

HERE FOR EACH OTHER

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1. The Church is a God community

2. The Church is a local community

3. The Church is a sanctified community

4. The Church is a united community



West Valley Church
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Here For Good: Here for Each Other

Last week we launched HERE FOR GOOD – an incredibly significant event. One day we will look back on this time and see that this was the start of a major shift in the growth, ministry, and life of West Valley Church. We have begun an effort that will propel West Valley Church into a position of growth and influence for Christ in this community to a degree we've never had before. We believe what we've begun is *vital* for the future of our church and our ability to impact West Valley and beyond with the Gospel. We've said this already before, but I want to make sure you hear it again: We must be finished with the burden of debt at our church. Paying off the mortgage will free up \$100,000 each year in our church's budget! \$100,000 of your giving every year is currently going to *the bank* for their profit – but it ought to be here, put to use by us for ministry. Currently because of that debt our ministries to our children, youth, young adults and adults are all functioning on *shoe string* budgets. Now, I'll be the first to say that our pastors and leaders are doing amazing things with the dollars we *do* have; think about what we could do with *\$100,000* every year for ministry!

We could also 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 so many new families as neighbors to the north.

I also want to remind us of something that you heard Don Wilson talk about in the video: our amazing facility is an incredible gift given to us from our predecessors. Some of you who are here today 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 for our ministries, plus 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 organizations, and we've seen people become part of our church family because of it. But, this great facility is in desperate need of being updated. We must do so, in order to be *even better* at welcoming new folks. We want to be able to use this place in even greater ways for *this* generation in our church and for the generations to come – just like *we've* been able to do, thanks to previous generations. We must put those mortgage dollars to better use than handing a hundred thousand dollars over to the bank every year. And think what we could do with the \$500,000 in interest we'll save! Don't you think it's time we stopped giving all that money to the bank and started investing it in ministry here?!

To accomplish this, we've been working hard for a very long time to get us to this pivotal point in our church so we can pay off our mortgage and renovate key spaces in our facility. We believe God has led us to this time. We want to make sure you have everything you need to understand what it is we are doing, and so that you can be fully informed to pray

about your commitment to this great task. It will take 100% participation – each of us stepping out in great faith to do what God leads each of us to do. So, we have our web page: www.westvalleychurch.com/hereforgood. Watch the vision video there, and read through the material. We have the information in the packets that you received (if you didn't get one, grab one on your way out). We have these books that have information and instructions, along with pages for sermon notes, for small group questions, and for daily devotions. Have you been using those? How are you doing with it? I want you to know I prayerfully wrote all those specifically for this time.

Hold them up if you brought them with you? Please bring them each Sunday, and please plan to be with us every Sunday between now and March 8.

Last week, we learned that no matter what, we need to be “Here for Christ” with our lives. We all must be deeply committed to Christ, and then he will lead each of us to give to whatever degree he expects each of us to. We talked about how we need to be willing to sacrifice for Jesus, we need to be available to serve Jesus, and we need to be determinedly single-minded for Jesus. We concluded last week by each of us writing one area of our lives that we need to be “Here for Christ,” and we posted them on the posters around us, as you can see. There are some powerful commitments on those signs; things like what I do with my time, doing daily Bible reading and prayer, getting out of debt, not watching so much TV or spending so much time on my phone, getting baptized, volunteer more, work on my marriage, introduce certain people to Jesus, forgiving certain people, tithe to the church, and praying about what to commit for **Here for Good**. Those are all amazing things, and several of them have to do with what we are going to talk about today.

You see, to be **Here for Good** means not only to be *Here for Christ*, but we are also **Here for Each Other**.

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

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

The Bible does not refer to church as a building; it means *people*. The Church is not a building, it's a community. So while we are and will be identified AT our beautiful building, we are not to be identified AS a beautiful building. We are to be identified AS a community of believers in Jesus. And that means we look and act differently than any other gathering of people.

So what is the Church supposed to look like?

It looks like a group of people who love God and love each other; people who are seeking to put the needs of others ahead of their own. They are servants. They watch out for one

another, they care for one another, they encourage one another, and they share generously together.

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

You can find that everywhere in the Bible, and today we are going to look specifically in one passage, just three verses. Look at what it says in 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:

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

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

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

1. The church is a **God** community.

Paul wrote this letter to “the church of God.” Now, what does that mean? It means the church is not great because *you* belong to it (as much as I think you are a great group of people and I love spending time with you!). We are not a great church because of the people who attend. God is not impressed by our level of education, our income, or our great personalities. Our church is valuable because *it is God's*; it belongs to God. It's His idea. He loves the church. He calls the church His Bride. The sad thing is many Christians don't feel the way God does about the church. Even though God created the church and loves the church, there are many Christians who seem to want nothing to do with her.

Recent research reports that in the United States about 10 million *Christians* have not been to church in the last six months. Nearly all of them say their spiritual life is important, and still 10 million of them don't seem to care about God's bride. That's seems so sad. I know they probably have a lot of reasons; I know how busy our lives are, especially when you have kids who are involved in so many things. But imagine how painful it must be for God; to know that His children – the ones He sent His Son to die for don't like His bride. They're all for *Jesus*, they just don't seem like His wife.

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

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

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

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

The incredible thing is that, even though I'm far from perfect, and nobody knows that better than Shelly, that makes no difference to her – it might annoy her from time to time but my wife does not love me because I am perfect. It took about 5 seconds after saying "I do" for her to realize that wasn't true. Actually, she knew it long before that and she *still* said, "I do"! But despite the fact that I am imperfect, she continues to love me. That's called *grace*!

