

Here For Good 3.0
Here For Each Other
1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1. The Church is a God community.

- 2 Timothy 2:13; 1 Peter 2:10

2. The Church is a local community.

- 1 John 4:20; John 13:35

3. The Church is a sanctified community.

- Galatians 2:20

4. The Church is a together community.

- Ephesians 4:11-13

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church
Michael W. O'Neill
9/25/2022

Here For Good: Here for Each Other

We are in a sermon series this fall called “Here For Good 3.0.” That’s because we are in the final year of our three-year effort to raise at least \$1.6 million dollars, and part of that was to get our church out of a debt that we had carried for over 20 years. Two years ago that debt was over a million dollars. And within one year, by the provision of God and your generosity, we paid that debt off! And we saved the church over a quarter million dollars in interest over what would have been the remainder of the loan. Now we are all giving generously above our regular giving to finish our goal so we can renovate spaces that desperately need it.

After we paid off the mortgage in July of 2021, we created a video to update everyone of what’s going on. I think it would be great if we watched that again.

I think we can all agree that we have been on an incredibly significant journey, and we are just nine months away from celebrating our completion. One day we will look back on this time and see that this was the start of a major shift in the growth, ministry, and life of West Valley Church, one that will propel West Valley Church into a position of growth and influence for Christ in this community to a degree that we’ve never had before. We believe what we’re in is *vital* for the future of our church and our ability to impact West Valley and beyond with the Gospel.

We’ve freed up money that was in our annual budget for mortgage, moving it to ministry. Your leadership team is prayerfully investing those dollars for greater ministry impact to our community as well as within our church.

But we’re not done; we have an amazing facility that is an incredible gift given to us from those who were here before many of us – some of you who helped make this place happen are here today! How many of you were a part of this church when this Worship Center was built in the 1970s? How many of you were a part of this church when these new additions were created in the late 1990s? We want to thank you! We are grateful for this amazing facility, but here we are twenty years later, and some parts of this building are nearly fifty years old (including this room we are sitting in)! We need to renovate!

After we were able to pay off the mortgage, your leadership team interviewed and hired a church architect to begin the process of determining what we could renovate with the resources we hope to have, if everyone is able to fulfill their pledge. Then, last September the Leadership Team appointed the Renovation Team, chaired by Tom Froula and Steven Stillely. I told you this last week, but I’ll just say it again. The Renovation Team consists of a group of eight people from our church plus the principle architect who began having monthly meetings since last October to determine both priorities as well as what we can afford. They started out by sending out detailed questionnaires to 75 ministry leaders in

our church in order to hear from them what they felt needed to be updated in all the areas of the building in which they serve. Then the team reviewed and sifted through those pages and pages of responses in order to help the architect begin looking at spaces. The team also began researching the potential costs of the needs in those areas in order to help the Leadership Team prioritize the spaces that we could make the most impact with whatever dollars finally come in when we finish in May.

The Renovation Team is in constant communication with the Leadership Team so that the best decisions can be made. At the end of this series next month, we will take time to give you as detailed information as we can give you by then.

Now here we are, and every week we use every corner of our building in every way for our ministries, plus since the pandemic we've even been able to re-open our facility to our community in ways that have met needs and built amazing partner relationships with people and organizations, and we've seen people become part of our church family because of it. But, this great facility is in desperate need of being updated. We must do so, in order to be *even better* at welcoming new folks. We want to be able to use this place in even greater ways for *this* generation in our church and for the generations to come – just like we've been able to do, thanks to previous generations.

That's why we are in this series called "Here For Good 3.0" – to help us as we're on the home stretch to reach our goals and be able to renovate as much as possible in our facility.

We started this series by learning that no matter what, we need to be "Here for Christ" with our lives. We all must be deeply committed to Christ, and then he will lead each of us to give to whatever degree he expects each of us to. Then last week we were reminded how God expects us to be here for our community in order to carry out the mission Christ has given us – seeking the lost so that they can be saved, serving them, and sacrificing for them. Not just in our own personal lives, but together as a church; that's why it's so important to get involved in the ministries of our church and to give toward Here For Good.

Now today we want to see that to be **Here For Good** means not only to be *Here for Christ* and *Here for our community*, but we are also...

Here for Each Other.

If we are *Here for Christ and for our community*, then Christ expects us as his church to be *Here for Each Other*, and the Bible talks *a lot* about this. So as we look at this today, I think you will see how **Here For Good** will help us be *Here for Each Other*.

