

We Are the Church

Part Eight: Live as People with Purpose

*Matthew 22:37-40; Deuteronomy 6:4-5;
Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:25-37*

1. It is perfect.

- *1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 John 3:16, 4:7-12, 19*

2. It is without prejudice.

- *Philippians 2:4; Matthew 5-7*

3. It is practical.

- *1 John 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:8*

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West Valley Church
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We Are the Church, Part 8
Live as People with Purpose

I recently saw an essay called "What is a Dog?", and it was written by an anonymous woman. She said this:

Dogs are men in little fur coats.

Dogs lie around all day, sprawled on the most comfortable piece of furniture in the house.

They can hear a package of food opening a half a block away, but don't hear you when you are in the same room.

They can look dumb and happy all at the same time.

They growl when they are not happy.

When you want to play, they want to play.

When you don't want to play, they want to play.

They will love you forever if you rub their tummies.

They leave their toys everywhere.

They do disgusting things with their mouths and then try to give you a kiss.

Dogs are little men in fur coats.

I don't know about all that, but I think one of the greatest proofs of God's love is the fact that my wife loves me! Who else but God could give Shelly the ability to love a guy like me – just a big dog without fur.

Today I don't want to talk about dogs, we want to talk about love. Today we are finishing up our series called, "We Are the Church," exploring all the ways that we are the church, even if we are limited in our ability to meet together. We've also concluded this series with a look at our West Valley Church mission statement, which states clearly what we are to be doing as Christ's church here in this neighborhood:

Introduce People to Jesus Christ
Equip People with a faith that works
Live as people with purpose

We've looked at the first two, so today we are going to explore that last part: what it means to "live as people with purpose."

Over the last couple of weeks I've shared with you that a significant Scripture that drives our mission statement as a church comes from what is called "The Great Commission" – how Jesus commanded and commissioned us to share the Good News and to help people become better and better disciples. Well, there is one other very important passage of Scripture from which we get our mission statement, and that is in Matthew 22:37-40. It is called "The Great Commandment," and it's called that because Jesus said it is the greatest command in all of Scripture. Jesus said:

“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 22:37-40, niv)

Jesus is actually quoting two separate commands from the Old Testament; they'd both been around for a long time and every good Jew knew them very, very well. They were some of the first Scriptures Jewish children memorized. The first part about loving God comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (among other places), and the second part about loving your neighbor comes from Leviticus 19:18 (among other places). Like I said, every Jew knew these two commands. But Jesus was the first one to put the two together. No one had done that before. In fact, Jesus was saying that the two are equally important; they cannot be separated. To love God IS to love others. The only way to prove love for God is by showing love to others. That's why it's so important. If you were with us last week, you remember that is exactly what that passage from the book of James is talking about. Here's the point, and here's what it means to live as people with purpose: if we are going to live the lives that God saved us to live, if we are going to act like true disciples of Jesus, we are going to live a life of love. We are going to prove our love for God by loving people. Period. That is the great commandment.

In Luke's gospel, he records Jesus stating this great commandment, and then Jesus goes on to teach and describe exactly what this love toward others is like. It's in Luke 10. It's really the main passage of Scripture for today, so can I ask you to stand with me as I read it? Even if you are joining us online, you can honor God's Word by standing where you are, if it's possible to do so. This is what Jesus said:

Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?” He answered, “What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?”

He said, “That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself.”

“Good answer!” said Jesus. “Do it and you'll live.”

Looking for a loophole, he asked, “And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?”

Jesus answered by telling a story. “There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man’s condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, “Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I’ll pay you on my way back.’

What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?”

“The one who treated him kindly,” the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, “Go and do the same.” (Luke 10:25-37, tmt)

Thank you for standing; go ahead and have a seat. We are going to learn what it means to live as people with purpose, because in this passage we just read, Jesus is describing what it will look like: how we love others. So let’s be sure to learn these lessons.

There are three takeaways we *must* learn today if we are going to live this purposeful life of love. The first thing about this love is that...

1. It is *perfect*.

Now right away you are probably thinking, “How in the world can any of us love perfectly?” That’s a great question and Jesus answered it. When the Scriptures talk about how we need to love perfectly, it doesn’t mean perfect in the sense that it is totally flawless. It means perfect in the sense that it is total or complete. We cannot be holy and without flaw as God is, but our love for others can be holy in the sense that it is total or complete. This is what God means when he says:

“But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.””
(1 Peter 1:15-16, nlt)

Holiness is love, and our love can be holy! God can fill us with his Holy Spirit so that this can be true in us.

In that passage we read earlier in Matthew 22 when Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves, he didn’t use the word for “brotherly love.” He used the word “agape love” which is *unconditional* love – loving others with no strings attached, no conditions on it. It means we love others for who they are, not for who we think they should be (*repeat*). *That* is the way we are to love others, and the reason we can do it is because we have been given that love by God himself. The Bible says:

“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.” (1 John 3:16, nlt)

John goes on to say in the next chapter:

“My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God *is* love—so you can’t know him if you don’t love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God.

My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us—perfect love

We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.” (1 John 4:7-12, 19, tmt)

If you are struggling to love someone – anyone – everyone – pray, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the kind of perfect love you know you need. That’s how we live as people with purpose. How do you know if you have this kind of love for others? When...

