

Session 1: Loving God: The First and Great Commandment

OUR INHERITANCE: LOVING GOD FOREVER

Matthew 22:37 says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your mind” (paraphrased). Now the gospel of Mark adds, “And with all of your strength” (Mk. 12:30). It adds a fourth distinction there. We will look at that a lot throughout the course, those four distinctions that are all complimentary to one another, though they do have some very definite distinctions. But here is the part that I want to focus on tonight. Jesus said, “This is the first . . . commandment” (Mt. 22:38): the one that is first priority to God, first priority in the kingdom, the first emphasis of the Holy Spirit. And He said it is the great commandment. It is the commandment that has the greatest impact on God’s heart, the greatest impact on your heart, the greatest impact on the people to whom we minister.

So Jesus gives this commentary on the great commandment. Now He is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, which we will look at many times throughout the course. The important point tonight I want to highlight is that Jesus is giving His own commentary on this passage that He is quoting from Moses. Of course, He is the One who gave it to Moses, but He is adding something that Moses did not receive. He said, “It is the first commandment; it is the great commandment” (Mt. 22:38, paraphrased). This commentary from heaven has been greatly overlooked and dismissed by the Body of Christ throughout history.

What we are committed to doing as individual believers, and even as a spiritual family, is that we want to take those two words, “first” and “great,” and push them to the full extreme of the grace of God, their meaning for our life and for this generation. I want to challenge you in your ministry and your personal life—that instead of reducing them and dismissing them as casual statements, we are going to honor these two descriptive statements of the great commandment, the first commandment.

CREATING AN INHERITANCE FOR THE SON

This commandment reflects God’s ultimate purpose for creation, His eternal purpose. From before the foundation of the world, God had a plan in His heart. Before the world was created, He had a “why” behind the “what.” We know what happened: He created the heavens and the earth. This commandment tells us why God did what He did. We know what He did on the cross: He accomplished redemption. This verse tells us why He accomplished redemption. So it gives us the why behind the what of creation and redemption.

In a sentence: God wanted to establish a family for Himself. He wanted to raise up faithful children, sons and daughters who would be loyal to Him in love, and He also wanted to raise up an equally-yoked Bride for His Son who would be His eternal companion. The Father promised His Son an inheritance. That inheritance is a people whom He would totally possess. Jesus’ inheritance involves more than real estate, more than owning the nations, more than government, more than the fact that He controls the nations.

He does own all the real estate of the earth; it has been deeded to Him by the Father. We see insight into that in Revelation 5, that the scroll was given to the Son—the title deed to the earth. So we know the inheritance of the nations: He owns all the land. We know He controls all the governments, but to inherit the nations and to totally possess them means more than that. It means that He would possess the heart of the people in all the nations of the earth. The Father said in Psalm 2, “I will give you the nations—total control over the government. I will give you the ends of the earth, the very people” (v. 8, paraphrased). “You will possess them in their entirety” is the idea here.

MANDATORY OBEDIENCE AND VOLUNTARY LOVE

Jesus’ inheritance involves the mandatory obedience of all creation. In Philippians 2:10–11, Paul gives us some insight. Paul is actually quoting Isaiah 45:23, where the Father promised the Son in the Old Testament that every knee will bow, every tongue will confess—every knee, every tongue, every demon in hell will bow down their knee in obedience. Every unbeliever, when assigned eternal judgment, will go there in obedience to the word of Jesus.

Obedience of all creation is mandatory, but there is more. God wants more than mandatory obedience. He wants voluntary love. The inheritance of the King is the obedience of all the nations, but the inheritance of the Bridegroom is the voluntary love of all the people in all the nations. So as a king, He receives an inheritance: “Every knee will bow.” As a bridegroom, He receives an inheritance: “Every heart in Your kingdom will love You. All of the redeemed will love You. Not automated, not forced, not programmed; it will be voluntary love. They will choose to love You because they will see Your worth and they will want You.”

The very core of the Bridegroom’s inheritance is different from the inheritance of Jesus as the King. The very core of the Bridegroom’s inheritance is the fact that the people will be equally yoked to Him in love. Now, we are going to spend time on this in one of the sessions and really break it down, this idea of being equally yoked in these four ways: all the heart, all the mind, all the soul, and all the strength.

LOVING GOD AS GOD LOVES US

Now the reason the Father wants the people to love Jesus this way, and the reason Jesus wants it is because this is how God loves us. This is the most remarkable thing. I cannot even imagine this. That is biblical because it presses beyond human comprehension. Ephesians 3:19 says it is beyond the comprehension of the human mind without the aid of the Holy Spirit and without the time frame of eternity to unpack it. Even by the Holy Spirit we only get a little bit of it, but for the ages, forever and ever and ever, we will continue to understand this—that God loves us. Can you imagine? God loves us with all of His mind. How vast is God’s mind? He loves us with all of His heart, all of His strength. Imagine the strength of God.

