

# HERE FOR CHRIST

Psalm 37:3; Luke 9:57-62

1. Willing to sacrifice for Jesus

2. Available to serve Jesus

3. Determined to be single-minded for Jesus

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**West Valley Church**  
**Michael W. O'Neill**  
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## **Here For Good: Here for Christ<sup>1</sup>**

Today is the day my friends! Today is the day that we launch HERE FOR GOOD – an incredibly significant work. One day we will look back and see that this was the start of a major shift in the growth, ministry, and life of West Valley Church. Today is the first step in what 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. I believe what we are about to embark on is *vital* for the future health of our church and our ability to impact West Valley – and beyond – with the Gospel. To be finished with the burden of debt will free up \$100,000 each year in the church's budget! That's money that is currently going to profit the bank that could be put to use by us for ministry. Today we are able to do amazing things in our current ministries to children, youth, and adults (discipleship, worship, men and women), but they are all functioning on shoe string budgets. Think about what we could do with *\$100,000* every year! We could actually invest in our ministry to our own church, which means better equipping ourselves to grow in Christ and to live out the Gospel in our church and community.

We could also more fully invest in our outreach efforts in order to be even *more* effective reaching unchurched people in West Valley, especially now that we are going to have new neighbors to the north.

Not only that, our amazing facility is an incredible gift given to us from our predecessors. Some of you here helped make this place happen. But some parts of this building are nearly fifty years old (including this room we are sitting in)! Every week we use every corner of our building in every way; we've even been able to open it up to our community in ways that have met needs and built amazing partner relationships with people and other ministries. I'm excited to announce a *new* partnership – one we've been working on for many months – with La Casa Hogar. I'm very excited to announce that in April La Casa will begin holding citizenship classes here at our church for people in West Valley who want to become full citizens of our community and country! We are so blessed to be able to share our facility and help them in this way.

But, this great facility is in desperate need of being updated. And we need to do that so that we can be even better at welcoming new folks, and put this place to even better use for this generation in our church and the next generations to come – just like we've been able to do, thanks to previous generations. We need to put those mortgage dollars to better use than handing thousands over the bank every year. Think what we could do with the \$500,000 of interest we'll save. The church took out this mortgage 19 years ago, for \$2.5 million. We've

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a sermon by Rule Digal, "Commitment to Christ."

paid in the neighborhood of \$1.75 million in interest since then. Don't you think it's time we stopped giving all that money to the bank and started investing it in ministry here?!

I've got to tell you, over ten years ago, while Shelly and I were interviewing with the church about being the pastor, we hadn't even answered the call yet, but even then, I knew that one of the major priorities would be to eliminate the debt. This church **MUST** be debt free! Many of you know that our church took steps to refinance the debt seven years ago, but that was never meant to be the solution – it was only a temporary step that would lower our payments and interest rates, and buy us some time until we were ready to pay it off in full. That time is now! I think the Bible means it in Romans 13:8 when it says:

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

I also knew way back then that we were not yet ready to pay off the mortgage; we *first* needed to re-prioritize missions in an even greater way. I knew back then that WVC needed to re-invent the way we approached missions, so that we would include greater participation across all generations and involve relationship building with people in other countries. So we prayed with our church's missions leadership, we sought the Lord, and he led us to establish our missions partnership strategy in Guyana, when missions partnerships were not common in our denomination at all; now they are! And now, after six years, you know that we finished that partnership by dedicating that beautiful church and community center in Victoria.

*Now* we are ready. We intend to do even *more* ministry and mission partnerships – but we can't without *first* eliminating the debt.

I'll share some more in a bit, and of course we'll go over more and more of this over the next several Sundays. But I think you can see that, if we are going to accomplish this, it will mean first and foremost that we are **Here for Christ**. We *must* be committed to Christ. Every one of us is going to be challenged to pray about what God might ask us to do for the sake of his mission here at West Valley Church. What he's going to ask of us is going to be challenging for every one of us in our own way. He's going to ask us to step out in significant, sacrificial ways, and we're going to be faced with the decision to obey, or not – just like we talked about last week. In order to be ready to be obedient, we must each be more deeply committed to Christ; we must be first and foremost *Here For Christ*.

