

HERE FOR GENEROSITY

Proverbs 11:11

1. Blessed to be a blessing

2. Just to do justice

3. Impacted to make an impact

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West Valley Church
Michael O' Neill
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Here for Good: Here for Generosity

West Valley Church is **Here for Good**. That means that we will be here on this corner in this community until Jesus returns. We're here for good. 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. 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. Last week we saw that to be **Here for Good** also means that we are *Here for Our Community*; that very clearly the reason we are not in Heaven yet is because there are other people around us who *won't* be there if we don't introduce them to Jesus, so we follow Jesus' example and his commands: to seek people, to see them saved, to serve them, and to sacrifice for them. So if we combine all those sermons it means this: if we are going to take our relationship in Christ seriously, we are going to *give* of ourselves for others. We are going to be generous with our love and with our lives. We are *Here for Generosity*. God has called and ordained *this* church to make West Valley a better place. God's will is that His people who gather at West Valley Church will be a blessing to the people around them.

That's why it is so important, at this point in our church's story, that we *finally* deal with and address the debt and the needed renovations to our facility.

We believe what we've begun 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: the time is *now* for us to eliminate our mortgage that we've been carrying for nearly 20 years. To be finished with the burden of debt will free up \$100,000 annually in the church's budget! That's money that is currently profiting the bank that should be put to good use by us for ministry. Think about what we could do with *\$100,000* every year! Think what we could do to reach our community with the Good News of God's love for them! Think how well we could introduce people to Jesus Christ, if we could invest in our ministries inside and outside our church!

This is especially true now that there are over 600 luxury apartments moving in next door to us. Those are going to be young adults and young families that statistically have no relationship with a church.

And, our ability to minister means we need to update the effectiveness of one of the main tools we have – our facility. Except for the café, the newest parts of our building are *twenty* years old, and the oldest parts – including this room – were built in the *1970s*! These spaces were made to meet the needs of people and a culture that lived almost fifty years ago. It's time for us to update these spaces to meet the needs of people *today*. 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.

So today I want to make sure we understand that if we are here for Christ, for each other, and for our community, then it inevitably and logically and naturally follows that we are here to be generous; we are *Here for Generosity*. We are being called to give sacrificially for **Here for Good**. The vision is not just for *us*; the vision is for those around us – for our community, and even beyond our community, and for the children and youth who are with us today. We looked at a verse last week that I want to return to today: Proverbs 11:11 says that “Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted . . .” Another translation says, “A city becomes great when the righteous give it their blessing. . .” Let me translate that to where we live: “Through the blessing of West Valley Church, the city of West Valley is exalted. . .” (that’s the pmt: Pastor Mike Translation). The point is that wherever God’s people are, He intends for them to be a blessing to those around them. Notice that it does *not* say, “Through the blessing of the righteous, the righteous will exalt themselves.” By our presence and involvement where we live, who gets exalted are built up? The city! Who do we bless? The city!

This statement from Proverbs was true of God’s intentions for His people in the Old Testament, it was true of His people in the New Testament, and it is still true of His people today. Our mission statement as a church is to *Introduce People to Jesus Christ, to Equip People with a Faith that Works, and to Live as People with Purpose*. That verse fits our mission, and we must do whatever we can to accomplish that, because that is the mission we get from the Bible for the people of the Kingdom of God. Many of you are committed to that mission and pray for that mission in this church every day. Your Leadership Team, which is your church board, is made up of leaders who plan and pray and steward that mission. And as we carry out that mission, our church will be a blessing to this city and to the world. It’s already happening! And we’ve come to the place in our mission that we must all come together and participate in the incredible opportunity and endeavor, to be *Here for Generosity*.

So we are going to spend the remainder of our time in this message today unpacking what Proverbs 11:11 looks like. I think it’s clear that for us to bless and exalt our city, it means we are going to have to give of ourselves; it will require generosity on our part; something must come *from* us that benefits those around us. God loves us, and he calls us to love others. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. We’ve been loved, we must love. We’ve been given to, we must give. We are...

1. ***Blessed*** to be a ***blessing***.

That word “blessing” in the verse means a couple of things. First, it means that God blesses His people. All through the Bible you find examples of God’s desire to bless His people. That blessing can come in many different forms. It can mean peace of mind. It can mean health. It can mean material blessing. It doesn’t *always* mean those things, but “blessing” *will* always include more of God Himself; God longs to be with his people, and so the greatest blessing is his presence with us. And with His presence comes the blessing of His provision; He will provide whatever we need, so we can be generous.

