

## Restoring Our First Love

Series: Reboot: Fresh Start for a New Year

Brad Bailey - Feb. 19, 2023

Intro

Today ...we are concluding our new year focus on rebooting our lives.

Restore our life functioning ... from the **malaise... changes ...pandemic.**

We may be doing this...but without the same sense of vitality.

We may not be able to know exactly how the various changes have led to a state that is slower... but we sense we **need to reboot,,, updates... some reconnections.**

We saw the significance of the power of **purpose and priority.**

We want to be the like this **Belgian Malinois...but we are more like this Golden Retriever.**

FOUND AT: Belgian Malinois vs Golden Retriever - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhXQHPabOys>

**Look at Jesus...** his earthly life... **came at a time of deep darkness** for God's people... the people whom God had called out to make Himself known.

They had **proven to be unfaithful** ... God had stopped raising up any prophets... it had **been 400 years since the last prophet...**and now the people had come under the rule of Rome...under oppression.

**A lot was "shut down" so to speak.**

And then ...just as the prophecies had declared... a **people living in darkness would see a great light...**for a child would be born... who would be called mighty God.

And this child...lived as one who was **not defined or deterred** all the circumstances at hand.

He spoke as one who **carried the very authority of God...** and **lived out of a relationship with the heavens** unlike any merely human life.

And this drew the common people... and threatened the religious leaders.

And it **led them to ask questions...**

Was asked...

**Mark 12:28-31**

**"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"**

<sup>29</sup> **"The most important one,"** answered Jesus, **"is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."**

And as Matthew recorded... he explained...

**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." - Matthew 22:40**

Everything hangs on these two great commandments... everything flows from them.

And the first is this...

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. - Mark 12:30**

These words **may sound so familiar...** and perhaps so general...that they may be **easy to simply hear and go on.**

**But Jesus is describing what is to be the very core of our being.**

This is the **first and highest calling ...that is upon us.**

Because **our very existence comes from Him**...our very nature is that which was created as a reflection of Him.

**Acts 17:27-28**

**He is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist.**

**Our very existence ...emanated from God's will...and God's love.**

**Our love of God is our first love.**

He is our first love in that He is **the source and center** of life itself.

We **tend to think** God is **demanding that we make him first**...because He deserves it. He isn't asking us to make Him first because He deserves it... but because He is first... He is the source and center of our lives.

Perhaps it is hard because we tend to see God as some potential **secondary type of love**.

We live to be loved... It is at the **oxygen of the soul**...but we tend to give ourselves almost entirely to the **love of fellow creatures**...or **at least some form of what we call love**.

But we are endowed as spiritual in nature.

And God who is spirit **sees more than we see**...and

**Only God loves us for who we truly are...and truly will be.**

It's time to grasp this... particularly having just had the Valentine's holiday. Valentines Day can serve as a fine nod to love...and particularly romantic love. And **God affirms earthly love**.

**> But we are not merely bodies... but spiritual beings**

**Valentines Day is but a confused echo of an eternal reality**... at its **best it may echo the divine drama**... at its **worst** it roots us as mere bodies... that **no longer points us to ultimate love in which we exist**.

...As we noted earlier in this series... **one of the most valuable** ways we can reorient our lives...is to **stop trying to be something we aren't**.

The problem is not with healthy pride and aspiration ...or healthy self-expression... but with the underlying false role of being our own source of glory.

**It's been said, that**

***"Man is the star in our contemporary drama...for which an idea of God may be given a place on the stage ... but only as a kind of co-star or supporting actor to serve our lead role."***

And because we are trying to play a role that is not our role as human life, we will **never be able to play the part**... **never fulfill** what is required....**never be at peace**.

As the Bible described in the Book of Genesis... we **are trying to cover ourselves with fig leaves**... to **cover our nakedness**.

We will be **anxious**... because we will never live within your true nature.

And as the Bible describes... **separated from God**...we are **left anxious** ... **striving**... **trying to prove our worth**.

When God rooted the people in this command... He was calling them out to be liberated...to be free. They were to be a people who lived in this reality.

This is **what Jesus bore... Amidst all the problems...his life was defined by something that transcended them all.**

**The eternal kingdom of God is at hand... and it is rooted in our relationship with the King.**

**At the core of our lives** is not the issue of WHAT we do...**but of WHY.**

Our **love from God and for God... is WHY** we rise up every day... and WHY we find rest at the end of the day.

**Jesus was fixed on his Father in heaven... not in some automated way.** Rather he **formed that connection.** He directed his nature to be connected.

**Our love of God should be the center of our very beings...from which we live.**

When we speak of love...we can all sense **it is a big vague.**

**We tend to think** primarily of love as **a feeling we get... or have for someone.**

And that **makes the whole idea of choosing to love... feel elusive.**

How can I simply choose to love if love is simply a feeling?

