



Loving God With All My Heart

Summary and Goal

Is God the desire of your heart? What your heart wants, it finds a way to get.

Main Passages

Matthew 6:19-24; 22:34-40

Session Outline

1. Understanding What is Ultimately Important (Matthew 22:37; 6:19-21)
2. Loving God Without Distraction (Matthew 6:22-23)
3. Loving God Without Rival (Matthew 6:24)

Theological Theme

Loving God with the all one's heart demands the elimination of idolatrous distraction.

Christ Connection

Jesus taught of the dangers of giving undue value to lesser gods. He also modeled what complete devotion to loving God looks like through His own sacrificial service.

Missional Application

The believer's effectiveness in living as a witness for Christ is empowered when his or her focus and affection are uniquely and unwaveringly set on God.

Historical Context of Matthew

Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaeus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

Setting

Determining the date of composition of Matthew's Gospel depends largely on the relationship of the Gospels to one another. Most scholars believe that Matthew utilized Mark's Gospel in writing his own gospel. If this is correct, Matthew's Gospel must postdate Mark's. However, the date of Mark's Gospel is also shrouded in mystery. Irenaeus (ca AD 180) seems to claim that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. However, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote only twenty years after Irenaeus, claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was still alive. Given the ambiguity of the historical evidence, a decision must be based on other factors.

Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

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Session Plan

Loving God With All My Heart

Introduction

- ❓ If someone were to ask you how you love God, what would you say? What habits, actions, or other expressions would you be sure to list?
- ❓ What aspects of daily living would you identify as potential hindrances to maintaining a fervent love for God alone?

In this week's session, Matthew recorded Jesus' most well-known body of teaching, the Sermon on the Mount. In His teaching, Jesus warned against giving ultimate value to money or treasures. In so doing, He pointed to the greater danger of allowing other things to challenge God as the recipient of one's whole affection.

1. Understanding What is Ultimately Important (Matthew 6:19-21)

Having just finished teaching about how to pray and the correct manner of fasting, Jesus turned His attention to the matter of storing up treasures. It was significant that He did not specifically say "money," but clearly had things of material value in mind. Leon Morris says, "Jesus demands that his followers be wholehearted; it is important that they should not set their minds on anything earthly..."¹ Rather than speaking exclusively about money, Jesus used treasures as a way of addressing anything of earthly value that would obscure a person's understanding of that which is of ultimate importance and value – loving God.

- ❓ How would you expect a person who finds ultimate value in worldly things to act in the middle of crisis? What habits or customs might you expect to see in that person's life?
- ❓ What about loving God with all one's heart would necessarily set a person apart from those who place great value in worldly offerings? What do you think the appropriate relationship between a believer and worldly goods should be? What does this have to do with worship?

2. Loving God Without Distraction (Matthew 6:22-23)

Jesus changed metaphors in explaining the importance of unrelenting focus on God. His second metaphor spoke of “light” in place of “treasure,” but the consistency of His message remained. Jesus spoke of the eye being the lamp of the body, giving the mental image of the eye serving as the sole window in a body. As such, the eye served as the determinant for the degree of light that filled the body.

- ❓ Describe a time when not being able to see clearly or made a task or journey more difficult. What different aspects of the task were made more challenging? Why?
- ❓ During decision-making for daily living, how does being able to clearly discern God’s leading and worldview make challenging decisions clearer? What contribution does knowing what God values make in the process?

3. Loving God Without Rival (Matthew 6:24)

Only one thing can be most important in a person’s life – God or something else. If the “something else” takes the place of priority, the word for that is idolatry. Perhaps a better way of stating the problem would be: only one thing can be most important in a person’s life – God or gods.

- ❓ How easy would it be for you to identify what is most important in your life? How do the decisions you make in relationships, finances, worship, and what is allowed to influence you reflect that most important thing?
- ❓ What other rivals for your ultimate affection can you identify other than money? What makes these sources so alluring?

Conclusion

- ❓ What are some indications in your life that your desired “treasures” might be shifting? What have you found to be most effective in reorienting your treasures beyond earthly accomplishment or acquisition?
- ❓ Who in your life has permission to ask you difficult and personal questions about your devotion to loving God? How do you cultivate that community and confidence? How has it bolstered your relationship with God?
- ❓ What evidences of your love for God exist in your daily life now that didn’t a year ago? Why is it important to take a personal inventory of how God is changing you as you walk with Him?



