and solitude, and Sabbath, and community, and serving, and generosity. We have to take on His lifestyle. You see, we've been using this little graphic to just say these are just some examples of the things that Jesus did that we can see all throughout Scripture. He had peace in chaos, and joy in every circumstance, purpose in the mundane, love in every relationship He had, He was free from the world, He was connected to God in a disconnected world. This is just some of the things that Jesus did.

And so, the question I want to ask you today is simply this, is this even possible? It sounds really possible, and it looks really appealing, and it's a great graphic on social media, but is this even possible? Is it actually possible to do the things that Jesus did? Is it possible to have peace in chaos, and joy in every circumstance, and purpose in the mundane, and love in your relationships, and freedom from this world? Is that even possible? Said another way, is it even possible to live a different way? You see, the question I'm asking you is, can you change? Can you change? And if so, how do you change? Those are two pretty important questions that we really should wrestle through in our lives and come to some kind of conclusion, don't you think?

Is it possible for you to change? Can you go deeper? Can you become more mature? Can you become free? Can you become more mature? Can you become healthy? Can you be transformed? Is it possible for you in your life to actually change? Or do you think, this is just who I am. This is just how I do my life. This is as good as it gets. I've tried. I've struggled. I've strived. I've put in the effort. I've had the willpower. I've done all of the things and I've not changed. And so, many of us have just resigned to like, this is just my life, and I've learned to numb, and I've learned to cope, and I've got strategies for dealing with the brokenness in my life, and sometimes I have really good seasons where I can put the dogs at bay, but if I'm honest, no, I don't really think that I can change.

In fact, if I'm going to change, then God's gotta lightning-bolt-strike me. Or maybe some of us think, I don't know that I even really want to change. And some of us probably think, the reason I can't change is because I'm a victim to everyone else in my life. And if they would change, then I could change. Can you change? I don't think we think about that question a lot, and I think if we're honest, somewhere deep down inside of us subconsciously, most of us believe no. Why? Because we have brought our theology down to the experiences we've had in life. Our beliefs have been determined by what we've actually experienced, and for a lot of us, we would say like, "I haven't changed, and therefore, it's not possible to change." And I've been married to someone who hasn't changed. They were passive when I married them 20 years ago, and every year they become even more passive. My mom was controlling when I grew up, and every year she becomes even more and more controlling.

My kids aren't who I want them to be, and maybe they were just born that way, and it's impossible for them to be any different. Our boss hasn't changed. Our friends haven't changed. The people we've known in church for years, they haven't changed. And so, we've created this entire theological construct based on the experience of the lack of transformation we've seen in our lives and in the lives of the people around us. And we know the verses. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come." "You go from glory to glory, being transformed more into His image and His likeness." "'Come, follow Me and I will make you,' Jesus says." "We are the clay. He is the potter, and He will shape, and mold us into who He wants us to be." "His divine power has given me everything I need for life and godliness." We know all the verses, which doesn't seem to work itself out in our life, does it?

Can you change? You see, I think if we're honest, a lot of us feel like the apostle Paul. He says, "I do not understand what I do for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my sinful nature for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin I do not want to do living in me that does it, for in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the

law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members who will rescue me from this body of death?"

How authentic. How vulnerable. How honest, and how real. Did you ever feel like this? Does this feel like your life? Like the things that you want to do, you can't do. And the things you don't want to do, you find yourself just doing over and over and over again. What is Paul saying here? He's saying, "Hey, the things I really want to do, I can't do them. And the things I don't want to do, I find myself doing them even when I'm trying not to do them." And what he's expressing to us is that he has lived in the world for so long that he's been trained and conditioned by the world so he naturally does the things the world does. We've been saying you gotta do what Jesus did if you want to do what Jesus did. Well, Paul is saying, "I have done what the world has done for so long that I naturally and effortlessly do what the world does."

I have these habits, these routines, these ruts, these neural pathways, these whole ways of life that I have created that just take over on-the-spot. I've spent so long doing what the world has done that I just naturally and effortlessly in the moment do what the world does. It's not what I want to do. It's not even who I am anymore. I'm a new creation. I'm part of the divine nature. The sin nature has been broken on my life, but there's this sin living in me in the members or the actual parts of my body that has made me a prisoner to the sin that is, in a sense, trapped or trained in the parts of my body to make me do things that I don't want to do. So, I've been trained, I've been trained by the world and that's why I naturally and effortlessly do what the world does on-the-spot. This is why we do things like we say, "I'm not going to be angry, I'm not going to be angry, I'm not going to be angry." When we get to the spot, we're angry and we can't help it.

This is why we say things like, "I'm not going to look at it, I'm not going to look at it, I'm not going to look at it," we look at it. So, we say things like, "I'm not going to be controlling, okay, today is the day, I'm not going to be controlling today, today, this hour, I'm not going to be controlling," and we control. "I'm going to serve, I'm going to be a servant, I'm going to go into that situation with my family, and I'm not going to be selfish, I'm going to serve," and we step into it, and we're selfish. Why? Because we've spent so long doing what the world has done that we naturally and effortlessly do what the world does on-the-spot, in the moment. We have been trained. We have been conditioned. We have ruts. We have habits. We have routines. We have whole patterns of our life that make us do things that we don't want to do or prevent us from doing the things that we do want to do. Think of how you have been formed by the world.

The family you grew up in, your family of origin, the house you were raised in, the things your dad did or didn't do, the things your mom said or didn't say, the experiences you've had at school, the dysfunctional relationship or relationships that were in your life, the ways that you've been trained and shaped at work, the religious condemnation and conformity that has

been pressed upon you, the media, and the ideas, and the images of the world that have just saturated your life year after year. Think of how you have learned to defend yourself, fight for yourself, protect yourself, glorify yourself, serve yourself, shame yourself, condemn yourself, you have been shaped by this world. And so, yes, you're a beloved son, but you've been trained to live like an orphan. And yes, I am free, but I have been trained to live in bondage.

And yes, I am holy in Jesus, but I've been trained to live like the world. See, if you can catch this, before you met Jesus, before Jesus became Lord of your life, you were lord of your life. And while you were lord of your life, dead in sin, living in the ways of this world, there were a whole network, a complex network of attitudes, behaviors, perspectives, opinions, responses, initiation, actions, words that were formed, and shaped, and literally impressed into who you are that when you now meet Jesus, yes, you're a new creation, you've been set free, the sin nature has been broke off you, you're a part of the divine nature, but all that forming, and shaping, and training doesn't just go away. So, you find yourself doing the things you don't want to do or not being able to do the things that you do want to do.

Why? Because you spent so long doing what the world does that, on-the-spot, you naturally and effortlessly do what the world does. What I'm trying to tell you is that your will is not stronger than your training. So, when he says, my will is not to do it, or to do this thing, and not that thing, but my willpower is not stronger than the training I've experienced. So, in the moment when I get to a fork in the road, I will take whichever rut is most deep in my life. And when it's been the things of the world, those ruts that I have created over time, I just naturally and effortlessly take them. Is this making sense to you? This is why right now, if I handed you a pen, and you're right handed, and I told you to write in your left hand, you couldn't do it. If I handed you a football and told you to throw it with your off hand, it would be the most awkward, uncomfortable experience for all of us watching you.

If you have a Texas accent and I told you to not speak with that accent, but speak with a Canadian accent, couldn't do it. And if I told you to stop making your normal facial expressions, like fix your face, you couldn't do it, right? Not that you don't want to do it, but you just couldn't do it. Why? Because you've been trained, your body has been shaped and molded in such a way that without a whole new round of training, that's what you're going to do. That's what Paul is saying. He's saying there is literally sin that is in the members or the parts of my body. I have literally been trained in this world to do and say certain things, and not do and not say other things that, on-the-spot, even though my will, my heart, is to go God's way, I've been trained the world's way, and I can't have the willpower strong enough to override my training.

It's like sin has been trapped in the members of your body, your body parts, your hands, your feet, your words, your facial expressions, your ears, all of that has been trained in the ways of this world. Does that make sense to you? It's like you get to this fork in the road and you've been trained so deeply to be depressed that you can't even be joyful. You get to the fork in the

road, and you've been trained so deeply to be bitter and resentful that it's almost impossible for you to be forgiving in the moment. You've been trained so deeply to be a person of control that you get to that moment, and literally, you can't trust God because the ruts are so deep, and they take you in the direction that you don't want to go. We've been trained to hide, to hoard, to hate, to steal, to kill, to destroy, the lust of the eyes, the cravings of the flesh, and the pride of life. And so, if we want new ruts, if we want new directions in our life, we've got to build new ruts that are deeper than the old ruts because your body has been trained to take you in the direction you don't want to go.

That's what I'm trying to say to you. And we think of the body, and we think we don't really want to talk about the body in church. We're not here to talk about our bodies. We're here to talk about our hearts, and our souls, and our spirits, but God gave you your body, and your body is you. And inside your body, God has put the creativity of the human spirit. And it's at the place of your body where heaven touches earth. Your body is meant to be God's will on this earth. There're so many verses about the body. "Offer your body as living sacrifices." "The Lord is for the body and the body for the Lord." "Your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit." "Your body is now the body of Christ on this earth." God has given you a body. And the reason He's given you a body is, is that you might become His person on this earth walking in loving relationship with Him, accomplishing His will as you rule and reign.

He's given you a body. This is the place that you rule and reign. He's given you the authority to choose what happens, how you speak, and how you act. It is the place where God has allowed you to have your will, and He won't override it, He won't usurp it, but what we have to acknowledge is that our bodies have been trained by-- we have done the things the world does for so long that our bodies naturally and effortlessly do the things the world does when we get to the spot. So, the words and the actions of our body are the world's words and actions, because we've done the things the world has done, so we do the things the world does. And we get so discouraged as followers of Jesus because we've done the things the world has done, and then we just want to be able to jump over here and do the things that Jesus does. But my body hasn't been trained for that. So, it naturally takes the ruts and takes me in a direction that I don't want to go.

Is this making sense to you? It's literally like sin has gotten trapped in the individual members of your body. It's been trained in the ways of sin. And so, Paul is basically saying like then, "Is it hopeless?" Who will rescue me from this body of death, this body that has been shaped in a life without God? Well, the good news is, "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord," that He can change me. And he goes on to say, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you." He says you're no longer under the sinful nature, it's been broken. You're now part of the divine nature. You're included in Christ, and you have to start by acknowledging, "I am no longer a slave to sin, I am no longer controlled by it because God's Spirit lives in me." "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin."

My body has been trained in the ways of the world to naturally and effortlessly do and say the things the world does. This is why I react in anger. This is why I have this whole pattern of how we do our marriage. This is why I get frustrated. This is why I listen to gossip. This is why I can't help myself. Why? Because I've been trained, my body has been trained in life without God, yet my spirit is alive because of righteousness. "And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies." Your body, not just your spirit and your heart, but He will help you do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did, so that your body becomes the living will of God on this earth. One more, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ." Count yourself, reckon yourself, consider yourself dead to sin.

So, when you're going in the direction you don't want to go, you can stop as a follower of Jesus, not necessarily control yourself, because your will isn't strong enough, but you can stop, and you can say like Paul, "This isn't even me." That word, that action, that behavior, that response, that's not even me. That sin that's living in the members of my body, it's been trapped there because I've been trained in the ways of the world, but I consider myself dead to that, and alive to God. Starts there, I got to acknowledge that no longer has power. It did and it's all you could do before Jesus. You did the things the world did, and you did the things the world did because that's all you could do without Jesus. But now, you can consider yourself dead to the ways of the world, alive to God, so "don't let sin reign," have the highest influence in your body, the natural things you effortlessly do, "so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin." Why?

Because you spend so long offering yourself being trained, being formed, being shaped, creating these deep ruts of your life in the ways of the world "as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves," your body, through submission and surrender, "as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness." In other words, choose to submit and surrender to the Spirit, open yourself to God, acknowledge that there are deep ruts in your life that cause you to have words and actions that aren't the things you even want to do, and ask God to help train you, retrain you, reshape you, reform you. Ask God to help you do the things that Jesus did, like prayer, and fasting, and silence, and solitude, and confession, and generosity, and service. You're like, "What do those have to do...?" Everything, because they're creating new ruts.

They are now retraining the members of your body to do things in the way that God would do them as if He Himself were living in your body, which He is. And so, this is why He says, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't "try" to be godly. Don't use your willpower to be godly. Train yourself to be godly, because you have been so deeply trained to be worldly. And your will doesn't have enough power to override your training. Your will is not stronger than the ways that you have been trained. We've been using this verse and talking about running a marathon, that's how it's using it. The same way that you can't run a marathon right now, this is going to

be so freeing for some of you. In the same way that you can't run a marathon right now, some of you can't not be anxious right now. You don't want to do it, you've tried everything, you know how to do it, your will isn't to be anxious, but you've been so deeply trained in the ways of the world to be anxious that you can't not be anxious the same way that you can't run a marathon right now.

Some of you, in the same way that you can't sit down and play Beethoven on a piano right now, you can't not be angry. It's been so deeply formed and shaped in you, when you hit those junctures, it just takes over, and you feel ashamed, and disappointed in yourself, and terrible, and you have to make it right with everybody, but it just keeps happening because you've been so deeply trained in that. Some of us, in the same way that we can't bench press our own body weight, physical training, we can't not be controlling. And if you would see that and acknowledge it, it's incredibly freeing that the parts of my body have been trained in sin, and I'm included in Christ, but there's this residue, there's this leftover new training that has to take place. Just think about it with me for a second, think of how your hands have been trained in this world to take instead of give.

Think of how your tongue has been trained to curse instead of bless. Think of how your eyes have been trained to lust and covet instead of look with compassion and love. Think of how your ears have been trained to listen to gossip, and slander, and division instead of the voice of God. Think of how your mind has been trained to complain, to criticize, to judge, to look at what's wrong instead of being trained to focus on what is good, and true, and right. Think about how your feet have been trained to run away from God instead of running the race with perseverance that's been marked out for you. Think of how your heart has been trained to hunger and thirst for the things of this world instead of being trained to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Think of how your feelings have been trained to feel condemnation, and shame, and apathy instead of being trained to feel peace, and joy, and passion.

Think of how your heart has been trained to be wicked, and deceitful, and selfish instead of being trained to be honest, and humble, and servant-hearted, and vulnerable. You see, if you can catch this, it creates tremendous compassion for the people in our life because when we say to them, "Stop doing this! Why are you always doing this? Or why can't you ever do this?" Literally, some of them, they can't. The ruts are so deep that their heart is towards God, and they want to, but they actually can't. It gives us so much compassion for others and so much compassion for ourselves. When, all of a sudden, I realize there are these ruts that I don't want to take, but I can't not take them because they're so deep and it's not even me, it's the sin living in the parts of my body that's been trained. So, I got to consider myself dead to sin and alive to God.

And you say if I do the things I don't want to do and don't do the things I do do, do I just abdicate then? That's just who I am, there's no responsibility? No, no, no, no, no. What He's saying is, you take responsibility to acknowledge that reality, confess it before God, and then

start a new training program, a new training program to be godly. And we wake up one day and we realize, I don't have to do this, but I can't not do it right now because I don't have the willpower to override my training, but I can train differently, and I can train to be godly, and I can train to go in a different way. And then, you start realizing, this says, "Train yourself to be godly," not "train yourself so that you're not worldly." Big difference. A lot of us end up with a vision for our lives that's in reaction to who we don't want to be. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be like my dad. I don't want to be like my mom. I don't want to be like those people. Listen to me, if you have a vision for your life that's who you don't want to be because you're afraid of becoming that, just understand, fear attracts that which it's afraid of.

So, the moment my life is, "I'm training so I won't be worldly," or won't be like my mom, or won't be like my dad, it literally is attracting that thing into your life. as opposed to having a faith of who I do want to be because faith attracts that which it hopes for. And we don't just try to weed the bad things in our life, we've got to plant the good things in our life, seeds of righteousness, and they will grow, and eventually overshadow and choke out the old ways of life as we build new ruts to take us in new ways. Train yourself to be godly, but you've got to first decide that you want to be godly, which means I have to first decide that I want to be a disciple of Jesus. If I actually want to change, I have to first decide that I want to become something, that I want to be godly. And so when Jesus says, "Come, follow me, and I will make you," I have to choose to respond to the invitation.

I have to choose to respond that He initiates, that we don't choose Him, He chooses us, that He comes to us, and He invites me to come and follow Him, a disciple. We asked that question last week. Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? You say what is a disciple again? It's a learner, a student, a follower, one who becomes like the one that they're following. A disciple is someone who has considered their life, and counted the cost and realized Jesus' way is better. And I want to learn to think like, and talk like, and act like, and live like, and believe like Jesus. A disciple is someone who has arranged and rearranges their life around Him, orders and reorders their life around Him. They have an intent to obey, an intent to follow, and they're not perfect. They make tons of mistakes, but when they do, they're quick to repent, and they believe when Jesus says, "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." they believe that is what is good, and true, and right.

And being a disciple isn't this religious activity or exercise, it's someone who is literally saying, "Jesus teach me how to live in your kingdom with you because I'm tired of these old ruts in my life, and you said they're broken, but I need to create new ruts with you." This is why Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." A disciple is a student who is training and being trained to become like Jesus. So, last week, I asked you the question, who are you a disciple of? Who are you doing the things that they did so you can do the things that they did? Whose thoughts are you thinking? Whose words are you speaking? Whose actions are you imitating? Whose way are you walking in? Whose truths are you trying to believe?

And maybe a better way of saying-- because that can feel defeated and I do the things I don't want to do and the things I want to do, I don't do. Maybe here's a better way of saying it, whose thoughts are you training to think? Whose words are you training to speak? Whose actions are you training to imitate? And whose truths are you training to believe? And whose way are you training to walk in? Have you decided, I want to be a disciple of Jesus, and I want my body to be formed in a way that naturally and effortlessly takes me in His way? You see, here's how you know, in a sense, a different way of thinking about, am I a disciple? When you come here, do you listen like a disciple or do you listen like the crowd? Do you listen like a disciple or do you listen like the crowd? You say what does that mean? Let me tell you, you look through Scripture, and all the stuff and people like, here's how the crowd listens. The crowd sits there and thinks, "Man, this is a great message for my wife. I really hope she's listening today because she got some ruts that she needs to deal with."

The crowd sits there and thinks, "Man, this is a great message for my husband. I wish he was here today. I'm going to send him the link." The crowd thinks, "I hope that person in my Circle shows up today and that they're listening because I can't wait to get the Circle to be like, 'Did you hear it?'" That's how the crowd listens. The crowd listens to deflect, to defend, to argue, to disagree with an edge of criticism and evaluation. The crowd listens thinking, "How is this going to help my business? How is this going to help me as a coach? How is this going to help me in the classroom? How is this going to help me in my family?" But a disciple listens saying, "Jesus is speaking to me. To me." And there's nothing wrong with hoping someone else in your life hears it, and there's nothing wrong with wrestling through the content, and there's nothing wrong with using it for the good that God wants to do through your life, but you got to listen to it as a disciple first.

That's why He says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus says, "Why do you worry about the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye when you have a plank in your eye all along? You hypocrite. Deal with the plank in your eye then you can help take the speck out of their eye." In other words, do you have ears to hear first as a disciple? Because I will never change if I don't first listen as a disciple. You see, when we look at Jesus's 12 disciples, once they had decided to be disciples, and once they had started following Him, and were listening like a disciple, we see tremendous change. You read the Gospels and you see these guys, they were a disaster. They had done the things the world had done for so long that even while they're walking with Jesus, they naturally and effortlessly do the things the world does because they've been so deeply trained and formed. Sin had been trapped in the members of their body. They had been shaped in such a way that when they got to those junctures, they couldn't help but take the rut.

But then you look at Peter, and you see that he's edgy, and harsh, and arrogant, and prideful, but as he walks with Jesus, Jesus trains him and creates new ruts so he becomes peaceful, and kind and stable. We see John, and he's angry, and he's full of vengeance, and wrath, and

hostility, but we watch as Jesus trains him to become loving, and kind and peaceful. We see Matthew. Matthew loved money, he was selfish, and he spent his life taking advantage of people, but we watch as Jesus trains him to be free from the love of money, to be generous, and to love others. We see Simon the Zealot, a guy with a rebellious spirit who wants to come against everyone and everything, but Jesus trains him to be submissive and surrendered. We see Thomas, so full of doubt, but Jesus trains him to be a man of faith. And what we discover is that change is not only possible, it's normative.

It's not only possible, it's normative. It is actually the way of following Jesus and what actually happens in our life. You see, so many of us, we get so lost in salvation, and I've been trying to put this in this series for you that salvation is not just the forgiveness of your sins and heaven when you die, it's so much more than that. And we forget that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. We forget that we have been saved, this is the one we think about the most. You have been saved by grace through faith. Forgiven, set free, included in Christ, a beloved son, your past has been taken care of, your future is secured once and for all. You have been saved. And one day, you will be saved. One day, Jesus will return and He will make all things new. And He will save you from the sin, and the violence, and the injustice, and every dark, and broken, and vile thing in the world around you.

But right now, we are in the process of being saved. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it's the power of God." "Being saved," I thought I was saved? Yes, but you're being saved. You say, "Saved from what?" Saved means to heal, to make whole, to set free, to deliver. You are being saved right now from wrong motives, and ungodly beliefs, and the old sin patterns that have been built into your life. The sin that's been trapped in the members of your body that causes you to do and say the things that you don't want to do. You're being saved from the lust of the eyes, the cravings of the flesh, and the pride of life. You're being saved from your false self, from living the way that you want to live. And if we make salvation some eschatological event that in some future moment, my past is taken care of, we've completely missed the point of salvation.

If salvation is this end-times, some event in the future will pay for my past, and all will be well, and I can go back and live my life, that's a religious fairy tale. That's not salvation. God wants to save you in the here and the now from all of the things that have taken place in your life so that you can be free and naturally and effortlessly do the things that He does. This is why He says, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose." Work out, walk out your salvation, you have been, you will be, but you are being saved. And so, now what is my responsibility? How now shall I live? What shall I do believing that I have changed and can continue to change? I have to have an awe, a wonder, an urgency, and know that God is working in me to will and act according to His purpose.

In other words, if you want to change, you can't do it without God and He won't do it without you. If you're waiting for the lightning bolt, you're going to wait a long time, because God says there's a responsibility on you to change, but you can't do it without Him. Just like you couldn't raise yourself from the dead, you can't actually get rid of the ruts in your life in your own strength, in your own power. We have to submit, and surrender, and allow Jesus to retrain our eyes, and our hands, and our feet, and our mind, and our lips, and our tongue, and all of it in the way of Jesus. Are you with me on this? Okay. Hang with me for this and let me try to put it all together. Dallas Willard, the great theologian, has helped me tremendously understand this, and he has such a profound grasp on it. And he says that if you ever want to know how people change, there are three components.

He calls it VIM – vision, intent, and means. That if people want to actually change, you have to have vision, you have to have intent, and you have to have means. You say what does that mean? Well, if I want to change in any area of my life, I have to have a vision. I have to see what can be in the midst of what is. I have to have a preferred future. I have to have an alternative reality. I have to see something that's really good, and really captivating, and grabs a hold of me. Then, I actually have intent. I have to be determined. I have to be focused. I have to, I have to be eager, and earnest, fully committed. Regardless of the cost, it's like I intend to become that no matter what it takes of me, but then, I need means. I need next steps, and opportunities, and education, and training, and teaching, pathways to be able to move forward. And he uses this great analogy and he says, why is it that almost every other country in the world, everyone is trying to learn English as a second language?

Just about every other country in the world, everybody speaks their language, but they want to learn English as a second language. Why? Because they have a vision for it. They realize that if they can learn English, it will give them opportunity, success, prosperity, it will bless their family, it will open up a whole new reality, so they intend to do it. They become deeply devoted, and committed, and eager and earnest to see that reality come to pass. So, then they find means like Duolingo, and going to English-speaking cafes, and watching English programming, and trying to find people that speak English to teach them. And they put all this effort into it and it's amazing how they actually learn to do it. And then, he says why is it that Americans don't learn to speak any other language as a second language? Why is it that we, as a people, have no interest in learning Arabic or Japanese?

Because you don't have a vision for it, you don't see how it will make your life better, it's not a preferred future, it seems it won't increase your opportunities, your success, your prosperity and your life, so you don't intend to do it. You have no actually intention to go and do it. So, it doesn't matter that the means are as plethora as they have ever been in all of human history to learn another language. We have no interest in doing it because we don't have the intent or the vision. Okay. Could it just be that the reason a lot of us don't experience change in our walk with Jesus is because we don't have a vision to be His disciple and to live in His kingdom? Therefore, we never intend to actually do it, become determined, eager, earnest, committed

regardless of the cost. So, it doesn't matter that there are so many means available to become that kind of person because we don't have a vision for it nor do we have the intent.

I mean, I want you to think about our church. Do you know how much vision and means there are? Do you realize that my primary gifting as a communicator is vision? Vision, movement, life, here's who you can be, here's what God says, here's what's in front of you, here's a preferred future, there is vision upon vision upon vision. And means, there are so many means. Get in a Circle, join a team, come to Tuesday Night Prayer, Serve the City, ValleyCreek+, the Reading Plan, worship music that we create, weekend experiences, all the things. There's vision and there's means, the question is, is there intent? And what I've learned over the years is I have no ability to move your intent, nor does anyone else, because your intent is in your body that God has given you rule and reign over, and you get to decide what you intend to do. And when we use the word intent, I'm not talking about a New Year's resolution like, "I intended to get healthy this year, I just haven't got around to it."

Or, "I intended to get the groceries on the way home, but I just didn't really want to do it." Intent is eagerness, earnestness, devotion, commitment with all my heart and here's the problem. This will be so helpful for some of you, when you don't have a vision to become, and you have no intent to really pursue it, you will become critical of the means. This is American Christianity. We don't have a vision to live life in the kingdom. We have no intent to do it. So, what do we do? We complain about the means because we're not changing, and so it's got to be someone else's fault. Why do we do Circles? Can't we do Bible studies? And why do we do the student ministry with these MVMNT nights and Circle things? When I was a kid, we did youth group and that was great. Why can't we do that? And why do we do these songs? Why can't we do the hymns? Those were my favorite back in the day. And why are we doing this Different Way series again? I don't know. John just seems a little off. It's not my favorite series. There's got to be something else.

And reading through the New Testament again, didn't we just do that last year? Why on earth would I reread that this year? At least give us the Old Testament. The problem is not the means. When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. So, you can complain about the means all day long in any area of your life, it's not the means, there are more means available to do anything you want to do in human history, more than any other time in human history, anything. From play the piano, to learn Arabic, to become a person who lives in the kingdom of God, it's all there. And listen, I'm in a season where I have kids, teenagers that are in sports, in theater, in school, and I watch – this isn't just spiritual – I watch teachers, and coaches, and directors cast great vision, and have amazing means. "This is who you can be and what we can do," and, "This is how we will do it if you will come!"

And I watch them pour themselves out, and what they can't do is they can't move the intent of the student. And we sit there and we say things like, "Man, that student could be..." "Boy, if they care just a little bit, do you know how good they would be at this?" It's intent. It's intent.

So, here's the question, do you have intent? And you will never have intent if you don't have a compelling vision. And I've thought long and hard about this, and I'm convinced that change is really so simple that it comes down to humility and hunger. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." You will become filled with whatever you are the most hungry and thirsty for. Why? Because you have a vision for it so you intend to do it and you'll find the means.

What are you hungry and thirsty for? What's the vision that's captivated your life and the intent that you are pouring yourself out and pursuing? This is why it doesn't matter how many times I stand up here, for some people, we can talk about things like-- and if you're going to follow Jesus, you're going to have to change your schedule, and you're going to have to learn to live free from the love of money, and you're going to have to find time to prioritize God, and you're going to have to learn to walk in some different ways. And we can say those things over and over and over again, but if you don't have a vision to become that kind of person, which is why I ask you all the time, who are you becoming? You realize, some of you, ting, light bulb. Why do you ask us all the time who we're becoming? Who do I want to become? Because what I'm asking you is what's the vision of your life? Because that's what you are intending to pursue.

So, if I say the vision for my life is to be a follower of Jesus, but there's no intent to pursue it, it's not my vision. It's what I say my vision is, but my vision is whatever I actually have intent to do. So, for a lot of us, our vision is actually the path of least resistance, because that's what we intend to do and we can see that by the means that we go after in our life. So much more to say about this, I kind of want to, but I actually have to leave it here. Do you believe that you can change? And if so, how do you change? And do you have a vision to become the kind of person that God says He created you to be? And is there an intent within you to pursue that?

My hope in trying to help you realize that you have been trained in the ways of the world helps open up your eyes to, if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I got to actually do the things that Jesus did because all I do are the things the world does because I spent so much of my life doing what the world has done. And so, our practice takeaway for this week that we've been-- just one more prayer again, Jesus, help me intend to change. Jesus, help me have the intent to actually become who you say I can become because there are so many means. Just for one more time for some of you, it's why literally, when we say things like, "Hey, you could get in a Circle! Hey, you could come to Students! Hey, you could come to Tuesday Night Prayer! Hey, you could come to Serve the City!" you know what you hear? "Womp, womp, womp, womp." And it's totally okay, I'm just helping you try to connect the dots because there's no intent.

The person who has intent hungers, and thirsts, and it doesn't mean they do everything, they ask God for wisdom on what means to take advantage of so they can become the kind of person they long to be. But the problem, hear me, is not the means, and it's not really the vision. "Come follow me, I will make you fishers of men." It's intent. And so, this week, maybe take some time to think about, can you change? How do you change? What ruts have been so

deeply formed in your body that you naturally and effortlessly do the things you don't want to do and don't do the things that you do want to do? And then, ask yourself, spend some time with the Lord, Jesus, help me have an intent to change. So, Jesus, thank You that You change us.

Thank You that You fill us with righteousness when we hunger and thirst. Holy Spirit, I know that was a lot, and I did my best, broken attempt to try to explain some of the deep profound things that You do in our lives to set us free. And so, Holy Spirit, would You just speak to us as we go throughout this week? I pray that when we hit some of those ruts and routines, You'll show us and say, "That's one right there." And that we wouldn't condemn ourselves or be defeated in ourselves, but that we would consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, and it's going to open up a new place for us to be trained so that our body, our life would become literally the living will of God on this earth.

Lord, I pray that You would continue to just lay bare our souls, and help us be honest and authentic about what we actually have intent to do. Jesus, may You keep inviting us into Your kingdom, casting the greatest vision that was ever cast, man living with God in an everlasting eternal kingdom that is good, and true, and right. May we repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. May we take a different way, in Jesus' name, Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



FEBRUARY 11, 2024

SEASON ONE, EPISODE FOUR

“HOW DO I CHANGE?”

All right, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad that you're here with us today. And we are in a series called A Different Way. And before we jump in, I just want to start by celebrating you. I want to celebrate you for the way that you've been listening over these last few weeks, the way that you've been open, the way that you've been wrestling, the way that you've been thinking and contemplating and reflecting on what God is saying and what God is doing. We've been getting incredibly consistent feedback from all our Circles and our serve teams of how God is moving in this season and in this series. And so, all I'm trying to do at the beginning of this series is lay a foundation, cast a really big vision, try to lift up your head a little bit, and then speak to the deep things inside of you. Because you were created for more.

You see, the first week we started this whole thing and we just said that Jesus invites us to a different way, that we don't have to live like everybody else. We don't have to live a life of stress and worry and anxiety and hustle. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Come and let me teach you how to do your life." And then the second week. Then we talked about how God invites us to come and be His disciple, a learner, a student, a follower, one who becomes like the one that they're following. Jesus invites us to come and arrange our life around Him and He will teach us how to live in the kingdom. He will teach us how to live our lives. And then last week, we talked about change. And we said it's actually possible to change. Not only is it possible, it's actually normative. And yet if we're honest, we have been deeply shaped and formed and molded by sin in our lives. So, we have these deep ruts, these deep patterns, and we find ourselves often doing the things that we don't want to do and not doing the things that we do want to do because of these ruts that have been created in our life.

And I spent all week sharing that with you last week and studying on it. And then this week, I fell into one of my ruts and finding myself not doing what I want to do and doing what I don't want to do and watching as the sin patterns of my life hurt the people that I love that are around me. Sin always steals, kills, and destroys. And it can be incredibly defeating when you find yourself in one of those ruts. And then you have to stop and remind yourself there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He's broken the power of sin off my life and He's training me to go in a different direction. He is inviting me to a different way where I become one who does the things that He does. And we said that if we're going to change, Dallas Willard, the great theologian, gives us this great little acronym, that if people have changed, they have vision and intent and means.

That if you're going to change in life, this is how people change. They have vision, they have intent, they have means. They have vision. They see an alternative future. They see what can be in the midst of what is. They see what must be in the midst of what is. And then when that vision captures their heart, they have intent, eagerness, earnestness, determination, all their heart, they're set on it. And then they will find means, next steps, pathways, education, training, opportunities. But that's how people change. And he gives us this great example and says, why does almost every other country in the world learn English as a second language?

Well, it's because they have a vision for it. They have a vision that if I learn English as a second language, it's going to bring me prosperity and success and blessing and opportunity, so I intend to do it. I'm eager, I'm earnest, I'm determined with all that I've got. So, I will find the means, like Duolingo and English-speaking cafes and English programming, and I will change.

And yet he says, why then is it that Americans, we don't, almost none of us, learn any language as a second language? Like, why haven't you learned Arabic or Japanese in your life? Because you don't have a vision for it. It's of no value to you. You don't see how it's going to make your life any better, so you never intend to actually go and do it. And it doesn't matter that there are more means available to you right now to learn Japanese or Arabic than have ever been in human history. So, could it be the reason a lot of us never spiritually change is because we don't actually have a vision to be a disciple of Jesus, and live in His kingdom. So, then I never actually intend to do it, and it doesn't matter what kind of means are available to me, I don't have a vision nor intent, so I'm not interested in the means. There is all kinds of vision that is cast for you and all kinds of means that are available to you. The question is, is do you have intent?

And no one can do anything about your intent but you. And the reason it's so important to have a vision and then to have intent is because then your life is not led by your feelings. If you find yourself saying all kinds of, all the time, I didn't feel like doing it, then just be clear, you don't have intent, which means you don't have a vision. Because feelings don't matter when I have intent, when I'm captivated by a vision. And if I don't have vision or intent, eventually I'll start to complain about the means. And that's what I shared with you last week; what happens to so many people in churches is because they don't have vision or intent to live in the kingdom, they start to complain and criticize the means, the methods, the things that are available. So, the next time you find yourself complaining or someone else is complaining to you, stop and ask yourself the question, are they actually growing right now? Because maybe the reason they're complaining about the means is because they don't have intent or vision.

And what the church organizationally does in that dysfunctional scenario is we just keep adding means upon means upon means upon means, convinced that if we just give enough means, eventually it will move your intent and you will have a vision. The only problem is when we stockpile all the means, there are so many activities available, we get so overwhelmed we don't even know which one to do. Or we start doing all of them and we become so busy doing the activities of God that we don't actually become like God. Okay, neither of those are good. And what I've learned over time is that the people that actually change are people that have humility and hunger, which is why Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." You will always eventually be filled with whatever you are the most hungry for, okay? That's where we got to last week and left it off. And what I want to do is I want to keep taking this conversation further with you and I want to give you a model for how people actually change. Like once I have vision, once I have intent, once I start pursuing means, how is it that I actually start changing?

And after doing this for a couple decades, reading the Scriptures a ton, studying, thinking about this a lot, a working theory, a working method for how people change, I think it's something as simple as this. If you're actually going to change and be formed, you've got a vision, you've got intent, you're pursuing means, this is you and it all starts with the Holy Spirit. You don't change yourself, the Holy Spirit changes you. Just like you can't save yourself, you can't change yourself. It's the Holy Spirit's work in our lives through two things. Its encounters and His daily activities. See, we change when we have encounters with God. See it all over Scripture. Moses has an encounter with God at the burning bush, his entire life changed. Jacob wrestled with God all night, his entire identity changed. Paul had an encounter with God on the road, his entire reality changed. The lepers encountered God. The woman at the well encountered God. The woman caught in adultery encountered God. And their lives changed.

One word, one moment, one experience, one encounter, one breath, one visitation from God can completely change your life. The Holy Spirit changes us through encounters, but also His daily activity. See, Jesus says to the disciples, "It's for your good that I go, because if I go, the Holy Spirit will come." And you are now the temple of the Holy Spirit and He resides inside of you. And every day, the Holy Spirit is active in shaping and forming and molding you. He convicts you of sin when you're on the wrong track. He guides you in truth when you need to know where to go. He points you towards Jesus. The Holy Spirit is constantly at work in your daily life, forming you into the image of Jesus. In fact, it says, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious." The acts of the flesh, your life without God, this is the best you can do.

"Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, and envy." That's the best you can do on your own. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." When the Holy Spirit is at work in my life, this is what He is producing and this is what He is forming in me. That's why Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. But apart from Me, you can do nothing." Which is why Paul says, "Don't grieve or quench the Holy Spirit." Be open and hungry and thirsty and let Him work. We change by the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

And then, as the Holy Spirit starts moving, He starts moving through God's Word. God's Word. God says, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge." We don't have knowledge about how the kingdom actually works, so we get destroyed. And you know this is true in your life. You need knowledge to find the way. You have to have knowledge to change a flat tire. You have to have knowledge to prepare a healthy meal. You have to have knowledge to file your taxes. And without knowledge, there is a destruction, which is why Jesus says, "You will know the truth. And the truth will set you free." He says, "My Word is designed to free you from the bondages that you don't even know you have."