Now that will take the supernatural power of God to do this, of course. It takes God to love God. A fundamental principle of Scripture is, it takes the power of God for us to love God. God knows that. Romans 5:5 says that God has promised us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to

empower us to love Him—that He would pour love into our heart. This would involve several different dimensions of love. We will look at it in a minute.

FOUR DIMENSIONS OF GOD’S LOVE

I like to think of the love of God as having four dimensions. Number one: the revelation that God loves us. The Holy Spirit pours that knowledge into our heart. Number two: the ability to love God back. That is the second dimension. Number three is the ability to love ourselves in the love of God, by the love of God. Jesus said, “You will love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Mt. 22:39, paraphrased). The reason so many do not love their neighbor well is because they do not love themselves well. You will never love your neighbor in greater quality than you love yourself in the grace of God. That is a concept opposed to promoting our carnality. I am not talking about that; we are to deny that dimension of ourselves, our carnal lusts. We are to see who we are in God’s eyes, and agree with it instead of dismissing it. As we love ourselves in the grace of God, we will then, in the overflow, love others, which is the fourth dimension.

So, first, the Holy Spirit pours out the revelation that God loves us, then awakens our heart to love God back. Then it overflows and we love ourselves in the overflow of our exchange with God’s heart. Then we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This is all supernatural. It takes the operation of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the greatest gift and work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life: to pour love into the heart in these four ways.

Right before Jesus went to the cross in the upper room, He prayed what is called “the High Priestly Prayer.” This is the crescendo statement—John 17, the great prayer of Jesus. Here it is, Jesus praying for the saints for twenty-six verses. There is nothing like it in the Bible—Jesus praying for His bride. In the final verse, the volcanic explosion in which this prayer ends (and then Jesus goes to the garden after this), He says, “Father, I have declared Your name to them for this reason, that the love with which You loved Me would be in them” (Jn. 17:26, paraphrased). In other words, “That they would love Me in the quality that You love Me, in the same measure.” Beloved, this is inconceivable, except for the grace of God. Before God is finished working in us, which He will continue on forever—that is a more accurate way to say that God’s work will continue in us forever—we will love Jesus in the way the Father loves Jesus.

A BRIDE EQUALLY YOKED IN LOVE

Beloved, that is being equally yoked in love. All over the nations, throughout history, God has been selecting and training a Bride. God’s purpose is going to come to a crescendo and a place of maturity before the Lord returns. Beloved, I am talking about people in their natural bodies before the resurrection. It says in Revelation 19, “The marriage of the Lamb has come, and the bride . . .” (Rev. 19:7, paraphrased)—we are talking about the Bride on the earth, not the Bride with resurrected bodies. There is a generation that responds in a way where they are prepared—a prepared Bride for a worthy Son.

What a grand plan. The Father has a worthy Son, and He is raising up a prepared Bride, a ready Bride. I can assure you, in the generation the Lord returns—in the generation in which the Bride is made ready by voluntary love, by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit—that the Holy

Spirit will restore the first commandment to first place. Beloved, that is what is on the Holy Spirit's agenda at this time in history, though right now, at this moment, there is not such a large percent of the body of Christ that is focused on this agenda. But before the Lord returns, this will be the premier agenda of the Holy Spirit worldwide.

As forerunners, what you are saying in your heart is, "Lord, I want to do that which You are going to be universally emphasizing worldwide in a minute from now." Of course, with the Lord a minute might be a decade or two. Who knows? Maybe a little bit longer; maybe a little bit shorter.

"I want to lay hold of it now." That is what a forerunner does. Forerunners get hold of it one short step ahead of the universal emphasis of it—of the Holy Spirit to the Body of Christ worldwide. You can be sure of one thing: the Church will be a prepared Bride before the second coming. For those who have ears to hear, in Deuteronomy 6:4–5, where Jesus is quoting this passage from, it says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God" (paraphrased). Jesus is really actually interpreting that: "Hear, Israel; pay attention, he who has ears to hear" (paraphrased). It's as if He says, "Let Me tell you. Let Me give you a hint: it is more than important. It is the first and the greatest of all the commandments." He is commenting on the call to hear and to pay attention.

I mention the fourfold love because I am laying a groundwork to understand the first commandment, because not in any way does it undermine the first expression of this first dimension. The second dimension of this revelation of God's love for us, and then an impartation of love back to God by the Holy Spirit, will overflow in love for ourselves and love for our neighbor, both believers and unbelievers.

