

## ***Session 1 Loving God: The First and Great Commandment***

### **I. THE CALL TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART**

*Tonight is going to be a snapshot and overview of the entire subject, **Cultivating a First Commandment Lifestyle**, and then the next nine Friday nights we are going to break it down, line by line. I mean there are many more implications than what we will cover in these ten sessions.*

- A. Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:37-38 is one of the most significant statements in Scripture. It is God's mission statement for the human race and, thus, the most reliable measurement of success at the judgment seat of Christ. It has many implications—it reveals God's personality, our value, how we function, our destiny, and how we should view and value others (since God loves them deeply).

<sup>37</sup>***“You shall love the Lord...with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”***

<sup>38</sup>***This is the first and great commandment.” (Mt. 22:37-38)***

*Jesus makes this most significant declaration. I mean, it is dramatic! He stands before the people of Israel in Matthew 22 and says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind.” And then He adds in Mark 12, “with all of your strength.” Mark 12:30 adds one more word, one more dimension: “all of your strength.”*

*Then He goes on in Matthew 22:38 and makes this revelatory comment that had never been said before: “I want you to know this is what God the Father calls the first priority of the kingdom; it is the first commandment.” It is the number one priority of the Holy Spirit. And then He called it the “great commandment.” It is the commandment that God calls the greatest. It is what moves His heart the greatest. It is what makes your life the greatest. This is remarkable! I have good news for you: this will be the first commandment forever. In a million years from now, it will still be the first commandment. It will still be the thing that God calls great, even in the resurrection.*

*The problem with this verse is that we are so familiar with it that it is very, very easy to overlook it because we are so familiar. “Oh yeah, yeah, love the Lord your God with all of your heart. Yeah, we got it.” And we move on, but this verse is so significant. As Benji said a moment ago, I do not know of anything more significant in the Bible than this. The only one that would be equal to it is that God loves you with all of His heart and all of His mind and strength. That would actually be greater. And that is why He calls us to love Him with all of our heart and strength: because He loves us with all of His heart and all of His strength. It is so remarkable!*

*And so, verse 37, there are four dimensions of our humanity, our human makeup: our heart, our soul, our mind, and then Mark 12:30 adds our strength. We are going to look at these four dimensions. You will want to understand them because, when we stand before the Lord, this is how He is going to evaluate our life. I cannot imagine spending my life not knowing this statement, and then standing before the Lord on the last day and this is the evaluation for what He calls greatness. Many believers might say, “I did not know this was greatness! I thought greatness was having a big following, or having a lot of people listening to my ministry!” And the Lord would say, “No, that is not what greatness is. This is what greatness is.”*

*The remarkable thing is that anybody can walk in this greatness, no matter what kind of gifting you have or what kind of gifting you lack. If you seek for this, God calls your life choices great. No matter what level of gifting, your impact, or the response that people give to you, this is what is great. This is the great equalizer. I mean, we look at this guy over here, and he has the biggest world ministry, and then this other guy and the Lord's favor is on him, and we think “Wow! I wish I was him!”*

*The Lord would say, “You do not have to wish you were him or her. If you do this, your life will be called great on the last day by your life choices.” It is so remarkable.*

*Now most of us are aware that in Matthew 22 the next verse, verse 39, is “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Sometimes I have had people ask, “Well, which is more important: loving God or loving your neighbor?” and I say this, “If you love Jesus and you set your heart to love Him with all of your heart, then it will always, always, **always** overflow into loving people.”*

*I have had people debate this, “Well, I am really a second commandment person,” and I say, “Well, that is impossible because if the second commandment becomes first in your life you will get burned out. You will be sincere, but you will end up bitter and burned out.”*

*The first commandment must be in place for the second commandment to be sustained in our life. A lot of people unwittingly, though they are sincere, make the second commandment first, but it is confusion and they just do not know it, and they actually make the Body of Christ an idol. Their whole big deal is to love and honor people, yet the Lord would say, “You cannot do that apart from Me inspiring you! Your connection to My heart is your only chance of walking out the second commandment.”*

*Well, I call Matthew 22:37, this very powerful declaration, “God’s mission statement for the human race.” If God had one mission statement for the human race, I am guessing that this would be it. This is why He created the human race: to enter into this reality. Well, it is not just that.*

*I determined—and I know many of you are doing the same, but for some of you this will be new—to make this the mission statement of your life. Not just for the human race, make it **your** mission statement. I will tell the story in the midst of this ten-session course about when I made this intentional decision when I was in my twenties many years ago, about forty years ago. By the grace of God, the eyes of my heart opened, and I said, “This is first!” It was like, “Oh my goodness!” A lot of folks assent, but it does not really strike them that this really is first. And this really is great. So I said, “If this is true, and I believe it, I am going to make this my life mission. I am going to go after this, and when I drift from it, by the grace of God, I am going to realign to it over and over and over and over again.”*

*The good news about knowing this information is that it is the most reliable measurement of what God calls greatness. All of us want to be great in God’s sight, and what that means is that we make our life choices and He judges them great. That is what that means when God says, “You will be called great in the kingdom.” Another way of interpreting that is: “I will declare your life choices were great!” That is what He is saying.*

*There does not need to be any ambiguity or confusion. This is what makes your life choices great, regardless of how many people listen to you or how much money or blessed circumstances or favor you have in the eyes of people. If you do this, you can be sure, you can go to bed at night and rest assured this is how God will evaluate your life. And you can say, “I am not that great at it, but I am going for it with all of my heart.”*

*And the Lord says here, “If you stay with it, your life will be called great in My sight.” And when that touched me, it liberated me. I said, “That is what I want more than anything!” That is what everybody wants, even if they have not defined it yet. Everybody wants a greatness about their life that lasts forever, and the only greatness that lasts forever is when God says your life was great. And this is the clearest evaluation of God saying your life is great. I go to bed every night and can say, “I am on the trajectory of having a great life! I love this!” because if you have that certainty, beloved, you are strong in your spirit, even with delayed promises, even when people resist you, or when things are frustrating. You are on the path to having a great life, and if you know that Man, you can endure or press through anything. I mean press on to the Lord in the*

face of anything if you have that assurance in your heart, even our weak love. I am not even talking about how mature our love is. I am talking about the setting of our heart. This is where I am going.

