

# Loving God – The 3L's

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2007

**Matthew 22:36-39** Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt **love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind**. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Philip Keller was a shepherd for years who is now a spiritual shepherd over God's people. He has used his life experiences to challenge believers to seek God with their whole heart. Carefully read through the six questions he has put together and allow God to examine your walk with Him.

## Six Soul Searching Questions

Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*

(1) Do I really belong to God? (2) Do I recognize His right to me? (3) Do I respond to His authority and acknowledge His ownership? (4) Do I find freedom and complete fulfillment in this arrangement? (5) Do I have a purpose and deep contentment because I am under His care? (6) Do I know rest and repose (calmness, peace) and a definite sense of exciting adventure in belonging to Him?

Use these questions as a motivation to seek God in a greater way. That is what this article is all about. It won't be easy, but it really is not that difficult either, it is a matter of allowing God to do a work within your heart in such a way that seeks Him as our highest priority and sees Him as our greatest treasure.

## The 3L's of GBC

For years the emphasis of my ministry has been focused on challenging the congregation of Grace Baptist Church to *live* for Christ. We would all agree that is a noble goal. However, my method for obtaining such a goal has changed dramatically. The **3L's** explains the way that I present the great commandment of **Matthew 22:36-39** to the congregation.

**(L#1) Learning About God:** This is step one and is easily and often overlooked resulting in frustration for both the membership and pastors of far too many churches. People hear heart stirring messages and realize their desire for God needs to improve. They leave the service with sincere intentions and yet in most cases nothing changes. This cycle repeats itself leaving the Christian in a spirit of confusion and discouragement. Their focus is on *living for God* without understanding step one of **Learning About God**. Sound Bible preaching is vital, but we must learn how to become a student of God's Word for our own personal Bible Study. Step one cannot be by-passed, it cannot be over-looked. There is no short cut to loving God, but the investments you make are well worth any and all efforts as you begin to see step two, **Loving God** overflow out of step one.

*"I have the profound sense that many people who complain of not being able to rejoice in God treat the knowledge of God as something **that ought to be easy to get**. They are passive. They expect things to happen to them from out of nowhere."*  
*John Piper, When I Don't Desire God*

*"...the pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God and the Christian. No one can obtain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part."*  
*Jerry Bridges, The Pursuit of Holiness*

**(L#2) Loving God:** This is step two and it cannot be self-manufactured, it is a genuine by-product of spending time with Jesus Christ in the pages of Scripture and prayer. As we learn more about our sinfulness and more about God's grace and mercy our love for Christ increases. As we learn more about the call to personal holiness, we fall more out of love with ourselves and the world and more in love with Jesus. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit using the sacred Scriptures in our hearts. Keep in mind, your effort with God's help involves step one, step two takes care of itself. This in return overflows into **Living for God**.

**(L#3) Living for God:** This is step three but just like the second step it is a by-product, it is *not* something we force or self-produce from our self-determined will. It is the gracious work of God's grace as a result of our application / obedience of step one. We see this model portrayed often in the Bible. One such example is found in **Romans 12:1-2, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.**

The Apostle Paul spent eleven chapters helping his readers **learn about God** before he ever appealed to them to **live for God**. He wanted his audience to get an understanding about salvation in faith alone, justification and sanctification and many other wonderful Biblical truths. Paul made his appeal for the followers of Christ to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice only after he presented them with sound doctrine. That is why we should place our emphasis on **Learning**. **Loving** and **Living** are born out of our time **Learning** about the immeasurable truths of God. Step 1 involves the spiritual disciplines of being a student of God's Word and seeking His help in prayer. **Loving God** is our goal and the only way this will occur is through **learning** about Him. Therefore, we must be willing to change our schedule, or to get up earlier or set aside other priorities to make wanting to know God our highest priority. Quite frankly this is where most people give up and in doing so they miss countless blessings that come with knowing God in a greater way. Our relationship with Jesus Christ needs to be cherished and protected. So, don't surrender any spiritual ground, fight for your walk with Christ!

