

## :: summary

In a world full of so much uncertainty, many of us, like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, are looking for a sense of assurance and control that easily leads to a legalistic relationship with God. In his response to a question about which of God's laws is the most important one to keep, Jesus provides an answer that not only sums up the message of God's word and his purpose for humanity, but also articulates the difference between abundant life with God and just doing legalistic religious activity. He offers a vision for the lives of his disciples.

## :: discussion

Generally speaking, the level of access you allow others into your personal life is a pretty good indicator of the level of intimacy in a relationship and a basis for how we define relationships in categories like acquaintance, companion, friend, best friend and use descriptors like superficial, close, intimate, etc.

As you consider the level of access you allow God in your life at this point, what words would you use to describe your relationship with Him?

Read Mark 12:28-31

A rabbi who takes notice of Jesus' authority approaches Jesus with a significant question about the most important of the commandments found in the *Torah*, which literally means "instruction" and refers to God's teaching and Law He provided in His word. Essentially, the question is, "What is the great essence of God's teaching?" to which Jesus gives a twofold reply: to love God with all of who you are and love your neighbor.

What does this question and response indicate about the ultimate goals and priorities of Christian life?

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-12

After leading Israel through the desert for 40 years as God showed them who He is and prepared them for the good life with Him in the land He would provide for them, Moses, who speaks as God's messenger, is giving Israel final instructions before his death. These are the words Jesus uses to explain the essence of God's teaching and what it means to love God in complete devotion with all your heart (affections), soul (life), mind (thoughts) and strength (abilities) that make up your whole self.

As you consider the four realms of your life (heart, soul, mind and strength), how does God rank in priority in each of those areas? Practically speaking, what would it look like for God to occupy first place in all four realms of your life?

Read John 15:10-13

Speaking to his disciples before his crucifixion, Jesus affirms the command to love one another as an extension of love for God. When we acknowledge God on His throne as Lord of our lives and our top priority in all things, we as disciples of Jesus who are learning to take on his likeness are able to express his character and love those around us the way God does.

What "noble" behaviors are being exercised and which selfish or "base" instincts are being denied as we love others over ourselves?

When asked what the essence of God's teaching is, Jesus responded with the commands to love God and love others saying, "There is no greater command than these," because these two teachings are the basis for intimate, transformative relationship with God, and all Christian activity that makes up the Jesus way of life.



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