

## Loving the Lord Your God with all your Heart

By Jo Kadlecek-Gilbert

### **Introduction of series: Why the Greatest Commandments Still Are.**

At the retreat we learned the story of Jesus and the story of us. As a follow up, we wanted to ask: What's next for us in learning how to live out his story in the life he's given us together? What's the practical application of living in the love of Jesus? Put another way, in an age of selfishness where none of us like being told what to do, how do we respond to God's Greatest Commandments: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" And '*Love your neighbor as yourself.*'" – *Matthew 22:36-39*

First, let's take a moment to reflect quietly on the hand out, pen in hand, ready to consider some good challenges. Now let's read Matthew's passage together:

Heart. Soul. Mind. Self. Neighbour. Love. In today's culture, we have no problem using these words *from* the commandment: Heart ("She's got a lot of heart; Just follow your heart, etc."); Soul ("That's food for your soul; I drive a Soul!"); Mind (Becoming *mindful* of what's around us; She's got a brilliant mind for that). And no one argues with the idea of loving your neighbour because it's right, good social justice stuff. Just as no one argues with the idea of loving yourself; it's a concept that fills self-help shelves in bookshops, websites, conferences or 'life coaching strategies to be your best self.'

So these words – heart, soul, mind, self, neighbour – have a lot of meaning and currency today. But when we think about them apart from the greatest commandment, separate from loving *The Lord Your God*, we miss the best part! We can't pick and choose things from scripture to suit our lifestyles, perspectives or agendas. To think about our heart a part from the Maker of our hearts is well, heartless. Just as Soul without the Spirit of the Lord your God or Mind apart from the Mind of Christ are simply incomplete. So we'll spend the next 5 Thursdays exploring how the heart, mind & soul are connected to loving *Lord your God*, and loving your neighbour as yourself.

Think of this WoW a little like the journey in the Wizard of OZ. What does the Tin man want? (heart), Scarecrow? (Brain/mind) Lion? (Courage/soul) Dorothy? To be at home in Kansas with her family where she can love as she's loved. Oz is a land full of love for neighbours, except for the Wicked witch of the west, so Dorothy and her friends set out on the yellow brick road to see the Wizard of OZ. They believe he'll give them that what they're longing for.

Like the characters in Wizard of Oz, we can't look at any one of these without thinking about the others. They're all connected. They go down the yellow brick road together. You can't love God with just your mind, for instance, and keep your heart in the corner.

(Jesus had a name for that: Pharisees.) No, God's commandment is all-inclusive, we're to integrate our love for Him, not separate it. We're to love him wholly. Why? Because we are wholly loved! We love because He first loved us. That's our starting point! Because He cares intimately about every part of our lives, hearts, souls, minds, selves and neighbours, we want to learn how to love him with every part of who we are.

But why does Jesus make this holistic love a *commandment*? Aren't commandments rules to be obeyed? Can you command love? Who even uses that word any more?

Jesus, the Lord your God, does! I think what these guys are really asking Jesus in these passages, is what we're all asking: what's the greatest way we can live? What's the highest call, the greatest mandate, vision or lifestyle we could ever want? What's the ultimate fulfillment to every longing I have? What's the most important thing in this life, or for the lawyer in his religious, Jewish world? Jesus has a beauty of an answer: It isn't to be successful, to be famous or to live a life of leisure, etc. It's to Love God with all of you! Love God with our jobs? With our friendships? Love God with our families, our holidays and cruises? Our art and money and service? Yep. Love him with all of them because if He's the Lord your God, he's lord over every part of your life.

What is it about the *Lord Your God* that makes him so, well, worthy of love with each part of our human existence? Love is a response to love, and love begets love. This is still the *greatest* commandment because God's great love for us is greater than anything else. He wants our all-encompassing devotion because loving him is the best way we can live as human beings; it's what we're made for. Period. After all, the Lord your God held nothing back: he left heaven, became a human, walked a dusty, dirty earth, proclaimed his authority and healing over every broken thing, willingly got arrested, tried and sentenced to execution for our sake, died an excruciating death as a human, and rose again so you and I could have a new life. His love is the greatest thing we'll ever know. So loving him is a natural extension of that all-amazing, costly love for us; when you know such extravagant love, it spills out of our lives onto others, our neighbors. It's all about relationship, not rules or religion! As Tim Keller said, "When Someone gave himself utterly for you, how can you not give yourself utterly to Him?"

So remembering heart, soul, love are intimately connected, we'll spend this month trying to unpack the Greatest of God's commandments. This week let's look at what it means to love God with all of your heart by asking 3 questions: 1. **What does the bible say about the heart?**

**2. What does it look like to love God with all your heart (or how?)**

**3. What happens when you do? Ready?**

**1. What does Scripture tell us about the heart?** It's the center of our being. In fact, "Heart" (Hebrew *lebab/leb* [b'bel], Gk. *kardia* [kardiva]) occurs over a thousand times

in the Bible, making it the most common anthropological term in Scripture. It refers to a person's very center of both physical and moral activities.