Here's something that's interesting about the blessing that comes from being in God's presence: research has proven that those who faithfully follow Jesus gradually increase their worth. Over time, the bottom line of believers generally increases. Now that doesn't necessarily mean that their money multiplies or that they suddenly get rich. Part of the way that God blesses is when Christians realize who they are in Christ, they face life more confidently. They realize that everything they have belongs to God, they are grateful and so they become more responsible and a better steward of God's resources. When we realize how much God loves us and provides for us, we begin to take better care of what he gives us.

Jonathan Gruber of the economics department at Massachusetts Institute of Technology did a study that yielded the following conclusion: Attending religious services may enrich the soul, but it will also fill your wallet. Gruber was quoted as saying:

"Doubling the frequency of attending church leads to a 9.1% increase in household income . . . Those who attend church more, end up having higher levels of education and income, lower levels of welfare receipt and disability, higher levels of marriage and lower levels of divorce."¹ That study simply points out the fact that as we obey God, all the parts of our lives get better; we will be blessed by Him, and sometimes that blessing comes in monetary or material ways. Whether or not it does is not the point; God will *always* provide what we need as we trust and obey Him. That's what God was saying through the Old Testament prophet Malachi when he said:

"Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my Temple. Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams." (Malachi 3:10, tmt)

Again, that doesn't mean that we will automatically become rich – our bank account may not be full, but our lives most definitely will change and become more full!

And we can trace *every* blessing in our lives back to God; it all originates from Him. James in the Bible says:

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (James 1:17, niv)

Of course, the greatest gift of all is abundant life here on earth and eternal life in heaven. It's called salvation, and it is available to those who will receive it because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

And it is God's intention to bless others *through you*. That's the second meaning of the word blessing in Proverbs 11:11—that as God blesses you, he wants to use you to be a blessing to others:

"I'll make you a great nation and bless you. I'll make you famous; *you'll be a blessing*. I'll bless those who bless you; those who curse you I'll curse. All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3, tmt)

This is a promise to Israel, but it also applies to believers: you will be blessed and you will be a blessing.

¹ (Reuters, Oct. 25, 2005)

Every blessing that God has given to you, he wants you to use it to be a blessing to others. **Here for Good** is a major way, right here and now, that you can bless others; by giving out of what God has given you and out of what you trust that he will give you. **Here for Good** is a commitment that we are all making for the next three years.

When it comes to giving to the church, the Bible expects all of us to give a tithe – 10% of our income to the church we attend. That’s clearly stated in Malachi 3 as well as by Jesus in Matthew 23:23. But then **Here for Good** is a commitment we are all making, on faith, that *above* the tithe, we will give whatever generous amount we feel God is asking us to do. It’s a commitment to give, over the course of the next three years, an amount that we wouldn’t normally think we could give. It’s a promise, on faith, that God will provide it so that we can give it. So it will likely include both one-time gifts as God blesses, as well as a commitment to give regularly in significant ways above the tithe.

As we’ve said before, our goal is to raise \$1.6m over the next three years. That’s \$1.1m to pay off the mortgage that the church has been paying for the last 20 years. We’d be paying on it for about 14 more years if we didn’t raise those funds. If we pay that off, it will free up close to \$100,000 every year in our budget that can go to ministries – both to those within our church as well as those in our community who haven’t met Jesus yet – moving money from mortgage to ministry. Plus, the other \$500,000 we need to raise will go a long way toward much needed improvements in our facility – in this space, in the foyer restrooms so they are handicap accessible, and in other spaces of our church as we are able.

Take stock of what you have...God has not given you what you have so that you can stash it away somewhere. It is given to you so that you can be generous with it. And as long as you keep giving it away, God will keep giving it back to you. Jesus said it himself:

“Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands---all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.” (Luke 6:38, gnb)

The more you give, the more comes back to you, because God is the greatest giver in the universe. You can’t out-give Him. Go ahead and try. See what happens.

We were talking about this in a recent class I was teaching here at church, and one couple shared how they were at a previous church out of state, and that church was also doing a campaign like we are.

The couple had decided to faithfully start tithing 10% about 6 months before the giving campaign started. When it came time to pray about what they should give for the campaign, they both came up with same number, but they didn't know how they were going to be able to do it. They wrote their commitment on the commitment card and turned it in.

