

All right, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad that you're here with us today. We are one church that meets in multiple campuses, carrying the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations, a movement of hope for the city, and beyond, and wherever you are, and whatever's going on in your life. We're so glad you're here with us today because God is moving. And I love how God is moving. We've had a great kickoff to the fall this week. More than 350 circles launched across all of our campuses. There's a place for you if you want it. VC College officially started with 41 students, first class ever 41 students. VC College is official. The future has become the present. We had our first-ever MVMNT Night with hundreds of students from every school you can think of in the entire region gathering at their campuses. Yesterday, we had an amazing leader summit with almost a thousand leaders gathered together to seek God and to prepare their hearts to lead throughout this fall. Kids Leadership Experience kicks off today. It is a great fall. God is moving and He's not just moving in the big. He's moving in your life. See, I'm hearing more stories than maybe I ever have heard before of people right now experiencing dreams and visions from God. People hearing God's voice for the first time and in new ways, people getting and giving prophetic words and words of knowledge, people seeing pictures and images from God, people getting new spiritual gifts that they're walking out. There's this sense of stirring, and supernatural movement of God in our family right now. And one of the common things that keeps being said, or being heard, or being experienced is that God is filling us to overflow. There'll be a word that I keep hearing from different people, in different dreams, and visions, and prophetic words that God is filling things to overflow, that there's a fresh rain that's falling, that the river of God is flowing, and carving, and shaping the space around us. So, God is moving. Open up your eyes, open up your ears, open up your hearts and don't miss what He's doing. In fact, just last week I was in the worship center and I was just walking around praying for you. Sometimes I come in here when I'm by myself and no one else is around. It's dark and I just come in here and I just seek the Lord and I pray for you. And as I was kind of wrapping up my time, I just kind of said to the Lord, "Like, God, what do you want to say? Like, what do you want to say to me?" And as I was just walking in just a big circle, just praying, I felt like God just kind of whispered in my heart and said, "Do you want to have fun in here?" And it really caught me because if you know me, I'm not really a fun kind of guy. So, I said, "Do I what?" He said, "Do you want to have fun in here? Do you want to have fun with me in here?" And I thought about it for a second. I said, "Yeah, I'd like to have fun." And then I felt like God just said back to me, "Well, what would be fun for you in here?" I said, "Well, it'd be really fun if you would move and people would respond. That's really fun for me." And God said, "Okay, well, let's have fun then together this fall." And I started thinking about it. And I started thinking that God is the most joyful being in the universe. We think fun and God are incompatible. No, God is the most joyful being in the universe. Joy is a pervasive sense of wellbeing. And what we learn through scripture is that the joy of the Lord is our strength and joy comes from the highway of holiness. And joy is a mark of maturity because it's a fruit of the Spirit in our lives. And I started thinking about how the kingdom belongs to little children and children have fun. And why do children have fun? Because they're free from self-consciousness. Do you ever wonder why just kids just always have fun no matter where they are? Because they're never conscious of themselves. They're not thinking about themselves. They're not worried about themselves. They're not consumed with themselves. They're not self-focused. They're not selfish. No, they're just free to engage with whatever is in front of them and around them. And so, when we enter the kingdom as little children, we can become free of ourselves and experience the joy of the Lord, experience the Lord, the most joyful being in the universe. And so, maybe that word wasn't as much for me. Maybe that word is for you. Do you want to have fun in here? Are you having fun in here? It's

church and Jesus and the spirit of God is moving with God. Is that fun? Because that's God's heart for you. So, may it be fun in Jesus name. May the joy of the Lord be your strength. See, we're in a collection of talks on movement, mission, and maturity, and we're just taking some time to talk about how our heart is to move with Jesus, be on mission with Jesus, and grow in maturity with Jesus. And we've been saying, "We can't make God move, but we can prepare for when He does." And I can't make God move, but boy, I can live my life in such a way that attracts His presence. And I'm ready to respond when He does. And He is, you see, we're all in different places of our spiritual journey. Everyone in this room, you're at different places in your life, different places in your faith, different places on your journey, but we're all on a journey with Jesus. And one day Jesus comes walking down the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And He sees two guys who have fishing businesses and they kind of finished up their fishing for the day. They've got their boats, their nets, their lives. And He walks right up to them and He says one simple thing. He says, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." And in that moment, Jesus interrupted their lives. He disrupted their lives and He gave them an invitation to come and follow Him one next step at a time. And all He did was give them a vision for their life. I'll make you a fisher of men and a single next step. Follow me like right here, right now.

