

West Valley Church Mission Matters

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Last week we finished up a month-long series called “Making Change,” encouraging us to consider how we live in relationship to the resources that God has given us. We looked at four key ideas: Less is More, Stress is Bad, Giving is Good, and Tomorrow Matters. If you remember, we finished up talking about investing in eternity – giving to the church and to ministries and to others in ways that help people meet Jesus and have abundant lives in him.

You also know that last week we finished our fiscal year facing a deficit, and we asked you to consider giving beyond your usual tithes and offerings to help us finish the year.

So today I thought we'd take the time to talk about *why* giving to West Valley Church is an investment in eternity; what our mission is here as a church, and then I want to give you the update on how we finished up the year. Let me start with this interesting article that I recently read in from NPR news.¹ The authors wanted to figure out what those of us who are alive can learn from the lives of the deceased. The segment featured a marketing expert named Lux Narayan. Narayan and his employees examined 2,000 editorial, non-paid *New York Times* obituaries over a 20-month period between 2015 and 2016. What surprised them was that the most common word in the obituaries was the word “help”:

The author wrote, “I was fascinated when I saw that word [“help”] because when you're analyzing 2,000 paragraphs of text, you wouldn't expect one or two words to stick out and stand out as prominently as this did. And what we found fascinating when we went through some of those descriptors was the fact that the *help* took on different contexts. For example, Reverend Rick Curry, who *helped* veterans and disabled people by running writing and acting workshops. (Then) there's Jocelyn Cooper, who was a grassroots organizer in Brooklyn in the 1960s. And she *helped* pave the way for the first African-American woman to sit in the US Congress.

It's beautiful that the people ... are remembered ... in terms of *helping* people ... And even more fascinating was the fact that the overwhelming majority of obituaries featured people famous and non-famous who did seemingly extraordinary things. They made a positive dent in the fabric of life. They *helped* ... It was beautiful how that word stood out so strongly.” Isn't it interesting that helping others is what surfaces as the most significant thing that people are remembered for? I hope that can be said about you and me when I am gone.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=645360945>

Here's the point of that story: *your life has purpose*. You are here for a reason. You are here to make a difference in this world – every single one of us. God sent his Son to die on a cross for you because your life matters. Jesus didn't die on the cross in your place and rise from the dead just to save you from death; he did it to save you into a life of value, meaning, and purpose. God has given you the Holy Spirit to transform your life and give you power to live out that purpose.

God has a mission for you to carry out in this world. That's why he saved us and gives us his Holy Spirit.

I've said this before, but if there was any one thing I'd want our boys to remember is what I told them as they were trying to determine what they were going to do for careers. I told them that whatever it is that they do, they are here on earth to make a difference in the world for Christ. Their career could be *how* they make a difference – say a doctor, pastor, teacher, counselor, first responder, lawyer, or whatever – or, their career provided them with the means to make a difference. Either they give the money to make a difference, or the money enables them to go make a difference (like on missions trips). Make sense? Either way, you are here to make a difference in the world for Christ; to make people's lives better, to love people, to help people, and to show them who Christ is.

You are not here just to exist or to take up space. When God created people, he said:

“Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.’ God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27, ceb)

You were made in his image, and that means you have a part in his plans. Let me ask you this – which do you think it is: Do you think God has some intentional plan in mind for this world and for people, or do you think he's just sort of passively floating through history, only stepping in to fix things when we screw them up too much? God *is* actively involved in the world and wants to be involved in and through your life to accomplish the very best for every one of us and for this planet.

So *if* God has a plan, and he has made you in his image and likeness, then do you think his intention for your life is for you to passively float through life? Or do you think he wants you to be actively involved in his plans?

There's a verse in the Bible that reveals God's intent to work with us in this world:

“We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28, ceb)

We often pull that verse out to comfort ourselves when things go bad or we are going through difficult circumstances. But I think it's about way more than that. This verse is not about God somehow magically turning bad things into good things. It is not given to us so we can tell people when bad things happen to them that their suffering is all part of God's plan (it's NOT! God does *not* plan bad things to happen to us). What it *is* saying is that no matter what happens to us or around us, God

wants to work in us and through us to make a difference in this world for Christ. That's why it says, "for those who are called according to his purpose."

You were created for something. That's why the Bible says:

"Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us to be his very own through what Christ would do for us; he decided then to make us holy in his eyes, without a single fault—we who stand before him covered with his love."
(Ephesians 1:4, tlb)

"To make us holy" means God wants us to be like Christ – obeying God, loving God and loving others.

