



DNA

VALLEY REAL LIFE

All scripture in this booklet is from the New Living Translation (NLT) unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME

We are thrilled that you are interested in learning more about Valley Real Life! We are honored that you would take time out of your schedule to hear about our church “DNA.” This class is designed to: 1) Give you a 10,000-foot flyover view of our church’s beliefs, mission and vision for making disciples who make disciples; 2) Provide an on-ramp on how to best connect to Jesus and others; 3) Offer you an opportunity to officially make VRL your church home. It is our hope that over the next couple hours as you hear more about who we are, our purpose, and where we’re going, that you will consider joining our family and team.

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CLASS

The local church is the most important institution on the face of the earth because it was instituted by Jesus (Matt.16:18) and purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). God ordained the church to be the vessel through and by which the world would come to know Christ. Everyone needs the local church.

The Bible is very clear: Christians are to belong to a church—to belong to the body of Christ. That word, “belong,” is kind of a tricky word, because it means more than “just show up as often as you can on Sundays.” We use the word “belong” the same way you would if you were saying you belong to your family. When you “belong” to your family, it doesn’t mean you just show up to be fed when you are hungry, rest when you’re tired, and use the family name for applications when needed.

Paul writes to the Galatians, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of God.” A family is a place where we love and are loved in a way that helps us become all we should be. When we belong to a family, we are in relationships with the other members of our family. We are part of something bigger than ourselves.

As part of a family, we are valuable, contributing members, not just attendees. We contribute our

time, money, ideas, and energy. We are not only served, but we also serve. We are together for times of celebration, challenge, and everything in between.

You’ve heard the phrase, “blood is thicker than water.” That phrase is typically used to describe the bond there is in a family. It is the same in the church. We are connected through the blood of Christ and are sisters and brothers in God’s family. Ephesians 2:19 says, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of His household.” We are part of God’s family. As members of the church, we don’t attend, we belong.

In the New Testament, there’s not one example of a believer or believers refusing to become part of a local church, or of someone saying they were only

part of the “invisible” church... whatever that is...Scripture never mentions it. In fact, believers in the New Testament found their identity through the local church. There were the churches in Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, etc.—it didn’t matter where you were, if you were a believer, you were a part of a local church. When the Apostle Paul went on missionary journeys, he went to

establish more churches and visited existing churches. When he returned from his journeys, he went to the church in Jerusalem.

We understand if you don’t want to make VRL your church home/family. Our goal and desire for you is that you find a church to connect to and grow in your relationship with God and others.

As believers in Christ, we are admonished in Scripture to submit to spiritual leaders **Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13**, to place ourselves in a position of mutual accountability with other believers, **Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:11-16; Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:16, 19-20**, and meet together regularly for worship and instruction in the Word so we can encourage and build one another up in the faith through words and deeds **Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 2:46-47; 20:7**. The only way to do that is to be an active, viable family member of a local church.

When we belong to a family, we are in relationship with the other members. We are part of something bigger than ourselves.

WHO WE ARE

OUR VISION: REACHING THE WORLD FOR JESUS CHRIST, ONE PERSON AT A TIME

OUR MISSION: TO BE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS

OUR CHURCH STRUCTURE

We are an autonomous congregation governed solely by the Word of God and biblically qualified leaders selected from within our local fellowship. The church was never intended to be a democracy ruled by the popular vote of the congregation. Rather, the church is a “theocracy” divinely led by God and His Word through a plurality of godly leaders called elders. The elders are entrusted by God with the responsibility of being the spiritual and organizational leaders of the church **1 Timothy 5:17** under the authority of Christ, who is the Head of the church. **Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18**

GOD’S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH

JESUS – THE OWNER AND HEAD

Colossians 1:18 Christ is also the head of the church, which is His body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So He is first in everything.

ELDERS – THE GENERAL MANAGERS AND LEADERS

1 Timothy 5:17 Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching.

PASTORAL STAFF – THE COACHES AND EQUIPPERS

Ephesians 4:11-12 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

CONGREGATION – THE PLAYERS AND MINISTERS

1 Peter 2:9 But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.

ELDER LEADERSHIP AT VRL

Our church is led by a plurality of godly leaders from our local congregation who serve as elders in accordance with **1 Timothy 5:17** (NIV), “The elders

who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” They are charged by God with the spiritual oversight of our fellowship, business responsibilities and obligations of our church family as well.

Our elders do not vote on decisions. We follow the practice of unanimity. In other words, if we are not all in complete agreement we will not proceed until, after a time of prayer and reevaluation, we are able to be completely unified in regard to a particular decision. It’s okay to agree to disagree as long as we walk out of a room united. We do not hold elections or ask our people to vote on leaders, business matters or our annual budget.

Our leaders are held accountable to the highest of biblical standards and expectations by the family members of our congregation. We encourage ideas, input, and questions from prospective family members and encourage people that once they become part of the VRL family, to feel free to continue to ask any questions they may have about any area of our ministry.

The goal of Valley Real Life is to be and make disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 4:19) A disciple is one who follows Jesus, is changed by Jesus, and is on mission for Jesus. We call this our ABCD process.

BIBLICAL STANDARDS FOR ELDERS

1 Timothy 3:1-8 This is a trustworthy saying: “If someone aspires to be an elder, he desires an honorable position.” So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach. He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money. He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? An elder must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall. Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil’s trap. In the same way, deacons must be well respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers or dishonest with money.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS

Self-controlled	1 Timothy 3:2 Titus 1:8	Not overbearing	Titus 1:7	Respectable	1 Timothy 3:2
Hospitable	1 Timothy 3:2 Titus 1:8	Not quick-tempered	Titus 1:7	Not given to drunkenness	1 Timothy 3:3 Titus 1:7
Able to teach	Titus 1:9	Loves what is good	Titus 1:8	Manages his own family well	1 Timothy 3:4
Not violent but gentle	1 Timothy 3:3 Titus 1:7	Upright, holy	Titus 1:8	Sees that his children obey him	1 Timothy 3:4-5 Titus 1:6
Not quarrelsome	1 Timothy 3:3	Disciplined	Titus 1:8	Does not pursue dishonest gain	Titus 1:7
Not a lover of money	1 Timothy 3:3	Above reproach (blameless)	1 Timothy 3:2 Titus 1:6	Holds to the truth	Titus 1:9
Not a recent convert	1 Timothy 3:7	Husband of one wife	1 Timothy 3:2 Titus 1:6		
Has a good reputation with outsiders	1 Timothy 3:7	Temperate	1 Timothy 3:2 Titus 1:7		

HOW ELDERS ARE CHOSEN

- Identified through relationship (Life Groups and ministry service)
- Interview process (candidate/spouse by elders)
- Attend regular elder meetings
- An unspecified time as an apprentice elder to determine fit and availability
- Presentation to congregation with one week objection period (biblical reason why this person should not be installed as an elder in our church)
- Installed as an elder (if no biblical objection is found)

BIBLICAL STANDARDS FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH – THE CONGREGATION

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your spiritual leaders and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