Well, the fact is that God calls this the first and great commandment, and it has many, many implications. We will develop them through this ten-session course. It reveals, number one, what God's personality is like. What kind of God makes loving God the number one thing of His entire empire? That tells us about Him. I mean, all the kings of history make servitude to them and working for them, the great thing of the empire. If you serve the king, he promotes you. This King says, "Oh, I want you to serve Me, but that is not first. Loving Me is." That gives us so much insight into His personality, how He thinks, how He feels, and how He judges. He judges human life through this grid. That is remarkable insight about God's personality.

Well, it has many more implications than what God is like. It gives us insight into our value. I mean, look at our weak and broken lives in the natural. Why would the God of Genesis 1 who made everything—I mean go out tonight and look at the stars. He is so powerful, so smart!—say, "Your loving Me is the most important thing."

"Why would You care if I talk to You? You are powerful and exciting; I am weak and pretty boring! Why do You want me to love You? Why would you want a person like me to love You?"

And His answer would be something like, "That is who I am, and that is what I am like." And that gives us insight into ourselves. Beloved, nobody can offer Him all of your love besides you. You are the only person who can give Him all of your love. This makes your life powerful and valuable. I mean, He has billions of angels serving Him. They serve Him really well, billions of them. He would say, "I am not looking for more workers. I have billions of workers. I am looking for those who will exchange love with Me."

I say, "Who am I that You care if I love You!" I mean the great kings of the earth do not care if some little peasant pays attention to them. They do not even think about that little peasant.

However, the Lord says, "My mind is on you. You are always on My mind."

Like, "Who are You? Who am I?" Beloved, this changes and shifts the way we view life, this commandment does, this commandment because He calls it first and great.

It also gives us insight in how we function. It shows us how we function. If you do not pursue loving God with all of your heart—I am talking about pursuing it, not even obtaining it; I am talking about pursuing it—I will say it positively: if you pursue it, if you are reaching for it, though you are stumbling, and you are reaching again. You are stumbling, you are losing sight of it, then you return. You lose it again, but you reach again. That reach will give you liberty in your spirit.

If you do not reach for this, simply because of the way that God designed the human make-up, you will be like tires stuck and bogged down in the mud. Many believers are not reaching for this, and their lives are stuck in the mud. They are in depression, rejection, constant fear, and just absorbed with thinking how bad they are, which is human nature, by the way, so do not feel like you are the worst person in the world if you think that. Billions do. And the Lord would say, "There is a way out of it," but the way out of it is not just claiming you are forgiven by the grace of God. The way out of it so that you have a liberated heart is by setting your heart to do this. When you reach for this, it changes our whole way of thinking on the inside. It changes the way you process your life.

Some ministries will tell people, "God loves you. God loves you," which is very true, by the way, but they leave the people with the impression that God's grace is free, which it is, "and He loves you," and they say, "Good enough!" And then they think, "I will just live my own selfish life with the assurance that I am going to heaven."

*But the Spirit would say, “You will never have a liberated heart, ever. You were designed by the God who loves with all of His mind and strength. You were designed in His image! You were designed to love with all of your mind and all of your strength. If you do not reach for that, you do not function rightly. The tires are stuck in the mud! Your life is moving this way internally, and you do not have to do that.”*

- B. The first commandment does not start with us, but with God who loves us with all His heart and in the same intensity that He loves inside the fellowship of the Trinity. This is a most dynamic truth for which we say, “Thank You,” and ask the Spirit to reveal more of **God’s love for us** and to impart more **love for God in us**. To “abide in love” is to continually realign our heart to His love.

***“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)***

*This first commandment, to “love God with all of our heart,” does not start with us; it starts with how God loves us. I love to say this, and it is one of my favorite things to say actually: we are called to love God with all of our heart and strength **because** He loves us with all of His heart and strength. I mean, that is the God we are dealing with.*

*Again, I love going out to look at the stars at night. With the naked eye, you can see about ten thousand stars of the whole heavens, which is about a billionth of a billionth of one percent of all the stars! I just made up that number, but it is a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of one percent of how many stars exist. They say that there are a billion, or some many billions, as scientists disagree on how many galaxies there are. And the Milky Way galaxy is one of the medium-to-small ones, and there are a billion-plus galaxies with a far bigger number than that, stars beyond measure. When I look up, I say, “Lord, You are so smart! You have every star perfectly in order!” and He says, “I love you with all of My mind,” and I say “What!?” It is like \*tilt\* “I cannot even comprehend this!”*

*He would say, “No, you will not comprehend this fully, but I will give you more if you want more. I will give you more insight how I love you with all of My mind. You cannot even begin to grasp this in fullness, even in the age to come.” And in the age to come, a billion years from now, we will be learning more and more and more about this forever and forever. I am, in the most positive sense, just ruined by this, ruined in a good way, I mean. This is beautiful, but we easily drift from it. We easily drift from it.*

