

All right, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. Come on, whatever campus you're at today, Denton, Gainesville, Flower Mound, Louisville, online, let's just welcome each other together for a moment. We are so glad that you are here. And I know sometimes that may seem a little silly to cheer for all of our other campuses, but it's not silly. It reminds you that you're a part of something so much bigger than yourselves. You are a part of the body of Christ in motion, a movement of hope for the city and beyond. And if you're new, if you've been just coming and checking it out, if you have left and recently come back, I just want to tell you, I'm so glad that you're here. And I believe you are here for such a time as this. I don't think it's a coincidence. I don't think it's an accident. I think it's God drawing you unto Himself because He loves you and has so much more for you. And what a great start to this year, it's been here at Valley Creek.

See, we spent the first two weeks worshipping and praying, seeking God, saying, "Jesus, we want you to be our one thing, our main thing, our only thing." Seeking first His kingdom, believing He's going to give us everything else after that. And then, our worship team released their brand-new album, which is outstanding. So, many of us are just listening to it on repeat over and over again in our lives. It's the best one that they have ever created. And then, we had three days of RE. RE was probably my favorite RE that maybe we've ever done. Thousands of people coming to seek God. And I just watched as person after person heard God's voice, and experienced God's presence. God brought wisdom for people, for the decisions they need to make in their future. God brought solutions to problems, the things that people have been facing. And I think God brought healing to a whole lot of people over these three days of RE.

And then, circles kick off this week. We had an amazing movement night on Wednesday for the beginning of the student semester. And so, so many great things happening at the beginning of the year. And here's just what I want to tell you. I want to tell you what God told me at RE. And the thing that God told me at RE is, is that we are becoming the church that we have dreamed of. I just want to speak that over you and so many of you that have been here for so long with, we are becoming the church that so many of us have dreamed of, that so many of us have prayed for and sacrificed for and served and led and given. Like we're becoming it right in front of your eyes. It's like as you watch a teenager becoming this adult that you've shaped it and molded and prayed and believed and hoped and wished and thought and threw coins in a wishing well that that would happen. That's what's happening right before our eyes. We're becoming the church that so many of us have dreamed of. And so, the question then that you have to ask is, "Okay, then what's next?"

Like, "Where are we going? What are we doing? What does God have in store for us?" Well, I have the answer to that question because I feel like we've heard from God. And I can't wait to start a new series next week where I'm going to tell you what that looks like and where we're going. So, you're going to want to be here for that. But you see, before we can create the future, we have to make sure we have a plan for the present. Before we can talk about this future that's in front of us, we have to make sure we're going to become the kind of people that can steward the future that's in front of us. Well, you see, if you were here with us last year,

we spent an entire year. Remember this? Remember this? Or did you forget about it over Christmas and New Year's? You're like, "I ain't never forgetting that red. It's like burned in my head from a whole year." I know. We did one series for a whole year, A Different Way, doing what Jesus did, talking about being His disciples. And in many ways, we didn't set out for that to be a year-long series. I thought it was going to be a couple of months, but God was moving, so He slowed down.

And over the course of a year, God did a deep work. And the deep work is the hidden work, and the hidden work is the important work. And this was my favorite series that we've ever done. Fifteen years of preaching last year, it was my favorite series that we've ever done. God moved in a profound and powerful way. And then, we butted right up to Christmas, if you remember this. And so, I had to stop the series and land the plane. And I gave you one last practice plan. It was to enjoy God and the life that He's given you. And I told you at the beginning of January, we will help you create your own personal practice plan for 2025 so A Different Way isn't a series, it becomes a lifestyle. And that's what I want to do today because we're going to need those practice plans to become those people, to create the future that's in front of us. And so, I just want to start by walking you back through, you're like, "What did we talk about last year?" Some of you are like, "I think maybe we talked about living a different way."

See, Jesus says, "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." Jesus offers us a different way. He says, "Come to me, whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you've done, whatever your life looks like, come to me." There are no barriers, boundaries, mediators, or in between you and God. You can come directly to Him. "All you who are weary, who are tired, and worn out and beat down and discouraged and exhausted and burdened, overwhelmed, stressed, full of worries and cares and heaviness, and I will give you rest."

Jesus offers you rest, not situation and circumstantial rest, but rest in the deepest place of your soul. And He makes it very clear that rest is found in Him and in only Him. Rest is not found in your counselor or your medication or your situation or your circumstances or your friends. There's a time and a place for all of those things. But without Jesus, you will never have rest in here. So, He says, "Come, because I offer you real rest, and take my yoke upon you." What is a yoke? A yoke is an old wooden thing that they would put on two oxen together and strap them in so they would go in the same direction. And when they were strapped in together, they became exponentially more powerful. One can put 1,000 to flight, two can put 10,000 to flight. And when you're yoked in together, you can't pull apart because you're now going in the same direction. So, Jesus says, "Come yoke in with me. Come, let me carry the weight, the burdens, the heaviness, the weariness, and you will become exponentially more powerful as I do the work. And my power and my grace is moving through your life, and you will go in my direction."