What is described is not simply some passive feeling...

And as our first love... central... whole selves...

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.** - Mark 12:30

**It starts** by telling us to love God with **our whole hearts.**

Our contemporary culture understands the “heart” as the center of emotions, but the Jewish culture in Jesus’s times understood it as more than that. For them, the heart of man was the center of the will (Proverbs 4:23). It reflects what we desire most. What we treasure...what we give our hearts to.

**Heart – What we desire most and therefore “give ourselves” to. (What do we think about most? What rules our will...our choices?)**

**Soul – What we most deeply trust ourselves to.**

**Mind – What shapes our understanding. (What is the source of reference for not simply what we think about...but how we think about life?)**

Romans 12:2 reminds us that we need to be transformed by the renewal of our minds to be able to test and approve God’s will – that is how we can love God with our whole minds.

***Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*** - Romans 12:2

**Strength – The energy we have been given. (What are the various forms of effort I apply to my serving the good of the other?)**

Our love of God should lead our lives at the core of our being.

***Our love for God is about whose heart we are most bound to... who we are living most deeply in response to...who is at the forefront of what matters most.***

**Our love of God begins with God.**

The Bible says that

**“Love is of God” - 1 John 4:7**

and

**“God is love” - 1 John 4: 8**

“God is love.” This is a profound statement.

**God doesn't just love; He is love.** His nature and essence are love.

But far from some sentimental feeling... this love **is the very force** by which God acts... by which God created... by which God so loved the world that He came to save us.

And this is where we see that this great love is **not some mere sentimental feeling that sets side what is true and right** simply to be close to another. The love of God cannot be separated from what is true and just... **cannot simply negate the consequences** of what we choose... **but rather can provide a way** for those who will receive it.

God's love is the power of mercy...that which seeks the good of the other when it is undeserved. It is not based on what we deserve. [1]

The Bible uses a **very distinct term**...the Greek word **agape** ... which refers to a **benevolent sacrificial love** that **seeks the best for the loved one.**

God is not simply the source of love. God is the source of the truest of love... the highest of love.

**This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven. - 1 John 4:10 (GNT)**

As Richard Baxter posed...

***“Is it a small thing in your eyes to be loved by God – to be the son, the spouse, the love, the delight of the King of glory? Christian, believe this, and think about it: you will be eternally embraced in the arms of the love which was from everlasting, and will extend to everlasting – of the love which brought the Son of God's love from heaven to earth, from earth to the cross. That love will eternally embrace you.” - Richard Baxter***

Our love of God begins with God. [2]

**We love because he loved us first. - 1 John 4:19**

When we think about loving God...we tend to think... of such love as a basic proposition... one we agree is good...and we **quickly concentrate on being more and more obedient to prove it.**

> We can miss the point that it is speaking to what the key to obedience is.

It is a response to the love that begins in God.

**Our love will grow** by **focusing more intently on his love** for me than on my own self generated love for him.

**Our love for God is the truest relationship we can have with God.**

In any relationship.... **we can relate** out of **different mindsets** and **motives.** You can help someone **because of the position they have** in your life... boss...or spouse... **or because you deem someone to be good**...and that they **deserve your service**... or it could be because they **have loved you with the deepest of love and loyalty** and you have become bound to them

It is the **same with God.** There are different depths....each fitting...but one is the most fitting.

The Bible speaks of fearing God.

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.  
- Proverbs 9:10**

**Fear – recognition that God is the source of life... to whom we are accountable**

It is not referring to fearing in the way you fear someone who wants to harm you...but rather **the good sense... the wisdom...**of knowing that there is a source in which all life is bound...and to whom we are accountable. [3]

**This is not the fear that hides us from punishment...** but the fear that **humbles us in our position.**

**Duty – aware of what God deserves because He is true and right.**

Such a **duty is entirely fitting.** God deserves to be honored and obeyed.

**But obligation will always lack** what is **satisfying** and **sustaining.**

To obey out of duty raises us to understand obedience in our minds, but not in our hearts.

And we all know...that **if someone does what we want...but only out of duty...**not because they want to... we have not come to the relationship we really long for.

**Love – desiring to please God because of a deep and personal knowledge of His sacrificial love and kindness.**

Obedience to God is not only fitting of His position as the source and center of life... not only deserving of our duty... but it is how we respond to His love...to His lovingkindness.

As the Scriptures explain,

**God's kindness leads you to repentance ...that is, to change your inner self, your old way of thinking—to seek His purpose for your life - Romans 2:4 (AMP)**

And Jesus says that the obedience God seeks is that which flows with love. [4]

**John 14:23**

**Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.**

What is he describing?

Our truest relationship ...our most fitting relationship with God...is that which flows from love.

One in which **the motive for obedience...is our love for God...** rooted in God's love for us.

It is not duty....but desire.

