

Living on Mission

Mark 12:28-34

Rev. Brian Bill

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People love to give their thoughts about who is “The Greatest of All Time,” otherwise known as “The G.O.A.T.” We enjoy debating about who is at the top or what is the ultimate as we make top ten lists and categorize accordingly.

- **Who is the greatest athlete?** Those making this list include Michael Jordan, Usain Bolt, Serena Williams, and Katelyn Clark.
- **What’s the greatest invention?** Suggestions include the wheel, writing, electricity, the printing press, the computer, the Internet, and of course, cheese curds.
- **What’s the greatest movie?** While there is a lot of debate about this one, films like Casablanca, Schindler’s List, Lord of the Rings, and Gone with the Wind vie for the top spot.
- **What’s the greatest state?** Right, Wisconsin.

One day a religious guy came up to Jesus and wanted to know which commandment was the greatest of all time. It’s the last week of Jesus’ life and He’s just cleared out the temple and chased away the moneychangers. As a result, His enemies have unleashed a hurricane of hatred toward Him. After disposing of the Pharisees and the Herodians and making the Sadducees sad, a scribe sought out Jesus because he heard that He **“answered them well,”** which means, *“admirably or beautifully.”*

Please turn to Mark 12:28-31: ***“And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that He answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which commandment is the most important of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And 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.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”***

We’re continuing in our series called, “Mission Ready.” Here’s our main idea for today: *If we want to live on mission, we must love God supremely and love our neighbors sincerely.*

Scribes were men who copied the Scriptures by hand, they were *teachers* who taught the Torah, and they were known as *lawyers* because they often ruled on disputes. This seeking scribe came to Jesus with a question: **“Which commandment is the most important of all?”** Another version reads, **“Which is the first commandment of all?”**

Let me ask you, *“How many commandments are there?”* 10? A first-century Jew would say 613 because the Pharisees had counted them: 248 were positive: *“do this”* or *“do that”* and 365 were negative: *“don’t do this, don’t do that.”* For them, a *“don’t a day”* kept the devil away!

The answer Jesus gives to the question about which commandment is the most important is simple and yet summarizes the entire teaching of Scripture: *Love God supremely and love your neighbor sincerely.*

1. Prioritize love for God. The top priority, the consummate command is so important that Jesus quotes “The Shema,” which literally means, *“to hear”* and comes from the first word of Deuteronomy 6:4: **“Shema, Israel...”** Look at His answer recorded in Mark 12:29: **“The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’”**

We might say, *“Listen up!”* The *Shema* is a declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to the Almighty. These words were recited when rising in the morning and when going to bed at night. It was the first prayer a Jewish child was taught to pray, and it was the last thing a Jew would pray prior to death. We’re to love God for who He is, and we’re to love Him with all we are.

- **Love God for who He is.** Jesus goes right to Scripture to establish three truths about God.
 - **God is powerful.** The name **“Lord”** is Yahweh, the self-existent one. The name **“God”** is Elohim, the Creator, and is in the plural, which is early evidence for the Trinity.
 - **God is personal.** We see this in the phrase, **“our God.”** Verse 30 adds, **“your God.”** God is powerful *and* He is personal; He is majestic, *and* He is mine; He is other, *and* He is ours. Warren Wiersbe points out that Jesus’ answer reveals how we are to live *“not by rules but by*

relationships.” Do you have a personal relationship with God? Can you say He is your God?

- **God is preeminent.** Next, we see Yahweh is unique: **“the Lord is one.”** This is a powerful statement of uniqueness and exclusivity. He is one in essence and existence, and there is no other. J. Vernon McGee translates it this way: *“Jehovah our Elohim is one Jehovah.”* We could render it, *“The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.”*
- **Love God with all you are.** Verse 30: **“And 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.”** The phrase, **“And you shall love...”** is a command in the future imperative. It can be translated like this, *“You will love...”* This word for love speaks of a never-ending, unchanging, unconditional, all-consuming loyal love.

