

Here For Good 3.0
Here For Good
Psalm 37:3-6; Jeremiah 29:5-7

1. Live abundantly in exile.

- *Luke 17:20-21; John 17:15-19; 1 Peter 2:11; John 10:10*

2. Live loyally for the Lord.

- *Jeremiah 29:4; Colossians 3:23-24; Romans 14:8;
Philippians 2:9-11*

3. Live generously for others.

- *Matthew 5:43-48; Jeremiah 29:7, 11*

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West Valley Church
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Here For Good

Psalms 37:3-6; Jeremiah 29:5-7

West Valley Church is **Here For Good**. We will be here on this corner in this community until Jesus returns. We're not going anywhere. But we are also here *for* good; that means that, until Jesus comes back, West Valley Church is here to *do* good things in the name of Christ and for his Kingdom.

In this sermon series we've learned that being **Here For Good** means, first of all, that we are...

- *Here for Christ*. All that we have and all that we do is for Christ, for his purpose, his Kingdom, and his glory. We are a people fully committed to Christ. **Here For Good** also means that we are...
- *Here for Our Community*; one of the very clearest messages of Scripture is that the primary mission of God's Church is to introduce people to Jesus Christ, and we do that the way that Jesus told us and showed us – by loving and serving our community. Sharing the Gospel both visually and verbally. That also means that we are...
- *Here for Each Other*; that we are called to serve one another and build each other up in Christ. Then lastly, we realized that to be **Here For Good** in all those ways means we will be...
- *Here for Generosity*; we have been blessed so that we can be a blessing, we have been made just to do justice, and we have been impacted by the Gospel so we can impact others with the same Good News.

Then last week, at the end of the NNU University Choir and Orchestra concert, you saw that your Leadership Team is setting the example of generosity when they donated \$15,000 to the Eddie Miles Memorial Alumni Scholarship at Northwest Nazarene University. That scholarship is an endowment, which means the amount donated to it is called the corpus, and that amount doesn't change; what is awarded is from the money gained on interest from that amount, but they never touch the original corpus of the endowment. Make sense? So your Leadership Team wanted our church to honor Eddie's memory, as well as invest in the lives of NNU students for generations to come. Remember too that Adam Dolsen, president of Dolsen Companies, also agreed to match our award, bringing the total gift to \$30,000. What a great morning! If you weren't with us, you will definitely want to go back and watch it on our West Valley Church YouTube Channel. Can I just tell you a little background about that wonderful contribution to the scholarship?

When I heard last spring that NNU was changing the name of the alumni scholarship to the Eddie Miles Memorial Alumni Scholarship, it seemed appropriate and important for our church to make a significant contribution to that; after all, we have always strongly supported our Nazarene University, and of course Eddie was a part of our church family. When I began to pray about it, I began asking God very specifically if we as a church might

be able to double the endowment and more than that, raise it to over \$50,000. This last summer your Leadership Team began to discuss it, along with the Finance Team, to see if there might be funds available in our operational reserves that we could use. Remember – we did not use Here For Good dollars for this. Your elected leaders are very good at being wise stewards of what you give, but they felt it was important to do something generous, so they agreed that we as a church would donate \$15,000. At the same time, I felt that I needed to meet with Eddie’s employer, Dolsen Companies. I knew he had a great relationship with them and loved his work and they loved him. Tom Froula from our Leadership Team is friends with the president of Dolsen Companies, Adam Dolsen, and he set up a meeting for us with Adam. Tom and Adam and I met together, and during that meeting, I explained the scholarship being renamed after Eddie, and I basically said, “we as a church have decided to donate \$15,000, and we’re just a church. You are a corporation; I would like to ask you to consider at least matching our donation.” Adam was very gracious, and said that the company has a committee that reviews these requests, so he would talk to them and get back to me. The next day he called me and said, “We’re in. We’ve been looking for a way to honor Eddie, and this is the perfect way.” So just like that, God answered prayer and we were able to double the endowment AND raise it to over \$50,000 all in one weekend! Before we shared that announcement last week, I privately shared the news with Joel Pearsall, NNU’s president, and it brought tears to his eyes.

