

West Valley Church
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Living the Elemental Life

For seventeen years, [Grethel] Beyah survived in an abusive marriage. The family moved repeatedly, usually after they were evicted when they had no money to pay the rent. One cold Chicago winter, Beyah was trying to help her husband load their furniture from the street into a truck. “I just went to the back and started crying,” she said, “and the tears were freezing to my face it was so cold out.”

The couple went for counseling, but that didn’t help. They eventually called it quits and got a divorce. The young mother was left with nine children, several of whom were too young to go to school. Her divorce forced her to be both mother and father for her family.

That single mom determined to make a difference in the lives of her nine children, despite the abuse she suffered, despite poverty—despite the odds being stacked against them. And what she did as a result was amazing. I will tell you how that story turned out later.

But it is amazing what a difference living a life of purpose can make. Last week we concluded our series called “Elemental Faith,” in which we learned about our relationship with God the Creator and Father, what Jesus the Son has done for us, and who the Holy Spirit is and what he will do for us. Today is the day of Pentecost—the day that we’ve been talking about for the last six weeks during the “Wind” and “Fire” portions of the series. If you weren’t with us, then feel free to go online at westvalleychurch.com and download or podcast the messages. But we’ve been talking about what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Today I want us to see what happens to a life that has been filled with the Holy Spirit. Many of you prayed very significant prayers over the last few weeks, committing yourself completely to God’s purposes for your life, asking the Holy Spirit to fill you for his purposes, and submitting to the Spirit in your life to carry out that purpose. All that we’ve been talking about for the last thirteen weeks has led to this; we were created by God for a *purpose*, Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to make that *purpose* available to us, and we are given the Holy Spirit and filled with the Spirit to have the power to complete that *purpose*.

Here’s the point: God has a mission for you to carry out in this world. That’s why he gives us his Spirit. On this Pentecost Sunday we are also recognizing you students who are graduating, and I want you, too, to understand that you have a very significant purpose to fulfill in this life. I don’t care if you are a graduating senior or are an adult senior; you were made for mission! You were created to

carry out a purpose, not just to exist or take up space. When God created people, he said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-27, niv) You were made in his image, that means you are part of his plan. So when it comes to God's management of his ultimate plan, let me ask you: do you think God is just sort of passively floating through history, reacting to what happens and fixing whatever we screw up? Or do you think he is actively involved in order to carry out his ultimate purpose for this world and for our best? Then if he is carrying out a plan, and if you are in his likeness, do you think your part in that plan is to passively float through it? Or do you think he expects you to be actively involved in it? The writer of Psalms said, "Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God--you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration--what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; you know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something." (Psalm 139:13-15, the message)

You were made for something! That's why the Bible says, "Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love." (Ephesians 1:4 message) He has chosen us be whole and holy by his love, and that is to be *like Christ*, to carry out his purposes for this world. That's what he had in mind when he made you: "God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made." (James 1:18, ncv)

Made for a mission! The Bible says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10, niv) Did you hear that? We were created in Christ to carry out God's good work in this world! Listen to how the Message Translation unpacks that verse a little more: "No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing." (Ephesians 2:10, message)

We were made and saved for a reason, for a purpose, for a mission. To carry out Christ's work in this world. And its work we had better be doing. God's Word is very clear about this, and it is as true for every believer as it is for our church.

First, our mission involves: **the Great Commission.** The Great Commission is Jesus' last command to his disciples and to us, after he was resurrected from the

dead and before he rose into heaven. The Great Commission is the words Jesus wanted ringing in our ears until the day he returns for us. This is that great commission: “Jesus drew near and said to them (*his disciples*), ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20, gnb)

This is the Great Commission—it’s Great because it comes from God and it’s a co-mission because Jesus is empowering us and commanding us to carry out His mission with him—it’s a co—mission. Now there are two key parts to the Great Commission we have been given. The first is to tell people about God’s love. Jesus said we are supposed to make disciples. We are to introduce people to Jesus Christ so that they might come to know him and become a follower, or a disciple, of his. Notice that Jesus didn’t tell us to make decisions—we are to make disciples. A decision is simply accepting Christ into your life. A disciple is one who actively lives it out. We are interested in building people’s *best* lives, not just seeing them repeat a prayer. Do you understand the difference?

The second important part of the Great Commission is to teach people to grow in their faith. Making disciples means that people are growing; that they are actively following Jesus and doing the things that Jesus has told them to do. It means that people are growing deeper and higher in their faith, learning and living in all the great things God has for them.

That’s part of our mission—to obey the Great Commission.

