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NEXT/Week 4/Together, One Church/Ed Ollie & Shawn Williams
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By Mary Fairchild mairlady.com . All emphasis mine.

Well, as Dave said my name is Ed and I'm here with pastor Sean today and I can't wait to share with you the Word that God has given to us today and for those that are joining us online thank you so much for being with us you know as a pastor you get an opportunity to be able to be at the front seat of history often sometimes you get an opportunity to see people get married and take their first steps with Jesus Christ sometimes you get an opportunity to be able to see new life in Christ and and partner to do things that are greater than yourself. But you also have an opportunity sometimes to sit with people and hear a difficult report from the doctor. Sometimes you sit with people and you have an opportunity to hear the pain they've experienced from spiritual leadership. Pastoring is a challenge but I would never , will never forget what it feels like to sit with someone who is close to death. You see something happens when people are close to death(1:30); they don't have much time. Sean they don't spend much time mincing words. Their filters are low but the clarity is high. And such was the case last summer with a friend named Al. You see Al was a person who would come to me after the service and give me a hug. Al was the guy who would ask how he could pray for me , but I received a phone call that I needed to go to the hospital downtown to be able to spend time with Al and his beautiful wife because cancer was ravaging his today and I hate, hate cancer with a passion. And as I looked in his eyes as I saw him hanging in the balance between going to be with Jesus Christ and experiencing a day that we all hope that we can experience and seeing that he was getting ready to leave his family he asked me(2:34) to tell people three things. He said the first thing Ed I want you to tell my wife that I love her and she's the greatest gift that God's ever given to me. The second thing I want you to do is I want you to tell my kids that I love them and that I couldn't be more (2:54) proud of them than I am right now. But the third thing that he told me is he said, Ed I want you at my funeral to preach the Gospel. I want you to tell my family and friends about the person who changed my life and who gave me eternal life. And I said I can do that.

Out there there's a lot of things I can't do but I can do that my brother. I promise you I'll do that and it reminded me of a little church that started in 1975. A ragtag group of people who had the audacity to believe that God could reach people far from Christ. And the fact that that same church is still committed to doing the same thing today of reaching people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Aren't you glad to be a part of a church like Willow Creek. I was just thinking what is it that would drive a person (4:02) at the end of their life to say words like that whether you're at home watching this or hear in the building I want to invite you to go to Matthew 28 real quick we're going to share with you the why that Jesus had . You see Jesus said a few words toward the end of his life as well and he was **hanging out with his apprentices (4:27)**and late in Matthew 28 we find out in verse 16 that **he says to his apprentices** I want you guys to meet me at a mountain right outside of Galilee and when we meet at this mountain there's some things that I want to share with you. And the Bible continues in verse 17 to say something that I want you to catch. It says that the disciples gathered together and they worshiped Him but some doubted. I could preach a sermon just on those words right there, but in 2020(5:03) is **there anybody like me that worshiped God but you doubted?** Is it ever been a time in your life where you have seen the hand of God but you've had questions? If that's you I'm glad that you were in good company because the disciples were that way but Jesus did something in verse 18. He noticed and saw the doubt but he didn't stop. Jesus said these incredible words, "All authority in heaven has been given to me." Wow. Don't miss that Willow. Don't miss those words all authority has been given to me. I'm not a peasant. I'm not a carpenter anymore. I'm not a prince. I'm a king and I

have a kingdom and I'm coming back and I'm here to tell you that in my kingdom I have an agenda and all authority has been given to me. I want to serve notice to the devil today that all authority has been given to Jesus Christ and we stand under the banner of Jesus Christ. That's why we do what we do as a church it's not who we are.

So in his final words Jesus says to the disciples a very simple thing if you don't listen to anything else listen to what Jesus told the disciples. He said go . I want you to go. Well, go where? Well, thank you I'm glad you asked. I'm going to share with you He says go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20). In Christian circles this is not called the great suggestion. This is something you can opt out of or clep out of. This is called the great commandment. **Its because Jesus had a purpose** (7:19)it was a command. Jesus wanted you and me to know that based on the previous verse He has all authority. We can't do it within ourselves Willow. We can't do it within ourselves those that are viewing online. We have to go in the power of Jesus Christ. And He told them to do 2 things. I want you to baptize and I want you to teach. It was the greatest transference and power in human history. **The king is giving apprentices the keys to the kingdom(7:54)**. Because of who Jesus is we are empowered to go Sean, but we should probably talk a little bit about how we should go.