Since step one is the crucial part of our walk with Christ and since step two and three are more overflows than efforts, we need to place our attention on the first step, **learning about God**.

The following information is designed to spark some spiritual interests within your heart as well as provide some practical ways to apply step one. Keep in mind, '**sanctification**' the Bible word for growing and maturing in Christ is a process. We grow in our love and in our faith. With sanctification the issue is *not* speed but direction. We want our attention and affections turned away from self and the world and turned towards Christ. What are the two disciplines that produce spiritual growth?

**(1) Prayer:** More than likely if you have read this far you have a desire to increase your love with God. Be sure and thank Him for placing this desire within your heart and ask Him to increase it. The following is a model or example that will help you in your pray time. **The IOU of Prayer**.

**IOU of Prayer** (Out of Psalm 119)

**Incline (turn)** my heart **Psalm 119:36** Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

**Open** my eyes **Psalm 119:18** Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

**Understanding** for my mind **Psalm 119:169** Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word.

**IOU-** Our heart is bent towards selfish desires and self-will and we need to constantly seek God to **incline** (turn) our heart towards His Word. We need God to **Open** our eyes (spiritual insight) to see the richness and supreme value of His Word and then we need **Understanding** to apply the wondrous Words of God to our lives on a daily basis. Pray throughout the day the IOU prayer quoting the Scripture references.

**(2) Bible Study:** This goes much further than just 'reading' the Bible. It involves mediating on and memorizing the Bible. Keep in mind your goal is to know and love God, keep praying seeking God to incline your heart towards His Word. Don't give up, do not surrender, fight for your love for Jesus. Once you taste the thrill of discovering Bible truths on your own your desire will increase to study even more.

There are numerous benefits that come with being a sincere student of Scripture, notice the following that are listed. The ultimate benefit is a deepening of our **Love for God**.

1. God's truths are revealed **John 17:17**
2. Satan's lies are exposed **2Corinthians 4:4**
3. Our hearts are searched **Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 139:23-24**
4. Christ's grace is magnified **2Peter 3:18**

Since personal Bible Study is the lifeline of our spiritual growth, (sanctification) it is vital that we understand and apply the basic principles of studying God's Word.

Three basic steps to Bible study:

1. **Observation** - like a Bible detective look for clues as you read a portion of Scripture. Ask yourself as series of questions. A helpful habit is to read a chapter and then write out a number of questions as if you were a teacher giving a test to students.
2. **Interpretation** – we are looking for the original writers intended meaning for the original readers. Be careful *not* to read 'into' the text what we want it to say, we want to read 'out' of the text the original meaning.

A. Take Scripture into proper context (what is the chapter teaching)

B. Compare Scripture with Scripture

*"If some passage of Scripture can be interpreted in two different ways and one of those interpretations is in clear conflict with the rest of Scripture, the interpretation that produces the contradiction should be rejected."*  
Ron Nash

3. **Application** – this is the 'so what' of the Bible, how does it apply to me today?

Example of Step One of Bible Study: Observation

**Matthew 4:1-11**

1. Who led Jesus into the wilderness and why was He there? V1

2. What was the physical condition of Jesus during this time? V2
3. List the three different ways Satan tried to tempt Jesus? V3-11
4. How did Jesus deal with the temptations? V4, 7, 10 " \_\_\_\_\_ "
5. What happened after the devil departed from Jesus? V11

Put this same practice into other passages to develop a godly discipline of Bible Study

**Matthew 7:21-29, 13:1-23, 23:13-36 (The 'woe' sermon) 27:27-54, Acts 9:1-19, Romans 3:9-28, 12:1-19, 1Cor. 13:1-13, 15:1-20, 2Cor. 12:1-10, Galatians 5:16-26, Eph. 1:15-23, 3:14-21, 5:21-33, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 3:12-15, 1Timothy 6:6-12, 2Timothy 4:1-8, Titus 2:11-15, Hebrews 11:1-40 (Hall of Faith) James 3:1-12, 13-18, 1Peter 2:20-25, 3:1-7, 1John 1:5-10, Revelation 2-3 (The 7 Churches) 19:11-21 (Return of Christ)**

Another helpful tool here at Grace is the Study Guides that are presented each Lord's Day. Develop the habit of reviewing them and the Scriptures that are related to them. This is an easy way to follow up on the message and it allows the Holy Spirit the opportunity to bring back into your mind what you heard earlier in the sermon.

