

HERE FOR GOOD

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

1. Live abundantly in exile

2. Live loyally for the Lord

3. Live generously for others

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West Valley Church
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Here for Good

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

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

In this sermon series we've learned that being **Here for Good** means, first of all, that we are *Here for Christ*. All that we have and all that we do is for Christ; for his purpose, his Kingdom, and his glory. 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. **Here for Good** also means that we are *Here for Our Community*; one of the very clearest messages of Scripture is that the primary mission of God's Church is to introduce people to Jesus Christ, and we do that the way that Jesus told us and showed us – by loving and serving our community. Then last week we realized that to be **Here for Good** in all those ways means we will be *Here for Generosity*; we have been blessed so that we can be a blessing, we have been made just to do justice, and we have been impacted by the Gospel so we can impact others with the same Good News. Last week we all came forward, posting the words "I'm All In" on these pin drop posters. By the way, if you haven't, I'd strongly encourage you to go look at the different notes on those posters; they are really inspirational – all the ways that we have committed to be **Here for Good** – some are written in English, some in Spanish. It will move you to tears. So all of that brings us to the point of all of this: that West Valley Church, and all of us who are a part of it, are **Here for Good**.

What is happening here is a clear and definite move of God. You've felt it; we all have, and it was overwhelmingly confirmed by the way our leaders set the example for us last week with their commitments. Now, it is up to *all of us* to step up and step in to what God is doing. Please: be a part and do your part; you don't want to be left out and you don't want to miss out.

What God has led us to is *vital* for the future of our church and our ability to be **Here for Good**. We've said this many times already, but I want to make sure you hear it again: 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 money is currently profit for the bank that instead 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 with that 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 all those luxury apartments moving in next door to us. Those are going to be young adults and young families that, according to demographic research have never had a relationship with a church.

Besides funding ministries, to be able to minister effectively means we need to update one of the main tools we have – our incredible facility. Except for the café, the *newest* parts of our building are *twenty* years old, and the oldest parts – including this room – were bought and built in the *1970s*! These spaces were made to meet the needs of people and a culture that lived almost five decades ago. It's time for us to update these spaces to meet the needs of people *today and in the future*. We need to be able to do our very best to welcome and minister to people who come through our doors every week looking for a church home and a place to worship God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please tell me that you are getting this – because *this* is why you are here; this why we are **Here for Good**.

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

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

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

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

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

1. Live ***abundantly in exile***.

This wasn’t exactly what God’s people wanted to hear; they wanted to hear that they would be back in the Promised Land soon. They wanted to know that God was going to swoop in and rescue them and restore them to the promise. They hoped they could somehow sequester themselves from the evil and unclean and perverse people of Babylon, preserve

themselves until God would rescue them and get them back to the place where they could live free again.

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

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

You are not going to be able to cross a border with signs that say, "Welcome to the Kingdom of God," because you are already in it.

The Kingdom of God is not a place to live, it is a way to live.

It is a way to live life abundantly, with God through Christ, right where we are.

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

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

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

Are we in exile? In a way, yes. When you became a Christian – that means that you realized it was your sin that sent Jesus to the cross, that he suffered and died in your place, was buried, and then rose from the dead to break the power of sin in your life. So you accepted his forgiveness and sacrifice and you accepted his new life in you. When you became a Christian, you became a citizen of God's Kingdom. So now you live your life differently – *while you are here*. That's our instruction from Scripture:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The New Testament tells us:

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

Here for Good isn't really about our financial goal, even though that is a key element of it. **Here for Good** has always been, and always will be, about living fully for the Lord, and then obeying whatever he asks of you. We've stated the goal, but we have not and will not tell you how much you should give as an individual; you need to pray about that and do what God tells you. And the truth is, what the Lord will ask of you might even be bigger than what we would ask; he knows how much your faith needs stretching.

Eva Lounsbury is our missions president, and she is also the prayer leader of our campaign team. In that role, she emails regular prayer prompts to our team. I want to read you a portion of the prayer she sent out last week: “(**Here for Good** is) not about giving all our money to the campaign, but it's about giving all of US and our desires and our plans and our dreams and our talents to the Lord, and then obeying as He leads us – to give, to serve, to go, to preach and teach and love.” I loved that – she's so right, and it is so true. **Here for Good** means we are urging all of us to live fully and loyally to the Lord. We demonstrate that by committing to give whatever God asks of us.

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

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

No matter what, we live loyally for the Lord!