It's a, it's a great piece Ed, but you think about again, like Ed mentioned going has been the heart of Willow Creek since 1975 and probably invading the hearts of leaders before that. Yeah, and though the methods have changed over the years the mission has never changed. We've always been about the mission of Jesus. It's always been about going. But the question becomes how do you go because we could go to a street corner with a bullhorn. We could go with a messege of fear and judgment. We could go in such a way just to earn a couple of extra Jesus points which would serve us all well and so it's not just a matter of going. What also matters is how we go and so like you mentioned if this were called the great commission, how we go is defined by what Jesus gave us as the great commandment. (8:43)

So if you've got a Bible we're in Mark 12 and we see Jesus in Mark 12, he's asked this question by these religious leaders and just what the question was Jesus what is the greatest commandment? And you know how Jesus responded, but in the moment it must have been a pretty remarkable moment where Jesus took what this religious leader would have already known which is the OT religious Scriptures and he highlights among the 400 plus commandments that God gave his people in Israel. He highlights two.

The first is from Deuteronomy 6. **It's often called the Shema**. Very powerful passage because if you want to know the greatest commandment is simply this(9:17) Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul , with all your mind, with all your strength. That is the heartbeat of who God is and what He's called us to be. That's the how we go now.

But notice in Mark 12:29-31 **not only did he give us Deuteronomy 6 and the Shema** the love God with everything, notice what he also says he says and the second commandment is just like it he says love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment that is greater than these. And so if Jesus calls us in the great commission to go. The question becomes how we go **and how we go is love.** (9:57) **Like we go in a loving way now.**

As I think about what that looks like when Jesus talks aobut these great commandments, again he was asked What's the greatest commandment. He actually gives two , two responses to one question right.

It's almost as if he's saying in order to love God fully you have to love your neighbor and if we were to ask the question, "who is our neighbor?" what we realize is there's no outclause it's not as though Jesus says you can love this person, this person, but you don't have to love Larry I guess—because Larry is a little hard to love sometimes....there's no exception clause to whom God calls us to love and so God calls us we're to love our rich neighbor and our poor neighbor. We're supposed to love our homeless neighbor, our gay neighbor, our Muslim neighbor that God calls us to love.. our annoying neighbor, our republican neighbor, our democrat neighbor. There is no exception clause. We're called to love. So if you ever want to know that God's great commission is to go how we go is the great commandment that we are supposed to go in love. It's supposed to define everything that we are and everything that we do and so when Jesus talks about being the salt of the earth the city on the hill that cannot be hidden that's because when we go in love in the way that Jesus loved we go in love in radical and unconditional types of ways it helps people understand the gravity of the grace the love the mercy of our great God it's not just that we go—it's about how we go with a loving, serving, sacrificial posture into this world that God has called us to go but, Ed, I would argue that it's not just about how we go. I would also argue that love is why we go. Again, when you think about when we go sometimes we feel this evangelistic challenge and we think man I've go to do that because I'm I'm obligated to do so or or somebody's twisting my arm hard enough, or somebody's spiritually guilt-tripped into it. We don't go for those types of reasons. Love is not only how we go, love is also why we go because the truth is if your life's anything like mine my life has been wrecked by the good news of Jesus. My love has been transformed by the good news of Jesus. I am no longer the same person today than I was the days before I met my Lord. That the love of Jesus was wrecked has transformed, has changed me from the inside out my friends. I got a long way to go but I'm not the person I used to be because of what God has done in my life, so the reality of it is I'm compelled to go because of a loving God and what he's already done for me. That we have this all powerful(12:32-49 is blank) and peace. Could find hope you could find freedom. My friends I'm convinced that changed people change people and when you when your life becomes so transformed by the love of our great God we're compelled. We're called to go into the world to be the light and to be the salt to be the hands and feet of Jesus to this world who so desperately needs Him. And so we're called to go, but how we go, we go in love. Why do we go in love? It's the greatest commission coupled with the greatest commandment.