And that's about it. He didn't give them all the understanding. He didn't give them all the details. He didn't give them a lot of clarity, just a direction and a next step. And they had to sit there and wrestle with what were they going to do? Because this wasn't subjective, figurative flowery language, like just believe in me for a few moments and every once in a while, come to one of my gatherings, and then continue to just live your life just as it was. No, this was like, actually like leave your boats, leave your lives, leave your families, leave everything that you... all your comfort, all your conveniences and come follow me one next step at a time, you follow and I'll make. And so, Peter and John had to decide whether or not they were going to follow. And they thought about it for a moment. And it says at once they left everything behind to follow Him because there was something about Jesus that called to their soul. And over the next three years, they followed Him one next step at a time. They didn't always know where they were going. They didn't always understand it. That didn't always make sense to him, but they followed Him one next step at a time. And after three years, shaky Peter became a rock and angry John became a person of love because they followed and He made. And I think in many ways, that's the journey with Jesus. He shows up in your life when you're least expecting it, interrupts your life, disrupts your life with an invitation, but He doesn't give you a lot of clarity. He gives you a direction and a next step. And that's about it. And you have to decide whether or not He's worth following, even though you don't have all the details. And what you have to understand is that we follow and He makes, and His ability to make is always greater than our willingness to follow. And what I love about this statement is it reminds us that God makes things that are in motion. He makes things that are in motion. Our job is to move. His job is to make. He doesn't say, "Stay here and I'll make you." No. "Follow me, move. You got to move. And if you start moving, I can make you because I only make things that are in motion. So, take a step and follow me." Or do you remember the story of the Israelites? 400 years of Egyptian slavery. God sets them free. He brings them out into the desert. He tells them He's taking them to a Promised Land, the destination, and then He gives them a next step to take. And He doesn't explain all the details. He doesn't tell them how the journey is going to go. He just gives them a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It's incredibly important because they've been slaves for 400 years. They're now in the desert. How do they live? Where do they go? What do they do? They've never had freedom to make their own decisions. So, they don't know how to actually get to this thing called the Promised Land. And so, God gives them a

pillar of cloud by day, the cloud representing His presence that protected, and covered, and blessed, and provided. Think of being in the desert. What you want more than anything else in the day is a cloud to just block the heat of the day. And then it would be a pillar of fire by night. And if you're in the desert at night, what do you want more than anything else? You just want a fire to warm you, and protect you, and bless you, and keep you. And it's a great reminder that He is the Great I Am. And God will be for you exactly what you need Him to be when you need Him to be it. I'll be a cloud for you in the day and I'll be a fire for you at night because I am the Great I Am. And I will be for you that which you need me to be. So, follow me, follow me. When I move, you move. When I stop, you stop. Where I go, you go. Keep your eyes on me and I will lead you to discover who you are, who I am and what you are created for. He gave them a direction and a next step and His presence to follow. And as they followed His presence one next step at a time over the next 40 years, they went from being slaves to sons. They got to the Promised Land and they discovered who they were, who God was, and what they were created for. And I believe those two stories are the great prophetic picture of what following Jesus actually looks like. God leads us one next step at a time. This is a life of movement, which is the collection of talks that we're in. We move with Jesus. He leads us in small steps, not giant leaps. And next steps aren't expectations to fulfill their discoveries to be made. And the next step is any belief or behavior that moves you forward on your journey with Jesus. A next step is simply obeying God and doing whatever He asks you to do, whenever He asks you to do it, regardless of whether or not you understand it, like it or want to do it. And what will happen is God will often give you a direction and a next step. And that's about it. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. In other words, I'm going to show you where you're going and then I'm going to give you a next step. And I'm not going to give you all the details in between. And this is the great journey of a life of faith. God says, "We're going that way." Say, "Okay." And He says, "Step here." "Okay." "Step here." And He says, "Now step here." Like, "Okay, I got this." "Step here." Then He says, "Step here." We're like, "I'm crushing this thing with Jesus." And we step here. Cause I'm going that way. So, it makes a lot of sense. And then all of a sudden God says, "Step here." But I thought, "Yeah, I know." But I thought, "Yeah, I know." Okay. And then we go here, "Cause it's really not out of the way. It's fine." And then, God says, but now here." And you're like, "Yeah, but..." "Yeah, I know. But here." "But, God, I know that. But you're slowing things down, Jesus." "Yeah, I know." And then we step here and then He says, "Now step here." And this is our great problem because we're convinced, we're going there. And in our mind, the fastest way from A to B is a straight line. But what you have to remember is that God's detours are supernatural highways. The best, the only way to get where you're going is by taking every next step, He asks you to take, in the actual order He asks you to take them. And the problem is, is we don't want to take the steps He gives us. We want to take the steps that we feel like taking, or that seem logical to us. And the problem is, instead of taking this step, we decide you said we were going that way. So, we blaze a trail ahead to get there. But the only way to get where you're going, the best way to get where you're going is by taking every step He gives you, even if it doesn't make any sense. Because if I get to where I'm going without him, did I really get there than anyways? And sometimes God will ask you to take a step that seems illogical. Not because He's trying to get you somewhere, but because He's trying to show you something. Sometimes, He will ask you to take a step because He's trying to teach you trust. Sometimes He will ask you to take a step because He's trying to do something in you or reveal something to you. Sometimes God just asked you to take this step because it's not about you. It's about what He wants to do in someone else's life through this step. Oh, now I got it. Yeah. It's not about getting there. It's about walking with him. This is why it says we stay in step with the spirit. We live in the spirit.

