

Here For Good 2.0

Matthew 10:39

1. Always Personal.

- *Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:10*

2. Always Present.

- *Galatians 2:20*

- **Past.**

- **Present.**

- **Prospective.**

3. Always Painful.

- *Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:17*

4. Always Partnered.

- *1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Romans 8:17; Matthew 28:20*

5. Always Perishing.

- *Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 15:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:3*

6. Always Possessive.

- *Colossians 2:10, 3:3*

7. Always Powered.

- *Colossians 2:10, 12; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 13:4;
Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 1:18-20*

- **Perfect love.**

- *Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 4:8-18; John 13:34-35*

- **Living Proof.**

- *1 Corinthians 8*

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Here For Good 2.0

Today we are marking the halfway point of our 3-year effort called Here For Good. Here For Good is an excellent way to describe what West Valley Church is about – we are here to be good, here to do good, and here for good – we are going to continue advancing, growing the Kingdom of God until Jesus comes back.

These are difficult days, aren't they? We're dealing with pandemics and politics and disastrous government policies and global tragedies like earthquakes, floods, fires, and global warming. It almost sounds like Jesus is coming back soon, doesn't it? I've had people ask me if I think he's coming back soon, I say, "Well, it's sooner than it used to be!" Folks, if Jesus *is* coming back soon, you can choose one of two responses: you can say, "Good – I'm just going to hunker down and wait for his return." Or you can say, "If Jesus is coming back soon, I've got work to do! There are a lot of people that need to see and know God's love for them!" One of those two responses is selfish, and the other is biblical. Guess which one is which?!

Church, we are Here For Good. If you aren't here for good, why are you here? Seriously! If Jesus died for you and rose from the dead for you just so you could be saved and go to heaven, then what's the hold up? Why are you still here? The only answer to that is because you are here for good. Christian: you are not here to escape. You are here to live the Kingdom of God's love. You are here for GOOD, and you are here as long as it takes. Fortunately, you are not alone. You have an entire, great church full of people who are here to do it alongside you. We are in this together – we're better together, right?

That's why Here For Good is so important – we needed to get rid of the mortgage so that we could invest all that money in ministry, and we need to renovate some of the tired, old, ineffective areas of our facility so we can better take care of you and your kids and better serve our community. We've got to get those things out of the way so we can completely focus on what God wants to do in and through us in this place.

So while we are in this together, it's up to you to decide what you are going to do: are you going to commit yourself completely to Christ, or not? Are you going to fully do what God is asking you to do in this life? Are you Here For Christ?

You see, it's one thing to invite Jesus into your life. But if that's all you do, it's still just that—*your* life. It is entirely another thing to *give up* your life to Jesus, so that it is no longer *your* life—it is *His*. You will never know true freedom, you will never reach your fullest potential, you will never achieve your highest purpose, you will never make a Kingdom of God impact in this world, you will never know fully the kind of good you are here for, until your life becomes *His* life. I don't mean that figuratively—as if all you need to do is just start acting like Jesus. I'm talking about surrendering all control to Him, and you no longer live your life – Jesus lives *His* life *in you*. Jesus made this point when He sent out the Twelve to go preach and when He was teaching about His own death. He said:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matthew 10:39, niv)

Our true life comes as we give up our life completely to Him.

There is a life that you can live that is *free* from sin; not just the consequences of it, but the power of it. You can have power to NOT sin, so you can live fully in Jesus! Imagine that there's a man who is a notorious sinner. He's a gambler, an alcoholic, he's heavy into pornography, and he's an adulterer. And he dies. As the hearse carries him past the casino, it no longer has power over him. As they drive by the bar, alcohol no longer entices him. He doesn't even notice as they drive by the strip club or even the house of the woman he'd carried on his affair with. All those urges are long gone. None of those things attract him anymore – because he is dead to them all.

