



Part 2: Lesson 6

Cultivating the Good Soil

The Great Commandments: Loving God

Fertile Soil: Starting Your New Life with Jesus



The Bible says, “**God is love**” (1 John 4:16). Now consider this, **God loves you**. The One who made the mountains and the oceans, the sun and the moon, the God who created all things loves you. **God was motivated by love** to send His Son Jesus Christ to rescue us from the penalty of sin and death (John 3:16). And it is God’s passionate desire that you live in a loving relationship with Him. As you live in God’s love, you discover that He also lives in you (1 John 4:16). This becomes the essence of the spiritual life.

So how do you live in God’s love? Many Christians attempt to structure their life with a collection of rules and regulations by creating a long list of dos and don’ts. During Jesus’ time, that was how the religious leaders believed everyone should live. They created countless rules and placed heavy burdens on the people about how they should dress, what they should eat, and what to do and not do. They were critical of Jesus because He was different. Even today, some Christians try to live their lives with a rigid structure of rules. It is called “legalism” and it does not work because it is based upon the belief that we can earn God’s love and favor. Jesus showed us that God’s love is not something you earn; He freely gives it to us—it is called grace. Jesus also demonstrated that God’s expectations for spiritual living go far beyond following a long list of rules. He desires our love.

YOUR GROWTH GOAL



In this lesson will study the most important commandment in the Bible for living the Christian life. You will learn:

- 1) The greatest commandment is to love God**
- 2) Four ways you can love God.**



Before you go any further, stop and ask God to help you understand His word, to help you experience His presence, and to become the person He wants you to be.

A STORY ABOUT LOVING GOD: A Woman Anoints Jesus (Mark 14: 3-9)



This is a moving story about a woman who expressed her love for Jesus in a special way, and how He received her love.

While he [Jesus] was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

What do you think was this woman’s primary motivation for what she did to Jesus?

How did Jesus respond to her action?

Why did Jesus call her action a “beautiful thing” and that what she did would be told “throughout the world?”

DIGGING DEEPER: THE GREAT COMMANDMENT: LOVE GOD



What is the most important thing that you should do to live the Christian life? Jesus was asked this question, and this is what He said.

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “**Of all the commandments, which is the most important?**”*

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘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 mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

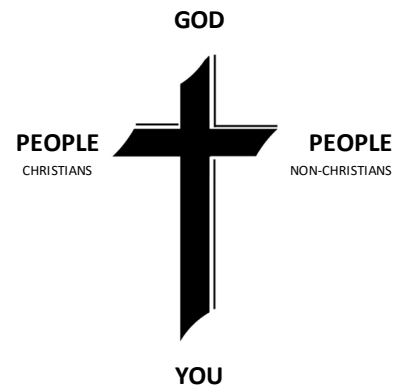
When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions (Mark 12:28-34).

In your own words, what is the greatest commandment?

When the teacher of the law replied to Jesus, “To love Him [God] . . . is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices,” what do you think he meant by this?

HOW TO LOVE GOD

So, if loving God is the most important thing for you to do, how can you do this? Is it possible to love someone you cannot see or touch? Someone whose nature is so much greater and different from our own? **Yes!** This is God’s desire, and through the Holy Spirit, He makes it possible. Developing a loving relationship with God is the inner or vertical dimension of your spiritual life—the relationship between **God** and **you**. It is deeply personal and needs your attention and priority. In this section, you will learn four ways to grow in your love for God:



I. LOVING GOD BEGINS WHEN YOU REALIZE HOW MUCH GOD LOVES YOU

Consider what these Scriptures say about God’s love for you.

“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure” (Ephesians 1:4-5 NLT).

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. . . . God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. . . . We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:9-10, 16, 19).

When did God start loving you?

How has God shown His love to you?

Why do you love God?



Your love for God is a response to God's initiative of loving you. God gives His amazing love, and you return yours to Him. You can love because God loved you first. As God moves in your life with His love and grace, you embrace it as an act of our love.

According to 1 John 4, what is God's nature?

When you begin to realize that God's nature is love and that you were created to be like Him, you can begin to understand your purpose in life and how you can love Him back.