First of all, I think it's worth reminding us that the church is *not* a building. We call this building the church, but the Bible *never* uses the word that way. The Bible uses several metaphors for the church, but whenever it actually uses the word "church," it is the Greek word "ekklesia." That was a common word, normally used in public politics to describe an assembly of people. But the Bible takes it a step further and it means literally, "God's people gathered out together."

The Bible does not refer to church as a building; it means *people gathered together and going out into the world*. The Church is not a building, it's a community. So while we are and

will be identified AT our beautiful building, we are not to be identified AS a beautiful building. This building is a tool – a facility – that helps facilitate our ministries. This building is not a sacred place; it is a place where sacred things happen. And so we want to make sure it is as beautiful and effective as possible in helping those sacred things happen! And those things happen when we as Christians are here for each other.

We are to be identified AS a community of believers in Jesus. And that means that we look and act differently than any other gathering of people.

So what is the Church supposed to look like?

It looks like a group of people who love God and love each other; people who are seeking to put the needs of each other ahead of their own. They are servants. They watch out for one another, they care for one another, they encourage one another, and they share generously together.

That's exactly what we are to be. Now I realize that in this church you can't get to know everyone equally, and that's okay—God doesn't expect that. But you can get to know *some people*. You can connect with a few people and make it your goal to build each other up; to write them a note when they are missing, to say a word of encouragement when they're down, to take them out to eat when they are lonely. That's why small groups are so very important; the way that we are the "ekklesia" in intentional ways during the week is in our small groups. Then we all come together as the "ekklesia" in celebration and worship on Sunday. God is calling us together to be something unique – something special. He is calling us into an uncommon unity, a community.

You can find that everywhere in the Bible, and today we are going to look specifically in one passage, just three verses. Would you please stand with me as I read, and look at what it says in 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and from our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:1-3, niv)

Thank you; you can be seated.

In verse 2 Paul gives us a four-part description of the church: To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-- their Lord and ours...

There are four things about the church—about us—that I want us to see, beginning with:

1. The church is a *God* community.

Paul wrote this letter to “the church of God.” Now, what does that mean? It means the church is not great because *you* belong to it (as much as I think you are a great group of people and I love spending time with you!). I tell everyone all the time: “We have a lot of really great people in our church.” But we are not a great church because of the people who attend. God is not impressed by our level of education, our income, our great

personalities, or how good looking you are – and you *are* – you should see what I get to see every Sunday! Our church is valuable because *it is God's*; it belongs to God. It's His idea. He loves the church. He calls the church His Bride. The sad thing is many Christians don't feel the way God does about the church. Even though God created the church and loves the church, there are many Christians who seem to want nothing to do with her.

Research on church attendance is in flux right now because we are still getting out of our pre-pandemic behaviors. It's interesting that in the last month, 14% of Christians have attended both in person and online. Thirteen percent only attend in person, and 16% only attend online. I am so incredibly grateful that we have the ability to stream worship services, and I know for many of you who attend online, it has been a literal life-saver. I will tell you that, if it is possible for you to attend in person, I would strongly encourage it. You are missing out on a wonderful spiritual dynamic of being in the same room with God's people. But the sad news is that 28% of those who were regular church attenders before covid *have not attended in person or watched an online worship service even once since the outbreak.*¹ That seems so tragic. I know they probably have a lot of reasons; I know how busy our lives are, especially when you have kids who are involved in so many things. But imagine how painful it must be for God; to know that His children – the ones He sent His Son to die for – they just don't like being with His bride. These people will say that they are all for *Jesus*, but they just don't seem to like His bride.

How does that make sense? I don't know about you, but if you don't like my wife, you're not going like me either! You can't separate the two of us. When you say something that hurts her, it hurts me.

When we got married, we made a commitment to put the needs of one another ahead of our own. We entered a covenant of self-sacrificial love. I say this at every wedding I perform, but marriage is not a contract. A contract says, "As long as you hold up your end of the bargain, I'll be faithful to you. The moment you don't do your part, I don't have to either." But marriage is a *covenant*, and a covenant says, "I don't care what you do or don't do—I will always remain faithful to you."

God has made a covenant with the church; it is not a contract. That's why the Bible says:

"If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is."
(2 Timothy 2:13, nlt)

So the question is, are we being true to our covenant with God and toward each other?

