



Pastor Caleb Duvick
Jesus & the Great Commandment

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Series: Unexpected
Mark 12:28-34

**BIG IDEA – FOLLOWERS OF JESUS LOVE GOD WITH ALL AND
LOVE ALL LIKE GOD**

Good evening, Two Cities Church. I'm glad to have you guys here with us. My name is Caleb Duvick. I'm one of the pastors here at Two Cities Church. One thing I do every night before I go to bed, as much as I can, is just take time to journal and process my day and try to think about what the Lord has for me.

One of the questions I answer every single night is "What is something I need to be doing tomorrow?" After a couple of years of trying to process that, I've come to see what is at the heart of that question is, "What is the single most important thing I need to be doing?"

If you were to go home tonight and put pen to paper, how would *you* answer that question. Or maybe let me take it one step further. How would God answer that for you? What is the single most important thing God wants you to be doing today, tomorrow, and forever?

In the sermon tonight, what you're going to see is a man asked God that once, and God gave him the answer. What we're going to see in that answer is, in many ways, the very key to Christianity. So, if you have your Bibles, go ahead and open up. Turn or type to Mark, chapter 12.

You're going to see Mark, chapter 12, is a long chapter. There's a lot to cover tonight, but here's the reality: I only speak about half the speed of Kyle, so we're going to home in on one of these sections. (By the way, if you're ever having a bad day, go ahead and listen to a podcast of Kyle at half speed. You'll thank me later.)

So, Mark, chapter 12. Let's look at verse 28. ***"And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another..."*** We're entering into this context where Jesus is having discussions with all kinds of religious leaders. This scribe comes in, and he sees that Jesus answered them well.

So, you have a scribe who is wise recognizing the wisdom of Jesus (the way we say that today is "Game recognizes game") so he decides to ask Jesus a question. Here's what he asks him: ***"Which commandment is the most important of all?"*** This is a very important question for the scribe, because religious leaders like him would have found out, as they examined the Mosaic law, that there are 613 individual commands. You thought 10 was bad. Try 613.

There were 365 negative commands, one command for each day. Those are the commands that are, "Don't do this." There were 248 positive commands. "Do these things." So, for the scribes, one of the games they would do was they would debate one another. It was like, "Which of the commandments is most important?" That may sound nerdy to you, but we do the same thing. "Who's the greatest ballplayer? Who's the greatest superhero? Which is the greatest *Lord of the Rings* movie?" (The correct answer is "All of them.")

For this man, he sees Jesus, and he sees that he's answering these other religious leaders wisely, and he's thinking, "This may be my chance. This may be the person who can unlock this question we've been arguing about for centuries. This may be the person who can finally help me understand what the single most important thing I need to be doing is." Here's how Jesus answers him. Look with me in verse 29.

"Jesus answered, 'The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'"

Now, for most of you here, this is a very familiar passage. You've heard it so many times in so many places. What it has become for you is probably familiar. You probably memorized this at church camp or Awana growing up. Your grandma probably had this cross-stitched on a pillow somewhere. You guys see this on social media profiles, like Instagram or Snapchat or TikTok, people saying, "Hey, look, I'm a Christian." You hear this from politicians on both sides of the aisle. It's usually completely out of context.

As we hear this over and over and over again for most of our lives, we become familiar with it, and not in a good way. It's like the Pledge of Allegiance. How many thousands of times have you heard or said the Pledge of Allegiance? Do you even

know what it means anymore? That's what these verses have become for so many of us, and that's a problem.

Here's another problem: this Great Commandment Jesus gives us is rarely something churches or Christians are known for actually doing. A lot of times, Christians are not known for loving God. They're more known for their hypocrisy. They talk about loving God, but their lifestyles match up something very different. They love the creation more than the Creator.

Oftentimes, Christians are not known for their love for people. Too often, we're known for our hostility more than hospitality, for being more inward focused than we are outward focused. I would say it's because of the church's failure to live out this Great Commandment that we are so weak and ineffective in the world today. So, what Jesus is telling us here is something deeply important.

