**Series Road Map**

**Series Overview:** This year the word we've been focusing on is Essential. So, what is essential in our Christian walk? When we get to the end of our lives and we finally meet Jesus and He asks us "What did you do with the life my Father gave you?" How will we respond? The two greatest commandments boil down to this: Love God with everything you have, and love your neighbor as yourself. In this series, we are tackling two hard questions: What on Earth am I here for? And, How do I love God and the people God has trusted me to love well?

**Week Overview:** The first and greatest commandment is found in the Book of Matthew, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Loving God can sound easy, but for most of us, it can be incredibly intimidating. How do we even begin to love the Creator of everything?? What does that look like? Why does it matter?

***Outline:***

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Meaning of life question

**Tension (what’s the struggle):** What does it look like to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength? Why does it matter, why is that the first and greatest commandment?

**Text: Matthew 22:37; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 4:7-8; 1 John 4:19**

**THP**: You can’t pour from an empty cup

**Supporting Points:**

1. We love because He first loved us
2. God is love, and He loves without reason or restraint
3. Apart from Him we can do nothing

**Application (call to action)**: Recharge with God daily, fill your cup until it runneth over so that we can live out the two greatest commandments. The fuel for everything we do lies in loving God fully.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Each campus will need 14 plastic coupe glasses and a big pitcher. The pitcher can be labeled “GOD” with tape or whatever works. The glasses are going to be stacked 3x3 for the bottom level, 2x2, and one sitting on top like a tower. You will pour water into the top glass slowly and carefully until it starts to overflow

Coupe glasses: <https://www.walmart.com/ip/Clear-Plastic-Champagne-Coupe-Glasses-8oz-20ct/552126722>

(Or anywhere you can find them)

Let’s pray.

Have you ever been asked, “What is the meaning of life?” Have you ever struggled with that question yourself? Would you know the answer if someone asked you? What would you say? Some say, “The meaning of life is to be happy and fulfilled.” Some say, “Life has no meaning, we are all here by a grand accident.” while others say, “Just do you, that’s all that matters, life is short.” I agree with the last half of that answer. Life is short. Why were we put here on Earth? Especially now? By the end of this 3 week series you will have an answer. You will be able to say, I know what I am here for. You will know your foundational purpose. I say foundational because God has graciously given all of us a very specific calling and very unique gifts, but this foundational purpose surpasses all of those things. This purpose is the meaning of life and we will begin to uncover that in the coming weeks.

Now that I’ve broken the ice with some deep philosophical questions, let’s dig in to the heart of Christianity. If some of you don’t know the first and greatest commandment, it is this: In the book of***Matthew 22:37*** *Jesus replied: “’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’*

The disciples were asking Jesus what the greatest commandment was, since there were so many, and that was His response. We can be confident that this first commandment is a fulfillment of our divine purpose, and it serves an even greater purpose. Throughout Jesus’ life here on Earth he was exemplifying the two greatest commandments. Quite literally everything He ever said and did points right back to this: Love. Love God, love others. You see, we were first created to love God, and when we get to heaven, that will still be the first thing we do! Love and worship God! Some of you may be thinking, why do we even have commandments? What is that all about? Commandments are basically God’s way of loving us and keeping us out of trouble. They are His healthy boundaries for us. I know that might sound strange to some of you, but it’s equivalent to your parents telling you “No” when you want to go and touch that hot iron or go “sledding” down two flights of stairs in your house. Commandments are God’s way of saying, “I love you, and since I love you, I am giving you healthy perimeters so you can live your life full of joy with less heartache and regret.”

Now, back to that first commandment, to give us an idea of what love God is talking about, let’s go to scripture. There are a couple verses in 1 Corinthians that talk about love. Most of us know 1 Corinthians 13:4, you know, love is patient, love is kind. It’s read at almost every Christian wedding, right? But I want to read you the verses before it, **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**. It reads: *“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”*

*(start soft, and get louder throughout this next paragraph)*

I want to unpack those verses for a moment. Here is a summary: If I can speak in tongues, but do not have love, I’m just making noise. If I can do great works and have giant sized faith, but have no love, I have nothing. If I can prophesy like the greatest prophet there ever was, but I do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I have in the name of charity so that I can brag about it and post it on social media, but I didn't do it with love, I gain NOTHING. *(softer here)* You see, love should be the action verb that causes us to do all the great works for God’s kingdom. If you want to volunteer but you do it out of obligation instead of love, it is for nothing. If you are a generous friend but only because you want to look like a generous person and you didn’t do it with love, it means nothing. Do you see what I’m getting at? *\*pause\** Before I get ahead of myself here, I want to talk about why we need to get the first commandment right before we can fulfill the second.

