

The Greatest Command

Loving God with all your Heart Part 1

Matthew 22:35-40 6-5-11

Summary: Love for God is the most important thing. Love is more than mere commitment and more than mere emotion. It must come from EVERY part of a person, including the seat of the emotions: the heart. The feelings of love are desire and delight.

The greatest command.....	1
The greatest question.....	1
The most important thing	2
My testimony	2
What is love?	3
Reductionism	3
A function of the heart and soul	4
A function of the strength.....	5
A function of the mind	5
More than Commitment	6
The Greek word.....	6
What feelings?.....	7
<i>Delight</i>	7
<i>Desire</i>	8
<i>Joy</i>	9
Conclusion: Good news and bad news	10

Matthew 22:35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

The greatest command

The greatest question

Normally I like to teach verse by verse through a book of the Bible, but once in a while we stop to consider an especially important topic in Scripture and study all that God's Word teaches about that subject. And so today we begin a new study of not just an *important* subject, but, according to Jesus, the most important subject in the entire Bible.

Matthew 22:35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested [Jesus] with this question 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

In Mark's gospel it is worded this way:

Mark 12:28 "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

It was the greatest question ever asked. Never has there been a broader, higher, deeper, or more important inquiry. There are over 31,000 verses in the Old Testament, and every last one of them came from the perfect, infinite, omniscient mind of God. Some speak of the creation, some of God's perfect plan, some of His nature, some of His will. And there are thousands of commands. Which one is the

greatest? What a question! Just think if we had the answer to that question! If you were to obey the greatest command God ever gave, then at that moment you would be engaging in the greatest possible activity. Of all the great things people have done throughout human history, nothing would be greater than this.

The most important thing

And think about who is being asked this question. It is the Lord Jesus Christ – God the Son. So what we have here is the greatest Person in existence looking at the greatest book (the Bible), and picking out the greatest command.

Jesus does not have to think about it. He does not say, “Well, it depends on what kind of a context you’re thinking about.” He does not say, “It depends on what century you are dealing with.” He does not say, “It depends on if you are a child or an adult, man or woman, rich or poor.” Jesus just gives this man an absolute answer.

In fact, Jesus gave him even more than what he asked for. He asked for the greatest, and Jesus gave him the answer and then said, “**This is the first and greatest commandment.**” **Greatest** means of highest weight and important, and **first** means highest in rank, influence, honor, or priority. He asked for the greatest command, and Jesus gave him a command that is not only greatest but also first – and not just greatest and first, but it is also a command that summarizes all the commands – so if you obey this you are obeying the whole Bible. And not only that, but take a look at verse 40.

Matthew 22:40 on these all the Law and the Prophets hang

Have you ever thought about what that means? What does it mean that all of God’s Word dangles from the command to love God?

It means not only is this command the first and greatest, and not only does it summarize all the rest, but everything in the Bible depends on this command. That means nothing in the Bible has meaning apart from the command to love God with all your being. It means you cannot obey any command in the Bible if you are not obeying this command. For example – the Golden Rule. If you do unto others as you would have them do unto you – and you carry that out all day every day, but you do not love God with all your heart – you are not obeying the Golden Rule. Everything in the Bible depends on loving God. If you study theology, and learn all about the nature of God – but you do not love Him, you have wasted your time. If you become an expert on systematic theology and memorize all the Proverbs and understand the meaning of each one, and study the parables, the epistles, the Gospels, prophecy – none of it has any use at all apart from loving God.

It is first, it is greatest, it is the summary, and every single thing in the whole Bible depends on it. So let me ask you something - Would you agree that most sermons should have the purpose of helping the people love God more? How about most Bible studies? Most devotions? Most Christian books? Most prayers? Most ministry? Everything we do as a church should revolve around this command (which is why we named this church *Agape* (Greek word for love)).

The solution to every sin problem is increased love for God. The greatest need of the soul is increased love for God. The most effective way for human beings to glorify God is to love Him. The key to every virtue is love for God.