*Well, John 15:9—for those of you who have been around here—this verse and the one later in John 17:26 are my two favorite verses in the Bible. And why am I telling you that? Because I want you to look at these two verses again and say, “His favorite verses in the whole Bible? That is a pretty big statement. I mean, wow, really? What is it in these two verses that is so significant?”*

*When I think back over the last thirty years, I have spoken more on John 15:9 than any other verse. I have quoted it more times in just the last thirty years. The first ten years I did not know it so well. Why am I telling you that? I want you to re-look at this verse with a “What meanest thou this? What?” This verse, my heart’s desire is that you would speak about this verse, sing it, pray it, blog it, talk about it all of your days, not just once or twice a year. I want you to make this one of the primary passages you think about in your life. That is why I am going on and elaborating on this, because some of you have never really noticed this verse, but that is okay because today is a good day to start. There is so much in here, and we will look at it probably almost every session, and for sure we will reference it.*

*Look what he says: he makes three dynamic statements in John 15:9. The first statement, “As the Father loved Me;” the second statement, “that is how I love you;” the third statement, “stay focused on this truth.” To abide means to stay focused on it. Live in this truth. Wow, we could spend the entire session on this! I am going to try*

*to be brief on this, and, by the way, we will never finish the notes as you know that is how it goes, and I do not care. We are going to look at many of these passages and concepts throughout the series, so I never try to finish notes, and that never concerns me. I like to give them so you can look at them later.*

*There are three gigantic, gigantic foundation stones in this one verse. I mean, Jesus must have preached this—this is my own version—and looked up to heaven and said to the Lord “Yes! that felt good to say that,” though nobody got it.*

*Phrase one: The way the Father loves the Son. What a vast topic! From eternity past, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have enjoyed this deep fellowship with one another. Tremendous delight in relating to one another! When Jesus said, “In the way that the Father loves Me,” I am picturing Him pausing and saying, “Ohhhhh.”*

*They might have said, “Are You okay, Jesus?”*

*“Ohhhhh, just, ahhhhh,” Jesus said “in the energy that He has for Me, in the intensity.” That is a big subject. “That is the intensity that I have for you.” And then He goes on to say “I want you to stay locked in on these two truths: the intensity of how God loves Me is the intensity of how I love you.”*

*If you lock into those two truths, the Spirit will give you more and more as the years unfold. Those are a little bit cryptic, it is a little bit like “Wow, cool, heavy...what?” Each one of these phrases is big. They are mountains. Jesus is saying, as it were, “If you lock into those two, the Spirit will reveal it little by little over the years if you ask Him.” And, as you know, the Spirit will give you more if you ask for more. If you can read that verse and move on and not ask Him, He will still sneak up on you sometimes and ambush you, but if you ask Him, He will give you much more on those two phrases. However, Jesus knew that those two phrases with a little bit of living understanding—and I mean a little bit, poquito, a little bit of understanding, Benji—a little bit of understanding will set your heart in an energizing way to love God and to love people.*

*Jesus knew the first commandment starts correctly with those two things. If we bypass those two truths, those mountains, and try to love God starting with “I am going to love God,” He would say, “It is not going to work that way. You have to take a few steps back to see how the Father loves the Son and how the Son loves the Spirit.”*

*Again, we do not know so much about that, but there is more in the Bible on this than meets the eye. You say, “Wow!” and you get caught up in that just a little bit—I do not want to exaggerate this—but when you see that is the intensity with which He loves you, beloved, you are positioned now to love God more, and then it will always overflow to loving people.*

*A lot of sincere believers are misinformed as they start with trying to love people, and they grit their teeth and say, “Oh, those people just annoy me!” They love faceless people far away. They love the poor just as long as they do not run into them. They love the nations until they go there and meet the guy who hits them in the face, then say, “I don’t love the nations anymore!” As long as they are poor and far away, “We love them!! We love the nations!” I tell you, they are mean in the nations. Humans are mean. Christians are mean when they do not get what they want. And a lot of folks, when they get up close and personal, think “Aghhh! This is hard, to love!” Beloved, it is going to take far more than gritting your teeth to get through that.*

*“Well, okay, I will listen to what that Bickle guy says. I will love God first and overflow into loving people!”*

*No, you cannot grit your teeth and make that work either. You can set your heart there, but I challenge people, “Do not try harder, but rather spend time to see more clearly. If you see more clearly, you do not have to try harder to rev your emotions up.”*

*Well, what is it that you need to see more clearly? Phrase one: the intensity of how the Father loves the Son. Phrase two: the way the Son loves you. If you see those things more clearly, then you do not have to grit your teeth to love God. There will be—and it is small, I do not want to exaggerate it—there will be a steady movement of your heart saying, “Wow! I love You for that! Really? You love me this way?” We have this gratitude like, “No! Not really! Really?” and then it starts stirring our heart up to love God, then we can overflow into loving people, even those mean people when you get up close and personal.*

*Now, I do not mean that everyone in the earth is mean. However, everyone in the earth will disappoint you in their weakness when you get up close in certain ways. And if your love is based on them being happy about you and treating you with joy and favor, you are going to have a hard time loving for thirty, forty, fifty years because not many people are going to love you with a happy spirit and give you everything you want consistently for decades. That is not going to happen. And so the only other way is tapped into loving God and the only way that you are going to do that is by seeing these two truths.*

*So when I look at these verses, this is not small. This is really big stuff! Jesus was at the Last Supper when He said this. And, incidentally, about an hour later—I do not really know how long but a little bit later that evening—He said, in effect, in Matthew 26:41, “And by the way, every one of you will deny Me tonight.” So when He said, “I love you like the Father loves Me,” He was not saying, “I am just star-struck with how devoted you are.” He said “Every one of you will deny Me tonight! Your love is weak, your love is fragile, and your love has betrayal in it. But My love for you has intensity like the Father loves Me.” And this was the truth that actually restored them after they betrayed Him that night. Jesus said, “I love you with the intensity the Father loves Me.”*