The incredible thing is that, even though I'm far from perfect, and nobody knows that better than Shelly, that makes no difference to her – it might annoy her from time to time, but my wife does not love me because I am perfect. It took about five seconds after saying "I do" for her to realize that wasn't true. Actually, she knew it long before that and she *still* said, "I do"! But despite the fact that I am imperfect, she continues to love me. That's called *grace*!

God is the same way toward the church. The church is special not because of who we are but because of Who we belong to, and because of the covenant He made to us! We belong to

¹ <https://igniteamerica.com/certified-stats/are-regular-church-attenders-still-attending/>

God! There are a lot of unflattering things you can say about the church, and many of them aren't wrong. But remember Who she belongs to – remember Who loves her – remember Who died for her – remember Who created her.

Is the church perfect? Of course not! Sometimes people say, "I don't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites." The answer to that is, "Full? It's not full! There is always room for one more!" Of course we're not perfect; that's why we need God! As long as I am a pastor, there will always be at least one church in town with a saved sinner in the pulpit. No, the church is not perfect, but it IS God's. He created it, He loves it. The church does not rise and fall with us. It's a God-community. That's why the Bible reminds us:

"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have mercy." (1 Peter 2:10, niv)

That means that our success doesn't come because of our ideas or our efforts; we are successful because we follow the Holy Spirit's leading, and we obey what he wants us to do – even if it is uncomfortable for us. And God called us to sacrifice for **Here For Good** in order to get his church out of being hostage to the bank, and to get us investing that money in ministry where it belongs, which we did! Now he is calling us to keep this facility as attractive and functional as we can to facilitate for his use and glory.

The second thing that Paul tells us is that...

2. The church is a *local* community.

Paul writes to "the church of God IN CORINTH." Corinth was a city where the church was located. This is the primary way the word "church" – "ekklesia" – is used in the New Testament: it is almost always used to describe a *local* gathering of believers in a local, geographical place.

When God created the Church, He gave the Church an address. He created the church to be something we can see, touch and experience. When Jesus rose from the dead, the Bible says that he ascended into heaven, and He remains there, praying for his church and preparing for His return. He sent us His Spirit to live in us and work through us.

But the physical presence of God, in the Person of Jesus, is no longer here. That's why God created the Church—the Church is now Christ's physical presence in West Valley. God is Spirit, so He gathered together a group of His people to be His physical presence. The church gathered (that's us) reminds West Valley that God is real, that He's alive, that He's active, and that He's working among His people. The church is a visual aid to remind us that God is here.

A few times when I've talked to people about church, I've heard people say, "I don't belong to the local church, I belong to the invisible church." Meaning "I am a Christian, I am part of the universal body of Christ, but I won't commit to a local church. I see no value plugging into the local community of faith." To which I say, "Okay. When you need someone to pray for you, who prays for you? Invisible people praying invisible prayers? When you get sick who visits you – invisible people? When you need someone to bring in food or help you fix your house or car, or to cry with you when you are grieving or sit with you when you are

lonely, I assume you have invisible people with invisible food and invisible help who do that for you?" It's easy to commit to something invisible, it's easy to make a commitment when nothing will be required of me. No one to keep you accountable, no one to ask you how you are doing, no one to say, "You're not living consistently with what you believe." No one to say, "We need you to give to support the great ministry of this church and keep it going." Invisible is a *comfortable* commitment, isn't it? But if we learned anything so far, it's that following Jesus is *not* comfortable. Following Jesus is not for the lazy couch slouchers. Have you ever noticed that God isn't satisfied with those types of commitment? Once we commit to Him, He's not content with us just talking about it. He is not impressed by our words! He wants to *see* your commitment, and the way we show it is how we love each other.

It is easy to *say*, "I love you" – what God wants is to see is love in action. God wants to take our faith to the next level. So how does He help you do that? He places you in an environment where you can be tested. Guess where that is? He plugs you into a local community filled with imperfect people, people with rough edges and baggage. And once He drops you right in the middle, He will ask you to grow and not just stand around. He will ask you to give of your time, your talents, and your compassion. And now, with **Here For Good**, God is asking you to commit financially in a significant commitment to *your* local church. God is always taking our faith to the next level. Our love must be visible. That's why we're told:

"For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:20, niv)

God is not impressed by our words, instead He applauds our action. He's looking for evidence. That's why the church exists. It is a physical, tangible place where your commitment to Christ becomes evident. It is a place where faith becomes visible, and we live out what we say we believe. If the world sees us, a bunch of imperfect people, caring for each other, supporting each other, sacrificing our money for each other, praying for each other, loving each other in spite of all our faults, then the world will know that Jesus is real. That's why He said:

"Everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another." (John 13:35, niv)

The way we love each other in our local church is the singular proof.

