



what matters most

LESSON 2 // LOVING OTHERS

One of the greatest challenges we all face is defining and dedicating ourselves to what is truly important—establishing the right priorities. As followers of Jesus, we can look to His example and teachings to understand how to live this out.

In Mark 12:28-34, Jesus teaches us about an overarching set of priorities we need to embrace:

Mark 12:28-34 (NLT) *One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”²⁹ Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord.’³⁰ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’³¹ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”³² The teacher of religious law replied, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other.”³³ And I know it is important to love Him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law.”³⁴ Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared to ask Him any more questions.*

In our last lesson we looked at Jesus’ call for us to love God—above everything else, passionately, maturely and obviously. Let’s now consider two other important insights about what matters most from Christ’s teaching in these verses.

1. Loving God helps you love others.

The second part of the “Great Commandment” tells us to love others. To obey this, we must obey the first part of the commandment. Loving others, in the fullest sense, is impossible without loving God first. The first part establishes the foundation for the second.

If we don’t love God first and wholeheartedly, we will devalue others because we do not see them in the light of God’s love and His value. This results in negative, cold, judgmental attitudes toward others, hatred and resentment. We will also unconsciously expect to find fulfillment from relationships with others that can only come from a loving relationship with God.

Loving God helps us love others the right way because it fills our primary need for love so that we don’t try to fill this need from other people or sources. Loving Him shows us what true love really is. It connects us to the only inexhaustible Source of love and gives depth to our love for others.

2. Loving “you” helps you love people around “you.”

Mark 12:31 also teaches us that an appropriate love for yourself is necessary to loving others. “Love your neighbor,” Jesus commands us, as you “love yourself.”

It's important to understand what Jesus is and isn't saying here. He isn't teaching us to:

- *Affirm ourselves in our sinful condition.*
- *Tolerate pride.*
- *Be self-centered.*
- *Live self-absorbed and self-satisfied lives.*

Loving yourself is about:

- *Understanding the value placed on you by God.*
- *Understanding your need for and dependence on God as your Creator and Redeemer.*
- *Coming to peace with (and proper acceptance of) yourself as a unique creation and expression of God, with purpose and meaning, while still acknowledging your need to change, grow and become more like Jesus in the way you think and live.*
- *Appreciating God's willingness to work in and through both your strengths and weaknesses.*
- *Acknowledging and appreciating the resources Jesus has made available to you because He considers you valuable, worthwhile and significant to His purposes.*

There are many things that work to undermine this kind of appropriate self-acceptance: guilt, failure and rejection, negative parental experiences, and even faulty beliefs and values. Before we can truly learn to love others, we must be delivered from the ungodly influence and effects of our own self-hatred and lack of self-acceptance.

Only when we come to peace with ourselves before God can we learn to live and walk in peace and love with others. Loving and accepting "you" in Christ, helps you love people around "you"!

Romans 5:1, 2 (NLT) *Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.*

Discussion questions

1. How does loving God first help you love others?
2. What does it mean to "love yourself" as Jesus wants you to? In what ways do you struggle with this and how can His love help you overcome these struggles?
3. Read Romans 5:1-2. How do these verses speak to you about being at peace with yourself in a way that can help you love others?