

Alright. Yeah, baptisms! That's incredible. Every time, it's incredible. Every time. Here's what I want to say about that. If you've been around a while and you've watched us baptize literally thousands of people, I just want to encourage you – don't ever take it for granted. It's a life. It's the life of Jesus. It's hope on the move into their lives, into generations of their family after them. If you're newer with us, yeah, we get a little excited about baptisms because we get excited when the old is gone and the new has come. For everybody who was baptized today, wherever you guys are at, I want to speak over you and just say you are no longer just a sinner saved by grace. You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. You are not defined by your past. You are not defined by what the world says about you. You're not even defined by what you think about you. You are no longer a slave to fear. You are a confident, beloved son or daughter in whom the Father is well pleased, and you have a bright future. You have a bright future. So, once again, just truly everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. What a great day to be together, and we are watching the beginning of a whole bunch of disciples step into a life of discipleship of following Jesus. What's a disciple? A disciple is a student, a learner, a follower, one that becomes like Jesus, the one they follow.

And all of last year, we took a journey of learning to be a disciple. The journey was called "A Different Way". We literally did one whole series as a church for all of 2024 called "A Different Way," and the idea there was to do the things that Jesus did so we could do the things that Jesus did. Now, if you weren't here for that time, that is all good because even over these next few minutes, I want to invite you to just join us in this conversation to learn to think like and so ultimately we can learn to live like what a disciple is. And here's the first thing I want to point out: all the people that were baptized today, they're stepping into a newness of life, a brand-new kind of thing, and they're going to start to live out the way that Jesus lived. Well, how did Jesus live? Here's what Jesus did and what He had. Jesus had peace in the chaos. He had self-control in the face of temptation, joy, purpose in the mundane, hope in the midst of despair, wisdom in life, love in His relationships. Like, He was love and He was loved. Freedom from the world, He forgave no matter what, connection with God. And aren't all of those things the things that we want? Aren't all those things the things that way down deep we desire for in life? And that is what's promised to us if we live this life and live it the way that Jesus lived it. The only problem is, is that these things don't just happen. If you think that they just happen, test it the next time that you have somebody who's really impatient at a light and is honking at you. How's your peace in the chaos? Test it next time you have a coworker that gets all of the accolades that you did all the work for. How's your self-control? Test it next time you have like fights within your house, and you're like, "Why is it always chaotic and crazy? Where is my joy in the midst of the circumstance?" We just... we know that this is what's available to us; we're just not always sure how to get it. So, that's what we learned about. We learned that if we wanted to live the life of Jesus, we had to actually take on the lifestyle of Jesus. If we want to live the way that Jesus lived, we have to do the things that Jesus did. Well, what did Jesus do? Well, this is what He did. He did practices, spiritual practices to learn to train Himself in the life that the Father had called Him to. Jesus did all 12 of these things. He was deeply rooted in Scripture. He meditated. He practiced silence and solitude. He lived a Sabbath life where He

actually valued that day of week to truly remove Himself from the world so He could sit in the presence of God. He would fast. He would fast from food so He could, you know, deny His flesh, and He can learn to live as somebody fully submitted to the Father. And when we look at a list like this, we can see it a couple different ways. One is, we can see it as almost like churchy or religious. We could see it as something that maybe, like super spiritual people do. But what's interesting is that the Bible wouldn't define this as super spiritual. The Bible defined this as like a normal Christian life. This would be like normally following Jesus and doing things to actually train ourselves to live like He lived. And so, in each one of those areas, we actually walked through those last year and decided that those are the practices of Jesus. Those are the way that we can practice to be like Jesus so we can live like and talk like and act like and actually live in Jesus. And so, it was an amazing year. And we decided as a church that it wasn't going to just be like a year or a series. It was going to be a lifestyle for us as a people.

