

REA↑LATIONSHIPS→

It's All Connected by Love

Mark 12:28-34

By Andrew Ogea

January 3, 2021

Good morning and happy new year! It is good to see each of you here today. What a year it was in 2020, right? We began the year as a church praying and asking the Lord to bring about revival. And, in many ways, I believe he did.

We had set before you three initiatives or challenges to position yourself for revival. The first was to invest in the Lord as your top priority. We had a Bible reading plan and devotional material that we read through as a church this year. At our vision meeting, we heard testimony of the difference it made in the life of one of our community groups to read through the Bible together.

Seeing God work in the Old Testament, the connection to the new, and how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament as the Messiah for the World had a huge impact on strengthening their faith.

When COVID hit, we were so blessed to already have this in place so that our church could stay connected in spirit and in the truth of God's Word even though we were disconnected. I've heard numerous testimonies of couples reading the Word together and families learning about our God together.

The second challenge was to identify one person that needs to encounter Christ Jesus, and then for you to be prayerful and intentional about seeking out opportunities to have a conversation about Christ, or to meet a need in the name of Christ.

Some of you are here today because one of our church members took this call to heart, and began praying for you, had a conversation about the Lord with you, and now you are here. I had the privilege of witnessing one of these folks accept Christ, and weeks afterward, he shared about how Jesus and being with the family of God here has changed his life.

The third initiative was to ask the Lord what your one impact will be. What is the one impact I can have for you Lord to make a difference this year? Some of you started initiatives like prayer gatherings, working in the hospital, leading a small group. Some still have a vision for what God is calling you to do to serve him, but it is just on hold right now for a little while.

So, God has been working. However, this past year wasn't what I had in mind or expected. God often does that. His Holy Spirit puts something on your heart and you do your best to plan for outcomes. But, ultimately he is in charge of the outcomes.

In 2021, I believe God is going to bring to fruition the spiritual renewal in our church that has been planted and growing from this past year. In many ways he pushed the pause button for us. We had a reality check. A faith check. A priority check.

Some of us have tried to push through this past year to maintain normalcy. Some of us have been living in a new kind of normal. Some have been isolated and are desiring or attempting to return to a sense of normal, but maybe don't see how yet. I fear that others have withdrawn completely and have no plans to return to our church or any church for that matter. That breaks my heart.

But, as we come to 2021, your staff and leadership believe Jesus is going to continue to build up Northshore Church into what he wants us to look like, not on our expectations or our plans, but on what he wants.

We believe he wants to stir up what has been stagnant. He wants to shake up what has been complacent; to redirect what has been aimless; to reveal and rid us of that which is meaningless; to reveal what has become inauthentic or mundane. I believe he wants to connect what has been disconnected.

Disconnected...that is what I have felt the most of the year. Have you? Have you been disconnected this past year? Perhaps you have been disconnected from family; Disconnected from your brothers and sisters in Christ; Disconnected from your faith; Disconnected from serving the Lord and others; Disconnected from things that bring you joy; Disconnected from what is most important.

And this is where we will direct our focus today: What is most important? What is primary? What is the greatest area that should consume our focus in life? This is not a new question. In fact, this type of question is something that Jesus was asked quite a few times in the gospels.

Today, I want us to look at Jesus' answer to this question. So, I invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 12: 28-34. The question comes from a scribe, a teacher of the Old Testament, the prophets, and the Mosaic Law.

Before we read this passage, I want you to understand some context. A scribe and other religious leaders of Israel were often rebuked by Jesus in Scriptures. Specifically, Jesus presented warnings in his teachings taught against the scribes - these teachers and theologians of their day. In Mark 12:38-40:

38 As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces

39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.

40 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

The scribes, the group of teachers had disconnected themselves from that which was most important. They became selfish and wanted prestige, honor, and status for themselves. They took what wasn't theirs and abused their authority.

But it is from this group of teachers that one scribe comes genuinely, without malice, and asks Jesus, "What is the greatest command?" What is most important? Let's take a look in Mark 12:28-34:

Mark 12:28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.