The word **“all”** is used four times, and literally means, *“the entire, the whole.”* God’s whole-hearted love for us cannot be answered with half-hearted commitment from us. By describing the heart, soul, mind, and strength, no area is left out. We’re to love Him with everything we have – with devotion in our hearts, with passion in our souls, with thoughtfulness in our minds, and with passionate energy through our hands and our feet. Kent Hughes says it well: *“It does not take much of a man to be a believer, but it takes all there is of him.”*

We’re to love Him ahead of everything else and love Him fervently with every faculty of our being. Ponder these words from Isaac Watts: *“Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”* I like this honesty from William Cowper: *“Lord, it is my chief complaint that my love is cold and faint; yet I love Thee and adore; O for grace to love Thee more.”*

The first part of the answer Jesus gives covers the vertical dimension. Next, He describes what love looks like on the horizontal level.

If we want to live on mission, we must love God supremely and love our neighbors sincerely.

2. Practice loving your neighbors. Not surprisingly, Jesus quotes Scripture again in verse 31: **“The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’**

There is no other commandment greater than these.” This reference comes in the middle of Leviticus 19:18. The people standing there didn’t see this one coming because these two commands were never linked together before. Matthew 22:39 introduces it this way, ***“The second is like it...”*** showing how love for God and love for our neighbors is linked.

Notice again that *agape* love is used. We’re to love our neighbors with limitless and unconditional love. I like how the Believer’s Bible Commentary puts it: *“We are to love God more than ourselves, and our neighbor as ourselves. Thus, the life that really counts is concerned first with God, then with others.”*

Listen to the rest of Leviticus 19:18: ***“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”*** We must give up our grudges and grievances and refuse to take vengeance on a neighbor who has wronged us. Notice we’re to love our neighbors *because* God says, ***“I am the LORD.”***

Don’t be like the woman in Florida who bulldozed her neighbor’s mobile home because she didn’t like them. When asked why she did it, she said, *“Because the people who lived there were unsavory...I consider what I did a favor to the neighborhood.”* She’s now facing a felony charge. This reminds me of a meme I came across: *“Mister Rogers didn’t adequately prepare me for the people in my neighborhood!”*

Since He is Lord, I must love Him, and I must love those whom He loves, which is everyone. His self-declaration of who He is makes me obligated to love Him and to love others. And how I treat others is inseparably linked to how I view God. If I’m not obeying the second commandment, I’m disobeying the first. We must keep the order straight – our priority is to love God and proceeding from that, we must love others. If we just love others, we can fall into humanism. If we only focus on God, we’ll become disconnected from people.

Then, Jesus states: ***“There is no other commandment greater than these.”*** It’s interesting that though this man asked for the one greatest commandment, Jesus gave Him two. He did so because loving our neighbors is the practical outworking of loving God. And yet, He uses the singular ***“commandment”*** to show that these two commandments are complementary and cannot be separated because they are really one. *The main thing we must do is to keep the main thing the main thing.* And that main thing is to love God supremely *and* to love our neighbors sincerely.

Seven people are getting baptized this weekend! Since most of them will take place in the 10:45 service, I wanted to share part of the testimony of a woman named Lynette Dopler because it shows how loving God supremely leads to loving our neighbors sincerely. I have her permission to share this.

“The day we came to Pastor Brian to say we wanted to be baptized, I said a silent prayer while my husband was talking with him. I prayed, ‘Lord, give me an opportunity to talk to someone about Jesus.’ My Bible study group knows me and knows I’m more of a listener than a speaker. That very day, a former neighbor of ours stopped by in his car and waved me over. During our conversation, Jesus was brought up, which was something we have never talked about before. He was mad at God for his declining health and family situation. We talked about Jesus, which tested my knowledge...this was my first opportunity to talk about Jesus to someone...shortly after, Kip and I were sitting in our lawn chairs in our driveway discussing the meeting with our former neighbor when two young ladies drove up...and asked if we’d like to talk about Jesus.”

Lynette saw the linkage between fully surrendering to God and the opportunities she had to have gospel conversations. When we start by loving God supremely, He will give us ways to love our neighbors sincerely.