So, let us keep in step with the Spirit movement. We don't get ahead. We don't get it behind. We go where He goes and we move with Him and we allow Him to be the one to lead. Even if we don't get it, even if it doesn't make sense, even if we don't like it. And what you'll discover over time is that maturity is getting past, getting somewhere, or doing something. It's about being with someone. We're moving, and mission, and maturity, right? So, we're trying to get to maturity. So, sometimes you'll figure out that movement isn't about getting somewhere, or doing something. It's just about being with someone and trusting Him and saying, "I'd rather stay in step with you than go there by myself." In fact, the evidence of a spirit filled life is that I move with God and do what He asks me to do, when He asked me to do it. In fact, just look at these handful of verses in Proverbs. It says, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." We have all these ideas, all these plans, all these dreams of what our life is supposed to look like, but the Lord determines our steps. The question is, are we willing to take His steps even if they're out of alignment with our plans?" Or how about that says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death." There's a lot of things that seem right to us doing what we want, when we want, how we want, but those things lead to death. But if I will do what seems right to him, what He wants, when He wants, how He wants, it will lead me to life. Or how about this? That says, "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn shining ever brighter til the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble. The path of the righteous gets brighter and brighter." In other words, every time you take a next step that God asked you to take, your life gets a little brighter. You can see a little more, the light turns on a little bit stronger and you start to have this clarity of what your life is and what you're doing. But every time I resist the step that God asked me to take and choose to go my own way, things get darker and darker. And I start to stumble and eventually I will be lost. And then I will get stuck because I will no longer have any light to see, because I have chosen to walk away from his life. That is the light of man. And so, next steps are really simple, but I'm not saying they're easy. They're not easy. God will ask you to go when you want to stay. He'll ask you to stay when you want to go. He'll ask you to give when you want to take, he'll ask you to apologize, and forgive when you want someone else to apologize to you. He will ask you to often go in the direction of your greatest fear. He will challenge your comforts and your securities. He will do things that are inconvenient and uncomfortable. I mean, it's really simple, but it's not easy. It's not easy. And sometimes God will ask you to do things like forgive that person, start something new, let go of this, trust Him here, stay a little bit longer. I mean, you can think of a thousand things that some of you, it's just like get in a circle. That's the step. And everything in you is like, "Yeah, no, no, no, no." One more time. "No." Right. Because it doesn't seem right to you, but maybe it seems right to him. And the more unrelated a step feels like it is. I believe the more important it is to take. The more unrelated the step feels to the journey you think you're on, and it's from the Lord, the more important that I really believe it is because I often think it's in the small, mundane, routine, ordinary things where God does the greatest work. It's not in the big, spectacular... like we think that the most important steps are these big, spectacular, unknown face the giant, cross the sea kind of moments. And while those are great, I actually think the harder steps to take are the ones that feel like they're purposeless, pointless and beneath us. Oh, that step is beneath me. Why would... I'm not, I'm going to do, that's why you need to take it because it needs to eradicate the pride in your heart. And God needs to do the deep work inside of you that can only happen in that step. The question is, is do we trust Him enough to surrender our lives to him? And you say, "Well, how do I know what step I take?" Well, just ask, listen, and respond. We've used this for years around here. It's a little moniker. That's just how we lead our church. You ever wonder, how do we do what we do? How do we

make the decisions as a church? We ask, listen, and respond. If you ever want to know, how do I live my life? How do our leaders live their lives? They just ask, they listen, and respond because this is the pattern in scripture. Just ask God. Ask God, "What do you want me to do? How do you want me to respond? How do you want me to follow?" And He promises He will speak; all I have to do, if any of you needs wisdom, ask God and He will generously give without finding fault. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. Call to me, and I will show you great and mighty things that you do not yet know. Ask, and then listen. Listen. The question isn't, is God speaking? The question is, are we listening? "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." So, He is speaking. Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me," which means the question is not, can you hear God's voice? The question is, are you listening to God's voice? Just like when you were born as a baby, you were born with ears and you didn't have to learn how to hear. You naturally heard. You had to learn how to tune into the voice of your father. Okay. When you're born again, you're born with spiritual ears. And you don't have to learn how to hear. You have to learn how to tune into the voice of your father above all the other noises, and value that voice above all other voices. And then I respond, "Whatever He says, I do. Obedience is greater than sacrifice." This is love for God to obey His commands, and His commands are not burdensome. Scripture tells us, "We ask, we listen, and we respond, and we can trust in the promise of God that says, I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you and watch over you." What a verse, what a promise for your life, wherever you are, whatever you're struggling with, wherever the journey has taken you, He promises He will instruct you, teach you, counsel you, and watch over you. In other words, He says, "I will lead you one next step at a time. And if you will follow me one next step at a time, your best life, your with God life will emerge."

We're convinced that our best life is doing what we want when we want. No, our best life comes when we do what He invites us to do, when He invites us to do it even if it feels like it's going backwards, because there is no backwards with God. There's backwards in our mind. There's backwards in this world, but with God, a step backwards is always a step forward. Are you with me on this? So, you have to remember that God speaks in sentences, not paragraphs, because you can only obey one sentence at a time. He speaks in sentences, not paragraphs, because you can only obey one sentence at a time. Like He speaks in fragments, if you will. It's like, we want the whole story. I want all the details. That's not how God does it because you can't obey the whole story and the whole story would overwhelm you. You remember Luke Chapter 5. Peter has finished up fishing all night, hasn't caught any fish. He's cleaned everything up. Jesus comes walking down the shore and He says, "Hey, Peter, can I borrow your boat?" One sentence. Peter has a choice. "Am I going to let Jesus borrow my boat, even though it doesn't make any sense? Or am I going to say, 'You know what, Jesus, I'm going to need some more details than that.'"