Think about how God's Word talks about God's Word. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." "God's Word is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating soul and spirit, joint and marrow." "He sent His Word and healed them." "My Word is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path." "The words I speak to you are spirit and they are life." "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." "Change your mind, the truth has come." This is why this verse says, "All Scripture" – God's Word – "is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training" – the word we've been using – "in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every work." What a verse to sit on and meditate on. That God's Word is His breath, training us to become who He has created and called us to be. This is why we need God's Word in our life, through Scripture, through Bible reading, through study, and through preaching. This is why we have such a high view of preaching because preaching is God's Word declared over your life to shape and form you. Just like Ezekiel preached to Moses and prophesied to the dry bones.

When God's Word, like right now, is being spoken over your life, dead things are coming to life. Things within you are awakening. Dreams are being released. Destinies are being released. Revelation is being given. Movement is happening. Healing is taking place. And the best thing that happens is seeds get planted in your heart and they begin to grow, night and day, whether you're asleep or you're awake. You don't even know how, but it starts to change you from the inside out. How are we ever going to become like God if we don't first learn to think like God?

So, am I open to His changing Word? Then the Holy Spirit starts to work in our lives through godly relationships. And notice it doesn't say friendships, acquaintances, community. This isn't the girls' night out girls. This isn't fishing buddies. This isn't that student that I think is cool and I want to be around. This is another disciple of Jesus in my life. Another person who knows what a disciple is and has decided to be one. I need at least two or three of those directly involved in my life where they're saying, "We're going to do this thing together." Think of elite athletes. No elite athlete ever trains alone. They know they need other elite athletes in their life to push them to be their best. Come on, think about what the Bible says. "Confess your sins to one another and pray for each other that you might be healed." "Spur one another on towards love and good deeds." "Encourage one another." "Forgive one another." "Build up one another." "Strengthen one another." There are so many "one another's" in the Bible. Who are the one another's in your life? "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Who are the other elite athletes that you're training with to become who you say you want to become?

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will" – not, "I will;" not, "you will" – "We will in all things grow, change up into Him who is the head that is Christ from Him, the whole body connected, joined and held together by every supporting relationship grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work." Like, I can't become who I'm called to be without you. I need another disciple or two in my life that is helping form and shape and mold me. So, my

question for you is this. Is there anybody in your life that you can confess sin to? And when was the last time you did it? Is there anybody that will love you enough to forgive you when you mess up and point you towards Jesus? Have you built any relationships where you spur one another on towards love and good deeds? Because you become like who you hang around.

So, the Holy Spirit works through godly relationships and then through trials – hardships, grief, suffering. This is the one we probably like the least. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." It says trials help us become mature and complete. Trials, like that marriage that falls apart, like that broken relationship, like that sickness in your body, like the lost job, like the financial hardships, like the, like the wayward trial. Yeah, those things are the things, when we're surrendered to God, that He uses to make us mature and complete.

Remember, God tests you to strengthen you. Satan tempts you to break you. And there's a big difference. God is not tempting you in your trial. He's testing you to remove the things in you that aren't supposed to be there. And this is why He says, "Consider it pure joy." How? Joy is a pervasive sense of well-being. And if I have a vision and intent to become who God has called me to be, then when trials show up in my life, I can actually have joy because I know they are part of the means of what God is using to help me become who He has called me to be. Or how about, "In this you greatly rejoice" – there it is again – "though for now" – for a little while – "you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials, these have come" – why are they here? – "so that your faith of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire may be proved genuine." He says, "Rejoice because the trials are refining you."

See what trials do in our lives is they break us. They break us open. They humble us. And they bring us to this place of submitting and surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus, like a big storm that comes in and it unearths everything that was really there. All the things that we didn't even think were inside of us, they get exposed, they get laid bare, and God invites us to surrender them to Him. And trials remind us of what's really important in this life, and what really matters. In fact, this is why it says that famous verse that we know, that "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him..." Listen, you wouldn't have to say God is working for the good if you thought it was good. So, it immediately implies trials, suffering, grief. "...who have been called according to His purposes." We like that verse. It's on your pillow and your knick-knacks and your frames. But the next verse tells us why. "For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son."

Those trials have come and they're good because your destiny is to be shaped into the image and the likeness of Jesus. Are you open to what God wants to do in your life, in trials? And then there's the spiritual practices that form and shape us. These are the things we've been talking about. Training, habits, this is: we can't do it without God. But He won't do it without us.

This is why we have verses like this. "Since you have taken off your old self with its practices" – the way you used to live in the world – "and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." We actually have a responsibility to partner with what God is doing in our life, how He is changing us. That's the practices, the disciplines. That's primarily what this series is about, and then time. Maybe we like this one even less than trials.

In our instant, immediate, convenient, overactive, under-meaning lives, we don't like time. We want it now. We want it instant. We want it yesterday. But that's not how it works. It's a process. "Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we don't give up." Most of Jesus' teachings on the kingdom revolve around agriculture. Plants, trees, seeds. What do those things take to grow? Time. And if you're going to change, it's going to take time. This is a working theory for a big word: spiritual formation. How God actually forms you into the image and likeness of Jesus. But it's not just the image and likeness of Jesus. See, this is how people change. And if you have time, you should think through this later on your own in every area of your life that you're a part of. How do people actually change?

But just let me invert one for you. The spirit of the world, the spirit of the world has a plan and a destiny for your life. And what does he start with? Teaching. God's Word could be teaching. Indoctrination, ideas, images, media, lies. Lies deceived as truth. Or, what would be the word? Hidden, covered. I don't know. Disguised, thank you very much. Disguised, that's the word I was going for. Disguised as truth. Community. Finding other people that are moving in the direction of the world. You become like who you hang out with. That's why who you hang out with really matters. The spirit of the world wants to use the trials to get you to pick up ungodly beliefs, to be offended at God, to question His goodness and His love and make you become bitter and hard-hearted. He then wants to cause you to start practicing, training, picking up habits of the world. Enjoying the temporary pleasures of sin.

And then over time, he has shaped and molded you into the image and likeness of the world. This is spiritual formation. And everybody gets one. Whether you want it or not. Hitler had one. Mother Teresa had one. Osama Bin Laden, the Pope, your mom, your boss, and you. The only question is, is it intentional spiritual formation or unintentional spiritual formation? Because you are being shaped and molded into a kind of person. Is it the kind of person you want to be? And I get it. Spiritual formation, big word, not a word we use a lot around here. Let me just define it for you. Spiritual formation is the process of being formed into the image of Christ to become a person of love. Spiritual formation, which was that graphic I was showing you, it's a process. It's not an event.

It's not a one-time moment or an experience. It's a journey. It's an ongoing lifestyle and it is not linear up and to the right. There are good days and bad days. There are moving forwards and moving backwards. There is up and there is down. There is failure and there is victories. It is a

process of being formed. Notice, it doesn't say that you form yourself, because I can't form myself. I'm being formed, which means I don't have control. But I have to partner with God. He won't do it without me. I can't do it without Him. So, I'm the clay and I put myself on the potter's wheel, I'm the gold and I put myself in the refiner's fire, I'm the garden and I open up the gate and ask the Master Gardener to come in and work the soil. I am being formed, but I work with God in that process into the image of Christ. He is the prototype, the standard, the source of humanity of who we were created and called to be and ultimately to become a person of love.

That's the end result. A person that knows and relies on the love of God. A person who has good will towards God and towards others. A person who actually starts to live like, think like, act like, and believe like Jesus. That's spiritual formation. And you have one, whether you realize it or not. You've already had one. The question is now, what kind of one do you want going forward? Because you've been formed by the spirit of the world and by the Holy Spirit in different ways. What do you want to be as you go forward? Which is why we keep using this verse, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't try to be godly. Don't wait for God just to zap you and make you godly. Don't just will yourself to godliness. Don't train to be worldly. Train yourself to be godly.

And he uses the example of physical training and we've been talking about this in this series, that we all inherently know, I can't just run out and play for the Cowboys. I can't just put on a helmet and a jersey and run out there. If I really want to do that, I've got to train. I've got to practice. I've got to build habits. I've got to totally have a different, have a different routine. I've got to do all the things that professional athletes do. If I want to play Mozart, I can't just sit down and play at the piano. I've got to back up and practice every day, scales and chords and charts for long periods of time to be able to do that. If I want to speak Mandarin and just go to Beijing and drop in and fluently talk to people, that's illogical, and we all know it is. But I can do Duolingo and practice and learn and read and study. If I want to run a marathon, we all know we can't just run out of here and go run a marathon. But you can get sneakers and walk to the mailbox, the next day around the block, and the day after that, a mile, and so on and so forth and build up. We all get it in all the other areas of life, but for some reason when it gets to godliness, that logic goes out the window.

No longer do we think we need to train. We just think we become. I'm here. Poof, yes. Let me give you an alternative way of trying to understand this. Think of the area that we live in and how parents are very focused on having a training plan for their children to become who they want their children to be. The area we live in, there are lots of people who want to train their children to be great athletes. They're not just trying, they're not just willing, they're not just hoping. They actually have a plan. We're going to join this team and make this select and get on this travel squad and get this coach and this trainer and go to this gym and practice here and do there, it's a very clear plan. Why? Because they have such a vision and an intent to have

their kid be a great athlete. There's a lot of families that want to train their kid to be a great musician.

It's not arbitrary. They have a plan. We're going to be a part of this studio and have this teacher and be a part of this band and go to live in this school district so we can be a part of that one because that guy is the best director. And we're going to go to this practice and this training. There's a lot of families that want to train their kids to be educated. It's not arbitrary. You're going to go to this school, we're going to take these classes. You're going to get this tutor. You're going to go to this prep thing. You're going to take this study class. You're going to read these books. It's not arbitrary. Fair?

Okay. So, now if you ask those same families what their plan is to train their child to be godly, what's the answer? Let me ask you this. If you're a parent in this room, what's your plan to train your child to be godly? Do you have one? Have you ever thought about it? And if the answer is, "Well, we come to church one hour a week on the weeks that we're available," that would be like saying I'm trying to help my son be a professional golfer and I take him to the golf course one hour a week on the weeks that I'm available.

We all know that's absurd and doesn't work. And we've been called by God to train our children in the way they should go. So, what's your plan? And if you're sitting here and you're like, "I don't know. What should my plan be?" You know why you don't have a plan? Because you probably don't have a plan to train yourself to be godly. The greatest plan to train your child to be godly is to have a plan to train yourself to be godly. You are the greatest vision and means your child will ever see. Vision, you can't become what you haven't seen. Means, we need someone else to show us the way. And when I choose to train myself to be godly, I am now a vision for my kids to see and I can say, "Come follow me as I follow Christ."

I can't move their intent, but I can certainly cast a compelling vision and means by my life. This is why it says, "Remember your leaders consider the way of their life and imitate their faith." Just so you know, your kids are considering your way of life and imitating your faith, or lack thereof, whether you realize it or not. And I get it. I want my kids to be great at the other things that God has created and called them to do, too. But I want them to be godly more than anything else. I want them to live in the kingdom and I want them to be disciples, which means I have to train to live in the kingdom and I have to train to be a disciple, because I can't take them where I haven't gone.

I get it. Those other things, he says, have value. There's some really good value in the sports and the education and the music, all the things. But godliness has greater value because what good is it for your kid to gain the whole world and lose their soul? What good is it for you to gain the whole world and lose your soul? It's amazing how anytime I talk about the next generation, the whole room is like, "Yeah!" I want to be like, "But you, man. But you." Who cares if you make that money, get that job, accomplish that thing, win that trophy and have a

darkened, blackened, distorted, broken soul? At some point in time, I have to acknowledge I'm being formed and shaped either by the spirit of the world or by the Holy Spirit, and I get to choose which one I really want to go towards.

At some point in time, you have to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his purpose." Like I can't do it without God, but He won't do it without me. And if I've really been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light, I've got to work that salvation out. Like, I got to walk it out. It's got to kind of now mean something and my life should probably be different.

And there should be some fear and some trembling and some awe and some wonder and some gravity and some urgency and really thinking through, "What does my life look like in regards to this salvation that I now claim that I've experienced?" Because it should be different than the world around me. And God is working in me to help me become who He has created and called me to be. And this is where the spiritual practices come in. This is where spiritual disciplines come in. Are you still with me on this? A discipline is simply doing what I can do now so I can do what I want to do later. It's doing what I can do now so I can do what I want to later. For example, I can't play Mozart. But if I have a vision for it and an intent and I really want to do it, then I can back up here and every day for the next two years, I can practice 15 minutes of piano. And discipline will allow me to do what I can do now, eventually I'll be able to do what I can't do or what I want to do later.

If I can't run a marathon right now, I can't do it. But what I can do is every day, go for a walk that becomes a jog, that becomes a run. I can do what I can do now, so eventually I can do what I want to do later. Okay. A spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice, is simply doing what I can do now to open myself up to God's grace, so I can do what I can't do later. That's all it is. A spiritual discipline or a practice is doing what I can do now to open myself up to God's grace. I can't change myself. But I'm the clay and I can put myself on the potter's wheel, and I'm the gold and I can put myself in the fire, and I'm the garden and I can open up the door and ask God to come in and move. I need His grace so that eventually I can be empowered to do what I want to do later.

Spiritual disciplines or spiritual practices are simply opening yourself up to God. They're submitting. They're surrendering. They're offering your body as a living sacrifice. There's nothing magic in them. What they do is they open you up to God, so God can do what He wants to do in you.

Because as humans, we have an amazing ability to be completely closed off. And the practices open us up to God's grace, so He can do what He wants to do in our lives. You see, a disciplined person is someone who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. That's all it means. A disciplined person is someone who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. A disciplined businessman is not someone who gets up at four in the

morning, works out, does all his emails, prepares for the day. A disciplined businessman is someone who can make the right decision in the middle of the day when it needs to be made.

A disciplined athlete is not an athlete who is in the gym all the time, training all the time. No, a disciplined athlete is someone who can make the play when it needs to be made. They just know I can't make that play if I don't practice a whole bunch. Okay. A disciplined Christian is not someone who does the disciplines all the time. They're someone who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Like be wise when wisdom is needed, be loving when love is needed, be joyful when joy is needed, be peaceful, forgiving when that's needed. That's a disciplined person. And if we're honest, we look at that and we're like, "I can't do that now." I know. So, we back up and we say, "But I can do this, and that's going to empower me to be able to do that later." Are you with me on this?

It's simply opening ourselves up to God's grace. Ah, we got to skip. We got to skip. We got to skip. And here's the deal. These are the practices that we're going to talk about. These are ways you can open yourself up to God so you can do what you can do now so you'll be able to do what you want to do later. The lifestyle of Jesus, so you can live the life of Jesus. And if this overwhelms you, don't worry. You don't need to do all of these. We're going to talk through them and they're tools of grace. Means of opening yourself up to God, so He can do what He is really good at, which is changing us from the inside out. I just have to open myself up to Him. And what you'll see is that there are practices of abstinence and practices of engagement. Practices where I do something and practices where I practice not doing something. And those are meant to help me because the sin in my life is either sin of commission, I do something, or sin of omission, I don't do something that I should do. And they counteract.

So, let's say you have a sin of commission, anger. You just explode with anger. You can't control it. Well, that's commission. You would need to practice practices of abstinence. Like Sabbath, and simplicity, and fasting. Let's say that your struggle is, you can't forgive someone else. A sin of omission. You're not doing what you know God has asked you to do, to forgive. What do you need to practice? Practices of engagement. Like generosity, service, celebration. Let's say your struggle is pride. You're just a really prideful person. Acknowledge that and then look at the list and you say, "How can I counteract that in my life? Well, I probably need to practice service, and confession, and repentance. And probably some simplicity or some Sabbath." And if you'll take time to think through this, it's going to make sense to you. You see, as we get started, I just want to give you these guardrails as we go through these next bunch of weeks, because this was all the foundation. And this is really simple.

Spiritual practices are not a measure of maturity, okay. This is not a measure of maturity. You doing all the practices every day, eight days a week, does not mean you're mature. The Pharisees did all kinds of religious practices and activities and yet they were broken and decrepit on the inside. They had a great external, but a really broken internal. Jesus is going for the inside out. So, it doesn't matter if you do the practices, they are not a measure of maturity.

You know what's a measure of maturity? Love and obedience. The Fruit of the Spirit. See if you can catch it like this. The point of practicing piano is not practicing piano. The point of practicing piano is to become a really good piano player. And if you can be a great piano player without practice, go for it. The point of the spiritual practices are not the spiritual practices. This is so important. The point of the spiritual practices are to help me become like Jesus.

And if I can become like Jesus without them, go for it, because they are not the measure of maturity. Second thing is spiritual practices are an invitation, not an obligation. Okay, these are all invitations. Hear me, hear me, hear me. You don't have to do any of these. Yes. None of you. I don't care if a Circle leader tells you, a staff member tells you, a serve team member tells you, your spouse tells you. If anyone tells you you have to do them, you can just say, "Hey, point back to week four, John said I don't have to do them." You do not have to do any of these. In fact, if they're obligations to you, please don't do them, because you will hurt you and everyone else around you. You're free. These are not commands. These are invitations from Jesus. He says, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and you'll find rest for your soul." So, hear me. If you're vibrant and free, and your soul is at rest, carry on.

But if your life is weary and burdened and there's unrest in your soul, Jesus invites you to a different way of living your life. Third thing is, these are not one-size-fits-all. Not everyone needs to do the same practices. You find one you like, it doesn't mean your friends or your family needs to do that same one. And you don't have to do all of them. We need God to show us which ones to do, when to do them, and how to do them. Like if you're an introvert, you probably don't need to practice silence and solitude. What do you need to practice? Community. If you're an extrovert, you do not need to practice community. You need to practice silence and solitude. Yes. If you're a thinker, you probably don't need to practice meditation. You probably need to practice prayer. And if you're a feeler, you probably don't need to practice prayer. You probably need to practice meditation. Are you catching me?

Whichever one you're the most concerned about me talking about, that's the one you need to do, because your flesh is already crying out saying, "Not that one, not that one, not that one, not that one. Uncomfortable, inconvenient, I don't feel it. Nope, nope, nope, nope. Let's be sick on that week. We're not going. Nope." That's the one you need to do. In all seriousness, whichever one on that list you're already like, checked off, that's the one. In all seriousness, that's the one, because that will be the one that actually forms you. They're done with God, not for God. We don't do these for God as some religious merit, as if He is going to like, somehow give us favor because we do it. No, no. We enter into all these practices with God to know God. To be with God. In fact, the spiritual practices aren't something we do for God. They're something He does for us. If we will enter them with Him. And then they are done in the secret place.

This isn't about you running around telling everybody, posting on social media, making sure everyone knows you're practicing the day of Sabbath. Like, if you had to post on that, it wasn't the day of Sabbath, just so you're clear, you know. Jesus says, "When you pray, when you fast, when you give, do it in secret, and your Father who sees will reward you." It doesn't mean that you can't tell family or friends or the godly relationships you're walking with to help you to grow. I'm just saying, the point is not virtue signaling where everyone else sees and is like, "Oh, you're so mature." Why? Because it's not a measure of maturity anyways. You can be the meanest, nastiest person that practices every discipline there is. Or you can be a really loving and gracious person that's learning how to walk with God.

See, what I'm trying to tell you in all this, concept of change, and disciplines and practices is, this is a lifestyle. I am not talking to you about habit-stacking, about fitting this into your already-busy life, about doing these things while you're doing something else. This is about arranging and rearranging your life around Jesus and His lifestyle. If you were actually going to train for a marathon, you couldn't habit-stack your way into it. You couldn't fit it in your already-busy life. You would have to change some things. So, if you're actually going to walk a different way, you're going to have to change some things. I'm just going to tell you right now, it'll be awkward. It'll be uncomfortable. It'll be foreign, unfamiliar. It's a little unknown. Why? Because we've been so deeply shaped to live like this world that a different way feels very out of control. It feels very uncomfortable. It will actually be hard. And you're like, "I thought the way of Jesus is easy and light?" It is easy and light, once we have learned to walk in it.

It is very hard though to go from the way you've been living your life for 50 years to now trying to do the things that Jesus did. So I have to acknowledge that and ask for grace. And we're going to practice. We're going to try. And we're going to train. And we're going to struggle. And you're going to fail. And you're going to fall. And junk inside of you that you thought you already dealt with is going to come raging back to the surface, and you're going to be like, "I thought that was gone." And God is going to be like, "Hey, we're going to do a new level." And you're not going to get defeated and you're not going to get discouraged because you realize there's thousands of other people trying to do the same thing with you. And we're going to keep our minds set on Jesus. We're going to keep gathering back. We're going to keep encouraging each other. And we're going to say there actually is a way to live a different way in this world. I can actually be someone that does the things that Jesus did so I can do the things that Jesus did. And we're going to change. But change isn't the point. And you're going to grow. But growing isn't the point. And you're going to get a better life. But the better life isn't the point. The point is that I want more of God.

The point is not the disciplines. The point is that He is my one thing. And I want to offer my body as a living sacrifice. And I want to know You, God. I want You to teach me how to live in Your kingdom. I want to be Your disciple. I want to do life with You. And I want to move deeper into Your heart and actually become a person of love. This week, last prayer that we're going to

pray like this. Just Jesus, help me be open to Your changing grace. That's what the spiritual practices and disciplines are. Presenting ourselves to changing grace, not just saving grace.

Yes, grace saves you. But grace empowers you to do what you could never do on your own. It changes you from the inside out. And the reason I've been asking you to pray these little prayers, and I'm not sure if you write it down and forget about it all week, or you don't even write it down, or you don't think about it, or you do it once. Here's all these little prayers that I've done for these four weeks have just been to try to get you to crack the door of your life, so a light beam from God can shine into some of your darkness. And as your eyes begin to see, maybe, just maybe it's going to make you hunger and thirst to open up the door even more so that His life will be your light and flood all the dark places of your life and show you what's really available to those who want to walk a different way. So, close your eyes with me. I know that was a lot. And I know in a lot of ways today that was just a foundation setter.

Just trying to bring some clarity to you of how this stuff actually works. But what do you feel like the Holy Spirit is just stirring up in you today? He is so gracious and compassionate. He will not force us to be who we don't want to be. If we want to live like the world, He will let us. But when we have a vision for a different way, He will even help us have an intent that is greater than our feelings. And He will give us the means, one next step at a time.

My sense is for some of you, it's just like, super overwhelming. Don't be overwhelmed. The Holy Spirit is showing you where we're headed and what's available for you in the future. And then He is bringing you back to what's the next step. Every journey starts with a single next step. And it might just be that prayer, Jesus, help me be open to Your changing grace. Jesus, help us believe that we can change. Help us experience the spiritual formation that turns us into people of love. And help us to consider the ways of our lives because You offer us a different way. A much better way, because Your way leads to life. In Your name we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



FEBRUARY 18, 2024

SEASON ONE REVIEW

That is the cry of the season. I surrender. I surrender all to You, Jesus. And over these past few weeks, I've been thinking that if we want more of God, we have to give God more of us.

If I want more of God, I have to give God more of myself, because it's not God who is holding out on me. He has already offered me all of Himself to be filled to the full measure of His fullness. We're told that if we will give, that we will receive. And that if we seek, we will find. And that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. And He tells us, "When you seek Me with all your heart, then you will find Me." If we want more of God, we have to give God more of us.

Because it's really easy to sing, "I surrender all," while surrendering some. And the invitation is to surrender all. So, will you, with me, for the next few moments, will you just give God more of you? If we're called to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, what if we just take a moment and give Him those things of our life? Like, can we start with just your mind? Maybe if you want more of God, could you just, say like, God, I give You my mind. I want You have my mind. I don't even know what that means, and I don't know how to do it.

And I know You won't come and take it, but I can release it to You. So, God, I give You my mind. And God, I give You my heart. The very center of who I am, my will, my choices, my decisions. God, I give You my heart. You won't come and take it, but I can release it to You. So, I choose to surrender my heart. And God, I give You my body, this body that You've given me authority over. A place where I rule and reign, and You won't come and take it, but I can offer it to You as a living sacrifice. And You will gladly receive it.

God, I offer You this body. And then, I give You my soul. The deepest part of me. The part of me, Lord, that if I'm honest, I myself don't even understand. And You won't come and take it. You won't come and force it. You won't come and steal it. You wait for me to release it. To give it. To offer it. And so can you just say, God, I give You my soul. I want to give You more of me, because I long for more of You. In this moment, I surrender.

Maybe not all, because I don't know how and I don't know that I can, and I don't know that I'm ready yet, but I surrender more. How about that? Could you pray that to the Lord? Maybe not I surrender all, but I surrender more. I let go a little bit of the things that I've been holding on to. You won't come and take them. But You will gladly and joyfully receive them when I open up. And so, Lord, we surrender more, because we want more of You. Come and stir up within our hearts and our lives a hunger and thirst for righteousness, because you promised to come and fill us with more of Yourself. By faith, we believe that You have just released more of Yourself to us, as we have given more of ourselves to You.

Why don't you go ahead and grab your seat with me for a moment. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're glad you're here with us today. And we've been in this series called A Different Way. A big series, talking about living our lives the way that Jesus did. And in a sense, we've kind of

finished up Season One of this series. If you think of your favorite show, it has different seasons, well, we've kind of just finished up Season One, which was the foundation, which was the vision, which was trying to lift up your eyes and call to the deep things in your heart. And before we move on to Season Two, which is going to be the practices, which I know so many of you are ready to get to, we just have to stop for a moment and reflect, and think, and make sure we're aware of what God has been saying to us.

See, it's really hard to train if you don't know why you're training or what you're training for. And it's really hard to start to practice if you don't really want to play in the game. And so, sometimes we have to just stop and reflect, and contemplate, and think, and remind ourselves of what the Lord has been speaking and saying and doing. You see, you can't be a disciple if you're always in a hurry. If a disciple is someone who becomes like Jesus, Jesus was never in a hurry. So, if I'm always in a hurry, it's going to be really hard to be His disciple.

And in our culture of speed, we don't ever slow down enough to reflect, to think, to contemplate. And I would guess that most of us over these last five weeks haven't spent a lot of time outside of our hour together reflecting and thinking and contemplating on what God is trying to do in our lives, not because we don't want to, but because our lives are so busy, we don't have the time or the space to. And yet, God has called us to think deeply about deep things. God has created you to be a deep thinker about deep things. The problem is, is we've been discipled by the world to be shallow, and to be surface, and to be fast and just move on, as opposed to slowing down and actually reflecting.

God says, "Come now, let us reason together. Consider your ways. Give careful thought to your life. Examine your ways, how you're living, and test them and see if they are leading you to the path of life." And so, what I want to do for the next 25 minutes or so, is just give you a breath to take some time to actually reflect and think deeply about deep things by giving you this time back. And if you've been tracking in this series, you keep hearing me saying things like, following Jesus, it's about arranging and rearranging our lives around Him. This is an example of rearranging our lives around Him and what He is doing. We have an agenda, we have a plan. We have a calendar for this series.

And yet, we have to be willing to push all that to the side to arrange and rearrange our lives around what God is doing in the here and now, and actually be kingdom come kind of people that believes God is here, God is in the room, God is speaking, and He has been moving in my life over these past few weeks, and I don't want to miss it. Okay? So, can you just take a breath with me? I'm going to lead you through this a little bit, and here is how I just want to start. I just want to put up Matthew 11:28-30, one of the verses that we've been looking at in this series, and I just want to give you a few minutes to just read it. Think about it. What is God trying to say to you in this verse?

Now, I'm going to give you the same verse again, but in a different translation. Read it again, and see what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you.

One more time. I'm going to give you one more translation. Read it. What's God trying to say to you?

What a verse. I don't know where you are, and I don't know what's going on in your life, but what an invitation from Jesus to you.

Those aren't just ancient historical words in a book. Those words are living and active. The God of the universe speaking to you today. And that little five-minute run there was an example of thinking deeply about deep things, about contemplating, reflecting, refusing the shallow and surface answer, but desiring to go a little bit deeper into what God wants to say to me. And so, for the next 7-10 minutes or so, here's what I want to invite you to do is, if you have a journal and you've been taking notes, grab your journal. This is why I was hoping, why we wanted to make these for you in the first place is, it's one place where it's all contained together. If you don't have that, however you've been taking notes, or if you're new, I'm about to give you something here in a second, if you don't have one.

And for the next 7-10 minutes or so, I just want to give you the space to reflect on what God has been saying to you through these last five weeks. What notes have you taken? What Scriptures have jumped out? What words has He been speaking? What work has He been doing in your heart? And you might be amazed as you look at week one, you already forgot five weeks later what He was saying, and that was so impactful the hour you were in here. But then we forget about it when we go out there. Think of just some of the questions we've been asking so far in this series. Questions like, who are you becoming? And who do you want to become? Have you ever decided to be a disciple of Jesus? What is it that you want from Jesus? Who or what is discipling you? Are you happy with the direction your life is going?

And so, for the next few minutes, can you just look through your notes, reflect through the series. And if you're new and you're saying, "Today is my first day," or you're like, "I was only here one week, I don't know," just think on the question, who are you becoming, and who do you want to become? Holy Spirit, come move among us for these next few minutes.

What good is it to hear with no intent to obey, to listen without ever really trying to understand? To take notes without ever rereading them and reflecting on what it is that I was learning from God? And so, what I want to invite you to do now is, if you can in your journal, in one sentence, if you had to say, here is what the Holy Spirit is saying or doing in my life, right now, if you had to summarize in one sentence. This is thinking deeply about deep things.

This is good practice. If I came and saw you as soon as service is over in the atrium and I said to you, "Give me your one sentence, what the Holy Spirit has been saying or doing in your life,"

what is that one sentence? I want to invite you to actually write it down by faith. One summary of this last two months, here is what the Holy Spirit is saying or doing in a single sentence, or here is what He is inviting me to, or here's how He is moving in my life, here is how I'm experiencing Him, one sentence. What would that be?

And if you feel like you don't have one, then maybe your summary statement would be the Holy Spirit is just inviting me to be more aware of Him, or He is inviting me to just pay more attention to His work in my life, because I'm really not sure.

See, what we've just been doing together for the last 25 minutes or so, that's a different way. That's not "good American church." Some of you are like, "I know, because this isn't what I came for today." But that was just amazing kingdom come, because we just acted like God was real, God is here, and that God has been speaking to me. And we just acted like I'm actually on a journey with Jesus, moving with Him towards something, becoming someone different than I am today. And I just acted like I actually believe that my time in the gathering and having the word brought to my life is actually worth looking at and doing something with and, and responding and reflecting to, that was a great example of a different way, rearranging our lives, our time together, that didn't cost us much. It was just a little awkward maybe.

It was just a little uncomfortable maybe. It was just a little bit unknown, like I'm not sure where all this is going to go. And so, I just tried to demonstrate to you that all these practices that we're going to start, when they're done with the right heart, will be a little awkward and uncomfortable and unknown, but you can do it. In fact, if it was hard for you to just sit here in about 10 minutes of silence, that's a great question for you to reflect on. Why was it hard for me to sit in 10 minutes and think about what God has been saying to me? If that's you in your life, that should be the loudest siren you will ever hear in your life screaming to you of "Warning! Warning! Danger! Danger!" If your soul is that overwhelmed, that broken, that wore out, that disoriented, that trying to stay surface, I don't want to go in there.

That is God showing you, "Hey, there's something off here, invite Me in." Because sitting for 10 minutes to think about what God has been speaking to me is part of what being a disciple of Jesus is all about. And we did it with other people who are doing it with us at the same time. That's a great example of a different way. Let me try to pull this together for you in this. This week, a woman in our church shared with me what she believes is a prophetic word for our church in this season. And as she shared it, it super resonated with my soul because it's been things that I feel like the Lord has been speaking to me and showing me for us. And the, the prophetic word was that this is a season of open doors. A season of open doors, but not the kind of open doors we think of.

Normally, we think open doors, God opening doors for us, so we can go out. New opportunities, new breakthroughs, new relationships, new places to go. It's a season of God opening doors for us to step out and do all kinds of new great things. No, the open door is a

season of opening the door, not so we can go out, but so God can come in. In fact, Revelation 3:20, this is Jesus speaking, saying, "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me." If you've been in church for any period of time, you've probably heard this verse preached for salvation, for lost people that don't know Jesus. That's true. It's a great use of that verse. But in context, Jesus is speaking to the church here. This is not Jesus to the world.

This is Jesus to His own people, saying, "Hey, I'm here. I'm knocking on the door. And just so you understand, there's only a handle on the inside. I can't open it for you. I'm here. I'm knocking. I'm speaking, I'm talking. And if you want Me to come in, I can't open that door for you. You have the empowerment. You've been given free will. You have been given authority over your mind and heart and soul and body. So, will you open the door and let Me in? Will you invite My light into the dark places of your life?" Because if we're honest, there's a whole lot of dark places inside of us. Pride, fear, rebellion, unrepentant sin, anxiety, stress, worry, doubt, ungodly beliefs.

Shame, the pain of our past, there are so many rooms inside and we often allow God into the lobby when He wants to come into the basement. So, it's a season of open doors, not to go out, but to let Him in. And not just once, and not just in one place, but again, and again, and again, and again. Every door He knocks on, it's a season. There's a favor. There's an invitation from God to say, "Open up that door and let Me in. Open up that door and let Me in. Open up this door and let Me in." And that's what a different way life looks like, is letting Him into any and every place He wants to go in our lives. And with a little bit of fear and trembling saying, be gentle and humble with me in this, Lord. Be kind and compassionate in my pain.

Help me. When You come in this room, it's really dark. I don't even understand it. Can you bring Your light? And watch what He will do. And if we don't get this heartbeat as we move forward into the next part of this series, into Season Two and Season Three, it's going to get disorienting and it will be religious and it will be activities, and it will be things for things' sake. All of the practices that we're talking about are just ways of opening up the door and saying, it's a season of open doors. Come on in Jesus, into this place of my heart, the place that I'm even afraid of, the place that I don't even know how to control, but I'm inviting You in because You're here and You're knocking and You want to come in and eat with me deeply. You want to teach me how to live in Your kingdom in that room.

And You want to teach me how to become a person of love in that space. And so, if it's a season of open doors, I choose to let You in. And I'm starting by letting You in today by just being willing to slow down for 30 minutes and think deeply about deep things that actually matter, because I want to become a person of love, formed and shaped and molded into the image and likeness of Jesus. That's what church is about. And that's what life in the kingdom looks like. And this is the great invitation of a different way. Do the things that Jesus did. Jesus

always let the Father into any and every place of His life. There was no place the Father was not welcome.

If I want more of God, I got to give God more of me. May that be a word for your life and for our church in this season. And may we open the door as individuals and as a community to say, come Lord Jesus, come. So, thank You, Jesus, for Your goodness and Your grace. Thank You. But today, You are here and You are meeting with us. And so, we're willing to arrange and rearrange our lives around You, because we want to let You in. And I want You to do a deep work in my life. God, I confess and repent that so much of my life has been formed and shaped by the world to be shallow in surface and fast.

And You're inviting me to a life that is deep and profound and slow. And so today, even in maybe your uncomfortability in this room or the awkwardness for the, "I don't know about that," is God's gracious knocking on the door of your heart to say, "If you let Me in, I will bring you peace. Come all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Come learn from Me, for My way is easy and light." Jesus, lead us wherever we are and whatever pace we're at and whatever level of, of spiritual maturity we may be at in our journey today, would You lead us from that point.

Meet us where we are, God, and help us walk a different way one next step at a time. Thank You, Jesus, for Your presence. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY

DO WHAT JESUS DID

SEASON TWO TRANSCRIPTS

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A DIFFERENT WAY



FEBRUARY 25, 2024

SEASON TWO, EPISODE ONE

"SCRIPTURE, PART ONE"

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today. And we are in a series called A Different Way, talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. And last week, we finished up Season 1 of this series. And we kind of laid a foundation and cast a big vision and tried to lift up your head a little bit and speak to the deep things in your heart. And we asked some really big questions like, who are you becoming? Who do you want to become? Whom or what are you a disciple of? Can you change? And if you can, how do you really change? And we walked through some really big things together. And today, we are going to start Season 2 of A Different Way.

Just like your favorite series, there are different seasons and each season stands alone, but if you really want to get the most out of the season experience or the viewing pleasure, if you will, you have to know what happened in the season before. And when you get into a next season, that season starts with the assumption that you know what happened in the last season. So we are moving into Season 2 with the assumption that you know what happened in the last Season 1. And so if you missed anything that we talked about, I would encourage you to go back online, watch it, grab a hold of it. I'm going to start with that foundation, with that premise that you've got Season 1. Season 2 will be all self-inclusive. So if you don't want to know Season 1, that's fine. Season 2 will still be good for you. It just won't be as good as if you understood what was going on in Season 1. And what we are doing and what we're talking about is, we've been saying, if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we first have to do the things that Jesus did.

If I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, I have to first do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. If I want Jesus' life, I have to first take on His lifestyle. Like if I want to do the things that Jesus did, like have peace, and joy, and love, and be free from the love of money, and not have anxiety, and love my neighbor, and love my enemy, I have to first do the things that Jesus did, like pray, and fast, and meditate, and engage the Scriptures. And so as we move into Season 2, what we're now going to do is start talking about the specific practices, the things that Jesus did that enabled Him to do the things that Jesus did. And the verse that we've been using in this series is just, "Train yourself to be godly." Not try to be godly, not will yourself to be godly, not wait for God to make you godly, not train yourself to be worldly, train yourself to be godly.

My effort and God's grace coming together to change me from the inside out. And the best way we train ourselves is through spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines. And we've just been saying that a discipline is doing what I can do now, so I could do what I want to do later. A spiritual discipline or a spiritual practice is doing what I can do now to open myself up to God's grace, so I can do what I can't do or what I want to do later. You say, what does that mean? Well, it means if I can't be peaceful or be joyful or not be angry, I can't do that right now. What can I do? I can pray and I can fast and I can meditate and I can confess and repent. I can do some things that open me up to God's grace, put myself on the potter's wheel, allow Him to shape and mold and form me into His image and His likeness.

