

Loving God in the Real World  
Mark 12:28-31  
(GCF – August 30, 2009)

## I. Introduction

Scripture to meditate on this week: Ezekiel 11:19-20

Are there any testimonies from last week's passage?

How Do You Spell God?

Three women die and all three reach Heaven at the same time. There they meet St. Peter. He tells them he has some other important business to transact and asks them to wait outside. Finally he returns and calls the first woman into his office. He apologizes for making her wait so long. "Oh, I don't mind at all," the woman says. "I'm so thrilled just to be here in Heaven." St. Peter is delighted by her attitude. "Well, then, if you can just answer one question for me, we can finish processing your papers. Now tell me, how do you spell 'God'?" The woman spells it for him, then she goes on into the celestial realm. St. Peter calls in the next woman and also apologizes to her for making her wait. "It will be worth it, I'm sure," she answers. "I am willing to wait one thousand years if necessary in order to see God face to face." St. Peter is very pleased. He insists, though, on asking her one more question for the Records. "Tell me, dear lady, how do you spell 'God'?" The woman spells it perfectly, then enters the Pearly Gates.

Finally, St. Peter calls in the third woman. He also apologizes to her, but she refuses to accept his apology. "It was quite rude," she says angrily. "All my life on earth I had to wait in lines. Wait at the checkout counter, wait at the bus stop, wait for the kids to get home from school, wait for my coffee break. And now you expect me to wait to get into Heaven? Well, I just won't stand for it!" St. Peter said, "I'm so sorry. If you'll just answer one more question for our records, then you can go on in. Tell me, how do you spell 'Czechoslovakia'?"

Traditional Humor

Obviously, this will not be what it is like when we die, but this joke actually makes a relevant point.

The third woman is standing on the brink of entering heaven, yet she totally misses the point!

She is more concerned about things that don't matter than she is about spending the rest of eternity in the presence of her loving heavenly Father.

As your pastor, I am concerned that some of us are still missing the point. We get all caught up in what this person said or did or how someone else is living their life, but we are missing the point.

We get hung up on some minor point of doctrine, like should we baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or only into the name of Jesus? ...and we miss the point.

Now you may be growing weary of me saying the same thing week after week (and I assure you that I have much more I would like to say and preach on in the future), but I am compelled to continue putting before you “the point” of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

*“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.”* (Mark 12:29-31, NLT)

So, what does it actually mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?

## II. Loving God in the Real World

Today, I want to begin looking at what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Now each of these components is not easily defined, but I think that we will be able to get a pretty good idea of what it means in practical terms to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

### A. Loving God with All Your **Heart**

Dallas Willard in his book *Renovation of the Heart* defines the heart as “the executive center of human life. The heart is where decisions and choices are made for the whole person” (page 30).

I think this is a pretty good definition when you think of the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:34-35: *“For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. 35 A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.”* (NLT)

And again in Matthew 15:18-19: *“But whatever comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this is what makes a man unclean and defiles [him]. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts (reasonings and disputings and designs) such as murder, adultery, sexual vice, theft, false witnessing, slander, and irreverent speech.”* (Amplified)

The heart is the very **center** of who we are.

*“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”* (Proverbs 4:23, NLT)

In your bulletin notes I have listed a number of other Scriptures for you to look at concerning the heart. Suffice it to say that if we do not experience a changed heart we are unable to even begin the process of transformation that God longs to bring into our lives.

Sara mentioned a few weeks ago that there are those who come to church and they are looking for a better life. They try to do the right thing and for a while they may be successful, at least on some level. But eventually it is just too hard; they fail too consistently and eventually many just give up.

Something needs to happen in the heart.

Listen to Jesus in John chapter 3: *“There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. 2 After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. ‘Rabbi,’ he said, ‘we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.’ 3 Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.’ 4 ‘What do you mean?’ exclaimed Nicodemus. ‘How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?’ 5 Jesus replied, ‘I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.’”* (verses 1-6, NLT)

Unless you are **born again** (experience a heart change) you will never truly understand spiritual matters, nor can you see the realities of the kingdom of God.

You can try to follow all the rules and do the right thing, but to truly follow Christ you must experience a change of heart.

*“For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. 29 No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God’s Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.”* (Romans 2:28-29, NLT)

It all begins with the heart. The difficulty here is that we can’t initiate this change. We cannot wake up one morning and say, “I think I will follow Jesus now and with that decision be born again.”

This change can only be initiated by God.