WE LOVE TO LOVE AND BE LOVED

Now, why do we love being loved so much? I mean, we love to be loved. There is something about us that we love it. How many of you love to be loved? Well, it is more than that. You love to love. There is nothing more exhilarating than loving and being loved. Beloved, that is our inheritance forever and ever and ever. The reason we love it so much, both receiving it and being exhilarated and giving ourselves to it, is because we were created that way in the image of God. God is love; we were created in His image.

Foundational to this course—I will mention it a few times, but I just want to save you any wasted time with different folks in different places, because I have heard this debate over the years. It is an absolutely worthless debate—the debate that goes like this: which is more important, the first commandment or the second commandment?

I have heard people say, "Well, you guys are into the first commandment; we are into the second commandment."

I said, “That is inconceivable; you cannot separate these commandments. Everyone who loves God with all their heart will always love people. I don’t mean they won’t fail. Their hearts will be inflamed; they will love people far more.”

It is inconceivable to be into the first commandment and not overflow in an outlet to the second commandment. It is a theoretical argument, only argued by people who are pursuing neither. Seriously, if you are pursuing the second commandment, you will come up so bankrupt in your ability to sustain it. You need a fresh supply of encounter, of love from God and love back to God, to supply you, and love for yourself to supply you in that fourth dimension.

I have seen people sit around tables and argue it. I say, “Guys, no more. Which is more important: your heart, your liver, or your kidneys? Honestly, you need them all. Whom do you love most: the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?” You don’t answer that. No. Honestly, you don’t even go there.

Which is more important, the first commandment or the second commandment? The first comes in sequence because the first is what empowers us for the second. It is inconceivable to love God without loving what God loves, and that is His people. You will always love believers and unbelievers if you love God, always, always; because to love God is to run straight into that burning heart. Then you love what He loves.

WE MUST REALIGN OURSELVES TO FOLLOW THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Here is the point of this first session. It’s really the point of the whole twelve-session course on the first commandment, but particularly it is the focus of this session to show the wisdom and the beauty (wisdom, number one, but beauty number two), of continually realigning our heart, our ministry, and our life to the first commandment. Beloved, I have to do this regularly—I don’t mean every year or two; I mean every couple of weeks, for real (truly). I don’t do it every day. That would be exaggerated if I said that. I want to be practical, but every few weeks I have to stop and say, “I am already starting to pull away from this focus.”

IHOP–KC exists for the first commandment and the great commandment. That is the first reason we exist as a ministry. It is the first reason in God’s mind why every little home Bible study exists. Now it may not be in the person’s mind, but it is in God’s mind. It is the first reason for every ministry. It is the first reason for every person. When we come into agreement with that, it radically changes our life.

Here is what we are doing as a spiritual family: we are going to consciously, regularly realign our heart with the revelation that this is the supreme commandment. We are not going to apologize for it. We are not going to apologize for our intensity in focus after it, because we are going to have confidence that this is what God wants. I have run into ministries for years that want me to back away from this. Maybe they feel bad about themselves; I don’t know. I don’t pretend to have insight on why. People just get nervous about people locked into the first commandment. “What about . . . what about . . . what about?” I have heard so many “what-

abouts” over the years. The final statement is, Jesus defined it as the first and the greatest. On His authority, you can be sure; when we stand before God, He will back up those words.

By the very fact of the definition of love as being voluntary, He says, “I will only renew it in you if you renew it. If you want to realign your heart, I will renew love in you. I will not force you.” Because, as a king, the Father will force everyone to obey Jesus, but as a Bridegroom, the Father will woo us to love by showing the loveliness of Jesus. But this is something in which we see the nobility and wisdom of it.

LOVING GOD ON HIS OWN TERMS: THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE

Loving on God’s terms: this is massive, massive. We will talk more about probably all of these points in the twelve sessions in this course called “The First Commandment.” Jesus defined loving God as being deeply rooted in the spirit of obedience to the Word of God. This is critical. Look right there in John 14:15: “If you love Me,” Jesus says, “you will keep My commandments” (paraphrased). “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me” (Jn. 14:21). “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word” (John 14:23). What could be confusing about that statement? It could not be more clear: three times in a couple of verses. Of course, from Genesis to Revelation He makes it clear. It is strange how nebulous and how blurred many are even within the body of Christ on this definition.

There is no such thing as loving God without seeking to obey His word. It does not exist; it is a religious figment of someone’s imagination. It is religious sentiment; it is not reality. The Holy Spirit will not bear witness to it on the last day, at the judgment seat. God requires more than singing to Him about love or writing poems about love. He requires more than sentimental feelings about a God that we make in our own image. We are made in His image, but the religious culture is making a god in man’s image and then worshipping that golden calf.

