

# Soul, Mind, Strength

Loving God Updated Part 2

Mark 12:29 (Matthew 22:34-40) 4/21/2018

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**Mark 12:28 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?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'**

## Introduction

### Review

Last week we began studying what Jesus said is the greatest, most important command in the Bible. And it is not only the greatest, but it is also the summary of the whole Bible, and the basis for the whole Bible. Nothing in Scripture has any meaning apart from that command. If you obey it you are doing the greatest activity possible for a human being, and if you disobey it you are committing the greatest possible sin. That command is love the Lord your God with every part of your being.

And the first part of your being that he mentions is your heart, the seat of the emotions. That's the starting place because love is all about delight. You desire the object of your love, and when that desire is satisfied it produces delight.

Today I'd like to move on to the next category – love God not only with all your heart, but also with all your soul. What is that? If the heart is the seat of the emotions, what is the soul?

### What is the Soul?

If you look up the word soul in the OT you find something very interesting. The heart is the seat of the emotions; the soul is the seat of appetite. The Hebrew word for soul is NEPHESH, and that is the normal, everyday Hebrew word for appetite.

**Numbers 11:6 But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"**

Your soul is that part of you that craves and hunger and longs and desires. It's that part of you that sometimes feels empty and needs something to satisfy it. And it sometimes feels dry and needs something to refresh it. The soul is the throat and the stomach of your inner man – which is why Scripture so often speaks of the hunger and thirst of the soul.

**Psalm 42:2 My soul thirsts**

**Psalm 63:1 my soul thirsts**

**Psalm 143:6 my soul thirsts ... like a parched land**

**Psalm 36:8 You give them to drink from your river of delights**

**John 7:37 If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink**

**Isaiah 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of foods.**

**Psalm 63:5 My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods**

Just as your body is designed to keep getting hungry and thirsty, multiple times a day, God also designed your soul to run low on what it needs over and over and needs to be replenished.

What does that feel like when that happens? When your body is low on food, you feel hunger (a physical sensation of emptiness, weakness, pangs in your midsection). When your soul gets low on what it needs, you get low on things like encouragement, strength, peace, motivation, joy, happiness, courage, etc.), then you feel spiritual hunger, which feels like emptiness, boredom, discontent, lack of motivation, lack of fulfillment, worthlessness, aimlessness, etc. That's the hunger of the soul, and it's designed to make you seek spiritual food.

When your physical throat dries up, you feel thirst (a sensation of dryness that makes you desire water). When your soul dries up, you feel the thirst of the soul. What does that feel like? Depression, irritability, anxiety, restlessness, discouragement, sadness, indifference, despair, apathy, etc. Those things are what it feels like when your soul gets thirsty.

Or to simplify it, the hunger and thirst of the soul is what it feels like on the inside when you lack joy. Whenever we get low on joy, we have the hunger and thirst pangs of the soul. And everything we do in life is designed to satisfy those pangs. It's why we do everything we do. It's why people get married, it's why people get divorced. It's why we sit down and watch TV or read a book or talk to friends or listen to music. Those are all efforts to satisfy that thirst of the soul.

## **The Soul Loves What it Desires as Food**

So what does it mean to love God with all your soul? What does it mean to love God with that part of you that craves joy and encouragement and hope and pleasure and all the rest? You love God with your soul – you love God with your spiritual stomach by looking to God as food and drink. When you are restless, unhappy, empty, unfulfilled, depressed – what do you do to feel better? Whatever you run to in those times, that's what your soul loves. If you get depressed and listen to music to feel better, that means your soul loves music. If you have anxiety and you drink alcohol or take pills to feel better, your soul loves alcohol and pills. The way to love God with all your soul is, whenever you feel those painful emotions – lack of happiness, you look to God alone to satisfy your cravings for happiness.

## **The Food/Water-Likeness of God**

If someone asked you what God is like, what would you say? What would be the first metaphor that would come to your mind? You might say, "God is like a Shepherd, guiding and protecting and feeding." Or "God is like a refuge or fortress."

- Scripture uses a lot of metaphors to describe his attributes in ways we can understand a rock,
- a mother bird,
- a fortress,
- a shelter,
- a father,
- a mother,
- a friend,
- a king,
- a warrior,
- a blazing sun.

If you asked the psalmists what God is like they might mention those things, but more often than not they would say, “What is God like? He’s like a banquet. He’s like Thanksgiving dinner. He’s like the Golden Coral (except with better food). He’s like cold, fresh spring water when you’re parched and thirsty.”

Think of how often God compares himself to food and drink in the Bible. In Ps.36 he is the storehouse of food and river of delights that satisfies both high and low among men. In Isa.58 he’s the feast that satisfies those who call his holy day a delight. In Jn.6 he’s the real bread and real drink that satisfies the souls of all who come to him. In Isa.55 he is the milk and wine and bread offered for free that satisfies so much more than the bread that is not bread. In Pr.9 he is wisdom’s banquet that is so superior to folly’s banquet. In Lk.14 he is the food of the great Messianic banquet that satisfies all his people for all eternity. In Ps.63 he is the richest of foods that satisfies the massive appetite of the soul of David. In Jer.2 and Jer.15 and Ps.1,42,63 and 143 he is the spring of living water that satisfies so much more than the broken cisterns and that never fails, and that supplies our roots and makes us flourish, and that David longed for like a thirsty deer. In Ps.34 he is the delicacy that my soul will crave if I just taste and see. What does all that mean? It means when you experience the presence of God that part of you that is dry and empty will be filled and refreshed and thoroughly satisfied.