Secondly, then, is the **Great Commandment**. Jesus said that there was a command in Scripture that was the greatest of all. And like the Great Commission, it has two key parts. This is what the passage says:

“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)

That’s the Great Commandment. Jesus said that all the law and the prophets hang on these two commands. What he meant was that if we will obey these two equally important commands, we would fulfill everything that the Law and the Prophets say—in other words, all of the Old Testament—all of God’s expectations. So the first part is critical, and that’s loving God supremely. In all our actions, all

we do, we should be showing our love for him, especially as we worship. That's why what we do here together on Sunday mornings is *so* important. We are practicing and proclaiming that love.

But Jesus said that there is a second commandment that is just as important as loving God, and that is loving people equally. People matter to God—we matter to Him so much that he paid the absolute highest price to buy our freedom from death and sin and to have abundant life—he bought it with the life of his One and Only Son. There is no higher price he could have paid for us. So we, as his church and his people, naturally ought to have the same priority for people that God does. That's why we will love people as much as we love God, by doing what we can to meet the needs of people in West Valley, by welcoming them as friends no matter where they come from or what their life circumstances are. We will accept them. That's why we will care enough to introduce people to Jesus.

A Christian's purpose, and our church's mission, must then be a commitment to those four important principles found in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Share the Good News and encourage each other, love God and love people. So that we don't ever forget that, we've developed a mission statement for our church. Our mission is this:

Introduce people to Jesus Christ

Equip people with a faith that works

Live as people with purpose

That's it! That's what God has called us here for, and that's what this church is determined to do, and we'll do it until Jesus comes back. Let me take each of those one at a time, and explain to you what they mean:

Introduce people to Jesus Christ.

In this simple statement we have the first part of the Great Commission and the second part of the Great Commandment. Do you see that? The first part of the Great Commission tells us to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel. Make disciples of all men.” We do that by *introducing* people to Jesus Christ.

Look at that first word with me: “introduce.” We could have used different words there: “*win* people to Jesus.” “*Convert* people to Jesus Christ.” “*Evangelize* people to Jesus Christ.” But we chose the word “introduce” on purpose. Here's why: if you are an unchurched person in our community, how do you think you will feel if we told you it is our goal to “win” you, or “convert” you, or “evangelize” you, “indoctrinate” you, or worse yet, “proselytize” you? You would be offended, and rightly so. But the word “introduce” puts our work into the right

context: it is about a relationship with Jesus. Yes, I've met Him; I know Him! He is an amazing, powerful, personal, rescuing, healing, resurrected, living God, and I am graced to know him personally. I know how great, kind, loving, forgiving, and powerful he is, and I'd like nothing better than to introduce you to him. I'll tell you all about him! BUT: *I don't convert you. I don't save you. HE does.* So if I introduce you to him, I'm confident that you will find the same things about him to be true as I have. The choice is *yours* whether you accept him or not. But I'm going to make sure I've done the introductions. And so will you. And so will this church to people in this community. That's what we are and what we will do. That's our church.

This simple statement also reflects the second part of the great commandment: to love people equally. Because the way we introduce people to Jesus is by loving them. Loving them enough to accept them where they are at. To develop genuine friendship with them. To do whatever we can to meet their needs. Because they are not going to believe that Jesus is real until they see him and his character in us. And they won't see it until we are willing to meet their needs in whatever ways we can. People have to know we care about them and accept them where they are before they will accept what we believe. I know you all heard that and it makes sense, but you've got to know that what I just said is a fundamental shift in the way the church reaches out to people. You see, a few decades ago, for someone to become a Christian, they needed to accept the beliefs and basic tenants of our faith. Once they did that, they were welcomed into the church; they believed, so then they belonged. Believing led to belonging. But now, in current culture, it's the other way around. People won't believe until they see it and experience in the lives of believers themselves. If they know they belong, they are willing to believe. So in this day and culture, belonging leads to believing. That's why it's so important to love people and be willing to do whatever we can to help them.

The next part of our statement simply says, **Equip people with a faith that works.** This reflects the second part of the Great Commission: to teach people to grow in their faith. That's why the Bible says, "And he (God) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13, esv) As a church, we are to equip each other to better do our part so that we can all mature in our faith. As each of us carries out our purpose, we will all grow into and obey everything Jesus tells us to and accomplish our purpose as a church. So we equip people with a faith that works.

Now notice that we also use the phrase, "equip people with a *faith that works.*" We

chose those words for two reasons: first, because this faith we have in Christ really works, doesn't it? It is real and this life of faith really does do what God said it would. This faith makes a real difference in our day to day lives. It sustains us through the hard times and it guides us through the good times.