What he's going to tell us here is it's not enough to know this Great Commandment. It's not enough to be familiar with it. His invitation for us tonight is we need to deeply understand it once again, or maybe, for some of you, it's to understand it for the very first time, and not just that, but to live it out, to actually live it out in our lives. The big idea is this: *followers of Jesus love God with all and love all like God*. We're going to break down and go deeper into what we see here tonight.

01 FOLLOWERS OF JESUS LOVE ALL OF GOD WITH ALL THAT THEY ARE

Look with me again in verse 29. ***"Jesus answered, 'The most important is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"***

The faithful Jews who were listening to Jesus tell this to the scribe would have been very familiar with it, because what Jesus is quoting is something from Deuteronomy. It's what they call the *Shema*. It's what faithful Jews would have said twice a day as they rose up in the morning and as they went to bed at night. They would recite this over themselves.

It's in this passage that we learn some very key things about what Christ wants us to understand. The first is the *call*. The call he is calling each of us to is to love God. So let's hear that. We are to love God, not know him, not admire him, not agree with him. The beginning and end of what it means to have a relationship with God is love. We love him.

If you tell somebody you're a Christian, what you are essentially telling people is "I am a lover of God." It's an identifier, but what we see here is it's also a command. God commands people to love him. Some people might hear that and be like, "That sounds really petty. Isn't that needy that God would tell people to love him?" The answer is *no*. Here's why God does that. Here's why it's a good thing that God tells us to love him: because he knows that if we love him, it leads to our good.

Let me give you an illustration of this. I have four sweet little baby girls in my life. I think about this often. If there is one thing I want for each of them, it's to know and love God every day of their lives. Here's why: I know if they're putting God first and loving him, they are going to avoid all kinds of hurts and pains and struggles that come when we don't love God. I love my girls so much. I want them to love God because it leads to their good.

I've heard it said (this may sound strange to you) a lack of love for God, in many ways, is like spiritual AIDS. A person with AIDS doesn't die from AIDS. What happens is AIDS lowers the body's defenses to fight against other destructive illnesses, and that's how they die. That's what a lack of love for God is like. When we do not love God, it lowers our defenses from all types of sins that want to come into our lives and destroy us. Hear me say God commanding us to love him is for our good. He cares deeply about us. It's a good thing.

So, we're called to love God. How are we called to love God? You're going to see an interesting phrase here that Jesus uses in verse 29. He says, "**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.**" Why did he add that in? He could have just left that out. He could have gone straight to, "Love the Lord your God with [fill in the blank]." It's interesting. Why does he say, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one"? Here's why.

In Deuteronomy, when this commandment was originally given, it was given to Israel in the context of polytheistic societies, all kinds of other nations and people that didn't worship one god. This is a really different idea in Christianity to worship just one God. The cultures around them worshiped all kinds of other gods. It was so countercultural.

We can look back on that, and it's like, "Oh, that's so antiquated," but really, that's true for us too. The natural human heart is polytheistic. Even for us in the church, if we're honest, we can say we love and are following and worshiping God, but I'm willing to bet you're probably pursuing other gods as well. For many guys that may be money or sex or power. For women that could be affirmation or beauty or achievement.

We all are chasing multiple gods in our lives, but Jesus is saying, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Listen. There is one God who created man, and there are many gods

that were created *by* men. There's only one that is worthy of our worship. There is only one that is going to be able to hold all the hope we put into it. So we need to have a singular love for Yahweh, the Lord, who is one.

Here's what it also means to love the Lord our God as one. It means we love *all* of his attributes, not just the ones we like. There are parts of God we all like. Right? His love for us, his grace, his mercy, the things he gives us. Do you know why the second commandment was given, "You shall have no graven images of me"? It's because what we tend to do is we try to insert the things we like about God and leave out the things we don't like about him.