Let’s consider the 10 commandments. Loving God covers the first four and loving our neighbor captures the last six. In Matthew 22:40 Jesus says, **“On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”** The word “depend” means, “to hold up or suspend.” One pastor said it like this: “Everything that God has said, and everything God will ever say is supported and suspended by these two commandments.” The King James says: **“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”**

How we respond to the first commandment (loving God) will determine how we respond to the second (loving our neighbor). When we obey the second, it will give evidence that we have embraced the first. 1 John 4:20 says: **“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar...”** 1 John 4:21 says, **“And this commandment we have from Him: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”**

Many years ago, we had a storm door on the back of our house that needed to be replaced. Every time we opened the door; the top hinge would pop out. The

bottom hinge was OK, but after time the door stopped working correctly. Loving God is like the top hinge of a door and loving others is like the bottom hinge. You need both for everything to work properly.

It's easy to say that we love God; it's another matter to show we love our neighbors. It's obvious when we don't love our neighbors because our attitudes and actions are on open display. I like the honesty of one guy who said, *"To love the world to me is no chore; my big trouble is the guy next door!"*

Notice, Jesus is not saying we should just tolerate our neighbors or just be nice by waving to them once in a while. We're called to be more than just polite and pleasant. We're called to love them in tangible ways. I was challenged by something I read from Kirk Wareham this week:

"The commandment to love our neighbor does not include any qualifiers. It does not say that we should love those who are enjoyable to be around. It does not say we should love those who are nice to us, or who will return a favor. It does not say that we should love those who are easy to get along with. Jesus' commandment to love presumes all our neighbors...each person is unique and marvelous, and each person has a story. That story is important because Genesis 1:27 tells us each person was created in God's image. Sometimes that image is hard to see from the outside, for we see only what our eyes tell us. What we cannot see sometimes is the hurt, the torment, the pain buried deep behind the façade, behind the outer shell. Perhaps if we knew the whole story, we would be filled with compassion, and in the end, we might even love them."

It would be helpful to begin praying something like this: *"Oh, God, don't allow me to come into contact with anyone in need and leave him or her no better off than they were before I met them."*

Here are a few questions to ponder:

- *How can I get better at what Jesus says matters most?*
- *How can I be the best neighbor I can be?*
- *If I moved out of my neighborhood, apartment building, or dorm room, would anyone care? Would anyone even notice?*

Let's turn the noun neighbor into a verb as we look for ways to be intentionally involved in neighboring. The acronym **BLESS** is a helpful guide.

Begin with prayer: *"God, how can I show love to my neighbors?"*

Listen with purpose: Take the time to listen to the needs, struggles and pain of people around you. Be present. Hang out in front of your house or apartment. Make yourself an easy person to bump into.

Eat together: Look for ways to have a cup of coffee, a meal or dessert. Plan a neighborhood block party. We're having another one next month.

Serve in love: Look for ways to respond to the needs, struggles and pain of people. When you see a need, meet that need. 1 Corinthians 10:24: ***"Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."***

Share your story: When the time is right, share the story of how Jesus Christ has changed your life.

We could summarize our responsibility this way: *Love where you live because you live where you live on purpose for God's purposes.* That's what we see in Acts 17:26: ***"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place."***

Most of those we meet have no idea of God's love. You and I may be the only avenue they have to be exposed to His love. If we let God's love flow through us to our neighbors, we'll have a much better chance of winning them to Christ.

The pastoral team recently read a book called, "[The Art of Neighboring](#)." You can pick up a copy at the EdgeCafe Resource Center. Here's a summary:

"What if the solution to our society's biggest issues have been right under our noses for the past two thousand years? When Jesus was asked to reduce everything in the Bible into one command, he said: Love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself. What if He meant that we should love our actual neighbors? You know, the people who live right next door...many of us have hundreds of online 'friends,' but do we know our neighbors? Wouldn't it be great if we could mobilize our people to intentionally obey the second half of the Great Commandment? Imagine how our community would change!"

Imagine how Edgewood would change as neighbors are won to Christ and begin worshipping with us! It would be incredible if God would launch a neighboring movement right here in the Quad City area!

This made me think of another question: *What would happen in our community if we simply got better at the two things Jesus said matter most?*

Several years ago, during a brutal ice storm, a neighborhood lost power for several days. People were cold, frustrated, and isolated in their homes. But one man on the block had a generator and instead of just hunkering down and keeping warm with his family, he did something remarkable.

He grabbed his longest extension cord, walked it over to his neighbor's house, and knocked on the door. "Plug in," he said. "It's not much, but it'll keep your fridge running and a few lights on." Then he walked to the next house. And the next. By the end of the day, extension cords were running like lifelines across yards and driveways.