There is an unholy momentum in the nations of more and more believers, or people who name the name of Jesus, making a god after their own image—the image of a fallen culture—and calling that Christianity, then defining love according to worshipping that god of their own imagination. I call it “the god of the commercial Christmas tree.” Nothing against Christmas trees, but there is a commercial spirit in the culture of humanism about the Jesus of Christmas. Now the true Jesus of Christmas is good, but I am talking about that figurative sense of a fallen culture.

We must love God in a spirit of obedience. That doesn’t mean our obedience is mature. It doesn’t mean our obedience doesn’t fail. My obedience fails all the time. I am not talking about perfect obedience. I am talking about the setting of the heart to obey the Word, not just obeying the Spirit according to your imagination. I am talking about obeying the Spirit according to the written Word of God, most specifically in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5–7). There it is, the clearest definition of the Bible, in three chapters.

We must love God on His terms, not ours. The reason I am stressing this is because the Holy Spirit is going to restore the first commandment to first place, because the first commandment

was in first place for a moment in the early church. I don't know how long, maybe some years. But one of the core issues of conflict, even within the people who name the name of Jesus, will be the definition of love. Do we love on God's terms, or do we love on the terms of the humanistic culture that has no reference to obedience to the Word of God except for the verses they like?

GOD IS RESTORING LOVE, LIBERTY, AND FREEDOM

Jesus wants to take total control of your life because of love. He does not just want to forgive you; He wants to control you utterly. That is where your safety is, that is where your glory is: that control. He wants to control you for the purposes of love. That is where He is taking the Church. A lot of people define love, liberty, and freedom according to the fallen, perverse culture in our nation. The Western culture—the secular culture has so seeped into the Church that the Church is now defining love and freedom according to how the culture does and using Bible verses to back it up. That is not the love He is restoring. He is restoring the love that He defines. It is obedience to the Word. It is our glory; it is our freedom. The yoke of Jesus is our freedom. Being love-slaves to this man who is fully God and fully man—that is our liberty, that is our freedom, and that is the easy yoke.

God is not a hippie. He loves hippies, but He is not one. Why am I saying that? It is amazing how much of the definitions of love and liberty in the Church is coming from the hippie culture, even by young people who were not even alive when the hippie culture was happening. They have got this laid-back, chill-out approach to love. Beloved, love in the New Testament is hot pursuit, radical abandonment, total sacrifice, and self-denial. That is the love. There is no hippie culture in the language of the apostles, nor in the language of the Godhead toward the earth.

God loves us with a fierce determination. He gave everything. Jesus gave it all: He laid down His riches to become a man to come after us. So I just want to expose this cool hippie-culture false paradigm of grace and liberty, because the Holy Spirit is wanting to restore the first commandment—the true first commandment, according to the Word of God—and it is our liberty. It is our freedom; it is our greatness; it is our exhilaration. As a people, we are going hard after this with no apology to anyone. The Lord is smiling. We don't do it that well, but we are going hard. We will stumble, stumble, stumble. We will get back up and call sin, sin; repent of it; push delete; and run hard into the heart of God.

ORDERING PRIORITIES: AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

Loving God is the first commandment. It is what God wants first. Make no mistake about it: it is what He wants first. He wants it first in your life. He wants it first in the nations. He wants it first in the prayer room. He wants it first in your ministry. People are all confused about what the newest trend in ministry is. What does God want?

I tell you for sure, from the lips of Jesus: He is defining Deuteronomy 6:4–5: “Hear, O Israel.” He says, “Let Me tell you what you are meant to hear. Here is what you are meant to hear, O Israel, that the first commandment is first and it is the greatest” (Dt. 6:44–5, paraphrased). It is

not the first option. It is the first commandment and it is our liberty. Jesus makes it clear that cultivating love for Him is the first priority on His mind.

Beloved, never, never apologize for developing your love for God. As though you own an excuse to the multitudes of hyperactive people who have no focus on the love of God and who name the name of Jesus. You don't have to apologize for your intensity because they don't want to do it. You don't have to put them down. You don't have to criticize them, but don't get called into a debate.

Jesus said, "This is first." Be clear about it; be settled; go hard after it. God has everything, but He is searching for something. Is that not strange? He has everything, but He is searching for something. Not that He needs it, but He wants it. There is something that He wants. He's totally complete and happy within the fellowship of the Godhead; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are infinitely and eternally happy in the fellowship of one another. He doesn't want it out of need. He wants it because He is the God of desire. He is a God of desire. He wants it.