Here's how we break the second commandment today. You see this in people's "I like to think about God as" thoughts. "I like to think about God as [fill in the blank]." Here's what that is: people shifting and shaping their view of God based on whatever emotions or feelings they are feeling that day. God says, "That's not how you do it. I get to shape who I am."

Our view of God does not come from our constantly changing feelings and emotions. It comes from the Word of God that tells us the truth about who he is and what he's like. Here's another way we break the second commandment. It happens in the conversations that we feel embarrassed by God. You've probably been here before. You're talking with a friend who's far from God but close to you, and they ask you a hard question about God.

What do you tend to do in those situations? We try to soften him. We try to water down his judgment. We try to water down his sovereignty. We try to water down his wrath, because if we're being honest, we feel embarrassed by it. Jesus is saying, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Everything about him is beautiful and lovely and worthy of our praise.

What it means to be a Christian is we figure out, "God, teach me. Teach me how these things... I feel embarrassed about them in some ways, but, God, help me to see that you are good in all ways." Every day, we're coming to him humbly and asking him, "Help me understand. Help me to see you truly for who you are." That's how we love the Lord our God as one.

So, we love the Lord our God for all that *he* is, but he also calls us to love him with all that *we* are. Look with me in verse 30. "***And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.***" What word do you hear being repeated over and over there? *All*. We hear it four times.

Jesus could have just said it once, but he says it over and over and over again because he wants to communicate the radical nature of what he is calling us to in this commandment. The Christian faith is not just qualitative; it is quantitative. That means we give all of ourselves to God if we are going to be loving him and following him. We don't get to choose and pick. We don't get to compartmentalize the parts of ourselves we give to him.

I was reading a C.S. Lewis biography not too long ago, and there was a line that stood out to me. It was talking about Lewis joining the English army during World War I. The line that jumped out to me was Lewis was willing to give his body to the war, but not his mind. That's such a picture of us when it comes to our faith so many times. We're willing to give parts of ourselves, but not all.

Jesus is saying, "If you're going to be a follower of me, if you're going to be a lover of God, count the cost, because I'm going to call all of you to this." So, how do we love God? What does it look like for us to love him holistically? Well, he breaks it down for us. He says, first, we are to love God with all of our *hearts*. How do we love God with all of our hearts? I think we do that in three ways.

The first way we love God with all of our hearts is with our *emotions*. Here's what that looks like. That means we love God with our emotions on our best days, we love God with our emotions on our worst days, and everything in between. Most of us are good at one end of that spectrum. He's calling us to all of them. What we do with those emotions on the good days and bad days, and everything in between, is we run to him with them.

How do we do that? Through prayer. Prayer is inclining our hearts to God. It's where we process the emotions we're feeling with our God and Creator. Some of you struggle with processing emotions. I look at the men around the room. You're pretty good with angry and hungry, but the other ones, not so much. So, how do we learn to process these emotions, what's in our hearts, with God?

I think we do it through the Psalms. Athanasius, an old theologian, said most of the Scripture speaks *to* us, but the Psalms speak *for* us. So, if you're wondering, "How do I process these emotions, this angst and frustration or anger with God?" there's a psalm for that. "How do I go to God and process this joy or this hope I'm feeling?" There's a psalm for that. When we do that, we come to our God, and we give him all of our emotions.

Another way we love God with all of our hearts is through our *affections*. How do you know if you're loving God with your affections? Ask yourself this: "Is my heart near and dear to the things that are near and dear to God's heart? Do I love the things God loves? Do I hate the things God hates for the reason he hates them? Do I prioritize the

things I see God prioritizing in his Word?" The more you start seeing your affections aligning with those things, the more you know you are loving him with your affections.

Here's another way we love God with all of our hearts: with our *passions*. Our passions are the things we're excited about. They're the things that keep us up late at night. They're the things that wake us up in the morning. They're something we just can't help thinking about and dwelling on and sharing with other people.