And then eventually God's grace in my life will allow me to do what I want to do later. Those are the practices. Those are the disciplines. And we've just given you some guardrails. And we just said spiritual practices as we go through this kind of Season 2. And I think there'll be a Season 3 and most likely a Season 4. Okay. So just letting you know, this is important. So you really want to make sure you get Season 1. We've just said spiritual practices are not a measure of maturity. Like if you do all these things, it's not a measure of maturity. No one really cares. Maturity is based on love and obedience and the Fruit of the Spirit. The point of practicing the piano is not to practice the piano. It's to become a really good piano player. The point of the spiritual practices are not the spiritual practices. They're to become shaped into the image and the likeness of Jesus. And we said they're an invitation, not an obligation, which means you don't have to do any of these.

There's no obligation, no expectation, no religious pressure to do anything. Now, these are all invitations from Jesus to people who are weary and burdened, who want rest for their souls, who would like to live their life a different way. You don't want to do them, you don't have to. These are not one-size-fits-all, which means not every practice works for everyone in every season. You have to be open as we go through these to what the Holy Spirit wants to invite you into, which means you actually have to. And they are done with God, not for God. These are not things we do for God to get some kind of favor from Him. In fact, we're not doing this for God. God's doing it for us. And we enter every one of these aware that He is with us and He is the one doing the work in our lives. And they're done in the secret place. In other words, we're not doing these to be put on display so your neighbors and your friends and the people in your life see how spiritual and mature and religious you are. No, we do them in the secret place, so the Lord sees them and then He rewards us in the open later.

So spiritual practices, what we've said is, they are a lifestyle. This is not habit-stacking, adding to an already-busy life, trying to force them in. This is about arranging and rearranging our life around Jesus and His lifestyle so that we can become like Him. And Season 2, we're now starting to talk about those practices. And we're starting with the first one, which is Scripture. So Jesus, today, as we start Season 2 of A Different Way, would you come and teach us how to be disciples? Would you come and teach us how to be disciples? Would you come and teach us how to arrange and rearrange our lives around You? Jesus, we don't want to do religious activities for the sake of doing religious activities. We want to become like You. So we put ourselves on the potter's wheel and we say, shape us, Lord, into Your image and Your likeness.

You see, one day after 30 years of hiddenness, Jesus comes to John the Baptist to be baptized. And as He's baptized, He goes under the water. It says the heaven's part open, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus. And the Father speaks from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And immediately after Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit leads Him out into the wilderness. And for 40 days and 40 nights, He is by Himself fasting, and at the end of that 40 days of not eating anything, when you would think He would be at His weakest moment, Satan comes to tempt Jesus. And three times, he comes to tempt Jesus. And the first

time he comes to Him and he says, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Interesting. "If you are the Son of God," he leaves out the most important word “beloved.” Satan doesn't care if you know that you're a son or a daughter of God. He cares if you know that you're beloved because love makes you fearless. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." And Jesus responds by saying, "It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Three times Satan tempts Jesus and three times Jesus responds in the exact same way, “It is written.” When Satan comes to tempt Jesus, Jesus doesn't freak out. He doesn't panic. He doesn't rebuke the devil. He doesn't cry out to God, "Why are you so mean to me?" He simply responds by declaring, “It is written.” And in that moment, we learned that Jesus arranged His entire life around the Word of God. That for the past 30 years, Jesus had arranged His lifestyle around the Word of God.

He read it. He meditated on it. He memorized it. He prayed it. He prophesied it. He studied it. He learned it. His entire life was built around the Word of God because in that moment, He didn't have a Bible to turn to and say, "Hang on, Satan. Okay. This one is the one." No, "It is written." You can't say, "It is written," if you don't know what it says. He built His life around the Word of God. Now, I want you to compare that to Eve. Eve is in the perfection of the Garden. Adam and Eve walk with God in the cool of the day. And one day, Satan comes to tempt Eve much like he did with Jesus. And when he comes to tempt Eve, he gets her to question the goodness of God. See at the root of every temptation in your life is the questioning of whether or not God is good and whether or not God is good to you. And he comes to Eve much like he did to Jesus.

The serpent Satan said to the woman, "Did God really say..." questioning His Word, His voice, "You must not eat from any tree in the Garden?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the Garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the Garden and you must not touch it or you will die.'" Now on the outskirts, this looks really good. "God did say..." The only problem is, if you know the story, this is not what God said. Eve says, "God did say," but it's not what God said. She took a little bit of God's Word and a little bit of worldliness and she put them together and she was completely wrong. And isn't that what we do? Take a little bit of God's Word and a little bit of worldliness, put it together. Like "God helps those who help themselves." And we're convinced that's of God. "God helps" – in the Bible. "Those who help themselves" – in the world.

And we put them together and we fall and we crash. And what we learn is that Eve did not arrange her life around the Word of God. She couldn't say, "It is written," because she didn't know what it actually said. Jesus responded by saying, "God said," Eve responded with, "I think, and I feel." And what we learn is that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we got to do the things that Jesus did. And He arranged His entire life around the Word of God. And if we want to do what He did, then we have to arrange our life around the Word of God. You see,

God's Word is simply God speaking. God's Word is simply God speaking. Jesus is the living Word of God. The Scriptures are the written Word of God, but God's Word is God speaking.

In fact, this is why it says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. And the Word was God." Jesus is the living Word of God. It's God speaking to us through the life, the person, and the work of Jesus. And the Scriptures are the written Word of God. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away." Isn't it interesting that God's Word was in the beginning and God's Word will be in the end? It always has been, and it always will be. And what's so important for you to understand is that the Bible is not a book. It's a voice. The Bible is not a book. It's a voice. It's a voice of one crying out in the wilderness. A voice telling us God's thoughts and God's will. The Bible is not contained by leather and pages and font and text. It's Spirit and it is life.

It is God's voice. It is God's voice creating, God's voice blessing, God's voice loving, God's voice forgiving. It is not religious commands and expectations. It is not a book. It is a voice. And what we forget is how powerful and profound God's Word actually is. Like, do you realize that God created, sustains, and will redeem all things through His Word? He created, He sustains, and He will redeem all things through His Word. Go backwards with me. In Revelation 19, in the very end, "I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True" – Jesus – "And out of His mouth comes a sharp sword, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, with which to strike down the nations." At the very end of all things, Jesus comes and redeems all things, makes all things new with His Word.

That's how powerful it is. And not only that, but the Son is sustaining all things by His powerful Word. He is sustaining all things, literally right now, holding your life together by His Word. And in the beginning, "God said... and (it) was so... and (it) was good." In the very beginning, God spoke, it became so, and it was good. He spoke to chaos, and it became order. He spoke to darkness, and it became light. He spoke to nothing, and it became something. And when God speaks in your life, He creates. And God is sustaining your life in the chaos and the storm through His Word. And God is redeeming and making all things new with righteousness and justice, with grace and truth in your life, in the here and now.

And so what I'm trying to tell you is that God rules His kingdom with His Word. If He created, sustains, and redeems all things with His Word, then He rules His kingdom with His Word. And if I want to be a person of His kingdom, then I have to be responsive to His Word. Kings rule and reign with words and actions. Every king has a kingdom, and through words and actions, whatever is submissive and surrendered to those words and actions are a part of His kingdom. And God has chosen to rule His kingdom through His Word. And whatever is submissive and responsive to His Word becomes a part of that kingdom. And so if I want to live a kingdom life, I have to be one who longs for and values and is responsive, not to a book, but to a voice that comes from a person. I mean, have you ever stopped and thought about this? Have you ever

stopped and thought how or why do fish keep multiplying in the ocean, even though we keep polluting it?

Have you ever stopped and wondered, how is it that plants and vegetation keep just growing up, new plants from the ground, even though we strip the land bare? How is it that animals keep multiplying and reproducing, even though we've destroyed their habitat? How is it that humanity keeps multiplying and growing on this earth, even though we don't value human life? How is it that light keeps going to the edges of the universe and creating that which did not exist in the past? God said, and so it's so. "Let there be light," and that light is still moving and creating. "Let the oceans team with fish," so fish just keep reproducing because they're submitted to the Word of God. "Let the earth team with vegetation coming up from the ground."

"Let the earth be full of animals." "Let man be fruitful and multiply and reproduce." And even in our broken, fallen, sinful state, we are responsive to the Word of God. You say, that's biology and evolution. That's just what fish do. No, it's the Word of God. It's a king who has made a declaration over His kingdom. And even in its broken and fallen state, it is submitted and surrendered to it because it's the all-consuming, all-powerful Word of God. And so if I want to be a person who actually lives in God's kingdom, I have to become someone who responds to His Word. See, there are so much of our lives that is out of alignment with the kingdom of God. Not because we're bad people with evil intent, but because we're ignorant and apathetic and approach His Word casually. There are so many places in your life and my life, they're not in alignment with the kingdom of God. Not because God hasn't spoke, but because I don't know what He has said.

Think how much God has already told us about His kingdom, its values, its principles, its culture, the blessings, the opportunities, what's available. He has already spoken so much about His kingdom. The problem is I don't know what He says, so I can't align my life to it. God said it was so, and it was good. The problem is we don't know what He said. We don't believe it was good, and so it can't be so in my life. I don't know what God said. And what I do know, I question if it's good. And so it is not so in my life. Make no mistake, it will be so. God has just given you the freedom whether or not you want it to be so in your life. This is why Jesus, when He teaches us how to pray, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." You say, "God's kingdom, confusing language, I don't understand it." Well, God's kingdom comes wherever His will is done.

Wherever His will, His heart, what He wants, what He desires, what He chooses, wherever His will is done, His kingdom has just come. And the reason we pray "on earth as it is in heaven," because in heaven, everything is surrendered to the Lord. And so, it's the fullness of His kingdom. But on earth, there are kings and queens with kingdoms and queendoms. And God has given us the authority in this time, in this age to rule and reign and to decide whether or not we want to submit to His words or just speak out our own. And so if I want to see His

kingdom come, I have to surrender my life to His will. And His will is communicated by His Word. In fact, this is why Jesus goes on to say, "Give us today our daily bread." What was it that we just saw Jesus say? "It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." So could it be that Jesus is teaching us to pray for God's Word in our lives so we will know His will, so His kingdom can come?

That if I want to be a person who lives in God's kingdom, I must be a person who loves God's Word. God's Word will show me His will and His will, when I surrender to it, will bring His kingdom. If I desire to live in God's kingdom, I must love God's Word. To value His Word is to value His voice. To value His voice is to value Him. This is the great invitation – to repent for the kingdom is at hand. God's Word gives us the opportunity to repent and bring our will into God's will so His kingdom can come and I can reach out and take a hold of it. We spend so much of our lives being so worried, worried about the specific will of God. Like who should I marry? What job should I take? Where should I move? Should I buy this car? And that's great. Talk to God about all those things. Just don't ignore the general will that He has already released and revealed to us through His Word.

Consume yourself with that bread that you might know His will, that His kingdom would come. And I bet you wouldn't even be worried about most of the specific will we stress out about all the time. You with me on this? See, I love in Colossians chapter three, Paul and his passage where he's teaching us about how to take off the old self and put on the new self. He says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. And as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." If I want to dwell deeply in God's kingdom, God's Word has to dwell deeply in me.

God's kingdom is as deep in you as His Word is in you. Because if He rules His kingdom by His Word, and Jesus says the kingdom isn't here or there, it's within you. Then God's kingdom is as deep as God's Word is in my life. And so if I want to dwell deeply in His kingdom, I have to first dwell deeply in His Word, because He rules His kingdom by His Word, and where His Word is received, His kingdom will come. And when His Word is deeply in me, the kingdom is within me. And now I have songs to sing and gratitude to express. And all of a sudden, I now have wisdom to speak. Hear me. The authority to speak comes from the willingness to listen. And if you ever feel like when you talk, no one listens, your spouse doesn't listen, your boss doesn't listen, your parents don't listen, your kids certainly don't listen. It all just falls to the ground. Why? Because you're speaking your words, not His words. The word of the world dwells deeply in you. So it comes deeply out of you. But when the Word of Christ dwells deeply in me, now my words are aligned with His words. Now I have authority. Now I can do my actual commission, which is to rule and reign with God.

And if He rules His kingdom by His Word, how can I rule with Him if I don't know His Word? How can I be a hope carrier if I don't have the hope of Jesus inside of me through His Word?

This is how He creates, sustains, and redeems His kingdom. It must then become important to me if I'm going to ever live on mission to be a person of wisdom. In fact, if you can even catch this, do you realize Jesus says, "The Son says nothing by Himself. He only says what He hears the Father saying." He doesn't speak on His own. He only speaks what He hears. The Holy Spirit, it says, doesn't speak on His own, but He only says what He hears. Think of how much of our life we speak what we feel like saying, not what "it has been written." In fact, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, it's in the great teaching on how to live in God's kingdom. And this is familiar. You probably know this. This is how to live in God's kingdom. This is the end of the kind of conclusion of the greatest sermon ever preached.

He says, "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears the words of Mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." This is what Jesus says. "Whoever hears My words and submits and surrenders to them is a wise man who has built his life on the eternal, everlasting, unshakable kingdom. But whoever hears these words of Mine and does not submit or surrender to them is a fool who has built his life on the chaos of the world around him."

If God rules and reigns His kingdom through His Word, then we must become people who love His Word, not a book, a voice, a voice that shows us His thoughts and reveals to us His will in relationship, creating, blessing, loving, forgiving. Are you with me on this? You see, there are three profound things that God's Word will do in your life. God's Word will show you what's true in a world full of lies. It will show you what's possible in a world of impossibilities. And it will show you God's heart in a world without heart. God's Word will show you what's true in a world full of lies. Have you ever stopped and asked yourself the question, how do I know what's actually true? You spend any time thinking about like, how do you know what's true? What is good? What is real? What is right? Like, how do you know?

Is it what the news tells you? What you hear on social media? What your parents told you growing up? What you've experienced? What you feel? Your truth? Like, how do you know it's true? And maybe a better question to ask yourself is, how do you know if you're living your life under the influence of a lie? Have you ever stopped and thought about, what part of my life is under the influence of a lie? Jesus says, Satan's name is the father of lies. He is a great liar and deceiver. He speaks in the language of lies. And in this world, he just lies and lies and lies. And when you believe a lie, you empower the liar over your life. Jesus says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." They don't know what's true. Jesus says, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." So truth frees us from bondage. But how do I know what's true? Well, there's this amazing verse that says, "All Your words are true."

All of them. God's Word shows us what's true in a world full of lies. And either all His words are true or none of them are true. Because if He says, "All My words are true," here and one of them is not true, then they're all not true. They're either all right or they're all wrong. They're either all good or they're all bad. There is no in-between. God's words shows us what's true in a world full of lies. This is why you hear Jesus over and over again say, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." "Truly, I say to you." Sometimes He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you," like, "If you didn't get the first, I'm giving you the second." This is true. He says, "I am truth." It's called the Spirit of Truth. It's called the Word of Truth. God's Word shows you what's true in a world full of lies.

Have you ever thought about what it costs you to live your life under the influence of a lie? Think about humanity for all the hundreds of years we believe the world was flat, silly example, but a great one. What did that cost humanity living under the influence of a lie? What does it cost you to believe a lie about who you are, who God is, or you were created to do? What does it cost you to believe a lie about your past, or your present, or your future? What does it cost you to believe a lie about what is good, and what is right, and what is real? Lies like, "I am what I do." Lies like, "I'll never be enough." Lies like, "No one cares anyway." So subtle. And they have that Eve thing to them, a little bit of godliness and a little bit of worldliness, because we wouldn't flat out believe an overt lie, but that subtlety, that darkness, what does it cost you? God's Word wants to break the lies off of your life by showing you what's true. What lies need to be broke off your life? That's when His kingdom comes.

Second thing is it shows us what's possible in a world full of impossibilities. If we're honest, we live very small lives. I hate to break this to you, but most of us live a very small, finite life. We have reduced ourselves, we have, we have built walls and fences. We put ourselves in boxes and we live with the prison of impossibility. And we say the "always" and "nevers." This will always be like this, this will never be like that. And we believe that everything is impossible. Most of us have shrunk our lives so far down that we complain that our life is not more. And yet we're not even close to living to the boundary lines that have fallen in pleasant places for us from God, because of impossibilities.

And so, God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts and neither are your ways My ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts." God says, "Hey, My thoughts are higher than your thoughts. And My ways are higher than your ways. And the way I communicate My thoughts is through My Word. And My Word will tell you My thoughts and My thoughts will show you My ways. Because it's impossible to walk in My ways without thinking My thoughts. And you can't think My thoughts if you don't know My words or hear My voice. And My thoughts will show you what is possible in a world of impossibilities."

Like God's Word will show you that joy is not only possible, it's normal. God's Word will show you that peace is not only possible, it's normal. God's Word will show you that a healthy

marriage is not only possible, it's normal. God's Word will show you that healing is not only possible, it's… (normal). God's Word will show you that a different way is not only possible, it's… (normal). Huh. Impossibilities become possible when God speaks.

Think about all the things in the Bible where something was impossible until God spoke and it became possible, like Noah's Ark. Think about the Exodus, it was impossible until God spoke to Moses. Now, all of a sudden, it's possible. Peter walking on water when Jesus speaks to the impossibility and says, "Come," it's possible. The resurrection of Jesus from the grave, when He speaks and tells the disciples, "I know you think this is impossible, but this is possible in My name."

Hear me. It is impossible to dream, to have a vision, to create, to advance into the future, if you don't fill your mind with the Word of possibility. Listen, if you were here last year in the Hope Carrier series, I did three weeks on dreaming with God. There were the three most resisted messages I've had in years. And you say, "Resisted?" Like, like, listen, it's like a teacher here, like in school, like I know when you're listening, hate to break it to you. I know when you're not. I know when you're excited, I know when you're not. Okay. All the things, right. I know when you resist. Okay. Dreaming with God was the most resisted three messages. Like I can't even remember doing another one that was that resisted. And it really bothered me. And we talked with our team, couldn't figure it out. Same feedback from everybody, like people just resisted it. And I was never able to figure it out until this week. The reason we resisted dreaming with God is because we don't fill our mind with the Word of possibility.

And so all I see are the impossibilities. So I can't dream with God nor have a vision nor create because all I can see is the physical impossibilities in front of me, because I've not filled my mind with the Word of possibility. Could there be an invitation? To fill your mind with words that are Spirit and life, because Spirit is not confined by the physical and the supernatural is not confined by the natural and the kingdom is not confined by this world. The Word of possibility shows me what is possible and breaks through the limitations and barriers on my life to things I believe are impossible. And then it shows us God's heart in a world without heart. Jesus says, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." Listen to me, your mouth betrays your heart.

The mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart. Your words betray your heart every single time. Have you ever said to somebody, you said something and you regretted saying it? And then later you said, “Hey, I'm sorry, that wasn't me.” Maybe you did that even this morning. “Hey, that wasn't me.” Actually, it was, because that was what was inside of you. And that's why it came out of you. And Jesus is telling us here that God's Word betrays His heart. It will actually show us what's in there. I'm using the word "betray" to kind of catch your thinking. And what I mean by that is, because God is good, all He can do is bring good things out of the good stored up in Him. And so, the more I read His Word, the more I know His heart. And I

start to actually believe that He is the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and bounding in love, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. It's like, He can't hide that.

He can't hide how good He is in His Word because that's who He is. So when I read His Word, I start to see the good that's come out of the good things that are inside of Him because He is good. He can't say evil because there's no evil things that are inside of Him. You with me on this? You see, when Jesus says, "It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," what He's reminding us, is that our lives are sustained by the Word of God. But just like your body needs bread, your mind, your soul, and your heart need God's Word.

We're created to feast on it. And in the Old Testament, there's a great example of the Israelites every day, they had to go out and gather manna from heaven, bread from heaven. And it was a physical picture of spiritual truth that every day, I need God's Word. And I can't today eat on yesterday's manna. And I can't today store up enough for tomorrow's manna. No, every day I need to feast on God's Word. And if you don't feast on God's Word, hear me, you don't have to feel guilty, but you probably feel hungry. Your mind, your soul, your heart, are starving. Like if all you ever do is eat on the Sundays when you come in here and hear from us, that's great. We want to feed you, but you're starving.

That would be like eating one meal a week physically. Like you could do it, but your life trajectory is probably going to go like this. Listen, every week when you come in here, I've been cooking all week. Okay. All week, man, and I cook, and I cook, and I cook. I'm trying to be the best chef I can. And I mean like, it needs a little more salt, I put, you know, got to take that out of it. That ain't going to work. It's like, I'm trying to, it's too hot to cook cooked enough, not cooked enough. It needs a little more baking. I mean, I'm cooking all week to feed you the best meal possible. I, my calling from God is to feed His sheep, right? So I want to feed you the best meal possible, but I also want to teach you how to feed yourself.

And if you've ever wondered why on earth do we use so many verses? I think there's like 43 verses in today's message. We're not going to get to them all, but there's like 43. Why do I want to do that? Because I want you to see what's true in a world full of lies. And I want you to see what's possible and what's impossible. I want you to see God's heart. And so I want to feed you, but I want to teach you how to feed yourself. We want to be people who hunger for God's Word. But the problem is, I can't make you eat if you're not hungry.

And just like physically, if you starve yourself to a certain point, you're no longer hungry. We have starved ourselves spiritually to the point where we're no longer hungry. Because we've fasted from what we should feast on. And we feasted on what we should fast from. We fast from what we should feast on God's Word. And we have feasted on what we should fast from, the world. And so a lot of us we're like, we're starving. Listen to me, Jeremiah says, "When Your

words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight for I bear Your name." One of the things that I want more than anything for our church is that we would love God's Word. I mean, love it, consume it, desire it, pursue it, feast on it. It's not a book, it's a voice.

And we would love God's Word because we want to live in His kingdom. And if He rules His kingdom by His Word, then I'm not doing a religious exercise. I'm learning how to live in an unshakable kingdom. I'm learning how to live heaven on earth, heaven in my hell. But I got to be hungry for it. And I got to eat it when it comes. And I love, he says, "For I bear Your name." Do you know what evidence of bearing His name would be? Evidence of being a Christian, a disciple, a follower of the way? Someone who loves His Word.

"When Your words came, I ate them, for I bear your name." Evidence of walking a different way is a love for God's Word that becomes the joy of my heart, and delight, brings light to the dark places around me. I've got a hunger for this. And if you're like, "But I don't hunger for it," that's okay, tell God that! Say, "God, I've starved myself to the point that I'm not even hungry. Would you make me hungry? God, I actually really like feasting on the things of the world." Tell Him that. He already knows, so you may as well open up the door a little bit to be like, "I'm not even sure I want you in, but I'm going to confess. I'm just going to go ahead and say it. I like to feast on the world." God can work with that because you're now at least willing to acknowledge that He's the potter and you're the clay. I long for us to be a church that loves God's Word. I don't care what I have to say. I don't have funny jokes. I'm not really all that inspiring and relevant to the world's dynamics. I get all that, I don't care, I care about this. And I want you to know this and love this. And I want you to look forward to the slides that are in here. I want you to like, feel like you missed out when you see me skip one.

I mean, seriously, not because of me, because you're like, "There's more of God in there. There's more of God in that. Touch that thing again, touch that. There's more of God in there, I want it to come out. It's not a genie in a bottle, but touch that thing. I want, I want to know that." And I think sometimes we sit here and we're like, could you skip a few? And that shows us what we're actually hungry for. And that's okay, acknowledge that. I can't say, "It is written," if I don't know what it says. It's the difference between the lifestyle of Jesus and the failure of Eve. You don't have to live in the way of Eve. You can live in the way of Jesus. And we put all these barriers and boundaries around God's Word. And we think like someone else needs to speak to me on God's behalf. Listen, "The people say to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.'" They're like, "Moses, you go hear God, and then come put some slides in a deck and tell us what God said."

Here's the problem. If I won't listen to God, I certainly won't listen to His messenger. Straight up. If you don't hear God, you hear nothing I say because I'm just a messenger, man. "You speak to us, because if God speaks to us, we'll die." Not realizing that without God's voice, you're already dead because God's voice brings things to life, doesn't cause things to die. God's voice creates, sustains, and redeems. If I want anything in my life created, sustained, or

redeemed, I need His voice, because it brings things to life. And Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. God's come to test you. So that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." In other words, if you don't hear God's voice, you will never have awe and wonder and reverence and honor. You will never live a different way. You will live the world's way. But when I hear God's voice, all of a sudden my life becomes, "God said it's good. And so may it be so for me and my family."

Changes the whole dynamic. You need other people to prophesy, and to teach you, encourage you, and to equip you, but you got to hear God for you. One last verse for today. The Bible talking about the Bible. Talking about itself as a voice. Voice talking about itself as a voice. "Now then My sons, listen to Me. Blessed are those who keep My ways. Listen to My instruction and be wise. Do not ignore it. Blessed it is the man who listens to Me, watching daily at My doors, waiting at My doorway. For whoever finds Me, finds life and receives favor from the Lord." The voice talking about the voice. Listen, listen, do not ignore.

Listen, watch, wait, find. And what will happen? I will be blessed, I will be wise. I will be blessed, I will have life, and I will have favor. The problem is, we want someone else to listen, listen, not ignore, listen, watch, wait, and find for me. Because I would like to be blessed, wise, blessed, full of life, and favor. But that's not how it works. Jesus listened, didn't ignore, watched and waited daily and found what God wanted to say. And so, if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to do the things that Jesus did. And you can almost hear the pleading in this.

Almost. But it's also God saying, "He who has eyes to see, He who has ears to hear, He who has a heart to receive, will." God won't make you see what you don't want to see. And He won't make you listen to what you don't want to hear. And He won't force you to have revelation on something you don't care to understand. The question is, am I watching and waiting not for a book, not for a book, a book that's contained with leather and pages and font and text, but for a voice that's in the book, that's living and active, that Spirit and life that wants to speak to your soul and create and sustain and redeem, invite you deeper and farther into His kingdom of life. If we are going to be a kingdom church, if you are going to be a kingdom person, we must become people who love God's Word, not a book, God speaking. God speaking in all the ways that He speaks, and then arranging my life around that, and then being obedient to that.

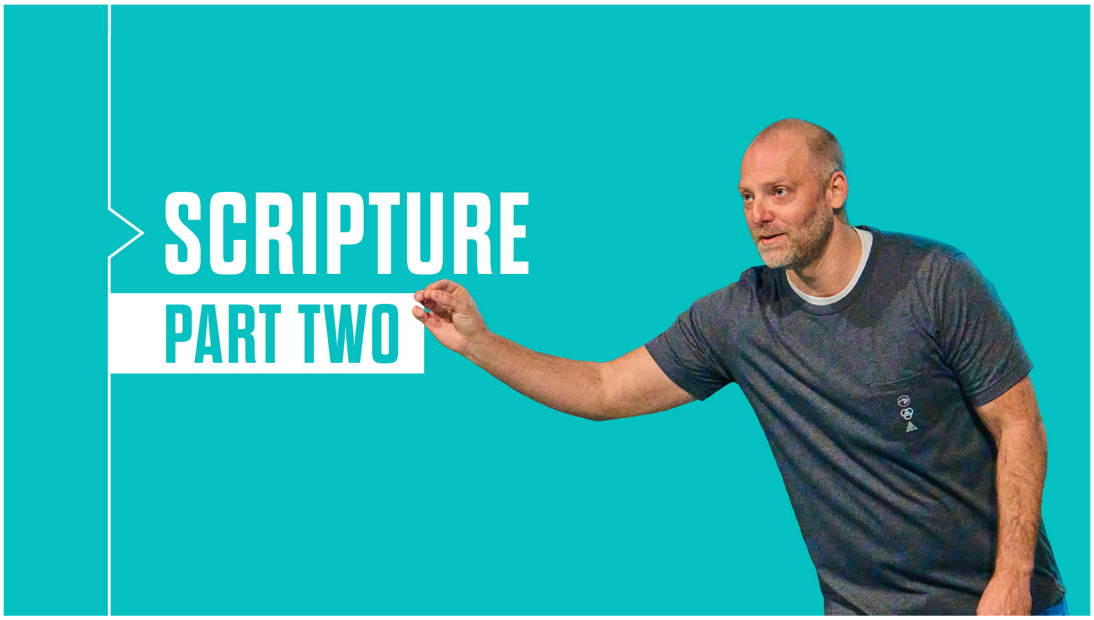
And you'd be amazed at who we could become. And you say, well how do I do it? That's a great question. That's part two for next week. Your practice plan, though, for this week, and every week I'm giving you a practice plan. Do it or don't do it. I don't really care. I'm going to sleep good at night. I'm going to do it. You don't have to do it. But every week I'm going to give you one because we're assuming you got Season 1 and you like Season 1. So you're still here for Season 2. Hey, I'm smiling at you. If you didn't like that, you're all right. It's all right. It's all good. Engage the Valley Creek Reading Plan five times this week. Okay. I just basically, here's what I did. I walked you into the gym and I showed you a bunch of the machines.

And I told you what they do. And you're like, "But I don't really..." I know. And I'm like, "Hey, don't hurt yourself this week, but just go try it. And then we'll talk about how to actually use the machine next week." I want to get you going on your training plan. Okay? And if you're like, and if you're like, "Hey, I do it, I do, I do more than that," great. That's great. You didn't, no one's telling you to tone it down, just, but we're all going to start at a place that's reasonable. And if you're like, "But I don't engage God's Word." I know. And listen to me, I love you. And I am doing everything I can to help you think about living a different way and then practice it slowly, methodically, not in a way that kills you. I'm not putting on a machine that you can't handle. I'm not asking you to run a marathon. I'm asking you to put your shoes on and walk to the mailbox. Five times, it'll take you less than 10 minutes each time. So it's less than an hour. You can, if you're a fast reader, you can even do it faster than that.

Right. I'm not trying to give you "how" today, I'm just trying to get you activated with a little bit of open door, a little bit of clay on the potter's wheel, a little bit of like, yeah, God, like, like, I don't know, God, but I'd love to experience a little more heaven in my hell. And if Your kingdom comes where Your will is done, and You reveal Your will through Your Word, I, I got to figure out how to surrender my life to Your Word. That's not a book of paper and leather, but it's Your voice. It's not a mysterious somewhere-off-in-the-universe voice. It's Your voice and You're right here and You're talking to me because You love me. So I don't believe all that, but I want to. So would You help me find five times this week to just start by going to ValleyCreek+ and opening it up and just believing that You're going to speak.

Jesus, we want to be people that say, "It is written," because we know what it says, because we want to live deeply in your kingdom. Lord, for years, we've longed to be a church that loves God's Word. And so many people come and go over the times and seasons. But I pray for this time and this season and this body of Christ that's gathered and assembled in Valley Creek. Would we be people who love your heart. Help us hunger and thirst. Help us not be satisfied with news and TV and social media and the voices of the world because there are lots of voices speaking, but only one voice that can create, sustain, and redeem. There's only one voice whom I want to submit and surrender to, and it's Your voice. So speak, Lord. We know You already are, teach us how to listen. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MARCH 3, 2024

SEASON TWO, EPISODE TWO
“SCRIPTURE, PART TWO”

Alright, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. Whatever campus you're at today, we are so glad you are here with us. And we are in a series called A Different Way. We're talking about doing what Jesus did, so we can do what Jesus did. We've been saying that if we want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, we have to first do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. That if we want His life, we have to first take on His lifestyle. That if we want to do the things that Jesus did, like not have anxiety, or be stressed out, or worried, have peace and joy, have the ability to love our enemy, to be deeply connected with God, then we first have to do the things that Jesus did. His practices, like fasting, and community, and meditation, and silence, and solitude. And we've been talking about this whole experience and setting it all up. And last week, we kind of started Season Two of the series where we're now getting into the practices that Jesus practiced and kind of talking about how do we now arrange our life around those realities. And we started last week with the first practice. It's probably one of the most important and yet the least understood; one of the most foundational practices if we're going to live a different way, and that is Scripture. So, give me just a few minutes to set up Part One from last week, so then we can move forward into Part Two together. You with me on that?

After 30 years of hiddenness, Jesus comes, He gets baptized. As He comes up out of the water, the Father speaks from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Immediately, the Holy Spirit takes Him out into the desert where He fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. And at the end of that experience, when we would think Jesus would be at His weakest, Satan comes to tempt Jesus and says, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." And Jesus responds by saying, "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Three times, Satan tries to tempt Jesus and three times Jesus responds with, "It is written." And in that moment, we discover that Jesus arranged His entire life around the Word of God. That He had ordered His entire life around God's Word. When Satan tempts Him, He doesn't freak out. He doesn't panic. He doesn't rebuke Satan. He doesn't cry out to God. He simply responds with, "It is written." And He didn't have a Bible to quickly look up a verse; it was in His heart. You see, you can't say, "It is written," if you don't know what it says. And what we learned from Jesus in this moment is that He arranged His life around the Word of God. And so, if we want to do the things that Jesus did, then we have to do the things that Jesus did.

Like, arrange our lives around God's Word. And we talked about how God's Word is simply God speaking. God's Word is God speaking. Jesus is the living Word of God. The Scriptures are the written Word of God. The living Word is God speaking to us through the life and person of Jesus. The Scriptures are God speaking to us through the Bible, through the written Scriptures. And we talked about last week how the Bible is not a book, it's a voice. That the Bible is not a book contained by leather and pages and font and text. It's a voice. It's a voice that is communicating God's thoughts and God's heart and God's will. It's a voice that is creating, sustaining and redeeming. It's a voice that is blessing and forgiving and freeing and loving. It is a voice not contained in a book. It is spirit and it is life. And we talked about how God rules His kingdom by His Word.

That kings rule their kingdoms through words and actions. And so, God rules His kingdom by His Word. And if we want to be people who deeply live in His kingdom, then we have to become people who deeply love His Word. That His Word has to be deeply embedded in us if we're going to deeply live in His kingdom. Why? Because God rules His kingdom by His Word. This is why in creation, it says over and over again, "And God said... and (it) was so... and (it) was good." God says, it becomes so, and it is good. That's how He rules His kingdom. The problem is, we often don't know what He says. We question whether or not it's good. And so, it is often not so in our lives. God has given us free will, the ability to resist or reject that which He is saying, that which we don't believe in. There is this time of eternity in the here and now, where we have the freedom to have our own will. But if we want to be people who live in God's kingdom, then we have to be people of His Word.

This is why Jesus teaches us when we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth, as it is in heaven." God's kingdom comes wherever His will is done. And He communicates His will through His Word. So if I want to know His will because I want to live in His kingdom, then I have to become a person of the Word, which is why He says, "Give us today our daily bread." Bread is not just food we eat, it is literally the Word of God that sustains and nourishes our life. So, it's His Word that shows us His will. And when I submit to His will, I become a person who lives in His kingdom. And so, if I want to deeply live in God's kingdom, I have to become a person who loves God's Word. Because God's Word will show me His will and give me the opportunity to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And we said that it is our deep desire to be these kinds of people, "When your words came, I ate them. They were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear Your name." Our heart is to be a people that love God's Word, that receive it with joy and delight. "I bear Your name," evidence of being a Follower of the Way, of a disciple of Jesus, is someone who loves God's Word. And I've been thinking about this all week. So, can I just speak over your life for a second? I just want to declare over your life and your family and our church that we will become a people who love God's Word. It is probably not so today, but in Jesus' name, may it become so.

May we be a people who hunger and thirst for His Word, who allow His Word to be our joy and our heart's delight. Even when we go through slides that we went through last week, may we not be like, "Let's get to the new thing." Let's be like, "That's God's voice speaking to me right now." And I love it, and I eat it. Serve me that meal again. Serve me it again. I want to see Genesis 1:3, "And God said... and (it) was so... and (it) was good." I want to see that again, and again, and again, because I know I don't believe it in every area of my life yet. So, I want to eat it. I want to feast on it. I want to become a person that loves, that loves, that loves God's Word. Listen, years ago, we weren't a worshiping church and we started saying, "We're going to become a worshiping church." And we weren't a church that prayed. And so we said, "We're going to become a praying church." And today, where we have become a worshiping and praying church, continually growing, okay, may we become a church that loves God's Word.

Because, we love Him, and we value Him. So, we value His voice and we long to live in His kingdom. And we ended last week with this passage in Proverbs. That's the Bible talking about itself. "Now, then my sons, listen to me. Blessed are those who keep my ways, listen to my instruction and be wise. Do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway, for whoever finds me, finds life and receives favor from the Lord." Listen, listen, do not ignore, listen, watch, wait, find. And then you will be blessed, wise, blessed, life, and favor from the Lord. The problem is, we want someone else to go listen so that we can be blessed. We have to learn to listen so that we can be blessed. We have to arrange our lives around the Word of God.

And that's where we left off. And we left off with this question that then says, okay, so then, how do I do that? How do I actually do that? Which is a really good and fair question, because if we're honest, we say things like this, like, "I just don't get God's Word. It doesn't make sense. I don't understand it. It's overwhelming. It's intimidating. I don't really know what to do with it. It's confusing. I don't even know where to start." All that is really fair. So here is what I want to say to you. Ability follows desire. The heart to hear is more important than how you hear. If you have the desire to know God's Word and hear His voice, ability will follow. If you have the heart to hear God's voice and to know His Word, how you actually do it will follow. We see it over, and over, and over again in Scripture. Jesus says, "He who has eyes to see, let him see. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. He who has a heart to understand, let him understand." Why? Because God won't make you see things you don't want to see. And He won't make you listen to things you don't want to hear. And He won't make you understand things you have no interest in understanding. It's literally why He declares, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." In other words, if you have the desire to hear, God will give you the ability. If you have the heart to hear His voice and know His Word, God will give you the how. And what I love about this is this is very reminiscent of Genesis 1. "And God said... let there be... and it was so." This is God creating in your life when you, when you have the desire to hear, "Let him hear." It's almost like God is declaring to the heart that's open. He is speaking to your ears. He is speaking to your, to His voice, to His Word. He is speaking to every obstacle, every learning challenge you have. All the works of darkness, "Let him hear."