But to be yoked in with Jesus, I have to first take off the yoke of the world. I have to first take off the yoke of religion, the yoke of self, the yoke of flesh because you can't be yoked to two things at the same time. And whenever you try, that's when you feel a divided soul because you're being pulled in the direction of Jesus and the way of religion or the world at the same time. "And learn from me." He wants to be your teacher, your rabbi, not just your Lord and your savior. He wants to teach you how to live your life because he's gentle, kind, compassionate, gracious, merciful, and loving. He's humble. He's not prideful and narcissistic. He is a secure servant, and He offers you rest for your souls. Whenever the Bible says the same thing twice, it's because it's trying to get your attention that He offers you rest in the deepest place of your life for it is easy and light. See, a lot of us think following Jesus is hard and heavy. You know what's hard and heavy?

The world is hard and heavy. Religion is hard and heavy. Sin is hard and heavy. Jesus offers us a way that is easy and light if we will choose to go a different way with Him. This is why He says, "This is what the Lord Almighty says." This is God saying to you and me, "Give careful thought to your ways. 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 your life. Is it going in the direction that you want it to?" Like, who are you becoming? And who do you want to become? It's the question I asked you all year long last year. Who are you becoming? And who do you want to become like five years, 10 years, 20 years from now?

What kind of person do you want to be? Are you living your life in such a way that you can actually become the kind of person you say you want to be? Or are you planting and not harvesting? Eating but not having enough, drinking but never having your fill? Like, the harder you try, the less it works. Give careful thought to your ways. Consider your life. Is it going in the direction that you want? Or maybe there's a different way that Jesus offers where I can actually become the kind of person that I say I want to be, which is why He says, "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 that leads to life, and only a few find it." Jesus says there is a wide gate and a broad road that leads to destruction. And this way of life says, "Come one, come all. Do what you want, when you want, how you want, anything goes. Whatever you want, you can do it. Your feelings and your emotions and your will can rule and reign. Go for it."

Jesus says you can take that path. But just so you're aware, somewhere down that path, like a bandit, destruction will come upon you. Or there's a different way, a small gate, a narrow road that leads to an ever-widening life. And on this way, you can't bring in all your opinions and your thoughts and your feelings and your preferences and the flesh because the gate is so narrow, you can't bring them in with you. You can only bring in a submitted and surrendered

soul. But if I will lay it all down to walk through that gate, my life continues to get wider and wider and wider. And when Jesus says this way leads to destruction, it's not a threat or a curse or a punishment. It's just the way it is. And He's making sure you understand that you know what is down the road that you have chosen, so we get a choice. And He will always let you choose how you want to live your life. But there's only two ways.

There's not a third road. There's not a fifth road. There's not an eighth road. There is a wide road and there is a narrow road. And He says, "If this isn't getting you where you want to go, I got a different way for you. Come on over here and try this. And you can become who I've created you to be." In fact, when Jesus says to Peter, "Come and follow me," Jesus wasn't using figurative or subjective or flowery language for Peter. This wasn't one of those things like, "Hey, Peter, have an emotional experience, come to a church service, be moved, pray a prayer, and then go back to your life and show up whenever you can." It was like, "Come follow me." It was very literal. "Come walk with me. Come be with me. Come move with me. Come learn how I live my life, and I'm going to teach you how to live your life in the same way." In other words, Jesus offered Peter what He offers us, to come and be His disciple. Disciple, a big word that simply means a student, a learner, a follower, one who becomes like the one they're following.

A disciple is someone who has considered their life and counted the cost and decided that the way of Jesus is better than the way of the world. They come to Jesus with the intent to follow, with the intent to obey. They want to think like, and talk like, and act like, and live like, and believe like Jesus. They have submitted and surrendered to His lordship. They want to live in His kingdom. They have looked at all of the ways of the world, and they know what the world has to say, but they want what Jesus says, and so they come with this heart of, "Because you say so, Lord, I will do it. And I've looked at all the different ways, and I've decided your way is best." See, you can be in church for 20 years and never have decided to be a disciple.

Big difference between being a Christian and identifying with Jesus, believing in Jesus, liking Jesus, having the emotional experiences of Jesus, enjoying Jesus as a good shepherd, and being a disciple who says, "I've come with the intent to follow, with the intent to obey, with the intent to love, with a submitted and surrendered life to become like you, Jesus." See, make no mistake about it. You are a disciple of someone or something. You are a student, a learner, a follower of something. Someone is showing you what to be like, and so you could be a disciple of the news. You might be a disciple of a political party. You could be a disciple of Wall Street. You might be a disciple of social media. You might be a disciple of an influencer. You might be a disciple of your generation. I don't know, but make no mistake about it. You are a disciple of someone. You say, "Well, how do I know?" Well, who determines what's normal in your life? Who defines what is good and true and right? Who determines what is significance and success? Who shows you the way that you should go?