When we have died to sin, the same can be true for us! Not only can you have the power NOT to sin, you can also have supernatural power to live *for and in* Christ—to do mighty things for Him. But it only comes to the fully committed life.

Let me try to explain it this way: when a person becomes a Christian, it's an essentially selfish act (at least in our culture). Think about it: why does someone accept Christ? (*I don't want to go to Hell, I want to go to Heaven, I've made a mess of my life and I need help...*). When we become Christians it's kind of selfish; we need *saving*. It's selfish in the same way that a newborn is selfish; it can't help being selfish – it just is. It was true for me; when I accepted Christ, I felt lost, I needed direction. I wanted hope—I'd made a mess of my life. Becoming a Christian is about *me*. Jesus saves *me*, he rescues *me*, he teaches *me* and loves *me*. And that's all good and important and valuable. The grace of God is unconditional – he will always love and accept us; we can never earn it. We can never be good enough to earn his love for us and we can never be bad enough to stop his love for us. But many Christians *stay* there: selfish...so their Christian life is all about *themselves*. Everyone *expects* a baby to be selfish. A baby needs someone else to feed him, burp him, and change his diapers. But no one wants an adult to act that way. It's no different for Christians. To be here for Christ means it is no longer about me, it's all about HIM. It's all about what He wants and needs, it's no longer about my wants and needs. Do you see that? The surrendered life, the sanctified life, the holy life, the consecrated life, the here for Christ life—it all means the same thing.

The apostle Paul summed up this whole topic when he gave his personal story or testimony. He said:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20, niv)

In that statement we have the essence of what we are talking about today. So let's take a deeper look into just what it means to be Here For Christ, or, as Paul said it, to be "crucified with Christ." First, a "Here For Christ" life is...

1. Always *Personal*.

There's a simple one-letter word that Paul uses to describe this surrendered life—the word "I." He said:

"I am crucified with Christ." (Galatians 2:20)

It is very personal. We know that when Jesus died on the cross, He did so for the entire human race—He died for everyone. But He also did it just for *you*—even if you were the only one on earth, He still would have died for you. We always say it around here, but it's worth repeating: He loves you as if you were the only one in all the world to love. So His death for you was very personal. And he was thinking of you when he was on the cross.

But more than that, the plan He has for your life is very personal, and the life of surrender requires a *personal response*. The problem is that the sin we commit is *also* very personal. Even though we have all inherited this sin – it is in our spiritual DNA – and even though Christ died to pay the penalty of sin for all of us, each of us personally needs to die *to* sin. We've got to determine to put to death our sinful life. I can't make the decision for you, nor you for me. The call of Christ to surrender your life to Him is personal. It's not just a philosophy or an idea. It will take YOU giving up control completely to Him, so that you are no longer in charge; *He is*. You no longer make the decisions for your life; *He does*. You no longer do what you want; you do what *He wants*. That's what the Bible means when it says:

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." (Romans 6:10, niv)

Being here for Christ applies to you, personally—it is always a very, very personal call. He is speaking directly to *you* today.

Pray

The second thing we learn is that it is...

2. Always ***Present***

Notice that Paul says:

"I *am* crucified with Christ." (Galatians 2:20)

He doesn't say "I WAS." He is not speaking in the past tense, as if it happened one time and that's it. The Greek language that Paul used is the perfect tense; that means it is an *always present condition*. It was a decision and an event that happened once, but the decision and its effect and its result continues to take place in the present. Does that make sense? When we surrender our life to Christ, it happens once, but it continues always. It's like when you get married. On your wedding day, you made a commitment to your husband or wife. But it wasn't for that one time; it was made once but you live it out every day, even if you don't feel like it, or it's not easy. When two believers in Jesus are married and serving each other, divorce is not an option. Neither is it an option to the person who determines to live his or her life for Christ. And it involves *all* of your life. When you submit your life to Christ, it includes your...

Past.