*Beloved, when we stumble and look up, we say, “No! I do not even want to face You! I stumbled!”*

*He says, “No! Let Me love you with the intensity the Father loves Me, and I will cure you. I will liberate and heal your heart of your failure and betrayal.” This passage is absolutely a mountain of truth—John 15:9—and I will say it over and over again.*

*I consider this the most dynamic truth. And, you know, when we read this, we need to pause. When is the last time that you paused when you read this passage and said, “Jesus, thank You that You love me like the Father loves You.” We should not only say, “Thank You that You love me that way,” but then we should ask the Spirit, “Reveal more of Jesus’ love for me! And impart more love for Jesus in me! Reveal it to me and impart it to me! Reveal it to me and impart it in me!” This is your number one prayer in life. This is what it means to abide in His love, to live in it. We will never graduate from this subject, even in eternity. A billion years from now this will be the number one point of focus for our lives forever. The first commandment will forever be the first commandment.*

*Well, I want to pause for a minute for us to actually say, “Thank you.” I want you to talk to Him. I will say the words, but I want you to close your eyes for a minute so you are not just looking around. “Jesus, Jesus, thank You! You love me like the Father loves You! Spirit, reveal that to me! Jesus, thank You. Spirit, reveal that to me. Let me see more so I can love more. Spirit, reveal this to me and then impart it in me. Impart it in me! In the name of Jesus, Spirit, impart it in me. Show it to me and impart it in me. Amen.” This is my number one prayer in my life as simple as that is. I cannot pray this too often, and I don’t mean just meaningless repetition. There is no prayer more important than this.*

*When the Lord says here in John 15:9, “Abide in love,” He is saying, “I want you to live in this. Do not graduate from this truth ever.” Meaning, moving on to other truths. Now, in your seasons in your spiritual life, there will be two and three-year seasons where the Lord will emphasize this truth or that one. There are two*

and three-year seasons where He will emphasize this activity or that activity, and that emphasis will change over the course of decades, but never do those emphases supersede this one. This one is always number one.

However, do you know what is most natural for us to do? To talk to God mostly about our opportunities and our difficulties. I mean, as sincere believers, our most natural thing to do is to talk to the Lord about kingdom opportunities, promises, “Oh Lord, You said You were going to do the ‘no disease known to man would stand before Your Son’s name!’ Lord, stadiums will be filled and millions will get saved!” And those are all great things, and we talk about opportunities and promises—and that is good—or we talk about difficulties “The enemy has stopped me here! Breakthrough in this! Help free my heart!”

That is good, but when we talk to Him more about opportunities and difficulties than we do about these two truths in John 15:9, the Lord would say, “You have slipped away. You are not abiding in this truth! You have already moved on to another truth.”

So my question is, “What do you talk to the Lord about in your personal life?” I do not mean prayer on the microphone during intercession for revival for the city, but in your personal life. What do you talk to Him most about?

Most believers would say, “Kingdom promises and opportunities,” which is the same kind of thing, or difficulties: “I want to be set free and break through the difficulties” or “I want the promises and opportunities to come to pass.”

The Lord would say, “Make that conversation number two. Talk to Me more about this.”

And this is kind of a “lightning strike of revelation” moment to a person’s life when this hits them. They say, “I never thought about that! It never occurred to me that ‘abide in this love’ meant this,” meaning study it, talk about it, pray it, listen to worship songs about it.”

I have known this for forty years, since my twenties, and I remember that as a young pastor I set my heart on this. I said, “I am going for this all of the way.” And probably two or three times a year, maybe four—I hope not but probably—I would drift away. And here is what drift means: drift means that I am talking more to God about my opportunities or my difficulties.

The Lord says, “Mike, I want to talk to you about those; you need to talk to Me about them. But they are the main things you are talking to Me about. Shift back to John 15:9.”

It is like, “Of course! Yes!” So two or three times a year—I do not know the real number—I say, “I did it again!”

My weak heart so easily moves from this, but the Lord would say “I will recover you. I will restore you. I will remind you if you want Me to.”

And so one of my prayers—did you know that I have this book called “Ten Prayers that Strengthen the Inner Man” or I call it “F-e-l-l-o-w-s-h-i-p” because that is an acronym of ten prayers to strengthen our inner man or our heart—one of them in the “F-e-l-l-o-w-s-h-i-p”—the ‘O’—I say, “Lord, sustain me as a man of one thing. Call me, remind me! When I lose my way, come up behind me and tell me again!”

I pray that a lot, and the Lord says, “I will do it. I will remind you more if you really want Me to, but I am not going to make you return to it.”

I have told Him this stuff for so many years, and I am still drifting from it. “My goodness, is there ever a time when I do not drift?” and the Lord’s answer might be, “Do not concern yourself with that. Just concern yourself with turning every time I tell you.” Okay. “Just return and we will be good.” Do not get all weird

about how bad you are. Just keep returning to this conversation, and you will be good, because we are all weak and broken in our heart.

- C. Jesus prayed that the Father's love would be imparted to us (Jn. 17:26). The grace to receive God's love and love Him in response is the greatest gift that the Spirit imparts (Rom. 5:5).