Who are you trying to emulate and become like? Whose life do you wish you had? That's who you are a disciple of. The question is, "Have you decided to be a disciple of the person that is going to lead you to the place you say you want to go?" In fact, this is why Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. A student, a disciple, is someone who is training to be like their teacher, whether intentionally or unintentionally." Make no mistake about it. You are a student of someone or something, and you are either intentionally or unintentionally training. You are either being transformed or being conformed to become like whoever you have decided knows what is good and true and right. And so, every one of us has to decide in our own life whether or not we believe Jesus knows what He's talking about. We all have to decide, does Jesus know what is good and true and right or not?

Because He can't be mostly good and usually right and sometimes know what He's talking about. He's either Lord of all or Lord of none. He's right about everything or He's wrong about everything because Jesus can't be right about forgiveness but wrong about how to live a life of freedom. He can't be right about salvation but wrong about how to have a healthy soul. And He can't be right about eternity but wrong about how to live your daily life. So, we have got to decide what kind of disciple of whom or what we would like to be because someone is setting the course of your life that you're following. And I just think it's really interesting that a lot of us, if we're honest, if we really evaluated our life, we're probably more of a disciple of our generation than we actually are of Jesus. Isn't it interesting that every generation comes along and they think they've got it figured out? And they're going to show the generation before them like how radically different they are and how individual and they're not like anybody else.

And then, you look at a generation, they all talk the same, act the same, think the same, live the same, look the same, want to do the same things. So, whatever generation you are a part of, the question is, "Does your life look more like your generation or like Jesus?" I think it is very easy for the world to disciple us into our generational mold. Gen Z, millennial, boomer, X, whatever it is. I don't want to be a disciple of my generation. I want to be a disciple of Jesus. But I have to decide that He actually knows what He's talking about. Because if He knows what He's talking about, then I'll rearrange my life. I'll seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and everything else will be given to me as well. Like, if I believe He knows what He's talking about, then I'll arrange and rearrange and order and reorder my life around Jesus, His kingdom and His ways because I believe everything I long for is somewhere down that path.

And again, make no mistake about it. This verse is also true for whoever or whatever you are a disciple of. You seek it first, believing everything else will be given to you down that path. If I'm a disciple of finance, I'm going after money because I think money is going to deliver on everything that I want. If I'm a disciple of fitness, I go after fitness with everything I got because I believe looking fit is going to give me everything that I want. If I'm a disciple of influence, then I go after influence with everything because I'm convinced if I could be an influencer, then I'll have everything I want. Whoever you arrange and order your life around is who you are a

disciple of. And you have chosen that because you think it's going to give you that which you want. So, so much of last year was trying to help us become aware of how have I actually arranged and ordered my life and who am I going to become if I stay on that path. And is that who I want to be? Or do I need to consider a different way?

"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 will save it." To come to Jesus, there is a denial of our flesh, our opinions, our rights, and our preference. We pick up our cross, we die to ourselves, and we follow Him. We go through the narrow gate into the small way that leads to an ever-widening life in Jesus' name. You have to lose your life if you're ever going to find it. This way, it says you don't have to lose anything. "I will give you everything until the bandit shows up and destruction comes and it all falls apart." Do you remember all this? And so, we spent all year basically saying this, that if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to first... do the things that Jesus did.

We remember. Good job. You're like, "You said it for a year. If we forgot, we're in trouble." If I want to do the things that Jesus did, I 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 Jesus' health, I have to first take on His habits. If I want to do Jesus' work, I have to first walk in His ways. If I want Jesus' life, I have to first take on His lifestyle. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, if I want to do the things that Jesus did, like heal the sick and raise the dead and cast out demons and love my enemies and forgive those who have hurt me and have a life of joy and be full of hope and live by faith and be deeply connected with God, then I first have to do the things that Jesus did. The way He arranged His life, the spiritual practices, things like Scripture and meditation and prayer and Sabbath and silence and solitude. See, we can do the things that Jesus did.

This is the life that if I sat down with you, I bet you would tell me you want. You want peace and chaos. You want to be able to control yourself in the midst of temptation. You probably want joy no matter what's happening. I bet you want a life of purpose because you were created for it. Hope in the midst of despair. Oh, my soul wants that. I would love wisdom in life. I'd actually love to feel and experience love in my relationships. I want to be free from the things around me. I would love to be able to be free from my past and forgive me, and I want to deep connection. Like, I want to do the things that Jesus did. But if I want to do the things that Jesus did, I have to first do the things that Jesus did because our great problem is, is I try to do the things that Jesus did on the spot without doing the things that He did behind the scenes, and I fail epically. I'm just going to be joyful today. How'd that work out for you? I'm not going to be angry until the first person cuts you off on the road, right?