We're not just talking about the bad things; we're also talking about all the good things. All the skills you've acquired, all the resources, all the achievements that we've made and taken credit for. Anything sinful you've surrendered, but anything you've accomplished or acquired is, too. So, if you've achieved some things, and Jesus tells you to give it away, you do.

That's why our generosity initiative, "Here For Good" is such a great thing. It's not that we're telling everyone, "You have to give 'X' amount of money." We're telling you, "Pray and ask Jesus what he wants you to give, then you commit to giving that." Whatever Jesus asks you to do, step out in faith and do it. That's how we've paid off \$1.1 million in mortgage in just over a year during a pandemic. That's why we are almost two thirds of the way to our goal while we are only halfway through the timeline! We are over 60% of the way to our goal but only 50% of the way through the timeline for our goal. If we keep it up, we will reach our goal in *two years* instead of the three we thought it would take!

Besides submitting our past, being here for Christ also includes your...

Present.

Submitting your life to Jesus isn't about freeing you from sin so that you can go do whatever you want. It also means surrendering any good things to Jesus: *your* desires, *your* wants, *your* relationships, *your* career decisions. They are *all* his. You do what *he* wants. It means if Jesus asks you to do something that sacrifices your present level of comfort – like giving to Here For Good – your submission to Christ is more important than your comfort. Of course, it also means submitting your...

Prospective.

In other words, your future. Whatever you're saving for now belongs to Him. It means you surrender your hopes, your dreams, your plans, for His. I'm not telling you to cash out your retirement or sell your house and give the money to the church – God has given you those things in order to take care of you. But it does mean that nothing is yours – he's taking care of you now, and he'll take care of you when you give up something that he asks you to.

Eva Lounsbury is one of the leaders in our church who gives of herself and her resources in very generous ways, despite going through some challenges with her job. But she's an excellent example of being "Here For Christ." Watch what Eva recently said. (video)

Eva understands that living life "Here For Christ" is about being a part of God's work, making a huge positive difference in this world, but it isn't always easy and it's usually not about comfort – not in this life, anyway.

That brings up a good point – there's something else you need to know about being Here For Christ—it is...

3. Always Painful

It is always personal – "I," it is always present – "I am," and it is always painful: "I am *crucified.*" I don't have to tell you that crucifixion was the worst possible, most painful death imaginable. Don't think for one minute that surrender – being here for Christ – is

going to be an easy, painless thing. Jesus knew His crucifixion would be painful, but he did it for the sake of others because He knew what lay beyond. The Bible says:

“Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.” (Hebrews 12:2, nlt)

It was painful for Jesus, and it's going to be painful for us too. But – like Jesus, we do it for the greater gain in it for the Kingdom of God.

Living here for Christ was the Apostle Paul's constant desire; that's why he said:

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...” (Philippians 3:10, niv)

And it should be our desire too. In fact, it's what all true children of God's desire. That's why the Bible says in Romans 8:

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:17, niv)

I hope you understand, we are talking about *dying* here: dying to your selfishness, dying to self-will, dying to being in control. Death is never easy. Sometimes it is quick. Sometimes it's long and lingering. I can't tell you how long it will take for you. I can only tell you it won't be easy, and it will hurt. A lot. *But it is worth it.*

Be encouraged, though – when you live for Christ, you won't be alone, because it is also...

4. Always *Partnered*

Paul said, “I am crucified *with Christ.*” Even though it seems like a difficult, painful, or scary thing to do, you are walking down a path that Christ has already walked. He has done it ahead of you, He has taken the full force of it and survived. He defeated death. That's why the Bible says this:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."
"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
(1 Corinthians 15:54-57, niv)

Because of what he's done, we don't have to go it alone. The passage I read earlier out of Romans 8 says this in a different translation:

“We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!”
(Romans 8:17, tmt)

When you consider being Here For Christ, you are not going it alone—you will go down a path that Christ has already travelled. And not only that, *He will go there with you.* Jesus

reassured us of this:

“And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:20, nlt)

That is very, very encouraging! Just remember, though, this isn't something you will do just once. You make the decision, but then you continue to live in it each day. It's...