So with all that in mind, how important would you say it is that we get the definition of love right? Imagine for a moment that you got it wrong. What would happen in your life? There are some words we can afford to mis-define, but not this one. To the degree a person misunderstands what love is, that person risks missing out on everything that is most important in human existence!

My testimony

If you want to know what happens when you get this wrong, I’ll tell you. I became a Christian at a very young age, and for as long as I can remember I have been as devoted as I knew how to be to the

Lord Jesus Christ. But during my junior high years I began to question my salvation. The more I read my Bible the more I kept running into passages like 1 Corinthians 16:22.

1 Corinthians 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him.

Verses like that were unsettling to me because I felt no love for God at all. I was committed to Him. I was determined to serve Him with all my life, and I would have died for Him. But I felt nothing in my heart that seemed to me to be love. It was at that time I began to hear respected preachers explain that love is not a feeling. *Agape* love, they said, is commitment, devotion, giving, and self-sacrificial service – not emotion. They assured me that as long as resolve is in place feelings are irrelevant. It was music to my ears. Commitment I could do, but generating emotion seemed impossible. Obedience seemed to be in the realm of possibility. But creating emotions of love where they do not exist – impossible. And why would God care about a bunch of sentimental, sappy feelings anyway? When it comes to pleasing God, actions are the bottom line – aren't they? Armed with this definition of love I was able to put my doubts to rest. As long as I was striving to obey God, I was loving God.

I went to Bible college and seminary, became a pastor and did everything I could to increase in personal holiness and spiritual maturity serving the Lord. I spent an hour in prayer each day, and studied the Bible thirty hours a week – read books, listened to sermons – did everything I could to grow spiritually and become more Christ-like. But it did not seem to be working. My prayer life was a drudgery. And dealing with people and their problems was burdensome. I read book after book on how to be a good father and husband, and tried my hardest to put all the principles into action, but my family did not feel very loved, and I just wrote it off as them wanting more of my time than I could give.

To make matters worse, besetting sins were getting the better of me. There was no doubt in my mind that God's way was better than the path of sin, but when the moment of temptation hit, the power to say no just seemed to elude me. And when I did manage to say no, I felt a sense of loss – like I was missing out. I tried everything I knew to try to change my desires, but to no avail.

And as I studied God's Word I saw some things that did not really square with my whole non-emotion definition of love. But every attempt to change my emotions proved an abysmal failure. It seemed that God simply did not design me to be an emotional person.

Then came 2005 – the most painful and wonderful year of my life. My spiritual life hit a disastrous low, I resigned as pastor I got a job delivering pizza and spent the next two years of my life devoting every spare moment of my time to studying all that Scripture says about what it means to love God. And what I discovered shattered my old beliefs and absolutely transformed my life. And the core of my discovery were two things: I learned that my definition of what love is had been way off. I learned that my understanding about how to increase my love for God had been way off. And those two misconceptions had tentacles that reached into every nook and cranny of my life. So the structure of this study that we now begin will be very simple. First we will see what the Bible says about the definition of love, then we will focus on how to increase our love for God.

What is love?

Reductionism

Our culture has reduced love down to only emotion. Hollywood says love is a mysterious feeling over which you have no control. Divorce is justified on the basis that love has evaporated, and therefore nothing remains of the relationship. And if any blame is assigned it falls upon the unloved person, for failing to be lovely enough. A guy abandons his wife, and in his mind it is her fault for not

being more attractive to him. He thinks it is her job to cause him to love her, and she failed, so he is justified in leaving her.

Now obviously that is a twisted perversion of love. Anyone with a Bible knows that is not love, because the Bible says so much about the role of commitment in love and doing what is in the other person's best interests. And so the Christian reaction against that perversion has been to point out that love is not selfish. Love gives and serves and remains committed even when the object of love becomes unlovely.

And all that is true. However some have taken it even further and have suggested that love has no emotional component at all. If you Google the phrase "Love is not a feeling" you get hundreds of thousands of sermons and articles arguing that *agape* (the primary Greek word for love in the Bible) is commitment and self-sacrificial service and has nothing to do with emotion. In fact, they say love is something you do, not because of how you feel, but in spite of how you feel.