I’m very proud of your Leadership Team, because they could have said, “No, we’ve got to save every dollar we can right now, since we’re raising money through Here For Good and we don’t know what the economy will be like.” They would have been justified to say that. But instead, they said, “We know God wants us as a church to be generous in this way. We are going to step out in faith.” And God doubled their faith!

That’s what God can do as you pray about being here for generosity through **Here For Good**.

What is happening here during these three years at West Valley Church is a clear and definite move of God. You’ve felt it; we all have, and it has been overwhelmingly confirmed over these years as we paid off the million-dollar mortgage in just one year, and as God doubled our gift last week. And if you have not joined us yet, it’s not too late! Please: be a part and do your part; you don’t want to be left out and you don’t want to miss out when we celebrate the conclusion next spring in May!

What God has led us to is *vital* for the future of our church and our ability to be **Here For Good**. We’ve said this many times already, but I want to make sure you hear it again: God miraculously provided for us, during a pandemic, and in just one year’s time, to eliminate the mortgage that our church had been carrying for nearly 20 years. We were able to be finished with the burden of debt and freed up nearly \$100,000 annually in the church’s budget! The Leadership Team continues to consider new ways to invest those dollars that used to be spent annually for mortgage as an investment into ministries that will help us achieve our mission!

Now that the debt is paid off, we need to be able to minister effectively by updating one of the main tools we have – our incredible facility. Except for the café (which is ten years old), the *newest* parts of our building are *twenty* years old, and the oldest parts – including this

room – were bought and built in the 1970s! These spaces were made to meet the needs of people and a culture that lived almost five decades ago. It's time for us to update these spaces to meet the needs of people *today and in the future*. We need to be able to do our very best to welcome and minister to people who come through our doors every week looking for a church home and a place to worship God. Please stick around briefly after the service so we can give you an update on where we are with Here For Good and with the renovation process.

I hope you've realized by now that **Here For Good** is not about charitable contributions or a finance transaction or even a not-for-profit donation and tax deduction; it is about being God's Kingdom people right here where we live; giving of our very selves – including our financial resources – to be here in West Valley for good. *This is a God thing*; an opportunity that God is giving us individually and collectively to see clearly what He is doing, and we have the choice to be a part of what He is doing – or not. God is giving us a way to give ourselves more completely to Him and his purposes. It's not the only way we do it, but right now in the life of our church it is a very big and very important way!

This is why West Valley Church is here – to be **Here For Good**.

Over 60 years ago, God put it on the heart of Mrs. Congdon to have a church on this corner. That dream was picked up by Pastor Paul Hayden and the "Wide Hollow Church of the Nazarene" began (two years later renamed to West Valley Church). We put a timeline in the original booklets that we made, which are out on the table, but that God-birthing dream 66 years ago has brought us to today – a church that has seen thousands find God's love, a church that has spent hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars around the world for missions, a church that has a permanent presence on this corner, serving the lost with love in our community in ways that are a blessing to them and demonstrate the Gospel visually and verbally. So let's do all we can to make sure that our roots go deep into the fertile soil of God's orchard in this community.

What West Valley Church has been doing, and what we will continue to do, is exactly what the Bible tells us through King David in the Psalms:

“Trust the Lord and do good; live in the land, and farm faithfulness. Enjoy the Lord, and he will give what your heart asks. Commit your way to the Lord! Trust him! He will act and will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, your justice like high noon.” (Psalm 37:3-6, ceb)