The heart reflects just how complex we are as created beings, made in God's image and the bible includes a variety of references (see your outline). Abraham in Gen 18:5 offers his weary guests food to "sustain their hearts" as they go on their way; man looks on the outward appearance, says Sam in 1 Sam 16:7, but the Lord looks on the heart. The Psalmist asks God to cleanse our hearts so he can worship the Lord with all his heart. Proverbs 3 invites us, to trust in the Lord with all our Heart. "A wise man's heart guides his mouth," says Prov 16:23. A happy heart makes a cheerful face, or is good medicine. Skip ahead to the Gospels and we'll find Jesus in the sermon on the mount (Matt 6) proclaiming that blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. He goes on to say, where your heart is there your treasure will be also, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Let not your hearts be troubled, he has come and made his home in your heart, John 14: 23. He chastises those people who honor God with their lips but whose hearts are far from him. And most recently in Ephesians we even pray that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened.

According to Dr. Google, our heart beats about 4,800 times per hour. That's a whopping 115,200 times per day. Over the course of a year, your heart would beat about 42,048,000 times! If you live to be 80 years old, your heart would have beaten over 3,363,840,000 times! So your heart is the very core of your existence, physically and morally, just as it was in the mindset of Christ's age. If it stops beating, you stop. Period.

Why would God command us to love him with every beat of our heart every day of our lives on earth? Why this at the beginning of the greatest commandment? Because it's the center of who we are and he wants our single-hearted devotion.

In Deut. 5:33 God gave the ten commandments out of love. "You shall walk in all the ways that the Lord your God has commanded you, *that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.*" The greatest commandment to love God encapsulates all 10. So our heart drives our love for the Lord our God. It defines our worship and ongoing communication with him everyday, not just Sundays. As St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless till they find rest in you alone, O God."

Yet, the heart in scripture could also be considered the same as what we might call our passions or gifts, given accordingly to the whole Body of Christ. These are the gifts that make your heart sing, the things you do that are life-giving for you. For me it's writing; I get jazzed and energized from the process of writing. For others it's painting, or cooking or serving or singing or teaching or evangelizing or whatever-ing. Those are also part of loving him with our whole hearts, honoring those desires that he's given us by offering them to him as an act of love. We use our gifts for his purposes, we don't

hide them or brush them off or think, I could never do that because so and so is so much better at it!

How do we know what they are (besides trial and error)? Psalm 37:4 calls us to “take delight in the Lord and he will give us the desires of our heart.” I’ve always thought of this verse like this: when we come to Delight in the Lord our God, when we enjoy his presence, fellowship with his people and reflect on his word by his spirit, he will *birth in us* the desires of our hearts. Yes, we’re wired already with some natural abilities but they come out more the more we delight in him! If he is our creator, and he is enormously creative, once we revel in his beauty and presence and delight in him, we become like him. He *gives* us the desires of our hearts, and often brings them to pass as we do! The minute we recognize that Christ has made his home in our hearts – as John 14:23 says – we start a life long love affair with him, we delight in him and he gives us His desires in our hearts so that we offer them to him for his purposes. We are his workmanship, his poetry created to do good works as we saw in Ephesians 2!

That’s part of what it means to understand our heart according to Scripture. But here’s where it gets tricky. The human heart is also resistant to God. We don’t want to change. We want to hang onto control of our lives and love the idols we have of comfortableness. Jeremiah the prophet said the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; who can understand it (Jer 17). The Lord searches the heart because he knows we are not good, we are impure, unfocused, broken. Too often we try to sound spiritual or look Christian but as we saw at the Gospel lunch hour, Mark 7:6-7, *this people honours me with their lips but their hearts are far from me*. Tim Keller said that our biggest problem in life is our heart, because our hearts are so easily enticed with other things. Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also.

Here’s another way to think about it: as the eyes were meant to see and the ears to hear, the heart is wired to understand, to discern, to give insight. Jewish scribes translated into Greek about 200 b.c. the Hebrew text of Proverbs 2:10, “wisdom will enter your heart” or “wisdom will come into your understanding” because to them it meant the same thing. When a person lacks insight or a moral compass the Hebrews said he “lacked heart.” Understanding cannot be separated from morals, and if it’s desperately wicked, we need a love so great it conquers our own hearts!

**So loving the Lord your God with all our Heart according to scripture**, means that the heart’s reasoning, as well as its feeling, and moral condition is deficient. Jesus said that “out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts” (Mark 7:21). Because the human heart is deceitful above all things (Jer 17:9) and folly is found even in the heart of a child (Prov 22:15), the Spirit of God must give humans a new heart (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26), through faith that purifies it (Acts 15:9; Eph 3:17). So yes, we’re made in God’s image, gifted for his purposes, but we’re also in desperate need of, well, spiritual heart surgery!

