

Small Group Guide: The Greatest Command

Sermon Series: Listening to Jesus' Words

Text: Mark 12:28-34

Core Message: Love God most in order to love others best.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin by asking God to open hearts and minds to understand what it means to live out the greatest command in everyday life.

Icebreaker Question (10 minutes)

Question: When you think about the word "love," what comes to mind? How would you define it in your own words?

Key Takeaways

1. The Greatest Command is Two-in-One

Jesus quotes two Old Testament passages (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18) but treats them as inseparable. You cannot love God without loving people, and you cannot truly love people without loving God.

2. Jesus Speaks with Authority

Jesus doesn't answer as a commentator or rabbi citing other sources. He speaks as the Lawgiver himself—the one who gets to define what is good and greatest.

3. Jesus Fulfilled What He Commanded

Jesus didn't just teach the greatest command; He lived it perfectly. He loved the Father most, which led Him to love us best—even to the point of dying for His enemies.

4. Love is Defined by God, Not Culture

We don't get to define love however we want. True love is defined by God's Word and modeled by Jesus. It includes both spiritual reconciliation and tangible care for people's present needs.

5. Scripture Shapes Us into Loving People

The Bible doesn't give us a verse for every situation, but it provides all the wisdom we need to love God and others well in any circumstance.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text (15 minutes)

1. **Why was the scribe's question different from the previous trap questions Jesus received?** What does this tell us about Jesus being a safe person to bring our questions to?
2. **What does it mean that Jesus called these two commands "one command"?** Why is it impossible to separate loving God from loving people?
3. **The sermon mentioned that Jesus answered "with authority" rather than as a commentator. What does this reveal about who Jesus claims to be?**

Personal Reflection (20 minutes)

4. **The "empty room test" was mentioned: Why should you do good when it costs you or when no one is watching?** How would you answer that question? What motivates your goodness?
5. **Which guardrail do you struggle with more?**
 - Loving God without loving people (religious performance without compassion)
 - Loving people without loving God (compassion disconnected from God's truth)
6. **The sermon said, "If you're reading Scripture and you don't love God more or others better, then you're reading it wrong."** How does this challenge the way you approach the Bible?

Practical Application (20 minutes)

7. **What would it look like practically for you to "love God most" this week?** Be specific. (Examples: prayer habits, worship, Scripture reading, obedience in a specific area)
8. **What would it look like for you to "love others best" this week?** Think of someone specific—a family member, neighbor, coworker, or even an enemy. What tangible action could you take?
9. **The sermon mentioned that Jesus loved His enemies enough to die for them. Who in your life is hardest to love right now?** How might God be calling you to show them love this week?

10. **The scribe was "not far from the kingdom" but "not yet in." Do you know anyone who admires Jesus' wisdom but hasn't yet entrusted their life to Him? How can you pray for them? How might you invite them into a conversation about Jesus?**

Action Steps

Choose one or two action steps to commit to this week:

- **Memorize the greatest command** (Mark 12:30-31) and pray it each morning.
- **Identify one person** you struggle to love and do one specific act of kindness for them this week.
- **Spend 15 minutes daily** reading Scripture with this question in mind: "How does this passage help me love God more or love others better?"
- **Have a conversation** with someone who is spiritually curious but not yet following Jesus.
- **Meet a tangible need** in your community—volunteer, give financially, or serve someone in need.
- **Confess to a trusted friend** an area where you've been loving God without loving people, or vice versa, and ask for accountability.

Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Read together: Romans 5:8

"But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Reflect: Jesus loved us at our worst. He loved us when we were His enemies. How does remembering this truth change the way we approach loving difficult people?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

- Pray for each person to experience God's love more deeply this week.
- Pray for specific people or situations mentioned during discussion.
- Ask God to make your group a community known for loving God most in order to love others best.

