

LESSON ELEVEN

THE GREATEST
COMMANDMENT

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

MARK 12:30



REFLECTION

The central rule of living has to do with love. When Jesus was asked, "What's the main thing of life?" he didn't hesitate to answer. Just as we need to think broadly about ways to express our love to others, we must be constantly widening the scope of our love for God. Think of someone you love. In how many different ways do you show that person your love?

SITUATION

Conflicts and enmity in Jesus' ministry were coming to a head. His opponents, the Jewish religious leaders, were threatened and were reaching the end of their patience. Jesus responded countless times to their trick questions and verbal traps. He showed that he was more than equal to the task. So much so that one teacher of the law decided to ask Jesus a question that had been on his mind for a long time. The Lord's answer left him with much to think about.

OBSERVATION

Read Mark 12:28-34 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.' ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

²⁸ Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

²⁹ Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

³² So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. ³³ And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

³⁴ Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

But after that no one dared question Him.

EXPLORATION

1. What did Jesus say was the greatest commandment? The next greatest?

2. What kind of love are we commanded to have for God?

3. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength?

4. How do you love yourself? How do you love your neighbor as yourself?

5. Think of a time when you witnessed a loving deed. What impressed you most about the situation?

6. What did Jesus say is the most important thing in life?

INSPIRATION

(Scene—Sunday morning church assembly; silent prayer)

Max: God, I want to do great things.

God: You do?

Max: You bet! I want to teach millions! I want to fill the Rose Bowl! I want all of the world to know your saving power! I dream of the day—

God: That's great, Max. In fact, I can use you today after church.

Max: Super! How about some radio and TV work or . . . an engagement to speak to Congress?

God: Well, that's not exactly what I had in mind. See that fellow sitting next to you?

Max: Yes.

God: He needs a ride home.

Max (quietly): What?

God: He needs a ride home. And while you're at it, one of the older ladies sitting near you is worried about getting a refrigerator moved. Why don't you drop by this afternoon and—

Max (pleading): But, God, what about the world?

God (smiling): Think about it. (From *Shaped by God* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. In which aspect—your heart, soul, or mind—do you find it most difficult to love God? Why?

8. Why is it challenging to love God as he commands?

9. Why it is often a struggle to love your neighbor as yourself?

10. How are the two components of the Great Commandment interrelated?

11. What does it mean when a person is not far from the kingdom of God?

12. In what ways is the command to love God different from the human emotion of love?

LIFE LESSONS

The Great Commandment, with its two components—love for God and love for neighbor—lies at the center of our response to all that Christ has done for us. Our response must not focus on what will make us feel significant, effective, or indispensable. Rather, we must keep coming back to obedience. As we recognize all that God has done for us, we need to ask ourselves what we can do for our neighbor in grateful response to God's mercy on us.

DEVOTION

God, give us strength as we try to be more like Jesus in our lives. We ask you to keep the evil one away from us and to keep us close to you, Father. Let our lives be testimonies of your love for us, so that when people see our lives, they would see how you have loved the world.

JOURNALING

How can you show others a more sacrificial love? What would be a good place to start?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Mark during this twelve-part study, read Mark 11:1-13:37. For more Bible passages about loving God and others, read Matthew 5:43-44; John 13:34; Romans 12:9; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Ephesians 5:2; 1 John 4:7-12, 19-21; 5:1-3; 2 John 5.