

**The Church Defined:
Live as People with Purpose
Part 7**

Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 10:25-37

*Introduce People to Jesus Christ
Equip People with a Faith that Works
Live as People with Purpose
LOVE.LEARN.LIVE.*

Our love is perfect.

- 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 John 3:16, 4:7-12, 19

Our love is without prejudice.

- Philippians 2:4

Our love is practical.

- 1 John 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:8

love.learn.live.
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West Valley Church
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The Church Defined: Live as People with Purpose Part 7

Sunday number three worshiping in the gym; how are we doing? Isn't it great to be able to praise and worship God and sense his presence no matter what room we are in?

Thank you for being such a great church that is willing to go through things like this together. You make it fun! We do this so we can be even better at what we're doing. Think about it: we worshipped in those pews for nearly 50 years. That's when our current sanctuary and seating was built. Now you are helping accomplish something that will take this church into the next fifty years.

Other churches might complain about being inconvenienced and about change, but not our church! We embrace it together with joy and enjoy the journey! It will be worth it, too. The painters have finished, the carpet is being installed, and in a couple of weeks the new seating will arrive.

God has been so faithful to us in the past 69 years that West Valley Church has been in existence – transforming lives and impacting our community, and he will continue to. That's why we've been sharing each other's stories on the videos that you've seen and that's why stories flank us on the wall over here as we worship. These are all reminders of how God has been at work in our church. He worked in us when we were sitting in orange pews, he's working in us while we are sitting here in folding chairs, and he'll work in us when we are in our new seating in just a few weeks.

This time of transition has given us a great opportunity to remember what it really means to be the church, and we've been exploring what our mission is here on this corner that drives what we do now and into God's future.

As a reminder, here is our focused mission: West Valley Church is here to -

Introduce People to Jesus Christ

Equip People with a faith that works

Live as people with purpose

We've simplified that statement even more into three simple words that summarize it quite well:

love. learn. live.

We've looked at the first two parts of our mission, so today we are going to explore that last part: what it means to "live as people with purpose."

When we talk about living as people with purpose, we get that from a very important passage of Scripture in Matthew 22:37-40. It is called “The Great Commandment,” and it’s called that because Jesus said it is the greatest command in all of Scripture:

Jesus said: “‘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 22:37-40, niv)

Amazingly, Jesus is saying that if we obey these two commands, we will obey the spirit of all the commandments and all the teachings in the Bible. All of Scripture is wrapped up in those two statements. Jesus is actually quoting two separate commands from the Old Testament; both commands had been recognized for a long time as being very important, and every good Jew knew them very, very well. They were some of the first Scriptures Jewish children memorized. The first part about loving God comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (and other places), and the second part about loving your neighbor comes from Leviticus 19:18 (and other places). Like I said, every Jew knew these two commands. But Jesus was the first one to put the two together. No one had done that before. In fact, Jesus was saying that the two cannot be separated; they are *equally* important. To love God IS to love others. The only way to prove that we love God is when we show love to others. That’s why it’s so important. This is our purpose.

Remember we’ve said before that Jesus didn’t die on the cross and rise from the dead just to save us *from* sin; he did it to save us *for* a purpose. We are not just saved *from* something we are saved *for* something. We were saved from sin and saved for a life of demonstrated love.

Here’s the point, and here’s what it means to live as people with purpose: if we are going to live the lives that God saved us to live, if we are going to act like true disciples of Jesus, *we are going to live a life of love*. We are going to prove our love for God by loving people. Period. That is the great commandment.

Luke’s Gospel records Jesus stating this great commandment, and then shows what it is like with a story. It’s in Luke 10, and it’s really the main passage of Scripture for today, so can I ask you to stand with me as I read it?

This is what Jesus said about living a life of love on purpose:

Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?” He answered, “What’s written in God’s Law? How do you interpret it?”

He said, “That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself.”

“Good answer!” said Jesus. “Do it and you’ll live.” Looking for a loophole, he asked, “And just how would you define ‘neighbor’?”

Jesus answered by telling a story. “There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man’s condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I’ll pay you on my way back.’

What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?”

“The one who treated him kindly,” the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, “Go and do the same.” (Luke 10:25-37, tmt)

Thank you for standing; you can sit back down on these uncomfortable folding chairs. You’re going to *love* the new seats! Many of us know this story as the story or parable of the Good Samaritan. This story really shows us what loving others looks like.