MEET OUR LEADERS

THE ELDERS



Jason Pegg
jpegg@vrl.church



Dan Shields
dshields@vrl.church



Anthony Frei
afrei@vrl.church



Seth Short
sshort@vrl.church

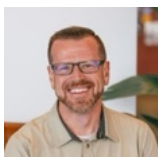


Bryan Johnson
bjohnson@vrl.church

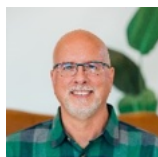


Marcus Munn
mmunn@vrl.church

EXECUTIVE TEAM



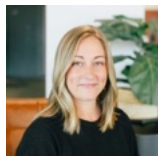
Dan Shields
Lead Pastor
dshields@vrl.church



Jay Jones
Executive Pastor of
Ministries
jjones@vrl.church



Christine Elledge
Executive Asst to Lead
Pastor
celledge@vrl.church

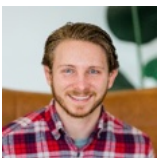


Brittany Murphy
Executive Asst to
Executives
bmurphy@vrl.church

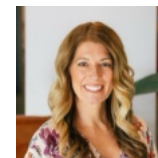
LIFE GROUPS



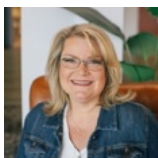
Kevin Carlson
Life Groups Team Leader
kcarlson@vrl.church



Zak Sommers
Life Groups & Young
Adults Pastor
zsommers@vrl.church



Jolene Fisher
Women's Ministry Lead
jfisher@vrl.church



Michelle Nelson
Groups Ministry Asst
mnelson@vrl.church

OUTREACH & CARE



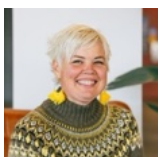
Steve Allen
Outreach & Care Team
Leader
sallen@vrl.church



Brad Pesnell
Care Pastor
bpesnell@vrl.church



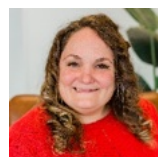
Drew Chukitus
Recovery Pastor
dchukitus@vrl.church



Kim Sonko
Outreach & Care Ministry
Asst
ksonko@vrl.church



Sara Yarbrough
Counselor
sara@thecouch.us



Kristina Paulding
Recovery Coordinator
kpaulding@vrl.church

NEXT GEN



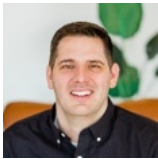
Tyler Lane
Next Gen Team Leader
tlane@vrl.church

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Hannah Seitz
High School Lead
hseitz@vrl.church

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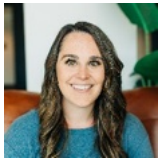
Connor Shoup
Middle School Lead
cshoup@vrl.church



Trevor Farris
Elementary Pastor
tfarris@vrl.church



Amy Wohl
Student Ministry Asst
awohl@vrl.church



Michelle Bonesteel
Early Childhood Lead
mbonesteel@vrl.church

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Amy Jarvis
Elementary Coordinator
ajarvis@vrl.church

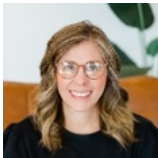


Danielle Gross
Childcare Coordinator
dgross@vrl.church

WORSHIP EXPERIENCE TEAM



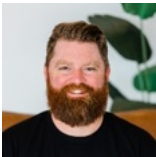
Kenny Mallgren
Worship Experience Team
Leader
kmallgren@vrl.church



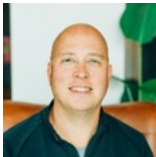
Christa Gray
Worship Experience
Lead
cgray@vrl.church



Hannah Pusateri
Communications &
Marketing Lead
hpusateri@vrl.church



Drew Payne
Tech Coordinator
dpayne@vrl.church



Matt Pegram
Guest Experience Lead
mpegram@vrl.church



Nic Hinman
Videographer
nhinman@vrl.church

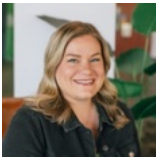
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Kaylee Cox
Worship Ministry Asst
kcox@vrl.church

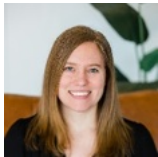
HR/ADMINISTRATION

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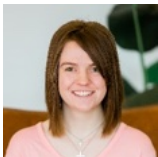
Jeff Paulus
Administration Team
Leader
jpaulus@vrl.church



Kellie Wood
Human Resources Lead
kwood@vrl.church

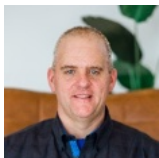


Jenny Schalk
Finance Clerk
jschalk@vrl.church

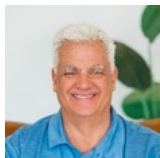


Blair Gasaway
Admin/Ops Ministry Asst
bgasaway@vrl.church

FACILITIES



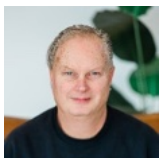
Jeff Sevigney
Facilities & Safety Team
Leader
jsevigney@vrl.church



Matt Goodman
Facilities Coordinator
mgoodman@vrl.church



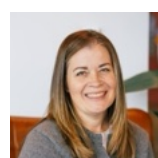
Ashton Duggan
Facility Support
aduggan@vrl.church



Jeff Dunham
Facilities Volunteer
Coordinator
jdunham@vrl.church



Stan Vandegriffe
Facility Support
svandegriffe@vrl.church



Maria Barney
Facility Support
mbarney@vrl.church

CONNECTIONS

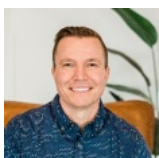


Jeremy Anglin
Connections Team Leader
janglin@vrl.church



Kjell Nygren
Technology & Systems
Lead
knygren@vrl.church

RIVERSIDE CAMPUS



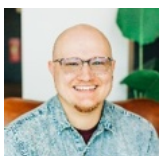
Kelly Armstrong
Campus Pastor
karmstrong@vrl.church



Kendra Croft
Kids Lead & Ministry Asst
kcroft@vrl.church



Michael Haynes
Technology
Coordinator
mhaynes@vrl.church



Kalem Morgan
Worship Lead
kmorgan@vrl.church

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

UNITY

God loved the world so much that He gave His son – Jesus Christ – to die as an atonement for our sin. He sent His son into the world in order to save the world through Him. Christ’s prayer in this was that His followers would be united as one, just as He and God the Father are united as one. We believe we are to be united in Christ, agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and one purpose.

Being united means extending grace to one another when differing opinions arise over Biblical teachings. That’s not to say we will be tolerant of false instruction or misguided doctrine – we will always follow the Bible on what it clearly teaches about right and wrong. But there are parts of scripture where believers can land on different sides of a debate and still remain in fellowship when Jesus remains at the center.

We strive to find common ground on the topics that matter (many of which are listed below) and extend grace on the ones that don’t. We must pursue unity, humility, and service to one another, avoiding the judgement and dogma that so frequently divide Christians today (Christian nationalism, expository vs. topical preaching, political movements, etc.). As Jesus said, the world will know we are Christians by our love for one another.

John 3:16, John 17:20-21; Philippians 2:1-2; John 13:34-35

GOD

God is Creator and Ruler of the universe. There is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He is Holy and Righteous. The only way to have an authentic relationship with God is through Jesus Christ.

Genesis 1:1; Psalm 145:21; Colossians 1:16; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ was with God in the very beginning, and God created the universe through Him. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, took on flesh and blood, and made His dwelling among us. His physical death on the cross saves us from our sin. His bodily

resurrection changed the course of history and created the path to eternal life with God.