My wife has a new passion: embroidery. She loves embroidery right now. She stays up late thinking about all of the different projects she wants to do. She's working on some for some of our kids' classmates right now. It's so sweet. She's showing me these things when she's done, and we rejoice in it together and hang it up for everyone to see. She's passionate about it.

You can take the quietest person, but if you find out what they're passionate about, they won't shut up about it. It's like, a guy who's passionate about trains... "Oh, I love trains! The Baldwin locomotive on the Polar Express is my favorite. I took my family to see one in Vermont last year. The bell, oh! When it rings, it's amazing."

When you're passionate about something, you just can't shut up about it. Are you the person who can't shut up about God? What would it look like if God was our passion in that way? We would be loving God with all of our hearts. How are you doing loving God with all of your heart?

Here's another way we love God: with all of our *souls*. How do we love God with our souls? This one is a little more interesting. It may be helpful for you to understand what the soul was created for. It was created for three things. First, our souls were created for the *supernatural*. Here's the reality that our souls waken us up to: what we see around us is just temporal.

There's something more to what we see in this world. This can't be all. That's why, when you look at our culture around us... We're post-Enlightenment. We should be moving more and more toward atheism, but what do we see? We see spirituality on the rise. Why is that? Because of the soul. It's waking people up to the reality that there's something more.

This may be interesting to you, but do you know that people in your life who are not believers are statistically likely to be open to having a spiritual conversation with you? Most of your friends who don't love Christ are open to spiritual conversations. The reason for that is because we all have a soul. We are awakening to the reality that there's something more, and we love God when we direct that seeking toward him.

Here's another thing the soul was created for: *significance*. We always have this deep longing to be doing something purposeful, to be doing something meaningful. I have so many conversations with people about their jobs. It's like, "I hate my job." Why is that? Because it's like, "I don't see what the purpose is in this. What is the deeper meaning I'm contributing here? What am I doing handing out towels at the YMCA? Where is the significance here?"

Why do you see all kinds of middle-aged dads suddenly buying Corvettes and wearing skinny jeans? I believe, at the heart of it, it's because there has been a disruption in the soul. It's this crippling thought they are wrestling with of "What am I doing? What am I achieving here? What is the lasting meaning and purpose I get to be doing here?" If we're trying to find that in anything apart from God, we're always going to be searching. We're always going to be wrestling.

Here's the third thing the soul was created for: *satisfaction*. I want to tell you this. You were not meant to walk through life always angst filled and longing, but that's where many of us are. We're always searching for satisfaction. We're moving from one thing to the next. We're thinking, "If I can just get [fill in the blank], then I will finally be happy. If I can just get [fill in the blank], then I will finally feel satisfied."

What is that thing for you? Is it a position? Is it a possession? Is it a relationship? Let me ask you something. Look back on your life. When you finally got that thing you thought was going to satisfy you, how did you feel? Maybe good for a moment, but did you truly feel satisfied? No, because here's the reality of the soul: nothing in this world is going to be able to satisfy it. Nothing you can hold out and touch and reach is going to ultimately satisfy you.

C.S. Lewis very famously said, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." That's what your soul is waking you up to. We can only find the answers to our soul's longing for God in God, because you are a soul created by God and for God.

Another pastor, John Ortberg, said, "The soul seeks God with its whole being. Because it is desperate to be whole, the soul is God-smitten and God-crazy and God-obsessed. My mind may be obsessed with idols; my will may be enslaved to habits; my body may be consumed with appetites. But my soul will never find rest until it rests in God." Your soul was made to love and seek God.

So, how do we cultivate more of a love for God in our souls? As I reflected on this this week, I could only come back to one thing: we live in the Scriptures. We have to live daily in God's Word, because when we live in Scriptures, here's what happens: we find and remind ourselves of the eternal hope for our souls.