Why? Because you have a heart to hear. We will hear if we want to hear. God won't make you see what you don't want to see. He won't make you hear what you don't want to hear. He won't give you understanding if you aren't interested. He won't empower your hands if they aren't surrendered. And He won't send your feet if they're not willing. He waits for you to say, "I want it. I want it." I mean, look what Jesus says. "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given. And you will receive even more. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them." That's really powerful. You know what that says? That God is speaking to those who are listening. That you will hear to the level you are listening. The closer you listen, the more thought and study and

interest and diligence you give to it, the more you will hear. But the less you listen, the less you're going to hear God's voice. Why? Because He won't make you hear if you don't want to hear.

Do you know what this verse is kind of saying? Like, think about it like this. Have you ever been talking to somebody and you know they're not listening to you? Anybody that's married or has children, especially teenagers, right? Okay. So, if you're speaking and the other person is not listening, you have three options. One is, you can get angry and get louder and raise your voice. Two is, you can start talking faster to become more interesting and relevant, trying to capture their intention through speaking. Or three, you can stop talking and wait for them to start listening. Well, Jesus doesn't get angry and start talking louder. And He doesn't start talking faster to get your attention. He just waits for you to be ready to listen. Could it just be that we don't hear God's voice in Scripture because we don't really want to? Instead of making it about it's hard to understand, and I don't know how, and I don't know where to start, and it doesn't make sense, I get all that. But could it just be that we hear exactly what we want to hear? And I get it. We say, "I have a desire to hear God's voice." I hear you. But we have a desire for a lot of things. And I think sometimes that desire is convenience and comfort. I want it to be easy. I just want it to be what I want to hear, when I want to hear it, how I want to hear it. But what you have to understand is that desire is measured by devotion. You say you desire a lot of things in your life, but what you really desire are the things you're devoted to. The things you continue to do with intense effort despite difficulty, so we can say we desire to hear God's voice and to know His Word. But am I devoted to it? Do I continue to do it with intense effort despite difficulty? Because He says He is speaking and I will hear if I understand. So maybe, just maybe, it's not on Him. Maybe it's on me. Because if I have ears to hear, He has declared to the universe, "Let him hear." And it must obey. I mean, have you ever stopped to think about what is the difference between trash and treasure? If I asked you like, what's the difference between trash and treasure, how would you answer that question? The difference is availability and accessibility. That's what makes something trash or something treasure. Trash is available and accessible everywhere. It's all over your house. It's all over the road. It's all over social media. It is available and accessible everywhere.

Treasure is not easily available, nor easily accessible. That's why it makes it valuable. It must be pursued, mined, searched after, looked after. And God's Word is a treasure because it must be mined by the heart who wants to receive it. I mean, look at Proverbs again, the Bible talking about itself. "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding. And if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then, then, then, you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God, for the Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Can you catch it? Accept, store, turn, apply, call, cry, look, search. Then you will have knowledge and understanding. Could it be that I have the level of knowledge and understanding that I actually want? That I actually desire? Because the Lord gives wisdom. It's

not that He is not speaking. Am I accepting, storing, turning, applying, calling, crying, looking, and searching for it as a treasure? See, faith doesn't make God speak. Faith simply opens my heart to hear what He has already said. Faith doesn't make God speak. Faith just opens me up to hear what He is already saying.

And so, assuming I have a heart to want to hear God's voice, assuming I have a desire to lean into the Scriptures, because His Word is not a book, it is a voice. Assuming that I have a heart to hear, that's where we got to start from, how then do I actually practically do it? I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt that you have a heart to want to hear it. How then do I actually do it? I've got four points for you on doing it. If you're here a lot, you know I don't ever really preach in points, and I don't like practicals. So, this is the best I got for you, if you have a heart to hear, here's how you actually can do it. With me on this? And if you don't have a heart to hear, my encouragement to you is, stay here. Stay here. Don't get lost in practicals. They don't matter. What matters is, do I have a heart to actually hear? Because until God says, "Let him hear," you won't. You can't. But you have to have the ears to hear for Him to declare that over your life. Okay? How do we actually do it? First thing, engage God's Word from a Jesus-focused perspective. Engage God's Word from a Jesus-focused perspective. Listen to me. The Bible is not so small that it's about what you have to do. The Bible is so big, it is about what Jesus has done. The Bible is not so small that it's about you. It's so big that it's about Jesus. And one of the great problems is that we read the Bible from a self-focused perspective. We open it up. We engage God's Word on, what does this mean for me? How does this apply to me? Is this saying what I want to hear, when I want to hear it, how I want to hear it? What does this have to do with me? It's not about you. It's about Jesus. And that's what makes it so relevant for you because the more clearly you see Jesus, the more clearly you see everything else. In Him, we live and move and have our being. In Him was life and that life was the light of men.

So the more I see Jesus, the more clearly I see everything else. And if I engage the Scriptures from a self-focused perspective, I will never enjoy God's Word, because it's not about me. It's about Jesus. In fact, this is why, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If Jesus is the living Word of God, doesn't it make sense that the Bible would be about Him? If he is the living Word of God, then the written Word of God is probably about Him, not me. And when I see Him, I more clearly see myself. In fact, do you remember the story of the Road to Emmaus? Jesus has been crucified. He has raised from the dead, but the disciples don't know it yet. And Jesus comes and He is walking with two of them down the road. They're defeated and discouraged. "And the resurrected Jesus, beginning with Moses, and all the prophets, explains to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'" The resurrected Jesus teaches us how to engage God's Word, that the Scriptures are about Him. Moses and the prophets, and now the New Testament, it's about Him. In the season of their life, when they were the most discouraged and most defeated, you think Jesus

would come and tell them, "It's okay, guys, you're going to be alright. You're awesome, you're an all-star. Here's a cookie. Here's a medal. It's going to be okay. It's about you. And I promise everything will be better." That's how we read it. He came and said, "Let Me tell you about Me." And as He started to teach them His Word concerning himself, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, because when you start reading the Bible from a Jesus-focused perspective, you will see Him not just in the Bible, you will see Him all over your life.

And they said, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" Have you ever had a verse or a passage or a page or be sitting in a message and something, it just jumps off. It like, leaps up. You can feel this burning, this life, this sustenance, this encouragement, this enthusiasm, this supernatural reality inside of your heart. When we're looking for it from the Jesus-focused perspective, that's what happens. And He is talking with us because it's not a book, it's a voice, and He opened the Scriptures to us. You can open the Bible, but you cannot open the Scriptures. You can physically open the book, but only He can open the Scriptures. That's why the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation. It takes supernatural realities to reveal God's wisdom to us. So I have to look for it. And I have to look for Him, and then I have to expect Him to speak. See, we read it making it about us. We read all the heroes in the Bible and we think we're the hero. We read Noah's Ark and we become Noah. "I am going to save my family and the world through this wooden boat." We read about Abraham and we think we're Abraham. "I'm getting up and going to a place. God will show me and I will be blessed to be a blessing, and all the nations on Earth will be blessed through me." We think we're Moses, the Great Deliverer. "God has sent me to confront Pharaoh. Let these people go. And I'm going to lead them out of exile into a promised land." We think we're David and we're going to defeat our Goliath. We think we're Esther, that we have been born for such a time as this. "The world is lucky to have me." But those are not stories about you. They're actually prophetic pictures of Jesus. See, Jesus is the true and better Noah. Through a wooden cross, He saved His family and the world. Jesus is a true and better Abraham. He got up and went to a place the Father was going to show Him. And He was blessed to be a blessing, and all nations on the Earth were blessed through Him. He is a true and better Moses. He is the Great Deliverer that confronted Satan, the great Pharaoh, and said, "Let my people go," and brought them from bondage into His kingdom. He is the true and better David who, one man on a cross, defeated Goliath, sin, death, and the grave through one act. He is the true and better Esther. He was born for such a time as this. "For God, in the perfect time, sent His Son under the law to redeem those under the law that we might become sons of God." It's not about you. It's about Jesus. And the more you see Jesus, the more clearly you see yourself. Even commands like, "Don't do this, and do do that, and don't do this," we're like, we get, "Ah," God can command me to do things because of what Jesus has done. I can love because I am loved first by Him.

I can forgive because He first forgave me. I can love my enemy because when I was His enemy, He loved me. You know what? Even those sin patterns in my life, I can stop and say, "I'm no longer under the mastery of sin. I have been set free, brought into a new kingdom. I now walk

by the Spirit." Even the commands are looking for what Jesus has done. And that's what empowers you to actually even be able to walk them out. The more clearly you see Jesus, the more clearly you will see everything else. And when you start engaging it from a Jesus-focused perspective, you will have so many things to say about Jesus. You won't walk away from your time in God's Word talking about yourself. You will walk away from your time in God's Word saying, "Let me tell you what I found out about Jesus. Let me show you this verse that's about Jesus. Let me show you this thing that God showed me about Jesus." And the more clearly I see Jesus, in Him is life, and that life is my light. It actually shows me who I am, what I'm created to do, and why I'm here. Make sense?

Okay. So, we've got to engage it from a Jesus-focused perspective. Second thing is, engage God's Word as a disciple. The Bible is not for information; it's for transformation. You have to engage God's Word very differently than you read Shakespeare, and fiction, and news articles, and stuff on social media. That's for information. This is for transformation. The point is not to inform your mind and sit there and ask questions like, "What was the geopolitical culture in Egypt during the time of the Exodus?" The point is not to read the Bible and figure out exactly what Roman culture was like during the first century church. The point is not to read and figure out what was the exact materials used to create the Tabernacle, and could we redo that today. That's fine. Learn all those things. That's information. The point is transformation.

I have to learn to engage God's Word by coming to it as a disciple. Like, don't even open your Bible until you have first said, "Okay, Jesus, today I'm here as a disciple, a student, a learner, a follower, one who becomes like the one they're following. So, Jesus, I need You to teach me how to live my life. Show me what it's like to be human. Jesus, I've heard a lot of things said, but I want to know what You have to say. May it be to me as You have said. Because You say so, Lord, I will do it." We need to learn to engage God's Word with the Spirit of Repentance. That I so desperately want to live in His kingdom and believe His Word is His voice that whatever He says, I've already decided to do it before He even says it. I mean, do you remember the story of Samuel, a young man who was learning to hear God's voice? It says, "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, for the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." He didn't know God because he didn't know the Word. And a lot of us are convinced, we can know God without knowing His Word. But if His Word is not a book, it's a voice, the voice comes from a person. So, when I'm engaging His Word, I'm hearing His voice, and I'm in the presence of a person. And when I'm in the presence of a person, I can actually get to know them and have experiences and encounters with them. Do you realize, even as we talk about these verses through this slide, it's God's Word, which is His voice, and He can only speak if He is present. So God's Word reminds us that God is right here, wanting you to know Him.

And he had a mentor in His life. So, Eli told Samuel, "If He calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.'" What a way to approach Scripture. Before I even open it, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." How different would our experience with God's Word be if before I even opened it, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening. I have ears to hear. So, would You

declare, 'Let me hear'?" And as he did that, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord, because it's in His presence, His personhood, from His voice and His Word, that I begin to grow and mature and change. The problem is, I think a lot of us come to God's Word with the inverse of this. "Listen servant, for your lord is speaking." I think we literally, sometimes open the Bible, and we don't say it like that, but we're kind of like, "Listen up servant, because your lord is speaking. And I got some things to say." And we put ourselves in the seat of judgement, judging God's Word, sitting there, almost like American Idol judges, deciding whether or not I like it. Am I going to push the button for this one or not? Do I like it? Do I agree with it? Does it make me feel good? Can I see this fitting in my life? How will this be in my world? Is this saying what I want to say, what I want it to say, when I want it to say, how I want it to say it? And all of a sudden, we put ourselves in this place of judge, critique, evaluator, judging God's Word, whether or not I'm going to receive it or reject it. But we have to acknowledge that we're not there to judge God's Word. God's Word is there to judge our hearts.

In fact, this is why it says, "The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Listen, God's Word is alive. You put it inside you, it starts to change you from the inside-out. We don't work on the Scriptures. The Scriptures work on us. We get them in there. It's alive. It's active, like a yeast. It begins to grow and transform us. And it penetrates. It gets all the way to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. In other words, it exposes all your secrets. It exposes your motives and your opinions and your pride and your secret struggles. All the things in the dark, it brings them to the surface in His goodness and grace. Why? Because it's a double-edged sword. It wounds so it can heal. God's Word wounds you so it can heal you. Make no mistake about it. If you engage God's Word, it will wound your pride, your ego, your false self, your selfishness. It will wound you so it can heal you, in Jesus' name. Or how about this next one that says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God's Word is His voice that's preparing us for the things He has created us to do. Teaching, rebuking, correcting, training. You're like, why do they have to say all four? Teaching, it teaches us what is true in a world full of lies, what is possible in a world full of impossibilities, what God's heart is like in a world without heart. It shows us what is true and that truth can set us free. It will rebuke you, which means convict you. It will convict you of wickedness, rebellion, and sin. It will bring those things to the surface to say, "Your life is off here. This is not true. This is not good. This is not real. Let's bring it back into alignment."

It will correct you. You say, what's the difference between rebuking and correcting? What the word "correct" means, it just means to straighten out something that was crooked. To correct means, I'm not in this rebellious state of wickedness. It means I just, I'm off and I don't even realize it. And God's Word will bring me back to true form, true alignment, so I can be straight in the way that He has created me to be. And training, forming, shaping, molding, spiritual

formation, and internal goodness. Can I just tell you, I think the reason a lot of us never live the good works that God's created for us to do? It's because we don't arrange our lives around the good news. It takes good news to be able to walk out good work. And if I don't submit myself to His Word and He rules His kingdom with His Word, how is He going to empower me to rule with Him?

I mean, do you ever sit there and look at Scripture and think, "This is right now useful to equip me to become the person God has called me to be, so I can do the things God has called me to do?" That is how you engage it as a disciple, very different reality. In fact, when the first gospel was preached, first time the gospel was preached after the resurrected Jesus, it says "When the people heard this" – the Word of God – "they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" When they heard God's Word, they were cut to the heart, laid bare, broke open. And their response is, what shall we do? Repentance. Not just different thinking, but different living. Being cut to the heart is always proved by the repentance that then I walk out. If you want to know if somebody is actually cut to the heart, it's seen in their actions, because repentance proves itself by its fruit. Can I ask you the question, when was the last time you were cut to the heart by what God said? When was the last time you were laid bare? Woe is me. A deep sense of conviction, a sense of brokenness, godly sorrow. When was the last time in God's Word or in a message that you were cut to the heart? And being cut to the heart doesn't always have to be negative. It could be like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. "Our hearts burned within us," with this overwhelming sense of joy, and faith, and hope, and the life of God. When was the last time you were cut to the heart? How about this? "When the people of Valley Creek hear God's Word..." what does the next line read?

"When the people of Valley Creek hear God's Word..." what does the next line read? Does it say, "cut to the heart," or does it say, "meh"? "Didn't like that message." "Don't know that I agree with that." "I didn't really understand what God was saying in the Scriptures today." And do we excuse it and push it off and move on? Because if we're cut to the heart, there will be an action that takes place in our life. And I've been asking our staff since we started this Different Way series, are people being cut to the heart? Here's my authenticity with you. Are we being cut to the heart? Or is it just kind of like, "Yeah, Different Way, that's cool. Super glad you changed from the red to the teal. That's great." And we laugh, like, disproportionately at random jokes like that because we feel awkward and uncomfortable with the answer in our heart. So it makes us feel good. It's like an emotional release, which is totally fine. But are you being cut to the heart? And if not, then here's what we do. We say, God, I fully acknowledge I'm not being cut to the heart and that concerns me. So, could You cut me to the heart? Watch what God might do in the midst of that. God, I don't have ears to hear, but I would like to. Could You help me? I really want You to speak over my life, "Let him hear." But I know I'm not there. But I'd like to be. That's how we move forward. That's how we change. That's how we live a different way and become disciples. With me on that?

Third thing is, we got to engage God's Word with Him. I wish I could stay there, but I need to give you these last two practicals and I can go through this quick. We got to engage God's Word with Him. Listen, I think sometimes the most ignored person when we're engaging God's Word is God. I think we think about ourselves and our kids and our boss and our school and all our stuff. But I think sometimes we forget that the Holy Spirit is there. So what we need to learn to do is just before you even just stop, sit down. Holy Spirit, I choose to become aware of You right now. Before I even open this and get going, I choose to be aware of You because I'm not. And I want to read this with You, not for You, and not by myself. Holy Spirit, I'm going to be aware of You. If that takes you a minute, two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, don't start until you've just become aware of God. Have you ever seen a farmer go out and try to sow His seeds in a storm? He can't in a storm, because the storm will blow it away. We live with a storm in here, and then wonder why none of God's seeds ever take root in our life. Because we have to first stop and be aware of Him and let Him calm the storm through His presence. Then I can receive. I mean, if God's Word is a voice, He is communicating. What is the point of communication? Communion. This is why marriages, what they have to primarily work on is communication, so they can have communion and intimacy with each other. God is speaking to you so that you will be with Him. So, hear me. Stop reading the Bible and start meeting with God. Stop reading the Bible. Never thought I'd hear that in church. And start meeting with God. Look at what Jesus says. "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them, you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." He says, "The point of the Scriptures is to bring you to Me." So, if I diligently study, read the Word, do the plan, mark the check off, get all the things done, but don't meet with God, I've missed the entire point. Point is not to read God's Word. The point is to meet with God, and His Word is a voice and a voice comes from a person. And He doesn't make me figure it out on my own. He gives me the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, "whom the Father will send in My name will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you." No matter what learning challenge you have or how difficult you think the Scriptures are, or how much you don't know, you have the Counselor who is there to teach you and show you exactly what Jesus has to say. His job is to teach. Our job is to be aware that He is there and He is with me.

In fact, you remember the story of Mary and Martha? "She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the things that had to be done." Only an undistracted heart can go deep with God. Depth requires discipline, focus, attentiveness, devotion. Mary had to sit at the Lord's feet before she could hear what He said. And we live in a land of distractions. Work, kids, sports, school, stuff, not even saying those things are bad. But you can't go deep with God with a distracted heart. Here's a key for some of you. This is the best thing you're going to hear me say in this entire message for some of you is, don't read your Bible with your phone in the same room. Why? Because what is the point of having a phone? The intended point of a phone is to give me access to all the other voices out there. So by actually putting it in a different room, walking into a different room, sitting down, and opening up my Bible, aware of the Holy Spirit, what I'm saying is, God, no

other voice in my life matters to me right now but Yours. It's a work of faith. You say, I like to read it on my phone. I don't care. Get a paper Bible. Put it in the other room and sit there and meet with God. Why? Because we all have these addictions to touch our phone, even if nobody is calling you, like every two minutes. Why isn't anybody calling me? You know? Then all of a sudden, you're like, "What's the weather?" And then, all of a sudden, there is a bing. Then all of a sudden, a thing. And then your mind goes, "Oh, the kids, I've got to get there later." And then all of a sudden, it's like, "What's the world saying?" Put your phone in the other room. You'd be amazed at how you'd start hearing God's voice. Come on.

Jesus, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, says, "Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in your name, drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.'" Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, I read the Bible." "Lord, Lord, I did the Valley Creek Reading Plan." "Lord, Lord, I went through the New Testament twice. Didn't want to either time, but I did. It's got to count for something, right?" "I never knew you." The only place in the Bible where Jesus defines eternal life, He says, "This is eternal life that they may know you." "Away from me, you evildoers." You say, "That's harsh. I'm a good person. I do good things." Goodness is not a work of the flesh. It is a Fruit of the Spirit. There is no amount of work I can do in the flesh to become good. It is a Fruit of the Spirit that grows in my life when I know Him. So the point isn't reading the Bible. The point is meeting with God. And if you read the Bible out of duty or obligation or religion or expectation, let me free you. Don't read it anymore. Don't read it anymore. Why? Because it's just hardening your heart. And it's just cluttering your mind. You don't have ears to hear so you're not hearing anything anyways. And there are no points in Heaven given for just reading the Bible. None. Stop reading the Bible and start meeting with God. And one of the greatest ways you can meet with God is by reading the Bible. Let him who has ears to hear, hear that.

Last thing. Engage God's Word with a plan. You probably just need a plan. If you're going to run a marathon, you have a training plan. If you're going to learn to play piano, you have a practice plan. If you're going to get healthy, you have a plan. To try to read God's Word without a plan, it's that whole saying, "you're planning to fail." Why? Because we need to know what we're going to read, when we're going to read it, and where we're going to read it. The whole point of having a Bible reading plan is so that when you wake up, or when you're going to read it, and you open it up, and you're like, "I'm not sure where I should start." It's like walking into a gym to work out with no plan and you see 10,000 machines. Where do I start? Just kind of aimlessly like walking around, looking. "Oh, that one looks hard." Come over here. You know, that's like turning to Leviticus. You're like, "Oh, aye, aye, no. Let's see if there's something better," you know? You've got to have a plan. And then you've got to know when you're going to read it. Make it work in your life. Arrange your life. If you're a parent with littles, maybe you've got to do it in the morning before they get up or at night after you've put them to bed. If you've got a big job, maybe you need to do it during your lunch break. If you're a student, maybe you need to do it as the last thing before you go to bed. But hear me. That's

when you're going to read it. But when you're going to read it is not when you start. You start before that happens. If I'm going to get up early in the morning, it means I've got to go to bed and probably not watch that last episode. If I'm going to read it at lunch, it means I have to already have thought about what I'm going to eat for lunch so I don't spend my whole lunch break trying to find food, so then I can sit down and read. If I'm going to read it as a student before I go to bed, I've got to use my study hall, not on my phone, but to get my homework done, so at night before I go to bed, I don't have to do homework. I can actually engage God's Word.

And then find a place. Where is a place that works for you where you meet with God? But you've got to have some kind of plan. And some of you are like, "That's so like, faithless to have a plan, like, just let God speak." Listen, faith is back here saying, "I'm going to build a plan with God because I'm arranging my life around His Word. And if He wants to change the plan at any point in time, He is free to change the plan." Come on. "Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway." Blessed is the man who daily has a plan, a place, and a time to meet with God under an open Heaven, expecting Him to speak. And when you have a plan, you'll fail at that plan. And you will struggle. And you'll be defeated. And you'll sin. And you'll make mistakes in your life. And Satan will use that to create a big divide between you and God's Word. He will bring shame and condemnation and fear and worry. And, "Is God mad at me?" And, "I need to feel stressed out about this." Here's the last verse for you. Here's how we approach God's Word. "So we know and rely on the love God has for us, for God is love." Here's how I approach God's Word. God is love. I am loved. And everything He says is loving. For some of you, that's your takeaway. God is love. I am loved. And everything He says is loving. If you have a plan, and you get behind, don't catch up on the plan. Catch up with God. The point is not the plan. The point is not putting a little check mark on that little thing we give you to say, "I did them all." Think of any relationship in your life. The point is not catching up on the plan. The point is catching up with God and saying, "God, I missed You. But more importantly, You missed me. And You are love. And I am loved. And so, I read this in love, because Your voice is loving." So, our practice plan for this week, for those of us that have set our hearts to say we're going to train in this season to become godly, to live a different way, these little practice plans each week, is to read Psalm 119 and engage the Valley Creek Reading Plan five times this week a different way.

Read Psalm 119. Psalm 119 is all about God's Word, and what God's Word will do. Sometimes you need to read less Scripture more. Sometimes you need to read more Scripture more. Sometimes you need to read less of God's Word more deeply. Less of it, but more deeply, so it changes you. Sometimes you need to read more of it more, so it's like a pressure washer, washing you with the Word, washing the world off of you. Psalm 119, this week is more Scripture more to wash the world off, and then engaging the reading plan five times in a different way. If you're like, "I already got this training plan down, read Psalm 119 in the past, and I do the reading plan. Easy practice week." In A Different Way. Which means, when you read the reading plan, come with a Jesus-focused perspective. Come as a disciple. Come do it

with God, and then follow the plan that He has for your life. The Bible is not a book; it's a voice, calling out in the wilderness to show you His thoughts and His thoughts will show you His ways. A Different Way. If I want to do what Jesus did, I got to do what Jesus did. And He arranged His life around God's Word. So, close your eyes. Come on, this is why I usually ask you most weeks, what is the Holy Spirit saying to you? Because I can't open the Scriptures for you. Only the Holy Spirit can. I can open the Bible, but I can't actually open the Scriptures. So what's the Holy Spirit saying to you? What's He stirring up? How about just this, what do you need to think about this week?

What do you need to talk to God about this week? Jesus, I ask that You would cut me to the heart when I hear Your Word, and that I would do things differently when that happens. Holy Spirit, come and cut us to the heart. Teach us to live a different way. May I not sit in judgement on Your Word, but may Your Word do a deep work in my soul. Give us ears to hear, Lord. And may we become a church that loves Your Word, not in information or knowledge, but the Word as a voice that comes from the great I am. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



APRIL 14, 2024

SEASON TWO, EPISODE THREE

"MEDITATION, PART ONE"

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. Come on, whatever campus you're at today, Denton, Flower Mound, Gainesville, Lewisville or online somewhere in the world, let's just welcome each other together for a moment. We are so glad you are here with us and we've had a great couple weeks in a row. We had two weeks of Spring Break, Selah, rest in Jesus' name, then together as a church, we prayed for our Easter experiences and services, which was one of my favorite services we've had in a long time, then we had a great Easter, where we met together with the resurrected Jesus, and then last week hundreds of people got baptized are moving forward on their journey with Jesus, and what I just want you to see in all that is that God is moving. He's at work. He's doing things in our lives. He's doing things in our church and there is this growing sense of hunger. There's this growing sense of discontent for the status quo. There is this hunger and this thirst for God.

And we've been in this series, this season, if you will, just called A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did, and we're taking most of this year to just talk about what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus, a learner, a student, a follower, one who becomes like the one they follow. Allowing Jesus to be our teacher; to give us a vision of who we want to become. And we're talking about, how do we arrange and rearrange, order and reorder, our entire lives around Jesus and His way. We've been saying that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we first have to... [do the things that Jesus did.] Yeah, you've been listening. That if I want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, I have to first do what he did behind-the-scenes. That if I want Jesus' life, I have to first take on His lifestyle. You say, well, what does that mean, to do the things that Jesus did so I can do the things that Jesus did? Well, do the things that Jesus did. What did Jesus do? Jesus raised the dead, and healed the sick, and cast out demons, and He had peace in this life; He was full of wisdom, He was able to love His enemy; live in freedom. If I want to do those things, I have to first do the things that Jesus did, like His practices – fasting, prayer, Scripture, community, generosity and so on.

You see, we've used this little image to say, this is a picture of the life that Jesus lived and these are the things that we want. Peace in chaos, joy in every circumstance, purpose in the mundane, being able to forgive no matter what, and sometimes we look at the life of Jesus and we think it's so beyond us, so impossible, we can never live that life. Yet, Jesus Himself says, "I tell you the truth," and anytime The Truth says, "I'm telling you the truth," you should probably... this is important. "Anyone..." Does that include you? "Who has faith in me will do what I have been doing." He says the life that I'm living is not this extraordinary ordinary, supernatural, divine Son of God kind of life. No, this is the normal Christian life. This is what it means to be human. This is what it looks like to be alive. This is what it looks like to be a person in right relationship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' life is actually available to you, and I when we decide to allow Him to be our teacher and us be His disciples and He will show us the way. But it doesn't just happen. We actually have to train ourselves to be godly. Not just try to be godly, not just wait to be godly, not just hope to be godly, not let the world train you to be worldly. No, we got to train ourselves to be godly. Just like it might be hard for you to be like Jesus right now or to be godly, in the same way, you couldn't just go out and run a

marathon. But you could start training, and you could walk to your mailbox, and then the next day, walk around the block, and maybe the next day, go around it two times, and so on, and so forth, and train yourself to be able to run a marathon. Just like we can't be godly the way we want to today, we can start training.

We've been talking about spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines, which is simply doing what I can do now so I can do what I can't do later. Doing what I can do now, what I have authority and the ability to do to practice in the here and now, so I can do the things I want to do later in my life and become who Jesus says that I can become. So in a sense, all we're talking about spiritual formation, the process of being formed into the image of Jesus to become a person of love. You see, one day after 30 years of hiddenness, Jesus is baptized. When He comes up out of the water, it says the heavens opened, the Spirit descended upon Him, the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Immediately, the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the desert to be in the wilderness for 40 days of fasting. At the end of that 40 days of wilderness experience, Satan comes to Jesus, at what we would think would be His weakest moment. Three times, he tempts Jesus. "If you are the Son of God..." and then tells Him to do something. Every time Satan tempts Jesus, Jesus responds by saying, "It is written..." and then He quotes a piece of passage, a Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy. In that moment, when Jesus defeats Satan, what we discover is that He spent the last 30 years of His life arranging His life around memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.

In that moment, when Satan tempts Him, and He declares and quotes three passages from the Book of Deuteronomy, we know He had it memorized and that He had meditated on it. Why? Because he doesn't have a Bible. He doesn't whip out a scroll. He does not have the Bible app to quickly type in "passages to help you find victory over Satan." No, He spent the last 30 years arranging and rearranging His life around memorizing and meditating on the Word of God. So He didn't win that victory in the moment, He actually won that victory long before behind-the-scenes. And what we see about Jesus is that He filled His mind so full of the Word of God that He thought God's thoughts, He spoke God's words, and He lived God's life. You see it over and over in the Gospels. He's constantly saying things like, "Have you not heard?" "Do you not know?" "Have you not seen?" "It is written..." He quotes these passages of Scripture over and over and over again because He has arranged and rearranged His life around memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.

If we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to first do the things that Jesus did, which is meditate on Scripture. So let's talk about this for a second. Meditation. It's a big word, a word a lot of us are familiar with, but we're not sure totally what it means. What does meditation actually mean? Well, to meditate on something means to think deeply about deep things. To meditate means to take a piece of Scripture and put it in your mind and turn it over, and over, and over, and over, and over again until you start to literally break it down. The way a cow would chew its cud over and over again, you keep turning it in your mind, breaking it down, smaller and smaller, until you actually start to absorb the very reality of that verse. That reality

starts to frame your entire mindset. As you absorb it, it starts to change your attitudes, and your judgments, and your opinions, and your preferences, and your perspectives. It changes your behaviors, and your motions, and your feelings. It literally starts to frame your entire perception of reality. See, to meditate on God's Word isn't just changing your thoughts, it's changing your thinking and your entire mindset. To meditate is not just thinking. Here's what I want you to understand. It's thinking with the Holy Spirit. That's what meditation is. It's not just going off in a corner and thinking deeply by yourself. No, it's thinking with the Holy Spirit, under the illumination and the influence of the Holy Spirit. When you're saying, "Holy Spirit, what does this mean?" "Holy Spirit, why did You say this?" "What does this look like?" "What are You trying to show me in this place?" You're allowing His influence and His illumination to literally break apart that verse until you absorb it. It becomes a very part of you. It's when you open yourself up to God's Word as it is, not to study or analyze it, but just to receive it.

In fact, let me try to make this clear for some of you. Meditation is simply having a vision for your thought life. That's all it is. It's choosing, intentionally choosing, what I am going to think about before the day even begins. Before the situations and circumstances arise, I've already decided, this is where my mind is going to go and this is what I'm going to be thinking about all day. And here's what's amazing. Every person in this room, you are already gifted at meditating. You're a great meditator. The only question is, is who or what are you meditating on? Ready? Do you ever worry? Do you ever worry? Okay. Do you know what worry is? Worry is simply meditating on the future without God. It's thinking about the future over, and over, and over again, but without God. So I worry, and I stress, and I have fear. How about this? Have you ever thought regretful thoughts? Have you ever been full of regret? Do you know what regret is? Regret is meditating on the past without God. It's thinking about the past over, and over, again. "Why did I do this?" "I shouldn't have done that." "I wish I would have done this." "I wish I would have done that." Okay. How about anxiety? Have you ever had anxiety? You know what anxiety is? It's meditating on the present without God. So I start to become overwhelmed, and stressed, and unsettled in all these things I have to do. How about this? Have you ever been really, really angry? Nobody wants to admit that one. Have you ever been really, really angry? And you just stew over, and over, and over again in your mind. You know what that is? It's meditating on how your will was violated. Have you ever been really offended at someone and you can't just seem to let it go? You know what that is? That's meditating on the offense and turning it over, and over, and over again in your mind. Have you ever been in love with someone and you can't stop thinking about them over, and over, and over again in your mind? Have you ever been really excited about something in the future and you can't wait to get there and you're thinking about it over, and over, and over again? That's meditation. You are actually already really gifted at meditating. The only question is, is who or what are you meditating on?

You see, I think we forget how powerful our minds are. God has made you in His image and His likeness, and He's given you this profound mind, and your thoughts lead your life. Right thinking will lead to right living. Wrong thinking will lead to wrong living. And whatever you fill

your mind with, your life will become full of the reality of. If I fill my mind full of the thoughts of God, my life will become full of the reality of God. If I fill my mind full of the thoughts of the world, my life will become full of the reality of the world. The problem for a lot of us is we believe we're victims of our thoughts. We believe that our thoughts choose us, but in reality, we choose our thoughts. You are not a victim of your mind. You are a product of it. God has given you the freedom of what you want to choose to think about. You are not enslaved to any kind of thinking. God gives you the freedom and the ability to choose what you want to think about. You can't choose the circumstances of your life, but you can certainly choose what you're thinking about. This is why Proverbs tells us, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Your thoughts lead your life. So sometimes we got to stop to think about our thinking and give thought to our thoughts. When was the last time you stopped to think about what you're thinking about or gave extended thought to your thoughts? "Fix your thoughts," which means you are not a victim of, but a product of. "What is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about it." Can I ask you a question? Are your thoughts true, good, and right? Are they pure and lovely? What are you meditating on? Because every day you're meditating on something and you get to intentionally choose what that can be. If we want to do the things that Jesus did, then we've got to arrange our minds around the Word of God and think about it all throughout the day. You with me on this?

See, what was Jesus' main message? Jesus' main message when He showed up on this earth was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Remember, the word repent means change your thinking, change your mindset. "Re," go back. "Pent," think penthouse floor, high view. Go back and get a higher perspective. Go back and get God's view on life. If you will repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand and you can access it. A lot of us repent enough to get into the kingdom of God, but we don't repent enough to actually live in the kingdom of God, to move forward and to advance. Why? Because we don't think about God's Word deeply enough or long enough to actually repent. If repent is changing my thinking, it's not just sitting in a church service being convicted by a verse and having a good feeling about it for 13 minutes and then walking out and going right back to my life. That's not repentance. Repentance is actually changing my thinking, and a lot of us in one moment can't actually change our thought life, so how do we actually repent? By meditating. Meditation is a key to repentance and repentance is the way we access the kingdom is at hand. The reason a lot of us never grab the kingdom is because we don't meditate on God's Word enough to actually be able to access it or to grab it; for it to become reality in our life. God gives us a piece of revelation, we see this little treasure and we think, "Wow, that's really good," and then we go right back to our life. But if I will take that thing and think about it, and mine it out, and turn it over, and over, and over again, I'm not just changing my thoughts, I'm actually changing my thinking and I'm actually changing my mindset until I start to think the very thoughts of God, speak the very words of God and walk in the very ways of God. Does this make sense to you? If you want to live deeply in the kingdom, you have to become a person who meditates on God's Word, because that's how you actually change your thinking. Not just once, but for good.

So, if you're here and you struggle with lust, don't keep trying to tell yourself, "Don't do it, don't do it, don't look at it." How's that working out for you? Instead, meditate on verses about God's love for you. If you're here and you struggle with greed, don't just keep telling yourself, "I shouldn't be so greedy." Meditate on verses that talk about God's generosity towards you. If you're here and you're always anxious, don't just keep talking about your anxiety, meditate on verses that talk about the peace He has already gave you. Why? Because that's going to help you repent, change your thinking, so you can access the kingdom that's at hand and bring it into your life. How about this? Paul in Romans Chapter 12, he spent 11 chapters talking to us about what we have in Jesus, the finished work of Jesus, the goodness of grace. So he says "Therefore," based on 11 chapters of theology of the finished work of Jesus, "I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy," based on everything Jesus has done for you, "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship." Worship is not just raising our hands. It's literally offering our bodies as living sacrifices. Every time you engage in spiritual practices or spiritual disciplines, you're offering your body to God as a living sacrifice. Every time I meditate, and every time I fast, and every time I pray, and every time I serve, and every time I do community, all those things, I'm literally offering my body to God as a living sacrifice. Why? Because I'm saying, God, I want to train to be godly. So here's my body. I don't want sin trapped in the members of my body. I want your righteousness to flow through the members of my body. So when I meditate, I'm literally offering my mind to God as a living sacrifice as an act of worship.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Okay. Let's see if we can get this together. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." The world has a pattern. The world has a way of life. The world has a very clear definition on what is good, and what is true, and what is right, and they want to conform you into it, shape you, mold you, press you, like a cookie cutter, form you into this thing where you become exactly like them in every way. All of us have more areas of our life that are conformed to the pattern of this world than we realize. So this is why he says, "Do not conform any longer." There are parts of your life that have been conformed to the pattern, to the standard, to the source, to what the world calls good, true, and right. He says, but don't be conformed, don't let them press you in.

Do you know one of the primary ways we get conformed to the pattern of this world? Okay. Everybody take a breath with me, and step on some things, is social media. Here's what's interesting. We go on social media, and we look for people to follow that we think are experts in the things we're interested in. So, we will follow people that we think are experts in finance, experts in beauty, experts in fitness, experts in relationships, experts in being Gen Z, experts in using our time, experts in travel, experts in the life that I think I want. The moment I follow them, let's use the words now, follow. I click the button. What does it mean to follow? It means they lead, and I have now submitted myself to be a student or a learner of that thing or that person. And now, let's use the words that we use. We call them influencers. What does

influence mean? Influence means to have power or authority over something. It means to have a compelling force on someone to make them do that which you want them to do. So the moment I follow someone who I think is an expert in something I'm interested in, I've literally just given them permission to lead my thoughts. I swipe through and I see an idea, an image, language, wording, a vision, a prophecy, whatever you want to call it, that I wasn't thinking about. Three seconds ago, I wasn't thinking about this, but because I've chosen to follow them and let them influence me, whoop, now there it is. Now I've let them, literally, I've invited them to lead my thoughts. And if my thoughts lead my life, I've basically allowed them to lead my life. So I'm allowing them to tell me what is good, what is true, and what is right. All of a sudden, I start to speak their words and walk in their ways and think their thoughts. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." So I allow their ideas and their images. All of a sudden, all of a sudden, they start to take over my life and I become conformed to the pattern of this world. I allow that way to become the way for me.