HE IS AFTER YOUR HEART

Many people pursue what they want and then they don't want it anymore—relationships included. I mean, they can't live without it and they get in the relationship and they don't want it anymore. With God, what He wants, He wants more and more forever and forever. He never loses that which He wants and desires. He remains perfect and infinite forever. He is searching for something. The eyes of the Lord are going to and fro across the earth, searching (2 Chron. 16:9, paraphrased). His eyes are searching. He wants something but He has everything. He wants something first, more than anything else. What it is, in one sentence: He is after your heart. Quoting one of Misty's songs: He is after your heart.

He is after your heart. That is what He wants: not your money, your heart; not your talent, your heart. He will use your money and your talent as an expression of your love for Him and His for you, and love for other people. He does not want you to live in compromise and then offer Him your time, talent, or money.

You say, "Hey, I will bargain with You. I'm going to live in sin. I'm going to live in some compromise, but I will do IHOP-KC for a year or two to balance out the scale. If You let me do a little pornography, a little immorality, a little bit of drunkenness, I will even do two fasting teams to balance it out."

He says, "I don't want your singing. That is not what I want. I want your heart. I want you to sing because I love your heart. Do not give your heart away and then give Me your singing. I want your heart. I am after your heart." That is what He is after.

WHAT GOD WANTS

One of the most important questions to ask God is always the question of the hour: "What are you looking for, God? What is it You are after?" Beloved, when we find what He is looking for, we will find what we are looking for. It is love. I am telling you it is love. Now, the heart of the

Bride asks for this. The heart of a slave and the heart of a hireling does not ask this question. The heart of obedience that is motivated by love is asking, “What is it You want? What is it You want?”

Since loving God with all our heart is the first priority to God, it must be the first reason we lead a worship team. It must be the reason we have evangelism teams. It must be the reason you lead a prophecy team or work with the children. It must be the reason you want to lead a Bible study: to get people to love God, not to see how big the Bible study will get and how many people will listen to your song. It cannot be about how much you sell or how many people listen to you. It must be about the first thing on God’s mind if we are going to line up with truth and line up with wisdom.

Someone says, “I want to make a CD.”

“Why?”

“Well, if I get a CD, more people will know about me. I will get my website. I will have more people, more influence, more money, more this, more that.”

“Those things are not intrinsically bad, but keep going. Why else a CD?”

“Well, this and that...”

“Why else? Why else?”

“Well, I don’t know, that seems like . . . God’s blessing and favor on me.”

“It is about people loving God, not about bigger crowds listening to you.”

A HOLY VIEW OF GROWTH

I am happy for IHOP–KC to get really big. I am happy for IHOP–KC to be small. I want IHOP–KC to be the size it is supposed to be, but I am clear about one thing: though we get off regularly, we must exist for the first reason—to raise up people who love God with all of their heart. That must be why we exist at every level. Numerical growth is good. I like numerical growth, but that is not the point.

People say, “Boy, that church down the road, they are growing so big; it must be the favor of God.”

I say, “That’s a cool little statement, but it’s a little naïve.” It is not my business why another ministry grows or doesn’t grow. God does not ask me. I don’t ask Him.

We are living in a secular, humanistic, man-pleasing culture. If you please man, you will grow. If you please God, you may grow, you may not grow, but your heart will grow. That is what we are

after. If we grow, we grow outwardly, but one thing is for sure: our hearts will grow. We are going after this. I am asking the Holy Spirit tonight to mark you: to mark you so that this thing gets hold of you, and you say, “That is why I am alive on the earth right now, and it is why I have a ministry. It is why I sing. It is why I write; it is why I plan; it is why I mow lawns. It is why I do everything. It is first. This is it.” Lord, Holy Spirit, mark us now. Mark us. Never let us be cured. Ruin us with this priority of God.

RUINED: ADDICTED TO LOVE

Beloved, I don’t want us to get ruined. Some people say, “I went to IHOP–KC and got ruined.” What they mean is, “I sit there, hear good music, drink great coffee, meet cool people, and I don’t want to do anything with anybody else.” Now, we do not want to ruin you that way. I want to ruin you by you becoming addicted to love, receiving it and giving it. Not addicted to good music and disconnected from people. Not disconnected from hard work and the mundane.

Beloved, the more I love, the more loyal I am to God in the mundane and the difficulty. Being ruined doesn’t mean I don’t have to do boring church services anymore. No, if you are ruined you may be involved in many boring church services, because your heart is energized with love. The Lord may assign you to a ministry that is a little bit boring right now, but you are ruined because you are addicted to love. You can connect with that love whether you are in a prison cell, pulling weeds under a hot sun, far away, or working twelve hours a day down at Wal-Mart. If your heart is connected with love, you are ruined. That is how you are ruined.