5. Always *Perishing*

Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ, *and I no longer live.*” It's a sacrifice that we make, for sure. But it's not a one-time sacrifice. In the Old Testament, a sacrifice was made by giving the life of an animal. It was a one-time thing. But when you surrender your life to Christ, you have to keep doing it. It's what the Bible calls a “living sacrifice.” Romans says:

“Present yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1, rsv)

A “living sacrifice” means it is something you keep on doing, and continually doing so results in living for him. Someone once said that the trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. That's true – it means we must continue to die for him. It's a day by day, moment by moment thing so that we continually live for Him. The apostle Paul understood this – that's why he said:

“I die every day – I really mean that brothers and sisters.” (1 Corinthians 15:31, nirv)

Once you make this decision, it is a lifestyle, or should I say a *deathstyle*—we must continue to die to ourselves every day. I remind you that it's what God has always wanted for you: the Bible says:

“It's God's will that you should be sanctified.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3, niv)

...(or “*surrendered to Christ*”).

Again, the original language actually means “It is God's will that you *keep on* being sanctified.”

There are a couple of other things I want to tell you, about living your life Here for Christ. Not only is it always personal, present, painful, partnered, and perishing, it is also...

6. Always *Possessive*

In other words, once you surrender to Him, He possesses you. He owns you. You are his. That's why Paul said:

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

Christ will not go where he's not invited, nor will he take possession of something that isn't offered. Even though he has every right and claim to you (remember he created you in the first place, and then redeemed you or bought you back on the cross), even though he has the authority to *take* you, he waits for you to offer yourself completely.

There's an old book called, "My Heart, Christ's Home." And that book is a fictional story of a guy who invites Jesus to move into his house, and room by room, let's Jesus into more and more of his house, until he finally signs over the title. Jesus moves into the home of your heart. Then he will move through the rooms of your life, teaching you at each room, helping you to give it to him. He will plainly tell you what is best, but He will wait for you to choose it. The work has been done by Him, but the choice is yours. If you choose it, then the life you live will be His. Once you do, then He takes possession of you, and the Bible says that:

"When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything." (Colossians 2:10)

That's why the Bible says:

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3, niv)

And having done that, you will see displayed in you a power that comes from Christ. You will live a life that is...

7. Always ***Powered***

"I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20, niv)

The kind of life that you read about happening in the New Testament among the believers was not reserved for them and only for that time. It is a life that became available to all of us after Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit was poured out into the lives of believers. It's a life that we can live today, and it's a life that our community desperately needs to see. Our community has seen enough of selfish, powerless Christians! They are still waiting to see if the Christian life is really true. *And it is.* But this power is only available through the sanctified, surrendered life: you die in Him, He lives in you. The life you live in the flesh you now live by faith in the Son of God—*the Son of God himself!* – who loves you and gave his life for you. It is a resurrection powered life. Listen to what the Bible promises:

"You have been given fulness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority . . . having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."
(Colossians 2:10, 12, niv)

"By His power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also."
(1 Corinthians 6:14, niv)

"...to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live to serve you."
(2 Corinthians 13:4, niv)

I'm being very straight-forward with us today; no fluff, no filler, no stories or illustrations. My desire this morning is that the truth of the Scriptures will be revealed to us, so that's

pretty much all I'm doing is giving you straight Scripture. Have you noticed that? I want you to hear it clearly, and the clearest way to hear it is through His Word, as God drives it into your heart. God says that His word pierces to the very center of who we are:

“For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.” (Hebrews 4:12, niv)

I'm praying even as I speak that it's doing that in us. My prayer for us is the same as the Apostle Paul's prayer was:

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead.” (Ephesians 1:18-20, niv)

Now, what does this empowered life look like? Well there are a couple of distinctives that you will always know about the person who lives “here for Christ.” One is that you will see in their lives...