"Can I borrow your boat?" "Yes, Lord, you can borrow my boat." Jesus gets in the boat and He tells Peter, "Now push off a little bit from shore." One sentence. Okay. Jesus sits there. He teaches the crowd who has been following Him for a while. And when He finishes up teaching, He now says to Peter, "Now put out into deep water." One sentence. Okay. Row out there. He says, "Now take your nets and throw them over the right side of the boat." And Peter says, "Lord, we've fished all night and we haven't caught anything. It's the middle of the day. There's no... throw your net over the right side of the boat. Because you say, so Lord, I will do it." Throws his net over the boat, pulls it in. It's so full of fish. The net breaks. The boat begins to sink. Peter hits his knees, he says, "Away from me, Lord, I'm a sinful man." And Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will no longer fish for fish."

You'll fish for men. Come follow me." Okay. Now imagine that story, not one sentence at a time, but the whole paragraph. Jesus comes walking down the shore of the sea, sees Peter and says, "Hey, Peter, can I borrow your boat? And here's, what's going to happen. I'm going to borrow your boat. I'm going to get in and I'm going to ask you to push it off. You're going to push it off for shore. I'm going to teach for a little while. When I get tired teaching, what I'm going to do is I'm going to tell you to put it out in deep water. I'm going to ask you to throw your net over the right side of the boat. You're not going to believe me, but you're going to do it and you'll throw it in and then you're going to pull it. And it's going to be so full of fish. And that's going to break. Your boat's going to begin to sink. You're going to be terrified, really afraid. You're going to hit your knees. I'm going to tell you, it's okay. Come follow me. And for the next three years, you're going to follow me around. And you know what? It's not going to go so great for you, Peter. You're going to make lots of mistakes. You're going to really embarrass yourself. For the next 2,000 years, you will be the butt of every Sunday morning church joke. And then I'm going to die, Peter. They're going to arrest me. They're going to crucify me. And you're going to deny me three times to a servant girl. I know, you would think a Burley, Romans and Charlie, but no, it's going to be a servant girl. And you'll feel really bad about yourself. You're going to run and hide, but I'm going to come find you and restore you. And then I'm going to empower you. You're going to preach the gospel. 3,000 people are going to get saved. You're going to lead the first century church. And then at the end of your life, you're going to have to do some things you don't want to do. In fact, you're going to be crucified upside down on the cross. So, what do you say, Peter? Can I borrow your boat?" "No, no. You may borrow John's boat, not my boat." Right. Cause Peter didn't have the faith for the paragraph. He had enough faith for a sentence. You don't have a faith for the paragraph. You have enough faith for the sentence. And if you will just listen one sentence at a time, one step at a time, because you can only obey one step or one sentence at a time, the best possible picture of your best life, your with God life will emerge. By the time Peter is martyred for his faith at the end of his life, he had the faith for that. Cause with each step he took his faith grew and increased, but he did not have the faith for that on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. So, God in His goodness and His wisdom doesn't tell you the whole story because it would overwhelm you. He tells you one step and asks you if you will trust Him enough to take it. In fact, do you realize the entire Psalm 23, the entire story of the good shepherd is a story of following God one next step at a time. "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, mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Can you see it? The Lord is my shepherd. The moment you decide to make Jesus your shepherd, it means you have given up the right to determine the direction of your life. He's chosen me, but now I've chosen him. So, I've submitted and surrendered my life to him. I am now His sheep and sheep follow their shepherd and they go wherever their shepherd asked them to go one step at a time. And He brings me to green pastures and the quiet waters. How does He get me there? One step at a time as I follow Him. And He restores my soul. In other words, I follow and He makes, while I move, He makes, He heals and restores the deepest broken parts of me as I am in motion with Him. And He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He leads me on paths that are good and true and right for His glory and for my good. And even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I don't have to be afraid, for you're with me. But I'm walking,