Does that make sense? Before you press the follow button and before you swipe through, just stop and ask yourself the question, do I want this person to lead my thoughts? Do I want this person to lead my thoughts? Why do I believe someone who lives like the world can be an expert of finance in my life? Because I'm in the kingdom. Why do I think someone who lives according to the pattern of this world can be an expert of health? Because I'm in the kingdom. But why do I think this person who says they're an expert in relationships and what life can be like in the world, why do I think they're an expert? Because I'm in the kingdom. So not only are they not an expert, they're actually, the Bible will call a fool. Where's the expert? The Scriptures. We didn't like that one. So don't let that happen to you. Ironically, we actually choose it.

It is so hard to lead a church to become like Jesus when we spend 167 out of the 168 hours a week consuming what the world says is the way. Most of us, all we get is the amount of verses I can get into this thing in 35 minutes. Can you see that? You choosing to be here today is a great thought, because here's what you're saying. You're saying I'm here to follow. Lead my thinking. Did you ever think that? You come to church and you sit there, this is why you should take notes. Lead my thinking because I don't want to think like that. I want to think like this. So "do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Change the way you think. It'll change the way you live. We need a renewing of our mind. We need a renovation of the mind. We need a restoration of the mind. We need our mind to literally be remodeled and He says we will be transformed. The word "transformed" here is the same word that's used when Jesus is transfigured. Do you remember that story? He goes up on the side of the mountain and it says He's transfigured. He's changed in front of the disciples and to the point where He radiates brighter than the sun and they literally can't even look at Him because it's so bright. In that moment, He's transfigured and what's happening is He is literally radiating the very glory, beauty, holiness, wisdom, the very life of heaven. In that moment, He fully represents the reality of another world. So when Paul uses that word, what he's saying is, when you will meditate on Scripture and renew your mind, your mind will literally

begin to radiate the very glory, and beauty, and holiness, and wisdom of heaven. People who think like the kingdom radiate the realities of heaven. Why? Because they start to think from heaven to earth and from the spiritual to the physical, from the invisible to the visible.

One of the great dreams of my own personal life is I want to become someone who literally thinks like the kingdom. There is no thought in this head that is of the pattern of this world, but every thought is primarily framed and shaped by what God says is true, the superior reality, an accurate perception of reality, instead of being deceived and being fooled. "Then," and only then, "will you be able to test and approve what God's will is." Only when your mind has been transformed by the renewing of it through meditation will you be able to see God's will in your life. The reason most of us can't see God's will that's right in front of us is because we've been conformed to the world and you can't see what you're not looking for. You can't understand the language you don't speak. You can't find that which you're not interested in. A lot of us can't find God's will for our life because we think so much like the world that even when He shows it to us, we can't see it. Are you with me on this? This is so important. I mean, when Joshua is about to go in and take the Promised Land, a picture of moving deeper into the kingdom of God, the Promised Land, the kingdom of God, Joshua is about to lead a couple million people, okay? Here's what God says, "Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it then. Then," everybody say, "then you will be prosperous and successful." He says the key to prosperity and success is meditating on God's Word. If I would have sent you a text this morning to say, "Hey, come to church today because I'm gonna tell you the secret of prosperity and success." We'd have a lot more people here than we currently have and everyone would sit with their journal and they'd be like this. Because we want to be prosperous and successful because God made us to desire that. God made us to desire prosperity, to have breakthrough and abundance and shalom and life. He's made us to desire to be successful, to accomplish God's purposes in our lives. He tells us the secret or the key of the whole thing is to just meditate on His Word.

"Do not let this book of the law," God's Word literally is the defining reality of what is good and true and right. "Don't let it depart from your mouth, but meditate on it day and night," in the morning and in the evening. When you're awake and when you're asleep. When you're coming and when you're going. When life is good and when life is bad. When the circumstances are favorable, when they're unfavorable. When you're driving, when you're playing, when you're working, when you're hanging. Everywhere you go, meditate on it. Then you will be able to be careful to do everything written in it. You can't align your life to something you don't know, and then prosperity and success will come. Here's what I want you to see. He says, "Don't let it depart from your mouth." Okay. The word meditate literally means to murmur. It doesn't just mean to think. It means to literally speak it out. We're not just supposed to read the Word. We're supposed to speak the Word. Biblical meditation would be literally speaking the very words of God over your life all day long. Be like everywhere you go, you're just walking around. You're just thinking, "God is for me, so who can be against me?"

"One thing I ask, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever." "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight." "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." "I am confident that God will work all things together for the good for those who love Him, who have been called according to His purposes." "I know there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." "I am convinced that nothing, neither height, nor death, neither angels, nor demons, nor nothing in all of creation will separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus." "My God will meet all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come." Are you hearing me? You gotta speak it. You gotta speak it.

When was the last time you spoke the Word of God when we didn't give it to you and say, "We're all gonna declare this together in church"? You're like, "That would just be weird, man." I think the way the world lives is pretty weird. You know what happens when you're meditating, murmuring, speaking the word of God? You know what's happening? It's the Word of God. God's Word creates. So when you speak it out, you're creating your future. God's Word prophesizes. When you speak it out, you're calling things that are not as though they were. God's Word heals. When you speak it out, you're bringing healing to your home and to your family. God's Word is living and active. When you speak it out, you're releasing life into the atmosphere. God's Word trains us in righteousness. When you're speaking it out, you're literally training yourself and your very spirit is becoming stronger in the moment. But instead, oh, we meditate, we just walk around and we do things like this. Like "I'm just, I'm no good. I'll never be able to do this." "I can't believe, why did she do that again? She always does that. Why does she never do what I ask her to do?" "I can't believe he's still acting this way. We've talked about this. Why isn't he doing it?" "This job, I hate this job. Why do I have to come here every single day? Why do they get to do it and why don't I get to do it? When is this gonna change? How do I just get out of this because this whole thing is awful?" So what's happening? That's the future you're creating. That's what you're aligning yourself with. You're being conformed to the pattern of the world because that's how the world thinks. Make no mistake about it, all those experts you follow online, that's the thought patterns in here. Oh, they may look really pretty, and they may have a lot of money, and a car you like, and they may have the vacations you hope for. But make no mistake about it, according to God, they're broken and lost and darkened in here. So I'm glad they look good on the outside, but do they have life on the inside?

The greatest thing you can do for your entire life, prosperous and successful, just meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing you can do for your marriage is meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing you can do for your future, meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing you can do for that sickness, meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing I can do for my work, meditate on God's Word. Greatest thing I can do for my anxiety, meditate on God's Word. It either is the definition of prosperity and success or it's not. You get to choose. If you don't think this is the

definition of how you become prosperous and successful, then here's my question. How do you believe you become prosperous and successful in life? That's a great thing to give thought to. Ask yourself, where did that thinking come from? Because it's a different thinking than what God says. With me on this? See, I've done this for like 20 years now. For 20 years, everybody has, the number one reason people say they don't engage God's Word. Do you know what it is? Don't answer, just think. Do you know why people for 20 years have told me they don't engage God's Word? It's because they say they don't understand it. "I don't get it." "It doesn't make sense." "It's just not for me." "I can't get it." Do you know there's no place I can find in the Bible where God commands you to understand His Word? But there are hundreds of places where God commands you to memorize it, to meditate on it, to read it, to engage it, to pray it, to prophesy it, to obey it, to align with it, to follow it, to delight in it, to consume it, to enjoy it. He doesn't tell us to understand it. He tells us to meditate on it. So we say I don't engage it because I don't understand it, and God says you don't understand it because you don't engage it. I mean, look at this. "For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding." You can't understand it on your own anyways. The Lord gives revelation and understanding and supernatural insight. You can't do this on your own. He has to reveal, reveal, literally show you that which was hidden and that which was covered and make it known to you. He longs to give it to you, but He only gives it to those who are hungry for it. In fact, right before it says this, look what it says. "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then" – then, then, then, everybody say... then – "you will understand the fear of the Lord and find knowledge."

He says if you'll accept it and store it up, if you'll literally memorize it, and turn and apply your heart to understanding, meditate on it, if you'll call out, and cry, and look, and search, then you will understand. Listen, we want to understand. God says faith leads to understanding. Understanding will follow your faith. By faith, put it in. By faith, read it. By faith, prophesy it. By faith, just think about it, for goodness sakes. Just think about it. You'd be amazed what kind of understanding you'll get. The reason so many Christians are so shallow and superficial is because we read it once, say I don't get it, and move on, and God says, "And that's why you don't get it. Because you're not willing to store up, apply, turn, call aloud, cry out because I want to give you knowledge." In fact, He says to the disciples, "The secret," the mysteries, "of the kingdom of God," there are spiritual truths that are spiritually hidden, but God wants to "give them to you." He gave them to the disciples because they were hungry. "But to those on the outside, everything is parable so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding." Do you feel like you don't perceive and don't understand? Could it just be then it's because you're not actually hungry for what He wants to show you? Because He gives the secrets to those who will steward them well. If God gives you hidden revelation that you don't want, you become responsible to now obey it. So if you don't want it, it's actually His grace to not give it to you. He only gives the secrets to those who are willing to

steward them because once they've been revealed, you are now responsible to repent and align your life with.

In fact, I love this. Jesus says to the Pharisees, "But go and learn what this means," and then He gives them something. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," whatever. He's saying to the Pharisees, the religious leaders who studied and analyzed the Word of God, "Go and learn what this means," and He quotes a verse. I want you to think about this. What is He saying? Here's what He's not saying. He's not saying, "Go read another commentary, go sit in another sermon, go talk to a friend." No, He's saying, "Think about this. Meditate on this under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and take some time to go deep with what I say is true." When was the last time you left a message with a verse that maybe didn't connect with you, or you didn't understand, and you went away and learned what it meant? Not from a commentary, or your Circle, or no, just by meditating on it and saying, "Holy Spirit, I don't understand, but you want to show me. So will You show me?" I get it. We say things like, "But God says, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth. So my ways are higher and my thoughts are higher.'" We're like, "I can't think God's thoughts. They're too out there." Okay, Jesus, the living Word came from heaven, took on flesh, moved into your neighborhood with grace and truth to bring the Word of God to you in the here and now. If He could do that, then the Holy Spirit, who has been released in your life, can liberally give you the mind of Christ, which is why it says, "We have not received the spirit of this world, but the spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned by the spiritually hungry. It's not that it's so far out there. It's just not available to those who don't want it. Are you with me on this?

Okay. See, for the last couple years, not even, 18 months, I've been really convicted and impacted by this truth that I'm trying to teach you. So we've started memorizing larger chunks of passages with some of our people. It started with just a couple of us and we started memorizing on some stuff and I watched how it went and then we started asking our staff to do it. In this last year, we've asked every leader in our church to memorize passages of Scripture, not like a verse, but like chunks, like a chapter. We started working it into our Kid's Leadership and our Student Leadership Experience. Then at Men's Nights in the fall, we actually worked on memorizing an entire chapter together. Every time I've asked anybody to memorize a chunk of Scripture, you should see them like, it's like you literally ask them to like, fly to the moon. Like, "Ah, I can't do that. That's so hard. I don't know how to… I don't have the mind for that. I can't do it. Oh, I, oh, ah, eh, oh." Oh my gosh. Okay, hang on a second. Breathe, first of all. Now let's talk about this. Do you know how good you are at memorizing? You know how many songs right now, if I could press play in your heart, bang, would just come out? You know how much useless information and knowledge you have stored up in there? Some of you guys are like, "I can't memorize Scripture." Bro, do you know how many sports facts you have? You could tell me like, Troy Aikman's incompletion ratio from 20 years ago, on the spot. It's not that we can't memorize, it's that we don't want to memorize. I mean, do you realize that the Jewish culture, like in Jesus' day, the entire education system was based on Scripture? It wasn't based

on math, and arithmetic, and reading, and writing to get a scholarship, to get into that school so I can be prosperous and successful because if you don't get in that school, you can't be prosperous and successful. Oh, wait, sorry. That was a person I was following on social media. Unfollow. Okay. It's either true or it's not. You get to pick. The entire thing was based on Scripture. Every 12-year-old boy, by the time he was 12, would have had the entire Torah memorized. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the entire thing. Why? Because God said, "I want you to think my thoughts and speak my words and walk in my ways." If you will put that in here, that's who you will become. Every person who went on from education from that point would have gone on to memorize the entire Old Testament. So, Jesus, the man, not the Son of God, the Son of Man, would have most likely by the age of 30 had the entire Old Testament memorized. We sit here and argue about memorizing two or three verses.

And then, parents, okay, so I'm just going to go for it today. Parents, we say things like this. "My kid can't memorize Scripture. That's way too hard. They got too much. Oh, it's too much." Okay. Hang on a second. Pause. Okay. Your kid is in AP Physics, Calculus AB, AP Chemistry. They can learn world history. They can study Shakespeare. They can memorize their entire musical theater script. They can learn every play in the offensive playbook. Oh, but they can't memorize a couple of verses. So we bring what our students are capable of way down here. You are capable of so much more. God designed it this way. So you can't say you can't do it, because God made it this way. You can say you don't want to do it. The reason we don't ask our students to do it is because we don't actually believe, that's where prosperity and success comes from, number one. But number two is because if I asked them to memorize it, now I have to memorize it. I'm not so sure I want to do that. If you're in a Circle or on a serve team, I would encourage you to ask the leader of that Circle or that serve team, how their journey of memorizing John 15:1-17 is going. Because that's what we asked all our leaders to do this semester. Ask them, what are you learning? How is it going? How has it been challenging for you? How has it been changing? Ask them, ask them, and in some way, because I hope for the accountability of it. I'll just tell you right up front, we've lost staff and leaders over this because they don't want to memorize Scripture. Here's what I want to say. No problem. Thank you for playing. Bless you. Appreciate you. Because the moment you tell me you won't memorize and meditate on Scripture, you're telling me you can't be prosperous and successful. Because if God says that's the key to taking to Promised Land, you're telling me you can't prosper nor succeed. So why can I then, can't, in good conscience empower you over people that you can't prosper and succeed with? I mean, just imagine for a second, if whatever you believed made you prosperous and successful, if you took just a fraction of that energy and how you look, and education, and networking, all the things, you just took fitness, or took a fraction of that, and put it into meditating on Scripture.

A dream in my heart is that we would be the kind of church that could walk around and anytime we see each other anywhere in this world, we would be able to say, "Hey, what Scriptures are you working on? What Scriptures are working on you?" "Oh man, I'm trying to meditate on

this," or, "I've been memorizing this, and God is showing me..." You know how amazing that would be? When was the last time you committed a single verse to heart, let alone a chapter? Listen to me, if God is the one who made the mind, He knows how it works and just like He says your body needs water and food, He says your mind needs His Word. It needs His Word in here to renew and restore, to change the thoughts, the thinking, the actual mindset, to break it down to a point where it absorbs the very realities of heaven to frame your opinions and perspectives and judgments and emotions and thoughts and feelings so you perceive reality. When I don't do it His way, I literally have a darkened mind and my mind freezes up and it breaks and it doesn't work. I mean, look at this furthermore, "Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done." Meditate on this one this week. They didn't think it was worth memorizing and meditating on the knowledge of God so He gave them. They said, "I don't want to think with you, God. I want to think by myself." He's given you the free will to go do that, but understand that your mind will become depraved, darkened, foolish. Do you know what this word actually means? It means, "can't stand the test." Can't stand the test of what? Your life. Your mind becomes so empty, so void, so darkened, so seized and locked up when it's not full of the Word of God that it literally can't stand the test of your life. This is why we're often so broken, and then we start doing things that shouldn't be done, and we find ourselves doing things we never thought we would do or be like, because we didn't think it was worth retaining the knowledge of God. Believing when God says, "You will be prosperous and successful wherever you go in every area of my life." The greatest thing I can do is put the Word of God in my heart, in my mind, meditate on it, mutter it, speak it. Listen, can I just say something for some of you? If you're here and you struggle with mental health in any way, anxiety, depression, ADD, ADHD, bipolar, any type of mental trauma, brokenness, darkness, like a darkened imagination, whatever you choose for your path of healing, make sure it includes memorizing large portions of God's Word.

You got to choose your healing path, medication, counseling, reframing my life, so on and so forth. Just make sure whatever your plan is includes memorizing large portions of Scripture, because that's how God says your mind works. You can't say, "I can't focus. I can't do it." The reason you can't focus is because you haven't done it. Working on it will actually teach you focus, but then I'll be able to apply in other areas of my life. Why? Because God says I'll be prosperous and successful if I will meditate on His Word. That make sense? The people of God can't choose the world's way for healing. The people of God have access to all truth and the world has some access to truth, but we must make sure we include what God says is priority and first most as truth before we just run off and do all the things that the experts tell us to do. Because if they're not experts in the kingdom, I have to be very careful with how I let them influence my thinking. Some of you are like, "But I can't… I mean, I can't, my life is…" I know, this whole series is about arranging and rearranging. I'm not asking you to add something into your already over the margin life. I'm saying you probably need to take something out so that you can now rearrange your thoughts. Oh my gosh, your thoughts. It's so sad to me that this verse is supposed to describe the world, and yet it describes so much of the American church

that we don't believe it's worth retaining the knowledge of God. Oh, I know God. Yeah, sure. Oh yeah, no. I go out and I live like everybody else. Think, I think like everybody else. That's why I live like everybody else. If I will think like Jesus, I can live like Jesus, but I don't think like Jesus and I'm making no effort to learn to think like Jesus.

I'm getting close to pleading, and I don't want to do that. So we're going to stop there for today and that's what you missed, but we'll get there next week. Here's your practice plan. Practice plan for this week. Remember, in this series, all year, there's a practice plan at the end of every one of these, choose to do it, don't, it's totally up to you, but we are training to be godly as a people. Memorize Psalm 23 this week. Okay. Hang on. It's only six verses. It's already a familiar passage. You're going to have some reference in context of it. We're even going to make you a digital download that you can put on your phone. Try it. Try it. Here's my question for you. If you don't try it, that's fine. Just make sure you're very clear in acknowledging the reality of where you're choosing to put your thinking. It's okay. Don't say I don't want to do it, great. Just then define like, what am I actually then going to think about this week? Money, sex, beauty, fame, frustration, my dysfunctional spouse, my wayward children, my frustrating parents, being cool, being popular at school, just acknowledge at least what you are going to choose to think about, because you choose your thoughts. Your thoughts don't choose you. This is choosing to just have a vision for what you're going to think about just for the next seven days. That's all it is. You're like, well, it's just choosing to have a vision for what I'm going to think about in the next seven days and watch what God will start doing as He starts washing and healing and loosing and releasing the very mind that He's given you to see the very realities of heaven, the will of God around you. Try it. Rearrange your thoughts this week and we'll talk about it more next week. You're like, "But I still don't know how to meditate." I will talk more about it next week. Fair?

So Jesus, we want to be people that have a renewed mind. I want my mind to be transfigured till it radiates the very glory of God. We want the mind of Christ. We want to be people that think according to Your Word. So God, just help us have a little bit of faith this week. Not worried about understanding, or analyzing, or studying, or doing all those excuses, the defense mechanisms of, "Which translation should I use? That one is this, and this..." No, just tear it all down, Lord, and just help us open ourselves up to Your Word. I pray for every person that thinks they can't memorize, that their thoughts would be renewed in Jesus' name, that You gave them a mind, and You wouldn't ask them to do something they can't do. I pray for every mind that has been darkened and consumed by the darkness of this world. Just click on a little bit of light, Lord, just a little bit of light, even as they mutter it, and murmur it, and just speak it out. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want," as they go through their life this week, Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light into our path. They're literally lighting up the very path they're walking on by just saying, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Give us a courage and a faith, God, to actually believe that Your Word does what You say Your Word does. Give us a hunger and a thirst for it. And I just declare that every person in here that wants

to do this, can, and every person that doesn't want, You can change their wanter. So by kindness, would You draw us to repentance? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



APRIL 21, 2024

SEASON TWO, EPISODE FOUR
“MEDITATION, PART TWO”

Alright, everybody, and welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad that you are here with us, and we are in a series, a season called "A Different Way." We're talking about doing the things that Jesus did, so that we can do the things that Jesus did. We're talking about arranging and rearranging our life around Jesus and His practices, talking about being disciples and becoming like Him. And last week we talked about the practice of meditation and there was such a spirit of revelation and repentance in the room. And our practice plan for the week was to memorize Psalm 23. And I want to celebrate you, because so many people practiced in Jesus' name this week. I heard so many stories of people taking the challenge and practicing their faith. I heard of a woman who's struggling through cancer and she decided that memorizing Psalm 23 was going to be a part of her healing process. I heard about a man in his 80's who thought memorizing Scripture was for children, but he decided no matter how old he is, he wants to renew his mind, and so he memorized Psalm 23 this week. I heard of a young adult who struggles with significant insomnia and anxiety who memorized Psalm 23 this week and slept the best they have in two or three years. I've heard from so many students and young adults who took the challenge and took it upon themselves to memorize Psalm 23, and when I would see them they would show me their phone screen to show me Psalm 23, they're like "I'm doing it, I'm doing it!" I heard of so many families doing it together, I heard of people deleting social media or going through who they follow and unfollowing people they don't want to lead their thoughts. Here's what happened this past week, we started training ourselves to be godly.

We started training ourselves to be Godly, we said, let's not just talk about this, let's actually try, let's train, let's put some effort into this, let's arrange and rearrange our life in a different way and watch what God will do. And so if you participated in any way, if you got one verse, you got one verse more than you had last week hidden in your heart. You might not be able to run the marathon yet, but you got to the mailbox, you maybe got around the corner, some of you took a nice two-mile run, you're training to be godly in Jesus' name. And so my hope was this silly simple little exercise that we did this week is opening up your mind to what we've been talking about, what it actually looks like to train, to rearrange our lives to become like Jesus. See, remember this is not a religious community center, where we just comfort and entertain people. This is not just a rec center where you come and play pickup ball when you feel like it. No, this is a training center and we're training for something that matters – to become godly in Jesus' name. And so we're learning how to do the things that Jesus did, and what we learn about Jesus is that He arranged His life around the Word of God. He memorized and meditated on Scripture, filled His mind so full with the Word of God until He thought God's thoughts, spoke God's words, and lived God's ways. And if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to think the thoughts that Jesus thought, and that's the practice of meditation. So we got through part one, let me kind of start back again and let's kind of start walking through it and then let me take you to some new places with me on that?

Okay. The practice of meditation, what is meditation? Meditation, a big word, simply means to think deep about deep things. Meditation simply means to take a Scripture, take God's Word, put it in your mind, and turn it over and over and over again, the way a cow would chew its

cud, chewing on it, breaking it down until you're able to actually absorb it into who you are. It's breaking God's Word down to this place where you actually absorb it to this place where it starts to frame your opinions and your thoughts and your perspectives and your judgements, where it starts to determine your feelings and your emotions, and it becomes the way you actually perceive reality. It's not just changing your thoughts, it's actually changing your thinking and your very mindset. You see, meditation isn't just thinking, it's thinking with the Spirit. It's thinking under the influence and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, where we take God's Word and we talk to the Holy Spirit about it and we say, “What does this mean? And why did You choose that word? And what does this look like in my life? And what do You want me to see in this?” You see, meditation opens us up to receive God's Word as it is.

This is why it's different than study. When you study something, you try to analyze it intellectually, understand it, and we can try to control God's Word to make it say that which we want it to say. But when I meditate on God's Word, I allow it to control me, and I'm now open to it submitting and surrendering my life, submitting and surrendering to how it wants to shape and fold and mold me. You see, meditation is simply having a vision for your thought life. We have a vision for so many things; meditation is having a vision for my thought life. It's intentionally choosing that which I want to think about before the day even begins. And meditation makes you incredibly stable. You don't become this person that's erratic, all over the place, emotions, feelings, chaos, crisis. Why? Because Jesus says, “Whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a man who built his life upon the rock.” So when I meditate on God's Word, I become steady, and I become stable, and I become strong. And the good news is, every person in this room, you're already a gifted meditator. You know how to meditate. Like, worry. Worry is simply meditating on the future without God. Regret is meditating on the past without God. Anxiety is meditating on the present without God. The inverse of those is true. Dreaming is meditating on the future with God. Gratitude is meditating on the past with God. Peace is meditating on the present with God. If you've ever been angry, or offended, or in love, or really excited about something in your future, you have practiced meditation. The only question is, who or what are you meditating on? You see, God has given you a mind made in His image and His likeness, and your thoughts lead your life.

Right thinking leads to right living, wrong thinking leads to wrong living, and whatever you fill your mind with, your life will become full of the reality of. So if I fill my mind full of the thoughts of God, my life will become full of the reality of God, and if I fill my mind full of the thoughts of the world, my life will become full of the reality of the world. And too many of us, we believe we're a victim of our own thoughts. That we don't choose our thoughts, but our thoughts choose us. But you are not a victim of your thoughts; you are a product of them. You cannot choose the situations or circumstances in your life, but you can certainly choose your thinking. So we need to give thought to our thoughts, and we need to think about what we're thinking about and this is what meditation is.

This is why it says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." The world has a pattern, the world has a way. The world has a sense of this is what is good, and this is what is true, and this is what is right, and they want to conform you, shape you, press you, mold you like a cookie cutter. They want to make you think their thoughts, because if the world can make you think its thoughts, it can influence your entire life. And "the mindset on the flesh is death, but the mindset on the spirit is life." We're transformed by the renewing of our mind. Change the way you think and it'll change the way you live. If we will renew our mind, renovate our mind, restore our mind by meditating on the Word of God, it's literally telling us that our mind will start to radiate the very glory and beauty and wisdom and reality of heaven. People who meditate on God's Word radiate the very glory of God to the world around us. This is why Jesus teaches us to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Meditation on God's Word is how we actually repent, change our thinking. Because you might not be able to go from this thinking to this thinking, but every day I meditate on God's Word, I go from there to here. And then I meditate on it again, it goes from there to here, and there to here, and there to here, and there to here, and before you know it, I actually start to naturally and effortlessly think God's thoughts and therefore experience His kingdom.

Then and only then will you be able to test and approve what God's will is. You see, only a renewed mind can see God's will. Only a renewed mind can see God's kingdom. And the reason so many of us can't see God's will, even though it's right in front of us, is because we think like the pattern of this world. You can't see that what you're not looking for, you can't understand a language you don't speak. And you won't find that what you're not interested in. You'll only see God's will if we first learn to think God's thoughts. In fact, look at this, "The god of this age" – Satan – "has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel." Satan has blinded the mind, not eyes, mind. When Satan can get us to think his thoughts, our mind becomes darkened and we literally cannot see it. This is why when you look at the world and you look at people around you and you think, "What are they thinking?" They've lost their... [mind]. They literally have. Satan has blinded their mind so they cannot see. If God's Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light into my path, and if my thoughts are not full of God's Word, then my mind has no light. So I literally cannot see. See, whoever influences your thoughts determines what you see. If Satan influences your thoughts, all you see is the world, when God's Word influences your thoughts, all you see is His kingdom.

Unbelief blinds you; faith gives you eyes to see. So here's my question for you. Where has Satan, the god of this age, blinded your mind? Where are you unable to see? The answer is, you have no idea. Why? Because that's an area you are blind and you literally can't see it. So we need the Word of God to turn on the light so I can actually realize that which I didn't see. That's what happened last week. The Word of God kicked on in so many people's lives that the spirit of revelation and repentance was released, we could see it like turning on a light in a dark room, and you're like, "Oh my gosh, that's been there all along." Yes, it has, and then we can respond in faith in Jesus' name. You see, here's the good news, no matter how blinded or darkened your mind has been, Jesus can heal it. "Jesus loved the church and gave Himself up

for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless." Listen, no matter how stained or wrinkled your mind is, no matter how darkened your imagination is, no matter how stuck your mindset might be, no matter how vile the thoughts that are in there, no matter how much of a lack of vision or dreaming you have, no matter how much mental health struggle you may have in your life, in Jesus' name, He wants to wash your mind, make it radiant without stain or wrinkle, holy and blameless, cleansing it in Jesus' name through His Word. You won't get to wash your mind through education, or enlightenment, or just sending yourself good vibes, or the three steps on social media to having a healthy mindset. It's the Word. It's the Word that washes our mind, and this is why God invites us to memorize it and meditate on it so we radiate His very glory.

You see, when Joshua was going in to take the Promised Land, a picture of advancing in the kingdom of God, this is what God tells him, He says, "Do not let this book of the law" – God's Word – "depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it then. Then" – then, and only then – "will you be prosperous and successful." God tells Joshua the key for victory, the key for his life, is to meditate on God's Word. You see, the book of the law is God's Word, and it tells us what is good, what is true, and what is right. And He tells us we're supposed to meditate on it. Turn it over and over in our mind, day and night, in the morning, in the evening, when you get up and when you lie down, in your coming and your going, when it's good, when it's bad, when it's hard, when it's easy. No matter what's going on in your life, fill your mind with God's Word so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Because you can't align your life to that which you do not know. And so, the key to prosperity and success is to meditate on God's Word. And He says, "Don't let it depart from your mouth." We're not just supposed to read God's Word, we're supposed to speak God's Word. And so, hopefully this week, as you are going through your life, you're speaking God's Word to yourself. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul." Hopefully this week, when something hard happened in your life, you are saying things like, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me." Hopefully this week, when you made a mistake, you reminded yourself, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

We're supposed to not just think about it, we're supposed to speak it. And if you remember a couple of weeks ago, we said that you are the most important preacher in your life. Meditation is choosing what you're going to preach on. I spent a lot of time every week figuring out what I'm going to preach on to you. Do you spend any time thinking about what you're going to preach on to you? Meditating on God's Word is choosing, "I'm going to preach on this to myself." This week, I'm choosing to preach Psalm 23 to myself over and over and over again until I get it in Jesus' name. Now, I've been thinking about this all week. Why don't we believe that this is true? Why don't we believe that meditating on God's Word is the key to prosperity

and success? Because if we believed it, we would do it, right? Because you do whatever you actually believe, not what you say you believe. So why don't we believe this? I think it's because, inherently, we know it's not true. Inherently, we know that meditating on God's Word will not give me the prosperity nor the success I desire. Because I think a lot of us have the world's definition of prosperity and success more than the kingdom's definition of prosperity and success in our own soul. See, there are very different definitions. The world's definition of prosperity and success is fame, fortune, and freedom. It's doing what I want, when I want, how I want. It's a life of ease, and comfort, and convenience, and consumption, where I am in the center and everything else revolves around me. The kingdom's definition of prosperity and success is becoming like Jesus and accomplishing God's purpose for your life. It's about submitting and surrendering, dying to self, picking up the cross, saying, "Not my will, but Yours be done. Your kingdom come; Your will be done in my life." And Jesus becomes the center in which everything revolves around. And inherently, we know meditating on Scripture will not get me this and you're right.

I mean, let's think about this for a second together, okay? Take a 30-year-old. Let's say you've got a 30-year-old who has graduated from a prestigious university. They've got a big job with a fancy title. They're making a ton of money. They've got a massive social media influencing. They've got lots of followers. They've got a brand-new car, a nice house, they're sleeping around, they don't have any integrity, and they are gaining the world, and yet losing their soul. Now compare that to a 30-year-old who's working really hard at a behind-the-scenes job. Who's hidden from the world and isn't really known or seen by lots and lots of people. Who's making just enough money to get by and has an old car and lives in an apartment, but loves his wife, has the Fruit of the Spirit growing in his life, is a disciple of Jesus, and is living on mission with Him. Which of these two is prosperous and successful? Now, I know we're in church, and so, you know, you have to say this answer. But let's pretend we're not at church. Which of these two is prosperous and successful? How about this? Which of these two do you want for your life? One more, parents, which of these two would you rather have your children live? Because if we're honest, we want the world's definition of prosperity and success, even if it requires a little bit of sin, a little bit of immorality, a little bit of a lack of character, a little bit of evil, a little bit of worldliness. See, I think we forget that John the Baptist was beheaded, and Jesus went to the cross, and Peter gave up his business, and Paul knew what it was like to have nothing, and we would declare them as prosperous and successful. And we look at Pharaoh, and we look at Potiphar, and we look at Herod, and we look at Saul, and they had everything the world offered, but they completely missed God's purpose for their life. Oh, they got the world's definition of prosperity and success, make no mistake about it. They just didn't hit the kingdom's definition of prosperity and success. And so maybe we need to repent about what prosperity and success actually looks like, because the world's way won't get you to the kingdom's prosperity and success, and the kingdom's way won't get you to the world's prosperity and success. So you've got to figure out which destination you want to get to, and then choose that way. Maybe there's some repentance that needs to take place.

And it's not saying that prosperity and success in the kingdom is poverty, having nothing, a life of hardship. No, it's saying whether you have a lot or a little, whether wealth or poverty, whether everything or nothing, it really doesn't matter, because my goal in life is to become like Jesus and accomplish His purpose for my life. So maybe there's some repentance there. And maybe that's why we struggle with this. And if you've said that kingdom prosperity and success is my destination, then meditating on God's Word is the way, is the way to get there. Meditate on it, not understand it, meditate on it, engage it by faith, put it inside you. This is why it says, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes it grow." Our job is to plant and water the Word of God in our life, it's God's job to make it grow. I plant it, I read it, I engage it, I memorize it, I water it, I meditate on it, but I leave the growth to God. I leave the understanding and the revelation and the wisdom and the insight and the aha, light bulb. I leave all of that to God. My job is to plant and water; His job is to make it grow. But He can't make it grow if I didn't plant it nor water it. And no matter how much I plant it and water it, only God can make it grow. And this is the spiritual practice that we've been talking about. I can't do it without God, and He won't do it without me. This is opening myself up to the life of grace, allowing God to do a deep work inside of me. I plant, He waters-- I plant, I water, He makes it grow.

In fact, catch this, I love this. This is one of my favorite things for this week. "The Word" – Jesus, the Living Word – "became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory." Right? Jesus is called the Living Word. And Jesus came, He took on flesh, and He moved into our neighborhood, and He dwelt among us. Jesus didn't come for a visitation; He came for a habitation. Jesus didn't come and make an appearance and disappear, He came to abide. And the moment, He moved into the neighborhood, the moment He came to dwell, everything changed. He walked with us, and He talked with us, and He saved, and He healed, and He set free, and He delivered, and He blessed, and He anointed, and we saw His glory to the same level that the Living Word came to dwell in this world. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." To the same way that the Living Word dwelt among us in our neighborhood, the written or the spoken Word of God is supposed to dwell in you richly. God's Word isn't supposed to be for a visitation, it's supposed to be a habitation. It's not supposed to show up for an appearance on a Sunday, it's supposed to abide in you all week long. And when I make room in my heart for Him to come and dwell through His Word, then guess what? Everything changes. He starts to walk with me, and talk with me, and I start to experience salvation, and healing, and being set free, and being delivered, and being made whole, and being blessed, and being prosperous. All of a sudden, I start to be anointed. And when the Word of God dwells in me deeply, I eventually will see the very glory of God in my life. The Word of God is supposed to dwell in you so deeply that you literally see the glory of the one who spoke it. Everything you see in Jesus' life in the gospels is available in your life, if you will choose to allow the Word of God to dwell in you richly. Meditation and memorization. You with me on this?

Remember, last week I talked to you about the Jewish culture and how they built their education system around God's Word. As they're going in to take the Promised Land, here's what God says to them, He says, "This is for all of the people of God. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and your minds." There it is again, you choose what you think about. Your thoughts don't choose you, you are not a victim of them; you are a product of them. "Fix these words" – choose to put My words – "in your hearts and your minds. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads." They would take little boxes and they would put the Word of God rolled up into the boxes, and they would tie the boxes to their wrists and around their foreheads. Might not have been fashionable and trendy, but the point of that was what? That the Word of God would influence what they did and what they thought about. That every action they took and every thought they thought was supposed to be submitted and surrendered to the very Word of God, as the people of God. "Teach them to your children." They were literally responsible to teach another, a part of this in Deuteronomy 6 says, "Impress upon them." They were literally supposed to, like the way a mason would take a chisel and carve something out of marble, they were supposed to carve the very words of God into their children. A lot of work, hard effort, manual labor, sweating, grit, struggle. But they were supposed to carve the very words of God, the very thoughts of God, into their children so that they would forever think that way and be shaped and formed once and for all, for all the rest of their lives. But it's hard to teach something you don't know, and it's hard to impress something upon someone that hasn't been impressed on you.

We're supposed to "talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you get up." Like, fill your conversation with the Word of God. How much does the Word of God come into your conversation? You don't even have to give the reference, like the address, and the street number, like, but just like, how often when you're talking does the Word of God come into your conversation? "Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Catch this, they literally would write Scripture on the doorframes and on the gateposts. What does gates and doors represent? Access and entry. They would write the Word of God on the doorposts and on the gates, so that only things that were submitted and surrendered to God's Word had access to their lives. What is the gate and the door of your life? It's your mind. So here's the question, what's written on the doorposts and the gate of your mind? What, what have you written in the doorposts and the gate of your mind? Because when you put God's Word in there, the things of the world don't get access or entry. When you write, "Forgive as I have forgiven you," on the gate of your mind, then guess what? Offense never is able to come in. When I write, "Freely you have received, freely give," on the doorpost of my mind, then guess what? Greed never gets to enter. When I write, "There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear," then fear never gets to get into my life. When I write, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," then shame never gets through my gate. When I write, "My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you," then guess what? Anxiety doesn't get access to my life. The problem is, is we don't have any truth written on our doorposts or on our gates, so the world comes barging in the gate, right through the front door, tramples on our garden, and brings death,

darkness, and destruction into the very home of our life. What have you written on the doorposts and the gate? What are you giving entry and access to? Because when the Word of God is true in your mind, lies can't get in.

