

Loving God With All Your Soul

Embracing a Christ-Centered Identity

I. Rightly Defining the Call to Love

1. The call to love God with all our soul is a call to embrace God's definition of love. More than just our obedience and our service, God is after *us*. His call is not just to serve Him or obey Him, but *to be His*.
2. The call to love the Lord our God is an intensely inward call with an outward expression. It's about rewriting our heart, soul and mind unto (and by way of) refocusing our strength.
3. When we focus on the outward expression of loving God we end up idolizing certain activities and ministries, and they become the end rather than a heart that is fully His. The result is that we're left living a double life that leaves us conflicted in our identity, and on top of that we don't get what we ought to from the "spiritual" times because we're confused about their objective.
4. The point of "You shall love the Lord your God with all" is that *we ourselves* are sacred – chosen of God and holy to the Lord – and we are to see all that we do through that identity.
5. The call to love with all is a call to a journey of love that has no boundaries – it runs the course of our entire life, it touches every relationship, activity and desire, it goes beyond surface-level changes to our deepest thoughts, emotions and perspectives, and it removes all ideas of a "passing" level of love as it calls us to greater abandonment each day.
6. The challenge of loving God is primarily perseverance – embracing it as a life-long journey, and pervasiveness – letting it touch every area of our life and not be one pursuit among many.
7. The little things are actually the most critical battleground in loving God. Love consists more of continual little gestures than of dramatic displays of affection, and it's the continual little gestures that build up our love unto the great displays of affection.

II. The Issue of Identity

1. Identity, belonging and significance is a basic need of the human spirit. We will either fulfill it in God, or it will drive us elsewhere. God put it in us because He longed for us to connect with and glory in His choice to set His love on us and call us His own.
1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*
Ephesians 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.*
2. If we don't come to God and allow Him to establish our identity in Christ, it will be established for us by the world. Our culture is searching for identity in all the wrong places, it wants to define who we are as a sum of our giftings and talents, and our achievements and activities.

3. That culture has invaded the church. We spend more time calling people to find their calling, to identify their giftings and their assignments than we do talking about the glory of our identity as adopted sons and daughters of God.
4. Our identity is not found in what we do or in what we're like. It's found in who we are in God's eyes. His is the only opinion that matters. The Apostle John got a revelation of this truth. By the time Jesus was finished working in John's life he went from the boastful apostle who wanted the right-hand seat in heaven to one who would only ever refer to himself as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.'
Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
5. There is a power and a life in the revelation that we are God's that exceeds even the knowledge that He is ours.
Song of Songs 2:16 My beloved is mine, and I am his.
Song of Songs 6:3 I am my beloved's, And my beloved is mine.
Song of Songs 7:10 I am my beloved's, And his desire is toward me.
6. Our fundamental identity as believers is we belong to God. We are in Him and He is in us.
Romans 14:7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.
1 Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.
Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.
7. That identity is born in revelation, and carried in remembrance. It is birthed as we hear God speaking "I have chosen you", and it is carried as we daily put on the title "I am the Lord's."
Isaiah 44:5 This one will say, 'I am the LORD'S'... And another will write on his hand, 'Belonging to the LORD'...

III. The Power of Identity

1. Understanding that we have received a new identity through belonging to God is what enables us to no longer find our identity in this world.
John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.
Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
2. We can't live for the eternal if our identity is in the temporal.
Colossians 3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.
3. A God-given revelation of who we are and what we're here for empowers us to live day after day in the pursuit of God.
Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law.

4. Identity frees us from our obsession with ourselves. When we're confident in who we are in God as a lover of God, loved by God, we no longer have the need to make it all about us. We can now truly serve others, and truly make our lives about God.
5. When our identity is found in God, we are unoffendable. The only thing that really matters to us is absolutely secure – no one can take it away from us. We can be stripped of reputation, influence, relationships, ministry and career, and it does not touch the one thing that matters most.

Luke 10:41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

6. It's the spirit of adoption that enables us to contend for the fullness of our inheritance in God without falling under a wrong yoke. We groan to be brought into fullness because we know who we are in God and we are confident in His love.

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us... 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body... 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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Practical Ways to Re-shape Our Identity

Luke 21:19 By your patience possess your souls.

I. How We See Ourselves

1. **Going deep in what Scripture reveals about our identity in God** is the foundation of how we begin to form a new identity. We must ask for a Spirit of revelation and then give ourselves to what the Bible has to say about who we are: His children (*Romans 8:15-21, 1 John 2:28-3:10, John 8:34-36, Luke 15:11-32*), His beloved bride (*Ephesians 5:22-32, Psalm 45:10-15, Song of Songs*), His sheep (*Psalm 23, John 10:10-30*), His prized possession and His delight (*Luke 15:1-10, Matthew 13:44-46, Proverbs 8:30-31*), His inheritance for all eternity (*John 17:20-26, Ephesians 1:3-19*).
Ephesians 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe...
2. Take the time to lay a solid foundation in the knowledge of who you are to God. It will bear unimaginable fruit over the course of a life-time, because that foundation is what gives us access with confidence and saves us from much grief in trying to make it on our own.
3. Having received those truths, we then open our mouths and declare them over our own souls. **Prophecy to our soul** is what begins to write that identity on our heart. God has given us amazing power in our own words.
4. Our two greatest errors in longing to hear God tell us He loves us is first ignoring that He already has and not giving ourselves to the testimony of Scripture about how God sees us, and second not letting God speak through our own lips. God wants us to not only hear that He loves us, but agree with it and declare what He has to say about us to the heavens (*Ephesians 3:10*).
5. It's our testimony about who God is and who we are to Him that overthrows the power of the accuser in our life.
Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