And so, we're instituting what we call practice plans. It's this idea that over any given season of time, we train ourselves to be godly. Because in 1 Timothy 4, it's really clear. It just says, "Train yourself to be godly." Not try, not attempt – train. Actually plan out how you're going to live out those practices. And so, it's not just an attempt we're going to make. It's actually that we're going to lean into it. And we're going to do all those practices not in our own strength, but we do them by grace. We do them in the strength that Jesus gives. We're not trying to win some kind of religious points with God. We already have that. We already have everything we need in Jesus. We have all the love, affection, points, value, forgiveness that we're ever going to need. But now, we get to start to live out our life on earth as it actually is in heaven. Becoming on earth, who He says that we are in heaven. And so, practices really are invitations. They're not expectations. They're means of receiving, experiencing more of God's grace in our life. It isn't just about what you're doing. It's about who we're truly becoming. And so, because of that, we have to understand we don't just stumble into the image and likeness of Jesus. Nobody walks through their life, they're like, "Oh, I just kind of became like Jesus was." We don't stumble into it. We don't... that's like what we hope would happen. It's not actually what happens. But what's weird is, in every other area of our life, we know that you don't just stumble into something you're really proficient at. You don't stumble into like running a marathon. Like, "Oops, I ran a marathon today." You don't stumble into practicing piano, and then suddenly you are a concert-level pianist. You have to plan for that. You have to actually practice to become that. And the same is true for truly training in godliness. So, I just want to share with you some of the different stories of people who are practicing out and living like Jesus lived. And for those once again that are maybe newer with us or haven't heard this before, everything you hear today, just listen to it through this lens: where am I at currently on my journey with Jesus? You just saw a whole bunch of people walk into the waters and take a giant kind of early step on their journey. Where are you? Because as you listen to some of the stories of people that are practicing like Jesus, I want it to open up your heart to be like, "Hey, that could be for me, too. It's not just for them." There is no like elite Christianity. There is no like you're the... everybody has it, and you can't access it. It is totally available – to all who would receive Him, He gives the rights to be called the children of God. So, that's for you, too.

So, you're invited to lean into even these stories. You're invited to lean into the encouragement. I have multiple... Here's one of the stories I want to share with you.

I got multiple guys in my own circle who they've been practicing really consistently, especially in the area of Scripture, and what they're seeing is that it's helping them with their anger issues. Multiple guys. They're like, "I'm literally less angry." And they don't have an explanation for it. They just know that the Word of God is washing them from their history of being an angry person, and it's actually transforming them and changing them, and that's incredible. I'm so thankful for that. Here's a story for you. We got this prayer request that came over our prayer request link this week. It's from a student and I quote, "Please pray that I would stay as passionate and on fire for Jesus while Student Leadership is on break this summer and that I stay caught up and on track with the reading plan this summer." Yeah. So, I actually... I want to just actually pray for this student right now. So, Jesus, I even just... I pray for that request that came through this last week. I pray, Lord, that You would just help him do exactly that. Hide His Word in your heart, stay on track with the reading plan. And I'm believing by faith that he's going to grow all summer long. It won't... He's not going to fall off the map, he's not going to be like, "Oh, I just kind of fell out of everything." He's going to stay right on pace with You. Jesus, help him know that there's entire church and their practices and people that want to surround him with the realities of the kingdom of God so he's not alone, he's not disconnected from it, he is going to lean in in the name of Jesus to Your Word and hide it in him this summer. Jesus name, amen. Amen. So, that's a great... even that request, that prayer request, that's like, that's in the atmosphere of our church and especially the atmosphere of our students right now, which is awesome. And then, I could tell you on a personal level, since I've been practicing the ways of Jesus, it has changed me. My springtime practice plan was to take solitude walks where I basically would go with no phone and no dog and just walk around with Jesus. And so, sometimes you're just like... yeah, people are used to be walking, but it's just kind of me staring at trees and looking at animals and listening to birds, and it was beautiful, and it was so good. And I felt like the Lord would just bring a peace to my heart. And I feel like it connected me to Him and creation and His Word and His heart for me, and it settled me through some kind of chaotic times in ministry this spring. I'm so thankful for the practice of silence and solitude.

And so, in January, we all built a spring practice plan together. We were going to run it from January through May. This month is May. And so, here's my question for you. How did it go? How was your spring practice plan? I think if we're honest, it's probably about, "Went okay," right? Probably, about 90% of us really didn't finish it all the way through. And maybe you started strong, maybe you fell off. Maybe you did carry it all the way through. Maybe you found it was hard in the middle, and you pivoted. How did it go for you? And if, when you look back on it, if you think, "Well, it didn't go so well, man, I really just feel like that was... I just felt like I fell on my face with that." Here's what I want to speak over you. A righteous person falls down seven times, they get back up again. So, over you and over however God's moving in your life, even though you might feel like it's like, "Boom, boom, boom, boom." May you just feel like