Colossians 1:15-20; Matthew 1:18-2; John 1:1-4, 14:6, 3:16; I Corinthians 15:1-8

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He makes us aware of our need to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. He gives us guidance and leadership on a daily basis so we can obey God’s Word and do what is right. He gives each of us spiritual gifts for the purpose of serving the Body of Christ. We seek to live under His control in all situations.

John 16:8-9; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 1:13-14, 3:16, 4:30, 5:18; Galatians 5:16,25; I Corinthians 12,13

MAN

We believe that man, created by God, willfully sinned, and as a result, is lost and without hope apart from Jesus Christ.

Genesis 1:27; Isaiah 53:6, 59:1-2; Romans 3:23, 5:8

SALVATION

Salvation is a free gift of God. The death of Christ on the cross is the only sufficient payment for our sins. Every person has sinned, but every person also can be forgiven and saved by Christ. By placing your faith in Jesus you will have your sins forgiven, you will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and you will receive eternal life. Faith is both internally experienced and externally displayed through belief, repentance, a public confession of faith, and baptism.

Romans 3:23, 6:23; John 3:16; Romans 10:9; Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:19; Matthew 3:13-17

THE BIBLE

We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God and the final authority for all matters of faith. The Bible is God’s Word to all people.

Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 119:105,160

THE CHURCH

The church is the body of Christ on earth, empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue the task

of leading others to faith in Christ and teaching followers of Christ to obey and serve Him. Involvement in a local church is critical to individual growth, fellowship, and support for life's day-to-day challenges.

Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:1-16; Ephesians 2:19

ETERNITY

People were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through the forgiveness of our sin. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally with God is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence.

John 3:16; John 14:17; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:17-18; Revelation 20:15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-9

PRIESTHOOD OF EVERY BELIEVER

Every Christian is called to "full-time" Christian service, regardless of his or her vocation. We practice the truth that every believer is a minister by encouraging every person to find a place of service and ministry. Every believer has direct access to God through prayer and Bible reading. Every Christian is an evangelist as they share their faith with those around them by word and by action.

Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:9

COMMUNION OR THE LORD'S SUPPER

Communion is the remembrance of Christ's death on the cross. The bread symbolically represents His broken body, and the juice symbolically represents His shed blood. Communion is offered to all believers upon personal reflection.

1 Corinthians 11:23-28

STEWARDSHIP

The church is to exist on the tithes and offerings of the people attending the church. Tithing is the practice of giving 10% of your income for the support of Christ's body, the church, and doing so because you believe it is God's command and is a part of worship. Offerings are gifts given that are above and beyond the tithe. These gifts are often sacrificial and/or spontaneous. Both tithes and offerings are critical to Christian stewardship.

Numbers 18:6, 21; Malachi 3:7-12; 1 Corinthians 9:3-

10, 13-14; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

GENDER, MARRIAGE, AND SEXUALITY

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God and, as such, have practical implications on how we live our lives.

GENDER

We believe that men and women have full equality in the eyes of God and in the eyes of man while also having complementary roles. (Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 11:11-12) We practice these two truths in the following scripturally based ways:

- The roles of Elder and Lead Pastor will be held by men.
 - Men and women are called to and can serve in positions of leadership, teaching, and pastoral roles.
 - Men and women can lead worship songs and the various part of the worship services such as communion and offering.
 - Men and women who are not serving as the Lead Pastor are able to teach/preach in weekend services, events, conferences, and trainings under the authority of the Elders.
 - Men and women can lead or co-lead groups where they are teaching/instructing other men and women in the group. Adult discipleship is best accomplished when men disciple men and women disciple women. While it is not always possible, we strive to apply that practice to discipleship environments.
 - For additional information, please request our more comprehensive doctrinal statement, "The Roles of Men and Women in Ministry" or ask to speak with our Elders.
- Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person. (Gen 1:26-27)

MARRIAGE

We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture. (Gen 2:18-25) We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. (1 Cor 6: 18; 7:2-5; Heb 13:4.) We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

SEXUALITY

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and

use of pornography) is sinful. (Matt 15:18-20; 1 Cor 6:9-10.)

EXPECTATIONS

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Valley Real Life as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the VRL members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by VRL in any capacity, or, in most roles, who serve as volunteers, agree to and abide by this Statement on Gender, Marriage, and Sexuality. (Matt 5:16; Phil 2:14-16; 1 Thes 5:22.)

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. (Acts 3:19-21; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 6:9- 11.)
We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity.

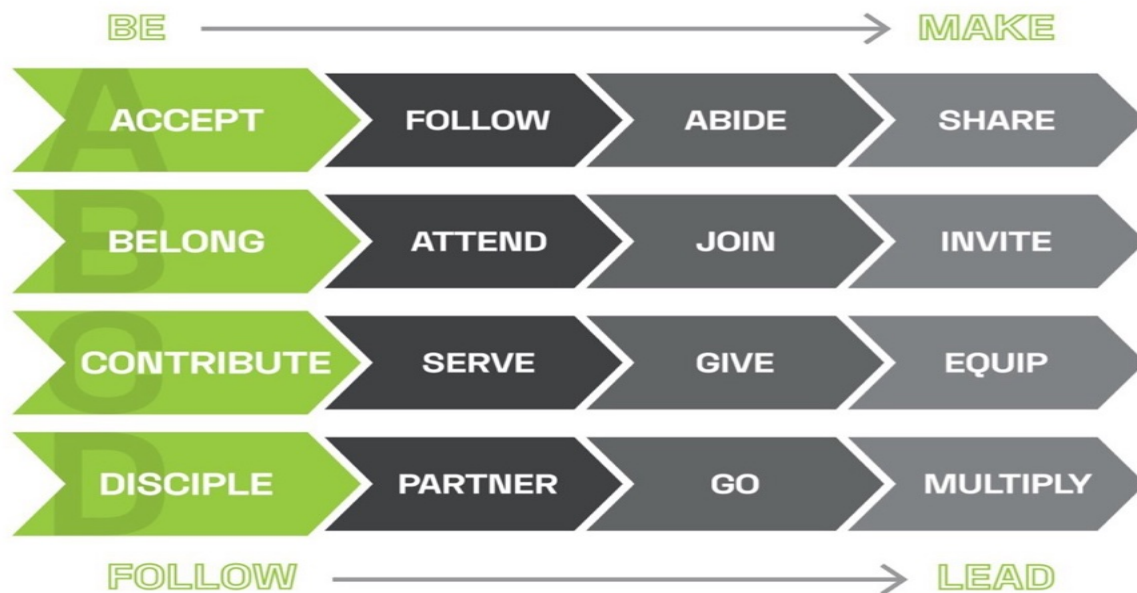
(Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31) Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of Valley Real Life.

FINAL INTERPRETATION

The Elders hold the ultimate responsibility for the Church's statement of faith and in areas that the statement of faith does not directly address, the Bible itself is the sole source of all that we believe. As the inspired and infallible Word of God, the Bible speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind. For the purposes of Valley Real Life's faith, doctrine, practices, policy, and discipline, the Elders serve as the final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application.