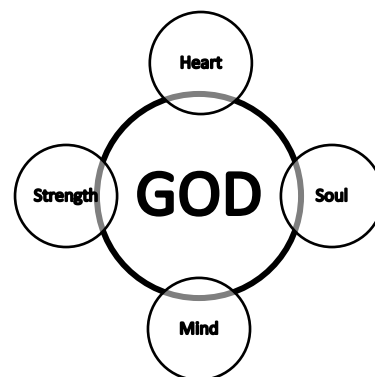
2. YOU LOVE GOD WITH ALL OF YOUR LIFE

Look again at the most important commandment.

"The most important one [commandment]," answered Jesus, "is this: '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 mind and with all your strength'" (Mark 12:30).

What do you think Jesus meant when He said that we should love God with all our:

- heart
- soul
- mind
- strength



To love God is to love Him with every part of your life. You can love God with your body, mind, and spirit. You love Him in your relationships with our family and friends. You love Him in your actions and by the way you work. You demonstrate your love for God by the words you use, through your dreams and desires, and with your will. God is interested in every part of your being. To love God means that you put Him first above everything else.

Prayer is the way you reach out to God and invite Him to work in your life. Take a moment and pray this prayer from your heart, asking God to be a part of all your life.



Almighty God, open my eyes, my ears, my heart, and all of my life to your presence so that I may love you and serve you faithfully. Help me to be a loving person to everyone that I meet today. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

3. YOU LOVE GOD WHEN YOU OBEY HIM

Read the following Bible verses and consider how they help you understand how you can love God.

- ❖ *“If you love me, keep my commands. . . . Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. . . . Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me” (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).*
- ❖ *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (John 15:9-10).*
- ❖ *But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them (1 John 2:5).*
- ❖ *This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world (1 John 5:3-4).*

In your own words, how do these verses help you understand how you can love God?

4. YOU LOVE GOD WITH YOUR GRATITUDE

This is a story about ten men whom Jesus healed of their diseases and how they responded.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy [a terrible skin disease] met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:11-19).

Who demonstrated love for God?

How did he show Jesus his love?

How did Jesus respond to the man’s gratitude?

There are many other ways that you can express your love to God, and there are countless ways that God expresses His love to you. These are just a few ways to start. As you grow spiritually in your inner relationship with God, you will discover new and meaningful aspects of God’s love and how to express your love.

CULTIVATING THE GOOD SOIL: GROWING INWARD- LOVING GOD



For many, the Christian faith begins as a profoundly personal moving event where God's grace enters and transforms their lives. On the other hand, spiritual growth is a process over a lifetime. Daily, hourly, and in every minute, we submit ourselves to God to allow His work of grace to continue to transform our lives and to mold us into His image.

In this section, you will carefully and prayerfully examine several aspects of your life to see what is being submitted to God's love and will and where you can grow deeper and stronger in your love for God. It is important that you not hurry in this examination, and that you pray, seeking God's guidance.

If you are doing this study with a group, share your examination with the other group members and ask them to pray for you. Listen to their responses, listen as they share their lives, and pray for one another. If you are not in a group, find a pastor or spiritual mentor to share your examination and ask them to pray with you, as well.

I. PERSONAL INVENTORY

Carefully and prayerfully make a list of the important things in your life.

What things on your list are helpful in your relationship with God?	What things on your list are <u>not</u> helpful in your relationship with God?

What is one way that you can express your love to God, this week?

2. REFLECTING ON THESE TRUTHS

Sometimes it is difficult to find the words to express to God our inner thoughts and feelings. The Book of Psalms is the Bible's prayer book. Psalm 103 is an expression of praise for God's love and compassion. Carefully read and pray the words.

*Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:
The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.*

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear
him;*

for he knows how we are formed,

*he remembers that we are dust. . . .
But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.*

*The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. . . .
Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.
Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the Lord, my soul.*

3. COMMITTING TO THESE TRUTHS

Think about the next few days. What is one new way that you can express your love for God in response to His amazing love for you? Write it in the space below.



Spend some personal time in prayer, thanking God for His love, expressing your love to Him, asking Him to guide to your growth, to strengthen and protect you, and to provide for your daily needs.

