

Here For Good 3.0

Here For Christ

Luke 9:57-62

1. Willing to sacrifice for Jesus.
- 2 Corinthians 8:9, Luke 9:23; Romans 12:1

2. Available to serve Jesus.

3. Determined to be single-minded for Jesus.

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West Valley Church
Michael W. O'Neill
9/11/20

Here For Good 3.0: Here for Christ¹

On February 9th in 2020 together we launched something called “Here for Good.” Those two and a half years ago we began talking and praying about taking a giant leap of faith that would propel our church forward and transform us in ways that will carry us into the next generation of our church family. That was the day that we began the three-year journey of HERE FOR GOOD – an incredibly significant work. One day we will look back and see that Here For Good started a major shift in the growth, ministry, and life of West Valley Church. That was the first step in what is moving West Valley Church into a position of growth and influence for Christ in this community to a degree that we’ve never had before. I believe what we started that day is *vital* for the future health of our church and our ability to impact West Valley – and beyond – with the Gospel.

In fact, let’s look again at that first video we made to kick off Here For Good – our three-year generosity effort.

As you heard, we began with a goal of raising one million, six hundred thousand dollars. At that time our projection was that \$1.1 million would pay off our what was left of a \$2.5 million dollar debt the church had been carrying for twenty years. That debt was costing our church nearly \$100,000 each year in our budget. That was money that was going to profit the bank that could be put to use by us for ministry. Paying off that debt meant we could actually invest in our ministry to our own church and better equip ourselves to grow in Christ and to live out the Gospel in our church and community.

We could also more fully invest in our outreach efforts in order to be even *more* effective reaching unchurched people in West Valley through our vision of being multi-generational, multi-cultural, and multi-site.

Not only that, reaching our goal would allow us to update our church facility. We had hoped to raise another \$500,000 for that. Our amazing facility is an incredible gift given to us from previous generations – some of you here helped make this place happen. But let’s be honest: some parts of this building are nearly fifty years old (including this room we are sitting in)! Before the pandemic, every week we used every corner of our building in every way; we opened it up to our community in ways that have met needs and built amazing partner relationships with people and other ministries. Then, of course, came the pandemic. But thank God, we’ve weathered and survived it and now our building is getting used more and more as a way to serve our community. We’re not at pre-pandemic levels yet, but we are growing more and more.

¹ Based on a sermon by Rule Digal, “Commitment to Christ.”

Of course, we all use this building every week for worship, for youth and children's ministries, and for adult discipleship and small group opportunities. But, this great facility is in *desperate* need of being updated. And we need to do that so that we can be even better at welcoming new folks, and so we can put this place to even better use for this generation in our church and *the next generations to come* – just like we've been able to do, thanks to previous generations.

You know the story of our progress with Here For Good, but let me tell it again:

Remember that after we began talking about Here For Good on a Sunday just like this, we all then spent six weeks praying and thinking about what we would each commit to give over the next three years to Here For Good above our regular giving. Our first Sunday to kick off our giving was going to be at the end of March. And then the pandemic hit. We began pre-recording services because we didn't have the capability to do streaming services yet, and we could not meet together. Yet despite that, we decided to start our Here For Good giving at the beginning of May – even though we still weren't meeting together. So we did. We all began giving remotely. Some gave electronically, some did automatic giving, some mailed their giving in, and some dropped it off at the church. For over six months we couldn't meet together, so we continued pre-recorded services and building our streaming capabilities, which we launched later that summer. And by the way, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Nathan Durnan, Mike Broom, and others on their team that literally built from the ground up our live stream video studio and services, and they continue to work hard every week so that we can have an extremely high-quality online worship service. In fact, it might be too good – some of our church family are still only joining us online, even though we've been back open for almost a year now!

Then the miracle: despite a pandemic, despite not being in person for six months (and then when we were open, we were *still* limited in how many could be together), despite all of that, we all gave to Here For Good and in ONE YEAR WE PAID OFF OUR MILLION DOLLAR MORTGAGE!!! In fact, we paid it off so fast, that it didn't take the million dollars that we predicted; we saved so much on interest that it actually only took a little over \$900,000.

