



what matters most

LESSON 1 // LOVING GOD

Choosing priorities is an inevitable part of life. Whether our choices are conscious and deliberate or thoughtlessly pursued, we all live by a set and system of priorities. We do those things that are most important to us.

A priority is what we value, deem important and give attention to, above or before other things. One of the greatest challenges we face is defining and dedicating ourselves to what is truly important. Establishing proper priorities requires careful thought, evaluation, planning and discipline.

In Mark 12:28-34, Jesus gave us an overarching set of priorities. He taught us, first of all, that loving God matters most. Let's look at four lessons we learn from this that help us set the right priorities for our lives.

1. Love God first.

"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" was the question posed to Jesus by one of the teachers of the Jewish law (Mark 12:28). The answer was clear:

Mark 12:29-30 (NIV) *"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.'"*

Jesus quoted in these verses from an Old Testament passage the Jewish leaders knew very well. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 was part of the "Shema" (the Hebrew word for "hear") that these leaders and devout Jews recited every day. Christ was saying that the most important commandment and priority was right in front of them in the words they declared daily: love God first and foremost!

2. Love God passionately.

This love for God is not simply a good idea or a nice feeling. Jesus said that it's expressed with *all* our heart, soul, mind and strength. There is intensity and passion in our love for the Lord!

The Greek verb *agapao* in verse 30 speaks of a supreme and divine kind of love—*agape* love. It begins with a personal relationship with God and is nurtured over time. It's an intimate and wholehearted love for Him that we must develop and strongly pursue. More than emotion, this love is based on loyalty, faithfulness, genuine enthusiasm and joy.

3. Love God maturely.

Not only can love be measured in its intensity and passion, it can also be measured in its maturity. One of the marks of real love is that it grows deeper over time. It moves from infatuation to commitment to deep, enduring devotion.

Notice how the Apostle Paul prayed for believers to experience this kind of maturing love:

Philippians 1:9-10 (NLT) *I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰ For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return.*

4. Love God obviously.

To love God “obviously” is to love Him in ways that other people can see. How can you do this?

- *Hunger for God's Word and obey it.*

John 14:15 (NCV) *If you love me, you will obey my commands.*

- *Consecrate and devote your life to the Lord in attitudes and actions.*

Deuteronomy 10:12 (NIV) *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

- *Express your worship, praise and gratitude to God.*

Psalms 116:1-2, 17 (NIV) *I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. ² Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. ... ¹⁷ I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord.*

- *Follow Jesus' example in character and behavior.*

Ephesians 5:2 (NLT) *Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.*

Our first priority is to love God. This is what matters most and brings the most joy and purpose to our lives. “So be very careful to love the Lord your God” (Joshua 23:11) is wise advice that will keep us on the right track toward His highest and best.

Discussion questions

1. What does it mean to love God passionately? How should this make a difference in your walk with the Lord?
2. Read Philippians 1:9-10. What do these verses tell you about growing more mature in your love for God?
3. What are some ways you can show your love for God so others can see that you love Him? What kind of impact could this have on the people around you?