

Bible Passage

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

⁴“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Outline**1. Introduction**

- a. Explanation of the Shema from Deuteronomy 6.
- b. Importance of understanding "heart," "soul," and "strength" in loving God.

2. Heart, Soul, and Strength

- a. Definition and significance of each term: Heart (Levav), Soul (Nephesh), and Strength.
- b. Jesus' addition of "mind" in Mark 12:29 and its implications.

3. Loving God With Emotion

- a. Emotion as a fundamental aspect of our relationship with God.
- b. Psalm 42's illustration of deep emotional yearning for God.
- c. David's example of expressive worship.
- d. Balancing emotion with other aspects of worship and love for God.

4. Loving God Through Study

- a. Study as an integral part of loving God.
- b. Role of Scripture in fueling emotion and understanding.
- c. Approaching Scripture with humility and a transformative mindset.

- d. The harmonization of emotion and intellect in worship.

5. **Loving God From Our Identity**

- a. The concept of identity in spiritual life, as seen in 1 John 3.
- b. Contrast between worldly identity and being children of God.
- c. Embracing our identity as children of God in all aspects of life.

6. **Loving God In Action**

- a. Jesus' teachings on the active aspect of loving God.
- b. The relationship between faith, works, and obedience to God's commandments.
- c. The role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers for action.
- d. Practical implications of loving God through actions in the community and the world.

Notes

The Shema, a central Jewish prayer from Deuteronomy 6, instructs believers to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength. This command is deeply ingrained in Jewish culture, often memorized even by young children. It encapsulates a profound and multifaceted concept of love towards God, going beyond mere ritualistic expression. In examining this command, it's important to understand the meanings of "heart," "soul," and "strength" in their original Hebrew context. The heart (Levav) is not just about emotions, but encompasses the entire inner being, including thoughts and will. The soul (Nephesh) refers to one's identity and entire personhood, representing the essence of life. Strength implies the actions and outward expressions that arise from one's being. Jesus' reference to this command in Mark 12:29 adds another dimension, including the mind, which highlights a Greek understanding of the distinction between emotional and rational aspects of the self.

Loving God, as per this commandment, is an all-encompassing commitment. It involves every aspect of a person: emotions, thoughts, will, identity, and actions. This love is not just a feeling or a set of actions but is an integral part of one's very being. However, individuals often have differing inclinations towards how they express this love. Some are more emotionally driven, others are more thoughtful or action-oriented. Recognizing and addressing these personal biases and tendencies is crucial in fully embracing the command to love God wholly. It's about

leveraging one's strengths in love while also developing and nurturing the aspects that are less natural to oneself. Thus, the essence of this teaching is to cultivate a love for God that is comprehensive and integrated into every facet of one's life, encompassing emotions, intellect, identity, and actions in equal measure.

Psalm 42, with its vivid imagery of a deer longing for water, beautifully captures the intense desire of the soul for God. This longing is not just a superficial yearning; it's a deep, emotive response rooted in our very being. It reflects a fundamental aspect of our relationship with the Lord, one that begins with heartfelt emotions and is influenced by our experiences and expectations of God's actions in the past, present, and future.

This emotional response is not to be dismissed as mere sentimentality. Emotions are a crucial part of our worship and connection with God. They are authentic expressions of our love and awe for Him. However, it's vital to strike a balance. While emotions are important, they should not dominate our worship or relationship with God to the exclusion of other aspects. David's example, dancing with abandon before the Lord, underscores the importance and authenticity of expressing our love for God in a raw, emotional manner. It's a reminder that worship and love for God can and should involve our entire being, including our emotions. This type of worship is encouraged, not something to be feared or repressed.

