
LOVING GOD, LOVING EACH OTHER

Chapel Theme, 2000-2001

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As we involve ourselves in the fulfilling of the Great Commission in our Jerusalems, Judeas, Samarias, and to the end of the earth (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), it is important that we remember that *the Great Commandment precedes and empowers that Great Commission*. When challenged to choose the greatest commandment, Jesus replied:

The most important one is this:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

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:

Love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no commandment greater than these (Mark 12:29-31).¹

Apparently, Jesus believed that both concepts had to be combined. Paul said that the whole Law is fulfilled in one word—*love* (Rom 13:10). It is against this background that we have chosen our annual theme that provides a structure for our chapel services and spiritual development: *Loving God, Loving Each Other*.

¹Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), 1984.

Loving God, Loving Each Other

There are eight months of chapels in our school year, and so our theme has an equal number of divisions.

July	Loving God with all my Mind
August	Loving God with all my Heart
September	Loving God with all my Soul
October	Loving God with all my Strength
Advent	Loving God because He first loved us
January	Loving Others through Relationships
February	Loving Others through Compassion
March	Loving Others through Evangelism

Woven into these themes will be weeks of special emphasis such as Missions Week, Spiritual Deepening Week, and Compassionate Ministries Week. Love for others is being expressed through our weekly Agape Offerings and in our prayer focus each week for one of the countries of our Region.

We recognize that it is only by LOVING GOD that we can LOVE EACH OTHER and fulfill our campus motto of “**Bridging Cultures for Christ.**” It is the only way that, despite our many differences, we can live together in community within these walls. It is only by LOVING GOD and LOVING EACH OTHER that we can be empowered to transform our learning into ministry, and that we can move beyond these walls with the message of God’s Love. The following are some excerpts from a four-part series of messages on Loving God.

Loving God with All the Mind

The theme passage for this year is found in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30; and Luke 10:27) and is based on the *Shema* found in Deuteronomy 6:5. In Mark’s account, Jesus unites the Hebrew and LXX versions. The Greek word translated as “love” is

agape. The meaning of the four words, heart, soul, mind, and strength, are not so narrowly defined as to be mutually exclusive, and various scholars interpret them differently, acknowledging that they overlap.

“Mind” includes our thinking ability, intellect, and understanding. John Wesley cared about the mind and reproduced a library of books for the stimulation and academic development of his pastors. The Church of the Nazarene has always taken higher education very seriously. In fact, on the date designated as its founding, there were already colleges and “universities” in many parts of the United States. Our tradition reminds us of the importance of *loving God with our mind*.

Loving God with all the Mind Means –

- The gospel is not only to be enjoyed; it is to be understood.
- We must add *understanding* to our *knowledge* (Prov 4:7).
In the parallelism of this verse, the second line goes beyond the first line. We need understanding, not just knowledge. God does not want us simply to learn *how* to re-tell Bible stories. He wants us to understand *what* they mean.
- The mind is not divorced from spirituality; the Gospel is holistic.
- Study can be sacramental: a sacred obligation and an act of obedient, reverent love for God.
- We must learn to think like preachers and theologians.
- We should approach our devotions thoughtfully, and we should approach our studies devotionally.
- We must have a willingness to have our minds changed.

Speaking to students, someone said, “Sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is to go to the library and ‘hit the books.’”

As we begin the school year, I challenge you to love God with all your mind. But don’t lose the simplicity of the Gospel.

Oh God, I offer You my heart—
 In many a mystic mood, by beauty led,
 I give my heart to You. But now impart
 The sterner grace—to offer You my head. (Anonymous, edited)

Loving God with All the Heart

The first point we have emphasized is that the obedient, effective use of our minds is an act of love toward God and is a spiritual exercise. That truth is balanced by the second emphasis: *loving God with our hearts*, a phrase that includes the concept of the heart as the seat of the emotions and relationship.

Loving God with all the Heart Means –

- The Gospel is about *emotion* and *affection* as well as *intellect*. Faith is more than rational assent.
- We must not *agapao* the World (1 John 2:15), or simply *phileo* God (John 21:15). We must not give the world the special, self-giving love (*agapao*) reserved for God, and we must not give God merely the affection (*phileo*) found in the world.
- We must have total devotion to Him—with a level of exclusivity. Loving my wife with all my heart does not exclude loving my mother or my daughter—but it does exclude loving anyone else with the kind of love (marital love) I have for her. In the words of the wedding vows, I have “forsaken all others.” Loving God does not exclude loving my wife, my mother, and my daughter, but it does exclude having any other gods. And I want my wife’s love to be offered, not begged for, to include affection, not just will, to include emotion, not just rationality. And God feels the same way!
- In loving God with our whole minds, we must not neglect the the growth of our hearts.

There are many stories of those whose years in graduate school were spiritually the most “dry” years of their lives—even times of falling away. That danger is always lurking at our door.

Pray that God will make this year a time of outstanding spiritual growth. Give Him your whole heart. Tell Him you love Him.

Loving God with All the Soul

For eight years, Janice and I lived just around the corner from the family home of the sixth president of the United States, John Quincy Adams. We visited his grave in the local church where he is buried beside his father, the second President of the USA.