They had filed their taxes, which included the deduction for their tithe. Two months after they made their commitment, they received their tax returns, and there was an increase in their return; that was – nearly to the dollar – the amount they pledged to the church!

Their tithing was what gave them the larger return that year...and they were able to turn around and give what they had pledged! God, of course, provided as He always does! They found these promises from God to be true! Now, I’ve said this earlier, but let me sound this warning more clearly in case you get the wrong idea: *We do not give generously in order to*

get rich. We give generously because God tells us to. Giving is a sacrifice, and sometimes we feel that sacrifice. God's payoff is very real, but the Bible says it comes at the proper time:

"So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up." (Gal 6:9, nlt, italics added)

That may be *now*, or it may be *later*, or it may be in heaven. God knows when you need it most; you can trust him.

God has given you lots of material blessings, so you can bless others. Let's look at what the Bible says about how God supplies what we need: "Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that . . ."

So that...*what?* How do you think he will finish that sentence? Do you think he's saying we will be made rich in every way so that "...we can get rich here on earth"? Nope; that's wrong. Scripture says that the reason God gives us so much is this: "so that *you can be generous on every occasion*, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." (2 Corinthians 9:10-11, niv) God is generous with you so that you can be generous. So in that verse, God comes right out and tells us why he gives us more than we need. It's not so we can find more ways to spend it. It's not so we can indulge ourselves and spoil our children. It's so we can give—*generously*.

When God provides us with more money, we often think "Well—this is a blessing!" And while that is true, it is even more appropriate if we say to ourselves, "This is an opportunity to *be* a blessing!" We need to see it as another opportunity for us to be generous. We are *blessed* to be a *blessing*!

God doesn't necessarily expect you to go broke being generous, but he is expecting you to sacrifice for the cause that is greater than yourself—His kingdom and his church. The Apostle Paul said:

"I am not trying to relieve others by putting a burden on you; but since you have plenty at this time, it is only fair that you should help those who are in need. Then, when you are in need and they have plenty, they will help you. In this way both are treated equally." (2 Corinthians 8:13-14, gnb)

God doesn't want you to have too little, nor does He want you to have too much. He intends for you to have just *enough*, and then *give the rest away*. Proverbs in the Bible says:

"Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8, niv)

Figure out what is enough for you to live on (and be sure to get out of debt – be responsible, just like we are doing here at the church). And be sure that *beyond what you need, you need to give*.

You are not a bucket; you are a pipeline. God doesn't pour into your life to fill you up like a bucket so that it all stops with you – He wants it to pass through your hands to others like a pipe. You use what you need, and the rest you pass on. That's one of the things that

Proverbs 11:11 means when it says that the city will be exalted through you—in the sharing of your blessings – you want to give in a way that blesses others. That’s exactly what we’ve been saying about **Here for Good**; for Christ, for each other, for our community, for generosity.

The second thing that this verse talks about is that God’s people are...

2. ***Just to do Justice.***

The book of Proverbs makes a big deal out of justice; 10 different proverbs address this directly and many more refer to it indirectly. The context of Proverbs 11 is all about the way of living of God’s people – they live in ways that are just, so when this verse talks about God’s people exalting a city, it is talking about justice, too: *it is referring to the moral character that God’s people bring to the culture, and their influence on the systems that oppress people.* That’s what it means for us to be just. God spoke through the Old Testament prophet Micah, saying:

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8, niv)

What we are talking about is the character of our lives, and God expects His people to have it. Read through the whole chapter 11 of Proverbs. In fact, read through all of Proverbs. It’s all about the honest character that God expects of his people. God is looking for the good character of His people at West Valley Church to have an affect on the culture of the community around us, causing West Valley to be a better place to live: more fair, more just, more safe.

I can’t tell you how many times I cringe to hear about people in our community who claim they are Christians, and yet they lie, they steal, they cheat, they gossip, they cuss like sailors, they slander and mischaracterize people of other races. Trust me – I hear about them and read it on social media. They slander others. They gossip and bad-mouth people – even in their own church family!

I’ve got a refrigerator magnet that a friend of mine gave me that really sums it up sometimes. It says, “Jesus is cool—but some of his followers give me the creeps.”

Folks, the world does not need more creepy Christians or dishonest people. The world does not need more mean-spirited people, or self-seeking people. The world needs people of loving character who are honest and fair and just. And if God’s people are *not* that way, then who in the world will be? But when God’s people *are* that way, that’s revolutionary! It’s counter-cultural! We are just to do justice. God saved you so that your life can help others.