- **Further Study:** Read 1 John 4:7-21 (the relationship between loving God and loving others)

- **Reflection Question for the Week:** "Am I near the kingdom but not yet in? Or am I growing deeper in my relationship with Jesus?"
- ## 5-Day Devotional: The Greatest Command

 - **Day 1: Love God Most**
 - **Reading:** Deuteronomy 6:4-9
 - **Devotional:** The Shema was prayed by faithful Jews morning and evening—a rhythm of remembering who God is and what He deserves. Jesus himself likely prayed these words daily. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" isn't asking for partial devotion or casual interest. It's a call to maximum effort, complete surrender. Consider this: what would it look like to love God with everything you have today? Not just in your prayers, but in your decisions, your conversations, your spending, your rest? The greatest life begins with the greatest love—loving the One who is greatest. When God has your whole heart, everything else finds its proper place.
 - **Day 2: Love Flows From Being Loved**
 - **Reading:** Romans 5:6-11
 - **Devotional:** We weren't saved because we finally got our act together. Paul makes it clear: "While we were still enemies, Christ died for us." Jesus didn't wait for us to clean up before He loved us. He loved us at our worst, in our rebellion, when we were unlovable. This is the foundation of the greatest command. We love because we were first loved—radically, sacrificially, completely. You cannot manufacture this kind of love through willpower or good intentions. It flows from encountering the love of God in Christ. Today, pause and remember: you are loved not because of what you do, but because of what Jesus has done. Let that truth reshape how you love others.
 - **Day 3: Love Without Action Is Empty**
 - **Reading:** James 2:14-17; 1 John 4:19-21
 - **Devotional:** Faith without works is dead. Love without action is a lie. James confronts us with an uncomfortable truth: saying "be warm and fed" to someone in need while doing nothing is worthless. John goes further—if you claim to love God but hate your brother, you're a liar. The greatest command refuses to let us separate loving God from loving people. They're inseparable. Real love shows up. It gets inconvenienced. It costs something. Look around today: who needs more than your words? Who needs your presence, your resources, your time? Loving others best isn't theoretical—it's tangible, practical, and often uncomfortable. Let your faith move your feet.
 - **Day 4: Guided by Scripture, Not Instinct**
 - **Reading:** Psalm 119:105-112
 - **Devotional:** How do we know what love looks like in complex situations? Our culture offers a thousand definitions of love, but without God's truth, we're prescribing medicine for undiagnosed diseases. Scripture is our lamp and light—not a rulebook with an entry for every situation, but the wisdom that forms us into people who can love rightly. The psalmist didn't just read God's word; he treasured it, obeyed it, delighted in it. When Scripture shapes your heart and mind, you become the kind of person who instinctively

knows how to love God and others in any circumstance. Don't just read the Bible—let it read you. Meditate on it. Let it reorder your loves.

- **Day 5: Not Far, But Not Yet In**

- **Reading:** Mark 12:28-34

- **Devotional:** The scribe understood Jesus' teaching. He agreed it was right. Jesus looked at him with what must have been both affirmation and longing: "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Not far—but not yet in. Agreement isn't allegiance. Admiring Jesus' wisdom isn't the same as surrendering to His lordship. Jesus doesn't want your intellectual assent; He wants you. He invites you to move from "You are right, teacher" to "You are Lord." Perhaps you're close today—you see the beauty of this life, you recognize the truth. But Jesus is calling you across the threshold, from near to in, from observer to follower. The kingdom belongs not to those who merely admire, but to those who enter—who pledge their whole lives to the One who gave His whole life for them.

In what ways do you find yourself trying to love people without loving God, or loving God without genuinely loving people?

How does the concept that science can describe moral behavior but cannot tell us what is good challenge or affirm your understanding of morality?

What would change in your life if you truly applied the 'empty room test' - doing what is good when there are no consequences, no credit, and no audience?

Jesus claims authority not just as a moral teacher but as the lawgiver himself. How does this claim affect your willingness to follow his commands?

In what practical ways can you love your enemies as Jesus commanded, especially those who actively oppose or hurt you?

How does understanding that Jesus loved his Father most in order to love you best reshape your view of the cross and what Jesus accomplished?

Are there areas in your life where you've been reading Scripture but it hasn't made you more loving toward God or others, suggesting a distorted interpretation?

What is the difference between being near the kingdom of God and actually entering it, and where do you honestly find yourself today?

How can we as a community balance caring for people's immediate physical needs with their ultimate need for reconciliation with God?

If loving God most means living with Scripture as your guide rather than cultural pressure or instinct, what specific life decisions might you need to reconsider?