I'm going to be hopeful until that one situation isn't the way that I want it to be and the whole world's falling apart. I can't do the things that Jesus did on the spot if I don't first do the things that Jesus did behind the scenes. And so, this is why He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the

life." If I want the life He offers, I have to walk in His way. He teaches us how to be human, how to live our lives. He came to show us the best way to be human in this world, walking with God. The question is whether or not we believe He knows what He's talking about and His way is worth taking. And so, in a sense, our theme verse for all of last year was just 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, and He uses the example of physical training, which we all can understand. For example, if you decided today that you wanted to run a marathon, you can't just run a marathon right now.

If you tried, you would pop a hammy and blow along by the time you got to the road. But for the next six months, you could train every day towards it, couldn't you? You might not be able to do it today, but what's the first thing you would do? Buy a pair of sneakers, and then the next thing you would do is walk to the mailbox. And the day after that, one lap around your block. Day after that, two laps around your block. Day after that, a one-mile walk. Day after that, another one-mile walk. Day after that, a two-mile walk. Day after that, a one-mile run. And over the course of training and time, you would build up the stamina and become the kind of person that can run a marathon, but you'd have to train for it. Same is true with piano. If I invited you up right now and said, "Hey, come and play some worship tunes or some Mozart on the piano on the platform. Like, just let it rip." Not going to be enjoyable for you or us because you can't do that, but you could train.

You could practice for the next two years. You could spend 15 minutes a day in your house on a keyboard playing chords and scales and charts, and you would be amazed at how you'd be able to train yourself to actually play piano. How about this? If you wanted to go and make the Dallas Cowboys team, there ain't no way you go to an open tryout in your current shape, put the helmet on, and make the team. You'd get smashed. But if that was your goal in life, you could spend the next however many months and years required to train yourself, physically practice, learn the plays to actually have a chance. Probably not, but you get the example. Or how about speaking a foreign language? Like, there ain't none of us that could drop into Beijing tomorrow and speak Chinese. But for the next two years, you could learn every single day, 15 minutes a day, and you would be able to learn how to speak that language fluently. Here's the paradox. Why when we get to godliness do we think we do not need to train?

We know it's true in every other area of our life, but we get to our spiritual life and we think showing up at church when I feel like it is going to turn me into this amazing person. It's just not. You're going to blow a hammy and pop a lung and get smashed by a giant man. Stay with the analogy. How do we change? Dallas Willard, the great theologian, says that the way we change is vision, intent, and means. You have to have vision, intent, and means to actually change. Vision, you have to have a vision for where you want to go, what you want to do, who you want to be. It has to compel you and captivate your heart. Then, you will have intent. You will work hard with diligence and effort and commitment and discipline, moving towards that thing. And then, you will find means, methods, opportunities, next steps to accomplish that

vision. And he uses this great example. He says, "Why does every other nation in the world, why does everyone else learn to speak English as a second language? Because they have a vision for it." They see how learning to speak English will open up their life, their opportunity, will make their world large, so they're captivated by it, so they have intent.

Not good intentions, like I should lose five pounds this year kind of intentions, like intent, devoted, committed, with this ruthless pursuit, no matter what, it's going to happen. So, then, they find the means. English programming, English-speaking cafes, English friends, books that are written in English, all the different stuff. He then says, "Why is it that no Americans ever really learn any language as a second language?" Because we have no vision for it. You don't have a vision to learn another language because you don't see how it would improve your life so you have no intent. You're not going to move towards it with any energy or effort. And it doesn't matter if there are more means available in this time in human history to learn a language than there have ever been in all of recorded history. If you don't have a vision, you won't have intent, so it doesn't matter that there are means.

So, could the great problem of 2025 American Christianity just be that we don't have a vision to become godly, to be a disciple living in God's kingdom, so we don't really have intent, intentional effort, discipline, devoted commitment, so it doesn't matter how many means are available, how many experiences and circles and reason, reading plans and worship albums are at my disposal. I don't have intent because I don't have vision. And all I can do is cast a vision for you and offer you means. You have to decide whether you not have intent, but you will never have intent if you don't have vision. Train yourself to be godly. Do you have a vision to be godly? You know why last year was my favorite year? One is it changed my life. Two is I really enjoyed what God did among us. But three is it freed me from the responsibility of your life. For all the years that I've done it, I like carry the responsibility for your life. But I have learned over this last season that if you don't have a vision to become godly, it doesn't matter how many means we create for you.

It doesn't matter how many Christmas books we give you at Christmastime or worship albums or re-experiences or visions or finding a better way to say this one phrase. If I say it like this, then you'll believe it and you'll do something about it. No, you won't. Because if you would, you would do it with no matter how it's said. Because you're open to what the Holy Spirit's doing in your life. So, the question is, do you have a vision to become godly? Do you have a vision to become godly the same way you have a vision, some of you, to be fit? Same intensity. Do you have a vision to be godly the same way, some of you, have a vision for wealth? Do you have a vision to become godly, some of you, the same way, to own your own time? Do you have a vision to be godly that rivals any other vision in your life? Because you have a vision for something, and that's why you have intent towards it.