So how can the Scripture say, “Love the Lord with all your heart” when we cannot initiate the change?

Loving God with all your heart is your response to the change initiated by God. In other words, you cannot make the first move, but you are responsible for how you respond to God working in your heart.

How do you love God with all your heart? By surrendering to Him from the very core of your being. You give yourself **entirely** to God.

*“Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don’t try to figure out everything on your own.”* (Proverbs 3:5, The Message)

This is something we do daily. We wake up in the morning and say to the Lord, “God, I give You my heart. I offer my very self to You. Have Your way with me. I surrender the control of my life to You. Help me to respond positively to Your commandments and be sensitive to Your leading. Have Your way with me, O God. Help me to love You today with all my heart, from the very center of who I am. I thank You that You want to soften my heart towards You and that You will help me love You from the very center of who I am. Amen.”

The Good News is that God longs to change your heart towards Him.

*“And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart, 20 so they will obey my decrees and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God.”* (Ezekiel 11:19-20, NLT)

*“And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.”* (Ezekiel 36:26-27, NLT)

So often we want to start with the outside. We think that if we do this or that then we are spiritual. Listen, you can pray, read the Scriptures, stop smoking, stop engaging in bad relationships, and go to church every time the doors open, but still not have a changed heart.

This was the plight of the Pharisee’s and this is what Jesus said to them: *“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! 26 You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too. 27 What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones and all sorts of impurity. 28 Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.”* (Matthew 23:25-28, NLT)

Love the Lord with all your heart – the executive center of your life. The heart reveals the ultimate and true intention of your life.

Have you put God first in all areas of your life? Have you given yourself to Him completely?

(Play the clip from *August Rush*.)

Do you want your life to be like beautiful music? Then give yourself fully to God.

This does not mean you are perfect in all that you do, but it does mean that your projection in this life is towards God as He has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ.

Your heart is turned toward Him. You may not be able to fully do His will, you may not even know for sure what God’s will is in some cases, but you are willing to be made willing.

### III. Application

Growing in our absolute love for God (loving God with all our heart) is a process.

#### A. **Surrender**

As I mentioned earlier, it all begins with surrendering to God when He initiates this love relationship with you.

Like a suitor, God comes to you and seeks to win over your heart.

Dallas Willard says that “when we surrender our will (heart) to God we consent to his supremacy in all things. Perhaps we do so grudgingly. We recognize his supremacy intellectually, and we concede to it in practice – though we still may not like it, and parts of us may still resist it.”

#### B. **Abandonment**

But as we grow in our relationship with God and come to understand His great love for us in all things, even the most difficult experiences in our life, we come to a deeper place of love for God – abandonment.

This is the place of complete surrender. We simply “sink into Christ” no matter what the circumstances of our lives are, and we find ourselves less and less concerned with the things of this world and the fear of what others think of us.

But there is more:

#### C. **Contentment**

Again I quote Dallas Willard: “Beyond abandonment is contentment with the will of God: not only with his being who he is and ordaining what he has ordained in general, but with the lot that has fallen to us...Gratitude and joy are the steady tone of our life. We are now assured that God has done, and will always do, well by us – no matter what! Dreary, foot dragging surrender to God looks like a far distant country...Grumbling and complaining are gone...Rejoice evermore is natural and appropriate.” (Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, page 151)

But the heart can go even deeper!

#### D. **Participation**

This is when we move beyond the passive aspects of our loving surrender to God and into actively participating in accomplishing God’s will in our own lives and in the world.

This is when we express our love for God in active obedience to His will in our lives. We are no longer just trying to resist sin; we are devoting ourselves to doing the will of God in every aspect of our lives.

Let me conclude today by saying that the progression toward loving God with all our heart as I have shared it here today may not be fully realized in this lifetime.

To love God with all our heart – to **fully** identify our will with *His* will – is the lifelong journey of love that every person who is truly following Jesus must daily engage in.

It does not really matter if we fully attain this – what does matter is that we enter into this process today and that we press on every day to attain everything that God has for us.

There are many things that seek to entangle us – to draw us away from loving God with all our heart, but let us have the attitude of Paul when he said, *“I once thought these things were valuable [referring to his adherence to religious rules and regulations], but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! 12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”* (Philippians 3:7-14, NLT)

Additional verses to study: Deuteronomy 4:29; 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 19:14; Psalm 86:11 (NIV); Psalm 139:23; Jeremiah 4:14; Matthew 12:34-35; John 7:38; Romans 10:9-10; and 1 Timothy 1:5