and I'm moving, and we're going to some places that I don't know that I want to go, that I don't know that I have the courage, or the strength, or the boldness for. But, if you're with me, I'm going to be okay. And I don't have to panic. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. See, we think the rod and the staff is for the wolf. The rod and the staff is for me. I need the rod of correction when I don't want to take the step. And I need the shepherd's staff with the crook on it to pull me out when I'm afraid. And I've got myself stuck in a bush. So, while I'm following Him in the valley, He uses the rod to correct and the staff to pull along. That brings me comfort to know that even when I don't want to take the step, He will help me. And He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. He anoints my head with oil. My cup overflows. In other words, the valley with God is a place of abundant life. The mountain without God is a place of barren emptiness. The kingdom of God is wherever God is. And so, if He's in the valley, I want to be in the valley because where He's not there, His kingdom isn't. So, I don't want to get there without Him because then I really get there then anyways. And goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. In other words, while I follow him, goodness and mercy are following me. So, even when I misstep, even when I make a mistake, even when I screw the whole thing up, goodness and mercy is coming along behind me, cleaning it up because God's more interested in my next step than my mess... than my misstep. He's got all the grace in the world to clean up my mess. The question is, do I have the faith to follow? This is the good shepherd. We follow; He makes. And once I become His sheep, I give up the right to determine the direction of my life. Listen to me. Have you ever talked to somebody who's done great things with God or has a really healthy soul? If you will ask them how they did great things with God and how they have a really healthy soul, they will basically tell you in whatever word choices they have, whatever vocabulary they have, they will basically just say, "I followed God through this life. One step at a time." They will never tell you, "At 22 I had a 50-year plan and I hit every mark, baby. And if you will do the same, you can, too." That's social media. That's the garbage the world wants to sell you. No, people that have a healthy soul and have done great things with God will actually tell you that the moments of interruption and disruption were the greatest detours of their life because it took them off of their path and got them onto His path. And that's how they became who they've become. And the whole point of next steps is learning. Trust, trust God from the bottom of your heart. Don't try to figure everything out on your own. Listen to God's voice and everything you do and everywhere you go, He's the one that will keep you on track. What a verse. Trust God. It's not about getting somewhere or doing something. It's about being with someone. And when you figure that out, you start realizing the journey is the destination. Not about getting to heaven when I die, or getting this successful company, or getting this spouse, or having my family look like this. No, no. It's about living in the kingdom of heaven right now. Right here. And if He is good, then every step He asks me to take is good, especially the ones I don't like. And it's a paradox for Christians to say, "God, we pray your kingdom come, your will be done." And then He says, "Great, step here." And we say, "No." Because every time I step where He asks me to step, what just happened? His kingdom just came and His will was just done. And every time I refuse to take that step, what just happened? My kingdom just came and my will was just done. Wherever God is leading you, it's always better than where you've been. And wherever God is leading you, it's always better than where you are because that's where He is. Are you with me on this? See, this is why Jesus says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, He is the one who loves me. And He who loves me will be loved by my father. And I, too, will love Him, and show myself to him." See if you can catch this. Obedience is God's love language. He says, "If you love me, obey me. That's what I want from you. I don't want you to do... I want you to just trust me enough to obey me. And if you will obey me, I will show myself to you." In

other words, next steps lead to next encounters. Every next step I take is leading me to a next encounter. Jesus says, "If we're faithful in the little, He can entrust us with much." The steps are the little. The revelation of himself is the much. So, if I will obey the little things He asked me to do, join the team, get in a circle, start giving, forgive that person, let that thing go, change your calendar. Don't take that job. Don't pursue that money. If I will obey those things that He is asking me to do, I will experience new encounters of Jesus Himself, because He's waiting to see if I will be faithful enough to take the step I don't want to take.

So, that He can show me more of Himself and reveal more of His goodness and His glory to me. If we want to see revival around here, then take every next step in front of you. Every next step. You want to say, "How do we prepare for revival?" So, we've been talking, "How do you prepare for a rival?" By taking this step, and this step, and this step? That's how. You want to know how we stop the move of revival by taking this step, and this step, and this step. Why? Because I'm going to do what I want, when I want, how I want. Do you want more of God? This is a question. Do you want more of God? Okay. He tells you. He tells you how. So, are you willing to do it? Like the irony of this all the time for me, you know, this is something that we teach a lot around here. The irony is, I believe that at most times, most of us know exactly what God has asked us to do. We just don't want to do it. And I don't even think it's because we don't think He's good or don't trust him. I just think there's so much of the world and the flesh within us and we just don't feel like doing it and it's uncomfortable and it's inconvenient. So, I just not really interested in doing it, but if we want to see God move and we can prepare in such a way that invites Him to say, "God, I'm taking next steps. I want next encounters. God, I'm taking next steps. I want next experiences, you promise. And then I'd claim this verse and I'd spend..." you know, you have to claim a promise, right? Doesn't just happen. You have to claim it and give it back to God. You say, "If I obey you, you'll show yourself to me. I'm obeying you, show yourself to me. Let me see more of you." Here's what I want to say. Some of you are here today and you're faced with some big choices. Should I marry this person? What college should I go to? Should I change this job? Should we buy this house? Should we start this business? Should we shut this thing down? Can I just tell you? You don't have to be afraid of missing it because when you walk with Jesus, you can't miss it. You cannot miss it. The world can't stop your step. No one can open that which God has closed and no one can close that which God has opened. The only person that can stop your step is you. The world can't, even if the world throws a pile of detours in front of you, God's like, "I got you. Whoop." But you can stop you. "No, I'm going to do it my way. I'm going to do it my way." You're one step away from a completely different life. Are you with me on this? Okay. Take a breath. See, we're all on a journey and we're all at different places on the journey. And the way we live the journey is one next step at a time. And sometimes it's really helpful to understand where we are on the journey. And I want to show this to you because I think these two go together, even though these should be two different messages. There was a study done a while ago that just basically was like, "What is a spiritual journey look like in a typical person?" And it was very helpful because it gave these kind of six categories. It says there's an awakening, a learning, a contributing the wall, the inward journey, the outward journey, and a life of love. And basically, they said is, "Here's how a spiritual journey works. We have an awakening. We see God, we meet God, the light turns on. We were lost, but now we were found. We were dead, but now we are alive. And all of a sudden everything becomes technicolor and we're so excited. So, we start moving forward and we start learning. We become a disciple. We try to take everything in a learner, a follower, a student of God. We learn, we want to show up at church. We want to read every book. We want to be around every experience that's possible because we're so