2. It is without *prejudice*.

In that passage in Luke 10, Jesus makes this point; he says that the good guy – the guy who helped the injured victim – was a Samaritan. That was so offensive to the Jews, it would be like, today in our culture if he said the good guy was the Al Qaida Terrorist. Or it could be called, “The Parable of the Good Nazi.” The one who modeled love was someone who was considered unlovable himself. *We* are to love without prejudice, or “pre-judging.” We usually associate that term with racial prejudice, and well we should. But it’s really talking about *any* kind of prejudging. Is there someone who you dislike? Who annoys you? Guess what? You are to love that person perfectly and without prejudice. That’s what a believer’s life of purpose does. That’s why the Bible says:

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4, esv)

When Jesus gave us the Great Commandment and said, “Love your neighbor,” the Jews had been interpreting that Scripture from the Old Testament to mean that their neighbor was a fellow Jew. That way they didn’t have to love anyone else – just their own kind. But Jesus made it clear that we are to love everybody – including and especially our enemies (read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7!). There’s a great story that illustrates this, that comes out of World War II. There was a group

of soldiers during the war in Europe who lost a friend in battle. They wanted to give their fallen friend a decent burial. So they found a church with a graveyard behind it, surrounded by a white fence. They found the parish priest and asked if their friend could be buried there in the church graveyard. The priest asked, "Was he Catholic?" The men said, "No, he was not." The priest said, "I'm sorry then. Our graveyard is reserved for members of the holy church. But, you can bury your friend outside the fence. I will see that the gravesite is cared for."

The men thanked the priest, and buried their friend just outside the graveyard on the other side of the fence.

When the war finally ended and before the soldiers returned home, they decided to visit the gravesite of their friend. They remembered where the church was located, and the grave, just outside the fence. Thinking they had gotten confused, they searched for it, but couldn't find it. Finally, they went to the priest to ask about its location. The soldiers told the priest, "Sir, we cannot find our friend's grave." The priest said, "Well, after you buried your fallen friend, it just didn't seem right to me that he should be buried there, outside the fence.

The soldiers said, "So you moved the grave?" "No," the priest said. "I moved the fence."

We live in a world that builds fences of prejudice to keep others out. There are enormous fences built between democrats and republicans. Between the left and the right. Between white and black and brown. Between rich and poor, between housed and homeless...Listen, believers in Jesus: *Christians are fence movers*; in fact, we are to be fence *removers* so anyone and everyone is accepted and loved, without condition or prejudice. That is our purpose, our mission. You and I cannot consider *anyone* to be less than us; less good, less privileged, less religious, less holy, less Christian. We are called to serve *all* others in love.

This love is perfect, it is without prejudice, and...

3. It is *practical*.

We talked about this last week, too, didn't we? Our faith is only real when it is demonstrated in the way we behave toward others. John wrote something else in his first letter:

"Little children, let us stop just *saying* we love people; let us *really* love them, and *show it* by our *actions*." (1 John 3:18, tlb)

Our purpose is to live a life of love that is perfect, without prejudice, and practical. *Love is visible when it meets the needs of others.*

Years ago, when I was a youth pastor, there was a young lady named Carrie in our youth group who had grown up in a single parent home – raised by her mom. Her dad had left her and her sister and their mother for another woman, when the girls were in elementary school. Like most kids in that scenario, she struggled with insecurity, feeling unloved and unlovable, thinking that it was her fault that her

father left. She specifically remembered thinking that she would surprise him one morning and make him pancakes, but she opted not to. That was the morning of the day he walked out. Ten years later, she still thought that if she had made pancakes, he wouldn't have left. To make matters worse, throughout the years he would promise to pick her up on her birthdays and on the days when he had custody, only never to show. She would pack her little bag, get dressed up, and wait by the window, waiting until the shadows in the streets ran long and the light faded. Every. Single. Time. He never came back. And he lived within ten miles of them. Of course, she struggled with the concept of God as a father, thinking that he too would leave her and that she could never earn his love. I tried to help her understand that God was everything she wished her father would've been. She said, "I feel like I'll be left waiting by the window for God, too. Even if he's real, he's invisible. He won't hug me like I wish my dad did." Then she said, "I need a God with skin on."

She's not alone in that feeling. The only way that people who don't know Jesus are going to see him is if they see him in *your* skin.

To live a life of purpose means that we love people in practical ways – not *saying* we love people, but demonstrating it by our actions. That's exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he said:

"We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too." (1 Thessalonians 2:8, nlt)

Living as people with purpose means we share *and* we show the Good News of God's love to everyone. Perfectly, without prejudice, in very practical ways.

Remember that John wrote that we can love because God first loved us. The greatest demonstration of that love was when Jesus willingly gave his life for us; he allowed his own perfect blood to be spilled and his body to be broken on a cross – becoming a sacrifice for you and me – for everyone, in all our ugly sin and dysfunction and hate and anger and violence and selfishness.

We participate in communion exactly to reconnect with that Love; to be reminded of his sacrifice, to be literally infused with that sacrifice into the very cells of our body as the elements are consumed by us, to recommit ourselves to be Jesus with skin on this world, selflessly allowing ourselves to be broken for the sake of showing God's love to others.

You received the elements when you came in; if you didn't get them, raise your hand. Prepare yourself for communion. If you are joining us in our online community, prepare whatever elements you have gathered. We will all share them together in just a few moments as I instruct us.

You don't need to be a member of this church....Again, if you didn't get them, raise your hand.

Prayer of consecration

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread...then the cup....

The Apostle Paul said:

“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16, niv)

Prayer of commitment

Stand, receive this from the Bible:

“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus ... make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” (I Thessalonians 3:11-13, niv)