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

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

I want us to see what that means by having us look today at a short passage that tells the story of Jesus' encounter with three different people. Each of them was confronted with the cost of following Jesus. It's found in Luke 9:57-62, and I'd like to read it to you. I'd also

like to ask you if you'd focus your attention on the passage and help me honor God's Word by standing as I read it:

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

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

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

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

Thank you for standing – you can be seated. Let me first give you some background and put this passage into some context. At this point in time, the popularity of Jesus had spread throughout Palestine. Because of that, there were many people who were attracted to follow Jesus because He had performed great miracles. He had enabled the blind to see, the lame to walk, healed the sick, and cast out demons. There were thousands who had heard and saw Him multiply the 5 loaves and 2 fishes into enough food to feed the 5000 men *plus* the women and children. Now, I'm betting you, many people who had experienced these things had thought, "If Jesus can do all these things then surely, if I follow Him, He can meet all *my* needs. I don't want to miss this great chance for myself."

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

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

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

## 1. Willing to ***sacrifice*** for Jesus.

In verse 57 the first man said to Jesus: "I will follow you wherever you go." That was a really bold statement, but did he mean exactly what he said? Would he really be willing to follow Jesus anywhere? Did he have any idea where Jesus would be going and what might

be involved in his journey? Did he think of the consequences of following the teacher? Or, maybe, he was just thinking about the glory of being a follower of this miracle-working teacher; maybe he was thinking how impressive it would be to be at a dinner party, and be able to drop that name: “Oh, by the way, did I tell you I’m a follower of the next ruler of the world? Yep, I know Jesus personally.”

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

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

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

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

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

I want you to know, though, that I’m not saying that those who follow Him have “no security.” There is perfect security in being committed to the Savior—you’ll have everything you’ll need; but it’s not earthly security, like wealth or power or comfort. You *might* have those things, but those are *blessings*, not rights. Those are the means, not the end. It’s not the security of material possessions, or money, or homes. Instead it’s the security of God’s faithfulness in everything you need so we can be generous in every way, and then the certainty that we have a life beyond this one, that no one and nothing can take away.

To some, this kind of sacrificial commitment may come by way of persecutions. I’ve read numerous articles about the persecution that is experienced by our fellow Christians in China and in Muslim countries today. Many of them were tortured and horribly killed. Even children are not safe. They need our prayers! But these people are not afraid about death. They know death might be the price for their commitment to follow the Savior. One person was asked why he risked his life for Jesus. Without a second thought he said: “Because I

know no other option than serving Jesus. The greatest privilege is to give my life for my Lord." I'm in awe of them, and inspired by their commitment. If *they* can give their lives for Jesus like that, then for sure *you and I* can sacrifice at the *least* through giving in significant ways.

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. Available to *serve* Jesus.

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

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

One important thing to see is that this man was physically there with Jesus at this point in time, and was *not* at his own home. By that culture, that means that his father was probably not dead yet, because if his father had already died, he would not have been where Jesus

was – he would’ve been at home. The Jewish custom/tradition was always to bury someone on the very same day that he died.

We also know that at that time and in that culture, when someone died, especially the father of a family, it involved a process. First, the person was buried in a tomb or cave, and sealed in. One year after the initial burial, once the flesh had finished decomposing and was gone, there was nothing left but bones. At that point they would retrieve the bones, and then the son would have placed his father’s bones in a special box, called an ossuary, and that box would be set into the wall of a tomb. So everyone, including Jesus, knew what this man was saying. What this second prospective disciple was *really* saying was this: “Lord, please excuse me this time. Please wait until my father dies and is buried and then reburied, and then after that, I will follow you. I can’t be available to you now, but maybe later on.” He wanted Jesus to wait around for as much as a year or more before making a commitment to follow Him. The reply of Jesus was a stern rebuke of the man’s indecisiveness. He wasn’t available to Jesus. He wanted to follow Jesus when it was more convenient for him, but Jesus would have none of that.