When you live in Scripture, you are pointed to the significance and eternal meaning God has given you in your life that answers that longing for significance. When you live in Scripture, you're pointed to the God, the only one, who is able to meet your deepest longings and desires. Let me ask you: Are you loving God with all your soul?

The next thing Jesus tells us to do is to love God with all of our *minds*. Something we've seen over the last hundred years is this movement of anti-intellectualism in the world. That has made its way into the church. It's this thinking that what matters is the heart rather than the mind. The way we feel about things is more important than what we know about things.

That's why you've seen many churches over the last century moving away from sound doctrine and theology. They elevate the feeling and the experience more than the knowledge of what is true. What we see Jesus saying here in these verses is the heart and the mind are on the same playing field. They are both equally important. That's why here at Two Cities we're going to be committed to the heart *and* the mind, because we see them both as valuable.

So, how do we love God with all of our minds? I think one of the ways we love God is through *intimacy*. Let me ask you this: What do you give primary occupancy in your mind? Let me ask that in another way. What do you think about the most? What do you dwell on? What do you read about? What do you watch? What do you listen to?

Here's what happens. When the mind finds something it deems valuable, it moves toward it. That's intimacy. It's not satisfied staying on the surface. It wants to dive deeper into that thing. Let me ask you this. Think about your relationship with God. Is it something that's at the surface or is it something you just can't help but dive deeper in, to seek more and more intimacy with? To love God with our minds means we give him primary occupancy over all else.

Here's another way we love God with our minds: by *renewing* it. Here's one thing we know as Christians. When we become Christians, the Bible says, God gives us a new heart. Praise God. It says he takes away our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. Do you know what stays the same? Your mind. We see that. Romans 12 gives us the command. It says, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

You see, the call for Christians is to, for the rest of our lives, be transforming our minds, to take off the old, to put on the new. I'd be willing to bet, for many of you, some of the biggest battlefields in your faith happen right *here*. It's in the mind. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (he's a famous pastor) essentially said, "Do you realize that most of the unhappiness in your life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?"

You're listening to yourself rather than talking to yourself. On a daily basis, you have two choices. You can always be listening to yourself and your constantly changing feelings and emotions based on your circumstances and being conformed to that or you can be talking to yourself about the truth of God, about who he is and what that means for your life and your circumstances.

What it means for us to be renewing our minds, to love God with our minds, is we need to start speaking the truth and preaching the gospel to ourselves daily. You need to speak the truth and preach the gospel over yourself daily. Here's what that looks like. You start by identifying, "What are the lies in my mind that I keep believing, that I keep conforming to?" When you've identified that lie, here's what you do: you speak the truth and preach the gospel over it. Here's what that might look like for you.

As I look around the room, there's probably someone here who thinks *this*: "I don't like myself. I don't like the way I look." Here's what that person needs to do: to see that you have been believing that lie, and then speak the truth that you are fearfully and wonderfully made by your Father in heaven. That is what is true. You keep telling yourself that until you start believing that.

For the person who struggles with the approval of man, who constantly is thinking, "I wonder what he thinks about me. I wonder what she thinks about me," you speak the truth over yourself that you do it unto the Lord and not unto men because your Father in heaven looks down and is satisfied. You speak that until you believe that.

For the person who is filled with arrogance and pride, you need to preach the gospel to yourself. You remind yourself that your arrogance and pride are the very nails that nailed Jesus to the cross. When you look at that cross, you can't help but be humbled. So, we speak the truth and preach the gospel to ourselves every day. That is how you love God with all of your mind. How are you doing loving God with your mind?

Here's the last one Jesus hits on. He says we're to love God with all of our *strength*. Historically, how people have understood that... How we love God with all of our strength is we are obedient to him. If there was a theme verse for what it means to love God with all of our strength, it comes from John 14. It says, "**Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.**"

Our love is proven by our obedience. That's a countercultural thing, because in our world today, our mentality is "My body. My money. My family. My resources. My sexuality. I get to choose what I do with it." For the lover of God, someone who's loving God with all their strength, they say, "I am not my own. I have been bought with a price. God gets to tell me what to do, and I happily do it, all the way, right away, in a happy way."