The problem is, that is just as reductionist as the world's error. Saying love is only emotion is reductionist and saying love is only commitment is also reductionist. Jesus did not say "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" and stop there, but nor did He say, "Love the Lord your God with all your strength" and stop there.

A function of the heart and soul

What did He say? To get a full understanding of what Jesus said we need to go back to the passage in the Old Testament that He was quoting, which is Deuteronomy 6:5. Deuteronomy 6:5 is the centerpiece of the entire Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The Jews call that the SHEMA and it is a really big deal for them. From ancient times all the way until today the Jews have always understood that there is something very central about this command. Moses is writing, and he begins with a familiar phrase – the phrase **with all your heart and all your soul**. Moses used that phrase eleven different times. He used it whenever he wanted to make a point that something had to really be wholehearted. For example:

Deuteronomy 4:29 But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.

So that phrase pointed to wholeheartedness, and it especially emphasized that which came from the inside – rather than mere external obedience.

Deuteronomy 30:6 The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts ... so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

The heart is the seat of the emotions. If you look up the word "heart" in Deuteronomy you will see that it is the source of anger, joy, courage, stubbornness, grudging, pride, loyalty, and willingness. All those emotional things are connected to the heart. And it is the same way in the New Testament. The heart is the place of compassion, gladness, desire, and forgiveness. So the heart is the seat of the emotions.

Now – in every culture, including ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek cultures, love is considered an emotion. So if God wanted to overturn that idea – if that was a giant mistake and God wanted everyone to start thinking about love as being non-emotional, why would He place, as the greatest commandment in the whole Bible, a command to love Him with your *heart* (the part of you that houses your emotions)?

What about the word “soul”? Sometimes the word “heart” can refer to the entire inner man, and sometimes the word “soul” is used to describe the entire inner man, so when Moses put both terms together he was making an especially emphatic statement that love for God must come from absolutely, positively, every single nook and cranny of your being.

A function of the strength

But that is not all. I told you that Moses was known for that phrase “all your heart and all your soul.” He said that a lot. One thing he never did, however, except here in Deuteronomy 6:5, was add a third term to that formula.

Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The word **strength** (in both Hebrew and Greek) refers to ability. This is where the world’s cheesy, sentimentalized version of love falls short. If you make love only a feeling, then you are forgetting that God commands that we love Him with all our **strength** – all our ability to accomplish things. So when James said faith without works is dead – you could say the same thing about love. Love without works is dead. The guy who says to his girlfriend – “I would crawl over broken glass to see you, I would climb the highest mountain and cross the hottest desert and sail the widest sea just to see your face – and I’ll pick you up tonight at 8:00...weather permitting” – that guy exposes that his “love” is just rhetoric. True love is a function of the heart and the soul and the strength.

A function of the mind

And then Jesus adds the word **mind** into the mix. We must love God with our intellect. F.D. Bruner said, “Good thinking loves God as much as good feeling and good willing, and deserves equal time with these usually more celebrated faculties.” That is true. A person who does not love God with his intellect does not love God. You cannot love someone you do not even know anything about.

So, let’s back up and gather all that into one pile and take a look at what it means. Moses takes his strongest description of whole-heartedness (“**all your heart and all your soul**”), then beefs it up even more by doing something he never does anywhere else and adds a third term (**strength**). So he is setting love for God apart as the command that more than any other command requires absolutely every ounce of your being. And then Jesus is not even content with that, and so He piles on yet another term: **mind**. It is like Jesus is shouting – “Every part of you, every part of you, every part of you, every part of you!”

And that is still not all. He also puts the word **all** in front of each word. Not only is every part of your being involved – your heart and soul and mind and strength – but every part of your heart and every part of your soul and every part of your mind and every bit of your strength. And that is not even all. Jesus also uses a figure of speech called polysyndeton, where He keeps repeating the word **and**. If He had just given the list with commas and no ands – (“all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”) it would mean that He wanted us to think of the list as a conceptual whole – one single idea. But when He keeps saying “and this, and this, and this...” that is designed to slow the reader down so you consider each term individually. Are you starting to get the feeling that Jesus really, really wanted us to get this – that love for God must include every conceivable part of every part of our being?