And that's why you find the means for it. But do I have it for godliness? Because if I don't have a vision to be godly, I'll never train intent. And I will never train unless I have a vision. But once



I have a vision, I'll have intent and then I'll find the means. And what are the means? The means are the spiritual practices or the spiritual disciplines. Spiritual practice or a discipline is doing what I can do now so I can do what I can't do now later. It's doing what I don't want to do now so I can do what I do want to do later. Say, what does that mean? It means this. I can't not be angry on the spot, but I can back up and practice fasting, denying my flesh and giving up control, doing what I don't want to do now so I can become the kind of person that can do what I do want to do later. I can't be joyful on the spot. Just depressed, I'm grumpy, I'm critical all the time. I just can't be joyful, you say.

Well, discipline would be doing what you can do now which is the practice of celebration and everyday learning to look at and speak out the goodness of God that is in your life so you can become the kind of person who naturally and effortlessly is joyful. You say, "I can't not be anxious." Right, you can't not be. So, when people say, "Don't be anxious," you can't do it. But you could back up and you could practice discipline, and you could start using meditation to fill your mind with the word of God, doing what you don't want to do now so you can become the kind of person who naturally and effortlessly, in the future, can do that which you say you would like to be able to do. Discipline is doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done the way it needs to be done. A disciplined businessman is not someone or a woman who works 80 hours a week. No, no, it's the person who can make the right decision when the decision needs to be made. A disciplined athlete is not someone who's in the weight room all the time. No, they're the kind of person that can make the play on the field or on the court when it needs to be made.

A disciplined Christian is not someone who does the spiritual practices all the time. They're the kind of person who can naturally and effortlessly do what Jesus would do when Jesus would do it, how Jesus would do it. That's discipline. To become the kind of person that naturally and effortlessly does the things of Jesus, and it's very available to you. Spiritual formation is really what we're talking about, the process of being formed into the image of Christ to become a person of love. It is a process. It is not a one-time event. It's an ongoing lifestyle of being formed. You don't form yourself. The Holy Spirit forms you into the image of Christ. He is the standard and the source to become a person of love. It's ultimately not about you. It's about you becoming a person that releases God's love in the world around you. And so, the spiritual practices, all they do is they open me up to God's grace so God's grace can flow through my life and transform me from the inside out.

I can't change myself, but I can position my life in such a way that opens me up to God's grace that changes me from the inside out. You can change. You can change. Come on, say it with me. Say, "I can change."

I can change.

Say it again. I can change.

I can change.

You can change. Why? Because His divine power has already given you everything you need for life and godliness. Jesus isn't giving you a vision that you can't accomplish. He's actually giving you a vision that He's already empowered you to live. You just need to open yourself up to His divine power. That's what the practices do. That's what the habits do. That's what the disciplines do. Or how about grow in the grace of Jesus? If grace is just the forgiveness of sins, you don't need to grow in it because you're already forgiven. Grace is God acting in your life to do that which you can't do on your own, to empower you and strengthen you. So, what do I have to do? I have to open myself up to His grace and do some things that maybe I don't want to do right now so I can become the kind of person who naturally and effortlessly does the kind of things that I say I want to do in the future. Are you with me on this?

Come on. In our church, we have a world-class trainer. If I went to him and told him I went to the gym three days and I'm super disappointed that I don't look like him, he would just laugh at me. He'd be like, "Bro, this is years of journey." We have a world-class violinist in our church. If I told her, "Hey, I tried to practice for like a month and I literally can't get it," she would just laugh at me. She'd be like, "Yeah, that's years of practice." We have Super Bowl champs in our church. If I went and told them, "Hey, I went in the backyard and threw like 50 balls and the Cowboys haven't called me yet. I don't think they'd even respond. They would just turn around and walk away." For some reason, though, we think, I read the daily Bible plan one day. "What, God, where are you, God?" God's like, "I'm right here. I'm always right here. You're just not seeing me." It's okay.

"I came to church for the first two Sundays of January. God, why? Where are you in 2025? It's October and I haven't seen you." It makes sense in every other area of life. But somehow when we get to the spiritual journey, we chuck the logic out the window. Jesus is just trying to remind us, "You can become whoever you want to be." There is a way that He invites us to journey if we want to be who we say we want to be in Him. The spiritual practices are not a measure of maturity. I told you this right from the beginning. They're a pathway to maturity. They're an invitation, not an obligation. You never have to do any of them, ever. They're all invitations from Jesus. And if you think you can become who you want to become without them, Jesus would say, "Go for it." Just make sure you understand where that path leads. They're not one size fits all. They change from person to person and season to season.