Then Paul says in verse 2, "to those *sanctified* in Christ Jesus and called to be holy."

3. The church is a *sanctified* community.

Let me explain what that means. I said this before, the church is called the Bride of Christ. Husbands, how did you look at your bride when she was coming down the aisle? Did you focus in on the one hair that was out of place, or the one area of her makeup that was uneven? No, you didn't see her imperfections – you saw all the reasons why you fell in love! You saw her beauty inside and out. Hopefully you *still* do!

When God looks at the Church, He doesn't see her flaws. He sees all the reasons He loves her. He sees a perfect reflection of His Son, Jesus Christ. And guess what: God looks at you

personally the same way He looks at the church! When God looks at you... He sees His Son, Jesus Christ, who is holy.

Look at it this way: the Apostle Paul said:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”
(Galatians 2:20, niv)

Listen to those last four words: CHRIST LIVES IN ME... That is where Christ is, right now! He is in you, through His Spirit. He is in His church. And more importantly, you are in him, the church is in him.

When God looks at you, He sees His Son in you. When Jesus’ died for your sins, His character covered you. Your life is hidden in Christ. Then, when you surrendered yourself to Him, His Holy Spirit moved into your life, and as a result you have been “sanctified,” or made holy in the eyes of God. The Holy Spirit is at work in you to shape your character and nature – your actions – to be just like Christ. That’s when God sanctifies you, He set you apart. To be sanctified means to be set apart.

But at the same time, when God sees you, He sees a work in progress. Just as my wife sees me! She tries not to focus on my mistakes though she is not content with them. If I stayed the same way I was when we got married our marriage would have been in trouble a long time ago. Needless to say I had some rough edges that needed to be worked out. Good thing those are all gone now...Nope! I grew and I am growing because her love looks past my flaws.

God sees our church the same way: we are a work in progress. *We have to live out what God has worked in. (repeat)* As Paul says, we are “called to be holy.” We must show on the outside what God has done and is doing on the inside. Our task is to remember Who’s we are! We are set apart by Him and for Him.

Russell Christoff is not a familiar name. He was an actor and relatively unknown model. His only body of work that you might recognize was a small picture found way back in the 1980’s on jars of Taster’s Choice instant coffee. He was the guy smelling the aroma of instant coffee.

In 1986 he posed for those photos and was given \$250. He was promised that if the photos were used, the company would pay him \$2,500. But he never got paid. For 15 years his face sold their product, and the odd thing was – he never recognized himself! For 15 years he never realized it was *his* picture on the front of those coffee jars—he didn’t even drink instant coffee! But one day, as he walked down the grocery aisle, he looked and saw his mouth! Once he recognized himself, he did what any true American would do – he called his attorney. And in 2002, Tasters Choice settled with him for a sum of \$15.6 million dollars.

It pays to recognize yourself! Well, listen: Christian, *recognize yourself*. The excitement of living the Christian life comes from realizing our full identity. We are sanctified in Christ – made holy, set apart for God’s Kingdom! *And* we are a work in progress. The church is set apart by Him and for Him to love each other and love the world in the power of the Spirit, and that’s unlike *anything* the world can offer.

And the more resources we have for ministry here at West Valley Church, the better we can grow in relationship to each other and to Christ.

The next idea is found at the end of verse 2: “together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-- their Lord and ours.”

4. The church is a *together* community.

We are in this TOGETHER. Would you stand again; I want you to hear what the Bible says in another place about the church being a together community:

“You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness. But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. . . It was he who "gave gifts to people"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith (*repeat 2x*) and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature.” (Ephesians 4:11-13, tmt)

We are in this to grow together! Thank you.

We have this amazing facility to worship together in, to share meals together in (and to have them cooked here by our wonderful cooks!), we have this facility to fellowship in, to enjoy conversation over a cup of coffee, to play volleyball and basketball in. We have this facility with spaces designed specifically for our little ones to grow in and be safe, for our youth to gather and build relationships, for adults to meet in and pray together in and learn together. In every way this facility helps us to be together; but it could do so even *better* if it were updated. For instance, fifty years ago, were buildings concerned with being handicap accessible? No! So we have restrooms in the foyer that a person in a wheelchair can't even get in to. And for those of you who are caregivers to folks of the opposite gender, or for those of you who have little ones, wouldn't it be great if we had a family restroom so you could assist your loved one?