Expanded Session Content

Loving God With All My Heart

Introduction

Until the debut of a certain blockbuster film from earlier this year, the idea of loving someone “3,000” made absolutely zero sense. However, as soon as *Avengers: Endgame* hit movie screens the iconic line became strewn across every possible social media platform. Not long after, stories began emerging theorizing about the origin of the unusual line. More significantly, however, was why the line stuck such a deep chord with viewers. Certainly, in the library of films throughout history, the appearance of some form of “I love you” is almost as commonplace as the closing credits. Perhaps that is the problem in itself. The rote manner in which love is communicated in all sorts of media has a numbing effect. But every so often a unique way of communicating the depth of love for someone else reinvigorates viewers’ capacity to empathize with the characters depicted on the screen.

Believers run the same risk in reading passages like “love the Lord your God with all your heart...” The casual and repeated ways in which similar phrases find their way into daily usage robs the phrase of the appropriate impact when it is read or heard. However, when one takes the time to plumb the depths of what is required to love God with all one’s heart, the transformative beauty of doing so can rejuvenate the soul.

Loving God with all one’s heart is not a sentimental, fluffy notion. Rather, it requires coming to grips with the nature of the world humanity lives in, facing it squarely, and willfully deciding to transcend the pettiness of that which seeks to take God’s place in the hearts of His people. Loving God with all one’s heart is spiritual warfare. It is discipleship. When practiced as God calls for, it is glorious.

- ❓ If someone were to ask you how you love God, what would you say? What habits, actions, or other expressions would you be sure to list?
- ❓ What aspects of daily living would you identify as potential hindrances to maintaining a fervent love for God alone?

Session Summary

In this week's session, Matthew recorded Jesus' most well-known body of teaching, the Sermon on the Mount. In His teaching, Jesus warned against giving ultimate value to money or treasures. In so doing, He pointed to the greater danger of allowing other things to challenge God as the recipient of one's whole affection.

1. Understanding What is Ultimately Important (Matthew 22:37; 6:19-21)

In seeking to give real application to the Great Commandment from Matthew 22:34-40, it is important to dissect the various ways in which Jesus spoke of loving God. The first of those ways, in quoting Deuteronomy 6, was to love God with all one's heart. The idea of loving someone or something with all of one's heart is not an unfamiliar concept for the modern Bible reader. However, because Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy, there was no question that He meant something specific in His answer. In allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, Jesus offered insight into what He meant by saying "love the Lord your God with all your heart..." in His teaching in Matthew 6:19-24. While this section of the Sermon on the Mount is most commonly cited as a teaching about tithing, Jesus had a much more profound application in mind.

Having just finished teaching about how to pray and the correct manner of fasting, Jesus turned His attention to the matter of storing up treasures. It was significant that He did not specifically say "money," but clearly had things of material value in mind. Leon Morris says, "Jesus demands that his followers be wholehearted; it is important that they should not set their minds on anything earthly..."¹ Rather than speaking exclusively about money, Jesus used treasures as a way of addressing anything of earthly value that would obscure a person's understanding of that which is of ultimate importance and value – loving God.

Jesus' contrast of the nature of such stored treasures was based on the return on investment. While that may seem trite, the reality was that Jesus wanted His hearers to understand the absolute folly and futility of embracing the offerings of this world as being of primary importance. All of what the earthly worldview held most dear, represented by money, fine clothing, etc., would ultimately decompose and deteriorate, much like the temporal world itself. D.A. Carson says, "In principle, by 'treasures of earth' Jesus refers to any valuable thing which is perishable or which can be lost in one way or another. The means by which the treasure is lost is unimportant."³



How would you expect a person who finds ultimate value in worldly things to act in the middle of crisis? What habits or customs might you expect to see in that person's life?

Rust

D.A. Carson: "The word translated 'rust' may mean just that, and therefore be connected with corrosion of metals; but it can refer to other kinds of decay and destruction as well. For example, it can refer to something, which eats away at a supply of grain.... Picture a farm along with its products and supplies being eroded, corroded, fouled, destroyed."²



What about loving God with all one's heart would necessarily set a person apart from those who place great value in worldly offerings? What do you think the appropriate relationship between a believer and worldly goods should be? What does this have to do with worship?

