

**:: summary**

You might be able to cram before a multiple-choice test, but you can't cram before a piano recital. Learning a song takes hours of practice, discipline and dedication, but the sound of a piece of music coming to life is a great reward, especially in the hands of someone who had dedicated their life to practice. You were made to worship God and enjoy Him forever, and your life becomes a beautiful worship song played in God's presence as you dedicate yourself to Him, practice His ways of life and engage Him through spiritual disciplines.

**:: discussion**

In ancient Israelite tradition, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is the beginning of what is called the *Shema* (shuh-mah) – a daily prayer of dedication to God and His ways of life for us. In its historical context, as Israel was about to finally enter the land God had promised to them, Moses spoke to the people about obeying the commands and maintaining the spiritual disciplines God had given them over their 40 years in the desert so they would continue to experience the blessings of life with God.

Does the word “discipline” carry a positive or negative connotation in your mind? How, if at all, does the word “discipline” fit into your life with God right now?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

The *Shema*, is named after the first Hebrew word at the beginning of verse 4, which means, “listen” or “hear.” In Jewish culture, to hear implies action and response, and love is synonymous with obedience. What Moses wants Israel to hear is that God stands alone as the one true God, and there is only one appropriate response for Israel to have toward Him: love that engages the heart, soul and mind, expressed in obedience to God.

What does this Biblical understanding of hearing and love suggest about the proper motivation for engaging in spiritual disciplines and keeping God's commands?

Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9

A very literal interpretation and application of these passages resulted in orthodox Jewish practices where Scriptures are physically bound to foreheads and hands and doorframes. A non-literal interpretation stresses the notion of obedience, as we love God in our personal life and teach those who are younger than us to love God through the practice of spiritual disciplines intended to be integrated into every aspect of our daily lives.

When you consider what it means to love God with all your heart, soul and mind, what practical daily rhythms and disciplines could you incorporate into your life to express that love? How could you teach and share those disciplines with someone younger than you?

Read Acts 2:41-47

This picture of the thriving early church provides a model for integrating essential disciplines into the community life of people devoted to the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer.

How could these four spiritual disciplines be fully expressed in Christian community life today?

God lovingly made you to worship Him and enjoy Him forever, and the only appropriate response to God's love is to love him back by obeying His commands. When you dedicate yourself to God, practice His ways of life, and teach others to do the same, your life becomes worship and you will experience the blessings of life with God. That's what you are made for.