<sup>26</sup>“...that the love with which You [the Father] loved Me may be in them...” (Jn. 17:26)

*This is my other favorite verse, and they go together! Oh my goodness! John 17 is called the High Priestly prayer. Jesus is the High Priest, and this is right before His death, right after the Upper Room. Some say He was still in the Upper Room. Some say He had left the Upper Room and that He was in the garden. We do not know for sure, but it is that same evening after He spoke John 15 at the Last Supper. He prays, maybe in the room or maybe on His way to the garden. We do not know.*

*Jesus says, “Father, the love with which You love Me, impart it to them! Father, the intensity of love that You have for Me, the very intensity, impart that to them! Impart it to those weak men, and their hearts will be liberated and their lives will be great! Father, impart it to them because they are never going to get it if You do not impart it to them!”*

*So Jesus prayed, and by virtue of this prayer we understand He wants us to pray this in unity with Him and say, “Father, the love with which You love Him, put it in me! Let me love Him in the way that You love Him, Father, in my weakness.”*

*Beloved, the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit to a believer is when God imparts love for God into the human spirit. This is the greatest gift! Some folks say “Well, I need a money breakthrough” I appreciate that. “I need a power breakthrough for ministry...I need favor breakthrough! I need a clarity breakthrough, because I do not even know what my life is about!” And I get all of that. I have had all of those pains over the years many times.*

*The Lord would say, “You just pray this while you are waiting for the breakthrough. You stick with this one prayer. Breakthroughs will come and go. Seasons will come and go. Pray this: ‘Father, the love with which You love Your Son impart it in me! He said it. You know that You are going to answer the prayer that He prayed. And I agree with Him!’”*

*Beloved, make this the number one prayer of your life: the grace to receive God's love and to return God's love. To receive it and then to return it is the greatest gift the Holy Spirit will ever impart to you. We may think that the greatest gift would be to raise the dead, that the greatest gifts will lead people to the Lord! I like those. I like both of those a lot. But nothing is greater than God revealing and imparting this in the human heart. Oh, fantastic!*

- D. God first exhorted Israel, through Moses, to love Him with all their heart (Deut. 6:5), and later Moses prophesied Israel would love God with all their heart in the end times (Deut. 30:1-6). In Matthew 22:37, Jesus' statement about loving God was both an *exhortation* and a *prophecy*.

<sup>5</sup>**You shall love the LORD...with all your heart...and with all your strength. (Deut. 6:5)**

*Well, let's go back to the very, very beginning, the very, very beginning when God first spoke the first commandment in human history, back to the first record that He ever spoke it ever in human history. Wow! Because, you know, God has had this in His heart from long before Genesis 1. God did not think of this when He created Adam and Eve. He created Adam and Eve **because** He was thinking of this. He created them in a response to His own desire to love and be loved because love by definition demands to be multiplied, and the*

way the Father, the Son, and the Spirit love each other is so dynamic that it demands to be multiplied and shared, just by the definition of love. And so I am imagining that in the fellowship of the Godhead way before Genesis 1, in ages past, the Father says, “I have this plan. You know how We enjoy each other?” with Jesus saying, “Oh, Father, I love You!” and the Spirit saying, “Oh, Jesus, I love You!” in the way they love each other. The Father said, “Let’s share it!”

“With the angels?” Well, I do not think God was confused inside the Godhead. This is all my stuff, so do not go there theologically. “No, no, no, not with the angels.” Love with the angels has never been recorded. The angels serve God, but it is never recorded that they love God. They might. I do not know as there is nothing in the Bible about it. They serve Him.

And the Father says, “No, no, no, I have a plan. I am going to make a new race of created beings, very different from angels. We are going to make them in our image so they are designed to receive and return this love forever.” And, oh, I cannot imagine the joy in the Godhead when this happened in Genesis 1!

However, when Moses—and this is about thirty-five hundred years after Adam, which was fifteen hundred years before Christ, just to give a ballpark. This is not the exact number, but it is pretty close—And so thirty-five hundred years after Adam and Eve were created and fifteen hundred years before Christ came, the Father thunders like lightning on the mountain. Israel had come out of Egypt’s bondage with the ten plagues, the miracles that liberated them. They went through the Red Sea. It split. Remarkable! They came to the mountain which was their first appointment after they got through the Red Sea. Exodus 19, it is fantastic. When you read Exodus 19, understand this is one of the greatest encounters of human beings with God in all of human history. Exodus 19: you might read past it fast, but do not do that. Go back and read it again.

Three million people—we do not know the real number but it says six hundred thousand men plus the women and children, so two to three million—they are at a mountain, and the mountain shakes with thunder, fire, and trumpets, with supernatural sounds from heaven. Three million human beings, plus or minus a few, are watching heavenly fire, heavenly trumpets, a mountain shaking with thunder and lightning. They are encountering God! Three million people! We are not talking about the five hundred who encountered Jesus in the resurrection, five hundred at one time. They saw a man with a resurrected body, five hundred of them at one time. Three million! I think in the end times we are going to see these kinds of miracles. Three million seeing the fire of God, are you kidding? One hundred and twenty in the Upper Room saw fire. Five hundred saw the resurrected Christ. Here it is three million, and they are terrified of God in His transcendence which means His infinitely superior power and majesty. They draw back and say, “O God of Moses! No, You are far too intense! No, no, God of Moses!” and they drew back and were trembling, several million people.

And then later they talked to Moses—I am making this part up—“Moses, what is this God like? What is He like? Is He like Pharaoh? He just wants us to serve Him harder?”

Then God spoke Deuteronomy 6. He said, “Go tell them this; I want them to love Me!”

They say, “The God that shook the mountain with fire and thunder and lightning what?”

“I want you to love Me!”

“Wait! You are that powerful? And what You want is tender love from us? Are You kidding? Is that really what You are after?”