I want to leave that passage up there because I want it to sink into your spirit. These verses are part of a Psalm in which David is attempting to answer the question of how we are supposed to live in a world that is filled with people who do bad things; how do we remain faithful to God when the world around us is living like hell on earth? How do we live when evil people seem to prosper, and the poor and defenseless and the righteous seem to struggle and suffer? How do we live in a world where there are new flu pandemics and variants all the time? How do we live in a world like that? If you are a Christian, I'll bet you ask that very question every time you finish reading the headlines of the day's news. Well, this passage is the answer! God is telling us through David, “Don't be afraid. Don't fret! Trust me! I've got this! And I've got *you*. Live fully for me without fear; farm faithfulness. Enjoy your relationship with me because I'll give you everything you need. Be a blessing to

others, live the kind of lives I've called you to live, make an impact by loving and serving others, and I'll make sure your justice shines for all to see." *Farm faithfulness.*

To "commit your way to the Lord" means that you trust God no matter the outcome, as you live generously for Him. Sow the seeds of love. Live in such a way that your righteous roots go deep into the soil of our community. When the temptation would be to circle the wagons and hide from the world and hang on tight until Heaven, God says, "Don't do that! Live fully for me right where you are!"

That's what **Here For Good** is all about; we want to sow the seeds of faithfulness, and one of the significant ways right now is through our sacrificial giving – one of the ways that we can ensure that the roots of West Valley Church go deeply into this community. The result will be an endless orchard of fruit that is a blessing for West Valley and beyond.

This is why we are **Here For Good**.

God inspired King David to write Psalm 37 sometime around 1000 BC. But it's a theme that God didn't let go of, because Jeremiah the prophet brought it up again over 400 years later.

Jeremiah was a prophet that God raised up to warn God's people to return to Him and start living for God again. But the King and people would not listen, and their rebellion and disobedience led to what's called the Babylonian Captivity. The giant evil empire of Babylon swept in, invaded, and then wiped out what was left of Israel. They looted all their treasures and took anything of value – including people, off to Babylon. They took material and human capital. They left the old women, children, and the infirm where they were, but took all the strong and smart and skilled people to Babylon. God's people were in exile, captives in a foreign world.

Shortly after this happened, Jeremiah wrote a letter to God's people with some instructions. In a portion of that letter, this is what he wrote:

"Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:5-7, nlt)

Let me repeat that last line: "work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."

I want you to realize how incredible Jeremiah's letter is. Remember when God used Moses to free his people from slavery in Egypt? That was 800 years earlier. At that time, when God told the Israelites about the Promised Land, he used the very same language that Jeremiah uses! The words of promise about the promised land are now words of promise in exile. These words were sacred words to God's people. But these words were solely and closely connected to the Promised Land, and Babylon was as far as possible geographically and spiritually from the Promised Land for God's people. But now God is telling them to live like they would if they were in the Promised Land, *while they were in exile* in Babylon. Babylon was the epitome of evil in their eyes, and the Bible still refers to Babylon as the epitome of everything evil. And yet God told them they are to live the same way in Babylon as they were supposed to live in Canaan. This is very significant. God is telling them to...

1. Live *abundantly* in *exile*.

This wasn't exactly what God's people wanted to hear; they wanted to hear that they would be back in the Promised Land soon. They wanted to know that God was going to swoop in and wipe out their enemies and rescue them and restore them to the promise. They hoped that they could somehow sequester themselves from the evil and unclean and perverse people of Babylon, preserve themselves until God would rescue them and get them back to the place where they could live free again.

But God didn't do that. Instead, God gave them several imperatives: build, plant, stay, eat, marry, have kids, find spouses for your kids, and have grandkids, and grow your families. This was *not* good news to them; this made it clear that they would be in Babylon for several generations. But these words of promise meant that the promises of God for them were not based on *where* they were, but on *Whose* they were, and on *Whom* would be with them. They thought they had to be *where* God was, but God was willing to be *where they were*. The promises of God were not based on being in Canaan, but on belonging to God, and the promise that God would be with them where *they were*. Are you catching this? It's important because this promise carried forth all the way to arrival of Christ, whose name is called "Emmanuel, God *with us*." (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23). God was with them in Babylon, God is with us today. That's exactly what Jesus meant when he had this exchange with the religious rulers:

"One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come?" Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is *already among you*."" (Luke 17:20-21, nlt *italics added*)

You are not going to be able to cross a border with signs that say, "Welcome to the Kingdom of God," because *you are already in it! The Kingdom of God is not a place to live, it is a way to live*. The Kingdom of God is not in Israel, it is not in the promised land, it is not America, and it is not in heaven. It is where ever the church is when she lives as Christ wants her to, loving the world around her. It is a way to live life abundantly, with God through Christ, right where we are.