II. What We Desire and Pursue

1. God asks us to believe two things about Him by faith. We must believe in His existence, but more than that, we must believe that His existence determines the meaning of our existence.
Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
2. The desires of our hearts matter immensely to God. He longs for us to choose the best things – to choose knowing Him and seeking after His kingdom.
Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

3. Actually **setting a vision for our hearts**, setting it before the Lord and putting it down on paper as a reminder and a plumb line for our lives gives us an anchor for what life is really about. It becomes a constant recalibration point.
4. God wants to be sought after, and so He created us to be seekers. We will always be seeking something in life – whether it's power, money and fame, achievement and legacy or just comfort or even survival. If we have not set God as our great pursuit and a heart alive in love as our vision, we will find identity in our lesser pursuits.
5. The best source of goals for our life is to adopt for ourselves the desires that God has for us. Throughout the New Testament, we encounter God's wishlist – not things He wants from us, but things He wants for us – God-breathed prayers conveying His desires for His church. (See 'Prayers for Fullness' handout)
6. As we begin **praying over our own hearts** the very things that Jesus is praying over us we identify more and more with how He sees us and His plan and purpose for our life. We get a vision for fullness, but in a way that is not about our striving but rather about His faithfulness to bring us forth in love.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

III. How We Approach Daily Life

1. It's not natural for us to wake up and think about how we're going to love God today. Instead, we think about all the things we have to do today. If we're not intentional about it, daily life begins to shape our identity rather than our identity shaping daily life.
Matthew 6:31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.
2. On an intensely practical level, our time (all of it) matters to God. Intentionally, **prayerfully going over our daily schedule** with God removes that false disconnect between spiritual things and the things of daily life, and fuels love on multiple levels.
3. It is first of all an admission that our time is God's and He cares how we spend it. The point is not that all of our time is to be spent alone with God or in overtly ministry-related activities. The point is that our time should not be driven by our needs and desires, or by the demands of those around us, but by God and the assignments (relationships, occupation, service opportunities, spiritual disciplines, etc) that He has given us.
4. Second, it is an opportunity to identify time that can be consecrated to God alone. It really matters to God that we set apart time in our schedules to spend alone with Him. Not so much for the functional value (although there is plenty), but for the continual recognition that we are *His*.
Exodus 31:13 ...Above all you shall keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.

5. Perhaps most importantly, though, it is an opportunity to deliberately and intentionally sanctify every activity as holy to the Lord, and determine ways to treat each activity accordingly. More than finding time for God during the day, we want to find ways to use all that we're doing as an expression of love and as a means of growing our hearts.
6. We have a general concept in the church that all is worship, but we often don't know what we mean by that. There is a particular heart posture that goes along with that. Our heart grows only to the degree that we are connecting with the fact that God sees our daily activity and are deliberately making loving God the object of all our activity.
“Whether we think of, or speak to, God, whether we act or suffer for Him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than His love, and the desire of pleasing Him ... In souls filled with love, the desire to please God is a continual prayer.”
John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection
7. It takes time to grow in love – there's no getting around it – but all time counts. It doesn't matter whether you're working, washing the dishes, mowing the lawn, watching the kids or alone with Jesus. If we sincerely and intentionally make the course of our life pursuing love, we'll find our hearts growing in the oddest of times – even while we sleep.
8. The objective is simply **practicing the presence of God** – a conscious awareness that God is with us always, that He sees the little things and it all matters. It takes only a little thing to begin bringing that shift in our hearts – a brief prayer as we start work to remind us Who we're really working for, pausing throughout the day to acknowledge God's nearness and tell Him we love Him, resuming a particular meditation about God during downtime.
9. The effect of taking life, and all of it's activities, and refocusing it around loving God is powerful in establishing in us the truth of who we are and our eternal purpose.

IV. How We Evaluate Life

1. Whether we realize it or not, we're writing a narrative about our life. We have a natural tendency to reflect and to look forward. We don't just live life day-to-day, we live in a history and a story.
2. If we don't take control of it, our reflecting on life can become one of the most fleshy things we do. We become the hero of the story, and we make it a grand drama centered around us and how people are treating us and the ups and downs of our circumstances... and the things that really matter – what God is saying and doing, and how our heart is growing in love, get totally ignored.
3. Jesus exhorts us, “be careful how you hear.” It's important to God the way we treat the things He speaks to our hearts and does in our lives – that we treasure His every word and touch, and we value as He does the movements of our hearts toward Him. “The worst enemy of faith is not doubt – it's memory.” ~ Sergio Scataglini
4. **Journaling** allows us to take control of the narrative. We get to determine what is remembered. We get to choose at the end of the day to forget silly little things that offended us or puffed us up in pride, and to instead focus on God's work in our lives and on the journey of our soul.
5. Embracing the journey of love as our story is so important – that we reshape our life story into being one not of roller coaster ups and downs in circumstances, but of God's continual shepherding of our hearts on a journey into deeper and deeper levels of love.