Thankfully, God's provided it; His heart is for us! His heart is that of the Prodigal Father looking always for the lost son. His heart delights over us with singing. His heart moves Jesus to spit on the ground and take compassion on the blind or deaf or marginalized to heal us. His heart sends him to the cross to die the death we should have died for our hard and distant heart so that God, who has the greatest heart in the universe, could cleanse our hearts through Christ's blood and give us new hearts through his Resurrection!

**So now that we know what our heart is according to Giver of the Greatest Commandment, how do we love him with all our heart?**

First, we invite him to make his home in our hearts – daily! It's a journey. Then as we often hear in Communion we're to: feed on him in your heart with thanksgiving.

We quiet our hearts so that we can listen to His voice.

We let the eyes of our heart be enlightened by paying attention to him, to our soul and our minds. We reflect on him. More on those things in the next weeks..

We honour and delight him with the desires and gifts he's placed in our hearts. We find that which makes our hearts sing, and do it!

All of these are useful and practical but perhaps the starting point for all of us today is this big aha moment I had while preparing: we can't love him with our whole heart if our heart refuses to let go of hurts we've hung on to for decades. We can't love him if our hearts are full of the fears that keep us from stepping out and using our gifts, or if we've allowed judgmental attitudes, resentments or pain to fester in our hearts, or a hundred other idols to live there, so much so that Jesus doesn't have much room to make his home there. By letting go of the many wrongs people might have done to us, and placing them in the hands of Jesus, whose heart is for us, we are free to live as he wants and we're filled with unending joy! He's absorbed the cost of those wrongs, so we don't have to. It's not easy to let go of hurt; forgiving others is hard and costs you. BUT I believe it's the only way we can really love God with all our heart. Forgiving others, as Christ has forgiven us, is the first step toward loving him with our whole heart.

**So what happens when we do? What happens when we let go and begin to love the Lord our God with all of our heart? Simply this: We come to know God's heart.**

Margie Granger told me, "You can't love someone you don't know intimately and the more you do love someone, the more you want to *know what he loves* so you can please him."

See, the Kingdom life Jesus initiated and summarized in these two commandments fulfills the deepest longing of the human heart. We're created in God's image to display his glory, to be his workmanship, to do good works for others. Out of the abundance of *his* heart, he gave. And so, if Jesus *is* our Lord, we are filled with his heart and character,

we hide God's word in our hearts so we don't sin against him, so that our mouths and our lives speak of the greatest love the world has ever known.

Who did Jesus hang out with as he walked on earth? Who grabbed his heart? Who moved him to compassion? Because, if Christ has taken up residence through his spirit in our hearts, and his heart is for the poor, the marginalized, the hurting, and the broken-hearted, we will love those who are hurting *because* he first loved us. Our hearts begin to break with the things that break God's heart. We learn to serve others as Christ did, to ask questions and really listen to people's stories because we care about them. We live out Matthew 25 when Jesus said I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, naked and you clothed me, homeless and you took me in. We respond to the needs of others as he did, as if we were responding to Jesus himself! Because we love the Lord Your God with all our hearts – and lives.

To whom much is given, much is required – not as a guilt trip but a privileged love affair! And in the process of giving and loving and serving, we turn our hearts again and again to acknowledge his presence, to see the glorious face of our Lord and Savior in the poor and in each other and in scripture, and we are radiant in the process. Others see our hearts are full of love and they want to be a part of that love.

My friend Georgia was a nurse in the emergency room in a hospital in Denver. She was also a great singer in the worship team of her church – early in her life, Georgia's heart had been smitten with the love of Jesus and now she saw both her job and her music as a form of worship to honour God. They made her heart sing. She even felt compelled to take socks and meals to the homeless guys who lived under the bridges in downtown Denver, where she'd sing them Broadway songs. But when her job at the hospital was threatened with a new policy that employees had to live near the hospital (she lived in the suburb) and word got out she might be made redundant, the local weekly very 'secular' newspaper did a cover story on Georgia, advocating the hospital keep this beautiful, singing nurse, who loved God with all her heart. They knew she loved Jesus and they reported that in their story. All over town that week you saw Georgia's face on the newspapers. Because they respected her life of love, they defended her faith. And guess what she didn't lose her job.

When we love God with all our heart, we know his heart and that changes how we live. The message of all of scripture and many writers of faith who've gone before us is this: keep tune to the heart of our heart ("Be thou my vision") and Love God, love God, Love the Lord your God.

Because he is always standing near by saying, "Take heart. It is I. Don't be afraid." Let's pray.

