

Sunday, October 23-29 (A) – Matthew 22:34-46

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Love*

Focus Question: *When did you first realize God loved you?*

word of life

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:37 (NSRV)

Read Matthew 22:34-46

Throughout Matthew 22 Jesus has been challenged and questioned by the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. In this week’s reading, it is a lawyer who poses the question to entrap Jesus. At first glance, the question seems easy. Which is the greatest of the laws? Keep in mind that there were well over 600 laws at the time. So, which of all the many laws is the greatest? Is it possible to select one law above others?

Jesus sees through the question and answers with profound clarity. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Even before the lawyer asks a follow-up question, Jesus clarifies the second greatest commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

1. *How might the response of Jesus put an end to the debate?*

The debate with this lawyer seems to be over. What more can be said? Who can argue about giving God our full attention and extending love to neighbors? In Luke’s Gospel, the lawyer asks one more question, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus expands the definition of *neighbor* by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Our neighbor is not only the person who lives next door to us or those people we like. Anyone who is in need is our neighbor and is to be loved.

2. *Who are we called upon to love?*
3. *How can you love someone you don’t even like?*

Jesus links two very old commandments: the love for God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and the love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Love becomes the very hinge upon which the law and the prophets are joined (See Romans 13:9-10). In fact, love sums up everything! But love is more than just a warm fuzzy feeling; it is a commitment of heart, soul and mind.

4. *How does love sum up the teachings and life of Jesus?*

Loving God becomes a life-long commitment demanding all of who we are. This love is not completed in a day or week; instead, our love for God calls for our full attention every day, every hour. Our love for God overflows us and rushes out towards others.

Jesus’ answer is very simple. The difficulty – for the lawyer then and for disciples now -- is to live constant love.

5. *What is so challenging about loving God with heart, soul and mind?*
6. *What is so challenging about loving our neighbor?*

word among us

Dear Aunt Philia,

My boyfriend and I are having problems. We've been together for three years. Do you think going to church will help us?

Love,

Me

1. *How would you respond?*
2. *What connection do you see between God and our relationships?*

Love! That's what it's all about. We spend our time, money and energy seeking and giving love. Sometimes we love another person, but other times the focus of our love becomes our job, car, sports team, or exercise schedule. The list goes on.

Jesus interrupts and invites us back to the basics. We are to place our full attention and energy on God. Jesus clearly reminds us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37 NRSV). This is not just a puppy love or a passing fad. We are to re-order our lives with a love directed toward God alone.

3. *What would it mean to re-order our lives so that they are directed fully towards God?*

God has created us with a tremendous capacity to love. God's love in us is not just a warm feeling. It becomes real in our care for others. Jesus instructs us to love others as we love ourselves – not with narcissistic behavior focusing on ourselves alone, but with love overflowing to both friend and stranger.

4. *How do you follow Jesus' instruction to love yourself?*
5. *What makes this so challenging?*

When we fully love the Lord, we treat others and ourselves with respect. Hopefully, we no longer need hundreds of laws to tell us how to treat others; instead our regard for our neighbor as well as our neighbor's well-being is motivated by the love in our hearts. We simply cannot love God without living that love in our care for our neighbor (See 1 John 4:20). We cannot profess our love for God, then follow-up by stealing, killing or wounding our neighbor.

Disciples of every age have recognized the challenge of loving. Daily, we fall short. Daily, we confess our shortcomings to God. We have not loved God, ourselves or our neighbor as God desires. Fortunately, God is gracious, forgiving and loving. God hears our prayer and gives us the opportunity to try again to love as God intended.

6. *This week, how can we love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul?*
7. *This week, how can we love our neighbors as ourselves?*

Prayer

Loving Spirit, fill us with love for God, ourselves and our neighbors. Amen

Dig Deeper

Luke 10:25-37



Daily Discipleship

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last word

This week, each morning, noon and night,
ask God to fill you with
love for God, yourself and others.