I want us to see three key foundational truths we *must* learn today if we are going to live a life of purpose. The first thing about a life of purpose is that...

1. Our love is *perfect*.

Now right away you are probably thinking, “This is crazy – no one is perfect.” But Jesus actually says we *can* love perfectly, and he describes what that is. Let me explain: whenever the Scriptures talk about how we need to have perfect love, it does *not* mean “perfect” in the sense that it is totally flawless. No one besides God can do that. But when the Bible talks about how *we* need to have perfect love, it means perfect in the sense that it is total or complete. You and I cannot be holy and without flaw like God, but our love for others *can* be holy in the sense that it is as total or as complete as it can be at any given moment. More than yesterday, not as much as tomorrow. Because we are always learning and growing. This is what God means when he says:

“But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.””
(1 Peter 1:15-16, nlt)

Why would God tell us to be holy like he is if it wasn’t possible for us? That would be cruel. Of course we are not flawless like God, but we can love completely. That’s what that verse is talking about. Holiness is love, and our love can be holy! How?

Because we can be filled with his Holy Spirit, who completes us in love. That's what the Holy Spirit does in us.

In that passage we read earlier in Matthew 22 when Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves, he didn't use the word for "brotherly love." He used the word "agape love" which is *unconditional* love – loving others with no strings attached, no conditions on it. *It means we love others for who they are, not for who we think they should be (repeat).* That is the love the Holy Spirit puts in us, the way we are to love others, because we have been given that love by God himself. The Bible says:

"We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16, nlt)

That's agape love –love that selflessly wants the best for others.

John goes on to say in the next chapter:

"My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God *is* love—so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God.

My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other. No one has seen God, ever. But if we love one another, God dwells deeply within us, and his love becomes complete in us—perfect love!

We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first." (1 John 4:7-12, 19, tmt)

So what does that mean? Love people. Completely. If you are struggling to love someone – anyone – everyone – pray, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the kind of perfect love you know you need. He'll begin working on whatever is in you that is keeping you from loving that way. Then you are living as a person with purpose.

But then, how will you know if you have this kind of love for others? It's when...

2. Our love is without *prejudice*.

In that passage in Luke 10, Jesus says that the good guy – the guy who helped the injured victim – was a Samaritan. We don't realize how inflammatory that was to say the good guy was a Samaritan. That was so offensive to the Jews. That would be like if today Jesus told an Israeli that the hero – the good guy – was Hamas. Or, to help us realize this, we might call it "The Parable of the Good Nazi." The one who modeled love was someone who was considered incapable of love and was

unlovable himself. Someone who they considered to be racist was the one who showed love.

The point is that *we* are to love without prejudice, or “pre-judging.”

These times that we live in really give us a great opportunity to show purposeful love. Distrust and racism are really high in our culture. There is so much fear right now from folks who are Latino. Whether they are undocumented or not, they feel like the cultural climate is against them, that anytime an Anglo looks at them they wonder if they are being judged. I’ve been told that there are some people who are being contracted by the government and being paid for every person they turn in. If there ever was a day that needed to hear this parable, it is our day. You are the body of Christ. West Valley needs to see our purposeful, perfect love without prejudice.

But beyond that, this parable is really talking about *any* kind of prejudging. Is there someone who you dislike? Someone who annoys you? Guess what? You are to love that person perfectly and without prejudice. That’s what a believer’s life of purpose does. That’s why the Bible says:

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4, esv)

When Jesus gave us the Great Commandment and said, “Love your neighbor,” the Jews had been interpreting that Scripture from the Old Testament to mean that their neighbor was a fellow Jew. That way they didn’t have to love anyone else – just their own kind. It would be like Latinos saying they only need to love other Latinos, or white people deciding they only need to love other white people. That’s why the expert in religious law asked, “Who is my neighbor?” He was hoping to only have to love his fellow Jews. But Jesus made it clear that we are to love *everybody* – including our enemies (read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7!). There’s a great story that illustrates this, that comes out of World War II. There was a group of soldiers during the war in Europe who lost a friend in battle. They wanted to give their fallen friend a decent burial. So they found a Catholic church with a graveyard behind it, surrounded by a white fence. They found the parish priest and asked if their friend could be buried there in the church graveyard. The priest asked, “Was he Catholic?” The men said, “No, he was not.” The priest said, “I’m sorry then. Our graveyard is reserved for members of the holy church. But, you can bury your friend outside the fence. I will see that the gravesite is cared for.”

