

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living
Leader's Guide

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 12: LOVING GOD

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Life and Worldview. This series of lessons examines the choices and practices that are essential for Christian living. When we live according to the Word of God, we realize that the choices we make each day affect our faith. We will also have an increased desire to pray, practise the commands of God, and learn to serve others. These are important lessons for understanding the practicality of Christianity and how to live out our faith within our community.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is new Christians, those who would like a refresher on the basics of Christianity, as well as those preparing to teach these Christian practices and beliefs. Also, those with an interest in Christian thought will find value in these lessons as they pertain to daily living and choices.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 12: LOVING GOD

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to understand the commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength

LEADER'S NOTE

Love is a complex topic, but there is nothing more important to each one of us than to love and be loved. God's greatest commandments to us are that we love Him, and we love others. So we know that love is incredibly important to God. Love is sometimes thought of as an emotion or feeling we cannot control, such as falling in love with someone. This lesson explores God's commands, and examines what the Christian's response to Him should be. Love isn't something that only describes our feelings or emotions, but the thoughts of our mind and actions of our body as well. We can carry out God's commands by choosing to act in love – even though often imperfectly.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ How would you know if someone loved God?
- ❖ What are your thoughts on the command to love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, as well as loving others as yourself? Is this impossible to do?
- ❖ Why would God command that we love Him?
- ❖ How could you tell by someone's actions or life that they do not love God?

STUDY

TEACH

- ❖ **Loving God:** When followers asked Jesus what the most important commandment was, He spoke about love. He did not list duties, or what we must not do to anger God. Instead, He responded by saying that the most important commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength – and to love your neighbour as yourself. Both the Old and New Testaments therefore point to loving God as the most important part of being in right relationship with Him.



- The Old Testament and the Laws of Moses recognize that true worship of God comes from within (our hearts and minds and souls), and that our love for God is the greatest commandment. Our obedience is important, but it must come out of love.
 - Deuteronomy 6:5, Joshua 22:5, Joshua 23:11, Nehemiah 1:5
- The New Testament re-establishes this central command of God through Jesus Christ, who on several occasions informed people that this was the greatest commandment. In addition, loving God correctly is the only way to please God. This will result in using our energy to love others.. Our love for God is proven by our life.
 - Matthew 22:36-41, Luke 10:26-28, John 8:42, 1 John 4:20
- ❖ **God Commands Us to Love Him:** When we talk about commandments, they are not mere suggestions, but in fact are the Law of God. The whole of the Law (all morality) is summed up in this – that we love God and that we love others.
 - **We love God because He loves us:** Nothing else will bring us peace, eternal security and true joy in this lifetime apart from a relationship with God. Therefore, God's command that we love Him more than all other things is a truly loving action on God's part. (1 John 4:19, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 107:9, John 21:15)
 - **We love God because He is worthy:** Does it seem strange to you that God would command His creation to love Him and worship Him? God is greater than all things, and indeed created the world out of nothing. Therefore, would it make any sense for us to honour or love anything else more than Him? Love is the recognition of admirable qualities or worth, and nothing has greater worth than God. (1 Timothy 1:17, Revelation 4:11)
 - **Because we love God, we can truly love others:** It would be unfair for God to command something we are incapable of doing. Love is more than a feeling. It is living for someone other than yourself. Our love for God compels us to love others. Jesus commands us to even love our enemies! This is something we must choose to do. (1 John 4:20-21, Matthew 5: 43-45, 1 Peter 1:22)
- ❖ **Loving God is a Choice:** In many cultures, to say that we can choose to love God is confusing. Love is sometimes equated with romantic infatuation or feelings over which we have no control. However, we should decide to love, and recognize that the emotion will grow as we choose loving actions.
 - **Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength:** We are told to love God with everything we are! As we look at what it means to love God with all that we are, we will gain a clearer picture of whether we are truly loving God, and how that love should be expressed.

TASK: *Optionally if you have a study group for this material or a class, you could divide your participants into groups and give each group the information for one of the ways of loving God. Have them look up the verses and present this 'way' to the remainder of the class, including examples or roll-playing if they like.*