THE VRL WAY

ABCD Discipleship Pathway:



A

- Follow: Choose to accept Christ and be baptized by immersion
- Abide: Encounter God regularly through the Bible and prayer
- Share: Tell others my story

B

- Attend: Regularly participate in weekend services and ministries
- Join: Connect to a Life Group and the VRL family
- Invite: Ask people to join you at services and Life Groups

C

- Serve: Volunteer to serve others in our church, community, or world
- Give: Honor God with your finances
- Equip: Recruit, equip and release others for the work of ministry

D

- Partner: Commit to a spiritual partner
- Go: Courageously lead others in their ABCD journey
- Multiply: Raise up and release disciple makers

ACCEPT

- FOLLOW: Choose to accept Christ and be baptized by immersion
- ABIDE: Encounter God regularly through the Bible and prayer
- SHARE: Tell others my story

FOLLOW: CHOOSE TO ACCEPT CHRIST AND BE BAPTIZED BY IMMERSION

The most important decision you will ever make is the decision to ACCEPT Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and begin to follow Him. The Bible teaches that Jesus gave up His life to save yours, and that by placing your faith in Him you will have your sins forgiven, that you will be filled with His Holy Spirit, and that you will receive eternal life. Practically speaking, the Bible outlines four responses that are expected when a person begins an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus: Belief, Repentance, Public Confession of Faith and Baptism.

SALVATION AND BAPTISM – WHY AM I HERE?

God made me to love me!

Jeremiah 31:3a Long ago the Lord said to Israel: “I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love.

Ephesians 1:4-5 Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure.

We were created to have an intimate personal relationship with God.

Genesis 1:27 So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.

John 10:10b My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

When we know and love God, and live in harmony with His purposes for our lives, it produces tremendous benefits in our lives:

Clean Conscience—Romans 8:1
Life and Peace—Romans 8:6
Help with Weakness—Romans 8:26
Purpose—Romans 8:28

Confidence—Romans 8:31
Security—Romans 8:39
Power and Strength—Philippians 4:13
Fulfillment—Philippians 4:19
Freedom—John 8:32, 36

This is the kind of lifestyle God intends for us to live. Why then aren't most people really happy?

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Humans have a natural desire to rebel and ignore God's principles for living.

- “Look out for number one.”
- “Do your own thing.”
- “If it feels good do it—regardless of what God says about it.”
- “It's my life and I will do what I please.”

The Bible calls this attitude sin.

Isaiah 53:6a All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own.

1 John 1:8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.

Sin breaks our close relationship with God. It causes us to fear God and try to live outside of His will.

Isaiah 59:2a It's your sins that have cut you off from God.

Romans 3:23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

When people have problems, they often try many different ways of coping before turning to God.

Proverbs 16:25 There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.

Even when we know that our deepest need is God, we often try the wrong ways of getting to know Him:

- Salvation by Acquaintance - “My mother is a Christian so ...”
- Salvation by Sincerity - “It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.”
- Salvation by Abstinence - “I'll give up all my bad habits.”
- Salvation by Works - “I'll work real hard and earn it.”
- Salvation by Morality - “I'll be religious and go to church.”

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

God Himself came to earth as a human being to bring us back to Himself. If any other way would have worked, Jesus would not have had to come. The way is a person!

John 14:6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

God did this for us because He loves us and wants us to know Him.

Romans 5:8 But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO?

BELIEVE

John 3:16 For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:36 And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment.

REPENT

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Luke 13:3b And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God.

CONFESS

Romans 10:9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Matthew 10:32-33 "Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.

BE BAPTIZED BY IMMERSION

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

1 Peter 3:21 And that water is a picture of

baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

BAPTISM FAQ'S

Q: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?

A: It illustrates Christ's death and resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:3b-4 Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

Colossians 2:12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with Him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

It illustrates our new birth as a Christian.

2 Corinthians 5:17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

Romans 6:4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Q: WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

A: Every believer who has repented of sin and confessed Christ as Lord and Savior.

Q: WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

A: To follow the example set by Jesus.

Mark 1:9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized Him in the Jordan River.

Because Christ and the Apostles commanded it.

Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus came and told His disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

It publicly demonstrates that I really am a follower.

Acts 18:8b Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers and were baptized.

1 John 2:3 And we can be sure that we know Him if we obey His commandments.

Because every conversion account in Acts includes it.

Acts 2:38-41 Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!” Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

Acts 8:12-13 But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

Acts 8:35-38 So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Acts 9:17-18 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

Acts 10:47-48 “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?” So he gave orders for

them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

Acts 16:13-15 On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed.

Acts 16:30-34 Then he brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.” And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed

their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

Q: WHY BE BAPTIZED BY IMMERSION?

A: Because the Greek word for baptize is *baptizo*, which means “to immerse or dip under water.”

Because Jesus was baptized that way.

Matthew 3:16a After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water...

Every baptism in the New Testament was by immersion.

Acts 8:38b-39a ... they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water...

Q: WHAT ABOUT INFANT BAPTISM?

A: We believe the Bible teaches that baptism is a choice made by a believer to publicly express their own decision to enter into a relationship with Christ through faith in Him and His sacrifice on the cross. Since this is a personal choice and not a “by proxy” choice, Valley Real Life does not practice infant

The most important decision you will ever make is the decision to ACCEPT Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. The Bible teaches that Jesus gave up His life to save yours, and that by placing your faith in Him you will have your sins forgiven, that you will be filled with His Holy Spirit, and that you will receive eternal life. Practically speaking, the Bible outlines four responses that are expected when a person begins an intimate, personal, relationship with Jesus: Belief, Repentance, Public Confession of Faith, and Baptism.

baptism. We do celebrate a ceremonial commitment called "Child dedications." This commitment is a parent led public commitment, to join with the Church to raise their child to follow Jesus.

1 Peter 3:21 And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience.

Q: CAN MY FAMILY BE BAPTIZED TOGETHER?

A: Yes! If each family member understands fully the meaning of baptism, and each one has personally placed his/her trust in Christ for salvation. We encourage children to meet with our pastors about baptism before they are immersed. However, it is important to remember that baptism is a personal statement of faith and obedience, not a family tradition.

Q: WHEN SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

A: In the book of Acts people were baptized immediately after they accepted Christ. We encourage the same sense of urgency and timely act of obedience when a person comes to faith in Jesus and an understanding of His will for us.

Q: WHAT SHOULD I WEAR WHEN I AM BAPTIZED?

A: A dark t-shirt, shorts, or other appropriate clothing. What matters is what God does to you at baptism, not what you wear to your baptism. VRL has clothes available.

Q: WILL I HAVE TO SAY ANYTHING?

A: Yes. We will ask you to confess that you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that you have accepted Him as your Lord and Savior.

Q: WHAT IF I WAS BAPTIZED BY IMMERSION IN ANOTHER CHURCH?

A: That is fine, as long as you were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus **Acts 19:5** or in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit **Matthew 28**.

ABIDE: ENCOUNTER GOD REGULARLY THROUGH THE BIBLE AND PRAYER

Once you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior then it is time to start to develop a daily and ongoing relationship with Him. This can take many forms and is often referred to as Spiritual Disciplines. The real challenge behind abiding in Christ is how do you regularly encounter God through the Bible and prayer without allowing that to become some religious exercise. The key to

abiding in Christ is to realize that it is about developing our relationship with Jesus, not checking off a list of religious tasks. Some of the key practices you should develop in order to abide in Christ are:

PRAYER

This is not only a major opportunity but a need. We need to be constantly connected with our Lord. Jesus prayed while he was on earth and taught us to pray. If Jesus felt the need of prayer, how much more do we need to pray as well? God cares about you and everything that happens - from the smallest plea to the biggest need; what an opportunity. He is always listening and knows your needs, even if it sometimes feels like He isn't. **Psalm 55:22** says, that if you "cast your burden on the Lord," then "He will sustain you." Prayer is both telling God about your goals in life and asking for him to make you more like Jesus. Ask God to give you the strength to keep His commands. **John 15:10** says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." No one is able to do anything for God by his own strength: God is our strength. Without him, we can't do anything of importance!