Since then your Leadership Team has begun investing those mortgage to ministry dollars into our current ministries, and are praying about investments into new areas that will increase our ministry and outreach effectiveness. And we've hired an architect and have put together a renovation team that has begun looking deeply into the areas that need renovation and what we think we can afford to do, depending on how well we do in giving to Here For Good. We have just begun the design phase with the architect, which I'll update you about later in this sermon series that we're calling Here For Good 3.0.

So now here we are on the home stretch of Here For Good. We will conclude our giving with a huge celebration next May. In this series we want to revisit the original vision and encourage all of us to continue in our commitment to give. Some of us, like Shelly and I, have been able to already meet our original pledge, so we are continuing to give even beyond we intend to give all the way through to the end. Some of you need to think about following our example. And some of you have become a part of this church since this all started and haven't yet prayed about joining us yet. I don't want you to miss out on the excitement! So I want to encourage you to listen to these services and messages and pray

about whether or not God wants you to make some kind of faith commitment to give over these remaining nine months. Of course, that is entirely between you and God, but I think by the time we are done with this series, you *won't* want to be left out!

I've got to tell you, over twelve years ago Shelly and I were interviewing with this church about coming here to be the pastor. We hadn't even finished praying about it or answered the call yet, but *even then*, I knew that one of the major priorities for this church would be to eliminate the debt and renovate these older spaces. We've done the first part – now we need to finish the second part! That time is now! We need to give, not out of duty or requirement, but out of love for our church and our community. I think the Bible means it in Romans 13:8 when it says:

“Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law.” (Romans 13:8)

There are many ways we can show love to each other and our neighbor, but surely making this place a welcoming, hospitable space is a big one! Making our foyer restrooms handicap accessible. Making our Worship Center more comfortable and beautiful. Making our open spaces and children’s areas more secure and safe...all of these are areas that the renovation team is exploring with the architect.

Folks, we are ready. We are ready to finish our efforts and even exceed our goal of giving in order to do the most we can to renovate this church. We'll talk more about this as we go through this series. All of this springs from our commitment as a church to do what God has called us here to do. I think you can see that, if we are going to accomplish this, it will mean first and foremost that we are...

Here for Christ.

We *must* be committed to Christ. Every one of us is going to be challenged to pray about what God might ask us to do for the sake of his mission here at West Valley Church, whether it is to continue to give or for you to *start* giving to Here For Good. What God is going to ask of us is going to be challenging for every one of us in our own way. It will be different for each one of us. God's going to ask us to trust him and be obedient to him, to step out in significant, sacrificial ways, and we're going to be faced with the decision to obey, or not. In order to be ready to be obedient, we must each be more deeply committed to Christ; we must be *Here For Christ*.

Please know that **Here For Good** is not about fundraising for an organization; if that was what this was about, then we'd be trying to manipulate you or to strong-arm you into giving. But that is *not* what this is about. **Here For Good** *is about each of us committing ourselves to Christ and his mission through this church, prayerfully asking him what he wants us to do, then being obedient to what he asks. (repeat)*

I'm just telling you though, when Jesus asks us to step out in faith, it is usually in significant ways.

I want us to see what that means by having us look today at a short passage that tells the story of Jesus' encounter with three different dudes. Each one of them were confronted

with the cost of following Jesus. It's found in Luke 9:57-62, and I'd like to read it to you. I'd also like to ask you if you'd focus your attention on the passage and help me honor God's Word by standing as I read it:

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62, niv)

Thank you for standing – you can be seated.