First off, why should we love God? It may sound like a silly question, but apart from creating us, in scripture it tells us why. **1 John 4:19** *“We love because He first loved us”* God is the author of everything. He himself is the epitome and very definition of love. Love creates, love has purpose and meaning. So to put it simply, we love God because He chose to love us first. And we love others because He loved us first. I want to give you a visual here for a second if you’re having trouble wrapping your brain around God, the creator of everything, loving me and loving you.... I LOVE my husband. I really do. He is wonderful. He supports me and all of my endeavors, he lifts me up when I’m sad, and he is my biggest advocate. Do you think I’m doing pretty well at loving him as his wife if I think about him every 12 seconds for the next 40 years of our marriage, 24/7? I think that’d be a great way of showing how much I love him, right? Is that possible? Probably not. Do you know how big that would be in a pile of sand if I could? If all of those thoughts were translated into single grains of sand... it would cover about 10 square feet. That’s smaller than the size of a bath towel laid out on the floor. Stay with me now. God cannot lie, the Bible says that. So if HE, if GOD SAYS his thoughts outnumber EVERY grain of sand... that’s incomprehensible how much he thinks about each of us. And that’s not the church as a collective guys, that’s us INDIVIDUALLY. Does that not blow your mind?? He’s thinking about YOU. Right now! The creator of everything has you on His mind. God’s love and our relationship with God allows our cup to be filled so it can overflow to others’ because **you can’t pour from an empty cup.**

Have you ever been to a waterpark and seen that ginormous bucket a mile high filling up with water? Raise your hands if you know what I’m talking about. I can put up a visual on the screen here as well. This thing was so cool to see when I was growing up. The anticipation of the bucket filling and just drowning everyone was quite the experience. It was dramatic, it was HUGE, it was exciting and it almost simultaneously felt like we were doomed even though we knew we weren’t. What if we looked at it from this perspective: That we are that bucket. Here me out. What if that water filling us up was God’s love? And you can see it! You can feel the anticipation, everyone below this giant bucket knows it’s coming and everyone is happy about it. In real life, it looks like this: You are joyous. You are displaying the fruits of the spirit. You can’t help but express it because God’s love is THAT intense. And finally, you tip over and pour out this massive amount of love that has been building and building from being filled up over time. You feel SO loved that you have to spread it, that is the natural reaction to God’s love. It’s like “Man!! I’ve got to give this away, I can’t contain anymore of this love!” It wasn’t quick either, remember? It took some time. BUT, when the bucket dumped, it was undeniable. Everyone got SOAKED, and they ran to excitedly tell their families. Do you see where I’m going with this? When we are constantly in a loving, all consuming relationship with God, it is impossible for it not to affect those around us. And when we do, when we LOVE, when we act out in faith according to God’s will... the people we love will tell the people THEY love.

I’m going to read you a story from one of my favorite books lately titled Imagine Heaven by John Burke. This book is a culmination of stories about real life Near Death Experiences, or sometimes referred to as NDEs. What is so exciting about this book in particular, is not only are these stories real and backed up by many witnesses, but the author of the book lines up these real life events with scripture, so we can be even more confident in what the person is saying about their personal near death experience.

In this particular NDE, this man named George meets Jesus himself. I’m going to read George’s experience, and I want you to place yourself in this story as I read it. “George had felt so alive, so himself, he had not really let it sink in that he was dead. Now it hit him. In despair, he sunk down on the bed. The Light in the room started to grow brighter and brighter. ‘I stared in astonishment as the brightness increased, coming from nowhere, seeming to shine everywhere at once... It was impossibly bright: it was like a million welders’ lamps all blazing at once. And right in the middle of my amazement came a prosaic thought, probably born of some biology lecture back at the university: “I’m glad I don’t have physical eyes at this moment,’ I thought. ‘This light would destroy the retina in a tenth of a second.’ No, I corrected myself, not the light. He. He would be too bright to look at. For now I saw that it was not light but a Man who had entered the room, or rather, a Man made out of light... I got to my feet, and as I did came the stupendous certainty: You are in the presence of THE Son of God.’ George thought about Jesus, the Son of God, whom he had learned about in Sunday school- gentle, meek, kind of a weakling. But this person was Power itself fused together with an unconditional love that overwhelmed him. “An astonishing love. A love beyond my wildest imagining. This love knew every unlovable thing about me -- the quarrels with my stepmother, my explosive temper, the sex thoughts I could never control, every mean, selfish thought and action since the day I was born -- and accepted and loved me just the same. When I say He knew everything about me, this was simply an observable fact. For into that room along with His radiant presence -- simultaneously, had also entered every single episode of my entire life. Everything that had ever happened to me was simply there, in full view, contemporary and current, all seemingly taking place at that moment. How this was possible I did not know.. Every detail of twenty years of living was there to be looked at...*“What have you done with your life to show Me?”* The question, like everything else proceeding from Him, had to do with love. How much have you loved with your life? Have you loved others as I am loving you? Totally? Unconditionally?... Why, I had not known love like this was possible. Someone should have told me, I thought indignantly! A fine time to discover what life was all about.. *“I did tell you”* But how? Still wanting to justify myself. How could He have told me and I not have heard? *“I told you by the life I lived. I told you by the death I died. And, if you keep your eyes on Me, you will see more.”*