“Tell them, Moses, they should love Me. That is what I want.” I mean, this must have been the shock beyond measure. I imagine they couldn’t even comprehend that that is what the God who shook the mountain in Exodus 19 would want here in Deuteronomy 6:5.

*What a fantastic advancement of the kingdom of God! Meaning, the kingdom of God had been operating in certain small ways, but this revelation was so staggering that it shifted salvation history. This one revelation did that. It was such a huge advancement of the revelation of the God behind the stars whom nobody knows what He is like. He comes out on the surface, on the public stage, and says, “Tell them I want tender love. That is what I am about.”*

*It is like, “No way! Who would have that much power, that much wisdom, and yet be all about wanting tender love?”*

*And the Lord would say, “You do not know who I am, and you do not know who you are to Me. You do not know who you are to Me and you do not know who I am.” My goodness!*

***6The Lord...will circumcise your heart...to love the Lord...with all your heart. (Deut. 30:6)***

*A little bit later, the Lord makes a promise, and He shifts from the exhortation, “Tell them to love Me!” in chapter 6. In chapter 30, He prophesies through Moses, “They **shall** love Me!” If you will notice, it goes from an exhortation in Deuteronomy 6, “Tell them, Moses, they ought to love Me! This is what I am about!” to Deuteronomy 30, “Moses, tell them I am going to move in power in the generation My Son returns!” Moses did not necessarily know exactly all of that. I am adding the New Testament revelation to it. “Tell them I am going to pour out My Spirit, and they are actually going to love Me with all of their heart. I am going to see to personally.” He prophesies it! What a remarkable prophecy!*

*I call this probably the most important end-time prophecy: that God is going to have weak and broken people anointed in such a way through the circumcision of their heart—which is the anointing of the Spirit of the New Covenant—that they will actually love God like God loves them. Are you kidding me? It is the prepared Bride at the end of the age which is an expression of this. This is our destiny. This is our future. This is what we are on the pathway to. Do not get lost in those other narratives about how great or how terrible you are in your profile before people. How great or how little or how big or how small your ministry, how big or small your business, how big or small your friendship circle is. I mean, it is okay to look at those and cry out to God for this and that, but do not make that your life story. Beloved, you are involved in a life story so much bigger than how big or how little your impact is in the eyes of people. The Lord says, “I promise you, you will love Me with all of your heart.” Oh my goodness!*

*Jesus said in Matthew 22, the passage we started with—by the way, do you realize that was His last public message in Israel, Matthew 22? I mean, He saves the best wine for last. Here He is in Matthew 22, the very last public message He has to the people of Israel and therefore to the people of the Body of Christ through history. What would Jesus say if He had one last declaration? I know what He would say. Read Matthew 22; that is what He would say if He had one last sermon, one more prophecy. And so you go to Matthew 22, and you read it, and it is fantastic. Hopefully we will look at it, if not in this course but in the next one later on in the fall or spring or something.*

*Matthew 22, Jesus goes into Jerusalem, and, in verse 2, He says one of the most dramatic things. It has never been said before. He stands before Israel, and He knows the cross is just days away. I mean, He is right at the cross; it is a minute away. He knows it is His last sermon. He knows that He is standing before Israel and this is it. He is going to go to the Upper Room and talk to His disciples openly. And He stands—and I just picture Him closing His eyes, I do not know if He did—and He says, “The kingdom of God is like a king preparing a marriage for his son. My Father is the King. I am the Son. There is a marriage being planned!” He has never said this to Israel like this before. “You are the ones I am after!” and then a few verses later in verse 37, He says “You shall love the Lord your God!”*

And what He does here in verse 37 in this last message, “You shall love the Lord your God,” He is giving the exhortation of Deuteronomy 6, “You ought to love the Lord your God,” but He is combining it with the prophecy of Deuteronomy 30, “You shall love the Lord you God!” He combines the exhortation with the prophecy in His very last statement to Israel. Again, I see Him closing His eyes saying, “My Father has prepared a marriage, a wedding for Me! For His Son! I am the Son and, people of God, you shall love Me by the power of the Spirit!” and then He ends His ministry with that. Beloved, this is remarkable! He takes the words that were spoken to Moses, the exhortation of “you ought to love Me” and the promise of “you will love Me” and puts them both together and ends His public ministry with that declaration. Oh my goodness, that is so dramatic! Beloved, this is our story!

The greatest miracle of human history—I love to say this—is the transformation of the end-time Church from a compromising Laodicean spirit all over the world—I mean all of the nations, and there are exceptions and probably millions of people who are an exception to this, but there are hundreds of millions of believers who are stuck in a spirit of dullness, superficiality, compromise, with a Laodicean spirit. This carnal, Laodicean spirit of compromise is global, not just in America. This is global. It is all over the nations, and the Church is going to be transformed into a prepared Bride and they will love God. And this is going to happen in the span of one generation. That generation may be fifty years, maybe eighty years; I do not know. A generation in the Bible can be up to one hundred years according to Genesis 15. Well, He ends with this.

- E. Jesus defined loving God as being rooted in a spirit of obedience (Jn. 14:15-21). We are to love God on God’s terms. To “keep His commands” includes setting our heart to obey and pursue Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>“**If you love Me, keep My commandments.**” (Jn. 14:15)

- F. In Matthew 22:38, Jesus elaborated on Moses’ exhortation, adding two words—**first** and **great**. Here, He defined loving God as being “the primary” response that God wants *from* His people. The only thing He does not have is our voluntary love, something He will not take by force.