I'll tell you in advance that we are going to learn what we should do by seeing what *not* to do. These three guys are *not* going to give us a positive example. But that's why they are in this passage – each of them become a teachable moment for us. Let me first give you some background and put this passage into some context. At this point in time, the popularity of Jesus had spread throughout Palestine. Because of that, there were many people who were attracted to follow Jesus because He had performed great miracles. He had enabled the blind to see, the lame to walk, healed the sick, and cast out demons. There were thousands who had heard and saw Him multiply the 5 loaves and 2 fishes into enough food to feed the 5000 men *plus* the women and children. Now, I'm betting you, many people who had experienced these things had thought, "If Jesus can do all these things then surely, if I follow Him, He can meet all *my* needs. I don't want to miss this great chance for myself."

The three guys in our passage really represent *those* people. They *did* come and express their desire to follow Jesus. But amazingly, Jesus did not welcome them. In fact He turned them away. Why? Was he trying to keep people from following him? No, of course not. Of course he wanted as many people who wanted to, to be his followers – including us. But Jesus wanted something more important than gathering followers: He wanted those who followed him to be committed – entirely. Apparently, whether or not we are followers of Christ has *a lot* to do with our own level of commitment to him. That hasn't changed to this day; Jesus *still* requires that same kind of commitment from those who would follow Him.

So let's look carefully at three important points in committing our lives to Jesus, if we are going to be *Here For Christ*. Take out your church app or journal and start filling in these blanks and writing down what you want to remember from this message today; whatever God is telling you from his Word.

I want us to start with the first person that encountered Jesus in this passage, and see that Jesus is saying that if we are going to be *Here For Christ* it means we must be...

1. Willing to *sacrifice* for Jesus.

In verse 57 the first man said to Jesus: "I will follow you wherever you go." That was a really bold statement, but did he mean exactly what he said? Would he really be willing to follow Jesus anywhere? Did he have any idea where Jesus would be going and what might be involved in his journey? Did he think of the consequences of following the teacher? Or, maybe, he was just thinking about the glory of being a follower of this miracle-working teacher; maybe he was thinking how impressive it would be to be at a dinner party, and be able to drop that name: "Oh, by the way, did I tell you I'm a follower of the next ruler of the world? Yep, I know Jesus personally."

Whatever it was, he wasn't as committed as he claimed, because Jesus replied to the man by telling him that to follow Him "*wherever* He's going" was not going to be an easy road. Jesus did not want the man to think of the glory of being His follower; he wanted the man to know and realize that there is a price to pay for following Jesus. Jesus is reminding this man that He is not one of the "high-flying" Rabbis of Israel who take a private jet from village to village, staying in the best hotels, and collecting nice offerings from the crowds that come to hear them. No sir. The ministry of Jesus is truly a faith ministry – it means going places and doing things while totally relying on God to take care of you and supply your needs and provide what will be required.

So remember Jesus' reply to the first man's request: "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head." Jesus is saying here that even very small creatures have a relatively comfortable life compared to His life. He was asking the man, "If you really want to follow Me, are you willing to live and sacrifice the way I do?" There is no such thing as cozy, comfortable discipleship, my friend.

When Jesus stepped out of His throne in glory to come to the earth and live and die for us, Jesus left behind all that He had. Jesus exchanged wealth for poverty – out of a praise-filled paradise palace into a crude cave for cattle. Jesus exchanged ruler-ship for servant-hood. The Bible tells us this:

"You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus was: though he was so very rich, yet to help you he became so very poor, so that by being poor he could make you rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9, tlb)

So when Jesus was calling people to follow Him, He did not offer them earthly comfort and security. Actually, when He came to earth, He had *no* earthly wealth or security. All he had was loaned to him by those who loved Him. He borrowed a donkey to ride into Jerusalem. He was even buried in a borrowed tomb!

I want you to know, though, that I'm not saying that if we follow Jesus, we won't be taken care of or that we won't have what we need. You'll have *everything* you'll need. But keep in mind, it may not be the things our culture values, like wealth or power or comfort. You *will probably* have those things, but those are *blessings*, not entitlements. And whatever material possession you and I have are only the *means* to living out our Christian lives; they are not an end in themselves. It's not the security of material possessions, or money, or homes that we are after. Instead it's the security of God's faithfulness in everything we need so we can be generous in every way, and then the certainty that we have a life beyond this one, that no one and nothing can take away. This last week Wanda Collins passed away.