Whether you live for the Lord today or not, you will one day acknowledge he is Lord. You either do it with your life now, or you will do it from your knees in judgement.

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

He is Lord whether you live for him or not.

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

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

3. Live *generously* for *others*.

Here they were, living in the land of their enemies, and God tells them to be a blessing to Babylon. They must have been shocked to hear that God wanted Babylon to be blessed,

and that he wanted his people to be the pipeline through whom the blessing came! The Israelites felt that the Babylonians were their enemies, but they were not God's enemies. That is the heart of God, after all – there are no enemies of God among humankind. God loves all people, whether we like them or not!

This is no different than what Jesus told us:

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

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

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

 If you ever, ever, ever, wonder why West Valley Church does so much for the welfare of our community...

In fact, that's exactly why we want to be able to do *more*, and we *can* do more when we pay off the debt. We are **Here for Good!** The welfare of West Valley is *our* welfare!

There is a very practical side to what God is commanding here. There was some research that was done to determine the value of one church; to see what kind of contribution one church can make to its local community. More specifically, what's one church worth in purely financial terms? According to a study, on average, every year one inner-city church contributes \$476,663.24 to the local economy. That's based on research by Ram Cnaan, a University of Pennsylvania professor who considers himself nonreligious. His study concluded that one church alone, First Baptist Church in Philadelphia, contributed over \$6,000,000 a year to the local economy (more than ten times its annual budget).

Based on Cnaan's research, some of First Baptist's financial contributions include:

- Volunteer hours worked: \$94,770 (weekly hours x 52 weeks x \$20.25)
- Reduced crime rate: a reduction of \$64,416 (crimes within neighborhood compared with surrounding neighborhoods x \$2,210)
- Getting people off drugs and alcohol: \$78,750 (\$15,750 per person helped)
- Building enhancements/Capital campaign: \$60,000 (estimates that half of expenses are spent locally)
- Helping people gain employment: \$725,000 (\$14,500 per arranged employment)
- Suicide prevention: \$58,800 (\$19,600 per person saved through clergy intervention)

- Divorces prevented: \$22,500 (\$900 per couple)
- K-12 School: \$3,489,926 (# of students x \$9,666)¹

When God spoke to his people in exile and captivity to Babylon, I doubt that anyone did the math to determine what kind economic impact God's people had, but you can bet God had crunched the numbers; he knew! Think about the contributions made to their national economy by men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And that's just the ones we know of. Remember, after the invasion, the Babylonian army carted off all the best men and minds; all the smartest engineers, craftsmen, scientists, metalsmiths, builders – and they did it on purpose, because the Babylonians knew these people would make Babylon even better. We've done the same thing; why do you think that after World War II, the German rocket engineers came to work for us? Babylon took Israel's best and brightest.

So God told his people to be a blessing to Babylon – on purpose, *because the blessing would come back to them.*

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

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

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

So, my church family, the time has come for us to bring our commitment cards forward. I'm going to ask three of our leaders to come pray over this commitment time. This is a sacred assembly; this is a holy moment.

We have three leaders – Michael Barry, Kaleigh Allen, and Eva Lounsbury who are going to come lead us in prayer.

Now folks, you came in here with a number in mind, but as we've heard from God in his Word, and as you've been in prayer, it's very possible that God has asked you to increase that number. I want to ask us to spend a few of minutes in prayer and to think about it. If you need to, talk it over with your spouse, and make any changes that you need to. In a few minutes, I'll give us some instructions.

When you are ready, fill out your card, put your name on it, and put your card in an envelope so no one else can see it, and come forward and place it in one of these baskets.

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

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/april/spotlight-apr11.html>

O Lord, our God, may you be praised forever and ever! ¹¹ Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. ¹² Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength.

¹³ “O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! ¹⁴ But who are we, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! ¹⁵ We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace.

¹⁶ “O Lord our God, even these commitments that we’ve brought forward to honor your holy name come from you! It all belongs to you! ¹⁷ I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know we have done all this with good motives, and we’ve watched your people offer their commitments willingly and joyously.

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

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen!

Folks, this is a history-making day in the life of West Valley Church and West Valley itself. Stand to your feet and praise the Lord!

Over the next few Sundays, we will give others the opportunity to bring in their commitments as well. Then, on March 29, I want to encourage you to bring as large amount of your commitment as you can – one tenth if you can! We want this to be the largest single day offering in the history of our church. And then also on the 29th, we will announce the grand total that has been committed to West Valley Church for **Here for Good**. You won’t want to miss it!

Again, in the words of David:

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