They're done with God, not for God. You're not getting any bonus points in heaven. What you're getting is an experience with God and His grace is changing you. And they're done in the secret place. Like, in other words, nobody's supposed to know about it. It's just between you and God. Here's what I want to do. I want to help you create a practice plan for the rest of 2025. This was a reminder, a recap of the core heart of what we've talked about. This is now a part of who we are. It's not going anywhere. This is becoming the kind of church that some of

us dreamed of. I've dreamed of this, like this actually being in us. This is now in us. We're going to become these kinds of people. So, here's what I want you to do. I want you to take the card out that you got when you walked in. If you have your card from the last week that we did, that was kind of like your summary statements, you could pull that out. That might be helpful for you. If not, no big deal. Don't worry about it. And if I was going to help you create a practice plan and we were sitting down over coffee, what I would do is I would probably ask you three questions. I would ask you first, "Who do you want to become?"

Then, I would ask you, I would say, "Where do you see God already working in your life, like in the here and now?" And then, I would say, "What one thing, if it could change in your life, would change so many other things?" And I would start asking you those questions and drawing it out. But since I can't sit down with each of us individually, what we're going to do is we're going to trust the Holy Spirit as the counsellor and Jesus as the good shepherd. And we're going to trust that He will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. And He will counsel you and watch over you in the here and now. So, here's what I want you to do. I want you to close your eyes. And I want you to just picture in your mind, who do you want to be five years from now? Even if this is all brand new, today's your first day, you don't understand anything I said, that's fine. Just five years, who do you want to be? What kind of person? What does your life look like? What's your soul look like? What's your mind look like? How do your relationships look five years from now?

Okay, now hold that picture in your mind. The question I want to ask you is, is the way you're currently living your life going to help you become that person? Is the way, the daily rhythms and routines of your life going to help you become that person that you just saw in your mind you want to be five years from now? If we're honest, most of us would say no. Let's make one change together. So, I want you to open your eyes. And I want you to pick one practice that you want to work on from January to May in 2025. I just want you to pick one. You say, "I want to do them all." Nope, you only get to pick one. I want you to pick one because if you pick all, you'll do none.

And you say, "Well, how do I know which one to pick?" Well, which one are you immediately drawn to? Which one do you want nothing to do with? That's the one you should pick. Because that's the one that will most shape and form your flesh. There's a reason you look at this and you're like, "Not that one." There's a reason. And you should ask yourself, "Why do I not want to do that one?" That's probably the one that will actually form me the most. That's probably the one that I should pick if I actually want to train. If you're an introvert, you definitely don't need to pick silence and solitude. You probably should pick community. If you're an extrovert, do not pick community. You probably need silence and solitude. If you're a thinker, don't pick meditation. Pick prayer. If you're a feeler, please don't pick prayer. Pick meditation. Which one do you need to work on for this next year? I want you to just, by faith, and don't overthink this, just trust the Holy Spirit. Don't overthink it. Which one do you want to work on? Write that on your line. Just pick one. We're just going to do one.

And then, the question is, how are you specifically going to work on this over the next five months, from January to May? We're just doing January to May training plan, specifically. Very specific and very clear. Here's how you're going to do it. It should have a day, a time, a place. The more specific you make it, the more likely you'll be able to do it. Generalities in these things don't work. Those become goals. This is not creating a goal. This is a practice plan. The reason it's not a goal is because when it's a goal, if I don't accomplish it, it's either success or failure. But when I go to practice every day, I've gotten better. That make sense? A goal, I either did it or I didn't, I succeeded or I failed. But practice every day, I'm getting better, even if I don't feel like it. Now, specifically, how will you practice your practice? I'm just going to walk you through these. If you pick Scripture, it might be I'm going to do the daily reading plan every morning. It might be I'm going to memorize a verse a week. It might be I'm going to read the Bible Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays before I go to bed at night.

That's the level of specificity we're looking for. And if you know what yours is, you can fill it in, but I'm just going to give you examples on all of these. Meditation. Meditation, it might be, "I'm going to memorize a passage a week or a significant passage a month," or "I'm going to start every morning by meditating on Scripture and every night by meditating on Scripture." If you picked celebration, it might be, "Every single day, I'm going to specifically find and point out the goodness of God in someone else's life to them," or "I'm going to start every single morning or Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, or Tuesdays and Thursdays by having 10 minutes where I sit and reflect on the goodness of God in my life and celebrate it to Him." Maybe you picked prayer. That might be, "Every day, I'm going to pray the Lord's Prayer," "Every morning, I'm going to start with prayer," "Every night, before I lay down, I'm going to take five minutes to just turn my attention to God." "I'm going to set a timer three times throughout the day, every day of the Monday through Friday, that reminds me and I just become aware of God for 30 seconds and move on with my life."