"So that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give you." In other words, then, then, then you will be prosperous and successful wherever you go. This is how they were supposed to live. This is how Jesus would have grown up, and this is how we're invited to live in the here and now. And yet, since we do "not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He [gives us] over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done." This verse was killer last week. When we don't think it's worth retaining the knowledge of God and say, “I want to think like the world, God.” He says, “Okay.” And we get a depraved mind that's dark and foolish, unapproved, and cannot stand the test of this life. And then I find myself doing the things that I really never wanted to do anyways. Okay, see, at some point, you have to take responsibility for your own life and stop making excuses and just start acknowledging that it just wasn't worthwhile. Like, at some point, we've got to stop making excuses. "It was too hard." "I didn’t understand it." "I was too busy." "It didn’t make sense." "I didn’t know how." We got to stop making excuses and take responsibility for our own life, because repentance starts where excuses end. And just say, it just wasn't worthwhile to me. But I want to take responsibility for that, and I want to repent. Okay, so leaders, can we talk for a second? This week we told the church to ask you about how memorizing John 15 was going. How'd those conversations go? Was it awkward? Was it uncomfortable? Were you a little irritated? Were you able to share? Were you excited about the journey? See, remember, if you're a leader, you chose to be a leader. A disciple of Jesus who takes responsibility to create kingdom culture, make disciples, while accomplishing a specific task. And we want our leaders to be people who let their yes be yes, and their no be no, and do whatever they're doing with all their heart and can say, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” And so, if you are irritated or offended that that was even brought up, why would you be offended about being held accountable for something you committed to do?

Accountable, give account for that which you're able to do. We say, “Well, that's not fair.” But listen, Jesus says, “To whom much is given, much is required.” Jesus says He holds us account to that which we're able to do, that we will give Him an account for that which He has asked us to do. That we're called to live a life worthy of our calling. And we have this demonic influence in the church from the world that says you can't hold anybody accountable to anything. Look at the world, schools, education, the police, teams, work. You can't hold anybody account for what they're able to do, because people make excuses, they make defenses, they deflect it, they say tolerance, they say mental health struggles, all these things. But we're the people of God. Are you kidding me? Do you know how much Satan wants you to deflect accountability? Why? Because he doesn't want you to live a life worthy of your calling. He wants you to live down here, this average, subpar, mediocre life, and accountability is to give an account for that which God has made you able to do. So Satan wants you to get offended about being held accountable instead of actually thinking about what God has made you able to do. And even if

you're held accountable up here, and you've got to hear, you still got a lot farther than you were. I want to live a life worthy of my calling. And so, Student Leadership Experience students, how have you been doing in your journal? The things you committed to do, the verses you committed to memorize, the practices you committed to do? VCLA students, how are you doing in the things that you wanted to be held accountable for, the life that you said you wanted to live? Leaders, John 15, how's it going? It would grieve me that we would have a single leader in this church that doesn't think it's worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. Leaders, what in your life is so important that you didn't have time to retain the Word of God? What in your life is so busy and overwhelming that you didn't see it important to retain the knowledge of God? Maybe our life isn't arranged as much around Jesus as we thought and we need to take responsibility. Responsibility or repentance starts where excuses end. You're not a volunteer coordinator doing Habitat for Humanity; you're a spiritual leader ruling and reigning with God, moving into the future, releasing His very kingdom. And a depraved mind can't lead other people to repentance. So it matters. Account-able; what you're actually able to do. Everybody memorizing Psalm 23. Here's the good news: you just blew up every excuse you ever have about your inability to memorize Scripture.

Look at this: "When Your Words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight." Here's what I'm trying to tell you, you will never love God's Word more in public than you do in private. If it's not my joy and my delight in my Bible, it will not be a joy and a delight on this monitor. If I don't love it in private, if it's not the joy and the delight of my life in my Bible, then guess what? It will be something I tolerate and eventually get offended by on this monitor. People who love God's Word don't get offended in this room, just so you know. Man, we might go to the third week of this because you've got to stay with me, people. I have never met anyone offended in this room who loves God's Word out of this room, not one. Why? Because if I love God's Word, if there's a joy and delight out there, then when I come in here, I'm actually waiting for God's Word to come. And I don't get offended by God's Word, I allow God's Word to offend me. I allow it to change me and convict me and shape me. I don't try to control it. I realize there's a part of my life that's been conformed to the pattern of the world, and I want it to shape and form me. You see, some of you have been in church for 20 years, and you should have 20 years of maturity. You have one year of maturity 20 times, because I have never loved God's Word in private; I've only been remotely interested in it in public. And the extent of your spiritual maturity is about all we can give you in a transactional, consuming, entertaining, religious construct. It's the extent of the maturity you'll ever reach. And you can go from church to church and preacher to preacher, and they're great churches and great preachers; go for it. Just saying, if you don't have a joy and a delight in it out there, why on earth would you think you're going to find joy and delight of it in here?

If when He speaks, "When Your Words came," when He spoke and it didn't mean anything to you out there, why do we think that when He speaks, it's going to mean anything to me in here? And so leaders, this is the John 15 conundrum. If it wasn't important to you out there, you're already declaring it's not important to you in here. This is just why I'm trying to turn the

light on and help us see with me on this? Alright? I'm going to give you this one, and then I don't know what I'm going to do. Just hang with me for a second. I've been wanting to use this verse for like six weeks, so I'm just going to use it just in case. Look at what God says: "'Is not My Word like fire,' declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?'" "My Word is like fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces." Okay, what is fire? Fire gives light, fire burns, fire purifies, fire consumes, fire is powerful, and it's contagious. Okay, what does a hammer do? A hammer breaks, a hammer smashes, and a hammer builds. So God says His Word is like a fire that's inside of us. It turns on the light so we can see. It burns, it literally consumes, overtakes our life with passion. It purifies us and burns off all the impurities of our life, our heart, the way we think, the way we act, the way we live. It literally is powerful; it's like the power of God inside of us. And it spreads, it's contagious, it's passionate. And it's like a hammer that comes into our lives and breaks the hardness of our heart, it breaks my pride, it breaks my shame, it breaks my ungodly beliefs, it breaks my strongholds, it breaks my addictions, it breaks the generational curses, it breaks down all the things of my life that are hardened to God. And then He puts them back together and builds them into something beautiful. So could it be that the reason there's not a lot of passion and softness of heart in the people of God is because we haven't put His Word deeply inside of us? Could it be that the Church of Jesus is so apathetic and so hard-hearted because we haven't put His Word inside of us that He says will make us passionate and soft? Here's a question for you: Do you have the courage to let God set a fire inside of you and carry around a hammer in your heart?

Do you have the courage to let God set a fire inside of you and carry around a hammer in your heart? I think for a lot of us, the answer is no, and this is our main reason we resist the Word of God, because I know if I put it inside of me, He's going to burn out some things that I find comfort and convenience in, and He's going to take that hammer and smash the idols of my heart. And I'm just not so sure I want to lose this and lose this. If we want to be a people of passion and wholehearted, soft devotion to Jesus, we have to arrange and rearrange our life around the Word of God. The very fact that we get offended about being asked to memorize and meditate on Scripture shows the hardness of heart, because a soft heart doesn't get angry; a soft heart is open and humble and receptive. A soft heart realizes there are so many more hard places in here that I need him to break up. So if this is going to help break that up, break it up, baby. A passionate person realizes there's so much more of their life that needs to be set on fire. So they don't resist the torch; they say, "Bring it, baby. Light this thing on fire." Cause there are blind things in me that I don't even know are there. Turn it on; let me see. Let's purify it. I don't want to walk according to the ways of this world. My vision is not prosperity and success of money, fame, fortune, and followers. No, no. My vision of success is to become like Jesus and accomplish God's purpose in my life. But I can't do it without this, without this. We're sort of excited about that.

Do you got the courage? Do you got the courage? So many of you this week, memorizing Psalm 23, that was the greatest step of faith you've made in a long time. Man, I celebrate you. Man, I celebrate you. You bought a pair of sneakers, you put them on, and you went around

the block. And I hope that invigorates you to keep going. And this is a little bit of a correction for some of our leaders who think we're beyond that. We're beyond needing a fire and a hammer because we know that we're coordinating volunteers like Habitat for Humanity, but that's not what it is. It's about bringing the open heaven realities to the world around me. And if I don't have a fire in here, why on Earth do I think I'm going to light a fire in a 15-year-old boy? A 15-year-old boy who's got wet wood, who is literally looking for someone to turn it on, for someone to light him on fire, for someone who has something that's bigger and better than what social media shows him is out there. But he's in the dark. He can't see. So he needs people around him who have raging infernos that when he gets around them, it's so hot that he knows there's something different because when he goes back out in the world, it's so stinking cold. So I want to get back around that guy, and I can't even put words to it, and I'm 15, and so I'm awkward, so I don't even know how to say it right, but I just know there's something different, not because they're a good volunteer coordinator, but because they're a leader who feels it's worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God and lives with a renewed mind and therefore does what ought to be done.

Well, not sure what we're going to do next week, but the practice plan for this week is to now meditate on Psalm 23. So last week we were memorizing it, trying to get it in. Meditate on it this week. You say, “What does that mean?” Well, I was going to teach you in those last 10 slides what that meant, but just go with what we've been talking about. Think about it, pray it, dream it, embrace it. If you didn't memorize it, keep memorizing it. And whatever you have memorized, start now thinking, "The Lord is my shepherd... the Lord, the Lord God, the Creator, the sustainer, the Redeemer, the one who has life in Himself, the one who knows all things. The Lord is my shepherd... shepherd, leader, guide. He knows me, He cares for me, and He's my shepherd. I didn't choose Him, He actually chose me because He wanted me." Think deeply about deep things and keep filling your mind with the Word of God, and watch what God will keep doing. Come on. Don't lose your energy from last week to this week. We'll figure out next week. This is my whole point. We're just not in a hurry this year. We're just trying to live a different way. So I'm okay, you're okay, because genuinely... Garrett, go back to the fire slide, please. No, fire slide. Because I want to see God's Word be a fire and a hammer in us and change us from the inside out in Jesus' name.

So close your eyes. Holy Spirit, come light a fire in me. Come bring a hammer to the hard places of my heart. Give me courage to trust that You are a good shepherd. So whatever You light on fire needs to be burned, and whatever You break needs to be broken. That's what Psalm 23 teaches me. Psalm 23 teaches me that I can trust Him to light a fire, and I can trust Him to carry a hammer in the deepest places of my soul. So I just declare over your life that the embers of a fire are beginning to burn. I just declare over your life that light is beginning to be turned on so that you can see. I just declare in your life that the hardness of heart is beginning to be broke up in Jesus' name. I just declare over your life that the idols that you have trusted in that have let you down and failed you time and time again are starting to be broken up by the hammer of the spirit in Jesus' name, and He is going to rebuild it into something beautiful

and glorious. I just declare over your life that your mind, your mind has the ability to radiate the very realities of heaven, and so may the glory and the beauty and the holiness of heaven begin to shine through your thinking, that the very realities of God may be manifest in your life. So Jesus, thank You for Your church. Thank You for a community of people that are training together, training to become godly. We are not in a hurry. We are walking with You, the Good Shepherd, at your pace, cause You lead us on paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. So lead us, God. This week, Holy Spirit, illuminate Psalm 23 to our lives. Illuminate it, turn the light on, show us something, apply it to our lives. May we not try to analyze it, study it, correct it, control it, may we just be open to that which You want to show us and that which You want us to become in Jesus' name. Lord, You are our shepherd, and we get to dwell in Your house forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

A DIFFERENT WAY



APRIL 28, 2024

SEASON TWO, EPISODE FIVE

“RISE WITH THE TIDE”

This life is yours. And may my heart only burn for You, Jesus. So wherever you are right now, maybe, can you just take a big deep breath in. And just become aware that God is here. And He is with you. Oh, and He is for you. And He sees you. And He loves you. And He knows what's best for you. Because He is a good shepherd that is leading you into green pastures. And beside still waters. Remember, church isn't church if we don't meet with God. And so we don't just sing songs and go through the emotions, we become aware that He is here. And over these past few weeks, there's been this beautiful Spirit of revelation and repentance in our church. The Spirit of revelation, revelation is something you didn't see, but now it's uncovered and you see it. And repentance, it's changing my thinking. Turning from one way towards another of turning away from dead works and of faith towards God.

And this week as the pastors were praying for you, we just felt like we weren't supposed to rush on, but that we needed to stop and take a moment to give some time to respond to the Spirit of revelation and repentance that's been at work. You see, repentance is a great gift to the people of God. We often keep our distance from it because we allow shame and guilt and condemnation to get all swirled up in it. But when we confess and repent of our sins, there is a cleansing and a renewal and refreshment that comes from God. In fact, Acts 3:30, 3:19 says, "Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out. The times of refreshing may come from the Lord." When there is a Spirit of repentance and revelation at work in our lives, refreshment comes from the Lord.

And sometimes we just have to stop and acknowledge there are things in my life that need to be confessed and repented of. Sins and broken thinking, ways I've been acting, ways I've treated the other people even in this room, how I view God's Word, things I've kept, things I've kept in the darkness. And Satan wants to do everything he can to keep it in the darkness. And Jesus is graciously drawing you into the light. And if you say, "Confession and repentance, I don't know how to do it." You just talk to God about the brokenness and the bad thinking of your life. And you offer it up to Him, and you repent, you ask for forgiveness, and you receive His grace and His mercy. And you allow Him to cleanse you, wash you, and make you pure. And I think sometimes, as the people of God, we just want to move on to the next thing. But it's so good to sit in a little bit of godly sorrow. Like Isaiah who says, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips." Or David when his sin is exposed and he is broken and humble before the Lord. Or Peter who hits his knees and says, "Away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Or when the first gospel is preached and it says, "They were cut to the heart and said, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" It's the prayer that I've been praying for our church all year long is that we would be cut to the heart and respond with confession and repentance in Jesus' name.

And so for the next few minutes at whatever campus you're at, can you just take some time to confess and repent of where your life has missed the mark? Of where you're not embracing the revelation that He has entrusted to you? Of, maybe, where your life is not arranged around Jesus and His way, but around the world and its way? For the next few minutes, can you just trust the Spirit of conviction and the Spirit of grace that wants to convict us and show us where

we're off, but wants to give us a grace that not only forgives us, but empowers us to live a totally different way. Let's not rush on, but let's, let the Spirit do what He wants to do. So Spirit of conviction, Spirit of grace, come bring Your light into our darkness and give us godly sorrow, humility, and honesty. May we respond to Your Word and Your presence and Your Spirit in this moment.

So, does He have it all yet? It's a good song to sing, but what are you still holding onto? What are you still holding onto that God's asking you to let go of? So you can feel the tide of the kingdom rising. And as it's rising, if you hold on to the things He's asking you to let go of, you will drown yourself. But if you will simply let go of that which He is asking you to let go of, you will rise with the tide and He will take you to new places in Jesus' name. And so, Jonathan, can you guys all come back out? Because I want us to sing it again. Because I think there's an invitation in this for you and for me, and I just don't want you to miss it, and I want you to just do church. You're hearing me week after week after week for like these last two years doing everything I know how, because I don't want to see you drowned. I want to see a rise to a new place in God, the world is winding down, but the kingdom of God is winding up. And we live too much like the world and call it the kingdom. And so there are things that I'm over there praying for you and I'm just like, we just haven't let go of them yet. And what we all want to do is jump into this part three of meditation. I do too, I worked on it all week for you, but it doesn't matter if I'm not willing to first let go of that, which I already know I need to let go of. Okay, so I'll be real direct on some of these. Pride. Some of you, you are shackled to the anchor of pride. It's time to humble yourself before the Lord. Sexual immorality. Doing sex your way instead of God's way, man, it is dragging you down and it's killing you. It's time to let it go in Jesus' name. Greed. Some of us, our whole life, two hands on the bucket of money, and God saying "It's time to confess and repent." Not just say it, but actually live according to what I now say. Fear. Some of you are being drowned by fear. Rebellion. The spirit of, "I do what I want, when I want, how I want, nobody tells this guy what to do." That's killing you, because the kingdom is a kingdom of submission and surrender. A total disregard for the ways of Jesus. Some of us, it's like holding on to 50 pound anchors. And the interesting thing is, you're not shackled to it, you're holding onto it. And Jesus is just saying, "If you just open your hands, and this one, I will bring you to the surface and I will show you a measurably more than you can ask or imagine." This is what a different way looks like. You can't say a different way, but still live the same way. A different way means pride has to go. A different way means rebellion has to go. A different way means worldliness has to go. A different way means the language that I've been using has to go. A different way means the thoughts that I've been thinking, they have to go. And God is just inviting me to open up my hands and His grace will do all the work. So, so with, oh, just nothing but love, and hope, and compassion for your life, I want to invite you, to just try the confession and repentance experience one more time. I want to invite you to, just, one more time before we build the song up and start singing it, just like, now. So just close your eyes and just ask the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, what am I holding onto that's not of You? That's drowning me? That's what I want to confess and repent of. And I want to open up my hands to You. And I ask You to lift me up. Wash me anew and take me to a new place. Don't miss the moments

where God is at work. This is one of them. The window is open, go through it. Let go of what you're holding on to. Spirit of conviction, Spirit of grace, come move in this room, come work in my heart. You're knocking, I choose to open up the door, come in and shine some light on some of the things that I just quickly pass by. You can trust in His goodness. And you can rest on His grace. Let the tide of God lift you up.

I never want to sing songs that I don't mean. Unless I know I don't mean it yet, but I want to mean it. That's called faith. Faith is, I know I don't mean it, but I want to mean it. So I'm going to sing it and I'm going to speak it, I'm going to declare it. Religion is, I sing it and I don't want it. And I don't want to want it. I want Jesus to have it all. All of my life. His Word is a fire; I want it to burn my life down. I want it to burn my life down. That the only thing that remains is Him. I want it to burn our church down to the ground that we might rise to the new life that we have in Christ. I want it to burn, I want it to, every idol we have, every ministry that's not of the Lord, every method that we use that's no longer of Him, every program that we put our trust in instead of the person of Jesus. I want Him to burn down all of our thinking of what church is supposed to be like. And if it doesn't check these three boxes, it wasn't church. I want Him to burn all of the idols that we, that we build, sometimes in this room, and at our own seat. And we declare it as "church" and "good church" and "what I need." And "this is what I expect." And "I've come to be entertained" and "come to consume." I know that's nobody in this room, but it needs to be burned down in Jesus' name. The whole lukewarm, apathy, walking like a zombie through life, it's just not okay anymore. I get it, that was COVID. That was like five years ago. It's time to move on in Jesus' name. It's time to move forward to the new things that He has created and called us to do. It's time to stir up the coals of revival and like, wake up to the life I have in Christ and this different way that He invites me to live. I'm so tired of, of being, being here for an hour and then going out and living 167 hours like the world. And then coming back for an hour and going back to the world. It doesn't work. Destroys your soul. Exhausts you. I think there's a whole lot of things in our life, including our own church, that Jesus is asking us to put on the altar. Are we willing to do that?

I mean, you remember the story of Abraham and Isaac? Abraham waits 25 years for this promised child, 25 years. And God gives him Isaac. He's the love of his life, the most important thing to him. Everything in his life is arranged around Isaac, because through Isaac, all the promises that God declared to Abraham will come to pass. And then one day, God says to Abraham, "Abraham, I want you to go and sacrifice your son to Me. Abraham, I want to see if you love Me or Isaac more." And so Abraham goes on a three-day journey up the mountain. And he takes his son, the thing he loves the most. But he has such a faith and a trust in the goodness of God that he sets his son on that altar. And when he is about to take his life, the Lord speaks and says, "Stop. Now I know that you love Me, because you have not withheld your one and only son for Me." What is it that we're holding back from God that He's asking us to put on the altar? Maybe it's sin in our life that we want to continue to live in. But maybe it's a good thing that's become a bondage thing that He's asking us to surrender. That's "Jesus, have it all." "Jesus, have some" is, "Oh, Jesus, I'm not going to give You Isaac, but I'll offer You

this ram." "I don't want the ram, I want Isaac. And the reason I want Isaac is, because Isaac has your heart, and what I want is your heart." So you might be like, "Jesus, I'll give you this," but He's like, "But I want this. Because this is what has your heart and I want your heart." See, that whole story is a picture of the Father and Jesus. He offered His one and only Son. Now we know that He loves us, because He did not withhold His only Son from us. Jesus, have it all, because Jesus gave it all. And we never have to question if we're worth it, if we're loved, if we're wanted, if we're seen, if following Him is a life worth living, because He already offered Himself up for us. Jesus gave it all. That's the only reason we can say, "Jesus, have it all." Because I know He is trustworthy. Because if He would not withhold Himself, will He not then, in Him, give me all things? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not..." Ah, He gives me all that I need, exactly when I need it, and withholds no good things from those who love Him. I don't know, maybe this is my way of just saying to you, Valley Creek is on the altar, in Jesus' name. And we're not interested in the past, or in what everybody else is doing. We're interested in what God's doing. And we're interested in the kingdom. And we're gonna do things like memorize Scripture. So if that's like, "Hey, not interested in that," I totally hear you. I just wanna be super clear to you. To be like, in Jesus' name, have it all. Have it all. I don't wanna do Circles, and serve teams, and Serve the City, and weekend gatherings, and teach through messages, and do all the things for us to just live like everybody else. Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. Live as though you are a beloved son or daughter in Jesus' name. And don't drown yourself as the water is rising. Let go and go to a new place in God.

See, today is great church. This is not what we were supposed to do. It's great church. You're like, "Hang on a second. I need to know what's in there." Okay, maybe next week. The whole point is, here's the deal. We, I think we forget that we're a people on a journey with God. And a people on a journey with God aren't in a hurry, because they go at the pace of God. I know some of you are getting tired of standing, I'm just about done. We're not in a hurry. So here's the good news, everything that's in the deck, it'll be in the deck next week, too. But let's not miss what God wanted to do today with a Spirit of repentance. A Spirit of revelation in the air. And here's the deal. Even if you let go of one weight and not the other, you're already a little higher. And now I'm just going to be praying for you that the Holy Spirit will use that visual image in your life over the course of this next week and month to show you, where am I holding on as the water's rising that I need to let go of? It's great, let go, great. Just so we all know, none of us are done letting go. You're like, "Oh, I did it. I'm good." No, I have things I need to let go of. You have things. And every time you let go, you rise a little higher. You rise a little higher, and you rise a little higher. And this is what a different way looks like in Jesus' name. If today was your first time with us, welcome to the heartbeat of our church. We have a real interest in meeting with God, because we believe that God is real, that God is good, and that God is here And we are willing to put anything on the altar to say, God, whatever You want to do, I just want to meet, I just want to know You, I want to meet with You, I want to become like You, I want my thoughts to be filled with You because You are good, and You are good to me.

So we're going to call it there today. You are welcome to stay. You are welcome to come up and get prayer. If you feel like you haven't let go yet, don't leave. We've got time, sit down, pray. Come up and ask somebody to help you. Whatever that looks like, let us love you. As we've been working the last two weeks, our practice plan has been to memorize and then meditate on Psalm 23. My encouragement for you is this. Make sure you -- I don't want to say it. Here's what I want to say. Make sure you've put all of your heart effort into memorizing Psalm 23 for next week. And we're going to do something together with it. My encouragement for you is like, that is a great repentance step of faith to say, "Okay, God, I can do this." The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. You can do it. You can do it. You can do it. In Jesus' name. For those of you that want to give, you can give it boxes on the doors on the way out or online. Some of you, that was the thing you just let go of, the love of money. Now, repent and tide. Give to God because that's what He says we're supposed to do. Can't be any more clear and direct for you than that, right? I mean, or you can choose to hang on to it and let the water keep going. That's -- this is what I'm trying to say, right? Don't just rush out of this building and go on about your day. Have a conversation with someone because God tells us to love one another and serve one another, especially in the body of Christ. So be the body with the 15, 20 minutes where we're leaving in service. Some of you, that's what you just let go of. Is that this place is actually a spiritual family, not just a religious community where I come and go, makes sense? These are the kinds of things that we're talking about that are so normal in the kingdom, so normal in Scripture, and they should become so normal to you and me as the people of God.

I pray, that in some way, fire was lit in your life in some way to be like, the old is gone, the new has come, a different way in Jesus' name. Here we go, next week, Meditation, Part Three. We'll keep moving on. We're not in a hurry because we want God. Valley Creek is on the altar. So Jesus, I just say to You, have it all. Have our church, have everything about us, have our, have our lives, our minds, our hearts, our souls, our energies, everything we do and say, Lord, may You have it all. Our jobs, our families, our homes, our finances, our futures, our freedom, everything. May You have it all, because you gave it all. So You are worthy of it all, in Jesus' name. Everybody said, amen. Amen, I love you. Have a great week.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MAY 5, 2024

SEASON TWO, EPISODE SIX

“MEDITATION, PART THREE”

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you're here with us today. We are a movement of hope for the city and beyond and we want to see God's kingdom come and His will be done. But before God's kingdom can come out there, it has to first come in here. Before it can come in here, it has to first come in here. So, I love what God is doing among us. I love the direction that we're going as a church. I love what we're doing and why we're doing it. God is deeply at work in the lives of the people sitting all around you right now. If you made me summarize some of what's happening in this season, I would say it's a season of purifying, a season of pruning, a season of sifting. It's like every person that really wants healing, and breakthrough, and freedom, and deep internal transformation, Jesus is offering it to them in the here and now. So, we've been in this series, really this season, just called A Different Way, talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. Talking about being His disciples and who we're becoming and arranging and rearranging our life around Jesus. We're taking a look at like, 12 practices that Jesus practiced in His life so we can arrange our life around what He did so we can do what He did. By now, we should be at practice like, seven or eight. We're on number two. We've talked about Scripture. Today, I hope we finish meditation. What I want you to see in this is, I think God has slowed us way down to get our attention to be people who love Jesus.

I think God is trying to get our attention. He's not in a hurry. He says, "Hey, you need Scripture and you need meditation if you're ever going to do the things that I did and become like Me." I mean, we are a people of the kingdom. Look at what this says. "Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above. Not earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." He says people of the kingdom are supposed to have a totally different mindset than the people of this world. Our mind is supposed to be set on different things, on the kingdom of God. The reason we need the Word of God in our life is the Word of God shows us what the kingdom of God is like. It shows us what's available in the kingdom. It shows us who we are and who God is and what we were created to do. We need the Word of God to discover our life that's hidden in Christ. In fact, when Jesus says, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," He says repentance is the way we access the kingdom. But how can I repent of things that I'm not aware of? How can I repent from things that I don't know are inferior? So I need the Word of God. I need to set my mind on the Word of God if I'm ever going to discover my life that is hidden with Christ.

Our problem is, we have expectations of what we've experienced. We have a vision for what we've seen. We think our destiny is somehow tied up in what the world has demonstrated to us. The problem is what you've experienced, what you've seen, and what's been demonstrated to you has been the inferior realities of this world. So, we need to renew our minds by setting our minds on things above, the Word of God, so we can discover the kingdom of God that is available to you and I in the here and now. So, I've been thinking for the last couple of weeks, why don't we love God's Word? If we can just be honest and don't make it about you for a

second, just why don't the people of God love His Word? I mean David says, "Oh how I love your law!" – Your Word – "I meditated on it all day long." He says the reason I meditate on God's Word is because I love it. I won't meditate on it if I don't love it. But why don't I love it? I've been thinking about all the times in my life where I did not love the Word of God. I've been wrestling with it and thinking, why didn't I love the Word of God? Why don't we love the Word of God? Here's what I think. I think it's really simple. I think we're not captivated by God's Word because if we're honest, we're not really captivated by God. I think we're not really interested in God's Word because if we're honest, we're not really interested in God. I think we're not really all that passionate about God's Word because if we're just straight-up honest, we're not all that passionate about God. Let's just say it like this. I don't think we love God's Word because if we're really honest, I don't think we always love God.

I mean, think about a couple that first falls in love. They are captivated by each other. Because they're captivated by the other person, they're captivated by their words. Have you ever had that experience where you want to hear everything they say? You want to read every letter they write you. You read and reread the text. You'll stay up until two in the morning talking eight hours with them about everything and nothing because there's this mystery, and this intrigue, and this excitement, and this hunger. You're captivated by their words because you're captivated by their heart. Think of your favorite influencer. You are captivated by their words. You want to read every book they write. Make sure you get the podcast that just got released. You want to make sure your social media algorithm has them at the top of your feed. You're captivated by their words because you're captivated by their life. Or maybe your favorite musicians, you want to hear every interview, every song. You want to be the first to hear the words that they're singing. Why? Because somehow you're captivated by their life. So, could it just be that the reason we're bored with God's Word is because we're just bored with God? If the mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart, I will only be interested in listening to the words of people who I am interested in the realities of their heart. So if I'm not captivated by God's words, it's because I'm not really captivated by His heart. It works in life and we know this. That couple that was captivated by each other, and therefore each other's words, 30 years later, isn't it interesting how they don't listen to anything the other one says? They still say I love you, but the other person starts talking and it's like, "Wah wah wah." Why? Because I'm no longer captivated by them. So, I'm not really captivated by what they have to say. If that's you, you don't have to sit here and feel bad and all of a sudden get discouraged and figure out, "Oh, my gosh, how am I going to be captivated by God's Word? I got to be..." No, no, just stop. Stop yourself. This is Jesus-focused theology. Don't focus on being captivated by God. Focus on the fact that He is captivated by you. Stop and ask, then stop to think that we love because He first loved us, and start to realize that Jesus Himself is captivated by me. He rejoices over me. He delights in me. He sings over me. I'm the apple of His eye. He has laid down His life for me. No one can snatch me from His hand. His mind is full of thoughts of me. When I start to realize He is captivated by me, I will become captivated by Him.

See, I love this. "But he who keeps (treasures) His Word (who bears in mind His precepts)" – meditates on the Word of God. "(Who observes His message in its entirety)." Not just the parts we like. Not just the encouraging verses that are on the knick-knacks in your house. The parts that correct and rebuke and train. "Truly in him has the love of and for God been perfected, (completed, reached maturity). By this we may perceive, know, recognize, and be sure that we are in Him." It says if I treasure God, I'll treasure His Word. I treasure His Word because I treasure Him. When I treasure His Word, meditate on it and observe all of it – not just the parts I like – then the love of and the love for God has been perfected in me. I have received the love of God and now I have love to give back. So, now because I understand God is captivated by me, I become captivated by Him. Because I'm captivated by Him, I am now captivated by His words. Because His words reveal His heart and I want to know His heart so I will listen to what He has to say. Does this make sense to you?

I mean, I love what Jesus says. "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. Jesus' love language is obedience. The way He receives love is through obedience. Love for Him is to obey His commands, but I can't obey that which I don't have. I have to have His commands, know what His Word says, so I can obey it, so I can love Him. Jesus' love language is obedience, but I first have to have His commands. So, can I ask you the question? Do you have His commands? "Whoever has my commands." I can't obey that which I do not know. I can't submit and surrender to that which I am not aware of. So, if I really want to love God, I know I have to obey His Word, but I first have to go get His commands. I have to go engage the Scripture, and memorize, and meditate, and hide it in my heart, and put it inside of me, and search it with all of my life, because I want to love Him. But I need to know what He says so I can obey Him because He says obedience is His love language. So, do you have His commands? Then let me ask you a really pointed question. If obedience is Jesus' love language, does He feel loved by you? If obedience is His love language, does He feel loved by you? You say, "God has feelings?" Yes, He do-- Yes, He does. He's a person. We can grieve Him. We can please Him. Does He feel loved by you? What was the last thing He asked you to do, then did you do it because you just loved Him? His command came and you obeyed it, whether you liked it or not, because you loved Him. See, love for God is not going to church. Love for God is not calling yourself a Christian. Love for God is not posting something on social media that's a Bible verse. Love for God is obedience. If you came in and you came in and you were married and we had marriage counseling and we sat down and you both said, "We love each other, but neither of us feels loved by the other person," we would start talking and we would probably figure out very quickly that you're not meeting each other's love languages. That there are five simple love languages – time, touch, words, gifts... and service. Thank you. This person wants time and this person wants touch. So, you usually give that which you want to receive. So, the other person doesn't feel loved because we haven't studied them and brought ourselves to do that which they long for and that which they want. What Jesus wants is obedience. But I can't obey that which I do not know. So, are we searching out and seeking His commands so that I can submit and surrender my life to Him? Because I love Him, because he

loves me. Does Jesus feel loved by you? If not, here's what's great. You can do it today. Whatever that last thing He gave you in His Word. Just do it by faith, because He says that's how He is loved. With me on this? I'm not so sure. He's worthy of my obedience. But I can't obey that which I do not know and I'm convinced we do not know. That's why we can't obey.

See, two weeks ago, here's where we got. "'Is not my word like fire,' declares the Lord, 'And like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?'" This is profound to me. God said His Word is like a fire and it's like a hammer that breaks. If you think about a fire and you think about a hammer, what does a fire do? A fire illuminates. A fire burns and consumes. A fire purifies. A fire is powerful and it's contagious. And what does a hammer do? A hammer breaks. A hammer smashes. And a hammer builds. So, when we put God's Word inside of us, it's like a fire and a hammer. It's a fire that illuminates and shows me things that I did not see in the midst of a dark world. It begins to burn and consume and take over my life and create this life of passion and it purifies. It removes the impurities of my life that should never have been there in the first place. It becomes contagious. It spreads from my life to other people's life. It's the very power of God flowing through me. And it's like a hammer. A hammer that breaks my pride, a hammer that breaks my ungodly beliefs, a hammer that breaks my idols, a hammer that breaks my unbelief, and the generational curses, and the strongholds of my life. It comes in and it smashes and it tears down so it can rebuild back together. So the question is, is the reason there's not a lot of fire and softness of heart in the church today is because we don't put His Word inside of us? Is the reason there's so much apathy and so much hardness of heart simply because we won't take His Word and meditate on it and think about it and dwell deeply on it and turn it over and over again in our mind? I left you a few weeks ago with this question of just, do you have the courage to let God set a fire inside of you, and carry around a hammer in your heart? Do you have the courage to let God light a fire inside of you, carry around a hammer in your heart? I think the answer is often, if we're honest, just, no. Because I don't want an uncontrolled fire. Because I don't know what it will burn up. There are things I find a lot of comfort and convenience in that I do not want to go. I don't want a hammer swinging around in my heart because I've worked really hard to protect my heart and build this little life that I got. I know there are some idols in there that if that hammer starts wheeling, those things are coming down and I'm not ready for them to go. See, if I can just tell you like personally in my life, if you said, "Hey, the last two years, just tell me what God has been doing in your life?" Here's my summary statement for you of my life. God has lit a fire in my soul that I must attend to. You want to know the summary statement of my life in this? God has lit a fire in my soul that I must attend to. God has started a fire inside of me, a fire of His presence, a fire of His love, a fire of His Word. I must attend to it. I must fuel it and steward it and protect it and arrange my entire life around it.

Then I said it to you two weeks ago, I want the fire of God to literally burn my life down. I want everything that's of me to be burned to the ground and only Jesus and his kingdom left. I want Him to burn my pride. I want Him to burn my ego. I want Him to burn the false motives that I have. I want Him to burn up everything that is wood, straw, hay, and stubble. I want Him to

burn religion out of my life. I want Him to burn sin, and ungodly beliefs, and broken thought patterns. I want Him to burn up the world. I want Him to burn up myself. I want Him to burn up my flesh. Everything that's not of Jesus, I want to be burned. I want this fire to be uncontrolled. I want it to be uncontained. I'm trying to remove the fire ring so it can just go. So, here's my question for you. What are you attending to in your life in this season? Because I'm attending to a fire in my soul. What are you arranging your life around? Because I'm arranging my life around a fire in my soul. I want God to church that we must attend to. I want Him to burn out everything that's not of Jesus. I want Him to burn our sin and our pride and our rebellion and our duplicity and our worldliness and our broken thinking and all the programs and methods and things that we do that are not of Jesus, all the religious baggage that we bring in, all the traditions that we worship, every idol, everything that's wood, straw, hay, and stubble that is a part of this family of God, I want it to be burned. I want it to be uncontrolled and uncontained where it jumps the fire ring and starts burning things we didn't think it was going to burn.

It's easy to cheer for that until it starts burning the thing you don't want to be burned. If you've ever been in church for a period of time, maybe you've come from another place or maybe you've been here, there are good things that become bad things because we start worshiping them. If you've been here for years, things like HUB Camp and Soul Sisters and Epic and Thursday Night Church, they were good things. When it was time to move on to the next thing, when there is a response that's negative over moving on from something that was good but has now become an idol, you see how much we actually worship that thing. Here's a great question for you. What would you be upset about if it got burned to the ground in this church? What would you be upset about? What would cause you to get offended, take your toys and go home, pull back, start grumbling? What if there was no more kids ministry and you had to have your own kid with you in church? What if there was no more cafe and you couldn't get a coffee and a donut in the morning? But what if there was no more lights and music and the whole thing? What if church Sunday mornings at 9:30 and 11:00 got burned to the ground? You're like, "Well, you can't have church if it's not at 9:30 and 11:00 on Sundays and without kids and coffee." So, I mean, here's the deal. At the end of the day, you know what we need? The Word of God, the Spirit of God, the grace of God, the people of God, and the mission of God, that's it. I'm not saying we need to get rid of anything. I'm just saying, I'm open for the fire to jump and burn down anything that is no longer of Jesus and the different way that He's leading us. What's in your soul? Is there any fire in your soul? Here's the great news. If your heart is so hard that there's no fire, you know what fire does? Fire can actually burn up rock when it gets hot enough. It's called lava. God can literally take the hardness of your heart and when you just put His Word inside of you, He can literally burn down and make it soft again in Jesus' name.