But Ed, I think there's actually still a piece missing into this equation. It reminds me of years ago. I think I was in college. I was at home for, uh, Christmas break and my mom had this great idea that we'd do this family activity and we put a jigsaw puzzle.. She meant to get a 500 piece puzzle, she actually got a 5,000 piece puzzle. (13:54) And so what was supposed to be just a couple hours of fun, you know as a family together, turned into this laborious effort over the course of the entire you know Christmas break. We were home for, I don't know, 2 or 3 weeks working on this puzzle. But you know the moment, if you've ever done a large jigsaw puzzle, when you finally get to the end, its like this climactic moment that we've been waiting for, you know, for weeks. And we got down to probably 20 or 30 pieces—we called the whole family in, and because we all wanted to be together you know when we finish this thing so we parted putting piece after piece in. It starts going a little quick toward the end and what do you know, we got to the very end and there was a piece missing. My friends I want to cry in this moment going back to that moment. I mean it was wrong on so many levels. Now, thankfully my dad's an engineer, he's a really resourceful guy and so what he did was he took the box top to the puzzle. He took it to Kinko as a copy place and he blew the image up the size of the puzzle. When we went home we laid that over the puzzle. He cut out the exact piece, put it on a thin piece of cardboard, my friends, we popped that piece right in. It was amazing. It was an amazing moment, right? And so I kind of think about this—it's an amazing command. We gotta and we gotta go in love, but there's something tells me that there's a piece that God still wants to pop into this equation that brings us to fruition.(15:13) Tell us about that piece.

I tell you, I've been thinking about that piece I'm so glad I wasn't a part of that 5000 piece puzzle. But I would say one of the things that God has allowed me to have a front seat on is the reality of something that is part of love because we quickly moved to relationship and hugging and saying we love one another but the last time I checked in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, many churches are struggling with what it really means to love. It reminded me in 1995 of a story that I was present. Bruce Kuhn, a Broadway actor, does the entire Gospel of Luke by memory. You can Google it. It's amazing. But he was (16:02) having a q and a session at the end of his presentation and a woman asked, "How do you love people as an actor on Broadway?" And what he said, Sean, is something that I'll never forget. He said this, **"I've never met a person who hates Jesus it's just the Christians they can't stand."** I want to say that again, I've NEVER met a person who hates Jesus—it's just the Christians they can't stand. How humbling that those words are as we think about the reality of our lives today. Do we act toward one another and other believers in our community in a way that people would see and say that they see us by our love. See the commitments that we keep and the character traits we reveal should reflect the character of God. My friend, Jeff Henderson, puts it this way he says that so often the church is known what we're against, but I believe we are coming to a time where God wants the church to let people know what we are for. That we are for families. That we are for men and we're for women. We are for the confused and the conflicted. We are for the disillusioned and those that are discontented. Why? Because we believe that God will lead them to His destiny through his Son Jesus Christ. We want to be known at Willow Creek for our love.

We're dreaming again. And we're dreaming because pastor Dave Ferguson told us last week that the X-Factor involves being so(17:54) close to one another that we rub off on each other. But last time I checked in my life, the hardest person to lead is myself. That when you rub off on one another, conflict is going to happen—it's a byproduct of any healthy relationship. Amen? And all the guys were just really quiet as though I heard a lot of women um in that moment. But see Jesus wants us to not be focused on just making a point, he wants us to be focused on making a difference. And in the Gospel of John 17 Jesus provides us the answer to how we can deal with conflict among one another. I want to encourage you this week to read this passage and I want to just share it with you. It starts with the 20th verse.

Jesus has just said that he hopes that the Father will empower His disciples through the Word and he says this, "My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought (and here's the word, circle it)(19:39) to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have love them even as you have loved me." **See the reality is God through his Son Jesus is saying "I desire for you to be one. I desire for unity to be the reflection of who you are. Your pain is not permission to hurt others. Your pain is not permission to not reflect the joy of Jesus Christ. It's an opportunity to dig deeper to where Jesus is and He tells us that he desires us to have unity.**

Ephesians 4:3 says it this way, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." It's only through our submission and utter dependence to God that any of can even remotely attain unity. My friends, I want to ask you this, and those that are joining me online, I want you to imagine this—what would it look like if Willow Creek became known for our love and not our blog posts? What would it look like for Willow Creek to become known for our love and not dissension? What would it mean for people to see Willow Creek and say, "Oh my goodness the unity of the body of Christ, Sean, is showing through! "I have to go and just check out how in the world has God allowed

them to flourish?" I will tell you it's because of the sin that makes His grace necessary. That, Sean, is what brings us to unity.(21:28)