If it's fasting, it might be, "I'm going fast on Fridays," or "I'm going to fast lunch on Tuesdays," or "I'm going to fast dinner on Monday nights." If you picked Sabbath, it might be, "I'm going to do a Sabbath day every Saturday." Say that's too much, "Okay, I might do a half-day Sabbath on Tuesdays." This isn't about putting so much weight on the bar you can't lift it, but it's also about not just having just the bar, that you can do it with one hand and not have any resistance. Tracking with me? Silence and solitude. It might be, "I'm going to spend three days a week, 15 minutes of silence and solitude in the morning or in the evening. Be very specific what that looks like. Simplicity. "I'm going to refuse to be busy. I'm going to choose the longest lines. I'm never going to drive over the speed limit. I'm going to slow my life down," or "I'm going to declutter it and get out of activities and possessions and things that I've had over the next five months." Community. It literally might be, "I'm going to get in a circle and actually go." Not fill out a form online and then when I get a call from the church to say, "Hey, we want to help you," ghost them. That's not what I'm going to do.

Painful, isn't it? Or you might say, "I'm going to come..." here's a great one for so many of you. "I'm going to come to church 15 minutes early and stay 15 minutes late every Sunday to build relationships with this body." Service. It might be, "I'm going to join a serve team," or "Every day, I'm going to take every opportunity in my family to practically serve them, which means I will become the master dishwasher and laundry doer." Generosity. It might be, "I'm going to start tithing," or "I'm going to set aside a certain sum of money that I'm going to give away every month." Confession and repentance. "I'm going to wake up every day and I'm going to declare, confess. I'm going to agree with God." Or repentance. "I'm going to be the kind of person that makes no defense of myself for the next five months." Anytime someone wants to push or challenge or correct me, I'm just going to say, "I am so sorry. I was wrong. Will you please forgive me?" Wow, who could we be if we did those? Okay, so by faith, can you just write one down?

Which box specifically, clear and specific, a day, a time and a place. Don't make it so big, you know you won't do it. Don't make it so small that it won't grow you. Holy Spirit, we're trusting your wisdom. Now, what do you need to remove from your life to actually do it? Because your life is already too full to just add it in. What's one thing you need to write down that you need to remove? Maybe it's, "I need to go to bed earlier at night. I need to wake up earlier in the morning." Maybe it's, "I need to remove social media. I need to remove being on my phone this much. Maybe I need to remove this relationship, this activity, this habit, this pattern, this behavior." I don't know. What do you need to remove so you can replace it with this? And then, this one's optional. There might be some people you want to do it with. You might be like, "I want to do this as a family," or "We're going to do this... I'm going to do this with a friend or my circle." That one's optional. But then, the last one is, who's going to hold you accountable?

Write the name of the person down that you're going to tell this to and say, "I need you to be ruthless with me to help me become the person that I say I want to be." And then, we're going to do this for the next five months. At the end of the next five months, I'm going to check in with you, and we're going to do a whole weekend when we're going to go back through and we're going to pull out our plans, we're going to talk about how we did. And we're going to increase the intensity if we need to. We're going to adjust if we need to. Who do you want to be? If you're sitting here, because I can tell some of you are like, it's like you go to the cereal aisle, you're like, "Too many choices." If that's you, pick Scripture and write down, "I'm going to do the daily reading plan with Valley Creek." Then, you pick the time of the day you want to write. That's the one. If you're like, "I don't know," I'm going to do the daily reading plan every day and you pick the time, morning, evening, afternoon, whatever. And if you're here and you're like, "Bro, I don't... this whole, I don't even know who Jesus is. Like, none of this." Great. Here's what I'll encourage you to write down. Why not, by faith, believe that you're here for a reason and write down the word "community" and just say specifically, "I'm going to come to church every Sunday between now and May and see if this God is here and if He's actually real and if He's worth my life."

That might change your life. That might be a habit that's worth trying because we're all at the beginning of 2025. You've probably already burned your new year's resolutions. The whole point is, those things don't work. They are goals. You've already failed. Proves my point. Fair? It's a goal. You're succeeding or you're failing. There's no in-between. If you're practicing, I'm growing and getting stronger. I'm becoming more like Jesus, not as fast as maybe I want to, but I'm trying. This is what we're going to do. We've made new journals for you for 2025. They're available in the cafe after service at cost. Every year, we try to get you a journal at the beginning of the year to, by faith, believe God is going to speak to me in this season, in this church, on this journey. Get one, contain all the things that we're going to go through of creating the future together in the next season.

Then, I would encourage you to go back and watch season one. Remember, we broke it up into four seasons. Watch season one or read the transcripts of season one, which talks to you all about the different way, the walking with Jesus. And then, the one practice that you picked, that individual message, watch it, read the transcript of it to remind yourself. You're like, "I picked Sabbath. I don't remember even what it is." It's probably not going to work. Watch the one or read the one and watch what will happen. Because this is now so a part of who we are, we're starting a new thing in February called, Transformation Tuesdays on Tuesday nights, outside of Tuesday night, prayer weeks. We will have an opportunity for you to come and practice spiritual formation for one hour while we'll walk you through a practice. And you'll be able to do it lifetime because we're actually training. We actually believe that God is here. God is real. Jesus knows what is good and true and right. And I can actually become like Him in Jesus' name. You get a choice.

