

West Valley Church Mission: Live

*Hebrews 1:3; Matthew 28:18-20, 22:34-40;
1 John 4:8; John 15:13*

1. Loving God: A Life of Worship *- Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21; Romans 12:1*

2. Loving People: A Life of Love *- Leviticus 19:18; 1 John 3:16, 4:7-19, 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:8*

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West Valley Church
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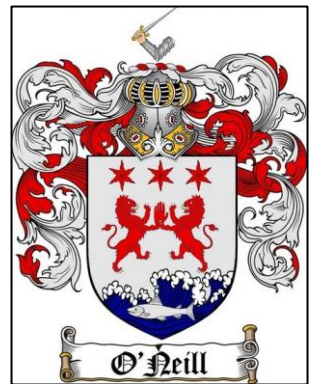
I thought before we begin, it might be good to remind you of our church logo – why we have it and what it means.

“Logos” are very important in our culture because they serve as an instantly recognizable representation of an organization, group, or a community. I could name businesses and you would instantly think of a logo. What do you think of if I say McDonalds? Golden arches. What about Nike? A Swoosh. The same thing is true for sports teams, right? If you see a big gold and purple “W” you’ll think of...U of Dub if you are a husky fan, or maybe disgust if you are a Cougar fan! But the use of logos brings up immediately recognizable companies, teams, or agencies. Logos tell a story, too.

How many of you know what your historical family crest looks like? Here’s the O’Neill family crest.

It tells a story! One of those is the red right hand in the middle of the shield. That is there because the story is that there were two Viking captains whose crews were racing their ships toward some land – what would later become Ireland. The agreement was that whichever captain touched the ground with his hand first would win and therefore own the land.

One of the captains was left-handed, and it was becoming clear that his ship was going to lose. So in an act of desperation, he cut off his right hand and threw it ahead of the other ship onto the shore, therefore becoming the first to “touch” the ground. His name was the Son of Nial, or “O’Neill,” and that is why there was an O’Neill dynasty in Ireland for centuries.



That image tells a story that you probably won’t forget! In fact, by tomorrow you might forget my sermon, but I bet you won’t forget that story! That is the power of logos.

What is curiously interesting is that the word “logo” originates in the Greek word “logos.” That word is the word that is used in the first chapter of John’s Gospel when he writes about Jesus, and he calls Jesus “The Word,” which is “The Logos.” In the first five verses he calls Jesus “the Logos” seven times! Jesus is the ultimate logo!

A logo is an image or representation or picture of a dynamic truth and story. Jesus is God, rescuing and saving people from their sin. The Bible says this about Jesus, the Logos:

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (Hebrews 1:3, niv)

Jesus is the greatest logo of all!

But for cultures and communities, a logo has always been a very important thing, representing the ethos – the cultural story and purpose. That’s why we have a church logo – it is an image that represents *us* and tells *our* story. We have a unique and easily identifiable image that leaves a lasting impression:

First, notice the colors; they represent the agriculture that is so important to our community.

Next, notice the shapes; they have several meanings for us. They remind us of the beautiful hills that are all around our valley. They also show the movement that represents the flow of water into our valley. All of that says much to the unchurched in our community.

But there’s more in it that holds valuable meaning to us. First, can you see the three colors are in what looks like a “W” – representing the “W” in “West Valley” and “West Valley Church.” Then, can you see the three “L’s”: love, learn, and live? And the motion represents the movement of our church into our valley – the flowing presence of God into our community through our church. There’s also a hint of wings like a dove’s – the Holy Spirit flowing. Besides the three “L’s” is the number three – three images that show the work of the Trinity in our community – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This simple image – our logo – represents a great deal to us, and tells the story of our community and our calling to that community.

So today, we are concluding our three-Sunday series reviewing and exploring our mission statement as a church. We are spending these three Sundays revisiting each of the three components of our mission statement, reminding ourselves how important it is, and the vital ways that we incorporate it into our lives and culture here at West Valley Church. We are spending time in our small groups each week exploring these, as well.

All that we’ve done in the last seven and a half years has been envisioned, and driven, by our mission statement. West Valley Church exists to:

- Introduce People to Jesus Christ,
- Equip People with a Faith that Works, and
- Live as People with Purpose.

Put more simply, love, learn, and live.

We started out with the first part of our mission statement, “Introduce people to Jesus Christ.” This is the most important thing we are to accomplish as Christians.