He adds two words in verse 38 that He did not tell Moses fifteen hundred years earlier. Again, I am going to throw in my little personal perspective which is not inspired. “Israel, I am going to tell you what I did not tell Moses. I am the one who told Moses, ‘Love God.’ I am the One who prophesied ‘You **will** love God, not just that you ought to. You actually will.’” I mean, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are all in it together so you can say that of any of the three persons of the Godhead who told Moses. He said, “I am going to tell you what I did not tell Moses.” Wow! What are you going to tell us that you did not tell the great Moses? “Moses did not know that this was the **first** commandment. I never told that to him. And Moses did not know that this is the commandment that makes a person’s life great. I am telling you, Israel. You are the first to ever hear this: this is the first commandment.”

This is what God wants most, *first*. Beloved, God has everything! He has all power, and He has authority over everything. God has everything but one thing, and He will not take it by force: your voluntary love. He says, as it were, “I will not force you to love Me. That is what I want most. I have all power, I have everything, but I do not have that, and I will not make you love Me, because love by definition is voluntary. I will not do it. I will woo you. I will wow you. I will show you the way the Father and the Son love each other. I will impart it to you the way I love you, but I will not make you respond.” That is remarkable.

- G. **First:** The Spirit's first priority and emphasis in the Church is for God's people to grow in their love for God. However, our natural tendency is to focus first on gaining more blessing on our circumstances—more money, honor, comfort, influence, etc. If we do not understand that God is committed first to helping us grow in love, we can be confused about His leadership in our life.

*The first thing He wants. It is the first emphasis of the Holy Spirit. When I talk to people about the prophetic, and they ask, "What is the Spirit saying?" I say, "I am positive..." I say this to get their "What? That sounds a little arrogant," but I like to say it to stir them up, so they lean in and say, "Really?" and I say, "I am positive I know what the Spirit is saying first."*

*They say, "Really? Wow! Man, did your prophets tell you?"*

*I say, "No, no, I do not have a bunch of prophets who told me that. I have the Prophet who said it two thousand years ago. He wants loving God first. That is the first thing He is emphasizing. That is the first thing He is speaking." And I tell my prophetic friends, not as the "know-it-all rebuke" guy—I do not want to be the know-it-all guy—I say, "If your prophetic ministry does not see this first, go back and ask the Spirit what He is saying. Yes, you might know a little bit about this, that, and the other that God is going to do, but if those things are first, go back and ask the Lord again, because you have missed it. I promise you from the lips of Jesus this is first. It is always the first priority, always the first priority."*

*Our natural tendency—I mean mine, yours, all of us—is to focus in our relationship with God on "Lord, I like these things"—and I really do like these things—"more money! More honor! More comfort! Easier! More influence! More friends! Easier, more money, more favor!"*

*The Lord would say, "No, I will get around to all of that. I will do all of it. I will do some of it in this age, and I will do this beyond measure where you are going, in the age to come, for billions of years. I am really into that, but I do not want that number one. If that is number one to you, you will get off track, and you will get into bitterness. Shift over and make the first commandment number one."*

- H. **Great:** It has the greatest impact on God's heart and our heart, and it is the greatest calling.

***<sup>19</sup>...whoever does and teaches them [commands], he shall be called great in the kingdom... (Mt. 5:19)***

*This is the commandment that God defines as great. Look at this. This commandment has the greatest impact on God's heart. He has everything, but there is one thing that He wants most which He does not have. It moves His heart more than anything else. Why would weak, little, puny human beings saying, "I love You in my weakness and I stumble all of the time" move Him? It's like, "Really? I mean really?"*

*He would say, "That is who I am, and when you set your heart on this, your life choices are great." This is what makes your life great, and this is what liberates your heart in the greatest way also.*

*You know we have "ten steps" here, "twelve steps" there, seven keys here, nine keys there. Go through this class. Go to that class. I actually do appreciate some of those classes and some of those steps. However, none of it works if you are not pursuing this as the first thing in your life. There is the greatest liberty that you will have in context to this. All those steps and classes—and a lot of them are really helpful. They really are, and I am not putting those down at all—however, when the healing of the human heart is separated from doing this first and great commandment and we can imagine that we can get the great breakthrough, the great liberty, apart from going for this, it is not real. We need to see this commandment in the center of the worship movement, the center*

of the counseling movement, the center of the preaching movement, the evangelistic movement, the missions movement. Everything needs to be anchored in this reality.

*Well, why am I saying this? I am contending for your greatness here, as a spiritual father. I am not rebuking or saying, "Get with it, you old rotten sinners!" That is not what I am doing. I am fighting for your greatness. I am telling you things that, if you are young and new in the Lord, may be new for some of you. They will be, but I am saying this is how you will be great! That is why I am telling you. That is why this class is so important to me. I love the first commandment class. I could do it every year! I am not going to, but I could do it every year.*

*Now I want to tell you this little tongue-in-cheek kind of joke. I am telling you this in advance, right now, so when I tell you later, you may say, "Oh, I forgot!" or maybe you will not.*

*I see somebody, and they say, "Hey, Mike! Would you pray for me? I am looking to the Lord for prophetic direction."*

*I say, "I already have it."*

*"You do? You have prophetic direction for me?"*

*"Yes"*

*"Seriously?"*

*"I have the most important prophetic word for you"*

*"Oh I knew it! Let me get my phone out, hang on, hang on..." I am carrying on; it does not really happen that way. "Okay, give it to me."*

*"You shall love the Lord your God..."*

*"Oh! I already knew that!"*

*"No, no, no, I do not think you do. This is the greatest prophetic word for you"*

*"I know that, but I want to know who I am going to marry, and what nation I am going to move in, how much money I am going to make, and how powerful I am going to be."*