you can always get back up in the name of Jesus. You can. You can, and we will together. So, if by chance it was difficult for you this spring, that is okay. Just understand for all of us, our will is never stronger than our training. And so, go ahead and take out that card that you received when you came in. Take out that card. On one side of that card, you'll notice that it has the practices. That's the red side of the card. And on the other side of the card, it's got some blanks to fill in. Now, once again, if you didn't do this with us, that's okay. You can still take this in and just think about it for your current season of where you are with Jesus. But go ahead and take a look at that card, and let's just think back a little bit on the spring practice plan that we were all encouraged to do as a church family. So, we walked all the way through that one weekend. We set the plan and we started to walk it out with our whole heart from January through May. So, here's the first question. My spring practice plan taught me what? I'm going to give you just a few minutes to reflect on the five months of just the practices. What did it teach you? How did you adjust? Maybe you felt like you bit off more than you could chew, or maybe you felt like it was too low of a bar. What did you learn about the spring practice plan? Maybe it was great. Maybe it wasn't so great. Either way, God was teaching you something in it. Go ahead and write that down. If you don't have a pen, you can maybe even use your notes on your phone. But what did your spring practice plan teach you? Or if you didn't fill that out, what is Jesus currently showing you in your life? Take a few minutes.

So the next question down has to do with starting another practice plan. In the months of June and July, we're going to run a 60-day summer practice plan. The idea there is just to practice either what we already have been doing or one of the other 12 practices and thinking with the Lord on, "What do I really need to like take my next step? What do I need to really lean into?" And we learned during the series last year, many times it's the one that you don't necessarily want to do, which is the one that it's like the exact one you should do. So, which practice are you going to choose to work on this summer? Go ahead and write that down, and then write down specifically how you're going to do it. Make a plan, work the plan. What would it be that specifically how are you going to carry out that practice over the months of June and July? If, while you are filling this out, you feel like a little bit like you did when you're in school having to take a test, let me just encourage you, this is not a test. There's nothing to be anxious about. Jesus already passed the test. You got an A. So, this is all about means of grace. This is about opening ourselves up to more of God's grace. This is how His grace both reaches us, reaches us with God's goodness, and teaches us to live empowered by Him. What's grace? It's a supernatural favor of God. What's grace? It's the supernatural empowerment of God to actually live like Jesus lived. So, if this feels all like anxious and anxiety inducing, or you feel like you're going to lose if you do, it's not. It's means of grace. It's opening our hearts to the goodness of God.

So, you can go on to that fourth line there. To practice that for the summer, I'm going to have to actually rearrange my life. And I'm going to have to remove. We can't just shove more stuff in. This is not a packed-out closet. We need to clear out some things so that we can make

room for some other things. How would you rearrange in order to pull off time and resources for that practice plan? Go ahead and fill that fourth question out.

And then, the final question on there. Who I'm going to ask to hold me accountable? Accountable, that's always a tough word, isn't it? But really, it's a good word because it just says that I'm able to give an account of what I can actually do. I'm going to take an account for what the abilities that God gave me, and I'm actually going to like open myself up to and say like, "In Jesus' name, I can do this. And it's okay for somebody to hold me to it because they love me enough to do that, and we are following Jesus together." So, who's that person? Who would you like to hold you accountable? And you can actually, after this, you'll be able to tell them, "I would like you to hold me accountable for my summertime practice plan." Go ahead and write down their name and then plan to buy them ice cream, but mostly write down their name. Take an account for that which I'm able to do. That is another way that God's goodness is in our life. He gives us people. He gives us each other. He gives us a church. He gives us things like practice plans, an actual strategy to walk out and become who Jesus says that I actually am, and experience that.

So, I'm so thankful for living a different way. I'm thankful for what it's deposited into us as a church. It is very much part of our DNA. It's part of our ethos. It's part of who we're going to continue to be as a people. And I'm just believing that God is going to continue to work in beautiful, and miraculous, and incredible ways over our life as we continue to live a different way. To do the things that Jesus did, so we can do the things that Jesus did. So, Jesus, thank You for today. Thank You for practice plans that help me become more like You. I'm thankful that I'm changing. I'm growing. It's moving me to a different place in my own life. And I'm so looking forward to who I'm becoming. I'm so looking forward to who my friends are becoming and for every single person that walked in the waters of baptism today who they are becoming in Jesus' name. This amazing future that's in front of them of learning to live like and talk like and act like and actually live in the goodness of Jesus. So, thanks for practice plans. Thanks for living a different way, and thanks for all that we have to celebrate in Your kingdom, because Your kingdom is forcibly advancing in our church, in our life, in this city. And so, Jesus, continue to have Your way, do what You want to do in this church and in our lives. In Your name, amen. Amen. All right.