You know, when I read George’s NDE for the first time, I felt truly convicted. I’m sure I would have felt the same exact way that he did when he was asked by Jesus, “What did you do with your life to show Me?” I would be frantically racking my brain trying to come up with all the things I’ve done in my life. I would tell Him that I worshiped Him and went to church, I would tell him about all the Bible studies and life groups I’ve been in, I would even tell Him about those times I volunteered! But.. that wasn’t what He was asking. Honestly, those things I mentioned, they would pale in comparison to all the wrong I’ve done to others, and all the missed opportunities I was given to simply love others. And I wonder, if I truly, wholeheartedly, unwaveringly lived out the first commandment, how much easier would it be to love others like Christ loves us? Guys, this whole idea of loving others... that didn’t come from us. Our broken human nature doesn’t automatically want to do good to others that hurt us, or betray us. That kind of longing, that desire to love people comes from God. When we have that steady relationship with God, His desires become our desires, and our heart slowly starts to break for the things that break His heart. In fact, the opposite is also true. You’ll know you’re straying from God when your compassion for others dwindles. When your thoughts turn inward, and you are more concerned about your own life than the lives around you that don’t know who God is.

Students, you can’t pour from an empty cup. **You can’t pour from an empty cup.** You want to know why the two greatest commandments are listed in the order they are? With loving God first and then others? It’s not only to showcase His importance in our lives but it’s intentional!! Without GOD we can do NOTHING. APART FROM HIM, WE CAN DO NOTHING! That doesn’t mean we have our hands tied behind our backs and are unable to walk or talk, it means we can and will do NOTHING of ANY true eternal significance without Him. He is our source of energy and love. If your cup is empty, and your neighbor's cup is empty, and neither of you are getting filled up by God’s love through the Holy Spirit, both of you will stay with empty cups. Empty hearts. No purpose. No fuel to drive that love like a dagger into someone else’s hardened heart. We must love Him first so that we can even be capable of loving others. ***1 John 4:7-8*** *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*

**ILLUSTRATION:**

I know you’ve been staring at these glasses up here wondering what they are for. This is the cup I’m talking about. You are the cup at the top. If you’re empty, meaning you are not getting filled with God’s love.. Then no one else below you is either, especially if they don’t have a relationship with Jesus. But, when we are filled, our God gives in abundance. Watch what happens. The pitcher in my hand is God, and the water is His love. When we allow ourselves to be poured into by spending time with Him.... \*pour the pitcher slowly into top glass\* we can begin to see our love spillover into others. Do you see? This is the beginning of understanding our purpose here on Earth. It is quite literally this simple when we break it down, and we will unpack this idea more in the coming weeks. But for now, we need to get this first part right. We need to get filled up. Guys, this world is so dark and it’s getting darker. Satan is working overtime because he knows his time is short. No matter how ugly this world gets, we are still called to do this one thing: Love.

So here’s what I want us to do to apply this: I want us to take the last few minutes of this message in a posture of surrender. Wherever you’re sitting, I want you to close your eyes and bow your heads with your palms facing up. We will never understand or even DESIRE to love others until we have that love relationship with God. He is our everything. If you feel far from God lately, or convicted in any way from the words spoken tonight, I want you to go deep within yourself and just sit with God for a moment. Talk with Him, be HONEST. Tell Him your struggles and your hurdles that make it harder for you to love Him with all your heart, mind, and soul. Today is a new day. Maybe yesterday you messed up, maybe you haven’t sat with God in days or weeks, but we get to start over today. The worship team is going to come up and finish out our time together in worship, but I want us to just sit with God for now and begin to rekindle the love that will ignite the passion in our hearts to love his creation like Jesus does.