Perfect love.

Whenever we use the word “perfect” we get bent out of shape. After all, as people say, “there was only one perfect person that ever walked the earth, and that person was Jesus Christ.” Have you ever noticed that when people say that, they are usually using it as an excuse for their own imperfection? Well, it *is* a true statement—Jesus Christ *was* and is perfect. But what have we been saying all along? That He can live his life in us. So, no, we are not perfect. But yes, *he is perfect*. And when he lives in us, *he is perfect in us*.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus preaching a sermon on love—that our love should be such that we even love our enemies. Would you stand with me as I read this passage? It's an important one:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48, niv)

Thanks you can be seated. So what does he mean by “be perfect”? Well, to understand that, you have to look at the context. Jesus is preaching about love, and he concludes the thought by saying essentially, “You be perfect, therefore, just like your father in heaven is perfect.” That's not a suggestion or an idea, it is a *command*. But here's the thing: Jesus wouldn't command it if it couldn't be done; he doesn't command what he won't also give us the power to do. And the command is given in a sermon on love. So he's saying we must have *perfect love*. The Apostle John reminded us that we don't have to be afraid, that we can be made “perfect in love”:

“Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love.” (1 John 4:18, nlt)

In other words, one of the easiest ways to see the power of a life living Here For Christ is the way a person loves God, and the way that person loves others. And I’ve got to tell you, it takes a lot of power to love some of you! Just like it does for you to love me! It’s not easy, but it’s possible. It doesn’t mean we won’t make mistakes, but it means love for God and others drives *everything*. Look for the evidence of this power in your life and in each other. Because the way we love is evidence of the power of God—because that’s what God is. He IS love:

“We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in His love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.” (1 John 4:16, nlt)

So it would make sense that if Jesus owns you lock, stock, and barrel, and is living His life in you, then you too will love. That’s why the Bible says:

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:8-18, niv)

Jesus also said that this would be the distinguishing mark of his disciples—that they have this kind of love:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35, niv)

Love is the...

Living *Proof*.

Love is the living proof of death – the irony is not lost on me. It’s in dying that we live! It’s in becoming poor that we are rich. It’s in losing that we win, in serving that we lead, in giving generously that we gain. The proof of this life is death! When we die in him, which is what it means to live “Here For Christ,” *that* is when the world will see the proof that Christ is real—because then we really live!

But we Christians often get this backward. We become Christians because it’s about us – we want to be saved, we want, we want. We want to be fed; we want the music style that we like. We want...but our mature Christian lives are not supposed to be about us: God intends for us to sign over our lives so that now our lives are about Jesus and others. So it becomes about how *others* need to be saved, about how *others* need to be fed, and about what type of music *others* like. It’s about what type of building do *others need*. That’s why we need to renovate. It’s not about us! It’s about *Jesus* and *others*; and then Jesus takes care of us. That’s why Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8 about being willing to give up his rights for the sake of someone else. So listen; if you don’t like this type of Christianity, you might want to rethink things, because *this* is what God calls us to, and it’s the only way we can be our very best, and be what we were created to be.

The problem with that “me, me, me” attitude is that then we become really fickle. Here’s why: we are willing to serve Jesus *as long as he does what we want*. But when the price

gets too high, or the focus shifts from ourselves, we change our tune.

There are a lot of Christians like that, I think. We serve him as long as he's doing what we want. But the call we are being given today is to surrender and serve Jesus always. *Always*. Today you have the opportunity to submit your life to him. Will you?

Prayer

The idea of giving generously together for this great cause might be frightening. But to the life surrendered to Christ it is exciting – it becomes an exciting opportunity to die to ourselves and to see him do great things through his life in us.

Benediction:

(May) Christ dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
(Ephesians 3:17-19)