Now, are we going to see all that and say, “Jesus didn’t mean to include the emotions”? When Jesus said, “**with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength,**” what He meant was that you only have to love God with part of your heart? You only have to love Him with your will, not with your emotions? What could Jesus have possibly done to make it more clear that every part of us – including the emotions – is involved? The greatest person looked at the greatest book and picked out the greatest command, and that command is that we love God not only with our

thoughts, words, actions, will, and resolve; but also with our affections, emotions, desires, and feelings. Love is more than a feeling, but it is not less than a feeling.

Love for God is not acceptable if it comes from only one portion of your being. If we reduce love down to only emotion and emphasize feelings to the exclusion of the responsibility to will and to act, we destroy love. And people who love God that way – lots of feeling and emotion but no action – they are the ones who will hear those dreadful words on Judgment Day: **“You wicked, lazy servant! throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (Mt.25:26-30). But the people who err on the other side and reduce love down to only commitment and obedience and service and actions without the emotional part – that is a kind of legalism. And anything that moves us in the direction of external conformity without internal passion puts us at risk of ending up like those who have impressive, Christ-centered ministries but who hear those other dreadful words on Judgment Day: **“I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers”** (Mt.7:23). Works are important – no question about that. We must love God with all our strength and ability. So work is mentioned, but it is mentioned last because works have no meaning except to the degree that they reflect what is in the heart.

More than Commitment

The most famous description of love ever written is 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter). And the very first thing Paul does in that chapter is to destroy the idea that love can be reduced to mere commitment or self-sacrificial action.

1 Corinthians 13:3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

If the definition of agape love is self-sacrificial giving then giving all you have to the poor would be love by definition. And if the definition of love for God were commitment and devotion, then dying in the flames as a martyr for Him would automatically be love by definition. So the fact that you could do both of those things and still not actually have love proves that love is something more than action and resolve.

The church in Ephesus was rebuked by the Lord for having forsaken their first love and at the same time they were praised for their commitment and obedience.

Revelation 2:1-4 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. ... 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

The Greek word

Now at this point some of you might be thinking, “What about the definition of the Greek word? Isn’t it true that the word *agape* is fundamentally different from other Greek words for love like *phileo* or *eros*?” There are many very prominent Bible teachers who teach that. For many years I used to teach that. You will find that in commentaries and even in some Bible dictionaries. So when I started to realize that Scripture does not seem to support that, I did some research to where that definition came from. It turns out it did not come from any ancient Greek sources or Greek usage. Nor did it come from the Bible. It came from philosophy. Philosophers like Plato and Kant and Kierkegaard figured that since we do not have control over our emotions, God could never command us to have an emotion, but He does command love, therefore love cannot be an emotion. It must be something we have control over. And those philosophies were popularized in the Church by a man by the name of Anders Nygren in his enormously influential book, *Agape and Eros*, published in the 1930’s. In that book he argued that *eros* and *philia* refer to emotional love, whereas *agape* describes a special divine kind of love that “has nothing to do with desire and longing” and “does not ascend ... to secure advantages for itself.” And so many otherwise reliable scholars and Bible teachers latched on to that

definition that it persists to this day. But Nygren's theory is not supported by any linguistic evidence. It just comes from philosophy. The linguistic evidence and the biblical evidence point in the opposite direction. The word *agape* is very often used to describe emotional love in Scripture. In fact, *agape* and *agapao* (the noun and the verb) are used nineteen times in the Greek translation of the Song of Songs to describe sexual love – which is as emotional as it gets.