The last couple of weeks, we saw people stepping into the waters of baptism, and they answer this question: "Are you willing to go wherever God asks you to go and do whatever he asks you to do?" For the person who is loving God with all of their strength, they don't just say yes to that in the baptismal waters.

They say yes to that every moment of every day. Whenever God calls us to do something, we say, "Yes, Lord." We tell God we love him every moment that we choose to say yes to him in obedience. It's a tangible way to say, "God, I love you." It's how we love him with our strength.

Another way we love him with our strength is by taking care of our bodies. We take care of our bodies. Scripture says our bodies are temples. It's where God dwells in us. I'll be the first to say... This is one area I know the Lord has convicted me of. I'm continuing to work on it. Let me ask you this: Are you allowing God to have a say in what you do with your body?

In many ways, we can go to two ends of the spectrum. We can be either neglecters or obsessors. Here's what neglecters do. I'm not talking about people who are dealing with the effects of the fall. I'm talking about willful choices people make with their bodies. We can become neglecters of our bodies when all we eat is food passed to us through a window. Do you know what I'm talking about? You'll get it.

We're neglecters of our bodies when we never get a good night of sleep. We're neglecters of our bodies when we refuse to touch a treadmill, when we overly medicate, when we never take a sabbath. What that's doing when we neglect is saying, "God, you gave me something sacred and holy, but, frankly, I don't really care." When we neglect our bodies, we are not loving God with all of our strength.

The same is true when we're obsessors. These are the people who worship and serve the creation over the Creator. The way it works itself out is you hold people hostage to your exercise routine, your diet. You constantly judge people and the way they look compared to yourself. God finds it offensive when we love and worship the temple rather than the God of the temple. So, we need to get ourselves right when it comes to loving and caring for the body he has given us.

Listen. He has given us our bodies for two purposes. The temple exists in Jerusalem and in us for two reasons: to glorify God and to bring other people to him. That's it. Your body is not an end; it's a means to an end. So, how are you doing loving God by glorifying him with your body and living out the Great Commission? That's what it's for. All of these things bring it together. What Jesus is saying... You and I love all of God with all that we are, but it doesn't end there. There's one more thing.

02 FOLLOWERS OF JESUS LOVE ALL THOSE AROUND THEM WITH ALL THEY HAVE

We see that in the next verse. Jesus says, "***The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'***" For Jesus, you can't stop at an all-encompassing love for God. Jesus is saying you can't love the invisible God without loving visible people. You cannot separate these two things from each other. They always have to go hand in hand. It's basically one commandment, this Great Commandment.

You cannot love God without loving people, and you will never be able to truly love people if you never love God. Here's the good news, though. If we can get the first command right, the second one is always going to come with it. Loving God is an upstream commandment. If we're doing this, if we're loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then everything else is going to fall into place. That's the good news. We're called to do that.

Who is God calling us to love? Everyone. We are called to love all. There are no loopholes, not any escape hatches. We're called to love all. But to make it a little more graspable for us... I look through Scripture, and it's like...*Who are the neighbors Jesus is calling us to?* There are four of them I want you to hear.

The first neighbor you are called to love is the *church*. You and I are called to love the church. It is inconceivable for us to love God without loving God's people. It's like saying to your best friend, "Bro, I love you, but I hate your wife." It's inconceivable to God. Here's what God says. In John 13, Jesus says, "***By this all people will know that you are my disciples...***" "Do you want to give proof that you're my disciples? You'll be able to do that if you love one another."