The problem today is that many Christians want to do just like the Israelites did while they were in captivity; they want to sequester themselves against evil and unclean and perverse people and situations, and hunker down and wait for heaven – as if the Kingdom of God starts in heaven. "Let's just be holy people who don't get infected by sinful people." But folks, the Kingdom of God is *here, and now*. It is already among you. And while we live in this world, here in West Valley, we are to live differently than this world. We live Kingdom lives. This is exactly what Jesus prayed for us about:

"I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. (John 17:15-19, nlt)

Jesus wants us to live out the abundant life he promised us, starting *right here and now*.

Are we in exile? In a way, yes. If you are a Christian, you accepted God's forgiveness and Christ's sacrifice through the cross and you've accepted his new life in you. When you became a Christian, you became a citizen of God's Kingdom. So now you live your life differently – *while you are here*. That's our instruction from Scripture:

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.” (1 Peter 2:11, niv)

Live differently than the world around you, but keep on living! Live abundantly in exile!

This was a significant lesson for the people of God, and it is a significant lesson for God's people today. Don't ever, ever get it into your head that you have to just grin and bear it, white-knuckling life until you finally get to heaven. Abundant life starts here and now! This is exactly what Jesus meant:

“I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.” (John 10:10, ceb)

Doesn't that sound similar to what Jeremiah said when he told them to live abundantly while in exile?

Remember, the promise wasn't about where they were, it was about whose they were. It wasn't about *where* they lived, it was about the *way* they lived. The same is true for you and me. While we live here, we are to...

2. Live *loyally* for the *Lord*.

I want you to see something about this letter that Jeremiah sent to the people in exile. When he wrote the letter, he was essentially writing down what God told him; he was sort of taking dictation. This was God's letter to His people. So in verse four, which was right before we started reading it in verse five, it addresses the people this way:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles...” (Jeremiah 29:4, nrsv)

See that phrase, “The LORD of hosts”? Here's what that means (I'm going to bust out a little theology on you): the original Hebrew language was “YHWH Sabaoth.” YHWH is the holy name of God. When Moses asked what God's name was during his encounter with God at the burning bush, God said, “YHWH.” In theology it's called the “tetragrammatron” – it means it's the Holy Name comprised of four letters. It is the most holy name of God. In our language we might say “God,” and that could mean a whole lot of things. But in Hebrew there is no mistaking “YHWH” – that name means one thing and one thing only – THE Most Holy and High God, there is no other. He always was, is, and will be. He is the I AM, the Eternally Present One. Then next was another word, “sabaoth,” which means heavenly armies (not to be confused with sabbath, which means rest). So God is saying that his name means that he is the Great God, the Greatest God, who commands the Greatest army of all – the army of heaven. Imagine how that sounded to the people in exile, who were being held captive by the enemy armies. Babylon was the greatest, most powerful army on the planet, and Israel had been captured and enslaved by Babylon's armies. Then they get a letter

from their God – the greatest God of the greatest army in all of heaven and earth. This was a reminder: their God and his army was greater than Babylon or any other nation.

God addressed himself on purpose to give his people hope. But he also reminded them that he was the ultimate authority, so whatever he told them to do, they'd better do it. They needed to live loyally for the Lord. They weren't just to live abundantly in exile any way they wanted to; they were not to live the way that the Babylonians lived. They were to live loyally for the Lord.

The same is true for us; being **Here For Good** means that we live abundantly in this world, in all the fulness of life that Christ gives us, and we are to live our lives for Christ.