I mean, I love what Jesus says. He says, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." He says the moment you don't have an interactive relationship with the Scripture, not a mastery of, but you just don't know the Scriptures, you don't have a relationship with God's Word, your life is in error and you have no power. Your life

is in error. If you don't know the Word of God, your life is already inferior to what it could be. You no longer know what is good and true and is right. You now find yourself on the wide road, the broad gate that leads to destruction. You're in error and there's no power of God, there's no possibilities. But when I will know the Scriptures, all of a sudden, I start to live a righteous life, a life that is right, and good, and true. The power of God is all over me. I mean, if Jesus rules His kingdom through words and actions, then I have to value His words if I ever want to see His actions. The reason we don't see action of God in our life is because we don't listen to the Word of God in our life. There's an order. The Word comes before the action. If we don't see a lot of action or a lot of power, maybe it's just because we haven't valued the Word because we're an error because we don't know it, so we're out of alignment with God. He says, "Hey, you can be right. You can be on the good, true path, and you can have the power of God flowing through you if you will simply arrange and rearrange your life around God's Word." Because you become captivated by it because you're captivated by Him because you realize He is captivated by you. Are you with me?

I mean, just think spiritual warfare for a second. "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." You are in a real spiritual battle. Don't ever kid yourself and pretend that there is not the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness engaged in a war. We already know who wins, but there is a real war for the reality of your life in the here and now. We think spiritual warfare is a lot of demons hiding behind the bushes of the situations and circumstances of our life. But what this verse tells us is that the primary battlefield of spiritual warfare is in the mind. The mind is the primary battlefield of spiritual warfare. Most spiritual warfare does not happen in the situations or circumstances of your life, they happen in your mind long before you get to this situation or circumstance. We're so worried about a demon hiding in the situation or circumstance in our life, but here is the reality, he doesn't have to go hide in the situation or circumstance in your life. If he can influence your thought, he's already won the situation and circumstance before you even get to it, because whoever influences your thoughts leads your life. So, it says that the spiritual warfare we do is to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. In other words, I can't afford to think a thought that is not faith, hope, or love. I can't afford in my life to have thoughts of unbelief, despair, and fear. Why? Because I empower darkness in my life. We get all confused about how do I take captive a thought and what do I do and remove and replace and bind and loose and all these things? I've been waiting a couple of weeks to just tell you this. If you will just fill your mind full of the thoughts of God, there will be no room left for the thoughts of the devil. If you will just simply fill your mind with the thoughts of God, there's no room left for the thoughts of the devil. If I will fill my mind with God's Word and memorize on it and meditate on it, all of a sudden, there's no room left for a thought of the devil to get in there. Why? Because it's full. Think of a glass that's full when it's all the way to the top, there's no room for anything else to get in there because it's full. But the way, you know it's full is when it's overflowing because if I

get this close to the top, there's still this much room for something else to get in there. So, I know my thoughts are full or my mind is full of the thoughts of God when the words of God are actually coming out of my mouth. It's overflowing.

So, what I want you to see in this is meditation is an act of spiritual warfare. Literally, meditating on the Word of God is an act of spiritual warfare. Why? Because when I'm meditating on the Word of God, there are no thoughts to take captive because they're all obedient to Christ. When I'm meditating on God's Word, everything I'm thinking is in alignment and submitted and surrendered to the lordship of Jesus. So, rearranging your thought life around God's Word instead of the world is an act of spiritual warfare that brings you great victory because it's the primary place of battlefield. Here's our problem. Our problem is our mind is so full of the thoughts of the world that there's no room left for the thoughts of God. Our minds are so full of the thoughts of this world, filled and overflowing, because we can tell by the words that we speak that are words of unbelief and despair and fear, that there's no room left for the thoughts of God. Listen, those of you that really say you struggle with memorizing Scripture like Psalm 23 or John 15, can I just help you? I don't think it's that you struggle memorizing. I think it's your mind is so full of the thoughts of this world that there's no room left for the thoughts of God. So John 15 can't get in there and Psalm 23 can't get in there. Why? Because it's full and it's overflowing with the thoughts of the world. So, there's no room left. So, we go out in life and get smashed by darkness and then blame God. There's another demon hiding in that situation and circumstance. No, there wasn't. There was a thought that you chose to come into agreement with that is not of God. I mean, when Jesus goes to the cross in John 14, He literally tells the disciples, He says, "I'm going to the cross and Satan has no hold on me." You study it and you pull it apart. He literally says, "There is nothing in Me that belongs to him." I don't have a single thought in my mind that is in alignment with darkness. So, I'm not worried about the journey ahead because God has a stronghold on my mindset so he has a stronghold on my life. Whoever influences your thoughts is who has a stronghold on you. So, when Satan and the world influence my thoughts, then I have a stronghold of darkness in my life. But when, like Jesus, I can say, "There is--" oh, what would it be like to wake up one day and say, "Satan has nothing in me. There is not a single thought in my mind that comes from that pit of darkness because I've filled my mind so full of the Word of God that I am not afraid to go to the cross because I know who has a stronghold on me, and He's the good Father." You believe a lie, you empower the liar. Satan, according to this, is only empowered through human agreement. If Jesus says all authority has been given unto Him, then Satan has... none. So, he only has that which you give him. When I think his thoughts, thoughts that are rebellious to Jesus, I've empowered him to rule and reign in my life. So, that situation and circumstance, it takes me out because of my bad thinking way back here. This tracking with you?

I mean, let me give you one more on this. Remember when Jesus tells the disciples He's going to the cross and Peter steps up and he's like, "No, Lord, I'm never going to let that happen. That is the worst idea I've ever heard." "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of

men.'" Jesus says worldly thinking is agreement with the devil. "You have in mind the things of men." Worldly thinking. "Get behind me, Satan." Agreement with the devil. Worldly thinking is agreement with the devil. When we think like men, like humanity, we are in agreement with the kingdom of darkness. Logic, reason, common sense. We have all these good ideas that should come to pass. What the world thinks is foolishness, God says is wisdom. What God says is foolishness, the world says is wisdom. So, we have to acknowledge that worldly thinking is agreement with the devil, which means heavenly thinking is agreement with Jesus. I don't know about you, but I'm not real interested in common sense. I want uncommon wisdom. I don't know about you, but I don't really want logic and reason. I want the mind of Christ and thoughts that are above our thoughts. What some of you are sitting here and you look at this verse and you're like, "Man, that's a lot, but that ain't me. I don't think like God, but I certainly don't think like the devil. I think kind of right." You're like a "good, healthy, normal person." Do you understand? You just proved my point. That is a thought of man. To say there is not just two extremes. Good and evil. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of darkness. The Spirit and the flesh. The narrow road and the wide road. Gathering or scattering. I'm with or I'm against. There is no "I'm just a good person and I don't think like the devil." "I know I don't think like God, but I have good logic, reason, and common sense." According to Jesus, it's agreement with darkness. Influenced by darkness. Now, can you imagine if Peter would have said when Jesus says you're going to the cross, if Jesus would have said, "Lord, that breaks my heart. But I know that's of the Father, and so we will help you get there." Jesus would have said something like, "Peter, well done. As the Father has sent me, so I send you whatever you ask for in prayer, it's yours because I know you're already thinking in alignment with kingdom." I think a whole lot of the prayers we pray are out of alignment with the kingdom. That's why God can't answer them the way we want because we think like men saying it's good when it's not God. It's actually darkness.

I think it's fascinating that Jesus says, "You are a stumbling block to me." How many times are we the stumbling block to God's kingdom coming in our own life? How many times are we the stumbling block to the cross of Jesus being demonstrated for those around us and for ourselves to die and be raised to new life? I mean, it's logical to say. You can get Peter's perspective. Jesus, you're doing some good stuff. You can't go. That is a terrible thinking. But that was God's thinking. It just shows us how different the thought patterns actually are that we need to renew our mind in Jesus' name. Worldly thinking is agreement with the devil. If you think about the time and season that God has placed your life in, just like catch this for a second. Yeah, we went through the great pandemic of COVID, but we live in an epidemic of mental health. So, God has put you in a time and place of history in a world full of broken thinking. So, one of the greatest witnesses we have for the life of Jesus in the kingdom of God is to have a renewed mind. The people of God, we should be so full of wisdom and divine strategies, divine solutions, beautiful creativity, a holy imagination, visions, and dreams. Our mind should be so renewed that it literally radiates the very glory, beauty, and holiness of heaven. That people around us in the mental health trials see it and say, "You think so differently than me. Tell me how. Tell me how." So a great question to just ask yourself is this is,

are you inspired by your own thinking? Would you want your mindset? If the answer is no, why do you think anyone else would? Maybe we need to renew our mind with the Word of God so we don't think like the devil and call it God. So, we don't think like the world and try to tell everybody else to follow Jesus. Because I don't want your life if I don't want your thinking, because your life is a product of your thinking. Whoever influences your thoughts influences your life.

You see, in this fall, we had about 100-- or about 500 men memorize Psalm 1. If you're looking for another passage to memorize, to fill your life that reinforces everything we've been talking about, let me just read this to you. "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight, his delight is in the law of the Lord. On his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." He gives very graphic picture of the blessed man and the cursed man. He says the blessed man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. Because of that, he is like a tree planted beside streams of water, has everything it needs, its leaves do not wither, it bears fruit in season and he is successful and prosperous in the kingdom of God. There it is again. Compared to the cursed man who walks according to the foolishness of this world, whose life is like chaff, means looks really good on the outward because there are leaves and sticks and husks, but there is no seed and there is no fruit. So, they are tossed to and fro by this life because they have no stability, no anchor, no rudder because they have no truth. Because they spent their whole life standing in pride, they will fall at the judgment. So, can I ask you a question? Is your life more like the blessed man or the cursed man? Do you delight and meditate in the law of the Lord or do you walk according to the foolishness of this world? I mean, this is why David says, "I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." He says, "I put your word inside me that I don't want to miss the mark." I don't want to live an inferior life. I don't want to just be average and just get by. No, no. I want to be prosperous and successful. You see, when you read God's Word, it gets in your mind. When you memorize it, it gets in your heart. When you meditate on it, it gets in your Spirit. You read it, it gets in your mind. You memorize it, it gets in your heart. You meditate on it, it gets in your Spirit. It becomes a part of you. You literally soak it up until it actually becomes a very part of you. It's like a sponge put into water and it soaks everything up. All of a sudden, everything that's in that sponge is what it's been immersed in. When you squeeze that sponge, the only thing that can come out is that which is soaked up in the first place. The only thing that comes out of you when you're squeezed in this life is that which you've soaked up in the first place. So, when you're squeezed, what comes out of you? That's what you've soaked up into you and it's become a very part of you. I think we have no idea how much worldly thinking we actually engage in on a daily basis because we've soaked up the wisdom of this world and we've called it normal and healthy and good. Wouldn't you want every, I mean, who would want to go to the cross? So when we're squeezed, what comes

out of us is all this worldliness. That's why David says, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing." The words of my mouth come from the meditation of my heart. When my life is squeezed, whatever I've been ruminating on, whatever has become a part of me, whatever I've soaked in, is now what quickly comes out of me. Is what comes out of you pleasing to the Lord? If not, this isn't to make you feel bad. It's to bring a light on the reality of your life so you can see, I got to get off social media, man. I got to stop watching those Netflix series that are basically just like glorified porn. I got to stop listening to the music that I've been listening to. I got to break up with this girl or this guy because everything they say is just so bad, and I know I can't have this friend in my life anymore because their thinking is so broken. You know what? I might actually have to consider changing jobs and taking a demotion because this environment is so toxic for me, I can't do it. You know what? I can't sit at this lunch table anymore because all these things are soaking up into me and I'm starting to think them as normal. It's not normal. Set your heart on things... above, not earthly things. We're consumed with the earthly things and then wonder why we get thrashed in life. The people of God are so unvictorious. It's so sad. If I was a lost person and I looked at most of the modern-day church, I would be like, "I don't think I want your life. I mean, you say these things and you post a few verses, but you actually live a more miserable existence than I do. You don't even enjoy the bad things that we do. You use one hour a week to go to a building and sing some songs, listen to one guy talk. You give a little bit of money and feel guilty to volunteer. I don't want that." Would you want that? But that's what we present as Christianity because our thinking is so unbelievably broken. "I don't think like the devil. I know I don't think like God. I think like a good person." Jesus says there's no third thinking. Every thought is either influenced by God or it's influenced by Satan. There is no, well, "good person" thinking. There's hidden in Christ's thinking and there's living like the world thinking. The journey of renewing your mind is going through this process of acknowledging that's a worldly thought and I've thought that for 30 years. So Jesus, I need to confess and repent of that. Number one, acknowledge it, not make excuses. Then number two, I need to like, find things to remove that thought by filling my mind up with this over here. So, yeah, I'm not going to argue about memorizing John 15 because that would just be foolish because I actually want to think like God. I can make excuses of why I can't do it, but I'm realizing, my gosh, my mind is so full of thoughts of the world. There's no room for the thoughts of God. So, what happens when the cup is full and you want to put something else in there? You have to put something in there and it displaces everything. So, there must be a displacement. There must be a rearranging of your life if you're ever going to get there. Sort of lost you on all that, didn't I? We're either thinking deeply or we're wondering when it's going to be over. Don't worry. This is not long.

This is for all my bullet-point, black-and-white friends who for the last three weeks watched me flip through this slide and were like, "Dear Jesus, please show us the bullet points." This is really fast. How do you then actually do it? Don't worry. This is like three minutes. How do you actually do it? Pick a passage. Pick a passage. Don't be like, "I'm going to meditate on these 46 different things." Pick a passage. It can be a verse. It can be like we did Psalm 23, all six verses. Pick a passage. Maybe it's something we talk about on a weekend message. Maybe it's

something God shows you in our daily life. Maybe it's just a verse that God brings your-- maybe there's a struggle or a stronghold in your life and you want the antonym. Pick a passage and then keep it in front of you. Just keep it in front of you all day long as much as you can. Write it down on a card and put it on your dashboard. Write it on your bathroom mirror that you get ready in the morning. Put it on your phone screen. Put it in a little memo recording and listen back to it on your own. Work on memorizing it. You work on memorizing something that's in front of you all day long. One of the greatest things I can tell you to keep it in front of you, what I try to do in my life is, let it be the first thing you think of in the morning and the last thing you think of before you go to bed. Three, two, one, I'm awake. Don't touch your stinking phone. "What's the world have to say today? Oh yeah, I need more worldly thinking." I'm not sure what country I'm in with this accent, but don't touch your phone, and don't talk like that. Three, two, one. "Okay. The Lord is my shepherd. Doesn't feel like a shepherding kind of day, but Lord, You're my shepherd. I shall not want." Okay. Before you even touch the world, think about God. Then when you're going to bed at night, don't sit there. "What's the world have to say as I go to bed?" You want to know why you don't have good dreams and visions? Because you fill your head with the thoughts of the world right before you go to bed. So, Satan has your night because he has your thought. He has your mind. You go to bed watching something of darkness on the TV and then you wonder why I don't hear from God in the watches of the night like Scripture promises. Why? Because it just filled my mind with the thoughts of the world right before I go to bed. Turn it all off. Lay down. "Lord, today You were my shepherd. Fascinating as I think about my day, how much You are there." Find times throughout the day where you just sit down for five minutes and be like, I'm just going to sit down and turn it all off. I'm going to think about this passage from you. Keep it in front of you. See, we're so used to informational reading, reading for information as fast as we can to get the bottom. What does this mean? We want context. We want reason. We want information. Got it. Here's the da-da-da-da. Okay. But there's transformational reading. Transformational reading is, I'm not trying to get any information and I'm not trying to control the text. I'm opening my life up to say, "God, whatever You want to do in me through this passage, transform me." I'm not going to argue. I'm not going to fight it. I'm not going to defend it. Transform me. Then ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate it. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you God's Word and what He wants to say in the midst of it along the way.

Are you ready? Here's how it just-- "The Lord is my shepherd." The Lord, God, Yahweh, the maker of heaven and earth, the One who holds all things together, the One who has life in Himself, He is my shepherd. He's a shepherd. He leads me and He guides me and He's for me and He claims me and He owns me. He is my shepherd, not because I chose Him, but because He chose me and "I shall not be in want." Even though I feel like there are lots of things I want in my life, there really is nothing I need in my life because He withholds no good things from those who love Him and He promises to meet all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Sometimes He asks me to do things I don't want to do, but they're always for my good. He's always leading me to places of abundance and "He leads me beside quiet water." Sometimes He takes me places where I

never thought we would go, but He's always bringing me to peace and there's only peace found in Him. "He restores my soul," which means He will fix the very depths of the broken parts. I mean, the deepest brokenness that I don't even know. He promises that He will restore it. If He will restore that, will He not restore all other things? You see it? That's meditating. That's thinking deeply and pulling and pulling and pulling.

Last verse for you and this is so important. Jesus says to the Pharisees. "You search and keep on searching and examining the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. Yet, it is those very Scriptures that testify about Me and still you are willing to come to Me so that you may have life." Says there's a whole bunch of people that look at Scripture as a checkbox. Search it, examine it, memorize it, meditate on it, do the daily reading plan. Did I get the check? Did I need the check? Did I get the checkbox? Does this count? Does this? Did I get? Okay. Did I do? Jesus says, "Stop." He says, "The whole point of those Scriptures is to bring you to Me." He says, "If you memorize it, and meditate on it, and read it, and engage it, and get your checkbox, and your journal for the day, but you didn't come to Me, you missed the whole point." So, hear me, hear me, hear me. Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. There is no win in memorizing Scripture if you don't come to Jesus. There is no win in the reading plan if you don't come to Jesus. There is no win in checking off all of your little boxes. Scriptures are the footprints that lead us to Jesus. Some of us follow the footprints all the way to Jesus and He's like right here and then we're like, because I got to get my checkbox. Did I get my checkbox? Did I get it? Did it count? I was one word off. Did it count? There's no counting. There's coming to Jesus. Okay, that's for some of you. Now, there's a whole bunch of others of you that are like, my whole life is about coming to Jesus. Oh, I don't memorize Scripture. I don't meditate. I don't do anything that anyone else asks me to do. I don't do things that smack of religion or duty or obligation. It's just me and Jesus. Whatever me and Jesus feel like doing, that's what we do. Just so that you're clear, He says those are the very Scriptures that testify about Him and bring us to Him. Jesus wants to reveal Himself to you through His Word. So, if I actually want to get to Him, I have to go the way that He says and it's through His Word. So the point is not getting the checkbox. It's coming to Jesus. But I can't come to Jesus without searching and keep on searching and examining, memorizing, meditating, seeking, dwelling, thinking, absorbing the very Word of God. Does that make sense to you? This is what spiritual practices look like. I don't do it to do it, but I know I need to do it so I can find the one who is captivated in me.

So, close your eyes. Actually, no. Here's what we're going to do. Here's what we're going to do. Here's what we're going to do. I got ahead of myself and we're done. Here's your practice plan for this week. Declare Psalm 23 out loud every day this week. Every day, Psalm 23, speak it out over your life. You'd be amazed at what happens. As you're doing it, what's happening is you're renewing your mind. You're transforming yourself. You're declaring God's Word out in life every day. Just try it. You're going to feel really weird the first time you do it and I'm going to give you practice right now. So, on every campus, stand up, wherever you are. Every campus, stand up. Here's what we're going to do. We're just going to declare it all together.

That's how we're going to end today. Okay? We're just going to declare it out together. If you have it memorized, great. If you don't, no problem. I'm going to get you started, but then I'm going to back out. You're going to do it. Ready? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That's it. That's it. See? That's meditating. That's declaring. That's filling your mind with the Word of God. So, Jesus, thank You so much for Your Word. May we be people who love Your Word and practice the way of Jesus. We can't do the things that Jesus did if we don't first think the thoughts that Jesus thought. So, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for a fire that burns. Thank You for stirring up our faith. Thank You that You are the good shepherd. You lead us through dark valleys. Even when we mess up, Your goodness and Your mercy follows us all the days of our life. In Jesus' name, everybody said, amen.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MAY 12, 2024

SEASON TWO, EPISODE SEVEN

"CELEBRATION"

Pastor Jason Hillier: All right, hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. Happy Mother's Day to you. You came on a great weekend because this is going to be the kind of weekend where we celebrate all day long. And so, in just a second, we're going to spend some time praying for mothers, but before that, we're super excited to celebrate our next-gen graduation here at Valley Creek. You see, at Valley Creek, we're all about raising up generations of hope carriers. We believe that the next generations, the place where they start, their floor is going-- or, their ceiling is going to be our floor. Wherever we go into the love of the Father, as far as we go into that, they're going to go even further and farther. And so, all these hope carriers that are represented across all the generations, we're celebrating that they've learned so much about who they are, who God is, and what they were created to do. So today, we get to celebrate all the people that graduated different parts and facets of both the Kids Leadership Experience, Student Leadership Experience, VCLA, high school graduates, college graduates, trade school graduates, we're celebrating all of them, because they're going to take a next step into a new season. And so if that's you, if I just said you, come on down. We want to pray for you also. If you're one of those graduates in any of those areas, we want to pray over your next season, maybe just raise a hand as a sign of blessing to the ones that are down here out front, so go ahead and raise your hands with me as we pray over all of our graduates into this next season. You see, they don't go forth alone, they go forth with the people of God. And so right now, we pray over every single one of our graduates. Thank You, God, for what You're doing in their life. Thank You for the fact that You're with them, and You're leading them, and they will truly go out in joy. They'll be led forth in peace, and that the Word deposited into them is not going to return void because You are the one, Jesus, that's taught them who they are, who You are, and what they were created to do. We speak an identity over each one of them. We speak a peace over their next season. We speak so much life into wherever they're going to go, wherever You're going to take them. Thank You, God, that there is an entire family, the people of God, that are here praying for them. And so I just want you to hear this. Wherever you go, know that you have an entire church that goes with you. You have a people that loves you. You have a people that's praying for you. And a people that wants to see you become everything that God has called you to be. Thank You, God, that You are raising up a generation of hope carriers here. You're raising up a generation of hope carriers that's going to carry the hope of Jesus everywhere they go. They do not do it alone; they do it in Your name. Amen! Come on, God's so worthy. What if we just took a second to give him a shout of praise? Come on. God, You're worthy. You're worthy of the glory. We give You praise. Praise Your name. All right, it is a day of celebration.

We're going to just take a second to say, Happy Mother's Day. Moms, we love you, we need you. We hope that you feel seen and known and special today. And we also know that on something like a Mother's Day, it's filled with so many different kinds of emotions. For some people, it's a lot of disappointment. It's a lot of memories that are difficult. It's maybe places where your heart needs to be healed. So we first of all just speak to that part and just say, may the Lord heal you. And may He heal those places that are hurting inside of you. And Mother's Day also represents all kinds of things, including the fact that we're not even just celebrating

only mothers, we're celebrating spiritual mothers. We're celebrating those that want to be mothers. We're celebrating single moms, and all kinds of moms in all areas of life. Really what we're doing is we're celebrating women that are made in the image of Jesus and that carry His beauty and His creativity. We're celebrating all of you that are women in the room. We want to do that by just praying a blessing over you today. So if you came with a woman in your life, if you're here with her, I want to encourage you to just lay a hand on her shoulder and pray for her. If you see somebody in your area that maybe is here by themselves, you can ask them, if you can bless them and pray for them, because we celebrate all the women that are made in the image of God, and we pray a blessing over them. So right now, Jesus, we just pray over every single mom, every single spiritual mother, all the women in this place, we pray the hope of Jesus into them. We pray the life of Jesus into them. Specifically, we want to pray that any places where the world has tried to tell them who they are, or somebody's trying to speak lies over them, we speak the truth of Jesus. And we speak the love of the Father into their life. Anytime that they've maybe not been seen, not been known, we speak that they are known, and they are seen. In fact, I say that to you right now. You're seen, you're known, you're loved, and His grace is more than enough for you. So may you have a feeling that Jesus Himself is smiling down upon you today. It's not just your family praying for you, it's that the Father looks down upon you, and He looks at you with love. He looks at you with rejoicing. May you have dreams that rise up in your heart. May you have visions for a future and a hope with Jesus. May you know the best is yet to come. The best of your life is yet to come in Jesus' name. And so we speak that over every woman in this place, and we just see that they say that Jesus has been faithful to you. He will continue to be faithful to you now and forever. Come on. In Jesus' name, we worship You, God, because You are faithful to the end. You are faithful to every woman in this room. You are faithful to every mother in this room. You are faithful to every person in this room. In Jesus, we are seen, we are known, we are loved, we are valued, and we are wanted. And we have faith because You are faithful. So today, Jesus, we turn our attention and our affection and our focus to You because You are worthy of it all. Today, we celebrate You, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

Hey, whatever campus you're at, why don't you go ahead and grab a seat. Once again, let me welcome you to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us on this Mother's Day. On this day of celebration because today we're not only celebrating mothers, we're celebrating graduates, and we're celebrating all the amazing things that God has been doing in our next generation ministry. And so, I want to introduce to you Pastor Dave Scriven, our Executive Pastor of Next Gen. And Sebastian Mancillas, our Central Student Director. Dave oversees all of our next gen ministry. Sebastian oversees all of our Student ministry. And they're going to share with you some of the amazing things that God has been doing in our next gen as we keep celebrating how God is moving in this time, in this season.

Pastor Dave Scriven: Yeah, what a great day of celebration. And we truly love what God is doing in this season. Specifically, we love what God is doing in the lives of our next generation. So you guys may not realize it, but on any given week across all of our campuses, we have

about 1,500 kids and students that engage with us through our weekend experiences, through Wednesday nights. And on top of our kids and students, we have this growing and thriving young adult community that is literally getting plugged in. They're serving, they're leading in all aspects of our church. And see, what that means is, we're not just a church that believes in the next generation. We are a church of generations. And this has always been God's heart. See, it's always been about multiple generations coming together to serve God, to advance His kingdom. And that's why everything we do is about raising up the generations to come. See, if you ever wonder, like, why we make such a big deal about our kids and our students and our young adults, why do we, like, lay down our preferences and our priorities to raise them up? This is it. See, it's why every single weekend we are focused on helping our kids grow in their knowledge and understanding of the four core truths. That God is good, that Jesus has forgiven them, that they are loved, and that everything is possible. The same four truths that we declare over ourselves each and every weekend and that's because it's the core of what we believe, it's the foundation that we want them to build their lives upon. Right? It's why every single weekend, we invite our students to come and be part of this experience and not just be part of it, it's why we give literally the front and center of every Worship Center to our student section. So the students can lead the way in worship and raising up an atmosphere of faith and passion.

It's why every month we do things like Student MVMNT Nights, kind of like our "come one, come all" big gathering for students where literally every student can come and encounter the presence of God, and hear about Jesus, and learn how they could activate their faith. It's why we do Student Circles every Wednesday night. It's a place where like, students that are in motion in some way on their journey with Jesus can connect with other godly relationships; where they could press into what God is doing in their lives, where they could come together to learn how to engage the Scriptures and pray together. And it's why we do things like have Young Adult Gatherings and Hangouts every single month. Man, again it's all about raising up the next generation. And while those are some of the core things that we do, there's more than that. See, we have incredible leadership experiences for our next generation that is raising their hand to say they want to learn how to rearrange their lives around the things of Jesus. In fact, this year alone, we had more than 300 kids, students and young adults that participated in either Kids Leadership Experience, Student Leadership Experience, or VCLA. And we don't talk a lot about numbers but that is an incredible number. And if you're not familiar with those experiences, see basically what it is – Kids and Student Leadership Experience – it's a nine-month experience, where kids and students, they come and they learn how to genuinely grow as disciples of Jesus and how they could lead their generation today. Again, that's kids and students that's raising their hand to say, "I want to learn to live a different way." That "I want to be impressed upon. I want to be shaped, and molded, and formed into the image and likeness of Jesus." That they want to grow in character and accountability and they are surrounded and led by incredible coaches, literally some of the greatest leaders that we have in their church that have given up their lives to invest in our kids and our students, right? These are leaders that are leading the way to raise the standards, to raise them up in all things that

God has called them to, and to set an example with their own life. And finally VCLA, Valley Creek Leadership Academy, come on. So VCLA, it's a two-year college experience where our young adults can make the decision to invest in their personhood and their future while they pursue their education. See, while so much of the world right now is choosing the wide road and the broad gate, VCLA is full of students that recognize that narrow is the way and small is the gate that leads to life. See they've counted the cost and they said that they're willing to give up two years of their life to invest into who they're becoming so they can grow in personal holiness and purity, and ultimately fulfill everything that God has for their lives. So again, there is so much going on in the lives of the next gen. So much goodness and faithfulness that we see in what God is doing. Man, there is so much today that we want to celebrate.

Sebastian Mancillas: Yeah, and it has been an amazing year. And over the past several weeks, we've had our end-of-semester graduations and celebrations and man, what we would love then, to recognize every single kid, student, and young adult because they're all deserving of recognition. One of the things that we did new this year was recognize and award those that excelled in specific areas that we want to draw your attention to. You see, while we would love to share every single one of their names and share their journey that they've been on this year and as you can see there's a lot of them, but there's so many of these students that are joining with Jesus at a different level. But what I want to do is share the heart of each one of the awards so that we together can celebrate what they're being recognized for and what God has been doing in their lives. You see, in a Kids Leadership Experience, we awarded the Kids Leadership Award and that award went to our fourth and fifth graders who embodied the heart of who we are as a church. Who embodied the kingdom culture. Who lived out the gospel, and lived as a hope carrier in their lives and we're really excited that we got to recognize those kids in Kids Leadership. And for our students and our VCLA graduates, we got to celebrate them with these three awards that are behind them. See, the Kingdom Culture Award, and that's the heart of who we are. And this embodied the student and VCLA graduate that truly walked out kingdom culture, that advanced it and really embodied the values of Valley Creek, and by doing so, everyone around them experienced the culture that we want everybody to be a part of. The Three Circles Award was given to the students and VCLA graduate who embody living with a heart of the gospel in their lives. You can see the gospel, the kingdom, working in and through them everywhere they went. And the Hope Carrier Award was given to students and a VCLA graduate who just lived on mission. They are living as a disciple on mission to change their world, both in the church and outside the church.

And in these awards, if you can catch it, represent our visual language, a movement of hope for the city and beyond. Everything we do and everything that we're recognizing these students for is embodying all of who we are. The calling on our lives of raising up generations of hope carriers. So if you ever wondered why we do what we do, this is why we do what we do. If you ever wonder why we give, this is why we give. It's so that the next generation can truly go further and farther than we have ever gone. So man, I want to encourage you, if you know a kid, student, or young adult that needs to be involved in what's going on in this generation,

man, go to our website or scan the QR code in the seat back in front of you and invite them to get involved into everything that God has for them in this season. And if this inspires you, and if this is what you're giving goes to. Man, if you go scan the QR code in the seat back in front of you, man, we have made it really easy. Man, if your heart wants to be attached to the mission that we're on, to give to a VCLA scholarship. Man, this allows us to continue to do what we get to do to raise up generations of hope carriers. So if you're inspired by this and that's what God is leading you, man, we would love for you to consider that. But come on, these students right here are the ones saying, "I want to continue to grow as a leader, as a disciple of Jesus, rearranging my life around the things of the kingdom." So will you join me in giving them a hand right now? Come on, let's celebrate them. And we're already doing this. So at every single campus, come on, if you're not already, go ahead, stand up and let's cheer on this amazing generation of leaders.

Pastor John Stickl: Oh, come on. What a good day. Come on. What a great day. Go ahead and grab your seat, whatever campus that you're at. Today is a day of celebration because we are a movement of hope for the city and beyond. And we want to raise up generations of hope carriers. And everything we do is about the next generation. We really want our ceiling to be their floor. We want our summit to be their basecamp. The things we take by faith, we want them to be able to enjoy by sight so they can go and take new things by faith. And so everything we do in this church is geared and designed to help the next generation follow Jesus with everything that they've got. And that really is a picture of the gospel. The entire gospel is the story of laying down your life so that someone else might live. Jesus laid down His life so that you might live. And now He invites us to lay down our lives so that someone else might live. And so we will never apologize for celebrating the next generation, for giving up our preferences and opinions for the next generation, for designing everything around the next generation, because that's what it looks like to be a church of generations. In fact, I love what Nehemiah says, "Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." Come on, fight for your sons and daughters in Jesus' name, fight for your sons and your daughters in Jesus' name. Like, it matters. They matter. And they need the generation ahead of them to fight for them, which means you got to pick up the shield and you got to pick up the sword and you got to get in the game, which means you got to stop complaining about how bad the generation is and you got to start believing how great they can be in Jesus' name, which means you got to not make it about you, and your preferences, and your opinions, and your money, and your time, and your vacation, and how you like it. No, no, no, no, no. I got to remember the Lord. And the more I remember the Lord and how great and awesome He is, I start to believe how great and awesome this generation can be because they're made in His image and His likeness. And God has appointed them for such a time as this. And He has decided that they would be a generation of hope in a world that is hopeless. Hey, fight, fight for your children. Some of you have just abandoned your own children to the chaos of the world. You've abandoned the generations of the chaos of the world. Fight in Jesus' name. Just like if someone broke into your home, you wouldn't just let it happen and just sit there and allow

them to do whatever they want, you would fight. The world has broken into our homes. Fight in Jesus' name and believe you already have the victory through Him. Come on.

This is why God tells His people, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts, impress them upon your children. Talk about them when you sit at home. And when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up again." God says that we are responsible to impress His commandment, His laws, His decrees, His ways, His words, His wisdom, His kingdom, His life. We're supposed to impress them upon our children at home. Impress, shape, form, mold. Do everything you need to do to make sure God is at the center of every conversation you have. So what is this saying? He's saying, "Hey, you want to know how to raise your children?" Because parenting is hard. Every parent want to agree with that? Parenting is really hard. He says, "Hey, you want to know the way to do it? Make sure that I am at the center of everything you do. Make sure that talking about Me is at the center of everything that you do. The decisions you make, how you do your energy, what you do for life, what you do with work, how you handle hard situations, how you correct, how you discipline, how you celebrate, how you encourage. Make sure I'm at the center of it. Impress My life upon your children." And not just your biological children, your spiritual children, the children of this church, the children of this House, the children of this generation. See, I'm all in on this deal. And I think a lot of you have figured that out by now and this is like my whole life. And I have no idea how I would impress all the things of God upon my children without the other people of this church. Like, I'm all in on this deal and I fully acknowledge I can't do it on my own. I have a 14 year old and a 16 year old. They're both involved in students and the Student Leadership Experience. And so like my daughter has Meredith, and Virginia, and Sherry, and Eileen, and my son has Ron, and Greg, and Brian, and Josh investing into their life every single week. Not to mention Nicole, and Justin, and JZ, and Zach, and Charlotte, and all these amazing adults who aren't paid to do anything. They have decided they want to give their life to raising up the next generation. And so they encourage, and they correct, and they challenge, and they inspire, and they raise up, and they invest, and they're faithful, and they show up, and they show my kids what walking with Jesus looks like. See, you can't celebrate a generation of hope carriers without acknowledging there's a whole bunch of amazing leaders and serve team members who invest in them every single week. And we have outstanding leaders and serve teams in this church. In fact, they are worth celebrating right now. So we just at every campus, come on, every leader, every serve team in the next generation, every person that invests in somebody else's kids, somebody else's students, somebody else's young adult. You're outstanding. You helped me raise my kids in the ways of the Lord. And we need a whole lot more of them because we got a whole lot more of the next generation coming to this church than we had leaders and serve teams, who are willing to give their life to invest into them.

We're reaching so many lost, lonely and broken kids, and students, and young adults who have no parents who are interested in pressing anything upon their children except the world. So we need people to rise up and say, "God's commanded us to do this? Then I'm in on this deal." And you say, "Well, I can't do it. I'm like an empty nester. And I have nothing in common with

this generation." Some of our best leaders are grandmas and grandpas who don't know the lingo or the language, but they love so well. And you might say, "I'm a young adult. I don't have anything to offer this next generation." Oh, some of our best leaders are young adults who are walking with Jesus, showing this generation that it's cool to follow Jesus. You say, "Bro, I'm just trying to raise my own children. I'm up to like here with my own kids." Some of our best leaders are moms and dads who have decided, "I'll be a leader and that will help hold me accountable to get my kid or my student to the thing. Oh, yeah. Because now I'm accountable to be there, which means I'm going to get my own kid there. And I'm not going to lead my own kid there. That's probably not a great idea. But we're going to be there and we're going to be a part." Before you tell me this isn't for you. Can I just ask you, have you ever asked God if it's for you? I get it. But if you ever asked God, "God, is this something You want me to be a part of, this whole next gen thing?" And before you tell yourself no, just, just ask God. I mean, look what He says, "Train a child in the way he should go. And when he is old, he will not turn from it." Train a child in the way, train. Don't hope, don't have wishful thinking, don't assume it's all going to be alright, don't step back, don't abdicate, don't just let it all happen, don't just hope for a good result. No, train a child in the way. Not a way, because there is only one way and His name is Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. The problem is this, is we spend so much time abdicating the spiritual reality of our children, but we train them to be athletes, and we train them to be educated, and we train them in music, and theater, and we train them to be like the world. What are you training your children in? In all honesty, what is your plan? What's your vision? Because we've been talking about this kind of verse all year, "Train yourself to be godly." And we said that that requires practice and discipline and doing things I don't want to do and being told no at different times. What are you training your children in? Because when they are old, they will not turn from it.