When you really love someone **it is your desire to please that person.** Desire seeks to please

God...and **to be close to God...**and Jesus describes that such desire is **met by the presence of God.**

As we make our home in God...God makes His home in us.

He is describing how obedience is what flows most naturally from love.... from inward desire.

It is more than simply our duty...it's our desire. While we can obey from duty... which is quite fitting... when the relationship is fully engaged... we it will be our desire to obey.

**Fear... duty...and love...** these are **not exclusive from one another...** but **rather they move from what is known** with only a basic relationship,...creature to creator... to that of one who begins to grasp the goodness... such good deserves my obedience ... it's a fitting duty.

But human life was created for a relating ...spirit to Spirit... and able to know the nature of love...where the will can choose to act with intention....and understand it.

That is what it meant to be those who were called out to bless the world... they were his people rooted in this reality.

**Over and over the prophets** had spoken of how their hearts had become **unresponsive... to God's mercy...and faithfulness.**

**This is what Jesus was calling out** when asked what matters most.  
It was this love that **had been lost...even upon the religiously devout.**

**Religious performance can replace real relationship.**

In the **final book of the Bible**...the apostle John is given a vision...which includes Jesus speaking prophetically about the condition of different groups. And **regarding the church of Ephesus** he says,

**Revelation 2:2-4 (NKJV)**

**"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; <sup>3</sup> and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. <sup>4</sup> Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.**

Hard words to hear.

He speaks with **deep appreciation**... wanting them to know that he sees their **hard work**... their **deep commitment to truth** ...and their **steadfast nature**. They have done so much well...**but they have drifted from the heart beneath it all.**

**He is calling them back to that first love.**

And I believe that many of us can hear that need in our own live.

We may be **trying to do the right things**...but with **more duty than desire.**

**How can we restore our first love... our love for God?**

- **What does it mean to love God?**

- **How can I know if I truly love God, or if I only give verbal assent to loving God?**

**That is what we have prepared as our focus over the next 6 weeks.**

**Today is the conclusion of this series...but really the lead into another.**

**Next week... begins the final 6 weeks** before Easter weekend... before GF and Easter Sunday.

And **next Sunday** we will begin a **series entitled:**

**First Love: Forming Our Love for God**

Each week will provide a core step in how to renew our first love for God.

**Closing**

As we conclude the wider focus on assessing what is going on within our inner lives...and how we are engaging this gift called life...I believe God's word to us is... **Let Love Lead.**

**God is love...and the whole of eternal reality is rooted in His love.**

**Amidst all the darkness...there is light.**

**Amidst all the hatred...there is love.**

Jesus stepped into a world that was ruled... enslaved... and declared love rules.

God wants you to live into love...and to live out of such love.

Our vision... **"to become increasingly centered and satisfied in God."**

Realized that is the goal... ongoing... serves to realign me... call me further.

**It begins with accepting his love and forgiveness – INVITATION PRAYER**

Close with this blessing

**Ephesians 3:17-19**

**I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

**Notes:**

1. Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

2. Also – “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” - John 13:34

3. Regarding such fear, there is a healthy fear that humbles....but also a fear that hides. One is foundational... the other is an obstacle. To this, John writes of how that fear of punishment has been cast out by God...and is working a perfecting work in us. As noted well,

“The Bible says that "perfect love casts out fear" ([1 John 4:18](#)). What is perfect love and how exactly does perfect love cast out fear? To truly understand this verse, we must look at the passage leading up to it. John writes, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ... By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love" ([1 John 4:9–18](#)).

In this verse, the Greek for the phrase "perfect love" is *teleios agape* and "perfected in love" is *teleioo agape*. "Perfect" here is referring to that which is mature or complete. It is not just a love that is whole, but it is a love that has been completed. The Greek word used here for love, *agape*, is the highest of the four Greek words for love. It refers to a self-sacrificial, unconditional love, full of good will toward its object. To say that "perfect love casts out fear" is to say that "mature, completed, unconditional love that wants the best for you casts out fear."

- From “What does 'perfect love casts out fear' mean?” - [here](#)

[First John 4:18](#) says that “perfect love casts out fear.” The whole verse says this: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” The context here is important: verse 17 says, “This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.”

The “fear” that perfect love casts out is the fear of God’s judgment. We know that [Judgment Day](#) is coming, but those who are in Christ know the love of God, which drives away fear of condemnation. The dismissal of the fear of judgment is one of the main functions of God’s love. The person without Christ is under judgment and has plenty to fear ([John 3:18](#)), but, once a person is in Christ, the fear of judgment is gone. He is reconciled to God, and “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” ([Romans 8:1](#)).

Part of understanding the love of God is knowing that God’s judgment fell on Jesus at the cross so that we can be spared: “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” ([Isaiah 53:6](#)).

4. Again, in John 14:15, Jesus said: "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