The New Testament tells us:

Whatever you do, do it from the heart for the Lord and not for people. You know that you will receive an inheritance as a reward. You serve the Lord Christ."
(Colossians 3:23-24, ceb)

Here For Good isn't really about our financial goal, even though that is a key element of it. **Here For Good** has always been, and always will be, about living fully for the Lord, and then obeying whatever he asks of you. We began this journey with the goal of raising \$1.6m, but we have not and will not tell you how much you should give as an individual; you need to pray about that and do what God tells you. And the truth is, what the Lord asked of us collectively was even bigger than what our goal was; God wanted to stretch your faith.

Eva Lounsbury has been our Missions President for several years, and is now the director of Prayer Ministries for our church. She has also been the prayer leader of our Here For Good leadership team. Over three years ago when we began planning Here For Good, Eva sent out email with regular prayer prompts to our team. I want to read you portion of one of the prayers she sent out to us: "**(Here For Good)** is) not about giving all our money to the campaign, but it's about giving all of US and our desires and our plans and our dreams and our talents to the Lord, and then obeying as He leads us – to give, to serve, to go, to preach and teach and love." I loved that – she's so right, and it is so true. **Here For Good** means we are urging all of us to live fully and loyally to the Lord. We demonstrate that by committing to give whatever God asks of us.

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote:

"If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to God." (Romans 14:8, ceb)

No matter what, we live loyally for the Lord!

Because, let me just tell you something: whether you live for the Lord today or not, you will one day acknowledge he is Lord. You either do it with your life now, or you will do it from your knees in judgement.

"Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11, nlt)

He is Lord whether you live for him or not.

You can live a life of abundance, living now as if you were already in the Promised Land even while you are in exile, living loyally for the Lord; in obedience to him.

Now there was something else amazing about God's instructions to his people. While they were to enjoy their lives in exile living for the Lord, they were not simply to live selfishly for themselves. They were to...

3. Live *generously* for *others*.

Here they were, living in the land of their enemies, and God tells them to be a blessing to Babylon. They must have been shocked to hear that God wanted Babylon to be blessed, and that he wanted his people to be the pipeline through whom the blessing came! God wanted them to bless their enemies and be generous with them. The Israelites felt that the Babylonians were their enemies, but *they were not God's enemies*. That is the heart of God, after all – there are *NO* enemies of God among humankind. God loves all people, whether we like them or not!

This is no different than what Jesus told us:

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48, nlt)

God's heart hasn't changed. You and I cannot lock eyes with another human being without seeing someone made in the image of God. No matter who you look at, when you look them in the eye you see Jesus. I want you to see verse 7 again of Jeremiah's letter, because it really is a clear, bold command from God:

“Work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:7, nlt)

If you ever, ever, ever, wonder why West Valley Church does so much for the welfare of our community, (*look at the above scripture!*)

In fact, that's exactly why we want to renovate; so we can do more! We are **Here For Good!** The welfare of West Valley is *our* welfare!

God told his people not to withhold their blessing from Babylon but *to be a blessing to Babylon* – their enemies and oppressors – on purpose, *because the blessing would come back to them*.

And if God's people were to wonder how this could benefit themselves, if they began to doubt God's plans for them, later in that same letter, God said:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11, nlt)

Friends, God’s Word and his will have never changed. He is calling West Valley Church to be **Here For Good**. He knows what he’s doing. So it is imperative that we pay off that debt, move money from mortgage to ministry, and renovate our worn-out spaces. We can trust God; he knows the plans he has for us.

I want to pray the same prayer that King David prayed in 1 Chronicles 29 when all of God’s people brought their generous offerings forward for the sake of the Temple:

O Lord, our God, may you be praised forever and ever! Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength.

“O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! But who are we, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace.

“O Lord our God, even these commitments that we’ve brought forward to honor your holy name come from you! It all belongs to you! I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know we have done all this with good motives, and we’ve watched your people offer their commitments willingly and joyously.

“O Lord, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, make your people always want to obey you. See to it that their love for you never changes. Give us the wholehearted desire to obey all your commands, laws, and decrees, and to do everything necessary to fulfill these commitments.” (1 Chronicles 29:10b-18)

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen!