

Your Obedience to Jesus Can Be Summed Up in This Simple Command

If you're reading this, I know something extraordinary about you: *You're alive.*

That's a tremendous gift—and it's also terrifying. The life you're living right now, the life I'm living? It's not a dress rehearsal. This is the real deal.

I'll be honest—that terrifies me as the one writing this. If you read it, then you won't get the time back. So I want to make the time count, yours and mine, by talking about what truly matters in life. The things that give us actual purpose and joy. If we take the time to read something, it had better help us *live* in a new way.

Which takes us to the art of living. If we get only one shot at today, at life, how can we best live? Who should we be? How should we move through our days?

Turns out that God can show us what we're looking for.

It probably won't surprise you to hear that the Old Testament contains a ton of commandments—a whopping 613 of them!

But in the New Testament, Jesus sums all of them up in a single commandment: Start by loving God with your entire being, and follow that up with loving others the way you'd like to be loved.

We see this in God's Word in a section usually called "The Greatest Commandment." Here's the version told in the Gospel of Mark:

One of the scribes came and heard them reasoning together.

Perceiving that Jesus had answered them well, he asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, that there is one God and there is no other but Him. To love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

The scene starts when a first-century superlawyer—not a court-of-law practitioner but an expert in the law of Moses—asks Jesus a question. And the question seems to be motivated by a pretty good instinct. (Just because he's a lawyer doesn't make him the bad guy in the story.) He notices Jesus is giving some great answers to all the trick questions the religious leaders are peppering him with.

So he goes for the CliffsNotes. Remember those? You'd have a test coming up about, say, *Moby Dick*, except you were only on page 13 of the book and the test was the next day. So you'd grab one of those black-and-yellow lifesavers, and an hour later you'd be set. That's similar to what the superlawyer is doing. He must be thinking to himself, *This teacher knows all the answers. Let's take a shortcut through all the extra stuff to see if he can answer the question that actually matters.*

It's our question too. How are we meant to live? With all the distractions and different ways of living, what's the main thing ... and then, how do we actually live it out?

As we see in Mark 12, Jesus' answer is deceptively simple: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength . . . [And] love your neighbor as yourself" (verses 30–31).

Heart, soul, mind and strength.

These make up your control center, your emotions and will, your intellect and your bodily abilities—pretty much all of you.

During the time when Jesus was ministering, faithful Jews would have recited part of the greatest commandment every day. Some of them would even have carried it around on index cards in their pockets or had it displayed on the lock screens of their phones. It was a big deal—but Jesus did something even bigger with it.

See, there's a movement to what Jesus talks about here, and the movement defines our lives; upward, inward, outward.

That's the movement described in the greatest commandment. Loving God takes us up, learning how to love ourselves takes us in, and then we go out and love our neighbors.

And what's fascinating about Jesus' answer is that we *already* live upward, inward and outward. We can't help it. All of us relate to God in a certain way, all of us treat ourselves a certain way and all of us treat others a certain way.

Jesus isn't telling us to do something no human has ever done. He's not saying, "Fly like a bird!" or "Run at the speed of light!" or "Live life from old age to infancy!" Rather, he's saying we need to make sure that what we're already doing, naturally, is properly oriented.

And why do we naturally live upward, inward and outward? Because we were created to! But what if I told you that the needs you feel on a moment-by-moment basis are designed to

draw you into a new way of living?

Let that land for a moment.

The needs you experience are invitations.

Let me explain. All of us are created with deep, profound needs, so naturally we seek to satisfy those needs. But unfortunately, we often seek to satisfy those needs in ways that are not only unsatisfying but also sometimes downright harmful.

We often mistake distraction for satisfaction! But a need deferred or ignored is not the same as a need fulfilled. That's why Jesus invites us into *God*-designed ways of living that will meet our needs as nothing else ever can.

But it's up to us to respond to this invitation to join him on the journey.

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