Some folks say, “I have come to IHOP–KC and I am ruined.”

I say, “Well, what do you mean?”

“Oh, the music is unreal.”

I say, “Okay, good. Anything else?”

“Oh, yeah. Boy, the teaching is great—the Bible school teaching, of course. Oh, their classes...”

“Good, good. I like that. But that is not really the definition of being ruined—good music, good teaching in the Bible school. Why else?”

“Cool people.”

“OK. OK. Still, you have not hit it. That sounds like abdication. That sounds like bailing out.”

What are you ruined for? If it is, “I feel His love a little bit and I am abandoned to be a lover of God; I am going to show it to people with all my heart,” I say, “Ah. Now that is when we are ruined.”

RADICAL: LOVING IN THE MUNDANE

We can never go back to living without love being number one, the first thing. That is what being ruined is about. That is what being radical is being about. Being radical is not about doing an exotic ministry trip for three months. Being radical is not about doing something unusual for a year. Being radical is staying with love in the midst of the difficulty and mundanity for decades. Now that is radical. It isn't outdoing somebody and doing something exotic. That is not what radical is.

Some people do one-upmanship on a radical scale. "Radical means something extreme." That's cool if that's the culture's definition, but when I say "radical," I mean you live for love from the inside out, where nobody is looking, and you are feeling it maybe just a little bit and you are reaching for it. Maybe the connection is not there, but you're reaching and you're addicted to living radical for decades and decades. Not for a three-month term at IHOP-KC or somewhere else on a ministry trip.

GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIVES

God is after our hearts. Many are searching to know God's will. They say, "Hey, I want to know God's will."

I say, "What do you mean?"

Mostly they mean, "I want to know my ministry assignment."

That's OK; that's a good question, but I could tell you what the first issue of the will of God in your life is: that you would grow in love on the inside, positive.

"I'm looking for God's will."

I say, "Well, about 80 percent of God's will is shouting right at you."

Now that other 20 percent, and where you're supposed to do it, and who you're supposed to do the ministry with, maybe it's going to take you a little while to sort that out—but 80 percent of it is staring you right in the face. You don't need to give up on the 80 percent because you're in so much anguish searching for the 20 percent will of God, which is your ministry assignment. I have seen more people sit for five and ten years searching for a ministry assignment, not knowing the will of God, when 80 percent of the will of God was that they would grow in love, feel His love, connect with His love, and go after love.

I say, "I know God's will for your life."

"You do? Is it a prophecy?"

I say, "Yeah, straight from the Bible. The first and the great commandment, I assure you, that is the first issue that God is after in your life."

“Oh, come on . . .”

“No. Absolutely that’s what it’s about. He is after your heart.”

Christianity is an encounter with a person. Christianity is an ongoing encounter with love. Now, the feeling of love may be minimal. Beloved, do not undermine or minimize the power of a little bit of love—feeling it. A little bit goes a long way. I value the little increments of love I feel.

A guy comes and says, “Hey, I’m going to have fierce dedication, determination, radical commitments to righteousness. Man, we’ve got a noble cause. We’re going to change the city, the nation, the universe. We’ve got a noble cause, a radical commitment, a fierce determination.” Beloved, that won’t hold you steady for five years. It will hold you steady for a year or two; if you get a bunch of folks in agreement, you could keep the steam in the engine going. But if you are not encountering the subtle, continual, even small wooings of love on your heart, you will never stay steady for five years.

ENTERING THE GREATEST DIMENSION: PUTTING THE FIRST COMMANDMENT FIRST

I have been a pastor for over thirty years. I have seen many people on fire for five years. Very few people have I ever seen sustain their zeal for over ten years. There were so many radical people in the early 1970s when I met the Lord in 1971. We were all in high school. There were so many radicals. In college, there was a whole other group of radicals; then I started pastoring a whole other group of radicals.

I look back over thirty years, and very few of them have ever stayed steady for ten years. The reason? They were fiercely dedicated, they had a cause, they had a mission, but they were not encountering a person. And therefore the small, subtle, incremental, every-now-and-then stirrings of love did not touch them. That was not the focus of their heart. Changing something was the focus of their heart, or building their network, or learning stuff.

I say, “I want to change things, build a network, and learn stuff, but beloved, if you don’t feel that urge—just subtle, occasional stirrings of love where you feel love from Him and you feel love to Him, where it overflows a little bit to yourself and a little bit to people—you will never stay in a radical posture of dedication.” You may for five years. You may even stay for ten years. Some guys are just plain old strong-minded. But you will not go for decades. It will take love, because the mission will wear you out without being renewed in love along the journey.