33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

This scribe walked into a debate that had already been happening between Jesus and some other religious leaders. The Pharisees and Sadducees had already taken turns trying to trap Jesus. So, they are asking him their best questions to try and get him to answer incorrectly so they could arrest him.

Debating is something that was common for these leaders. Ancient writings show that rabbis counted 613 individual statutes in the law of Moses--365 that were negative-the don'ts; and 248 positive the do's.

And religious leaders went to great lengths and debated often in attempts to differentiate between the commands to distinguish those that were heavy or great, and those that were light or little.

So this scribe asked a question of Jesus that he had probably asked others numerous times before. What is the great commandment of all? What is the most important?

So, Jesus answers his question by quoting two Old Testament verses. The first quote is found in Deuteronomy 6:4:

Deut. 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These verses comprise what is called the Shema, which is a confession of faith that devout Jews recite twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening. When reciting this verse, there is an affirmation that there is only one true God, and he is the God who chose Israel to be the recipient of his covenant-love. There is no other before him or beside him. He is one.

And you think that would be it, let's just leave it at that command, but Jesus adds another from Leviticus 19:18

Lev. 19:18 “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

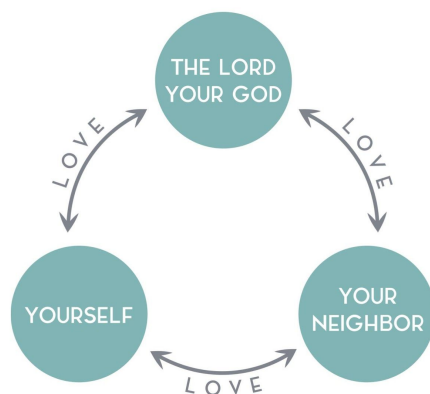
So, Jesus takes this scribe's questions, “What is the Greatest command?” and gives him two answers in one. These two answers give us what is most important, the greatest commandment as Christians: Love the Lord Your God, and Love Your Neighbor as Yourself.

Essentially, what Jesus is saying is that your relationships are what is most important. The great commandment concerns your relationship with God and other people.

But Jesus actually takes relationships to a whole new level in the Great Commandment, and he introduces what we are calling REALationships. The main point I want you to see today is this

1. The Great Commandment is all about REALationships

Not just relationships, but REALationships. Does anyone know what Webster dictionary's word of the year was in 2020? Pandemic. Well, this year, we want the word of the year in 2021 to be REALationships.



To illustrate this, I want to show you a little diagram, a framework, of the greatest commandment. If you notice, there are three relational components that Jesus mentions here. The first is The Lord Your God, the second is your neighbor, and the third is yourself. These are the three components that make up all of the relationships in our lives. He didn't leave anyone out.

But what Jesus shows us is that it is the love binding each one of these together which makes the relationships REAL. So this year, you will hear this made up word many times because it is our desire for you, Northshore Church, to connect or reconnect with what is most important: experiencing real love for God and people in 2021. Love God, Love People.

Jesus told the scribe and is telling us there are no commandments greater than these as believers. In Matthew's gospel account of a similar interaction, he said:

Matt. 22:40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Just picture the great commandment as a coat hanger with all of the books of the Old testament hanging on them. There is none greater.

So, over the course of this month, we are going to talk more about each part of this REALationships Framework from the Great Commandment. What does it mean to love the one true God for who he is? What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself?

Then the rest of our year will be spent learning about how we can prepare ourselves and position ourselves to love God and others above all else. So, the main point is that the Great Commandment is all about experiencing and pursuing REALationships. But, I want to spend a little time today looking specifically at this love that binds REALationships together.

1. The Great Commandment is All About REALationships

A. REALationships are connected by Agape Love.

We have one word for love in English, but it is used and applied in many different contexts. I love steak. I love my wife. Those are two totally different types of love, but we still use one word.

The New Testament was mainly written in ancient Greek. And in the ancient Greek speaking world, there were a few words that were used to describe love. One of them was *eros*. This type of love is deep desire, passionate aspiration, and sensuous longing. It often has a physical or sexual connotation. It is where our English word erotic is derived. It was used often in other writings, but not in the New Testament.