The final challenge is to become a reader of good Christian books. Fill your mind and heart with Biblical truths concerning worship and loving God. Even if you are slow reader, set aside some time each week to read and it will surprise you that you will complete most books within a month. Set a goal of reading 8, 10 or even 12 books in 2007. Keep you goal in mind – **Loving God!**

The following is a small list of helpful books on deepening your **love for God**.

1. *Pursuit of God* by A. W. Tozer
2. *Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges
3. *Seeing and Savoring Christ* by John Piper
4. *The Joy in Praising God* by C.H. Spurgeon

In conclusion, Scriptures and quotes are listed to challenge you in your desire in **Loving God**. Commit yourself through God's grace on seeking Him with your whole heart.

### **Psalm 119**

2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

24 Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

72 The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

92 Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

97 O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

127 Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.

140 Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

164 Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.

165 Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

171 My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

“God uses the Word to enable us to see the sin and unbelief in our own hearts. The Word exposes our hearts; and then, if we trust God, the Word enables our hearts to obey God and claim His promises. This is why each believer should be diligent to apply himself to hear and heed God's Word. In the Word we see God, and we also see how God sees us. We see ourselves as we really are. This experience enables us to be honest with God, to trust His will, and to obey Him.” Warren Wiersbe

**Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

“God's Word is the perfect discerner, (from which we get "critic"). It not only analyzes all the facts perfectly, but all motives, and intentions, and beliefs as well, which even the wisest of human judges or critics cannot do. The sword of His Word will make no mistakes in judgment or execution.”

John MacArthur

When you sincerely study the Sacred Scriptures, the Holy Spirit studies you.

“Why have we such uncertainty in Christian persuasion and such inconsistency in Christian life? Because we have lost the Bible. We do not read it; we glance at it; we read a verse or a paragraph now and then, but we do not eat it – devour it – consume it. We have Bibles; we ourselves should be Bibles.”

Joseph Parker

"If the congregation truly meditated upon God's Word throughout the week in sincerity to find God, then on Sunday a word would be a sermon, a sermon would be a library. One hint of God would send our minds to heavenly imaginations. Nothing makes the pulpit effective like prepared pews!"

Joseph Parker

"How we understand the person and character of God the Father affects every area of our lives. If God is the Creator of the entire universe, then it must follow that He is the Lord of the whole universe. There is no part of the world that outside His Lordship. That means that there must be no part of my life that is outside His Lordship. His holy character has something to say about economics, politics, athletics, romance – everything that we are involved in."

R.C. Sproul

"This is the great business of life – to put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks. I know of no other way to triumph over sin long-term, than to gain a distaste for it, because of a superior satisfaction in God. Our focus is not the ugliness of sin, but the beauty of the Savior!"

John Piper

"I find in the Bible a divine command to be a pleasure-seeker – that is, to forsake the two-bit, low yielding, short-term, never-satisfying, person-destroying, God-belittling pleasures of the world and to sell everything 'with joy' in order to have the kingdom of heaven, and thus to enter into the joy of your Master."

John Piper

"We should never try to deny or resist our longing to be happy, as though it were a bad impulse. Instead we should seek to intensify this longing and nourish it with whatever will provide the deepest and most enduring satisfaction. **The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God. Not from God, but in God!**"

John Piper

WOW! The last sentence of the Piper quote says it all! It is in God we find our deepest and most enduring happiness. Allow these truths to be used to turn your heart to seek Him, desire Him and long for Him above everything in your life.

**Psalm 63:8 My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.**

Seek God! Follow hard after God! Recognizing all along that it is God which enables and strengthens you to do so.

### *Learning Loving Living*

Wishing you God's very best on your adventurous journey into His heart,

Pastor Jerry Pelfrey

1 Corinthians 15:58 No Regrets!