Instead of the foolishness of placing one's ultimate affection in the offerings of the world (whether it be possessions, occupation, hobbies, etc), Jesus directed His hearers to store up heavenly treasure. While earthly treasure would have been easy to understand, the heavenly treasure to which Jesus redirected them would have been less clear. This shortfall of clarity is directly related to the unimaginable splendor of heavenly treasures. According to Carson, "The treasures in question are things which are the result of divine approval and which will be lavished upon the disciples in the consummated kingdom. The treasures of the new heaven and the new earth are wonderful beyond our wildest expectation. . . .Scripture extrapolates the advance tastes we enjoy here, and pictures love undiluted, a way of life utterly sinless, integrity untarnished, work and responsibility without fatigue, deep emotions without tears, worship without restraint or disharmony or sham, and best of all the presence of God in an unqualified and unrestricted and personal way."⁴

The difficulty with giving over such paltry and temporary affections would be in the delayed gratification of the eternal experience. Loving God with one's whole heart would require a holy patience and understanding that one's ultimate reward would not be revealed until the end of human history. The promised gentle grace of God, however, would be the promises, glimpses, and hints of His holiness that would sustain those who realize that He alone is the ultimate importance.

The outworking of such divine affection would be evident in the manner of daily living of Jesus' hearers. The treasures one held most dear would govern his or her life in such a way that the greatest affection of the heart would be clearly and consistently revealed.

2. Loving God Without Distraction (Matthew 6:22-23)

Jesus changed metaphors in explaining the importance of unrelenting focus on God. His second metaphor spoke of "light" in place of "treasure," but the consistency of His message remained. Jesus spoke of the eye being the lamp of the body, giving the mental image of the eye serving as the sole window in a body. As such, the eye served as the determinant for the degree of light that filled the body. According to Carson, "If so, the eye is the lamp of the body in the sense that it enables the body to find its way. Your eye must be 'good' in order for it to direct 'your whole body' . . .toward what is good."⁵ The term used for "good" referred in other

parts of Scripture to that which had “singleness of purpose, undivided loyalty.” Carson goes on to say that such singleness of purpose was a “heart fidelity...toward God.”⁶

Understanding that one with a good eye is one with unwavering focus, undivided loyalty, and singleness of purpose painted an vivid picture of what it would look like to love God with one’s whole heart. To do so would be free from distraction of other vices or folly. In addition, Carson notes, “if light is taken in its usual connotations of revelation and purity, then the individual with a single eye toward kingdom values is the person characterized by maximum understanding of divinely revealed truth by unabashedly pure behavior....It is by this unreserved commitment to kingdom values that Christians become ‘the light of the world’ (Matt. 5:14).”⁷ So then, one of the most notable passages for speaking to stewardship actually spoke much more intensely with regard to the believer’s loving exclusivity of devotion to God.

The Eye as an Indicator of the Heart

According to John Stott, “Not infrequently in Scripture the ‘eye’ is equivalent to the ‘heart’. That is, to ‘set the heart’ and to ‘fix the eye’ on something are synonyms.”⁸ Read Psalm 119:10 for an example.

- ❓ Describe a time when not being able to see clearly or made a task or journey more difficult. What different aspects of the task were made more challenging? Why?
- ❓ During decision-making for daily living, how does being able to clearly discern God’s leading and worldview make challenging decisions clearer? What contribution does knowing what God values make in the process?

Just as physical vision would enable the person to clearly navigate life’s tasks and challenges, spiritual vision would empower the believer to honor God as the love for Him found applicable expression in cruciform living.

3. Loving God Without Rival (Matthew 6:24)

Only one thing can be most important in a person’s life – God or something else. If the “something else” takes the place of priority, the word for that is idolatry. Perhaps a better way of stating the problem would be: only one thing can be most important in a person’s life – God or gods.

The strong language in this verse underscored the tremendous importance of making the correct choice. The word “masters” employed by Jesus had the connotation of a slave master who required absolute and total allegiance. “Love” and “hate” in Semitic thought were often equivalent to “choose” or “not choose.” Still the mutual exclusivity of the two masters should not be diluted. Only one was going to be most important and the fundamental basis on which major life decisions of the individual were made. Carson says that Jesus “means that any man’s first love and first allegiance must be directed toward the Father and toward the Son whom He sent.”⁹

- ❓ How easy would it be for you to identify what is most important in your life? How do the decisions you make in relationships, finances, worship, and what is allowed to influence you reflect that most important thing?
- ❓ What other rivals for your ultimate affection can you identify other than money? What makes these sources so alluring?