This renewing is small. It’s a little here, a little there. It’s every day or two; there’s no way to measure it: some days more, some days less; some weeks more, some weeks less—those little stirrings of inspiration on the heart about love—but boy, they really add up over time. The great commandment: it is not only the first commandment, it is the great one—the great one.

THE GREATEST IMPACT

Oh, I love this. Jesus is interpreting the Shema Israel: “Hear, O Israel, I am telling you what I want you to hear” (Dt. 6:4–5, paraphrased). If you love God, it is great. It makes a great impact on God’s heart. It makes a great impact on your heart. It makes a great impact on the people you touch. It makes a great impact on your destiny in eternity. It has the greatest pleasure, the greatest reward. It is the great one in every single way.

You can put ten more categories of greatness. I challenge you to do that: stretch this thing out to its full limits in the grace of God. It is what Jesus calls “the greatest.” What we call the greatest, typically, is what is the biggest externally. What Jesus calls the greatest is what is the biggest internally. Some of the greatest people in history, in the Bible, had very little impact. I like making an impact on people, but let me tell you the greatest thing about my life and your life. It is amazing. It is glorious. I can impact God.

“What?”

“The Genesis 1 God—He can impact me and I can impact Him, and it lasts forever.”

Now, some of that may overflow and I might impact you. I want to impact you, but I’m not going to sell out the most glorious and the greatest dimension of the grace of God in my life—that I can impact God and He can impact me. I’m not going to sell that out to network until I’m completely worn out and exhausted and backslidden. See, so many friends over the years in ministry are addicted to the growth of their ministry, are addicted to getting more people to listen to them, that they will sell out the greatest thing about their life to get a crowd over the years. They will network endlessly to get ten more people at their event. Some of that is OK. But beloved, I can say things; so can you; and God feels them and He remembers them forever.

Oh, my goodness. You can’t touch a person who lives like that. They are untouchable. You can criticize them, you can lock them away, you can take everything away from them, you can ignore them, you can treat them wrong, and their heart is exhilarated in love. You may beat them up. You may mistreat them. You could slander them, but you will never diminish the brightness of their spirit. They are untouchable because they have entered into the greatest dimension of their life. It is the great commandment. It is the commandment that makes them great. It is the commandment that greatly impacts God. It is the commandment that greatly impacts them.

See, me being impacted or you being impacted and you being great are in two different dimensions of greatness. It greatly impacts you, but if you will go after this, you could be one of the great people in God’s eyes in history. The great people of history are not the people who have the big crowds, though they might be. The great people in history are the people who have the great hearts, the big hearts, the big love. Go after it. He is after your heart. The greatest calling is to move God’s heart, to impact God’s heart.

HAVING A BRIGHT SPIRIT

Beloved, I want to impact you. I want to impact people, but I am not going to give up my inheritance to impact God to try and impact a few more people. I am going to take my changes in the grace of God and go after Him, and let Him inspire me and let the brightness of my spirit impact far more people over time.

Again, if you touch the first commandment, you will become far more steady in the second commandment and have a far greater impact. People don't just need more of you; they need the brightness of the Spirit in you. It's a little bit risky to say this, but I said it once to a group of homeschooling moms years ago, because we had hundreds of homeschooling moms in our church. I said, "Now, this is a little risky, but you need to hear it. Listen, moms: some of you, you're into homeschooling and your premise is—there's a certain truth to it, but taken to an illogical conclusion, it backfires—that if you're ever-present and omniscient and omnipresent, they'll somehow grow up righteous; that you'll guarantee your child's righteousness when they grow up. I say, 'Why do you not back away a little bit, spend a little time with Jesus, get a bright spirit? What they need is a bright mom, not just an omnipresent mom.'"

Because there are so many of these moms who love the Lord in this particular setting, who are so worn-out and frazzled, with a martyrdom complex: "We're pouring it out to the full degree."

I say, "Why don't you give a little less? Sit at the Lord's feet. It's the great commandment. It's the first commandment. Even you can't bail your family out without God breathing through you. Why do you not be in His presence and bring brightness to your kids? Your children need you for sure, but they need brightness in your spirit."

We had some hiccups over that meeting, but it's true. Some people approach all their relationships as if more of them must be the answer to that person. Well, there is truth. More of you is sometimes an answer to a measure, but more of you with a bright spirit is far more effective than just plain old more of you.

THE REVELATION OF THE SUPREMACY OF THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

What the Body of Christ and the nations are going to need as we get closer to the Lord's return in time is people with authority and brightness, not just people with humanistic sentiment. We need bright spirits that have encountered God in the secret place of our heart. Jesus called loving God the greatest lifestyle. He said it's the great commandment, which means it's the great lifestyle. It is the greatest ministry.