Our love for the church, both local and global, proves we are his disciples. So, here's the call for you. For some of you, if you want to love God with all of your heart, you need to get your heart right with all of God's people. For some of you, what it looks like for you to love your neighbor is to be reconciled to a brother and sister. Maybe that's another believer right here at Two Cities. Maybe that's getting right with another brother and sister in Christ at another church in our city or from another time in your life, because we're called to love that person.

Here's what happens when that becomes a reality for us. Jesus says that's a powerful witness. The world will notice when the church loves each other. Do you know what will make them notice even more? Not just if the church loves each other, but if the church loves people far from God but close to them.

The second type of person you're called to love is the *people right around you*. Who has God placed in your life where you live, learn, work, and play? Another way we

talk about that here is...*Who's on your FRANC list?* Your friends, your relatives, your acquaintances, your neighbors, and your coworkers.

I want to tell you something. God put every single one of those people in your life for a reason: because they are to be loved. He's giving you the responsibility because maybe no one else will. So, will you be the person who loves the people who he has, in his sovereignty, placed around you?

Here's a third type of neighbor he calls us to love: *people who are different from us*. Somehow those people never really find their way onto our FRANC list. We usually find the people we like because we like people like us. We look at people and are like, "I like you because you remind me of me. That's great." If we only love people who look like us and dress like us and think like us and do what we and our families do and value what we value, what's the point of that? Everybody does that.

What's radical about that? What sets us apart from the rest of the world? What we see when we look at Jesus is a love that crosses all types of boundaries...age, race, sex, nationality, socioeconomic status. God's love is bold in Jesus Christ. Ours should be as well. Love people who are different from you.

Here's the fourth neighbor God is calling us to love. When we hear the phrase, "Who is my neighbor?" it should remind us of another story in the Gospels. It's called the *parable of the good Samaritan*. Someone asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" and here's what he said: *your enemy*. "Even your enemies are who I'm calling you to love."

That can be the person you're tempted to hate...your ex [fill in the blank] or your mom or dad who was, frankly, an awful parent. Maybe it's your crazy neighbor who keeps getting leaves in your yard. I don't know. We're all tempted to hate different people, but God is calling us to love them.

He's calling us to love people who we are just diametrically opposed to, people who think differently than us, people who vote differently than us. A study came out this year that says most people are not even willing to live in the same house with someone who votes differently than them. As a nation, we have forgotten what it means to love our enemies.

I want you to imagine something with me, though. What would it look like if God treated *his* enemies the way we treat *our* enemies? What hope would there be for the world? What hope would there be for us? Thank God Jesus does not treat his enemies the way we do. Thank God. We are called to love our enemies.

Church, listen to me. If we can get this right, the world will notice. If Two Cities can get this right, this city will notice us, and they're going to see God at work. So, we love

our enemies. We also hear from Jesus *how* we love them. He says this: ***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** The way we love our neighbor as ourselves is we treat people with the same kind of detailed care we would treat ourselves with.

It's like we take off our flesh and put it on that person and say, "How would I want someone to treat me? I'm looking at a picture of me. What would I want?" When you're able to treat people like that, here's what your life will look like: You're going to be willing to serve rather than to be served. You're going to be willing to be wounded rather than to wound others.

You're going to be willing to bear patiently with the failings of others. You're going to be willing to extend the same kindness, mercy, and compassion we have received in God through Jesus Christ. We're going to look like the Good Samaritan who says, "I don't care about the cost. I'm going to take care of them. I'm going to give my time and my talent and my treasure."

Listen. You need to hear this. Everything God has given you exists for two reasons: to help you better love God and to better love people. Do you see your stuff as that? Do you see yourself as a steward for everything God has given you? Are you seeing it as a way to better love God and better love people? That's what it means for us to love our neighbors.

So, what is the single most important thing God is calling us to? It's for you to love all of God with all that you are and to love all of those around you with all that you have. Here's how the story ends. After Jesus unpacks this and lays it out for the scribe, here's what the scribe says.