Jesus' explanation that no one can serve two masters brought home the gravity of the decision to be made. According to Stott, there was no possibility of not making a decision, for "anybody who divides his allegiance between God and mammon has already given it to mammon, since God can be served only with an entire and exclusive devotion. This is simply because He is God."¹⁰

"Money" in this verse referred to an Aramaic word that meant wealth, "mammon." Carson explains that mammon "originally meant 'something in which one puts confidence,' or the like. Eventually, no doubt because man's confidence is so often deposited in riches, the word came to refer to all material possessions."¹¹ However, to reclaim the original meaning of the word broadens the application to more than simply materialism.

Conclusion

In examining the concept in light of Jesus' earlier instruction on the Sermon on the Mount, what it means to love God with all one's heart requires tremendous personal discipline and vigilant devotion. Here are some helpful considerations for the application of Jesus' teaching.

First, believers must keep careful watch over the real desires of their heart. The longer a person is connected to a church family, the more natural it becomes to provide expected answers to spiritual questions. Therefore, when asked about God's priority in his or her life, the expected answer back affirms God's ultimate priority. However, the delusions and desires of the world are subversive in nature, creeping in undetected in moments of jealousy, insecurity, and temptation. Without keeping careful watch over what "treasures" are really at the center of the believer's aspirations, loving God with all one's heart becomes a far cry from reality.

Second, because the last point is so tied to self-awareness and objective assessment, believers must be in community with other disciples who share a similar fervent passion for God. This means allowing others to ask hard questions with the expectation of receiving honest answers. That sort of community is for edification and sharpening, not for judgment and condemnation.

Third, in order to keep one's "eye" clear so that the body can be filled with light, it is imperative that regular meditation on God's Word and memorization of the same become a part of the believer's life. As God's Word increasingly finds a home in the believer's heart, the love for God will also increasingly find expression in the believer's ongoing sanctification. Knowing God more intimately and seeing how to follow Him more clearly cooperate to transform disciples under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the believer must choose his or her master well and daily. No one can serve two. It is either God or something else. No matter what the something else is, the consequences are ultimately the same. However, the choice is not one that is made one time for the rest of the believer's life. The resolution to lovingly follow God is a daily decision because humanity drifts toward sinfulness. The consistent renewing of one's confidence in God alone is necessary.

- ❓ What are some indications in your life that your desired "treasures" might be shifting? What have you found to be most effective in reorienting your treasures beyond earthly accomplishment or acquisition?
- ❓ Who in your life has permission to ask you difficult and personal questions about your devotion to loving God? How do you cultivate that community and confidence? How has it bolstered your relationship with God?
- ❓ What evidences of your love for God exist in your daily life now that didn't a year ago? Why is it important to take a personal inventory of how God is changing you as you walk with Him?

Prayer of Response

Pray and ask God to help you identify where you place ultimate value. Ask Him to help you forsake all lesser things in pursuit of Him as the ultimate treasure of your life.

Additional Resources

- *Idols of the Heart* by Elyse Fitzpatrick
- *Gods at War* by Kyle Idleman
- *Gospel Treason* by Brad Bigney

For Next Week

Session Title

- Loving God With All My Soul

Main Passages

- Matthew 22:37; Colossians 3:16-24

Session Outline

1. Loving God with the Soul by Knowing His Word (Matt. 22:37; Col. 3:16-17)
2. Loving God with the Soul in Key Relationships (Col. 3:18-22)
3. Loving God in Everything Done (Col. 3:23-24)

Memorize

“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

-Matthew 6:24

Daily Readings

- Monday - Colossians 3:23
- Tuesday - 1 Corinthians 10:31
- Wednesday - John 6:27
- Thursday - 1 Corinthians 16:14
- Friday - Matthew 5:16
- Saturday - Psalm 90:17

Extended Commentary

Matthew 6:19-24

6:19-21. Verses 19 and 20 are almost exact parallels, designed for easy understanding and easy memorization. This is a critical passage. Here the king drew an ultimate contrast between on earth and in heaven. He urged his followers to forget earth and think of heaven. We must not waste our time trying to get ahead in this world. It is the same idea he expounded in 16:24-27. What does it profit a person “if he gains the whole world”? Jesus was demanding that his disciples look up and ahead—“for the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory. . . and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” (Matt. 16:27).