If you look at the standard Greek dictionaries, in each case the first definition identifies *agape* as an emotion. The most commonly used Greek Lexicon is affectionately known by seminary students as BAG (or BDAG). Here is the first definition of *agape* in that lexicon: to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for, love.¹ Thayer's lexicon defines *agape* as, affection, good-will, love, benevolence.² The Louw and Nida lexicon says *agape* means ... to love, to regard with affection, loving concern.³ The most comprehensive Greek word study book is Kittle's massive ten-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. And in the article on *agape* it says *agape* is "a spontaneous feeling which impels to self-giving."⁴ That is what the Greek authorities say. And so every major English translation of the Bible translates *agape* with the English term "love" (a word normally connected with emotion). None of them translate it with the terms "obedience" or "commitment" or "surrender." The evidence from linguistic studies and from biblical usage is undeniable. So Charles Hodge was right on when he said, "Here again we have to choose between a mere philosophical speculation and the clear testimony of the Bible ... Love of necessity involves feeling, and if there be no feeling ... there can be no love."⁵

What feelings?

"Alright already, Darrell, – we get it. Love involves emotion. Love involves feelings – we get that. But what feelings? What exactly does it feel like to love God?"

Let's see if we can find an answer to that from God's Holy Word.

This psalm is a great place to go to learn about how love for God feels because the psalmist describes it in such detail. The psalm is really about his love for God's Word, but his love for Scripture is an expression of love for God himself, because the only reason why the psalmist loves the Word of God is because it is the perfect expression of the nature and will of God. So Psalm 119 is really a psalm about love for God Himself.

Delight

So if we ask the question, "What does love feel like?" one of the first things we will see is that it is the feeling of *delight* or *enjoyment*.

Psalm 119:47 I delight in your commands because I love them.

When you love something, you enjoy that thing. And the same goes for loving a person.

If you love a person you will feel delight when you experience what that person is like.

¹William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 5.

²Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, electronic version, 1988, BibleWorks LLC.

³Johannes P. Louw and E.A. Nida, "avga.ph," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* Second Edition, electronic version, 1988, BibleWorks LLC.

⁴Ethelbert Stauffer, W. "ἀγάπῳ," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittle, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:22-23.

⁵Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co. 1972), 1:428-9.

Matthew 12:18

Here is my servant



my chosen one

the one I love



in whom I delight

Do you see the parallelism? Love is always married to delight. They are used interchangeably in Scripture.

Proverbs 1:22 "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways?"



How long will mockers delight in mockery...?"

What does it feel like to love God? It is a feeling of enjoyment and delight whenever you experience Him.

“Experience Him? What in the world does that mean? Experience God? That sounds like meaningless religious jargon – what does that even mean?”

That is the way I thought for years. But it is not empty religious jargon. In the weeks to come we will discuss exactly what Scripture says about experiencing God’s presence. It is not just an abstract, undefined subjective sensation like some have made it out to be. Scripture says some very specific things about experiencing the nearness of God’s presence. So we will get into that in the weeks to come. But for now just understand that there is such a thing as experiencing God’s presence, and the most basic and fundamental core of love for God is feeling a sense of enjoyment of Him and delight in Him when you experience His presence.

Desire

So what does it feel like to love God? If you are experiencing His presence it feels like delight and enjoyment. But what if you are not experiencing His presence? Then what does love feel like? If I passionately love my wife so that I am full of joy and delight when I am with her, what is it that I feel when I am not with her? Answer: *Desire*. When you love something, that means you desire to experience the benefits of that thing. It is nonsense to speak of love apart from desire. If I told you, “I absolutely love steak, but I have no desire to ever eat any steak” – that would be nonsense. Where there is no desire there is no love. I have used this illustration many times, but it bears repeating. Imagine your husband comes home one day and presents you with some flowers and tells you, “Pack a bag because I’m taking you away for a weekend alone in a secluded cabin – just the two of us.” And you say, “Oh, you don’t have to do that.” And he says, “Oh yes, I do. It’s my duty. Don’t get me wrong – I’m not being selfish here. It’s not like I want to do this. I don’t have any desire to be alone with you, and I’m not expecting to get one bit of enjoyment out of this weekend. I’m just doing it out of sheer commitment and resolve and self-discipline because I love you so much.” What is she going to say? “Oh, I feel so honored that you love me that much, that you would be willing to make such a sacrifice.” No, she would probably say, “Why don’t you just stay home and watch the kids and I’ll go

to the cabin with a friend who actually wants to spend time with me.” If there is no desire there is no love.

And so all through Psalm 119 you see his love for God’s Word couched in terms of desire.