hungry because we've had an awakening. So, we're learning all this great stuff. And then as we're learning, we move to this place of contributing because we were created to contribute. So, we start giving and serving and leading and contributing. We become ambassadors, representatives. We become great marketers of the move of God. And we start telling everyone and everyone, everything that God is doing in our lives that they inviting them to come and be a part of it. And then after that, we hit the wall. We hit the wall. The wall is the place where your theology no longer works. The wall is the dark night of the soul. It's the valley of shadow of death. It's where all the easy answers no longer provide you any comfort. It's where all the quips and quotes of Christianity no longer work. It's where all the places that you've judged other people while in this place of how easy life would be if they would just dot, dot, dot, all of a sudden you realize it's not that easy. It's brokenness, pain, loss, trauma, a storm, whatever it may be. But if you can work through the wall, you get to the inward journey where God strips you down and He does a deep work inside of you. And He restores your soul, and rebuilds, and heals, and puts back together everything now free of trauma, and brokenness, and worldliness, and the pain. Then you move to the outward journey where now you're starting to do things once again, and you're doing much of the same things you did in two and three, only now you're doing them with God instead of for God, totally different perspective. And then if you move further, you kind of move to this place we would call like sainthood, like you become a person of love. And so, we're all on this journey. And here's how the typical journey works for most of us and most American Christianity, we have an awakening. We get really excited. We learn, we take it all in, we become a contributor, we get involved, and then we hit the wall. And when we hit the wall, the brokenness, the pain, the loss, the crisis, the storm, the dark night of the soul, whatever it may be, we usually hit the wall so hard that it bounces us all the way back. And we start over once again at stage one. And this is how it typically works. "I have an awakening. I meet Jesus. Oh my gosh, this is amazing. I learn everything I can. I take it all in. I become a contributor. And then I hit the wall. It's not what I thought it would be. And I bounce all the way back. And maybe a year later, I get invited to Valley Creek and oh my gosh, I have an awakening again. This is the greatest church ever. The three circles, hope carriers, the worship. Oh my gosh, this is what it's supposed to be. I start taking it all in. I go to transformation Tuesday, the reading plan. I'm in a circle. I'm doing everything I can possibly do. I become a contributor. I get involved. I lead. I serve. And then once again, I hit the same wall in my life and boom, all of a sudden Valley Creek is the worst church that ever existed. Those people, the decisions they make, why did they do this worship and always moving things? And why are there no programs? Boom. I come all the way back. And I find another church and I have an awakening and I'm like, this is the church. Oh my gosh. I'm so glad I'm not a part of Valley Creek anymore. I'm having an awakening to how church should be done. I learn everything I can. I become a contributor that boom, I hit the wall and it brings me all the way back again. And now it's about theology. So, I go, I find a charismatic church. I'm like, this is it. Oh my gosh. I get involved. Boom. I hit the wall. Now I come back. I find a Calvinistic reform church. I'm like, this is it. Tell me what a sinner I am. My gosh. I started learning all these things, contributing. Boom. I hit the wall. Now I come back. Now I make it about Methods. Oh, I got to find a mega church. This is it. I learned, I contribute. Boom. Nope. That was the worst thing ever. I need to find a micro church, a home church, smallest church. This is it. Three people on a couch. We've got it. We learn, we contribute. Boom. Hit that wall. We come all the way back. Now it's social justice. I've had an awakening to the need of social justice. I learned everything I can. I start contributing, telling everybody else how terrible they are because they're not a part of it. But then boom, I hit that wall and I come all the way back here. Now I deconstruct. This is it. I don't need anything. God is everywhere in the universe. My

gosh, I've learned everything I can. I've started telling everybody about it. Boom, hit that wall. That didn't work for me. And then I start to go. I try Islam. Boom. I try Buddhism. Boom. I tried the hobby thing. I do everything by every gear, toy tool thing that's possible in my hobby. Boom. Then I get chickens in my backyard and raise eggs. Same wall. It's the same wall. And the problem is, is I never deal with the wall because the wall's in here. And when I hit the wall, I make it about everybody else out there. It's their problem. It's their fault. They're the worst. And you know exactly what this is like, because I promise you, you have friends that you've watched in this church do this. You have friends and family in your life that you've watched do this. And you've probably done it. You hit the wall and instead of dealing with it, you make it about everybody else. And there's an invitation for God in that moment to say, "Deal with the wall. He and His grace will keep bringing you back to that wall until you deal with it. So, you'll never get away with it on this earth. You'll just recycle, and recycle, and recycle. And when I get to the wall, I just have to be honest about it. What do I do? I confess. I repent. I don't run. I don't pretend. I don't blame everybody else. I just say it's, "I just am broken, and I'm hurting, and I'm lost, and it doesn't feel like it works anymore." So, I sit and I look to Jesus. And if I can work through that wall, He'll strip me all the way down until there's nothing left. And He'll restore my soul if the good shepherd says. But because I kept following, He could actually make. When we hit the wall and we go back, we stopped following. He can't make. When I get through the wall, He can strip me down. I keep moving. He can make. Then the outward journey. I get to this place where I start healing up and I don't even know when and how, but I start doing these things once again, but not for God and with God. And then I start growing into this life of love. This is the great invitation. See, do you understand that COVID 2020 was the American deconstruction movement of the American church just hitting the wall? That's all it was. Everybody hated everybody. We all hated the church. We all decided nothing worked. We all decided everybody was the problem. Boom. It was just hitting the wall. So, we deconstructed and went back here and had an awakening. And now some of you that had that moment, you've already cycled this three times since COVID. You deconstructed with Jesus. You went back, you found something else that didn't work, like work from home. That thing didn't work. And then, you know, my kids we're just going to get a camper and travel the country. Boom, that didn't work. And then now we've come back around and we're like, right... and some of you are already like right here. You're like close to hitting the wall with us again. Maybe God just brings you back to the wall because He wants to set you free. And you're like, "But why aren't you taking me there?" Because we actually have to work through here. Is this making sense to you? See, remember the gospel is not the forgiveness of your sins, going to heaven. When you die, go back to your life, whatever you want. No, the gospel is the availability of the kingdom of God through the person and the work of Jesus, a different kind of life, life from above. And He restores our identity, reconciles our relationship, redeems our purpose. We now live every day, receiving His grace, experiencing His presence, releasing His kingdom. It's not a one and done. It's an ongoing reality. And the only way to work through the wall of your life is through the grace of God, the presence of God, and the kingdom of God. And so, now, let me take the spiritual journey and overlay it for you on our three circles. See, here's what happens. You have an awakening. You have a restored identity. You receive the grace of God, best thing ever. I'm a beloved son. Oh my gosh. So, I run to God and I start learning all these new things about him. And it's amazing because I never thought this relationship with God was possible. And then I moved down here and I start contributing. I'm giving, I'm serving, I'm leading, I'm on mission, I participate, but then bang, I hit the wall. Bang. I hit the wall, dark night of the soul, some level of brokenness, some trauma, some unhealed thing within us, some storm or circumstance when the theology, and the quips and the quotes,