Jesus was summarizing why the kingdom servant is motivated to practice righteous acts. It is not for temporary honor among men on earth, but for eternal reward before the Father in heaven. The point of this life is preparation for the world to come. The present tense verb here can best be translated, “Stop storing up treasures on earth!” But Jesus does specifically command us to store up for yourself in heaven. Moths were universally known as a destructive force (Job 4:19; Isa. 50:9; 51:8). Burglary was especially common in the day of mud-brick homes. Break is the Greek term meaning “break through.” It literally means “dig through.” There is no permanence in this world. You cannot take your treasure with you into the next world, but you can send it on ahead through kingdom-oriented stewardship.

Jesus not only saw nothing wrong with his followers working for reward; he went so far as to command it. The New Testament clearly encourages it (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 9:24-27). Jesus’ words in the last few verses of the Bible emphasize it: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12).

This concept of storing up heavenly treasure by doing good works was common in rabbinic tradition, and so it would have been easily understood by Jesus’ audience and Matthew’s readers. (New Testament passages that expand on this concept, including specific examples of behaviors that have eternal significance, include Matt. 5:12,30,46; 6:6,15; 10:42; 16:24-27; 19:21,27-29; 25:40; Luke 12:16-21; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:13-19.)

6:22-23. The conditional “if statements of 6:22b-23a are parallel, again using the form of poetic wisdom literature.

These two verses can be confusing until we look at them in the light of the preceding and following context. We have not departed from the theme of the person's attitude toward material wealth. Jesus spoke of a small part of the body as being very important to the body as a whole, much as James claimed that anyone who could tame his tongue could tame his whole body (James 3:1-12). No muscle of the body can relax if the eye is uncomfortable. Both Jesus and James were speaking of the inner human control over one's attitude toward wealth and one's choice of words. These two limited aspects of human choice can have profound consequences for the entire person (the whole body, figuratively speaking).

6:24. The center of this verse is, again, a symmetrical parallel pair of statements, poetically memorable. The term Money is from the Aramaic mamon, meaning "wealth" or "property." It is anything in which a person places confidence. Jesus carefully chose here the picture of a slave. There could be no doubt about the issue of control. No person can serve two masters.

Matthew 22:35-40

22:34-36. The Pharisees had regrouped after Jesus turned their first trap against them in 22:15-22. Seeing the same thing happen to the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together, seeking power and courage in numbers. The one expert in the law whom they chose to ask the testing question must have approached Jesus with some trepidation. For the third time in three challenges, the questioner addressed Jesus as Teacher.

This time the question was simple but profound: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Matthew used the simple adjective "great" (megas), but it carried superlative force ("greatest") in this context. The question demonstrated the way the religious leaders looked at the law. In their tradition, they had reduced the law to 365 negative and 248 positive commandments. They spent much time trying to prioritize these innumerable technicalities. They thought they could trap the Lord of the law.

22:37-38. Jesus drew his answer from the most memorized and recited passage in all the Jewish Scriptures: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:4-5).

Jesus quoted the Septuagint almost verbatim, but he substituted mind (dianoia) for the similar sounding "might" (dunameos). We are to take this list as an emphatic way of saying, "Love God with everything you are in every way possible." But it was not without significance that our

Lord deliberately substituted “mind” here rather than some other term. Christians need to take a lesson from this. We should learn to think critically and biblically.

Jesus emphasized his answer by identifying this commandment as the first and greatest commandment. This commandment was greatest because of the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 which preceded it: “Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone” (paraphrased). To honor Yahweh as the one true God is to love him exclusively, from among all others who claim to be gods.

22:39. But Jesus went beyond the critic’s question and added a second command, which is like (homoios, “resembling”) the first, this time drawing from Leviticus 19:18 (cf. Matt. 19:19): love your neighbor as yourself. This commandment and the first complement each other, so Jesus mentioned them together. They are not to be separated. It is impossible to love God without loving people, for his law and heart’s desire is to love others. The measure by which we know if we are truly loving people is if we love them as much as we love ourselves (cf. Eph. 5:28-31).

22:40. Finally, Jesus defended his choice of these two commandments by observing that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (or “depends” on them). Every Old Testament commandment and teaching fulfilled the commands to love God and to love people.¹²

References

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8. Carson.
9. Stott.
10. Carson.
11. Ibid.
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