Do you think safety concerns for children in public spaces have changed in the last 50 years? Even in the last ten years! So we must look at ways to create safer spaces for our little ones. And do you think technology has changed in the last fifty years? This room was designed for a technology that no longer exists! We can renovate this room in order to maximize the usability of this space and give us more flexibility in current and future technology that will help us worship in person and online even better.

All of that, of course, will depend on how much we have given when Here For Good finishes up next May.

I'm so grateful that we have this amazing space to teach over 700 children each year about Jesus while they play soccer on our great fields. We have this amazing facility to provide homework club for the schoolchildren across the street, and to provide space for groups like the Union Gospel Mission, Love INC, Birthright, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Bible Study Fellowship, World Relief, the high school and the junior high school and community groups to have important meetings and fundraisers. We have all of this, because West Valley Church gathered together decades ago to make this happen for *us*. Now it is our turn to do this for each other and for the generations to come.

Let's pray.

You heard me say in that video earlier that, after the pandemic, we learned that there were three key strategic initiatives for our church to be healthy in order to reach our vision of being a multi-cultural, multi-generational, and multi-site church. We are investing those mortgage to ministry dollars in our mission and vision, but those three initiatives are essential. They are, again: Meaningful evangelism, missional prayer, and greater member care.

Last week we talked some about meaningful evangelism, but let me just summarize again what that means. Our church has a great reputation in our community – through all the things we do to serve them, they know we care. But we must create more opportunities for people to specifically respond to the Gospel. Your pastors and leadership team are keeping this priority in front of us with every ministry.

Missional Prayer is something we will talk about later in this series, but it simply means we must do more than pray for our own needs, as good as that is to do. We must pray for the effectiveness of our church in our community to reach people with the Gospel. The third initiative is greater member care. Let me explain that one, because it has everything to do with being here for each other. Most of you remember Pastor Arden. He was our calling pastor, and we all loved him – he would visit folks in the hospital and in care facilities. He was in his nineties. But right after the pandemic started, Pastor Arden died of what was most likely the results of Covid. And we were all shut down because of Covid. Now before we were shut down, we also relied on our small groups to help care for each other; if someone was struggling or ill, the small group would know right away and begin caring for that person, and let the pastoral staff know. Then if that didn't work, we used the connection books; if someone hadn't signed in for more than four weeks in a row, we would reach out to that person to see if they were okay. But then when we were shut down, we realized we needed a better system.

So we began praying about how to better care for our congregation. As we prayed about that, Pastor Roger came to me and shared that he was feeling a greater burden to care for our people. He had already been trained to be a leader in the Grief Recovery Method – an eight-week series for people who have experienced loss.

So Pastor Roger and I began to pray and discuss what that might mean. We met with the Leadership Team to discuss an additional change in Pastor Roger's roles. Pastor Roger has agreed, and has gone through the training to coordinate our "Congregational Care Ministry."

This is a very, very important step in the growth and health of our church, and I'd like to ask Pastor Roger to come and explain what this is about, and what he has been doing.

Pastor Roger

The Leadership Team has authorized the use of some of the Mortgage to Ministry dollars in order for Pastor Roger and his team to be trained and equipped.

This is a very exciting next step in the life, health, and growth of our church!

Let's pray over this.

I want to say this again: we are in the final nine months before we are finished with Here For Good giving. We've miraculously paid off our debt, and now we need to all work together to raise as much as we can in order to renovate these key areas of our facility in order to be able to effectively reach and minister to the generations to come. To accomplish this, it is going to require great faith and sacrifice on the part of *every one of us*. If you have already met your pledge, I'd encourage you to do what Shelly and I have done – continue to give as God provides. Did you know that there are at least seven of us who have met our pledges but are continuing to give. You should join us!

If you are new to the church and want to pray about how you can join us, we have all these resources out there on the table for you: the original book that we gave out that explains Here For Good in detail, and then the booklet that we produced as an update when we were halfway through our three years. And then if you want to join us, pick up one of these cards, pray about what God is leading you to give, and then fill this out and turn it in to us by either putting it in the offering bucket, giving it to a pastor or Leadership Team member, or drop it off in the mail or at the office, and we will add you to our growing team of givers who are committed to making West Valley Church Here For Good!

Pastor Jason – Hebrews 13:15-16, 20-21

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