Imagine how our community would respond to people who are gracious and honest and just. At first they might have a hard time believing it; they might wonder if it’s insincere. But eventually I can guarantee you they would be grateful for it and even want to be a part of a group of people like that – like you!

This is the kind of character that Jesus was referring to when he told us that we are to add seasoning and light to the culture around us:

"You are like salt for the whole human race. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It has become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it. "You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16, gnb)

We are people who are blessed to be a blessing, and we are to be just in order to do justice. Through being generous in **Here for Good**, we will be able to do even more for those members of our community who have so much stacked against them. Think about the children in our partner schools. The majority of the children in those schools are on free and reduced lunches; when we provide backpacks and school supplies, when we volunteer in the schools, when we aid them with their homework each week, when we help them discover that learning new things is fun in our summer science camps, we are helping children and families who need justice when the system is working against them in many ways. When we help our Latino families learn English, learn how to use the computers, learn how they can become citizens, we are providing justice for our community. Think about the over 500 children who enroll in Upward Soccer with us, and all the families they represent. These families need a place for their children to learn how to play a great sport and be a valuable part of a team, and they can do it in a safe and loving environment. More than that, they can do it in a way that they are hearing the Gospel each week of the season – for 10 weeks! – with multiple opportunities to accept Christ and to know that we are a church that loves them. We are providing hope and love and a church family and a future for those kids and families; if *that's* not justice, I don't know what is. We do all those things now, while still paying \$100,000 each year toward a mortgage. Imagine how we could do so much more if that money were used for ministry!

We are blessed to be a blessing; we are just to do justice. Two great ways that West Valley becomes greater because of your generosity.

Finally, a city is exalted because we have been...

3. ***Impacted*** to make an ***impact***.

When you became a Christian, God made a profound impact in your life. The Bible says:

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!"
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

You have been dramatically changed; you will never be the same. You heard and accepted the Good News of God's great love for you. And now, God expects you to share that same Good News with others, too:

"Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation." (Mark 16:15, niv)

God's ultimate desire for people is that they would know him and not leave this world without being in a relationship with him:

“God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

God wants His people to share the Good News with others so that others can be blessed by Him, too.

In Acts chapter two there is a great description of the impact that the church was having on the city they were in:

“They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers. Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47, gnb)

Did you catch that phrase: “enjoying the good will of all the people.” The church was having a positive impact on the world around them, and the city appreciated that impact. That’s the same impact that God wants our church to have on West Valley. And that is the impact that God has positioned us to have—to make a difference in our community that the city will value and appreciate, being a blessing to them through our giving and through our actions in this community, for the ultimate goal of people responding to the Good News of God’s love for them.

That’s exactly what God is preparing us to do.

This last week, we were contacted by the Yakima Herald about the difference our church is making. This was the message:

“I’m a reporter at the Yakima Herald-Republic working on a story about churches in the Valley that are “rebranding,” moving or changing in their approach to delivering the message they have always delivered and are bucking the trend in declining membership. We have several churches in the Valley that are growing and going beyond the impact of a traditional church. People have mentioned your church and said you take a dynamic, sometimes nontraditional approach to delivering the message that other churches also deliver, but you do it in a different way to engage with the community and include members of all ages and backgrounds. I also heard about you recently as I wrote about Sam Miller getting his service dog, Finn, and you helped with fundraising.”

Folks, that’s YOU! The paper is calling us because they want to know what’s going on here; they are taking notice because through your blessing, West Valley is being built up.

There’s quite a bit of talk about what we give to West Valley, from allowing groups to use our facility to all the other things we do in the schools and community.

You know what surprises me? I’m surprised that people would think it’s unusual for a

church to want to give back to a city. The reporter mentioned something about churches “rebranding” – we’re not “rebranding” – we’re just the church, being the church! I don’t understand why it’s a big deal; it’s our mission!

But do you see what’s happening? Our church is “enjoying the good will of all people.” And do you know what else that means? God is blessing us and wants the city to be exalted through us – the city of West Valley and beyond.

We’re just getting started! That means that we *must* be willing to give in very significant ways to **Here for Good** so we can continue and expand these ministries and update our facility. It means we must live lives that have good character, that are making an impact in the city around us. If we fail in any of these things, then God will not be able to exalt this city through us, according to His desires.

Church, it’s *that* serious. There’s that much on the line. Let’s give like He told us to. Let’s live like He tells us to. Let’s exalt cities like He wants to.