He has chosen us to be whole and holy by his love, to be like Christ, to carry out God's purposes in this world. That's what he had in mind when he made you:

"God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made." (James 1:18, ncv)

You were made for a mission! Again, the Bible says:

"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Ephesians 2:10, nlt)

We were made, and we were saved, for a *reason*, for a *purpose*, for a *mission* – to carry out Christ's work in the world. And it is work we had better be doing. God's word is very clear about this, and it is as true for every believer in Jesus as it is for us collectively as West Valley Church.

So let's talk about that mission as it is given to us in God's Word. Remember – this is true for you as an individual follower of Jesus, and it is true for us as a church.

There is much the Bible tells us, but there are some over-arching things we are told that give context and reason for everything else. One of those involves...

- **The Great Commission**

The great Commission is Jesus' last command to his disciples and to us, after he was resurrected from the dead and before he rose into heaven. The Great Commission is the words Jesus wants ringing in our ears right up until the day he returns for us.

This is that Great Commission that Jesus has given us:

"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." (Matthew 28:18-20, nlt)

This is the Great Commission – it's great because it comes from God and it is the greatest thing we can do. It is a commission because Jesus is empowering us and commanding us and equipping us to carry out His mission with Him – it's a co-mission. Now there are two key parts to the Great Commission we have been given.

The first part is to tell people about God's love. Jesus said we are supposed to make disciples. We are to introduce people to Jesus Christ so that they might come to know him and become a follower, or a disciple, of his. Notice that Jesus did not tell us to make *decisions*—we are to make disciples. A decision is simply accepting Christ into your life. A disciple is one who actively lives it out. We are commissioned in helping build people's best lives, not just to get them repeat a "sinner's prayer." Do you understand the difference? We don't stop with a prayer or decision.

The second important part of the Great Commission is to teach people to grow in their faith. Making disciples means that people are growing; that they are actively following Jesus and doing the things that Jesus has told them to do. It means that people are growing deeper and higher in their faith, learning and living in all the great things God has for them.

That's part of your mission on earth—to obey the Great Commission. That's what we do at West Valley Church.

Secondly, then, is...

- **The Great Commandment**

Jesus said that there was a command in Scripture that was the greatest of all. And like the Great Commission, it has two key parts. This is what the passage says:

"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'" (Matthew 22:34-40, niv)

That's the Great Commandment. Jesus said that all the law and the prophets hang on these two commands. What he meant was that if we will obey these two equally important commands, we would fulfill *everything* that is written in the Law and the Prophets—in other words, *all* of the Old Testament. *This is the motive behind all the Old Testament.* So the first part is critical: loving God supremely. In all our actions, all we do, we should be showing our love for God, especially as we live lives of worship. That's why what we do here together on Sunday mornings is so important; we are practicing and proclaiming that love for God.

But Jesus said that there is a second commandment that is just as important as loving God supremely, and that is loving people equally. People matter to God—people matter to Him so much that he paid the absolute highest price to buy our freedom from death and sin and to give us abundant life—he bought it with the life of his One and Only Son. There is no higher price he could have paid for us. So we, as his church and his people, naturally ought to have the same priority for people that God does. That's why we will love people as much as we love God, by doing what we can to meet the needs of people in West Valley, by welcoming them as friends no matter

where they come from or what their lifestyle or circumstances are. We will accept them. That's why we will care enough to introduce people to Jesus.

A Christian's purpose, and our church's mission, must then be a commitment to those four important principles found in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Share the Good News and teach each other, love God and love people. So that we don't ever forget that, we've developed a mission statement for our church. Our mission is what God has called us here for, and that's what this church is determined to do, and we'll do it until Jesus comes back. Our mission statement involves the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Let me take you through our mission and explain it to you...

Introduce People to Jesus Christ

In this simple statement we have the first part of the Great Commission and the second part of the Great Commandment. Do you see that? The first part of the Great Commission tells us to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel. Make disciples of all people." We do that by introducing people to Jesus Christ.

Look at that first word with me: "introduce." We could have used different words there: "win people to Jesus." "Convert people to Jesus Christ." "Evangelize people to Jesus Christ." But we chose the word "introduce" on purpose. Here's why: if you are an unchurched person in our community, how do you think you will feel if we told you it is our goal to "win" you, or "convert" you, or "evangelize" you, "indoctrinate" you, or worse yet, "proselytize" you? You would be offended, and rightly so. But the word "introduce" puts our work into the right context: it is about a relationship with Jesus. We are telling folks, "Yes, I've met Him; I know Him! He is an amazing, powerful, personal, rescuing, healing, resurrected, living God, and I am graced to know him personally. I know how great, kind, loving, forgiving, and powerful he is, and I'd like nothing better than to introduce you to him. I'll tell you all about him!" BUT: we don't convert people. We don't save people. JESUS does. So if I introduce you to him, I'm confident that you will find the same things about him to be true as I have. The choice is yours whether you accept him or not. So in my life, I'm going to make sure I've done the introductions. And so should you. This is your purpose in life! That's what we are doing together at West Valley Church, and what we will do. That's our church.