READ THE BIBLE

Psalm 119:9 says, "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word." Setting aside time every day for the Bible is extremely important. Keep your mind fixed on it and allow your heart to be grafted to Christ and molded by it. The Bible is God's word, and in it the story of God's redeeming work in this world is told! As you begin to see your place within God's story, you'll see why your life matters, and where it is going. By reading the Bible, you open your ear to listen to God. **John 17:17** says, "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth..."

GIVE THANKS AND REJOICE!

God tells us in **James 1:17** that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father." That means we have hundreds of reasons to thank God! For breathing, for food, for jobs, friends, the family of God, forgiveness of sins, power to overcome evil, and more! The greatest reason to constantly rejoice and thank God is that, if you are trusting in Jesus, then you will enjoy an eternal life in heaven where God will dwell with us. There is no better hope.

SHARE: TELL OTHERS MY STORY

Sharing your faith with others can feel intimidating and difficult, but it is actually easier than we think and can also be incredibly rewarding. It really is as simple as sharing your faith story. The Bible calls this witnessing which, just like a witness in a court of law, is you simply telling what you saw and experienced in your life with regard to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and faith. The fancy word for this process is evangelism which is a cornerstone of the Christian faith and can be a great way to connect with people and share your passion in a tactful, friendly manner.

WHY?

WE EXIST TO SHARE CHRIST WITH A DYING WORLD

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord isn't really being slow about His promise, as some people think. No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

GOD HAS GIVEN US A MISSION

Matthew 28:19 (NLT) Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT) So we are Christ's ambassadors: God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

HOW?

BE AUTHENTIC

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." **John 15:5**

People must first be able to see that Christ is real in your life. If Christ is not real in our own life, then we will not be effective, for apart from Him we can do nothing.

BE NATURAL

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is

showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." **Romans 12:6-8**

Discover your own style of sharing your faith. The important thing to remember is to be you. Don't try to be like Billy Graham, one of the pastors at VRL, or anyone else.

BE VERBAL

"And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" **Romans 10:14**

Our example is important, but we must be ready and able to verbally share what we believe.

BE PERSONAL

"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.' Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked. 'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him...Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." **Acts 8:29-31,35**

We must spend time with people and discover their needs. Then we can share the message in a way that meets those needs.

BE PROCESS-ORIENTED

"I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready." ¹ **Corinthians 3:2**

Most people do not give their lives to Christ the first time you share with them. You will find that you share a little bit at a time until they are ready for "solid food."

BE TEAM-ORIENTED

"A person's coming to Christ is like a chain with many links. There is the first link, middle links, and a last link. There are many influences and conversations that precede a person's decision to convert to Christ. I know the joy of being the first link at times, a middle link usually, and occasionally the last link. God has not called me to only be the last link. He has called me to be faithful and to love all people." *Cliff Knechtle, Give Me An Answer, 1986*

PUT OTHERS FIRST

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible

means I might save some.” **1 Corinthians 9:22**

The Apostle Paul understood the power of putting others first by becoming like them. When we do this, we are able to relate to others better and they feel more understood. There are certainly limits to

this. We would not begin to curse when we are evangelizing someone who uses that language, but we also would not condemn that person for talking in that way. Let them come to Christ as they are and then let the Holy Spirit begin to change them.

What's your next step in Accept?

*The following are practical expectations we would have for those who are taking their family commitment seriously as it pertains to **ACCEPT**:*

- *Has made a public confession of faith and commitment to Christ as Lord*
- *Has a growing and abiding relationship with Christ*
- *Has been baptized by immersion*
- *Prays regularly for those in their sphere of influence who don't know Jesus*
- *Shares the gospel with others through word and deed outside the church walls*
- *Invites the un-churched on a regular basis **Matthew 28:18-20***
- *Read the Bible*

BELONG

- **ATTEND:** Regularly participate in weekend services and ministries
- **JOIN:** Connect to a Life Group and the VRL family
- **INVITE:** Ask people to join you at services and Life Groups

Fresh faith needs a relational environment to grow into vibrant, lasting faith. That's why once you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior your next step is to BELONG to a church and people who are also committed to growing in Christ.

We have been created to live in community and do life together. **Romans 12:4-5** Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

ATTEND: REGULARLY PARTICIPATE IN WEEKEND SERVICES AND MINISTRIES

Belonging begins by showing up! Each week VRL holds worship services and many other ministry opportunities designed to connect with God and with other believers just as they did in the early church.

Authentic biblical relationships produce the best environment for growth.

Acts 2:42-47 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper) and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's

Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

In those verses, Luke gives us the FOURTEEN ESSENTIALS that enabled that first church to literally explode and turn their world upside down. These fourteen ingredients form the pattern by which our church is organized. You'll be surprised as

much by what isn't listed here (the things people tell us we have to have today) as you will by what is listed here. They devoted themselves to:

1) STUDYING THE WORD

They submitted themselves to the teaching and instruction of their spiritual leaders. **Acts 2:42a**

2) FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

Being an active, involved, committed family member of the local church was considered essential not optional. **Acts 2:42c**

3) BREAKING BREAD

This included both sharing a common meal and observing the Lord's Supper or Communion. **Acts 2:42c**

4) PRAYER

This was the "power source" for the early church and still is for every church that really wants to grow and be all God wants her to be. **Acts 2:42d**

5) BEING FILLED WITH AWE

They never lost the wonder of it all. What a contrast from the modern day "ho-hum," "take-it-or-leave-it," "so what" attitude found among too many church members in the average church. **Acts 2:43a**

6) THE POWER OF GOD

They believed that God could do anything. And He did! (And He still can!) **Acts 2:43b**

Fresh faith needs a relational environment to grow into vibrant, lasting faith. That's why once you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior your next step is to BELONG to a life group of people who are also committed to growing in Christ. Jesus set a life group precedent for us in His earthly ministry when He gathered a group of 12 men and poured into them over a three-year period. He chose ordinary men who had very simple faith in Him and turned them into fully devoted followers and leaders of the first churches. They grew because He created an environment where they were able to ask questions, try things, and fail without being rejected. Just like the disciples, you need to belong to a life group with an intentional leader to help your relationship with Jesus grow.