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**. Over the last three weeks, we’ve all pinpointed ways we are going to be **Here for Good** for Christ, each other and our community. Today, we want to commit to be *Here for Generosity*. Next week, we will all bring our commitment cards forward, having written down what we believe God is asking us to give. So this week, before we do that, I want us to say, “I want to be willing to obey you, God. I’m with you, God. I’m going to be all-in through West Valley Church.” Up here on these tables are baskets that have post-it notes and sharpies. We’ve done this each week, but this week I’m going to ask you to do something different: in a moment, I’d like to ask you to come forward, take a post-it, and write three words on your post it. If you want to be willing to do whatever God asks you to do, write: “**I’m all in.**” That means you want to be ready to do whatever God asks of you for **Here for Good**. Then take that note to one of those pin drops, and post it on that poster with the post-it notes we’ve already put on them. Post it on there and then find your way back to your seat. Don’t put your name on it; just put that phrase, if you are open to whatever God is asking of you. When we are all done, We’ve got an exciting announcement to share with you before we go.

Okay? When you are ready, please come.

When done:

I want to read a passage of Scripture to you; it is from the Old Testament, 1 Chronicles 29. The people of Israel are finally ready to build a Temple for God. David has been preparing for the time, preparing the people, and preparing his own resources. His son Solomon is going to be the one who leads the work. So David calls all the people together, and this is what it says:

Then King David turned to the entire assembly and said, “My son Solomon, whom God has clearly chosen as the next king of Israel, is still young and inexperienced. The work ahead of him is enormous, for the Temple he will build is not for mere mortals—it is for the Lord God himself! ² Using every resource at my command, I have gathered as much as I could for building the Temple of my God. Now there is

enough gold, silver, bronze, iron, and wood, as well as great quantities of onyx, other precious stones, costly jewels, and all kinds of fine stone and marble.

³ “And now, because of my devotion to the Temple of my God, I am giving all of my own private treasures of gold and silver to help in the construction. This is in addition to the building materials I have already collected for his holy Temple. ⁴ *(then he lists all the amounts that he is giving to the building of the Temple. Then he said,)* Now then, who will follow my example and give offerings to the Lord today?”

⁶ Then the family leaders, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the generals and captains of the army, and the king’s administrative officers all gave willingly. ⁷ For the construction of the Temple of God, they gave *(and then it lists how much the leaders gave sacrificially, and then it says,)* ⁹ The people rejoiced over the offerings, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord, and King David was filled with joy.

As you may know, a number of our church leaders gathered together last night for a time of prayer, praise, worship, and to register their early commitment to the “Here for Good” campaign. The group that gathered last night were our Leadership Team members, our pastors and staff, our small group Leaders, our Worship Leaders, our teachers, leaders from our youth and young adult, and more.

Out of approximately 260 households that give on a regular basis to West Valley Church, 60 of those households have already made their financial commitments.

I am excited to share with you this morning that the total of those early commitments – from just 60 of our over 260 households – is... \$876,000 dollars! Will you celebrate with me the amazing goodness of God shown in these people taking such huge steps in their generosity?!

That’s 60 of our households. That leaves the other 200 of our households to do the rest! 1.6m is the *minimum* needed to achieve your goal of debt eradication + facility enhancements. Eliminating our debt (1.1m) will happen first, and facility enhancements will happen next. There are SO MANY things we need to do to "sharpen the tool" of the facilities God has given you. No dollar will be wasted---we will pay off the bank, and then make investments in our facilities in order to be HERE FOR GOOD in every possible way for the West Valley community in the decades to come.

So next Sunday, each of you will have the opportunity to present your commitment to this campaign. The goal is well within reach – the need can be achieved! If everyone will prayerfully seek God and His will in this very important decision, following the example of these faithful families who have led the way, I am confident that the result will be pleasing to God! Come prepared to make your commitment next Sunday.

Alex, I know you have some things to say...

What an exciting and encouraging move of God to see people sacrifice to make decisions like this! Our goal is a big one: \$1.6m over the next three years. Reaching our goal will

require all of us, each one of us, to do our part.

\$1.6 is the *minimum* we need to be all in and make the improvements necessary for what God wants to do through us!

Here for Good is an opportunity for us to grow our faith perhaps more radically than we ever have before, and I do not want you to miss out on that. Take the Challenge. You won't regret it!

Stand with me:

May God richly bless those of you who have challenged us with your commitment, May he bless each of us as we contemplate His will, and may he continue to bless West Valley Church!