But there's something else in that statement and it's this: if you have this faith, you will do those good works that you were created for. It's a faith that works for us, and it's also a faith that puts us to work:

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:14-18, esv)

Do you see that? If we have faith, we work—we work to meet the needs of people. So this also reflects the second part of the Great Commandment—to love people equally. SO if you are a part of this church, you are not allowed to just warm a pew. You've got to get working for this great purpose. That's why, lastly, I want you to see that last phrase: **Live as people with purpose.** This is the challenge to live our lives on purpose; to live out what Jesus commissioned us and commanded us to do, the good work we were created in Christ to do: introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose. Pretty simple, but that's what we're here for. And we wanted to make sure it is very easy for you to remember. So we've simplified it to three words:

Love. Learn. Live. That's it! We *love* God and love people enough to introduce them to Jesus. We *learn* and grow and teach others to grow in their faith; we'll *learn* by equipping people with a faith that works so we can grow together. And we will *live* out this faith, on purpose, for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ. This is *his* mission; it's the agenda of Christ's Kingdom. We even have an image to represent this mission—our church logo. Notice that it includes the church name and the simple expression of our mission statement: love, learn, live.

This is our logo; it represents us—this church. You routinely see this on our regular publications. You'll soon see it more often on signs, embroidered on shirts, and in many more places. It communicates who we are, together with the Holy Spirit, and what we are to do in this valley. And that is the key. Having a catchy design won't do a thing for us. It will be up to us—every one of us—to add value and meaning to this image. As you and I live out our mission in our community, people will see this and think of you. As we love, learn and live. As we introduce

people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose, and others see this image, they will think of us. I challenge you graduates, too—as you graduate and go to a college or a job or a career, you have a bigger, forever-lasting impact and purpose: to love, learn and live in the this world for Christ.

But listen: no amount of prayer, planning, purpose statements, strategy or embroidery will make a stitch of difference if you and I don't add the meaning, the value of this. It is up to you and me as believers in Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to live out our mission in West Valley. Then, our community will know who we are, what this logo means. They will appreciate that we are here in this community because we are making a positive difference, living as people with purpose! No matter where you are or what your circumstances might be.

Remember the story I started out talking about? I want you to hear that story because it shows what kind of an impact you can make with your life, even if you think your circumstances are bad. That young mother, Grethel Beyah, after her divorce from an abusive husband, was left with nine children, several of whom were too young to go to school. “God gave me insight to do things I didn't know how to do,” she said. Her divorce forced her to be both mother and father for her family. “I knew I was left with the responsibility of raising my children to be productive people, and I just had to pull from whatever was inside of me. I wanted to give them a foundation that could take them all the way. My philosophy was ‘If I die today, where would my children be?’ So I tried to prepare them to be self-sustaining.”

Beyah got a job working for Sears, but one person's salary didn't go far in clothing and feeding ten people. “We were hungry,” she said. “We were not clothed too well. We did not have anything much to go on except each other.” Still, the busy mother tried to contain her kids. “I figured once the streets got hold them, I would lose them,” she reasoned, so she kept them busy in free dance, music, and gymnastic classes offered through the park district. She limited their exposure to television, supervised what they watched, and often discussed with them what they had seen. One by one the children grew into young adulthood. All were high school honor students; three were valedictorians. All nine earned university degrees.

When it became clear that all nine children would earn bachelor's degrees (two went on to graduate programs), Grethel Beyah decided the family needed a tenth degree – one for herself. She graduated in 1994 after maintaining a B average and completing all the requirements for a degree in computer science from DeVry Institute of Technology. All of her kids were there. “I sacrificed for my children

and got all of them through school and out on their own,” she said. “Now it is my turn.” The graduation speaker mentioned Beyah’s commitment to excellence, and one of her children described her as a woman of integrity, perseverance, and caring.

Despite their best efforts, not all single parents are able to succeed as Grethel Beyah has. Children from some homes stray into harmful paths despite the best parenting. But others are like Beyah who, at fifty-four-year-old, walked across the stage to get her diploma. As she went by each section, section by section of the audience rose to applaud and cheered. The applause grew louder and louder and lingered for a long time. Gary R. Collins, *Family Shock: Keeping Families Strong in the midst of Earthshaking Change* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale Pub., Inc., 1995), 195-197.

Her life made a difference in the world through those nine children, and through her own life. And the difference continues to be made. If she can do that, how much *more* can you and I do in the power of the Holy Spirit?

God intends for *you* to make a difference; he has made *you* for a purpose. It is your job to love, learn, and live for Christ and his Gospel. It is your job to introduce people to Jesus Christ, to equip people with a faith that works, and to live as people with purpose. It’s your job, and mine, and ours together. Whether you are walking across a stage to receive a diploma or walking across the street to help a neighbor or just across the room, let’s live with purpose.

Pray

That’s our mission, church!

Play video

To help you remember your mission and your church’s mission, we have something for you. (magnets, touch cards)