You get a choice, who do you want to be and where do you want to go. This isn't religion. It's not a service. It's a training center for life. You go to the gym because you want a trainer to make you healthy. You go to a financial planner because you want that person to help you plan to have great finances. You come to church because you want the body of Christ to train you to be who you were created to be in Jesus' name. Because it's almost impossible to do it on your own. We spent a year talking about this. Here's your invitation to just humbly accept the word planted in you for all of 2024, which can save you, heal you, set you free, make you whole, deliver you. Do not merely listen to it and deceive yourself thinking, "I had a great year." But do what it says. Because if I don't do anything with it, I've deceived myself.

There's this opportunity to be like, "Am I willing to humble myself, open up the soil, receive it, and actually do what it says?" Put yourself in whatever industry you're in. If you're a teacher and you teach these students all this stuff and they don't do anything with it. You're a coach and you try to train your players to run these plays and they don't actually run them. You're a doctor or you're in healthcare and you tell people, "Don't eat this." And they eat this. They deceive themselves because they didn't have the humility to accept that which was spoken into their life. If you can catch this little paradox with me, if you would have started a year ago when we

started talking about this, ready? If you would have started training to run a marathon, when I use that analogy and you're like, "I'm going to run a marathon." If you would have trained to have done it, do you know the average person can train to run a marathon in just six months?

You would have already been able to run a marathon. If you would have sat here and you would have heard me talk about piano and you'd have been like, "You know what, at this season of my life, I'm going to learn to play piano." Do you know what they say? It takes the average person only one to three years to become an intermediate piano player where you could actually be on the worship team, leading worship. You would already be able to run a marathon and play piano. If you would have thought, "You know what? I want to learn to speak another language." They say it takes the average person only two years to become fluent enough to go to that country and have a full-on conversation with people. If just in last January, when I started talking about it, if you would have been inspired, you would have already run a marathon, you'd play the piano, and you could have gone to Beijing and talked Chinese, Mandarin. Who could you be in your soul at the end of 2025 if I actually had a vision and took the intent to take available of the means that are now right here in front of me?

Thousands of other people saying, "I want to live like this too," because that's half of the means you actually need to actually get there. Who could you be? See, we want to become lifestyle runners, not hobby runners. You know the difference? A hobby runner is somebody that trains to run the Boston Marathon. And as soon as they cross the finish line, they go get a burger and a beer, and they're done with it all. They regress, and they become even worse than they were before they started training. A lifestyle runner runs all the time because they want to be a healthy person, and they want to be able to run at any point, at any time. When we finished A Different Way last year, I think a lot of us were like hobby runners. We crossed the finish line, and we were like... and then, it's almost like we went backwards. And if that's you, don't feel bad about it. That's what happens. Until you say, "I'm not a hobby runner. I'm not doing a series. I'm doing a lifestyle called the different way, and I am now going to take seriously the responsibility to train myself to be godly."

Because it doesn't say your pastor should train you to be godly, or your mom should train you to be godly, or your husband really should be, or your wife should train you to be godly. Can you become this person? Jesus seems to think that you can if I'll arrange my life the way He arranged His life. So, your last practice plan is simply this. Run your play with all your heart from now till May. Run your play with all your heart from now till May. If you couldn't come up with one, we'll help you. Stay back, talk to somebody up for prayer. They'll help you pray through it. Run your play with all your heart from now till May. And we'll come back around in May. We'll talk about it together, because these matters. So, here's what I want you to do. I just want to invite you to stand up.

I want you to find somebody around you, and I just want you to tell them, "Here's my practice, and here's specifically what I'm going to do." And I want you to pray like a two-sentence prayer

over them by faith. And it's okay if you say, "I don't know. I don't know." It's okay. Then, pray for clarity that God would speak to them. Come on, we're going to take two minutes to do this. Just tell somebody by faith, speak it out, "Here's my practice, here's what I'm going to do." Lay your hand on their shoulder, pray for them.

It's a great first step of faith. It's a great first step of faith to just speak it out. Even if you don't know, the humility in saying, "I don't know," God moves in that. There's something that's powerful about being prayed for by someone else who's on the journey. There's a humility and an accountability to that. You keep praying. So, Jesus, we just thank you for a different way of the journey that we're on. We want to become like you. Today, we choose to say this church points their hearts towards being disciples of Jesus. Students, learners, followers, I pray for grace to be released into our lives. Would you help us train and practice to become godly because we can become that kind of person in Jesus' name. So, Jesus, help us become more like you. May we do the things that you did so we can do the things that you did. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.