We get this from a very important statement that Jesus made to his disciples, and to us, after he was crucified, buried, and resurrected, and before he ascended into heaven, where will be until he returns one day. We find it in Matthew 28:18-20. It has been called “The Great Commission,” because it is Christ’s commission *to us* and

his commissioning *of us* – he commands us and authorizes us to carry this out until he comes again. This is what he said:

“Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20, niv)

The first half of that commission is that we are to go anywhere and everywhere to make disciples, baptizing them into faith in Christ. That is where we get the directive in our mission to “Introduce people to Jesus Christ.”

Last week we saw that we are to do more than simply secure conversions; we want to see people become *disciples*; that is, we want to do all we can to help people grow in their faith. That’s in the second line of our mission, “Equip people with a faith that works.”

This reflects the second part of the Great Commission – making disciples and teaching people to grow in their faith. You’ll remember that we talked about the dual meaning in that statement: that we want to help everyone grow in this faith that really does work – it makes a transformational difference in our lives. But it also means that it is a faith that includes works; that we will work to continue growing and that it will be evident in our loving actions – especially as we meet the needs of the people in our community. In fact, we spent a lot of time in the passage from the second chapter of James, where he is talking about what it means to “Love your neighbor as yourself”. It’s *that* part of Scripture that we are going to look at today for the third part of our mission statement:

Live as People with Purpose

The first two parts of our mission statement are derived from the Great Commission – what we talked about earlier. This third part we get from what is called “The Great Commandment.” We can find it in something Jesus said as he was quoting from the Old Testament. I’ll set the scene for you, and then I’ll read to you what it says. Jesus has been teaching and the religious leaders, called “Sadducees” have been challenging him. These are not good people; they are more interested in preserving their power and control than in following God. In fact, they use God to control people. But each time they’ve attacked Jesus, he’s not only silenced them, but he’s responded with profound wisdom and power. So then another set of religious leaders, called “Pharisees,” who are just as bad as the other ones, they try their hand at attacking Jesus’ teachings. That’s where we will pick up the story:

“Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the

second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40, niv)

In that passage, Jesus is quoting what's been called "The Great Commandment" – when Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Mark's gospel adds 'with all your strength')." Then Jesus said that there is a second command that is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said that all the law and the prophets hang on these two commands. What he meant is that these two, equally important commands, are the intent of the entire Old Testament; everything in the Old Testament that God communicates, demonstrates, and legislates is driving at these two equally important commands. We will fulfill *all* of the Word of God – right down to every punctuation point – when we obey these two commands. *Love* is the driving force of Scripture, because, as the Bible tells us,

"Whoever does not love does not know God, *because God is love.*"
(1 John 4:8, niv, *italics added*)

God *is* love. It does not say that God is *like* love, or that God *wants* to love, or that he *decides* to love; it says that God *IS* love. It is his character, his nature, his DNA. So we are never more like God than when we love others. You and I are here solely because God loves us. He would not have created you and me if he didn't love us. And beyond that, because you and I have sinned against a holy God and rejected his holy love, we deserve to be destroyed for eternity in the very fires of Hell itself. The only reason you and I are not there *right now* is because God loves us. Grace is the expression of God's love toward us. Christ's sacrifice on the cross in your place and mine – his death and burial in your place and mine, is the ultimate expression of his love for us. That's why Jesus said:

"There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."
(John 15:13, nlt)

So the Great commandment for us means that we are to love God in return – to love him more than anything or anyone else in our lives. Living a life of purpose means that our driving force is...

1. Loving God: A *Life of Worship*

In that passage we read, when Jesus was asked what the greatest command was, he responded by quoting what is called the "Shema." "Shema" is a Hebrew word that means "listen." It is the first word in the essential creed of Judaism. It starts a sentence that, to this very day, is recited at the beginning of Jewish worship services. It is the first Scripture that every good Jewish child commits to memory. To the Jews, it is of the utmost importance. It is from this Old Testament passage:

"Hear (*Shema*), O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at

home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, niv)

Good Jewish households take this passage seriously and literally. This is called a *mezuzah*. I have two different kinds, and there are many styles of these – some made of brass like you see, others made of different material. What a Jewish household will do is take a small piece of paper with the Shema written on it, along with another passage of Scripture that is a companion to this one.



The other passage is called the “Vehayah,” which is the first Hebrew word in *that* passage. That passage says,

“So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today – to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul – then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.” (Deuteronomy 11:13-21, niv)

Small pieces of paper with those passages on them fit inside the Mezuzah, and then it is affixed or nailed on the right side doorpost of their home as you enter, at an angle toward the inside of the house. The slant is to indicate that, when every Jew enters, God and his Word are entering in as well. Then, as the person is walking out, they touch the Mezuzah to remind themselves of this priority commandment to love God with all their mind, heart, soul, and strength. When it is attached, they pray a prayer of blessing and commitment.