The call to love God with all our heart is not limited to emotional expression. It extends to a thoughtful, meditative engagement with God's Word. Loving God involves a deep study of

scripture, which fuels our emotions and enriches our understanding. Knowledge of God's Word is not just an intellectual exercise; it's meant to ignite our passion and deepen our emotional connection with Him. When studying scripture, it's crucial to approach it with humility and a willingness to be transformed, not just to accumulate knowledge or validate pre-existing beliefs. Scripture should lead us to worship, not arrogance. It's a conversation with God, an opportunity to listen and be changed. Therefore, loving God is an integrated, holistic experience. It's not about choosing between emotion and intellect, but about harmonizing them. Our worship should be both a heartfelt emotional response and a thoughtful, reflective engagement with God's Word. This approach allows us to fully embrace and express our love for God, encompassing all aspects of our being.

Understanding our identity in relation to God is a profound aspect of spiritual life. This identity transcends physical or societal labels and is rooted in a deeper spiritual reality. The passage from 1 John chapter 3 emphasizes this by stating that believers are called the children of God. This designation is not just a title; it's an expression of our transformed nature and relationship with the Lord.

The concept of the soul is central here. In spiritual discourse, the soul isn't just a part of our being; it represents our entire identity. It's who we are at the most fundamental level. This contrasts with worldly views that often tie identity to external factors like profession, nationality, or even physical attributes.

While these may describe aspects of our lives, they don't encapsulate our true essence.

In a world increasingly focused on self-definition and personal identity, there's a tendency to look either inward, to one's own feelings and thoughts, or outward, to societal labels and roles, for a sense of self. However, both approaches have limitations. Looking inward can lead to introspective confusion, as the inner self is complex and not always clear. Looking outward can lead to adopting identities imposed by society, which might not align with one's true self.

The Gospel offers a different perspective. It suggests that our true identity is found in being children of God. This identity is not derived from our own perceptions or society's labels but is bestowed by God Himself. It transcends the limitations and ambiguities of worldly identities.

Embracing this identity involves more than just acknowledging it; it requires integrating it into every aspect of our lives. It means loving God with all our soul, which entails loving Him with our entire being. This love is not just an emotional response or intellectual assent but a deep, holistic commitment that influences how we live, think, feel, and relate to others.

The implication is profound: if our primary identity is as children of God, then every other aspect of our lives should align with this truth. Our actions, thoughts, emotions, and relationships should reflect this fundamental identity. In a world that often presents conflicting and confusing ideas about identity, the Gospel offers a clear, unambiguous answer: our true identity is found in our relationship with God, as His beloved children. This

understanding liberates us from the constraints and confusions of worldly identities and allows us to live in the fullness of our true spiritual nature.

The vision series focuses on loving God with all of one's strength, as taught in Jesus' words. Jesus emphasizes that loving Him is intrinsically linked to action - specifically, obeying His commandments. This perspective shifts the concept of love from a mere emotional or romantic notion to a more practical and active one. Jesus' instruction is clear: if we love Him, we will follow His teachings and commands. This idea is further supported in the book of James, which discusses the relationship between faith and works. James clarifies that while salvation is not by works, genuine faith naturally produces works. This suggests that actions are a critical component of a faith-filled life.

Jesus' teachings are straightforward: love God and love others. This is not just a passive feeling but involves active engagement in the world. The Great Commission, which commands us to go and make disciples of all nations, exemplifies this action-oriented love. It's not about staying comfortable in familiar settings; it's about reaching out, engaging with the world, and making a tangible difference. However, this action is not just human effort; it's divinely inspired and empowered. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to be with and in believers, guiding and empowering them for these tasks. This ensures that the actions taken are not solely based on human ability or understanding but are driven and influenced by the Holy Spirit.

In practice, this means being active in sharing faith, serving others, and participating in community life. It's about loving God

through tangible actions, both within the church community and beyond its walls. This active love is an expression of our relationship with God, fueled by the Holy Spirit. The church, then, becomes a dynamic, action-oriented community, where each member is encouraged to actively participate in loving God and others. It's compared to a playground where everyone is freely engaging, exploring, and enjoying their faith journey. Ultimately, loving God with all one's strength is about living out faith in practical, actionable ways, guided by the Holy Spirit. It's a call to active engagement, not just within the church but in the broader world, embodying the love of God in every action and interaction.