*I say, "I get that. I did that. I wanted to know all of that too. I am not against that, but this is the greatest prophetic word."*

*"Ohhhh! Well, go ahead and pray for me then if you are going to carry on like that, Mike!" and so I pray for him.*

*And so some of you will ask, "Do you have a prophetic word for me?" Yes, it may be a year or two from now. You might forget this but maybe you will not. Anyway, I am just giving you a heads-up.*

## II. LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART

- A. We are called to engage our heart with Jesus with enthusiasm in pursuing and obeying Him. Some search for Bible verses or definitions of grace to validate giving less of themselves to love Jesus.
- B. We set our love on God by determining that the *primary dream* (goal and definition of success) of our life is to walk out the first commandment by grace. Our *secondary dreams* and definitions of success are related to our family, friends, vocation, ministry etc.—they flow from loving God.

<sup>14</sup>“Because he has set his love [heart] upon Me, therefore I will deliver him.” (Ps. 91:14)

- C. David set his heart to love God (Ps. 18:1). One of the most important decisions in our life is when we intentionally determine that our *primary dream* is to walk out the first commandment.

<sup>1</sup>I will love You, O LORD, my strength. (Ps. 18:1)

### III. LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR MIND

- A. We express love for God with our mind by putting things in our mind that inspire love for God instead things that diminish our capacity to love Him.
- B. What we do with our mind affects our ability to receive and express love. We show love for God by taking time to fill our mind with His Word and refusing to feed our mind on lust (Job 31:1).

<sup>1</sup>“I have made a covenant with my eyes; why should I look upon a young woman?” (Job 31:1)

### IV. LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR STRENGTH (MK. 12:30)

- A. We express love for God in the way we use our strength and natural resources (time, money, energy, talents, words, influence). We tend to use our strength first to increase our honor, comfort, influence, etc. God takes pleasure in the small things that His people do when they invest their strength in ways that express love for Him and help others to love Him (Heb. 6:10).
- B. We love God with our strength as we do the things that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7): *servicing, giving* (6:1-4, 19-21), *praying* (6:5-13), *blessing, forgiving* (5:44; 6:14), etc.

### V. LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR SOUL

- A. We express loving God *with our soul* when we exert the emotional energy to realign our heart to base our identity on our relationship with God instead of on accomplishments, recognition, etc.
- B. Our identity is determined by how we define our success and value and how we see ourselves.
- C. Our *primary success* and *identity* are found in being ones whom God loves and who love God, confessing, “**I am loved by God, and I am a lover of God; therefore, I am successful.**”
- D. When our identity is rooted in what we achieve and who applauds us, then we are more likely to burn out and to live in an “emotional storm” (by being too preoccupied with self). Therefore, we must often realign our thinking to agree with His love, truth, and investment in our lives.

*Amen. Let’s stand before the Lord. We have nine more sessions on this subject that is so vast. It is so big and way beyond nine sessions.*

*Lord, here we are before You.*

*We are going to go from nine to ten so we have one hour. Typically we will have short worship, twenty, twenty-five minutes on the front end and a longer ministry time because I would like you to hear the word and then I want you to receive ministry if you want it or just soak and talk to the Lord.*

*Go to John 15:9 and say, “Lord, I don’t even get what this means. You love the Son like what?” I know it is a bit cryptic for our human minds, but say, “Spirit, would you show me this?”*

*The Spirit would say, “If you keep asking Me, I will keep showing you just a little bit at a time, a little bit at a time. You just keep asking.”*

*“Well, would You impart it to me? Not just show it to me, but impart this love in me?”*

*He would say, “Yes, little by little. Not all at one time, but little by little.”*

*Lord, here we are.*

*Now I want to invite people to come down and, I mean, everybody could come down, but if you are feeling stirred and thinking, “I need prayer for this. I want to make this my number one ambition in life. I want to intentionally shift my life vision and make this number one. I am going to go for the other things, I want the other things, but I am going to make this number one. I am determining tonight. I am going to set my heart.”*

*The Spirit would say, “That is all I need. Set your heart, and I will show you.”*

*And I am going to give you some ways in the next ten weeks. Not that my ways are all the ways, but the Lord is going to show you and take you on this journey if you set your heart. I remember when I set my heart this way in my early twenties, forty years ago. I said, “I do not even know what this means,” but somehow I stumbled into this. Let me tell you something. When I stumbled into this forty years ago, this great gift of God, you know what the Lord was thinking about? He was thinking about you. He said, “Hey, little guy!” talking about me—not really—“in forty years you are going to have some stuff to tell a group of twenty-year olds.” He was thinking about you when He ambushed me.*

*And so, Lord, I ask You in this place, for these twenty-year olds, Lord, I ask that You would raise them up as shepherds. Raise them up for the next group of twenty-year olds so that they would have a history in God. Give them a history so for the next group of twenty-year olds coming in ten and twenty years from now, they will have something to tell them about. Here we are, Holy Spirit. Oh, we love You, Jesus! We hardly know You, but we love you.*

*I am going to invite as many as will come to come up and pray for folks, all the intern leaders, any IHOPU leaders, anybody that will help us. I am asking you to come up and help us pray. Anyone in the room, even if you are visiting, if you pray for people at home, come on up. We are going to wait on the Lord for a while as Brandon leads us. We are going to ask for the fire of the Spirit to come.*

*Fire, Lord! Release Your fire, Lord! Spirit of revelation, this is who You are and this is what You do. I ask for the fire of love to seal the human heart. I ask for Song of Solomon 8:6 fire of love to touch the human heart. Spirit of revelation, Holy Spirit, let us see Him!*