Isn't it interesting how, when life gets hard, we fall back on our training, not our desire. It's shocking how many of us in this room are exactly like our parents. Like, "Oh, I'm not anything like my mom." "I've spent my whole life trying to not be like my dad." And yet, isn't it ironic? That when life gets hard and trials come, you don't live according to your desires, you fall back on how you've been trained. Now you can retrain yourself in Jesus' name. It takes a lot more work than the original training. And so, what we're trying to do is train our children in the ways of the Lord. And so when life gets hard, they're going to fall back on their training instead of their desire, because training is stronger than desire. It's a lot of what we've been talking about in this series. And so what are you training your children in? What are we training this generation in? And it's really hard to train somebody to walk in a way that you don't walk in. Listen, I'm all in on this, this is like my life. My whole life is trying to train up the next generation. I don't want to build things for myself. I don't want to acquire a bunch of things for myself. And I don't want to just enjoy life by myself. I want to lay down my life to raise up the next generation. Can I ask you a question? Are you building for yourself? Are you acquiring for yourself? Are you just trying to enjoy life for yourself? Or are you like, man, I am training up this next generation to walk in the way of Jesus. And I don't know how, and I feel inadequate, and I feel unequipped. Great. That's where the Spirit of God shows up and does a deep work in your

life. In fact, I love it when John says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." John had no children. So he's talking about his spiritual children. "I have no greater joy than to hear my children are walking in the truth." Can I just tell you, there is a joy that so many of us will never know because we don't train our children to walk in the way of the Lord. And he says there's no greater joy than that. The greatest joy is watching your children walk in the truth and not just your biological children, but your spiritual children. There is a joy many churches will never know because they don't raise up the next generation. And hear me, if you don't see this place as family on mission, this whole experience thus far today is like being at a high school graduation of people you don't know. We done? Can we move on, can we get to the good stuff? But if this is family on mission, oh, this is a day of joy. You actually don't even care what we do for the rest of the time we're together because you're so full of joy because you're watching the children of God. The children of the family you're a part of walk in truth. So you have something to celebrate and something to be excited about and something to move forward on.

And so if you're here and this feels like challenging and convicting of your own life, listen, that's okay. You're like, hey, you're like, "I totally blew it, I didn't do any of that. My kids are like, 30." Great. And what do you do today? You own it. You just go and say, "Hey, I'm really sorry for the choices I made. I did not train you to walk in the way of the Lord and I have now had revelation and I was wrong. I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me? I am trying to learn to walk in the way of Jesus and I hope someday you will too." That's how you start. Or you start by saying like this. "My kids are in this season now and I know, that means I probably need to rearrange my life. If I'm going to train them in the way of the Lord, that has to be the first priority. It can't be like, the last." Here, can I just tell you what we do? We do this. Like, what sports are we going to play? What clubs are we going to be a part of? What activities are we going to do? What road trips are we going to take? What commitments are we going to make? What am I going to do for work? What are we going to do for hobby? What are we going to buy? Are we going to get this? Oh, and then church. Like, just I know. And you're like, it's Mother's Day. Don't do this to us. Listen, just so we're clear, bringing your child to church when you have time is not training them in the way of the Lord. It's training them in the way of the world because the world gives God its leftovers. The way of Jesus is, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and everything else will be added unto you." So what if you arranged or rearranged your entire fall – you got all summer to think about it – around, how am I going to train my child in the way? Because I will give an account to the Lord one day for it. And we will give an account to the Lord one day for how we do it as a church. And so even if you're a part of this church and you have no investment in the next generation, one day you will give an account to the Lord for how this family raised up the next generation. And you say, that means I need to be a leader or serve team or, no. But it means you're giving, you're praying, you're creating culture, you're encouraging, you're celebrating, you're interceding, you're giving up your preference and your opinion. Why? Because we're trying to teach this generation to go further and farther than we ever did. If it's taken you 40 years to figure out how to be a disciple, imagine if when you were 14, you knew how to be a disciple. How different would your life be?

How many mistakes would you have avoided? How much pain would you have not experienced? How much freedom would you have in the here and now? "I have no greater joy than to hear my children are walking in the truth." So I just declare in Jesus' name that your child is worth fighting for. Whether your child is 60 years old or six years old. I just declare that this generation is worth impressing upon the commandments of God into their life in Jesus' name, and that whether your child is 25 or two. That it's going to happen in Jesus' name. And I just declare that this generation is worth training, practicing, disciplining. Asking them to do things they don't want to do. Huh. That would actually be parenting. Huh. For whatever it's worth, for all we want to dogpile on the next generation, I actually think there's more to dogpile on in parenting than there is the next generation. But it's Mother's Day, we're not going to do that. All I'm trying to do is lift up your head. And say, in Jesus' name, you can do this. God has entrusted your children to you because He believes in you. And God has entrusted this generation to our church because He believes in our church. Let's live a life worthy of our calling in Jesus' name. You're with me on this? Okay.

Well good morning. I'm so glad that you're here. Today is a day of celebrating. And if you've ever been here, you know we like to celebrate. We're loud, we cheer, we hoop, we holler, we sing, we shout for the Lord. And if the first time you came, that was like, super disorienting to you, I get it. I get it because it's not normal in church, but it's supposed to be. You see you might know that we celebrate but do you know why we celebrate? We celebrate because celebration is a spiritual practice. Celebration is actually a spiritual discipline. See we've been in this series for most of this year called A Different Way. Talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. And we've said that if we want to do all the things that Jesus did, like love His enemies and pray for those who persecute Him, and live free from anxiety, and have no worry, and not love money, and be full of joy, then we have to first do the things that Jesus did, like His practices. Like Scripture, and meditation, and celebration. If we want to do what Jesus did on-the-spot, we have to do what Jesus did behind-the-scenes. And when we look at Jesus' life we discover that Jesus' life is full of celebration. He's always celebrating. And it's actually a discipline. A discipline is doing what I can do now, so I can do what I can't do later. A discipline is doing what I don't want to do right now, like celebrate, so I can do what I can't do later, like have joy in the midst of a hardship. Huh. Like have faith in the midst of a storm. Like see the goodness of God when my whole life is crumbling around me. That happens when we first start by practicing the simple discipline of celebration. And celebration is really simple. It's just simply paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God. That's all it is. Celebration, really simple word, really simple concept. Paying attention and then calling attention to the goodness of God in my life. It's looking around and seeing God's goodness and then acknowledging it. Elevating it, declaring it, praising Him for it. And if you read the Gospels, you see Jesus celebrate all the time. One of my favorites is in Luke chapter 10. The disciples were on mission, they come back, they bring a good report to Jesus. It's a good day with the disciples. There aren't many of them in the Gospels. This was one of them. And it says, "At that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise

and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure.'" Jesus, full of joy, celebrated the goodness of God. The words "full of joy" in the original language literally mean "leaping and dancing." Okay. Can you picture Jesus leaping and dancing? I mean, I think we pictured Jesus as like, stoic, and stern, and angry, and frustrated, and like, guys, all the time, leaping and dancing, celebrating, singing, joyful, top of His lungs. I mean, I don't even want to try to do it up here for you, but can you just picture? Jeez, I don't know what's harder to picture, me leaping and dancing or Jesus leaping and dancing. But either way, the point is, is that Jesus was constantly celebrating, turning water into wine at the wedding feast, playing with the children, hanging out with His disciples. He's always celebrating. And because He celebrated in the easy times, He was able to celebrate in the hard times. Because He practiced paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God when things were easy, He was able to pay attention and call attention to the goodness of God when things were hard. Because He could do it on a good day when the disciples came back and things were good, He could do it in the storm when the boat's about to sink. And He could see the goodness of God when His disciples all deserted Him. And He could see the goodness of God when He was on His way to the cross. Maybe if we spent more time leaping and dancing, we would have more faith when life gets hard, because we got to practice in the easy so we can be trained to do it when it's hard.

In fact, I love what God says to the people of God, this is in the Old Testament, the Israelites, He says, "Three times a year. You are to..." say it, "celebrate a festival to Me." Three times a year, they arrange their entire lives around a celebration. It didn't matter who you were. It didn't matter where you lived. It didn't matter what you were doing. It didn't matter what the situation or circumstance was like in your life at that season. Nope, everything stops. All the work, all the sports, all the activities, all the programs, all the things that we get so stressed out about stopped. And they all celebrated the goodness of God. They literally built their entire calendar, their life rhythm, around paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God. We're supposed to be people who celebrate. "Rejoice in the Lord always and again, I say rejoice." "The joy of the Lord is your strength." "The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Celebration is the way of the kingdom. And we need to learn to practice it in the easy so we can see it in the hard. I mean, do you remember when God is leading the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land? He sets them free from 400 years of slavery. He's leading them towards the Promised Land. And I want you to catch this. It says, "In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt, there we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted. But you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'The Lord has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we that you should grumble against us?'" Who are we? "'You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.'" So I want you to catch it. God is leading them from Egypt to the Promised Land and they are grumbling that they can't eat the food of the world. They're grumbling that they can't eat the food of the world. It's like they have nothing to celebrate. And you say celebrate, well, what would they have to celebrate? Oh, I

don't know. How about getting set free of 400 years of slavery? How about the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night over them? How about being declared a kingdom of priests? How about being declared as God's special possession? How about being led by God to a Promised Land, a land full of milk and honey that He was going to give you? Oh, I don't know. But they were so busy complaining, grumbling, that they had no room for celebrating. And I think this story is a whole lot more like my life than I care to admit. I think sometimes I'm so busy grumbling that I have no room for celebrating. I'm so busy focused on what's wrong with the world that I can't see what's right with God. And if I would spend more time focused on what's good with God, I would have no room left for grumbling, complaining, about what's wrong with the world.

See, if celebrating is paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God, then grumbling is paying attention and calling attention to the brokenness of this world. And if we're honest, we grumble a whole lot more than we celebrate. And we constantly talk about all of the things that are wrong with the world instead of all of the things that are right with God. And you might look at this and you might say, "Yeah, but you don't know what's going on in my life and all the places that I've been, and all the things that are happening, and all the things that I don't have that I want in the world." Oh, I don't know, you might have something to celebrate, like being rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light, like the Spirit of the living God dwelling inside of you, like living in the kingdom of God in the here and now, like being called God's beloved son or daughter. You see, this is a perspective issue. Two people can go into the exact same situation and one person pays attention and calls attention to the goodness of God, and somebody else grumbles by paying attention and calling attention to what's wrong with the world. And what I want you to see is that God takes grumbling personally. "The Lord has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we? You're not grumbling against us, but against the Lord." Listen to me, whenever you're grumbling, God takes it personally. Because when you're grumbling, you're saying there's more wrong with the world than there is right with God. He's going to take that personally. When I'm grumbling, I'm saying there is more brokenness in this situation than there is the goodness of God in this situation. And make no mistake about it, there is always more of the goodness of God than there is the brokenness of this world. It's just have you trained yourself to see it? And so, like Jesus, we have to practice it in the easy so we can see it in the hard. "Who are we? You're not grumbling against us." Just so you know, you're not grumbling against your spouse, or your parents, or your boss, or the government, or this church, or your friend, or your parent, or that person, you're grumbling against God. And you're saying there is more wrong in that situation than there is the goodness of God in that situation. God takes that really personal.

The cool part is, on the flip side, when you celebrate anyone or anything's goodness, God takes that personally too because every good thing comes from Him. So today when you cheer for a next generation student, you're actually celebrating God. You're not actually even celebrating them, you're actually celebrating God because every good thing comes from God. Every good thing is done by God's work in our lives. So He takes that personally as well. "Who

are we? You are not grumbling against us but against the Lord." Who are we? You are not celebrating us, you are celebrating the Lord. And you have to understand that celebration is offensive to the grumbling spirit. If you start practicing celebration, here's what I'm going to tell you, what's going to happen is the grumblers around you are going to be offended by you. Why? Because when you start paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God, surrounded by people who can only see what's broken in the world, they're going to get offended. They're going to think you're ignorant. They're going to think, "Don't you see all these problems and don't you see this stuff?" All these things are real and they might be facts. But there is a truth that is higher. And it's that God is good and He is good in the here and now. And I choose to train myself to see that instead of this. This is why, in the story of the prodigal son, when the prodigal son comes home, and the father throws a... party, and celebrates, and what happens? The older son refuses to come in and celebrate. He's offended, he's offended at his father paying attention and calling attention to the goodness of God, because all he can see is what's wrong with his brother. Celebration offends the grumbling spirit. That's why in church, when people are celebrating, there are always people that are offended, and it's so silly because it's the way we've trained ourselves to live by sight or to live by faith. I don't know about you, but I have more to celebrate than to grumble about, but I have to practice it, because otherwise I will complain about all the food I wish I had, too. But oh, I don't know, I've just been set free from slavery, the Spirit of God is leading me, and I'm on my way to the depths of the kingdom. So I actually have more of God's goodness, than the brokenness of the world, but it's a training, it's a thinking. You're with me on this?

You see, "They will celebrate Your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of Your righteousness." They, in context, this is generations. The generations, whatever generation you are, and whatever generation the person next to you is, will celebrate Your abundant goodness because it's everywhere, we just have to practice it. If I can be super honest with you, out of all the practices we're going to go through, this one is going to be one of the hardest ones for me personally. I am super gifted at seeing what is wrong. I mean, it's like a, I don't know, I was trained that way, I guess. I can walk in here, stand here and I'm just telling you right now, I can stand here and in three seconds, I can tell you that lights out, there's a piece of paper on the floor over here, there's five more people in this section than there is in this section, this guy's on his phone, this couple back here is fighting. And that thing on the wall is crooked. That's before I even say, "Hey, everybody, welcome to Valley Creek." Okay. That's my life. And so, for the last year, one of the things that I've been doing, I make my coffee in the morning and I go sit in my chair. And before I even open my Bible, before I pray, before I do anything, I just sit there and I practice celebration. I try to sit there and I try to celebrate the goodness of God from the day before. And some days it's so easy, some days I can sit there I just be like, oh, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. And some days I sit there and the coffee gets cold. And I have to work really hard and ask the Holy Spirit to show me His goodness when I can't see it. And so I'm practicing. I'm training on a daily basis because I can't run that marathon yet, but I want to do more than walk to the mailbox. And so I practice and I'm growing and I'm learning and I'm trying and I'm working it out with God, because I want to be

the kind of person that walks in and before I even say "good morning" to you can see I see the mercy of God over here. I see the compassion of God back there. I see the love of God right here. I see the provision of God over here. I see the protection of God in this. I want to train myself to pay attention and call attention to the goodness of God instead of training myself, or having been trained by the world in my flesh, to pay attention and call attention to what's broken in this world. And it's not easy. It requires you slowing down, it requires you lifting up your head and being aware and it requires humility. See, you can't celebrate the goodness of God if you're going a hundred miles an hour. You can't celebrate the goodness of God if your head's always down in your phone, you actually have to lift it up and look around and you can't celebrate God's goodness when you have a spirit of pride. Because celebration is not about looking at how good you are, it's looking at how good God is.

Celebration is not paying attention and calling attention to how good you did, it's paying attention and calling attention to how good God is. And hear me, it's all over your life. The goodness of God is all over your life. But like a deer in the woods, you have to train yourself to look for it and spot it, it's like, there it is. And the more you pay attention and the more you call attention, the easier it becomes. And you start to become the kind of person who did what Jesus did, so you can do what Jesus did, which is have faith and see the goodness of God in the storm, and the chaos, and the brokenness. So your practice plans for this week, really simple. And then we're going to do something together. Every day, this week, when you first wake up or right before you go to sleep, celebrate the specific goodness of God in your life. If you're like, "What's a practice plan? I haven't been here in a while. What is this?" Every week at the end of the practice that we're talking about, we're just saying, here's a practice plan to train yourself. We want to train ourselves to be godly. And the way we want to practice it this week is just every day and right when you wake up first thing in the morning or right before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes, just sit, just celebrate the specific goodness of God in your life, pay attention and call attention. And some will be so easy. Here will be the easy ones. The easy ones will be all the things God's given you. "Oh God, thank You for my house, I thank You for my spouse, I thank You for my parents, I thank You for this..." Those are the easy ones. And then you go a little deeper and you start celebrating the goodness of God in things like, "God, thank You for a hot cup of coffee. Thank You for this good meal, like, I just enjoy it." Like God wants us to enjoy our life. Like, I just, "God, thank You. I see Your goodness in this sunrise. I see Your goodness in this friend who is just kind to me." And then you kind of get through that little list. And then all of a sudden you're like, now what? Now you're in the good ones, because now you actually have to rely on the Holy Spirit to start showing you the goodness of God in your life. And you'd be amazed at how you start seeing things different. Because when I'm busy celebrating the goodness of God, I don't have any room left to complain about the brokenness of this world. Okay? So here's what we're going to do? Instead of me teaching you a bunch more about celebration, here's what I want to do. I want us to actually practice it right now. So if you'll grab your journal with me real quick, hopefully you have your Different Way journal with you. If you didn't get one of those, we'd love to get you one. And if you don't have any kind of journal, that's fine. Grab a pen, grab a piece of paper or grab your phone, if you

need to just go to a notes and space. And for the next five minutes, I just want to invite you to write down where you can see the goodness of God in your life. Just about five minutes. These guys are just going to play to keep you in the space. Let's just practice it right now, it's not just be hearers of the Word, let's be doers. I can see the goodness of God in my church. His Word in my life, the way He protected me this week, in the way He just forgave that brokenness in my life. Five minutes, I can see God's goodness in. And at every campus, I would just ask you, if you don't want to participate, that's fine. Could you just be still for the five minutes so as to not disturb anybody else? Holy Spirit, come show us. Help us pay attention and call attention to Your goodness in our lives because it's everywhere in Jesus' name.

Pastor Jason Hillier: Man, He's so worthy of the glory. He's worth celebrating and He is worth giving our lives to. And so, I'm thankful for all that we've got to celebrate today. I'm thankful we had an amazing day of practicing joy in the kingdom. In fact, what if we just gave Him another round of applause? Thank You, God. Your joy is our strength. This is great church. This is what it is to experience great church, to be in the church together. Thanks for being a part of it. If you need prayer for anything, right down the front, we'd love to pray for you and your family. Maybe if you want to come up with your graduate and pray at the end together. If you want to give, man, all of this is what we're given towards. All this raising up the generations of hope carriers. That's why we're doing it. That's what God has called us to. So you can give as you leave in the boxes or online at valleycreek.org. But as you go today, may you go with the joy of the Lord, knowing that God is good. Jesus has forgiven me. I am loved and everything is possible. We'll see you back next week.

A DIFFERENT WAY



MAY 19, 2024

SEASON TWO REVIEW

Come on, that's our prayer. Jesus, make me more and more like You. Jesus, You are a different way. Jesus, You are a better way and Jesus, You are the way of life. And You call each one of us by name to come and follow You, to pick up our cross, deny ourselves, and find the life that You offer in Jesus' name. May we have the faith and the hope and the love to move forward into the freedom that You offer us. God, we thank You for this journey, one simple next step at a time. Oh, God, make me more like You. Make our church more like You. Make our families more like You. Make our city more like You. May Your kingdom come and Your will be done starting from my heart to the ends of this earth, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Why don't you go ahead and grab your seat. Whatever campus or service you're at today, I am so glad you are here with us. And I love that last song that we just sung. Our team has been working hard on writing that, just based on what God's been doing in the here and now in our church. You see, we've been in this year-long series called A Different Way. And all we're doing is talking about doing the things that Jesus did, so we can do the things that Jesus did. It's that if we wanna do what He did on-the-spot, in the moment, we have to first do what He did behind-the-scenes. That if we want His life, we have to take on His lifestyle. And so we've been talking about the things that Jesus did, like He just lived without fear. And He had no anxiety. And He was peaceful. And He was full of joy. And He was free. He was deeply connected to God. He loved others well. He didn't get caught up in the circumstances or situations of life. And we look at Jesus' life and it's the kind of life we all want. It's the kind of life we're all pursuing. We just don't know how to find it. And until we realize that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to first back up and do the things that Jesus did, like the way He practiced and lived; His lifestyle. Things like fasting, and prayer, and Scripture, and meditation, and generosity, and service, and community, and all these things that He practiced day in and day out in His life that allowed Him to do the things that He really wanted to do. And so we've been talking about this. We've been just talking about like, what does it mean to be a disciple?

Asking big questions like, who are you becoming? And who do you want to become? And who are you a disciple of? And what is the direction of your life? And what's the vision for your life? We've been asking these big questions, wrestling through these big concepts. And today we finish up Season 2 of this Different Way series. See, we've simply broken this series, this year-long series, which wasn't intended to be, but that's what it's becoming, into just different seasons like your favorite TV show. And so the first season we talked all about, what does it mean to be a disciple? What is this life that Jesus invites us to? What does it look like to really follow Jesus? And then we're finishing up today's Season 2, where we started looking at some of those practices that Jesus invites us to take on, to train ourselves to be godly. And we were supposed to get through, honestly, all 12 of them, and we got through 3: Scripture, Meditation, and Celebration. Now, here's what I want you to hear, and you keep hearing me say this throughout this year is, we are not in a hurry. We have nowhere to get, we have someone to become. So I'm not trying to get somewhere; I'm trying to become someone. And I'm trying to help you become who God has called you to be. And so we're not really in a hurry; we're willing to go at the pace of God. And if you've been in our church for a long time, we just have this little cultural phrase we use just called "follow the cloud." So we're just a

church that follows the cloud. When God set the people of God free, the Israelites from Egypt, He led them to the Promised Land through a cloud, it was His presence. And when it moved, they moved. And when it stopped, they stopped. And where it went, they went. And what it did, they did. They just followed the cloud, and it brought them to the fullness of life that God offered them. And so we just say we follow the cloud. Wherever God is going, whatever God is doing, whatever pace God is taking, we're willing to arrange our lives to make that the centerpiece of who we are as a church.

And so we've slowed down, and I think what God has wanted us to grab in Season 2 is that we must become people who love His Word. That if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to first think like Jesus thought. And I will never think like Jesus thought if I don't learn to love God's Word for myself. And I love what God did in Season 2 of A Different Way. See, like I've loved it. You might be like, "Um, not so much." I loved it. I love what we're talking about. I love what we're discovering. I love the revelation God is showing us. I love the repentance that's happening. Like, this is the life that I want to live like, I loved Season 2 and what God is doing and saying in my life and who I am trying to become. And I loved so much of the goodness of God that I saw, all in your life. You see, whether you realize it or not, He who began the good work in you is faithful to complete it. And we're working out our salvation with some fear and some trembling. And it's God who is working inside of us to will and act according to His desires, and His purposes, and His calling in our life. Like God is at work and I'm watching revelation and repentance happen in people as they're rising up to a new reality with a clear vision of who they want to become and a new understanding of what it actually looks like to be a disciple of Jesus. And to be a church that says, "Hey, we just want to see His kingdom come. And His will be done in everything we do when we're gathered together and when we're scattered out in the world." And if you made me give you a summary verse for Season 2, I would just present this to you as kind of the summary verse. I think this captures so much of what we've been talking about for the last couple months. And it just says this. "So let what I'm saying sink deeply into your hearts and souls. Do whatever it takes to remember what I'm telling you. Tie a reminder on your hand or put a reminder on your forehead, where you'll see it all the time, and on the doorpost where you cross the threshold, or on the city gate. Teach these things to your children. Talk about them when you're sitting together in your home and when you're walking together down the road. Make them the last thing you talk about before you go to bed and the first thing you talk about the next morning. So that as long as there is sky above the earth, you and your children will enjoy the good life awaiting you in the land the Lord has promised you." I think that is a great verse to summarize Season 2, of Scripture and Meditation and Celebration. Three practices that the Lord is inviting us into that we would be people who love value His Word.

And so today we're wrapping up Season 2. And here's what I want to invite you to do. I want to invite you to grab your journals. Hopefully you have your Different Way journals. If you got one with us at the beginning of the series and you've been using it all the way along, taking notes, that was the point so that it could all be self-contained. And if you didn't get one, we'd love to

get you one. We've got some more on order. But here's what I want to do for the next about five minutes. I'm just going to invite you to read back through the notes you took during Season 2. Not Season 1, but Season 2 that started with Scripture. I just want to give you five minutes to just read through your notes. And if you didn't bring your journal, or you're new with us today and you're like, "I haven't taken any notes," on the QR code on the seat-back in front of you, you can use your phone and scan it. And we've created a Season 2 recap for you. And I want to give you just five minutes to just look at your notes of what God has been saying to us, because what is the point of taking notes if you never reread them? And maybe a better question to ask is, if you never take notes, how are you going to remember what God has been saying to you? Because here's a great question, if I just asked you this. What did God teach us two weeks ago? Can you remember? I preached it and I probably can't remember it. So what did God teach us six weeks ago? I don't remember. So that's why I write it down. So I can remember what God says, because we want to consider carefully what we hear, because how we use what God is saying to us determines what we will keep hearing in the future. And so you can use the QR code for a season recap, if you don't have one, but hopefully you have your journal. Let me give you about five minutes. Just re-read through what has God been saying to you over the course of Season 2, A Different Way. God speaks to you because He loves you. And sometimes when you just stop and look at all the things He's been saying, it reminds you how much you're loved. That God, Yahweh, Jesus, the One who has life in and of Himself has decided to speak to you, that you might have relationship with Him. Be healed and be free. And have revelation on hidden things that might be mysterious. But He wants to show them to you so you can walk them out. Don't be hearers of the word, be doers of the word. Which means we have to steward that which He says to our lives and value it because we value Him.

That was less than five minutes looking through your notes. For some of you that probably felt really long and for others of you, you felt like, "I read like one page of week one." So it's just a good reminder that this is A Different Way. Rearranging our life, and our time even together as a church, together around Jesus and His practices, because we are not interested in entertainment, we're going for transformation. And transformation requires slowing down and going back to that which matters. That which God has said, that which God has said, that which I need to master so that I can become free, because I'm tired of this world mastering me. And so here's what I want to invite you to do, you flip to a blank page. And if you don't have a journal, you can just grab your phone. Try to keep it on silent. But if you could just open up a brand new note page. And just maybe at the top of it, you can just write you know Season 2 Recap Questions. And I'm just going to walk you through five questions that I want to give you an opportunity to just process with the Holy Spirit as we wrap up Season 2. And so Holy Spirit, I just ask for You to keep speaking. We don't have to ask for You to come, because You're here. We don't even have to ask for You to speak, because we know You already are, but help us hear. And help us sort through our own thoughts, and our own confusion, and our own disorientation. Help us be focused, just process these with You. First question for you is just simply this. How is my understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus been

changing? How is my understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus been changing? How are you changing your thought process on what it actually looks like to follow Jesus? What it means to call yourself the people of God? What it actually means to say you're a believer? How has your mind been changing? Jesus keeps expanding our own definition of what being His disciple looks like. Keep leaning into how He wants to open up that box that we've put following Him in.

Second question for you is, how have I been re-arranging my life around Jesus and His practices? How have I been rearranging my life around Jesus and His practices? We've said that's kind of the key word in a sense of this series, arrange and re-arrange, order and re-order. How is your life arranged differently today than it was at the beginning of Season 2? And when you hear the word rearrange, I think some of us think like rearrange our furniture. You keep the same amount of furniture in the room and you just shuffle it around and then you buy another chair from IKEA and try to shove it in an already crammed living room. When we're using the word rearrange, we're saying, what do you need to get rid of so that you have space for that which God wants to do? You can't keep adding things into an already over-full life. So what would it look like and how have you been re-arranging? And if you haven't, then maybe the question you answer is just, why haven't I rearranged anything yet? If we learn practices to become godly, but never practice them, they don't help us. So really easy answers for this one would be like, "I changed what I listened to." "I've changed what's on my phone." "I changed how I do my mornings or my evenings to arrange my life around Jesus." And just think about this. If you had a baby for the first time and you brought that baby to your home, your entire life would be re-arranged and there would be evidence of that baby in every room of the house – cribs, changing tables, diapers, wipes, toys, bouncies, car seats – every room there would be evidence that your life has been re-arranged around that baby. Is there any evidence in your life that you're re-arranging your life around Jesus?

Third question is, if repentance starts where excuses end, where is God inviting me to stop making excuses and simply repent? If repentance starts where excuses end, where is God inviting me to stop making excuses and simply repent? In other words, where are you making excuses about why you can't follow Jesus? And just need to own it. Because you can't repent, change my mind, change my direction. If I won't take responsibility, respond according to the ability that He's given me with the revelation He has now shown me. Like, where are you just like, I just straight up, I'm just making an excuse here. I just say I'm too tired, but that's an excuse. I just say I don't have enough time, that's just an excuse. Like, where do you just need to own that? Holy Spirit, come help us. Repentance is such a gift from God. It brings refreshment, breakthrough. We want to be people who are quick to repent so we can live with a renewed mind that we might see God's will right in front of us. That one is an important question for you. I would wrestle on that one this week. Where is it an excuse, when God's inviting you to repent? Because your boss, and spouse, and your child, and your parent, and your work, and your circumstances, and situations, and your health, and your finances, and the government can't keep you from becoming who God has called you to be in Jesus' name. So

don't make excuses. Choose to repent, to become who He has called you to be because the kingdom is at hand.

Fourth question is, what is my Season 2 summary statement? What is my Season 2 of A Different Way summary statement? If you had to boil up this entire series season, like just this last, however many weeks this has been, in one statement, what would it be? In other words, if I came and talked to you in the atrium right after service and said, "Hey, just tell me, just, what's God been doing in your life? What's the Holy Spirit been saying to you over these last six, seven, eight weeks?" What would that be? This forces you to actually have to think deeply about a deep thing and consolidate it into one statement. I don't -- not a paragraph, just what's your summary statement in one sentence you could tell me. What God's been doing in Season 2 of A Different Way in your life? When you're flipping through Netflix and you get to Season 2 of your favorite show, the subtitle is like the summary statement of that season. This is like the subtitle of this season and we did it for Season 1. Mine was life-changing for me. And I want to help you by the time we get to the end of Season 4, have a summary statement for each season, so you can remember what the Holy Spirit is doing in your life. Because He loves you and He is forming you into His image and His likeness. And there is a subtitle for this Season 2 of A Different Way that you can't forget. So write it down, highlight it and don't lose it, because when we get to like, November, I'm probably going to ask you, what was your Season 1, and your Season 2, and your Season 3? When we do Season 4, you're like, "Oh my gosh." Yeah. Think of who you're going to be by then.

Okay. Last question. What is my practice plan for the summer? Every week I've given you a practice plan for all of Season 2 and most of Season 1. Today is your opportunity to create your own practice plan for the summer. It might be using things that we've done. For example, it might be to engage the Bible reading plan, or just-- the three practices of Scripture, Meditation, and Celebration. It might be to memorize and meditate on a new passage. Because you did Psalm 23 and you did it so well. You might want to do like our staff is doing Psalm 103:1-13. Join us in that, if you want or pick your own. Maybe it's to celebrate the specific goodness of God for 30 minutes each week. You set aside time to actually pay attention and call attention to His goodness. Maybe for some of you, it's just to come to church every week. That would be like hardcore training in your life. The way that it's currently arranged, that's incredible. Do, do that. Maybe it's re-listening to all of Season 1 and Season 2, because it's easy to forget like, what is your practice plan? We're training ourselves to be godly. And here's the deal, we can't run the marathon yet, but we've all gotten past walking to our mailbox. We've got to maybe like a three-mile run. And if you don't practice over the summer, you're going to lose all of that endurance that you've built up. So what's your practice plan? Because we're going to start our 60 Day summer series like we always do and we're going to take a break from A Different Way. I know some of you, you need a breath. You're saturated with it. We got it, we're coming up for some air, but what is your practice plan? Because if you just like check out of all this and then come in August and I'm coming back in hot. And I'm saying, "We're going to 10 miles, baby." And you can't walk to the mailbox

anymore. We're going to have a challenge. You're going to have a challenge because I'm going to 10 miles, so I'm trying to make sure you don't settle, in all seriousness.

Just like, what's one thing. What's one thing and wherever you are on your journey, Holy Spirit, come on, show us. Give us one practice plan that we should be able to say when somebody says, how are you practicing your faith this summer? How are you training to be godly this summer? You should be able to say that. It's not really complicated, it's not really hard and it's not really subjective. It's very objective. I am going to... fill in the blank. I don't even need to get to five miles, but I can't lose my three miles. I can't lose it. I can't lose it because it's too important to who I'm becoming. So I refuse to lose it because I'm not going back to zero to start over again because my wife, and my children, and this world needs me to become a person of love. So I'm not giving this ground up. That might mean I'm going to give up some of the worldly things that I would have done this summer, some of my own time, catch it. I'm preaching to you while you're doing this point. So I'm trying to help you. It's worth it. One thing, don't look at that list and think you got to do all this. You don't have to do anything on that list. I don't care. Just what's your practice plan? We did three practices, Scripture, Meditation, Celebration, just pick something. Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, You're the great trainer anyways, train us. Give us a plan. And this is called taking responsibility for your journey because you have to be able to be like, even if no one gives me one, I have to learn to do it. This is me teaching you how to like, come up with your own practice plan. See, here's what I want to say. Some of you, some of you might feel like, as we've gone through this and as we're going through, you might feel like, man, it's striving, it's performance, it's hard, it's making me do things I don't want to do, I'm earning. I have to do all this stuff and it's just getting so overwhelming. I just want to like, stop you with all that to be like, listen, this isn't about doing something for God. All of this is opening yourself up so you can just receive His grace to become who He has called you to be. John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. But apart from me, you can do nothing." The spiritual practices help us remain in Him. They help you be aware of Him. They help you be focused on Him. They help you rest in Him. They help you rely upon Him. They help you stay open to Him so that He can flow through your life and effortlessly and naturally bear fruit the character of Jesus. This isn't striving, struggling, earning, performing, you don't have to do any of this stuff. I told you that in Season 1. You don't have to do any of these things. But these things open me up so that God's grace can flow into my life and can change me from the inside out.

And what I want to remind you is that your spirit longs to do these things. The Spirit within you actually has a desire to please God, to follow God, to obey God. And that Spirit that is within you is stronger than that flesh that longs against you. And the kingdom within you longs to obey God more than the world around you and the world that might even be still inside of you longs to rebel against God. So we got to keep reminding ourselves, stop saying, "This is so hard, this is so hard, this is so hard." No, you have a new nature, you're a new creation. You have been re-created to live an entirely different reality. This is now the normal way of life. A

Different Way is the normal way for the people of the kingdom. And so all I've been trying to do, is lift up your head to say, it is hard to go against the grain and live like the world as the people of God. It is easy and light to go with the way of Jesus as His people. Season 2, you did it. It's a great season. Season 3 is going to be amazing, summer is going to be great. God is moving. Let's keep becoming the people He's called us to be. And so I want to finish all of this up with communion because it's a reminder of who we are. And so at all our campuses, our teams are going to come and they're going to start passing out the elements of communion. And this is for anyone and everyone who has put their faith in Jesus. And if you're here and you haven't done that yet, when it gets to you, we would just ask that you would pass it along because by taking it, what you're saying is, I'm a disciple of Jesus. I live a different way. I've been included in Christ. And I'm a new creation and communion reminds me that there is a calling that I'm now called to live by. I want to live a life worthy of my calling in Jesus' name. In fact, this is why Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The way of Jesus is easy and light. It doesn't feel like that to us a lot of times because we've been trained to live like the world. And your training is stronger than your will. So even though you desire to follow God, you've been trained to live like the world. So to live like God feels hard and heavy, feels burdensome and confusing. It feels disorienting and unreachable because we have been trained to live like the world. And so we're in process of retraining ourselves to be godly. To take the way that is easy with a burden that is light. We're doing what we can do now, so we can do what we want to do later. We're doing the things that Jesus did, so we can do the things that Jesus did. And communion reminds us that Jesus already did everything that ever has been or ever will be required from me. Communion reminds me that I've been included in Christ and there is a new reality of which I live by called the kingdom of Heaven. Communion reminds me that He is the vine and I'm the branch, and if I'm severed from Him, I have no life, no fruit. You can do nothing. But if I rest in Him and remain in Him and rely on Him, I will bear much fruit in Jesus' name. Jesus is a different way, he is a better way and he is the way of life.

And as we finish Season 2, all I want to say to you at the end of this whole thing of this, this part of the journey is man, God loves you so much that He wants to not only include you in Him, He wants to help you become like Him, because He shows us what it's like to be human, what it's like to be alive, and what it's like to be free in relationship with God. You see on the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He took the bread, and He gave thanks, and He broke it. And He said, "This is my body, which is broken for you. As often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me." In other words, He says, "Remember who I am and what I've done and what you are now included in." Can we receive the life of Christ together? And in the same way, after the supper, He took the cup and He said, "This is my blood, which will be poured out for you. The blood of the new covenant, a new deal, a new arrangement between you and me. And as often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me. Remember that I was poured out so that you could be poured into." So that you don't have to live defeated and discouraged, weary, burdened in this broken world. But that you could be healed and made

whole, have rest for your souls and walk in a way that is easy and light in Jesus' name. Let's receive His life together. So Jesus, You are the different way. And we choose to follow by faith. In Your name we pray. Amen.

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SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

SEASON THREE, EPISODE ONE

“BLACKOUT: GOLD SHIELDS”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

outside.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A DIFFERENT WAY



SEPTEMBER 8, 2024

SEASON THREE, EPISODE TWO

“PRAYER”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A DIFFERENT WAY



SEPTEMBER 15, 2024

SEASON THREE, EPISODE THREE

"FASTING"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A DIFFERENT WAY



SEPTEMBER 22, 2024

SEASON THREE, EPISODE FOUR

"SABBATH"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A DIFFERENT WAY



SEPTEMBER 29, 2024

SEASON THREE, EPISODE FIVE

“SILENCE & SOLITUDE”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A DIFFERENT WAY



OCTOBER 6, 2024

SEASON THREE, EPISODE SIX

"SIMPLICITY"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A DIFFERENT WAY



OCTOBER 13, 2024

SEASON THREE REVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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 churchstaffing.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 Elohims, 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? Of 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 your selves 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 needing 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 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. 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 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.