God is constantly describing himself as a feast, because that is his nature. It’s one of his attributes. Just as eternity or omniscience are attributes that describe essential aspects of his very being, so is this: that he satisfies the human soul.

## **Part of His Nature**

So let me ask you this – is it possible to commune with God and come away unhappy and unsatisfied? No. That is not possible. The food-likeness of God is one of his attributes. Which means it is impossible to experience his presence and not be satisfied. That is as impossible as it would be for God to die or to sin or to forget something or to make a mistake – it would violate his nature, which is literally the most impossible of all impossible things. To the degree that you have fellowship with God your soul *will* be satisfied.

The presence of God is not like the pleasures of this world – a matter of personal preference. Some people like green beans; some people hate them. Some people are deeply satisfied by a cup of coffee; others would rather be poked in the eye with a sharp stick. Physical food satisfies some people but not others. But the presence of God is not like that. There is no human soul that wouldn’t walk away feeling joy and delight and satisfaction and fullness and strength if they had a close encounter with the favorable presence of God. If I have my devotions and go away unsatisfied, and that restless, empty, thirst of the soul is still there, it can only mean that I have not communed with him. Whatever I did in my devotions, it was not enough of a direct interaction with him because his presence always, always satisfies the cravings of the human soul. And to love God with all your soul means to look to him and him alone to satisfy all your internal cravings.

### *Do you believe God can fill your cup?*

Scripture describes your capacity for joy as being like a cup. **Psalm 23:5 my cup overflows** (I am fully satisfied, and I have joy) When your cup gets empty, that's miserable. All human beings hate that feeling. And we fear it. We fear it more than hardship, we fear it more than physical pain. If God told you that tomorrow morning you will experience some pain, but even though you'll have pain, your cup will be full – you will be full of joy, you will be happy and delighted and fulfilled – would you be afraid? No. We're never afraid of being happy. If God said tomorrow you will suffer hardship but your cup will be full and you'll be happy – you wouldn't fear that hardship. That's why a pregnant woman looks forward to having her baby. Even though it will involve pain, she looks forward to it because she knows she will have joy.

But if God said tomorrow everything will go your way – you'll have money and success and people will treat you well and you'll lose some weight and all that – but your cup will be empty – you will feel discouraged and depressed and without hope and without joy – that would be terrifying. A dry cup is what we naturally fear the most – more than we fear suffering.

That's what determines how we live our lives. We avoid things that we think will drain our cup, and we pursue things we think will fill our cup and make us happy. And the key to loving God with all your soul is in realizing that there is only one thing that can possibly fill your cup, only one thing that can possibly satisfy the thirst of the soul – the presence of God.

### **Selfish? No – Worship**

Now, some of you might hear all this and think, “Wait a minute. This sounds like selfishness.” Isn't it kind of self-focused to talk about MY hunger and MY thirst and My desires? Shouldn't our focus be on God and his greatness and worshipping him? Yes, it should. So why does God tell us to love him with our soul – our appetites? Here's why:

### **Two Kinds of Asking**

There are two different ways to look to God to satisfy your desires. One way is pure selfishness, and it's not real love for God. But there's another way that is good and that honors God. Let me show you that from the Bible. The bad kind is in James 4.

**James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

Those people were asking God to fulfill their desires, and the answer was no because they were asking for selfish reasons. But there is another way to do it that isn't selfish.

**John 16:24 Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.**

So what's the difference between those two kinds of asking? Obviously there is a huge difference, since one is commanded and the other is sin. But on the face of it, they seem the same – in both cases the person is asking God to satisfy his desires.

### *Seeking God vs. Using God*

The answer has to do with the object of your desire. If I desire things in this world, and I try to use God to get the stuff I want, that's evil. But if I desire God himself, and I seek experiences with him, and I use the stuff in this world to enjoy him in ways that will fulfill the hunger and thirst of my soul, that is good, because it honors God.

If a man proposed to his girlfriend and said, “Will you marry me? I want to spend my life with you. I want to see your beautiful face every day. I want to hear you sweet voice. You fill my heart with joy whenever I'm around you.” Is she going to look at him and say, “How can you be so selfish? ‘I want to

see your face, I want to hear your voice, I, I, I – all your care about is yourself!” No. She wouldn’t see that as selfish, because even though he is seeking to satisfy his desires, his desire is for her. That’s not selfishness; it’s love. And it’s the same way with God. If we try to use God to get some other thing we love, that’s bad. But if we love God himself and desire his presence, and that’ show we satisfy the cravings of the soul, that honors God.

