

## Connecting In Community

### **God's Word:**

Matthew 5:17-20; 22:34-40

### **Key Verse:**

“And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.’”

--Matthew 22:37

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### **Breaking It Down:**

In Matthew 22:34-40, the religious leaders of that day were questioning Jesus regarding His position on the commandments that God wrote on the two tablets of stone as recorded in Exodus 31:18. They wanted to know if His new teachings were to take the place of the commandments. He responded that His role was not to do away with the commandments, but to fulfill them as He said in Matthew 5:17-20. Of course, they did not realize that Jesus had to fulfill all of the commandments in order to be a sinless sacrifice on the cross for their (and our) sins.



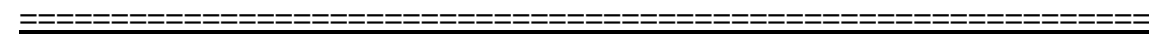
Then they asked Him if any of the commandments were more important than the others. Jesus told them the greatest commandment was, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” In other words, you must love God with everything you have. This requires us to love God completely, without holding anything back and without making anything more important or more valuable to us than worshipping, serving, obeying and fellowshiping with Him. This commandment is actually what it takes to keep the first four commandments found in Exodus 20:3-11.

The second commandment Jesus gives in response to the religious leaders requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves. This commandment is actually what it takes to keep the last six commandments found in Exodus 20:12-17. Love, whether for God or for others, is a selfless act. As we learned last week, love is a verb; it is action not emotion. Here the

emphasis is on putting others first, or living selfless lives. In fact, nowhere in the Bible does God say we must love ourselves. That's because we already do. Our natural inclination is to love ourselves first and foremost, before anyone or anything else.

Love is one of the main themes of Jesus' message throughout His time on earth. Loving God and others as He commands demands that we quit our preoccupation with serving our own self-interests. Loving God with all of our heart and soul means we don't hold back certain things we deeply care about, but that we, instead, "surrender all" as the hymn says. Loving God with our entire mind means putting aside other thoughts and concentrating on loving, and thus worshipping and serving, Him.

This is a lifetime effort but when each member of God's family is focused on loving and serving Him, and then loving and serving our neighbors, we are a community connected by love and one that works in harmony to build God's kingdom.



### **Living It:**

Being a teen is not always easy. Many times there are pressures to do things in order to be accepted or liked by others. Many times there are temptations to do things that we know may not be good for us or may even be against the law. Sometimes we do these things simply to rebel against our parents or to figure out who we are.

When I was a teen, I was in a bad situation at home. My father was an alcoholic and a drug dealer who didn't care what I did or how I lived. As a result, I got into a lot of trouble with authorities. I also had a violent temper and would get into fights with anyone for any reason.

Stealing, cheating, and lying were my means of surviving. I was full of anger and resentment about my parents' divorce. I had heard about Jesus. I had even prayed to Him to help me when I got into deep trouble. At times, I even promised to serve Him if He would help me, but I didn't really mean it. Each time when the worst was over, I would conveniently forget my prayer and continue on living my own way.

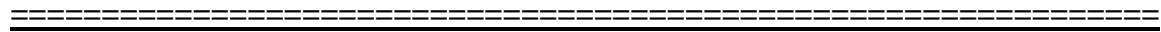


But God was patient and eventually got my attention. One night while I was "stuck" in church listening to a lesson I didn't care about, I began to think about my life and realized how unhappy I was. I thought about all the times I had heard how much God loves me and wanted me to come to Him. I had heard that He was the source of true happiness and true peace. I decided to give Him a

sincere chance. I prayed and asked Him to come into my life and take control. I asked Him to deliver me from the pain and frustration. I asked Him to show me the fatherly love I had never known.

God answered my prayer and filled me with a peace and a love I didn't realize could exist. As I began to love Him, He began to change me. Over time, with His help I began to gain control over my temper because I loved God and wanted to please Him. I found I enjoyed learning and didn't need to cheat. Loving God made me a different person. The great part is that my love for Him continues to grow each day and He blesses me with more joy and peace as I surrender more of my life to Him. Because of my love for Him, I am able to love others unselfishly. His love allows me to look beyond their faults and see the potential goodness He sees in them. From that, I can share His love with them in the hopes they too will come to experience the peace and joy I have found.

What about you? Have you made a decision for Christ out of convenience and then failed to truly let Him be Lord of your life? Have you put off making that decision? Won't you make a real decision to love God and let Him fill you with his peace and love? Then you too will learn the joy of loving and serving others. You'll be glad you did!



**Understanding It:**

1. What issue were the religious leaders asking Jesus about?
2. What did Jesus say were the two "greatest commandments?"
3. Describe a *person* who loved you "no matter what." How could you be like that person?
4. How can we show God's love to others?



**Doing It!**

Remember that person you identified last week that was annoying and that you were to show love toward? Continue showing God's love toward that person this week. Without naming the person, share with the class next week what you learned from the experience of the past two weeks. Also, commit to continuing to show this person and others God's love. Note: If you are having any trouble with this, speak to your teacher in private.