People came out of their homes to talk, to clear snow, and to share hot soup cooked over propane stoves. That ice storm, which could have isolated everyone, became a catalyst for connection. Weeks later, when the power was restored and life went back to normal, something strange happened: people kept talking. They helped with yard work. Kids played together. All because one man decided his neighbors were worthy loving sincerely.

What if Edgewood became known, not just for our services and programs, but for our extension cords – for our willingness to plug people into hope, warmth, and love? What if your act of neighboring sparked a movement right on your street?

This week, be the one who runs the extension cord.

A few days ago, Beth and I were talking to one of our neighbors who attends SecondWinders and Grief Share. She broke out in a huge smile when she described Roxanne Daugherty, an Edgewood member who leads our Grief Share group. She remarked how loving Roxanne is: "Roxanne calls to check on me. *What a lovely lady and now friend.*" I agreed and said the key is she lives out the Great Commandment by loving God and loving others. To which our neighbor said, "She absolutely does."

When your name comes up in a conversation, do others remark how much you love God and love others?

Here are two simple prayers to pray every day:

1. God, help me to love you more supremely today than I did yesterday.
2. Lord, help me to love my neighbors more sincerely today than I did yesterday.

Here's one action step: *Work at getting to know the names of three of your neighbors this week.*

3. Personally respond to God's love. In verse 32, the scribe responds to Jesus: ***"You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that He is one, and there is no other besides Him."*** It's comical to me that the scribe tells Jesus He's right. Of course, He's right, right?

Then, the man adds: ***"And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."*** He knew his Bible because this is a reference to 1 Samuel 15:22: ***"To obey is better than sacrifice."*** He understood that a relationship with God is far more important than religious rituals.

Jesus responds to the man in verse 34: ***"And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'"*** The phrase, ***"not far from"*** is emphatic in the Greek. He was close, but not in the kingdom. He was good, but not good enough. He was not far from, and yet he was far away. He thought he was on his way, but he had not yet received Jesus as the only way.

Jesus wanted him to see that even though he was close, there was still a chasm between him and the kingdom. He was religious, but did not yet have a saving relationship with the Savior. He was quite literally a few feet away from the King of the Kingdom. *Not far is still too far if you don't make it to where you need to go.*

Do you love anything more than Christ? Are you giving your priority to a possession, a person or a pleasure? Right answers alone don't get us to Heaven; the only way in is by repenting of our sin and receiving Jesus Christ as substitute and

Savior. To be close to the kingdom of God is not the same as being in the kingdom of God. You can be close but still not converted. You can know a lot and not be in the kingdom. Orthodox doctrine is good, but it alone is not enough to keep you from damnation. You can be like the scribe and copy the Scriptures and still not be saved by the Savior. You could be an inch from Heaven and spend eternity in Hell.

Here's the good news today. God is not far from you! Acts 17:27: ***“That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He is actually not far from each one of us.”***

I love how this encounter ends: ***“And after that no one dared to ask Him any more questions.”*** This is a double negative, meaning that absolutely no one, not even one dared to ask any more questions. Why is that? Because some of us don't really want to hear the answers that Jesus gives. And yet, I wonder if someone is not far from the kingdom right now. Could it be that today, right now, is the day that you enter the kingdom of God?

We don't know what happened with this scribe, but we have no indication that he put his faith in Christ and followed Him. How sad to be so close to Christ and not be converted. There was another religious man who had a close conversation with Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that he must be born again to enter the kingdom of Heaven. In John 7, in his capacity as a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus stood up for Christ. And in John 19, Nicodemus assisted with the burial of Jesus and is called one of His disciples in verse 38.

We must move from just having some good feelings about Jesus to putting our faith in Him and following Him. Are you ready to do that right now? Turn from how you've been living. Repent of your loveless life. Recognize that through the death of Jesus, all your sins have been paid for and be born again by repenting and receiving Him by faith as your Lord and Savior.

Will you commit right now to follow Him so that you can love Him and love your neighbor?

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Invitation Prayer

New Members at 10:45

Kip and Lynette Dopler

Kim Rodgers

Lucy Quinn

Kolton Minton