John Quincy Adams served in the congress after his term as president. He was a noted diplomat, serving overseas from the time he was 14. He also fought against slavery. In 1814, he wrote in his diary, “My hopes of a future life are all founded upon the gospel of Jesus Christ.” On his 79th birthday, he again affirmed his deep gratitude to God for all the blessings of life. Weeks before he died, he met a friend on the street who shook his trembling hand and said, “Good morning! And how is John Quincy Adams today?”

He replied, “He himself is quite well, sir, quite well. But the house in which he lives at the present is becoming dilapidated [worn out]. It is tottering upon its foundation. Time and the seasons have almost destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn, its walls are much shattered, and it crumbles a little bit more with every wind. The old tenement [apartment] is becoming almost uninhabitable, and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon; but he himself is well, sir, quite well.”²

We have an innate understanding that we are more than—and other than—our bodies. There are various interpretations of the meaning of

²Quoted in Peter Kennedy and Lorraine Espinosa, *From Generation to Generation* (Urichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing Inc., 1998), 382.

the word translated “soul,” including “life,” “spirit,” and “being,” and there are many discussions about the issues of dichotomy, trichotomy, or the unity of the person. But at the least, we can say that the term *soul* refers to my innermost being—that which makes me to be *me*.

There are a number of relevant scriptures that speak about the soul, including Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Psalms 103:1-2, 20-22; Ecclesiastes 12:6-7; Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 12:16-21; and Mark 12:28-33. These Scriptures remind us that

- Praise to God must come from the inmost depths of our being.
- There is part of us that eventually goes back to God.
- God sees the deepest recesses of our being.
- The destiny of the soul is more important than the death of the body.
- The real me is priceless.
- Our priorities reveal the condition of our souls and we can be called into account at any moment.

I think John Quincy Adams was expressing all of that.

Loving God with all the Soul Means –

- Loving Him with the essence of who we are.

It is possible to enjoy God with the mind or the heart—
but not one without the other.

It is possible to enjoy God with the mind,
without loving Him with all our inmost being.

It is possible to enjoy God with our emotions,
without loving Him with all our inmost being.

- Loving Him holistically.

If we love Him at the core, then we cannot have a love that is compartmentalized or is superficial.

If we love Him at the core, then a Christ-like life will flow from the depths of who we are. As Jesus said,

The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man “unclean.” For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man “unclean” (Matt 15:18-20).

- Loving Him without legalism.

Not outward conformity,
but inner grace.

Not duty,
but devotion.

Today’s question is this: Do you Love God with your inmost being, with what is most truly You? Is it well with your soul?

Loving God with All Our Strength

We come finally to the fourth concept from the *Shema*—from what Jesus said is the greatest commandment. I must love God with

- All my intellect,
- All my emotions and affection,
- All my inmost being, and
- All my energy and body and effort, with all my physical being.

Commentators observe that “strength” refers to mental and physical energy, possessions, and all the efforts of body and will. If we

are to be sanctified through and through (1 Thes 5:23), and sanctification is all about holy love—then we must Love with Spirit, Soul, and Body.

Loving God with all your strength means—

- Giving Him your energy and time.
You only have so much strength, so much energy, so many hours in a day, and so long to live. To what and to whom will you give that energy? On what will you use up your strength? Do you give Him the best of your energy or the leftovers?
- Giving Him your best effort.
He was to get the first fruits of the harvest, the firstborn of the herds, and the best of the flock. He was angry when He was offered the castoffs.

We must give our best effort
To become Godly (character)
To live out His values (lifestyle)
To build His kingdom (service).

- Giving Him your body.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your *bodies* as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1).

It is clear that Paul meant “body” not just “life.” He underscored that in the following passages from earlier in this epistle:

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be

your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (Rom 6:13-14).

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness (Rom 6:19).

Paul made the same point in the analogy of marriage in Ephesians 6:2ff and in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. And again—"You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor 6:20). Does your body belong to God or to yourself? Are the parts of your body used as an expression of your love for God?

If I love God with
All my body—
All my energy and time—
All my Actions and best efforts
Then, like Paul, I die daily—
Then I become a "living sacrifice."

We do not have a "private" life that is separate from our "God life." All of our life, all of our beings, and all of our relationships must come under the authority of God and flow from our love of God that is empowered by His love in us.

Part of today's lesson is that "Loving God" takes hard work and all our energy and strength. Ministry will take more than four hours a day or even eight! Your time will be swallowed up in the agendas of others. Your energy will be insufficient to the task.

In the recently completed Sydney Olympic games, how much energy, effort, and strength did the athletes invest in winning a gold medal, a wreath that will not last? Paul knew all about the Olympics

which were played hundreds of years before and after he lived. It was out of that knowledge that he wrote,

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor 9:25-27).

Paul realized that spiritual exercise is as hard as physical exercise. That's why he also wrote,

Train yourself to be godly, for physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come (1 Tim 4:7-9).

In addition to all that God's grace accomplishes in your life, loving God will demand all of your strength!

So in these four words, God Himself has declared that He expects us to love Him with all that we are—with heart, soul, mind, and strength—with affection, inmost being, intellect, and energy. We can offer Him nothing less.