## Loving God with Your Mind

Ok, so we’ve talked about loving God with your heart, and your soul, now the next one: your mind. You must love God with your ability to think.

**Philippians 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight**

Love abounds in *knowledge*. So this week I studied what Scripture says about how to love God with your mind, there were four principles that stood out. I’m sure there are more, but these are some important ones.

### To Know Him is to Love Him

First, you can’t love someone you don’t know. You certainly can’t have intimacy with someone you don’t know. And for your love for someone to deepen, you have to get to know them more. So to love God, we need to use our minds to learn more about what God is like.

**1 John 5:20 We know also that the Son of God has ... given us understanding, so that we may know him**

**Colossians 2:2 My purpose is that ... they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, <sup>3</sup>in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

All the various forms of fellowship with God - every one of them requires knowledge. Knowledge by itself is not fellowship, but your fellowship with God can never, ever go any deeper than your knowledge of God. And God is so good that the more you know him, the more you will love him. That’s why knowing God and loving God are almost interchangeable in Scripture.

**Psalms 91:14 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him ... for he knows my name."**

The more you see the truth about God, the more your heart will delight in him and your soul will hunger and thirst for him.

So step one to loving God with your mind is to learn what God is like. The most beneficial thing you can possibly do for your soul is learn something about God that you didn’t already know, and take delight in it.

### Love Listens

Second, love listens. If you love someone, you use your mind to pay attention to what that person says to you. So love God with your mind by listening to him. Fellowship with God never bypasses the mind. There are about 55,000 verses in the Bible. Guess how many are targeted at the mind? All of them. How many verses of the Bible can you understand without using your mind? None.

When you’re talking to someone and that person is looking around, not paying attention, not really listening – that bothers you. Why? Because lack of listening is lack of love. If you love God, you will love his words.

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

## **Psalm 119:167 I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly.**

One of the most important ways we love God is by listening intently to his words. And that means not just studying the Bible, but paying attention to God himself.

## **Forgetting God**

There are so many times in the Bible when we are told, “Don’t forget God.” A tragically large number of Christians have been faithful in every area except on they read their Bible they pray they show kindness to people they have good character they are honest all of it except for one little thing. They forgot about God. God Himself somehow got lost in the shuffle. They study about him, but they don’t actually pay attention to him. And so they don’t really love him. They don’t use their mind to have fellowship with God, and fellowship with God (interacting with Him in a back and forth love relationship) is the only thing that matters in life.

## **Love Obeys**

Third, very closely related to listening to God, is obeying God.

### **John 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."**

Part of loving God is doing his will by obeying his commands. And many of God’s commands have to do with our thoughts.

### **Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.**

He commands us to think a certain way.

### **Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**

### **Romans 13:14 do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.**

### **Hebrews 3:1 fix your thoughts on Jesus**

How do you love God with all your mind? When he commands you to think about some things and not to think other things, obey him. If you do that, it will please God and bring joy to you.

### **Psalm 104:34 May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I am glad in the Lord.**

## **Understand His Love for You**

One more. The 4<sup>th</sup> way to love God with your mind – contemplate and think deeply about and understand the depth of *his* love for you. Part of loving someone involves understanding and enjoying that person’s love for you. And it takes some major mental effort to deepen your understanding of how much God loves you. It goes way beyond *Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so*.

### **Ephesians 3:17 ... I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp (that’s an understanding word) how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge**

It is a massive mental effort to grasp the depths of Jesus’ love for you. And so you love him with your mind by using your mind to understand his love.

## **All Your Strength**

Ok, so the greatest command is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and one more: all your strength. Strength refers to ability. Love involves effort. This is where obeying God finally comes in. Obeying God is not enough if you don’t also love him with your mind and

soul and heart. But loving him with your mind and soul and heart is not enough if you don't also obey him. Remember the verse I just read a minute ago:

**John 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."**

So once you take delight in God and go to God to satisfy the cravings of your soul, and you fix your thoughts on him, then you express your delight in him by joyfully serving him.

**Matthew 6:24 No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

Notice he talks about serving only one master, then he switches to loving only one master. Loving God means serving God. Remember after Jesus rose from the dead, and it was time to restore Peter? Peter had denied him 3 times, and so Jesus allows Peter to affirm his love three times. He asks him three times: Do you love me?, Peter says yes, and then what does Jesus say to him?

**John 21:15 W...Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."**

**16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."**

**17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."**

For Peter, loving Jesus meant feeding the flock – teaching and preaching the Word of God to the people of God. Now, not all of us are preachers, but all of us are called to some ministry. Every Christian has spiritual gifts, and every one of us is called to serve God's people in some way. And Jesus Christ is saying to you right now, "Do you love me?" What's your answer? Is it the same as Peter's? (Yes Lord!) Then he is saying to you right now, "Then serve me by ministering to my people."

Love God with all your heart: take delight in him. Love God with all your soul: look to him to satisfy the cravings of your soul. Love God with all your mind: listen to him and fix your thoughts on him and keep learning more and more about what he is like. And love God with all your strength: serve him, obey him, and minister to his people.

**Benediction: Psalms 34:3 Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together. ... 7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. 8 Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him**