and all the easy answers don't work. So, I'm convinced it doesn't work. And I got to make it about everybody else because it couldn't possibly be me. So, we bounce all the way back and start over with something else. But if we work through it, then boom, we do the inward journey because you never graduate the school of identity. God just brings you around and does it a little deeper. And then I moved to this outward journey where I'm doing the same things I used to do, but now with God, instead of for God. And then I become a person of love, and I become profoundly healthy, and everything in my life is about goodwill for God, or others.

This is the journey that we are all on. And none of you gets to say, "I'm not on that journey." You might not have had an awakening yet. You might be over here. You might have not had the, "Ah, I see," but you're somewhere in this cycle. And what I want to show you is one more thing that I think is profoundly important, especially in our church with the three circles. And I've never taught this before on a weekend is this. If you're going to get, from circle one to circle two, if you're going to get to the mountaintop of relationship, you're going to have to walk through the valley of identity. And if you're going to get from circle two to circle three, the mountaintop of purpose, you're going to have to go through the valley of relationship. And if you're going to get from purpose to this next level security, you're going to have to go through the valley of purpose. You say, "What does that look like?" It means this. It means the wall could be at any of these points. The wall is not just right here. It's just an illustration. This is not all linear. This is the journey that we're on. And here's what happens. The valley of identity. I'm walking around through my life. And then all of a sudden, I hit this place where it's like insecurity, and pride, and narcissism, and rejection, and abandonment. And I wake up one day, and I'm like, "Who am I really? Does anyone know me? Does anyone love me? Does anyone see me?" The valley identity is usually this place where I've built all of these things, all of these sand castles in my life where I've found my identity and a wave has come and crashed them. Like for years I found my identity as a mom, but now my kids are graduated and gone. Who now am I? Or I built my identity as an athlete and all of a sudden, boom, the game's over and I don't get to play anymore. Who am I? Or I've built my identity on beauty and I wake up one day and I just don't find myself as beautiful as I used to think I was. Who now am I? I used to be successful and I got fired from my job. Who now am I? Like, we wake up one day and all of the sand castles that we've built our identity on and come crashing down. Who now am I? But if I will work through that valley of identity, I can have this whole new relationship with God. And then I'll find myself in this valley of relationship over time. Valley of relationship is just simply this. I wake up one day and I'm like, "God, where are you? God? I'd never thought my life would look like this. God, how did we even get here? Like, where are you? I can't feel you. I don't see you. I don't sense you. I'm kind of disappointed that this is life. I used to hear you and see you and experience you in all these places. And now it feels like you're gone, and you're cold, and you're distant. But if I'll work through that, I'll come out with a new level of purpose, but then I'll have to work through the valley of purpose. The value of purpose, I wake up one day and I'm like, "Is my life made a difference? Is what I do every single day even worth it? Like, does my life have any significance to it? Have I done anything worth doing in my life? But if I'll work through it, I'll wake up and be here with a totally different level of security." See this is Moses. When God comes to Moses and says, "Go set the Israelites free." And He says, "Who am I? Who am I to do that? I'm slow in speech and in tongue. God, I can't do it." And God says, "Yeah, but you got to work through this valley, Moses." And if He wouldn't have worked through the valley of identity, He would have never experienced the mountaintop looking God face to face on Mount Sinai. The valley of relationship is Peter. It's Peter, after he's denied Jesus, he's sitting in his boat and the resurrected Jesus shows up. And Peter's like