Another word is *storge* which is the kind of affection found in a family. This is the type of love a child would have for parents or a parent for a child. It is also a word not found in the New Testament.

Another word is *philia*, which describes different types of love, but mainly a brotherly type of love toward another. Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. Philia, philadelphia. It is used roughly 60 times in the New Testament.

But the word used most of all in the New Testament is Agape. The verb and noun are used around 250 times. This is the word that Jesus used to describe the love for God and others in REALationships.

But, What is agape love? In 1 John 4, we get a better understanding through a brief description of agape love. 1 John 4:15-17 says,

1 John 4:15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.

16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

This scripture shows us that Agape Love is first and foremost the very nature of God. God is love. Now, we cannot make the mistake of thinking that this is the only attribute and that all other attributes are underneath love.

For example, God is also all-knowing, all-powerful, all present, all eternal, all just, all infinite. But, in addition to these attributes, God is all-love. Everything God does is rooted in and motivated by love. He created the world because He is love. He formed humanity because He is love. And He rules the universe in love.

His love is uncaused, it doesn't make sense and is unreasonable to us by our standards. God's love is unending, unlimited, unchanging, unconditional. It's just who he is! God is love.

Secondly, this scripture shows us that Agape Love is only experienced by believing in Jesus as the Son of God. Did you notice what happened in Jesus's interaction with the scribe?

After Jesus told him the greatest command is to love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself, the scribe responded, "well said, teacher." "To love God...and your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Jesus recognized that he answered wisely, but what did he say to him? "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Here's the deal, you can know what the great commandment is, but the reality is, the great commandment will not save you.

You can try and have the best relationships with everyone. You can try and do good things for God and others, but if you don't have faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you will get the same reply as him: "You are not far from the kingdom of God." You may be near, but you are not in the kingdom.

Without Christ, relationships are possible, but not REALationships. Because it is only through Jesus that God's agape love flows to you and is manifested in you. This is the only way that God's love is

made complete in us. This is the only way we can have confidence to stand before God on judgement day.

This is the only way that we can be in this world, and be like Jesus, loving others with real love. It is only through a relationship with Jesus that agape love can produce in us the type of results that the Apostle Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 13,

1 Cor. 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.

It is only through Jesus that these results of love are manifested in us and it is through obedience to the Great Commandment that they flourish in all of our relationships.....

Just a couple of days after this interaction with this scribe, Jesus was having the passover meal with his disciples, and he issued a new command to them.

34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

If this new command were a coat hanger, the entire Bible, the Old and New Testament could hang on this one command. Jesus loved us so much that he died so we could experience the agape love of our Heavenly Father. He died on the cross and makes the Great Commandment possible for us to live out. He makes REALationships possible.

So, the question for you today is this....Do you want to experience REALationships?

If so, I have an invitation for you. In response to today's message, and to prepare your hearts for what is to come this year, I want to invite you to do three things. First, if you have never trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and asked him for his free gift of your sins being forgiven and eternal life, then he is inviting you to enter into that relationship today.

In just a moment, you will have the opportunity to ask him for it. So, then for the first time, you can experience REALationships, real agape love from God and for God, and real agape love for others.

For everyone here, I want to invite you in two other ways to respond. Both of them involve you stopping by the REALationships lobby in the lobby on your way out. First, I want you to pick up a Bible Reading plan for this series, for the month of January. It is a plan that will supplement every sermon for the month.

So, for example this week, you will be reading Scriptures that speak specifically about the love of God. There are five days, with one passage per day. I invite you to grow in your love for God by learning more about his great love for you.

Lastly, it is the new year, and many of you may do new year's resolutions. Well, I believe the Lord is asking us to make a commitment to experience REALationships this year. At the REALationships display, you can pick up this REALationships commitment card.

And we are asking you to spend time this week praying about how you can link the two greatest commandments in your daily life. How will you love God and others this year for the glory of Christ?

So on your way out, we encourage you to be intentional about getting these two things as a first step to show the Lord that you are serious about experiencing REALationships this year. I'm excited about it. I want this desperately in my life too. We all need this together. Please join me in prayer.