Verse 32: ***"And the scribe said to [Jesus], 'You are right...'"*** This man who has been studying Scriptures all his life, who knows them inside and out, sees Jesus is right. ***"You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."***

Do you know where this conversation is taking place? In the heart of the temple, and all around them people are making sacrifices and offerings. What this scribe is saying is "Jesus, if what you're saying is true, none of this can live up to that. This is so much bigger than all of these things we're trying to do to satisfy God. The biggest thing we ought to be doing, you're saying, is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love other people as ourselves. We are falling so far short."

He's starting to get it. Hopefully you are too, because this thought should scare you. If this is the thing God is calling us to do, if this is the single most important thing we

need to be doing, you and I have not done this for five entire minutes of our lives. The gap between what God requires and what we have to bring is infinite. There's no way we can ever live up to *this*.

The scribe started to get this, and I hope you're getting this today. Jesus sees the scribe's wheels turning in his mind. Here's what he says to him. ***"And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'"*** He says, "You are starting to get it."

There is nothing you could ever do to satisfy what God requires of us. Now you have to make a decision. You've started to understand what this Great Commandment is all about. Now what are you going to do about it? I don't think it's a coincidence we never hear what the scribe does. What I think the author of Mark is inviting each of us to do is to see ourselves in that scribe's shoes.

You have an understanding of this Great Commandment. What are you going to do with it? You have two options. The first option is to say, "I understand it. I'm not changing a thing. I can keep trying to win God's favor. I can keep trying to live my life, try to obey as many of those 613 commands as I can, and hope for the best." Here's what's going to happen: you are going to live a life in eternity apart from God, because it will never be enough.

Here's the second option: you can repent. You start by repenting. Say, "God, I have not lived out this commandment, and I know there is nothing in me that is ever going to be able to do this perfectly. I need help." You need someone who can take your place and fulfill that for you. Do you know where that leads you? Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Great Commandment.

When we look at Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ we see someone who loved the Father with all of his heart, all of his soul, all of his mind, and all of his strength every moment of his life. In Jesus Christ, we see someone who loved his neighbor, who loved the church to the end, who loved every person whose life intersected with his own, who loved people who were different from him...the orphan, the widow, the foreigner, the broken, the poor, and the needy. He loved them.

More than anybody else who has ever walked this earth, we see in Jesus Christ someone who truly loves even his enemies, and we see them being loved as himself. The God-man, who was willing to leave his Father's side in heaven to come down to earth and give up everything to come and draw near to us, who is saying, "I will pay whatever it costs to love the world, even if that means me going to the cross." While we were sinners, Christ died for us.

I don't know about you, but when I come face-to-face with that Jesus Christ, when I see the love he has for me, I can't help but love him back. When I become more awake to that love, the easier it is for me to love him with all my heart and all my soul and all my mind and all my strength. When I feel that love flowing back and forth between me and God, here's the result of that: I start loving the church more.

I start loving the people around me who he has placed in my life for a reason. I start loving people who are different from me, and I even find the strength to be able to love my enemies as Christ loved me. If you want to know what it looks like to live out the Great Commandment, it's not by trying harder. The antidote to disobedience isn't more obedience. The antidote is love.

If you want to be a person who is living out the Great Commandment in your life, stop trying harder. Ask God, "Would you fan the flame of love in my heart? Would you help me grow in an all-consuming love for you, because I know it's where I need to be? It's what's going to be the thing that allows me to love all of those people around me." May our church be a church made up of believers who love God and love other people well, because the world will not be the same. Would you pray with me?

Father, we come before you broken and needy. God, this command is good, but it is something we could never do on our own. I pray for each person here. Whether it's for the first time or whether it's for the thousandth time, we need you. Fan a flame in our hearts.

May we all be people who know you and love you with all we are so we can love everyone around us with all we have. God, through that, would you get the glory, and would you win more people to you? That is why we are here. It is the single most important thing we can be doing, and that can only be done in you, so help us, Lord. In Christ's name, amen.