Psalm 119:131 I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.

“I love God’s Word” means “I feel a desire to experience the benefits of God’s Word.” And so the posture of love is a posture of seeking and reaching for the object of its desire.

48 I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.

I love them and so I am reaching for them. And that reaching takes place by means of meditation.

97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Love is desire, desire strives to obtain, and in the case of God’s Word that obtaining happens through meditation. If you love Waterworld you will drive there and spend money on a ticket. If you love steak you will purchase one and put it in your mouth and eat it. And if you love God’s Word you will reach out for it through meditation on the principles of Scripture.

So, what does love feel like? Desire and delight. When you are not experiencing the object of your love it is desire, and when you are experiencing it, it is delight. In Psalm 42 David was not experiencing God’s presence so it came out as desire:

Psalm 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Or in Psalm 63...

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

That is how you say, “I love you” to God when you are not experiencing His presence. When we sing, “Lord, I thirst for You – I long to be in Your presence” that is another way of saying, “I love You” to God. Genuine love is driven by desire.

Joy

And when that desire is fulfilled, and God grants us an experience of His presence, the result is delight – joy! And that is why joy is such an essential virtue in Scripture. Have you ever wondered why joy has such a prominent place in the Bible? If all that matters is that we obey God, and feelings are not really that big a deal, why are there verses like Philippians 4:4?

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Once, it is important; twice, it is doubly important. In Galatians 4:15, where Paul is rebuking the Galatians for turning away from the gospel, you might expect him to say, “What happened to your faith?” Or “What happened to your commitment?” But he does not say that; he says, “**What happened to all your joy?**” The Galatians were in real trouble with God because they lost their joy. And God has been known to bring serious punishment on people who lose their joy.

Deuteronomy 28:47 Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, 48 therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

It is a very serious sin to lose your joy. Why? Because joy in the Lord is the result of loving Him. So if there is no joy that means there is no delight which means there is no love. And if there is no love then you are breaking the greatest commandment, which means you are committing the greatest sin. That is why when Paul saw the huge spiritual mess that was the Corinthian church he rolled up his sleeves and said,

2 Corinthians 1:24 ... we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

Joy is not icing on the cake in the Christian life. It is right there at the core because it is a byproduct of love.

Conclusion: Good news and bad news

For many of you this message is good news and bad news. The bad news is devotion to Christ is not enough. Commitment to God *per se* (by itself), is not enough. And that is terrifying news to some people who are not naturally very emotional and who feel hardly any desire for and delight toward God. It is terrifying to think that the most essential, most fundamental core of the Christian life is mostly absent in your life. And it is especially terrifying because nothing seems more impossible than generating feelings of love where they do not already exist. When someone tells you to feel love toward someone you do not feel love toward right now – whether it be your wife or someone at church or whoever – nothing feels more impossible. And it feels even more impossible when you think of loving God because He is invisible. And if all your efforts to learn to love Him over all these years of being a Christian have not sparked feelings of love in your heart, what will? For many of you, that is the bad news.

But there is also good news – great news. The great news is that this is possible. I am literally the least emotional person I know, and yet through the principles we are going to learn in this study God changed me, and I now have joy in the Lord that ten years ago I did not even think was possible in this life. From the time I first learned these things about six years ago or so, from then until today I have never experienced a single day of depression (even though I suffered more in those six years than any other time in my life). The great news is you do not have to live out the rest of your life grinding out commitment to God while feeling empty and unsatisfied and unfulfilled. Deep, profound, compelling joy in the Lord is available to you, and it will be available to you for the rest of your life no matter what happens to you. Which means never again will you ever be stranded without access to joy. Never again do you need to fear the possibility of losing something that will cut off your ability to be happy and fulfilled. Fanning into flame love for God is definitely an uphill battle, but the payoff is literally the greatest thing there is – love for God.

So how is that done? What specific steps can be taken to generate emotions that do not exist right now? And where does sacrifice fit in? And what about loving your enemies? I pray you will all be able to come each week as we go through this series and study what the Word of God says about each of those questions.

Benediction: Ephesians 6:23 Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.