I may touch millions of people in my ministry. My great ministry isn't television and conferences. The greatest ministry I can have is by giving myself to the first commandment. That's the great commandment. That's the great definition of life. That is the most radical, extreme lifestyle. The most noble and the greatest ministry you can have is that. Out of there, you can do whatever He whispers in your heart to do.

Do you know the way you move Him? Do you know the way you move Him? Do you know how greatly loving Him moves Him? Every time you repent of sin, even though you stumble in it, you say, “Lord, I call it sin because I love you. I say no to this.” You might stumble again, but when you really call it sin, when you really repent of it, it moves Him. Every movement of your heart moves Him. Sitting before Him with a heart of love—I don’t mean a heart of escapism. There is a lot of escapism going on in the body of Christ. I don’t just mean in prayer rooms, but in all kinds of ways: people are escaping reality through false doctrines of grace. There are people in the prayer rooms escaping. We are not interested in escaping; we are interested in encountering.

You can sit before Him and move Him. You can give a person a cup of cold water; you could love somebody with an unrecognized act of service that nobody ever gives you credit for. It moves Him. He said, “I will never forget the love you showed Me when you helped them. Never, never will I forget the love you gave to Me when you gave that person that money or when you helped them in that love deed” (Heb. 6:10, paraphrased). Beloved, we move Him, and that is what makes our life great and powerful. You could be one of the greatest people of history. Honestly, you may never be famous, never be known, never be recognized, nobody may ever know you at IHOP–KC except two or three people, but you might end up one of the great people before God if you will go after this.

Beloved, the sky is the limit in the grace of God. So many are so captivated about just getting more people to hear them; if you could disconnect, some of you—some of you are not into this at all—just disconnect from the addiction of getting more people to hear you and know that God hears you. God hears you.

“Yeah, yeah, I know; I’ll get to that later.”

No. God hears you.

“I want to make an impact.”

You are. If you would just sit down for a minute when you tell Him you love Him, you are moving Him.

“Wow . . . that is neat, but wait, wait, wait . . .” You are moving God. Beloved, if you get hold of that, nobody can touch you; nobody can derail you. It is the first commandment.

“The Revelation of the Supremacy of the First Commandment”—that’s all I’m going to say. I just wanted to say the title and end with that in a minute. I love that. It just needed to be said. That was my favorite part.

I’m not joking. The supremacy of the first commandment: what if—and I believe it to be true, a people here (I’m talking about all over the earth too, though, any group that wants it)—what if an

entire group of people got hold of the supremacy, the greatness, and saw it like God saw this commandment? What would it do to the atmosphere of that spiritual family? Amen. Let's stand.

MINISTRY TIME

I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit to mark us, that we would be ruined. I don't mean just ruined for an exciting ministry, big conferences, great music, cool people. That's not what I mean by ruined. I mean ruined because we have got the vision of the small, little increments of God's Spirit to touch us. Little by little, day by day, year by year, decade by decade we are ruined for love; we are ruined.

We are going after it. Even big ministry cannot derail us from this focus. We are ruined. Mundanity, persecution, prison, difficulty, hard hours, long hours, being mistreated, railed on, nothing can derail you. You are ruined by love.



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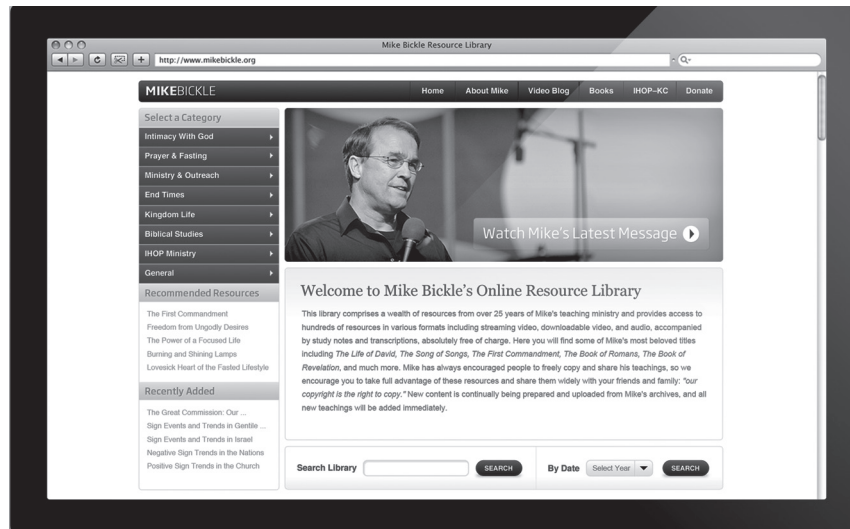
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