looking at Jesus like, "Jesus, what happened, man? Like my whole life did not go the way that I thought you said it would go. Like, where were you? You left me. Like you just left me hanging there. And why would you treat me like that? And I don't even understand this. And you're asking me if I love you. I don't even know, Lord, only, you know." But because he doesn't run and works through it, he ends up at the mountaintop here, preaching the gospel to 3,000 people, watching them get saved, being the leader of the first century church. The valley of purpose is Elijah. He calls down fire from heaven, the most spectacular moment in his life. And then the very next scene we see him is on the side of a mountain crying out to the Lord, "Lord, take my life. I want to die. Has my life made any difference? I'm the only one. No one follows you. No one wants you. This whole thing is a racket. Like just it doesn't work. Get me out of here." And God says, "Elijah, have a snack and take a nap." And he works through the valley of purpose and restores him and then reminds him that you're not the only one there's 7,000 other profits and what you're doing matters. And because he works through it, He goes, and anoints Elisha to take over who does twice as much as Elijah does. So, his significance in life was not what he did. It's who he raised. So, somewhere, you're in this journey, the wall can be anywhere. And my question for you is simply this. Where are you? Where are you? An awakening, a learning, a contributing. Are you in an inward journey? God's doing a deep work and outward journey where there's restoration that's being released. Are you becoming a person of love? Have you woken up to find yourself in a valley of identity, a valley of relationship, or a valley of purpose? Have you hit the wall? And you can literally, as I... some of you, as I'm teaching this, you're like, "You're seeing the last 10 years of your life pattern." When you realize the wall is the woman at the well, that's why she was married five times, living with a sixth man. Every man became the new wall. The problem was it was never the man. It was her. And the only way you get out of these valleys is by taking this step. That's why I put these two together. Like these should be two messages. They should, but the only way to get out of the valley is by taking the seemingly incongruent step for where you are in life. Breakthrough happens in the ordinary, not the spectacular. The only way out of the valley of the shadow of death, the only way out of the valley of identity, relationship, and purpose is to follow the good shepherd, which means letting Him lead you on those steps that you don't want to take, that you don't feel like, that I don't want to, that aren't comfortable, that aren't convenient. That's why He needs the rod and the staff to guide you. And if we will move, He will make because as I follow Him through the valley, He restores my soul. He frees me from the brokenness of the wall in here, in here. So, where are you? Where are you? And here's the deal. Some of you will be like, "Oh, I want more teaching on this," but you don't need more teaching on this. All you need is a reference point of where you are, and then a willingness to take whatever step He asks you to take. I'm not going to teach you anymore on this. Why? Because we will start to idolize and worship this, and we'll make that the new wall that we bounce back to awakening. Oh my gosh, have you heard the Valleys teaching? Oh my gosh, you got to learn everything about it. And I got to tell her, but I didn't actually work through the wall. So, I'm not giving you any more than that because it will become the new bounce back for you. If you ever play wall balls, like no, we're not doing that. We're working through it. And it doesn't mean... hear me. It doesn't mean it's not hard. And it doesn't mean that some of your wall isn't devastating. And it doesn't mean that there aren't tears, and brokenness, and pain, and disorientation, and you feel like you're free falling. No, God knows all of that. What He says is, "Don't turn around and run back." What He says is, "Don't go somewhere else. Even though you walk through the Valley of the shadow of death, you do not have to be afraid for I am with you. And this is the kingdom right here, right now. And I'm going to get you to your best life and to your with-God life. And if you'll just walk with me, you'll be amazed at what I can do."

Where are you? The only way forward is one step at a time. See, I think in some ways we've lost a little bit of the next step culture in our church, the sense that at any point in time, I can share with you, "Here's a next step I am taking, or the next step that I just took." We've got to get back to this place where we're moving with God at all times, because He makes things in motion. And sometimes it's helpful to just see where we are so we can have a context for how to respond. And the answer is to just take whatever step He's asking you to take to stay in step with the spirit in Jesus name.

I want to keep talking, but I can't. And I want to try to convince you, but I can't. And I want to plead with some of you, but I can't. So, all I can do is try to help you figure out where you are in life and then say, why don't you now ask, listen, and respond to whatever step He asks you to take. And even if it feels like it's going in the wrong direction, maybe just maybe you can trust that He's leading you to green pastures and still waters, and that He will restore your soul as you stay in motion. The next time you realize you're hitting the wall or you see someone else hitting the wall in your life, remember this, and remember that it's not about your husband, or your wife, or your boss, or your church, or your team, or your friends, or your mom, or your dad. It's about a deep work that Jesus is trying to do inside of you. And He does that work as I move with him. May we once again be people that hear the Holy Spirit speak to us and take every step that He's given us. May you receive His comfort and His grace as you're in these valleys. May you have the goodness of God through His spirit, and His Word, and His people, giving you the comfort and the courage to work through that wall. May He strip you down in that inward journey to build you back up in His image and His likeness, freeing you from the childhood trauma, and the divorce pain, and the sickness, and the loss and the hardship, and the sand castles that have been washed away by this world. May you continue to press on towards maturity to become a person of love. And may you take every step that He asks you to take, especially the ones that feel irrelevant and disconnected from the direction that you're going, because those are the ones where He does His greatest work. So, Jesus, thank you for leading us along the way. Take us to green pastures and still waters. May we hear what step you want us to take and may we act, because faith without action is dead. You're the good shepherd. May we follow, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.