Did any of you miss work last Monday because of the Superbowl – either you partied too hard or drown your sorrows or something? According to “The Workforce Institute,” over 17.5 million people missed work on Monday. 11.1 million of them got pre-approval to miss that day. 4.7 million called in sick on that Monday morning, and 1.5 million just didn’t show up – no explanation. Apparently 17.5 million of us didn’t find it convenient to show up for work the day after a football game was on TV.<sup>2</sup> What?!

Maybe that seems ridiculous to you, but how do you think it sounds to Jesus when we make excuses about our availability to him? He gave his life for us, and we can’t show up? Do we really think we can ghost Jesus?

How many times are we guilty of being unavailable to God and His work because we are doing something else? How many times do we neglect our time with God because we have to hurry to accomplish other things? That’s why we wrote those devotionals in your book – so you would be sure to take time with Jesus daily during **Here For Good**.

Now, I know we must always maintain a healthy balance between what we give for our work, our career and family, and what we give for the Lord. Jesus doesn’t want you to get out of balance with your responsibilities; that’s part of what it means to follow him. But don’t allow yourself to become so busy that you have no time left for the things of God.

I read a newspaper story some time ago about Mrs. Lilia Craig. The story was that she hadn’t missed attending church in 1,040 Sundays (20 years) although she was in her eighties. You’d think, doesn’t it ever rain or snow in her town on Sunday? Doesn’t she ever have unexpected company? Doesn’t she ever beg off to attend picnics, family reunions, or have headaches, colds, nervous spells, become angry at her pastor, or had her feelings hurt by someone else and felt justified in staying home to hear a good sermon on radio or TV?

Commitment and availability – that’s what she had. All we’re asking of you is to be here for *five* Sundays in a row; not 1,040 of them! Friends, no one can claim to have commitment

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wsfa.com/2020/02/03/millions-americans-skipping-work-day-after-super-bowl/>

unless she or he makes themselves available. Our commitment to God requires the availability of *all* we have to Him and His work.

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

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

The third man came to Jesus and made what seems like a reasonable request to go back to his home first and say good-bye to everyone there. In response, Jesus used a very familiar illustration that really drove home the truth that commitment to follow Him requires undivided attention and single-mindedness, which this prospective disciple failed to exhibit.

In verse 62, Jesus said, “No man, having put his hand to plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.” If a farmer wants to plow a straight line, he must concentrate fully on controlling the direction of the plow. He must keep his eyes looking in front and nowhere else, otherwise he will start to drift off course. Good plowing requires single-mindedness.

I don’t know about you, but when I mow my lawn, I don’t do laps. I feel like if you do laps, you end up with all these lines and then eventually ruts that just spiral in. I like to mow in straight lines and I do it in a different direction each time so the grass doesn’t start growing in patterns. I know, I’m probably a little OCD about that; is anyone else? I’ve found that to start, I have to mow a straight line across a wide area, and the best way to do that is not to look at my mower, but to find a fixed point where I want to end up (like a fence post), and then walk straight toward it. Then I get a straight line, and keep going on either side of that. It works the same way when plowing a field – especially when you were doing it with oxen and a plow. When Jesus said this, they lived in an agrarian society; everyone knew what it meant. Good plowing requires single-mindedness.

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

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

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

But try to take a careful look at everything that we gain by following Jesus. We gain His presence, His peace and His power. We gain a place in his Kingdom purposes. We gain his promises that he will provide everything we need. Some people in the Bible *did* look back when God had called them forward. Lot’s wife, Judas Iscariot, and Demas looked back. No



good thing is to be remembered about them. These three men – one made it all about himself; he wasn't willing to surrender. The other wanted to put it off for a year or more, the other wanted to put it off for a few days or weeks. They were not worthy of the Kingdom of God.