7) UNITY

Because of their great love for Jesus, they naturally had a great love for one another. **Acts 2:44**

8) SACRIFICIAL GIVING

They sold their possessions and goods so they could give. Today, many people can't give sacrificially because of all the monthly payments they have to make on the possessions and goods they've bought for themselves. **Acts 2:45**

9) MEETING NEEDS

They looked for needs and found creative ways to meet those needs. **Acts 2:45b**

10) CORPORATE WORSHIP

Today, it's a struggle for many people to come to church. These people made worship a daily priority. **Acts 2:46a**

11) HOSPITALITY

They opened their homes and got involved in each other's lives. **Acts 2:46b**

12) PRAISING GOD

They never took credit for what happened. They gave all the credit, glory and honor to God. **Acts 2:47a**

13) GREAT RELATIONSHIP WITH OUTSIDERS

This was not an obnoxious bunch. They were contagious and had the admiration and respect of people outside of their fellowship. **Acts 2:47b**

14) EVANGELISM

People got saved. When you realize the kind of church they were, it's not hard to see why so many people got saved. **Acts 2:47c**

JOIN: CONNECT TO A LIFE GROUP AND THE VRL FAMILY

Jesus has called us to not only be His disciples but to also make disciples. The church's primary responsibility is to be focused on intentional and relational discipleship. We know that discipleship doesn't take place apart from relationship—relationship with God and relationship with others.

LIFE GROUPS

Jesus gathered a group of 12 men and poured into them over three years. He chose ordinary men who had very simple faith in Him and turned them into fully devoted followers and leaders of the first churches. They grew because He created an environment where they were able to ask questions, try things, and fail without being rejected. Just like the disciples, you need to belong to a Life Group with others to help your relationship with Jesus grow.

Our strategy for making disciples is to place people in Life Groups and to move them through an intentional process where they can grow together through the ABCD Discipleship Pathway.

The three components that make up a VRL Life Group include:

1. AN INTENTIONAL LEADER

- One who shepherds each individual, who facilitates a conversation within the group, (rather than a lecture) and one who models a growing relationship with Christ.

2. A RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

- A group of 3-16 people in an environment that welcomes relational discussions that encourage spiritual growth in each individual.

3. A REPRODUCIBLE PROCESS

A process built around the idea that Jesus himself raised 12 disciples to then go out into the world to disciple others. Our groups are unified in the vision to grow then branch out to multiply the impact as disciple-makers.

HOW CAN I GET CONNECTED TO A LIFE GROUP?

- View our group listings at vrl.church/lifegroups. Filter the group listings by the type, day, and childcare needs. When you find a group, reach out to the leader by completing the contact form.
- For someone to help you navigate the online group listings and help you find a group
 - Visit the Connecting Point in the lobby.
 - Contact our Life Groups Team at 509.232.0840 or email us at groups@vrl.church.

JOINING THE VRL FAMILY

Becoming part of the VRL family (other churches refer to this as membership) is an important step in your commitment to VRL and in VRL's commitment to you. It is the way you formally state that you are aligning yourself with the church's beliefs, values, and activities. It is also how the church formally identifies who is part of VRL's spiritual leadership, community, and support.

Joining the family is based on the notion of a cohesive community of believers. It is dedicated to engaging in a shared spiritual journey with other people while pursuing accountability, mutual support, and spiritual progress. Our family members feel purpose and belonging and build close relationships with other Christians who hold similar views and values.

It is clear that joining the family is a biblical concept and expectation:

- Jesus declares in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." The idea highlights the formation of a distinctive community of believers who are bound together by their belief in Jesus Christ.
- The early Christians dedicated themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer, as seen in Acts 2:42–47. They met frequently, pooled resources, and witnessed the presence of the Holy Spirit in their neighborhood.
- The Apostle Paul also addresses certain groups of Christians and recognizes their membership in the body of Christ in Paul's letters to distinct Christian communities. For example, Apostle Paul writes, "All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.," in 1 Corinthians 12:27. Paul highlights the bond between believers in the passage, comparing it to being a part of a single, cohesive body.
- Hebrews 10:24–25 emphasizes the value of participating actively in a local Christian community by urging believers not to abandon gathering together but to encourage one another.

Opportunities for service and ministry are made easier by joining the family. Individuals support numerous ministries and outreach programs by utilizing their special gifts, talents, and resources while actively participating in the life of the church. The church community gains from this active participation by allowing people to positively influence the world and spread the love of Christ to others.

INVITE: ASK PEOPLE TO JOIN YOU AT SERVICES AND LIFE GROUPS

In 2021, The Barna Research Group conducted a national survey among unchurched adults which indicated that "25 percent would attend a church if a friend ever took the time or made the effort to invite them. That's 1 out of 4 adults. If the unchurched population in this country is roughly 60-70 million people (our best estimate), that means 15-18 million adults are waiting to be asked to go to church!" - George Barna

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'" **Luke 14:23**

To invite others effectively does not mean you hard sell someone until they give in. Spiritual invitations are persuasive, but they are also hospitable, relational, and compassionate.

To be invitational you need to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..." **1 Peter 3:15**. Your friends and acquaintances need to hear how Christ has influenced your own life. In addition, your friends have questions you could answer concerning the implications of the Gospel in their own lives.

Do not get discouraged if people refuse your invitation. Their refusal could be an opportunity for a spiritual conversation. Also, their "no" today may be a "yes" tomorrow.

What's your next step in Belong?

*The following are practical expectations we would have for those who are taking their family commitment seriously as it pertains to **BELONG**:*

- *Has attended and will continue to regularly attend worship services **Hebrews 10:23-25***
 - *Welcomes the un-churched and visitors on a regular basis (this is your home)*
- *Has committed to a life group or finding a life group*
 - *Helps others to get into a life group*
- *Has completed, signed and agreed with VRL's DNA Class and "Family Commitment"*
 - *Encourages others to commit to VRL by asking them to attend DNA class*
 - *Invite others*

CONTRIBUTE

- **SERVE:** Volunteer to serve others in our church, community, or world
- **GIVE:** Honor God with your finances
- **EQUIP:** Recruit, equip and release others for the work of ministry

Once you have accepted Christ and belong to a life group, your next step is to **CONTRIBUTE** your gifts and abilities to serve others. Jesus expects His followers to possess the same revolutionary attitude toward reaching and serving others that He did during his earthly ministry. To embrace the call to care for others you will need to find a ministry that fits you well and where you can serve God joyfully. Most importantly, you will need to undergo a major transformation in thinking. You will have to realize that life is not about your wants and needs. It's about leading others to Christ and serving Him.

SERVE: VOLUNTEER TO SERVE OTHERS IN OUR CHURCH, COMMUNITY OR WORLD

Every Christian is called to “full-time” Christian service, regardless of his or her vocation. We practice the truth that every believer is a minister by encouraging every person to find a place of service and ministry. Every believer has direct access to God through prayer and Bible reading. Every Christian is an evangelist as they share their faith with those around them by word and by action. **Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:9**

Participate in the life of the congregation through ministering to others in the church. **Hebrews 10:23–25; Galatians 5:13**

God's plan is that we discover and use the abilities God has given us for His purposes.

1 Corinthians 12:27 All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

Ephesians 2:1–10 (NIV) As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this

world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good

works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God's plan is that we become a team, all using our abilities together for His purposes.

1 Corinthians 12:12, 21, 25–27 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. The eye can never say to the hand, “I don't need you.” The head can't say to the feet, “I don't need you.” This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

As we grow in Christ, we move from serve us to service.

Mark 10:45a For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve others...