The men thanked the priest, and buried their friend just outside the graveyard on the other side of the fence.

When the war finally ended and before the soldiers returned home, they decided to visit the gravesite of their friend. They remembered where the church was located, and the grave, just outside the fence. They searched for it, but couldn’t find it. Thinking they had gotten confused, they went to the priest to ask about the location of their friend’s grave. The soldiers told the priest, “Sir, we cannot find our friend’s grave.” The priest said, “Well, after you buried your fallen friend, it just didn’t seem right to me that he should be buried there, outside the fence.”

The soldiers said, “So you moved the grave?” “No,” the priest said. “I moved the fence.”

We live in a world that builds fences of prejudice to keep others out. There are enormous fences built between democrats and republicans. Between the left and the right. Between white and black and brown. Between men and women. Between rich and poor, between housed and homeless, between sober and addicted...Listen, believers in Jesus: *Christians are fence movers*; in fact, we are more than that – we are fence *removers* so anyone and everyone is accepted and loved, without condition or prejudice. That’s why Ephesians 2:14 says that Jesus “has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (niv).

That is our purpose, our mission. You and I cannot consider *anyone* to be less than us; less good, less privileged, less religious, less holy, less Christian, less worthy of love. We are called to serve *all* others in love.

This love is perfect, it is without prejudice, and...

3. Our love is *practical*.

We talked about this last week, too, didn’t we? Our faith is only real when it is demonstrated in the way we behave toward others. John wrote something else in his first letter:

“Little children, let us stop just *saying* we love people; let us *really* love them, and *show it* by our *actions*.” (1 John 3:18, tlb)

Our purpose is to live a life of love that is perfect, without prejudice, and practical. *Love is visible when it meets the needs of others.*

I’ve shared this story before, but years ago, when I was a youth pastor, there was a young lady in our youth group who had grown up in a single parent home – raised by her mom. Her dad had left her and her sister and their mother for another woman, when the girls were in elementary school. Like most kids in that scenario, this girl struggled with insecurity, feeling unloved and unlovable, thinking that it was her fault that her father left. She specifically remembered thinking that she would surprise him one morning and make him pancakes, but she opted not to. That was the morning of the day he walked out. Ten years later, she still thought that if she had made pancakes, he wouldn’t have left. To make matters worse, throughout the years he would promise to pick her up on her birthdays and on the days when he had custody, only never to show. She would pack her little bag, get dressed up, and wait by the window, waiting until the shadows in the streets ran long and the light faded. Every. Single. Time. He never came back. And he lived within ten miles of them. So *of course* she struggled with the concept of God as a father, because she figured that God would leave her too and that she could never earn his love. I tried to help her understand that God was everything she wished her father would’ve been. She said, “I feel like I’ll be left waiting by the window for God, too. Even if he’s real, he’s invisible. He won’t hug me like I wish my dad did.” Then she said, “I need a God with skin on.”

She's not alone in that feeling. Everybody is needing to see a God with skin on. The only way that people who don't know Jesus are going to see him is if they see him in *your* skin. That's why we are called the body of Christ – the skin of Christ, if you will.

To live a life of purpose means that we love people in practical ways – not *saying* we love people, but demonstrating it by our actions. That's exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he said:

“We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too.” (1 Thessalonians 2:8, nlt)

Living as people with purpose means we share *and* we show the Good News of God's love to everyone. Perfectly, without prejudice, in very practical ways.

Remember that John wrote that we can love because God first loved us. The greatest demonstration of that love was when Jesus willingly gave his life for us; he allowed his own perfect blood to be spilled and his body to be broken on a cross – becoming a sacrifice for you and me – for everyone, in all our ugly sin and dysfunction and hate and anger and violence and selfishness and brokenness. Because you and I have experienced this love, we have been changed and we have his Spirit, so we can show this love to others. This is what it means to live a life of purpose.

Prayer

Benediction:

“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus ... 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.”

(I Thessalonians 3:11-13, niv)