

Life on Mission

Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew 22:34-40; 1 John 4:8; John 15:13

Live as people with purpose.

1. Loving God: a life of worship.

- *Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Romans 12:1*

2. Loving God: a life of service.

- *Leviticus 19:18; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:7-19; 1 John 3:18;
1 Thessalonians 2:8*

- **Love God supremely and love
others equally.**

3. Holy love: a life of purpose.

- *Philippians 2:5; 1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 Corinthians
11:1; Ephesians 5:1-2; John 13:15; 1 Thessalonians
3:12-13, 4:1-9*

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West Valley Church
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Life on Mission: The Ultimate Walk with Christ Live as People with Purpose

Today we're in the third part of our series exploring our West Valley Church mission statement. Our mission has been the determining factor in everything we've done for the last 14 years that I've been the pastor here. But as our church has grown, I realize that there are some of us who are not familiar with the West Valley Church mission, so we're reviewing it in this series. In fact, why don't you say it with me. West Valley Church exists to:

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

To help make it even easier to remember we've reduced it to three words: **love, learn, and live.** We will love people enough to introduce them to Jesus, we will learn together and grow in our faith, and we will live that out. That statement is the motivation and the measurement for all that we do as a church.

We are spending three Sundays exploring each of the three components of our mission statement, reminding ourselves how important they are, and the vital ways we incorporate it into our lives and culture here at West Valley Church. Then on the fourth Sunday, which will be next week, we will talk about our vision – what we will look like as we accomplish our mission. We're also spending time in our small groups talking about these messages.

We get our mission from a couple of very important statements that Jesus made to his disciples, and one of them was 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 (*his disciples*) 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.” That’s what we talked about in the first part of this series.

Last week we saw 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 it is a faith that *includes* works; that we will get to work with our faith so 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 about loving our neighbor 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 the Bible 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 religion to control people, and Jesus is a clear threat to that. But each time they’ve attacked Jesus, he’s not only silenced them, 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, try their hand at attacking Jesus’ teachings. So far, they’ve tried unsuccessfully to trip him up in his understanding of God and Scripture. So now they get a Bible scholar (called an expert in the law because he knew the Old Testament laws down to the smallest detail). Now they are trying to test Jesus’ commitment to God’s Word. 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 Jews call “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 love commands. What he meant is that these two equally important commands are the intent behind 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 I 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 so much that he offers salvation to us through Christ’s death and resurrection. That’s grace, and it 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 this one, or marble like this, others made of different material. What a Jewish household will do is take a small piece of paper with the Shema written on it, 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, and 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 priority of 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 to honor and obey him. 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. And let me tell you, God loves our weekly concert for him. You do understand that, don't you? Our worship gathering is not for us; it's for God. We are singing to God, about God, and for God. We pray and we give to worship God. We spend time in the Word so we can better understand, reflect, and obey God so that when we leave here, we are equipped to worship him with our lives.

Now, there is an equally important second part to The Great Commandment, and that is...

2. Loving People: a *life of service*.

When Jesus said 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 Jesus did a new thing – Jesus *put the two verses together* – that had *never* been done before. 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. In fact, would you stand with me as I read it? This is an important passage that deserves honor and our full attention:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But

perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:7-19, niv)

Thanks for standing; you can have a seat. 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 doing 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 our Jesus by 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 of word and deed. 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. No one is exempt from your love.

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 ways we do that as a church is by becoming a welcoming, multi-cultural church. We’ll talk more about that next Sunday, but I’ll just say this: loving our neighbor as ourselves means we make room for other languages, other colors, other cultures. It’s the Kingdom of God way. Love is behind all of the Old Testament Law and Prophets; a life of love is what Christ has saved us to become and now the Holy Spirit empowers us to live it. This is holiness; this is our purpose. This is...

3. Holy love: a life of purpose.

Last week we talked about growing in our faith – both in what we know and how we live. That’s what a disciple is. That’s what a Christian is. The word “Christian” is an adjective or a descriptor, and it literally means, “Christ-slave,” or “Christ-like.” From the beginning of Creation, God’s desire has been for us to find our identity in Him. Remember, we were made in God’s image, but sin messed that up. Christ, who IS God, is for us the example of what we can be, and gave his life in death and resurrection to destroy sin and its guilt in our lives, restoring us to being in God’s image. That’s what we’re told in numerous places in the New Testament that I want you to see (watch closely because these verses are coming in hot, so I’ll pause after reading them to let them sink in). Paul told the church in Philippi:

In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5, ncv)

John wrote in his first letter:

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:6, esv)

In Peter’s first letter, he wrote:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21, esv)

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1, esv)

And to the church in Ephesus:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1-2, esv)

They all said that because it’s what Jesus himself told us:

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (John 13:15, esv)

This is why time and again we’re told in the New Testament things like, “put on Christ,” “Christ lives in me,” “follow Christ,” “transformed into Christ’s image” – if you pay attention, pretty much all of the New Testament is driving at *this*. This is what the Bible calls holiness, or sanctification. It’s a big word that basically means we are filled with the very Spirit of God so we can be Christ like, and Christ is the embodiment of God, who IS love (according to 1 John 4:8).

So pay attention to the connection between love and holiness in this passage:

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

May he strengthen your hearts *so that you will be blameless and holy* in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, niv, *italics added*)

Love. Love for others. Blameless. Holy. Holy ones. Are you getting the connection? Christ-like love *is* holiness. Holiness *is* Christ-like love.

In the context of Paul's teaching about love being holiness or Christ-likeness, Paul then drills down more specifically about holiness being Christ-like love:

We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified (*that means holy love*): that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Note the teachings about sexual immorality; that's because what sin calls love, what the world calls love, is NOT love; instead, we are to live holy lives – lives of pure love for others.

Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit. (*The Holy Spirit is given to us by God to live a holy life of love*)

Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-9, niv, *comments in italics added*)

This is our purpose in life: to be holy; to live Christ-like lives by the filling of the Holy Spirit in us. To live a life of love: to love God supremely and love others equally.

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. That is holiness. That's why holiness, or sanctification, or being filled with the Holy Spirit is so important to our church – it's so we can live these lives of purpose in the world that is in such desperate need of the love of God in Christ.

Prayer

Here's the cool thing about our church's mission statement – it is a cycle. Here's how it works: If you are a Christian, you've been introduced to Jesus Christ. You've experienced this love of God in Christ, and you want to grow in that faith – a faith that really works and you are getting to work out your faith. We have been transformed in Christ to his likeness as we yield and surrender to the Holy Spirit, and therefore we love God supremely and love others equally; we love them 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 – in the ways we serve them.

When we are doing that, we will grow in our faith and equip others with a faith that works, 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, love others equally, so we will introduce others to Jesus... do you see that cycle? And the Holy Spirit of God within us empowers us to live as people with purpose.

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 to and devoted to if we are going to be obedient to God's Word, if we are going to be successful, healthy, and growing – living as people with purpose – as individuals and as a church. Because let me tell you, *a great commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment makes a great life and a great church!*¹

Pastor Roger for benediction:

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, niv)

¹ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, Harper Collins (Atlanta, 1995)