John 13:15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

GIVE: HONOR GOD WITH YOUR FINANCES

INVESTING MY LIFE

The church functions on the tithes and offerings of the people attending the church to support the Gospel here and worldwide. Tithing is the practice

Once you have accepted Christ and belong to a life group, your next step is to CONTRIBUTE your gifts and abilities to serve others. Jesus expects His followers to possess the same revolutionary attitude toward reaching and serving others that He did during His earthly ministry. To embrace the call to care for others you will need to find a ministry that fits you well and where you can serve God joyfully. Most importantly, you will need to undergo a major transformation in thinking. You will have to realize that life is not about your wants and needs. It's about leading others to Christ and serving Him.

of giving 10% of your income for the support of Christ's body, the church, and doing so because you believe it is God's command and is a part of worship. Offerings are gifts given that are above and beyond the tithe. These gifts are often sacrificial and/or spontaneous. Both tithes and offerings are critical to Christian stewardship.

Numbers 18:6, 21; Malachi 3:7-12; 1 Corinthians 9:3-10, 13-14; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH FINANCIAL GIVING

Look around you at VRL. What do you see? We see people connecting with God and each other on a regular basis, thus fulfilling the primary purpose of the church. People are visiting and enjoying a cup of coffee. Our worship band is leading people in worship. People are learning about God's word, and hundreds of people over the years have committed their lives to Christ through baptism. First time visitors are receiving their gift at the Connecting Point and finding out ways they can get connected and grow in their relationship with Christ and others at VRL. Children from birth through grade school are learning about God in age-appropriate settings.

During the week people like you are connecting in Life Groups, studying God's word and seeking the help they need for their personal struggles through our counseling programs, recovery and support classes.

Each of these ministries is possible because VRL is a member-supported church made up of people who are committed to giving to the Lord through VRL. Without the tithes and gifts of our members and attendees, it would be impossible to offer ministries that help people to become fully developing disciples of Jesus.

WHY SHOULD I GIVE?

IT IS ANOTHER STEP IN YOUR GROWTH AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

One measure of spiritual maturity is how we manage the resources God has given us. This is called stewardship. Our time, talents, and financial resources are all managed through stewardship, and God has called us to be good stewards. **Matthew 25:14-30**

Being a good steward is part of being a disciple, and the Bible calls us all to become disciples of Jesus. As we grow in our discipleship journey, our focus changes as we begin to understand that everything we have is from God and should be used for His

kingdom.

YOUR TITHES AND GIFTS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY EXPAND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Stewardship, specifically tithes and gifts, are part of being a committed family member of VRL. When you tithe and give to VRL it supports what God is doing in and through His church here in the Spokane Valley and around the world.

Is God calling us to expand our facilities here? Is He asking us to add more staff to support the growing needs of our church family? What opportunities is He revealing where we can be involved directly in our community and around the world? These questions and many others are currently being explored, and we know God's leading will come at a cost financially--directly or indirectly.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?

God wants you to be a cheerful giver and trust Him in this area of your life. The Bible encourages every believer to give 10% of their income, a tithe, to their local church. **Malachi 3:8-12, Proverbs 3:9-10.**

Jesus also affirms this practice for his followers:

Matthew 23:23 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things."

Anything over 10% is called an offering or gift. We understand that 10% may seem impossible, especially when your faith is new; however, we encourage you to take whatever step God is leading you.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.

"If you cannot live off 90% of your income, then you cannot live off 100%. It does not require a miracle for you to get through the month. I think that if you sit down and look at your budget, you will see that you can make it while giving at least 10%. Read the Bible and take from it what you will, and if you tithe,

do it out of love for God, not guilt.” Dave Ramsey

Dave Ramsey’s Financial Peace University (FPU) is offered twice a year at VRL. The 9-week class will teach you to have a plan for your money, get your finances under control, get rid of debt, spend and save wisely, and give like never before! Visit our website for more information.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT GIVING?

The Bible says more about giving than almost any other subject!

FAITHFUL GIVING DRAWS ME CLOSER TO GOD

Matthew 6:21 “Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will be also.”

FAITHFUL GIVING IS A KEY TO A FULL LIFE

1 Timothy 6:18-19 “Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

FAITHFUL GIVING REMINDS ME THAT EVERYTHING BELONGS TO GOD

Malachi 3:10 “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!”

Deuteronomy 8:18 “But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”

FAITHFUL GIVING HELPS ME TRUST AND SERVE GOD MORE THAN THE RESOURCES HE PROVIDES

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

WAYS TO GIVE

- Set up your giving through your bank’s Bill Pay system. This service is normally free to you and this electronic option saves VRL 3% in processing fees compared to other electronic methods. Use the following address for Bill Pay: Valley Real Life, PO BOX 397, Spokane Valley, WA 99016.

- Text to give at 509-620-6880. In the body of text type: \$(insert your contribution amount). Example: \$100. You will receive further instructions by text to finish your contribution.
- Give during services using a giving envelope with your cash or check. Envelopes are at the Connecting Point and at the entrance into the auditorium. You can drop it in the offering drop box on the wall as you exit the auditorium or lobby. Or you can mail your check to VRL. Mail to PO BOX 397, Spokane Valley, WA 99016.
- Give online at www.vrl.church/give. While there is no cost to you for this service, VRL will pay almost 3% of your tithe/gift as a service fee to the processing company.

All contributions are tax-deductible as long as we know who they came from. Please put your name on your giving envelope so we can record your tithe correctly. You will receive a year-end statement for tax purposes.

EQUIP: RECRUIT, EQUIP AND RELEASE OTHERS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY

As we serve God and others, we will find that our gifts, abilities, and experiences in ministry grow and become strong. As we do this, God expects us to begin to recruit, equip and release others to become ministers as well. This is not simply to meet the needs of VRL, it is an opportunity to create unity in the church and to help others experience what may be the greatest growth opportunity they have in Christ. The Bible says that this is how we become mature in our faith.

Ephesians 4:11-16 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

RECRUITING

This is using the relationships we have and build to invite others to join us in serving in a ministry role. You will often hear of the church inviting others to serve but nothing is more powerful than a personal invitation from someone to come serve with them in a particular ministry.

EQUIPPING

Just because someone is willing to serve, it does not mean that they are ready and able to serve. Equipping takes many forms but all of them carry the idea of walking with someone, not pulling them along. In fact, the Greek word for equipping in the Bible translated is *katartizo* and carries the idea of

coming alongside as one seeks to arrive at his destiny—not to pull “sitters” off the bench. Helping another to discover their spiritual gifts, passions, natural abilities, and best fit in a ministry area are all parts of the equipping process. The goal is to prepare them for how God wants to use them.

RELEASING

This is often the most overlooked and yet, the most critical part of developing a volunteer. God has not called us to lead and everyone else to follow and do what we say. God calls all leaders to release and empower those we are developing so that they can fully embrace and fully express the gifts, abilities, and training that God has given them in ministry.

What's your next step in Contribute?

*The following are practical expectations we would have for those who are taking their family commitment seriously as it pertains to **CONTRIBUTE**:*

- *Has a place or is committed to finding a place to serve within the VRL body **Romans 12:4-8; Galatians 5:13***
 - *Allows church leaders and teachers to equip them for service **Hebrews 13:20-21***
 - *Recruits, equips, releases volunteers for acts of service*
- *Has a place or is committed to being a servant to those in their area of influence in their homes, neighborhoods, work and leisure environments*
- *Committed to give of their finances regularly and generously to God through VRL; specifically working towards a tithe **2 Corinthians 9:7***
- *Is equipping others & releases them to do the work of ministry*

DISCIPLE

- PARTNER: Commit to a spiritual partner
- GO: Courageously lead others in their ABCD journey
- MULTIPLY: Raise up and release disciple maker

COMMITMENT FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

Jesus intentionally invested Himself in His disciples and He changed the world forever. His example shows us that the only thing more powerful than serving selflessly is serving strategically. The result of His ministry to these men was so effective and so powerful that a new term was invented just to describe His style of leadership. The term is “discipling.” When you DISCIPLE someone you maximize your impact in the kingdom of God because you are reproducing yourself in others and empowering them to reproduce themselves in others. This is the highest calling! And you were made for it!