This simple statement also reflects the second part of the great commandment: to love people equally. *Because the way we introduce people to Jesus is by loving them.* Loving them enough to accept them where they are; to develop genuine friendship with them. To do whatever we can to meet their needs. Because they are not going to believe that Jesus is real until they see him and his character in us. And they won't see it until we are willing to love them and meet their needs in whatever ways we can. People have to know we care about them and accept them where they are, *before* they will accept what we believe. Does that make sense? You've got to know that is a fundamental shift in the way the church reaches out to people. You see, a few decades ago, for someone to become a Christian, first they needed to accept the

beliefs and basic tenets of our faith before they could expect to belong among believers. So we had crusades and revivals, we had debates, all to get people to make a decision. Once they made a decision, they were allowed to belong; they were welcomed into the church – they believed, so then they belonged. *Believing led to belonging*. But now, in our current culture, people no longer respond to that approach. They find it coercive. They respond the other way around. People won't believe until they see it and experience in the lives of believers themselves. If an unbeliever belongs, *then* he or she is willing to believe. So before, *believing led to belonging*. In this day and culture, *belonging leads to believing*. That's why it's so important for you, and for us as a church, to love people where they are, and be willing to do whatever we can to help them.

The next part of our statement simply says...

Equip People with a Faith that Works

This reflects the second part of the Great Commission: to teach people to grow in their faith. That's why the Bible says:

“And he (God) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13, esv)

As a church, we are to equip each other to better do our part so that we can *all* mature in our faith together. As each of us carries out our purpose, we will *all* grow into and obey everything Jesus tells us to and accomplish our purpose as a church. So we equip people with a faith that works.

Now notice that phrase, “equip people with a faith that works.” We chose those words for two reasons: first, because this faith we have in Christ really works, doesn't it? It is real and this life of faith really does do what God said it would. This faith makes a real difference in our day to day lives. It sustains us through the hard times and it guides us through the good times. But there's something else in that statement and it's this: if you have this faith, you will carry out the good works that you were created for. It's a faith that works *for* us, and it's also a faith that we put to work:

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:14-18, esv)

Do you see that? *If* we have faith, we work—we work to meet the needs of people. So this also reflects the second part of the Great Commandment—to love people equally.

SO if you are a part of this church, it is not acceptable for you to just warm a pew. Your purpose is not to get a spot on a pew to become form-fitted to your particular backside. You've got to get working for this great purpose. That's why, lastly, I want you to see that last phrase...

Live* as People with *Purpose

This is the challenge to live our lives on purpose; to live out what Jesus commissioned us and commanded us to do, the good work we were created in Christ to do: introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose. Pretty simple, but that's what we're here for.

Ways we do that: We are great at that! Over 80% volunteer in some way. Over 70 of us have made the trip to Guyana.

And we wanted to make sure it is very easy for you to remember. So we've simplified it to three words: **Love. Learn. Live.**

As you and I live out our mission in our community, people see this and they think of you. As we love, learn and live. As we introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose, and others see this image, they will think of us. So we have it on stickers, mugs, coffee tumblers, t-shirts, print, etc.

But listen: no amount of prayer, planning, purpose statements, strategy or stickers will make a stitch of difference if you and I don't add the meaning, the value of this. It is up to you and me as believers in Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to live out our mission in West Valley. Then, our community will know who we are, what this logo means. They will appreciate Love. Learn. Live. That's it! We love God and love people enough to introduce them to Jesus. We learn and grow together and teach others to grow in their faith; we'll learn by equipping people with a faith that works so we can grow together. And we will live out this faith, on purpose, for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ. This is his mission; it's the agenda of Christ's Kingdom. Having a catchy design won't do a thing for us. It will be up to us—every one of us—to add meaning and value – that we are here in this community because we are making a positive difference, living as people with purpose! No matter where you are or what your circumstances might be. Can you see that we are here not just to make a difference in peoples' lives in this life; we are here to make an eternal difference by helping others! So your giving IS an investment in eternity!

Pray