I mean, so that's the heart, right? And so if we're kind of talking about all the different pieces that are falling into place for us, God does tell us to go; Matthew 28 is the Great Commission. **We talk about is coupled Mark 12 it's the Great Commandment, but I wonder if we think about it in coordination with John 17 which I would call the Great Collaboration. That it's all about what it looks like to do it together.** That we become people that we go, love, together. And it's at the heart of who God is. It's at the heart of what God desire to see in His people in His church and so you start thinking about his idea about being together. This idea of unity. And again we (22:12) might ask the question like why? Why is this so important? And I would suggest that there's a myriad of reasons why unity really matters, but as I think about it I think that there's probably two that really stand out. At least for me. One is, I am convinced that when we really come together, when we're really together, we are just flat out better together. That we can do more for the kingdom of God that that the kingdom can be expanded in greater proportions if we're willing to actually come together. And it reminds me of this age old illustration, maybe you've heard it before, but but the power of really strong horses like think Clydesdale-type of horses and if you take a single horse that called a pole horse and they're trained and you you put them you know you harness them up, I'm told that these pole horses can pull up to about 8000 pounds. It's unbelievable—couple more than I'm able to do myself. (23:02) They can pull 8000 pounds on their own, now if you take two of these massive beasts of animals and you train them both and you harness them up together you wonder how much they are able to pull together. You might think when you have twice the horsepower, like literally twice the horsepower, you might think that they'd be able to pull twice as much weight. But you know instead of pulling 16,000 pounds together they're actually able to pull up to 24,000 thousands pounds together. Twice the horsepower, three times the result. And I'm told if you actually take these two horses and you actually train them to actually work together so that they actually uh uh lean off of each other's strengths and that kind of thing that they can actually pull up to four times what one of them would be able to do on their own. **There's something about the power of team when you're willing to come together and work together and strive together and be focused together and accomplish the mission together.** We can do way more together than we would ever be able to do on our own. And I think the same principle applies not to just horses I think the same principle applies to any team. How many sports fans do we have? You know you kind of think about even in sports the the team that wins the championship often times is not the most skilled and talented team. Now you need skill and talent to win a championship, but often times the team that actually wins is the team that's figured out how to come together. They've got great chemistry. They're a great team. They figured out how to really work together. It's fundamentally about unity. It's about being together.

You know if that's true not just with horses and sports teams how much is it more true with the people of God? When the people of God come together empowered by the Holy Spirit of God what happens in the kingdom of God is greater than any of us could have ever imagined in our wildest imaginations, right? (24:46)What God can do in us and through us when we come together is quite remarkable. **And so I think part of really what God is up to as we think about this and as he prays for our unity is because we just can flat out do more for the mission of Jesus when we're together.**

But my friends I think there's even more at stake than that. And the reason I think there's more at stake than that because if you go back to the prayer that Jesus prayed he actually gives us the why of why he's praying this prayer. He says, (John 17:23)then the world will know—then the world will know that God has sent Jesus and that God had loved Him just just as that God loved us just as much as God has loved Christ. Right? That then the world will know. So what's at stake? What's at stake is our

witness in the world. My friends we live in a divided world. But here's the truth. That's not a new truth. This world's been divided since Genesis 3. That the moment the Fall happened in humanity this world has been divided over all kinds of different lines. And sure this season feels more polarized. And sure this season feels more volatile. But division and dissension is not new in our world. But God calls his people to something different. Yeah. And God causes His people to stand up and to stand out and to look different because it's only in the church that in the midst of conflict and tension we offer grace. It's only in the people of God that you see forgiveness extended. It's only in the people of God that despite our differences we can still come together because what **we discovered is that the mission of Jesus is greater than anything that could possibly divide us and I'm even willing to set aside the minor issues** to focus on the the greatest mission that there is on planet earth. My friends we are better together. Amen. And our witness in this world hangs on it. Our divided world needs a united church. Amen. We have to come together. We have to come together. There's just too much at stake. And I've got a conviction that that is growing and it is burning around this particular issue. I've got a deep conviction around it that that we've got to pray we've got to pray hard against any kind of spirit that would lead to division because that is of the enemy. And we got to pray that the Holy Spirit of God would join us in one heart. And that doesn't mean that we brush things aside that need to be dealt with. And that doesn't mean that we sweep under the rug the stuff that we don't like to deal with. It doesn't even mean it's an absence of conflict. It just means that we are willing despite our differences and despite the challenges **that we realize that there is a mission.** There is one who is greater than us and for His sake, for His mission we will come together. I mean fundamentally my friends. I believe that we are better together. It is together that we can love the brokenhearted. **It is together that we can transform communities.** It is together that we can come alongside those who are in addiction and help them find a sense of freedom. It's together that we pour our marriages that are on the brink of divorce. **It's together that we can lean in and learn from our global partners.** It's together that we stand for justice. It's together that we serve those in need. It's together that we plant churches around the world. It's together that we build life-changing community.

My friends we are called to go about that we are go we are never called to go about this mission on our own. (28:14) We're called to do it together. May we as a church, Willow Creek Community Church, may this mark our lives. We will be people who go, love together. Would you say that with me? **We're gonna be people who what? We go, love, together. Together one more time like you mean it. We're gonna be people who go, love , together.**