God is the same way toward the church. The church is special not because of who we are but because of Who we belong to, and because of the covenant He made to us! We belong to God! There are a lot of unflattering things you can say about the church. But remember Who she belongs to – remember Who loves her – remember Who died for her – remember Who created her.

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

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

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

"The borrower is the slave to the lender." (Proverbs 22:7, esv)

West Valley Church has been a slave to the bank, so in many ways we cannot do what God wants us to do, because a large amount of our budget must go to the bank every year. Let's get West Valley Church free to be fully God's Church!

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

2. The church is a *local* community.

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

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

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

A few times when I’ve talked to people about church, I’ve heard people say, “I don’t belong to the local church, I belong to the invisible church.” Meaning “I am a Christian, I am part of the universal body of Christ, but I won’t commit to a local church. I see no value plugging into the local community of faith.” To which I say, “Okay. When you need someone to pray for you, who prays for you? Invisible people praying invisible prayers? When you get sick who visits you – invisible people? When you need someone to bring in food or help you fix your house or car, or to cry with you when you are grieving or sit with you when you are lonely, I assume you have invisible people with invisible food and invisible help who do that for you?” It’s easy to commit to something invisible, it’s easy to make a commitment when nothing will be required of me. No one to keep you accountable, no one to ask you how you are doing, no one to say, “You’re not living consistently with what you believe.” No one to say, “We need you to give to support the great ministry of this church and keep it going.” Invisible is a *comfortable* commitment, isn’t it? But if we learned anything last week, it’s that following Jesus is *not* comfortable. Following Jesus is not for the lazy couch slouchers. Have you ever noticed that God isn’t satisfied with those types of commitment? Once we commit to Him, He’s not content with us just talking about it. He is not impressed by our words! He wants to see your commitment, and the way we show it is how we love each other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The church is a *sanctified* community.

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

When God looks at the Church, He doesn’t see her flaws. He sees all the reasons He loves her. He sees a perfect reflection of His Son, Jesus Christ. And guess what: God looks at you personally the same way He looks at the church! When God looks at you... He sees His Son, Jesus Christ, who is holy.

Look at it this way: the Apostle Paul said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

And the more resources we have for ministry here at West Valley Church, the better we can grow in relationship to each other and to Christ. We need to move money from mortgage for our ministry to children, to youth, to young adults, and to adult of all ages in small groups, classes, potlucks, and in worship ministries, so that we can do an even better job of helping each grow in our Christ-likeness.

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

4. The church is a *together* community.

We are in this TOGETHER. I want you to hear what the Bible says about this in another place:

“You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness. But that doesn’t mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. . . It was he who “gave gifts to people”; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ.

And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature." (Ephesians 4:11-13, tmt)

We are in this to grow together!

We have this amazing facility to worship together in, to share meals together in (and to have them cooked here by our wonderful cooks!), we have this facility to fellowship in, to enjoy conversation over a cup of coffee, to play volleyball and basketball in. We have this facility with spaces designed specifically for our little ones to grow in and be safe, for our youth to gather and build relationships, for adults to meet in and pray together in and learn together. In every way this facility helps us to be together; but it could do so even *better* if it were updated.

We have this amazing space to teach over 500 children each year about Jesus while they play soccer on our great fields. We have this amazing facility to provide homework club for the schoolchildren across the street, and to provide space for groups like the Union Gospel Mission, Love INC, Birthright, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Bible Study Fellowship, World Relief, the high school and the junior high school and community groups and La Casa Hogar to have important meetings and fundraisers. We have all of this, because West Valley Church gathered together decades ago to make this happen for us. Now it is our turn to do this for each other and for the generations to come.

Let's pray:

Pray

Last week, we all answered the call to be *Here for Christ*. We came forward, wrote an area of commitment on post it notes, and placed them on these four posters. Today we want to do the same thing; today, I want to ask you to write one way that you are, or need to be, *Here for Each Other*: either some way that you serve your church now or want to start serving your church, so that we can grow in even greater ways as the church – God's local community, sanctified together. I want to invite you to 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. If it is difficult for you to come forward, just raise your hand and we have people who will come to you and post it for you.

I want to say this again: we *cannot* fully move forward in our mission as a church without being free of debt and 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 (last Wednesday, West Valley Church turned 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, 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, have been thinking and praying already about what God is calling us to sacrifice so that we can make our *best* gift to the **Here For Good** generosity campaign – just like we are asking you to do. And, like you, we’ve got our own stuff – Shelly and I are fully in the “sandwich generation” – caring for our aging parents and wanting to be available to help our adult kids, along with our own financial responsibilities. But even so, 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 any financial commitments yet, but we do want to challenge you:

- Begin praying for what God will accomplish in this campaign, through you, first, and through all of us
- Commit to being in worship every Sunday between now and March 8, when we will receive our commitments.
- Commit to using the discipleship material we’ve provided for you through the devotionals and small group materials to study together during these 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 two starts *today*. If you haven’t started yet, go back and get caught up. If you haven’t picked up your packet, you can get one on the way out, and if you need an extra book, let them know at the table. We also have materials available in both English and Spanish. 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. You can also download a digital copy from the **Here for Good** page on our web site.
- Join us at 8:50 am next Sunday – February 23rd in the Orchard Room – that’s during our Sunday morning class time, for a Q & A session about **Here for Good**.
- 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.
- 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. You can use it in one piece, or you can pull out the orange pin-drop and put them up separately. Use it on your car, or to put your commitment card on your fridge or use

it as a frame for you family picture so you can remember to pray for yourself and your family as you prepare for **Here for Good.**

- Okay? We'll collect commitment cards beginning on March 8, so please: start praying now!

Pray