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

*Pray*

I would bet that as you've heard this, there is likely something you are already aware of; some way that you are holding back in being *Here for Christ*. Is there something Christ has been asking you to do, and you won't, or you resist? Here's what I want you to do. You'll see on the walls that there are four large posters of the pin drop. That pin drop, like a point on a map, indicates that we want to be **Here for Good**. Today, we want to commit to be *Here for Christ*. So up here on these tables are baskets that have post-it notes and sharpies. I'm going to ask you, in a moment, to come forward, take a post-it, and write some way that you need to be *Here for Christ*, and then take it to one of those pin drops, and post it on that poster, and then find your way back to your seat. Don't put your name on it; just put whatever that thing is that Christ is asking you to do or that you need to commit to him.

It might be an area of your life you need to surrender. It might be a relationship or a bad habit or some sin. It might be something he's asking you to do or someone to that you need to introduce to Jesus. It might be your finances; as we prepare for **Here for Good**, maybe you already feel resistance and an unwillingness to give in some significant way. Whatever it is, come forward, write it down, then place it on one of those four posters and then go back to your seat. When we are finished, we'll close.

*Pray*

So here we are; we *cannot* fully move forward without being able to prioritize and invest budget dollars into ministries.

That's how we arrived at the idea of **Here for Good**: we have a long, rich, God-blessed history on this corner for over 60 years (in fact, this Wednesday, West Valley Church will be 64 years old!). We don't intend to go anywhere soon, which is why we need to be debt free and allow our roots to grow deeply into this corner of God's good orchard.

Not only are we here for good, we've also done an enormous amount of good for God's Kingdom from here on this corner; we are here to do good – we are **Here for Good**! Psalm 37:3 talks about letting God use us right where we live. It says, "Trust the Lord and do good; live in the land, and farm faithfulness." That means we are *Here for Christ*, we are here for each other, we are here for our community, and we want to be here in generous ways. We are **Here for Good**, to plant our roots deep in this fertile soil by growing the Kingdom of God.

To accomplish this, it is going to require great faith and sacrifice on the part of every one of us; we need 100% participation. When all of us are all in, we will see God work to multiply our effort and we will accomplish this tremendous task of raising \$1.6 million over three years! Maybe even more than that, and sooner than that!

I want you to know that Shelly and I are *all in*. We too, are thinking and praying already about what God might be calling us to sacrifice so that we can make our best gift to the **Here For Good** generosity campaign. Like all of you, we've got challenges and "stuff" – unplanned expenses in this season of life; you know that we are caring for our aging parents and especially with my mom's cancer. We are helping our young adult children as best we can when they need us, not to mention that we are far behind in preparing for our own retirement one day. Still, through all that, we are listening to what God is calling us to give to **Here for Good** – exactly like we are asking you to do.

We're not asking you to make financial commitments yet, but we do want to challenge you:

- Begin praying for what God will accomplish in this campaign, through you and through all of us.
- Commit to being in worship every Sunday between February 9 – March 8.
- Commit to engaging in the discipleship material we've provided for you through the devotionals and small group materials to study together during these next six weeks. If you are not in a small group, we have special short-term small groups already organized just for you.
- Start reading the devotions in your book *today* – day one of week one starts *today*. Read these every day during this time together. You'll also find small group questions for you to think about before you go to your small group meeting and discuss them together.
- Join us at 8:50am on February 23 in the Orchard Room – that's during our Sunday morning class time, for a Q & A session about **Here for Good**.
- There's a sticker you can use to put on your car or your thermos or wherever you want, to show your desire to participate in **Here for Good**. There's also a magnet that becomes a frame. Use the pin drop to pin your commitment card on your fridge, or maybe your prayer requests. Use the frame for your picture or your family's picture in it on your fridge to remind yourself and your family that you are **Here for Good**.
- And use that commitment card that is in your packet to pray over, listen to God, and make a bold step of faith – bigger than you've ever done before – in your commitment to give to **Here for Good** at your West Valley Church. Okay? We'll collect these on March 8, so start praying now.