- ❖ **Loving God with all our Heart:** When the Bible writers talk about our 'heart' (*kardia* in Greek), they are not talking about the muscle that pumps blood, rather they are referring to our affections – our likes and our dislikes, the things that delight us and repulse us. Loving God with all our heart requires us to delight in God and be repulsed by sin. How can we know this? It is shown to us in the life of Jesus and throughout the Bible.
 - **From a Changed Heart:** When we become Christians, God changes our heart to be more like His (Ezekiel 36:26, Jeremiah 24:7) so we can now love what God loves. God told His people to lay His laws upon their heart (Deuteronomy 6:6, Psalm 119:97), and to therefore love God's commandments.
 - **All our Heart:** We are called to love God with all our heart, not in a half-hearted way.
 - God must be the source of our delight.
 - What we delight in decides how we spend our days, what we think about, what brings us joy.
 - To love God with our whole heart, we must ensure that we love nothing that God despises, and love nothing more than God.
 - Anything we love or trust more than God is an idol (1 John 5:21, Hebrews 13:5, Matthew 6:24).
- ❖ **Loving God with all our Soul:** In the Bible, the word 'soul' (*psyche* in Greek) means the unseen part of us that makes us a unique person. Personality, identity and life are different words for soul. This encompasses the choices we make, the actions we carry out, the things we do that distinguish us from others.
 - **Loving God with Godly Choices:** We must be engaged in loving God with all that we are, and every choice we make.
 - We choose how we spend our time, our opportunities, and our actions.
 - We choose what we do with our money, talents, and possessions.
 - Sometimes we will not feel like making the Godly choice, and it can be a struggle. But the choice to do what God desires is an act of love.
 - Loving God with all our soul puts God before ourselves (John 3:30).
 - **Loving God by Obeying His Commandments:** One of the principle ways we are called to demonstrate love for God is by obeying everything in His Word (John 14:21).
 - This involves careful study of the Bible in order to see if there is sin in our life and then deal with it quickly.
 - Loving God requires that every area of our life be submitted to Him.
 - Sometimes we have to choose God's way over what people demand of us (Acts 5:29).
- ❖ **Loving God with all our Mind:** Our mind is the source of our thought-life, our reason, our intellect. God is a reasonable and rational God who has ordered the world and everything in it according to complex patterns. The Greek word for mind here is *Dianoia*. This mind-love requires knowing about God, knowing truth from God's Word, and learning to think rightly



about Him. Also, our imagination can picture godly things, and comprehend beautiful art and music.

- **Setting our Mind:** What we allow our mind to dwell on shapes our attitudes, actions and desires.
 - Thinking longingly about sin is playing with temptation, and does not display love for God (Romans 8:5, Matthew 9:4).
 - Setting our mind on God and focusing on positive and beautiful things is a discipline that expresses our love for God (Colossians 3:2, Philippians 4:8).
 - When we are anxious or worried, we should focus on God's promises and His provision rather than our concerns (Isaiah 26:3, Philippians 4:6-8).
 - **Reason:** When Jesus spoke in parables, he often asked the crowd "what do you think?" Jesus invites us to use reason, and the Holy Spirit enables us to comprehend and think about the mysteries of God. Some possibilities include:
 - Discussion of Bible concepts, the study of theology, apologetics or higher learning (2 Timothy 2:7).
 - Asking questions of God and searching His Word – this will deepen our Love for God, and make us sure of the foundation of our faith (Colossians 2:8).
 - **Memory:** Our mind remembers things all day long – events, facts, images. Loving God with our mind could include:
 - Purposefully memorizing verses of the Bible (Psalms 119:11).
 - Remembering what God has done, His goodness and provisions (Psalms 63:5-7).
 - **A Renewed Mind:** When we become Christians, our mind is transformed and made new by the Holy Spirit. This renewal is also an ongoing process as we expose our minds to God's Word. This allows us to understand more of God, to obey Him and to love Him. (Romans 12:2).
- ❖ **Loving God with all our Strength:** Our strength is the part of us that can act in accordance with what we think and feel. The actions of our body should be loving towards God, careful of His creation and creatures, and focused on carrying out God's plans.
- **Working for the Lord:** Whatever work we do, we should do to honour God (Colossians 3:23, Ephesians 6:7).
 - We should carry out our business dealings being truthful and honest.
 - We should be obedient to God in our work lives, and honour Him by giving Him a portion of our income.
 - **Serving out of Love:** When we serve others, we can do it as an act of love for God.
 - We love God when we give time and energy to evangelism, discipleship, ministry and service to others.



DISCUSSION

- ❖ How can we love God more with our minds? What are good practices to get into that will challenge, sharpen and focus our minds on God?
- ❖ Which of these ways we love God is easiest for you? Which is hardest? Answers might vary depending on the personality and culture.
- ❖ What did you learn in this lesson about loving God? What will you need to change in your life?
- ❖ What fuels your love for God? When you have days when you don't feel like acting lovingly or in obedience to God, what can you do to set your heart, soul, mind and strength on loving Him?

PRAYER

Close by praying for your participants. Pray that they would increasingly love God with all that they are. Pray that their hearts will not be divided, that their souls will long for more of Him, and that their minds will not be swayed by worry or hollow philosophy, but rather consumed with truth. Pray that with their physical strength they will serve and work in any way that brings honour to God and further His purpose and mission in the world. Pray that their love for God and for others would be genuine, that it would be contagious and spread to those around them, and that they would devote themselves to the love of God.