Right now, Vicki Seal is on hospice at the Cottage in the Meadow. Both of those women would tell you if they could that their true riches are in heaven, not in this life.

The sad thing is that many people who call themselves Christians, or even followers of Jesus, have the same mentality with the first man here. They only want the comfort and the glory of being a follower of Jesus. When they begin to feel like following Jesus doesn't guarantee them material gain, they bail out. When they have to step out of their comfort, they chafe. And when something is asked *from* them—like to give of their time or in the case of **Here For Good**, they are asked to give their money, they start backing off. Friends, I want you to hear me say this, and I mean this – regardless of how greatly you have decided to give for **Here For Good**, or if you are praying about starting to give to Here For Good for these last nine months, please hear this: if you're not willing to sacrifice for Jesus, you're not fit for Him. Jesus left no confusion:

“Then (Jesus) said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”” (Luke 9:23, niv)

Someone once said, “The cross is not only our symbol of salvation; it is also to be the pattern for our lives.” Whenever Jesus asks us to do something, and we don't want to do it, that's a crossing of the wills; we need to lay down our lives, pick up Jesus' cross and follow him – not just follow him as long as it's comfortable. That's why we're told in the Bible,

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy—the kind he can accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?” (Romans 12:1, tlb)

Jesus has given everything for us; the least we can do is to give generously to him. We need to be willing to sacrifice for Jesus; we also need to be...

2. Available to *serve* Jesus.

In verse 59 we find our second man in the story. This person was busy doing something else and so was not available to do what Jesus asked him to do. When Jesus invited the man to follow him, he said: “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Now this sounds like a very noble and reasonable excuse. Maybe he's hoping to hear a considerate response from Jesus, but instead the Lord said: “Let the dead bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

What? That sounds like Jesus was being cruel, unkind, and insensitive to the needs of this man. It might *sound* like it, but you and I know that Jesus isn't like that, so obviously something else is going on. You know that the Word of God shows us that Jesus is always the most compassionate and concerned toward those who were distressed. To be non-compassionate is not his character, so we need to make sure we understand what's going on.

One important thing I want you to notice: this man was physically there with Jesus, right? That means he was *not* at his own home. So here's what that tells us: in that culture, that meant that his father was probably not dead yet, because if his father *had* already died, he

would not have been there with Jesus was – he would've been at home. The Jewish custom/tradition was *always* to bury someone on the very same day that he died.

We also know that at that time and in that culture, when someone died, especially if it was the father of a family, there was a very clear process that had to happen. First, the person was buried in a tomb or cave, and sealed in. One year *after* the initial burial, once the flesh had finished decomposing and was gone, there was nothing left but bones. At that point they would retrieve the bones, and then the son would have placed his father's bones in a special box, called an ossuary, and that box would be set into the wall of a tomb. So everyone, including Jesus, knew what this man was saying. What this second prospective disciple was *really* saying was this: "Lord, please wait until my father dies and is buried and then reburied, and then *after that*, I will follow you. I'll follow you some time in the future after my parents die and I've gone through the long process of burial for them, and oh, by the way, that will be after I've inherited their money." This guy figured he could wait, collect his money, and that Jesus could just wait around for a couple years for the guy to start following Jesus. But the reply of Jesus was a stern rebuke of the man's lack of commitment. This guy wasn't available to Jesus. He wanted to follow Jesus when it was more convenient for him, but Jesus would have none of that.

How many times are we guilty of being unavailable to God and His work because we want to do something else? You know it doesn't even have to be the big things; how many times do we neglect our daily time with God because we have to hurry to accomplish other things?

Don't allow yourself to become so busy that you have no time left for the things of God.

Friends, no one can claim to have commitment unless she or he makes themselves available. Our commitment to God requires the availability of *all* we have to Him and His work.