THIS IS AN INTENTIONAL PROCESS

2 Timothy 2:2 You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

OUR CHILDREN ARE OUR FIRST DISCIPLES, THEY WILL HAVE TO SHARE WITH THEIR CHILDREN

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 “Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Remember: The goal of Valley Real Life is to be and make disciples of Jesus Matthew 28:18-20;

Matthew 4:19. A disciple is one who follows Jesus, is changed by Jesus and is on mission for Jesus. We call this our ABCD process.

A disciple literally means learner. Biblically, a disciple is someone who submits to the words and actions of the person they are following. In a good way, it's like a willing servant to a master or a Padawan to a Jedi. Jesus is not just our Savior, but our Lord. A disciple is one who is committed in their relationship with others and to following Jesus' words and deeds. Our goal is to look and act more like Jesus every day. We do this best through:

- A commitment to His church **Hebrews 5:11-14**
- Deep relationship with Jesus **John 15:5**
- Deep relationship with others, with Jesus at the center **Romans 1:11-12**
- Committed to helping others in their relationship with Jesus.

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The goal of discipleship is to find a comrade in arms and help them go on this journey. At first there were 12 disciples, which swelled to 150, and then became over 3,000. People understood that it wasn't just enough for them to follow Jesus, but to be His disciple to help others do the same **Matthew 28:18-20**. We are only here today because they took that humble role seriously.

We see this expressed at three different levels.

PARTNER: COMMIT TO A SPIRITUAL PARTNER

Finding and making a commitment to a spiritual partner is the first step in becoming a disciple. We all

need accountability in our lives to ensure that our lives are staying on course. Identifying a spiritual partner is creating that accountability relationship so that we give someone permission to speak into our lives and support, encourage and also to correct and challenge us. While Jesus did not need a spiritual partner to keep his life on a godly course, we do see him modeling this with three men in particular. We refer to it as the inner circle or the men who were Jesus' closest friends. Peter, James, and John held a special role amongst the disciples and are often seen in the most significant of times. That is what a spiritual partner becomes for us. A

fellow believer that becomes a significant part of our lives and is there at the most significant of times.

GO: COURAGEOUSLY LEAD OTHERS IN THEIR ABCD JOURNEY

Most people are willing to take a step of growth, they just do not necessarily know how to do it. A disciple-maker steps into others' lives in a caring and gentle way to show the way forward. If someone is regularly attending services, they might encourage that person to join a Life Group as their next step and then help them find a group that fits. If someone has been serving regularly, they might take them out for coffee to guide them in inviting someone to join them and equipping them to serve. There are many ways and many steps that we can help others take, but the true disciple-maker is intentionally helping others to identify their next step and then walking alongside that person to help them accomplish it.

MULTIPLY: RAISE UP AND RELEASE DISCIPLE MAKER

The final and ultimate expression of discipleship is being a disciple-maker who raises up another disciple-maker. We will all stay on our own spiritual journey throughout our entire life, but God calls us to be a disciple who is making disciples who make disciples. In fact, if someone never takes this step it actually results in spiritual dysfunction because all their life ever really focuses on is self-development. It is when we pour our lives out and into another person that we become most like Jesus.

What about you? Are you ready to go on a discipleship journey with God and others here at VRL? That is the choice before you, and we call that a commitment to Jesus and the VRL family.

WHY IS COMMITMENT IMPORTANT?

Here are four reasons we believe that commitment matters:

IT'S BIBLICAL

God's plan to care for people and change the world is found in the church. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" **Ephesians 3:10-11**.

IT'S CULTURALLY EXCEPTIONAL

It is an antidote to our society. We live in an age where very few want to be committed to anything or live sacrificially. This attitude has produced an unbiblical "what's in it for me" primary mindset. Family commitment swims against the current of nominal, consumer religion. Christ has called us to live out our faith in loving, committed community.

IT'S PRACTICALLY BENEFICIAL

It defines who is on the team and who can be counted on. Every team has a roster. Every school has an enrollment. Every army has an enlistment. Commitment identifies our team.

IT'S PERSONALLY HEALTHY

It produces spiritual growth. God has ordained the church as the place for believers to be nurtured, transformed, protected, and equipped. "But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green." **Psalms 92:12-14**.

What's your next step in Disciple?

*The following are practical expectations we would have for those who are taking their family commitment seriously as it pertains to **DISCIPLE**:*

- *Commit to a spiritual partner*
- *Is committed to becoming more and more like Jesus in becoming and making disciples of others.*
1 John 2:6, Matthew 4:19, Matthew 28:20
 - *Who has God put in your life that you can start pouring into spiritually and journey through the ABCD process with?*
- *Raise up and release disciple maker*

UNFINISHED

Over and over in the 20-year history of Valley Real Life, God has made a way where there was no way. We believe that He's not done with us yet. Far from it! Coming out of a global pandemic, while seeing significant growth in our area and our church, there has never been a more urgent need for VRL to move boldly and to trust God completely. The times are challenging but, without a doubt, **WE'LL SEE HIM DO IT AGAIN.** That's why we are embarking on a season in our church unlike any other - one that will require openness to God working deeply **IN** us and **THROUGH** us, in new levels of **FAITH** and **GENEROSITY**. As God's **UNFINISHED PEOPLE**, we ask God to continue shaping us into His image as we grow deeper in our surrender to Him. As part of God's **UNFINISHED STORY**, we ask God to continue using VRL as a powerful conduit to continue advancing the gospel one person at a time.

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. Philippians 1:6

UNFINISHED PEOPLE

The Primary Goal is 100% Engagement

We believe that God's work in us is **UNFINISHED**, and He is calling us to take our relationship with Him to a new level.

UNFINISHED STORY

The Secondary Goal is \$17 Million made up of our **UNFINISHED MISSION**, **UNFINISHED VISION**, AND **UNFINISHED OUTREACH**.

UNFINISHED MISSION: \$8 Million

We will continue to chase after our mission to "Be and Make Disciples." This number represents our ministry operating budget for the next two years through the life-change that happens here at VRL.

UNFINISHED VISION: \$8 Million

With the rapid growth at Valley Real Life and in the Spokane area, we are running out of space in our current facility. To continue "Reaching the World for Jesus, One Person at a Time," we will be building a new auditorium, adding additional parking, expanding the kitchen and offices, and improving the student ministry area and classrooms. This goal is \$8 million and will cover the 40% needed of the \$20 million total to complete the project.

UNFINISHED OUTREACH: \$1 Million

We will accelerate our vision to care for people in our community and pursue international community development that leads to planting churches. Locally, we will develop an off-site counseling and care center to meet the growing needs, strengthen our partnerships with schools, and enhance our care for special needs, foster care, and adoption. Internationally, we will pursue development projects in Uganda, the Middle East, and the Philippines in order to plant multiple churches.

unfinished.vrl.church