All of that is to make the point that for *millennia*, the passage of Scripture Jesus quoted has been known as the Greatest Commandment. So Jesus wasn’t saying anything new; the Shema had been the greatest commandment for centuries before his time, and is still considered so today.

What it means for us today is that our primary purpose and ambition and orientation of our lives is to love God with all we are and all we do. And that means it is a life of worship. Worship is about expressing our love to God, and our very lives are to be lived for that purpose.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans about this:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1, niv)

Another translation says it this way:

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.” (Romans 12:1, tmt)

Everything we do, all that we live for, is to love God, which is a life of priority and worship. It means to simply and literally love God supremely with every fiber of who we are, with all of our lives. It is a total love, a total commitment to God, in love. So we do it in our individual lives, in our private worship in the morning or evening, and in the ways we live our lives throughout the day. Then it means we don’t miss an opportunity to come here and do so together – taking our individual efforts and combining them together as a community of believers in one concerted effort to express love and praise to God, to draw near to him, and to collectively hear from him.

But there is a second part to The Great Commandment, and that is...

2. Loving People: A *Life of Love*

When Jesus said that we are to “love your neighbor as you love yourself,” that too had been a command from the Old Testament. It is in Leviticus 19:

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”
(Leviticus 19:18, niv)

So when Jesus answered the question about what the greatest command was, he quoted *two* passages of Scripture that everyone already knew.

But the new thing – what had *never* been done before – was that Jesus *put them together*. No one had ever combined the two passages before. And more than that, Jesus was saying that the two could *not* be separated; that they went inseparably together. To love God IS to love others, and the only way to prove love for God is to love others. Because we know and have received God’s love, we can now show it and give it to others. The Bible says:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” (1 John 3:16, niv)

Once you recognize that the two commands go together, there are many Scriptures that begin to make more sense. For instance, look at what John says in the next chapter of his first letter:

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. *We love each other because he loved us first.*” (1 John 4:7-19, nlt)

We saw last week in the Bible when James wrote about how important it is to show “love for neighbor as for yourself” by meeting the social needs of people around us like food, water, and shelter. This kind of love for others is practical – it is demonstrated by the things we say and do. Again, John writes:

“Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.” (1 John 3:18, nlt)

It is a practical love – we show it in real, everyday kinds of ways. What should it look like for you? That’s something you need to pray about. But you could start in your own neighborhood.

What would your neighbors say about you? That’s a pretty good barometer of how well you are at loving your neighbor as yourself. Do they even know you at all? All of us who call ourselves Christian represent Christ. And our neighbors will decide their feelings about Jesus from how they are treated by us. That’s why the best way to introduce your neighbors to Jesus is to love them in practical demonstrations. That’s the example that the Apostle Paul gave us when he wrote to the people in the church in Thessalonica:

“So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:8, niv)

“Loving our neighbors” means that we will introduce them to Jesus through what we say and what we do.

What Jesus did so powerfully by combining these two great commands into one, was to tell us to...

Love God Supremely, and Love Others Equally

To live a life of purpose means we are going to live out this great commandment. The two cannot be separated.

One of the things we need to realize is that life is all about relationships – with God, with others, with ourselves, and with the rest of creation. That’s why the greatest purpose that we can live our lives for is the greatest commandment – doing all we can to make those relationships as loving and as healthy as possible.

Here’s the cool thing about our church’s mission – it is a cycle: we’ve experienced this love of God in Christ, being transformed in Christ to his likeness, and therefore we love others so much that we introduce them to Jesus – we can’t bear to think of them missing out on him. We do that in both our words and our actions.

When we are doing so we grow in our faith, and loving others as ourselves means we love them enough to work to meet their needs. Which is what it means to live a life of purpose: love God supremely, others equally, so we will introduce others to Jesus... do you see that cycle?

That is a cycle I want to get caught up in, that I can give and live my life for. It’s a mission we must be completely committed and devoted to if we are going to be obedient to God’s Word, if we are going to be successful, healthy, and growing – as individuals and as a church.

A Great commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment makes a great life and a great church!

I’ve been telling you this already, but I’ll say it again: the best way I know how to live this life of mission is to do so in a small group with people who I know and trust, who will pray for me and hold me accountable, and for whom I can do the same thing. I can’t encourage you enough to be in a small group!

In order to help all of us as we pursue God’s mission for our lives and church, please try getting involved in a small group if you are not already.