Finally, from the third person in that passage that encountered Jesus, we learn that we need to be...

3. Determined to be *single-minded* for Jesus.

The third man came to Jesus and made what seems like a reasonable request: he wanted to go back to his home first and say goodbye to everyone there. But in verse 62, Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." Those listening would've totally understood what Jesus meant by this. They lived in an agrarian society. That means that most people were farmers. If a farmer wants to plow a straight line, he must concentrate fully on controlling the direction of the plow. He must keep his eyes looking in front and nowhere else, otherwise he will start to drift off course. Good plowing requires single-mindedness.

I don't know about you, but when I mow my lawn, I don't do laps. I feel like if you do laps, you end up with all these lines and then eventually ruts that just spiral in. I like to mow in straight lines, and I do it in a different direction each time so that the grass doesn't start growing in patterns. I know, I'm probably a little OCD about that; is anyone else? I've found that to start, I have to mow a straight line across a wide area, and the best way to do

that is not to look at my mower, but to find a fixed point where I want to end up (like a fence post), and then walk straight toward it. Then I get a straight line, and then mow on either side of that. It works the same way when plowing a field – especially when you were doing it with oxen and a plow. Good plowing requires single-mindedness.

In the same way, our commitment to the Lord must be single-minded.

Jesus knew that this guy's heart was divided, and his lack of attention would seriously affect his commitment in Christ's kingdom. He would have been thinking about what he would lose by following Jesus. The guy wanted to give his farewells, but they were more than simply saying goodbye. Many ancient customs called for a prolonged goodbye filled with festive parties. It is likely that this man had intended to have several farewell parties from both family and friends. This could take days or even weeks before it was finished. *Then* he would follow Jesus.

The sad thing is, we are often like this man because we are afraid of what we will lose by following Jesus. We are hesitant to leave our comfort zones to go out to wherever God may lead us. We lack the faith to fully trust God with our whole life. We are afraid to take the risk of single-minded commitment. We're afraid to be generous because we want to keep hanging on to money.

But try to take a careful look at everything that we gain by following Jesus: we gain His presence, His peace, and His power. We gain a place in his Kingdom purposes. We gain his promises that he will provide everything we need. We need to follow and not look back. Some people in the Bible *did* look back when God had called them forward. Lot's wife was one, Judas Iscariot was one, and Demas was one who looked back. No good thing is to be remembered about them.

So these three men in our Scripture today give us the opposite of what we need to do: one made it all about himself; he wasn't willing to sacrifice. The other wanted it to put it off for a year or more – he wasn't willing to serve, and the other wanted to put it off for a few days or weeks – he wasn't single-minded. Jesus said they were not worthy of the Kingdom of God.

Are you worthy of God's kingdom? Are you willing to sacrifice for the Lord? Can God count on your availability for Him and His work? Can you be single-minded for Christ? It's all up to you. He won't force you. But neither will He accept half-hearted commitments.

Prayer

Two years ago Eva Lounsbury shared her testimony of how she was trusting God even when she was unemployed at the time. She prayed and God told her an amount to give to Here For Good – even though she wasn't getting a paycheck! This was her testimony.

Here's the cool thing about Eva's story: she was able to find some work for a little while in order to provide income, but now she has a great job working at the Union Gospel Mission that utilizes her gifts and talents so well, and because of that she ministers to people who have deep needs. AND she's able to meet her pledged commitment to Here For Good at the same time! How cool is that!? Eva knows what it means to be *Here For Christ*.

Pray about what God is asking you to do to step out for him. One tangible way to do that is through giving to Here For Good. Pray about it. See what he says.

In the meantime, all of the resources that we've used over the last two years are available out on the table in the foyer. Those will help you to pray about what you might want to commit to do. Pick up that material, read it, and begin praying about what God is asking you to do in order to be Here for Christ – not like these three dudes.

Pastor Jason:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased . . . Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:15-16, 20-21, niv)