

Value 2 - Cultivating Love for God

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Preacher: John Hopkins

[0 : 00] Turn your Bibles to Luke chapter 12, which is not our text for today, but there's something so cool in there, I just have to show it to you. As you're turning there, keep your ears open. If you recall, during the sermon series in Mark, one of the themes that we came back to multiple times was the idea of wrestling with God.

The fact of the matter is that we would not have to wrestle with God if life was easy. If all the answers were clear. If everything made sense. We wouldn't need to wrestle. But things don't make sense.

We don't know why some people are healed and some aren't. We don't know the pain that we individually have in ourselves. We don't understand what God is doing.

And I want to encourage you to take advantage of the privilege of prayer. Of not just a rote prayer. Saying the Lord's Prayer and just saying that generically.

Or just prayers that are, what's the word I'm looking for? Demanded of us.

[1 : 14] We were talking the other day about the importance of giving thanks before a meal. And how that just becomes a tradition or a habit that we do without even thinking. What I want to challenge you with is to wrestle with God.

Is to take your needs before Him. To ask Him why. To ask Him to help you to understand. And to rest in Him. That's the only way we're going to get through the hardships of life.

Because they're real. And for those of us who aren't experiencing those types of things. They're so in your face hard. We need to be praying for each other.

We need to be lifting each other up. We are desperately in need. Of each other's prayers. We're hopeless without our prayers for each other.

So make that a priority. Make that something that's important to you. That you continually do.

Because God answers prayer. God works through our prayers.

[2 : 15] It's critical that this has become a central part of our identity and our relationship with God. Individually and corporately. And honestly, it's an expression of our love for God.

And our love for each other. What we're going to talk about this morning is cultivating love for God. So before we get into Luke chapter 12 briefly. I want you to look at this image that's up on the slide behind me.

Now it's blurred on purpose. Look behind the letters. And if you look at it. And you squint your eyes a little bit. What you'll see is this long table. That goes back.

Looks like it goes on forever. And it's not just paper plates and plastic forks and spoons. But it's the most magnificent place setting. And series of place settings. That you've ever seen.

The forks and knives and spoons are gold. The cups are chalices. They're not just glass tumblers. The plates are beautiful.

[3 : 12] And even the setting is beautiful. It's an image that's designed to remind us of our future.

A day will come when those of us who are in Christ will come to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Where we as a church are introduced to the Lord Jesus as his wife.

That's the fundamental picture of the relationship between God and the church. The church is marriage. The church is marriage. And I want you to keep that in mind as we go through this talk about what does it mean to cultivate love of God.

How do we go through that? What does that look like? How do we do that? Because this is the core value. This is the centerpiece. Through which all the other values find meaning.

Derive energy and fuel to go forward. And what drives our fulfillment of our mission. We exist to glorify God. By walking with him.

[4 : 27] Walking closely with him. Striving together. To become more like Jesus every day. It's our love for God. Which is a response to his love for us.

That's the foundation of it all. So Luke chapter 12. I was preparing. Golly, probably 20 years ago. I was preparing a series of talks for a group of teenagers that Kara and I were leading.

And this group of teenagers that we were leading was part of a program called Coworkers.

Coworkers was a training program. It was boot camp.

And at the core of their job during the week that they were under our care was setting up the dining room for all the campers that were at Camp Elam out in Colorado. And serving the food and then cleaning up afterwards.

So they were the servants. And we used that as a vehicle to teach them about their relationship with God. And as I was preparing for that particular summer. This passage.

[5 : 29] Popped onto my radar and blew my mind. And I want to blow your mind. Because it's a very few words. But the picture it gives of what God has for us.

Mind-blowing is the only word that works. It's amazing. So Luke 12. Starting at verse 35. Be dressed in readiness and keep your lamps lit.

So we're waiting. We're anticipating the return of the Lord Jesus. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast. So that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.

Listen to this. Verse 37. Blessed are those slaves who the master will find. Blessed are those slaves who the master will find on the alert when he comes.

Truly I say to you. Now listen carefully to what Jesus said. Truly I say to you.

[6 : 38] That he. The master. Will gird himself to serve. And have them recline at the table. And will come up.

And wait on them. Jesus who died on the cross for us. Who suffered. Who took our sin. Who endured separation from God.

At the marriage supper to celebrate his coronation as king. The introduction of his bride is going to serve us.

Let that sink in. Jesus is going to serve you. That's love. We need to allow that love.

To soak into us. To permeate our minds and our hearts. Because when it does. The response that will come out.

[7 : 47] Will be a reciprocated love. That will pour back to him. We need to think about such things. In order for the love of God to grow in our hearts.

Our love for him. So keep that image of your mind. We are headed to a marriage supper. And this body. And the bodies of those who serve Jesus Christ.

Will come together. And the only picture that adequately describes it. Is the intimacy of marriage.

That's what we have to look forward to with the Lord. That's how deeply.

You are loved by God. So turn now to. Matthew chapter 22. Which is our text. Now I want to take a second.

While we're turning there. So our mission. Is we exist to glorify God. By walking closely with him.

Striving together. Become more like Jesus every day. First thing I want to emphasize.

[8 : 45] This mission statement. Is biblical. John and Tim and I did not sit around in a room. Or at the Hallmark store. And flip through Christian cards.

Until we found some neat phrase. That kind of. Caught our interest. And we thought was cute. That we studied scripture. And looking at the Bible. What became very clear.

Was. Ephesians 4. 1 through 16. Really captures the heart of what God wants for his church. And then. We put pencil to paper. And work together.

To summarize it in a way. That we could grab a hold of as a body. And that's where this lands. We exist to glorify God. By walking closely with him. Striving together.

To become more like Jesus every day. You should memorize it. Because unlike. The. Cute sentiment. Inside of a greeting card.

[9 : 41] That you forget after you read it. This is our. Our drum beat. This is the. The cadence to which we will march. As we go forward. As a. As the body of Christ. This is Jesus expectation for the church.

This is who we are. This is how we will live. This is our goal. You should memorize it. You should memorize Ephesians 4. 1 through 16. To really understand the heart.

That's behind the sentence. And make it your own. And you should meditate on it. Think about it. We exist. Stop. What does that mean? What does it mean to. To exist. Why do we exist? How did that happen? To glorify God. You have a purpose. Think about it before God. By walking closely with him. Striving together. To become more like Jesus. Every day. Take those phrases. One a day for a. Week. What does this mean?

[10 : 45] What is the implication for me? And what is the implication as I. As I communicate with other people? And then. We have our. Our five values. Now just like the mission statement. Those values.

Were not something we hatched up. It's not something we pulled out of a business book. Or a church organization book. We went to scripture. And what became very apparent. Is that these five things.

Are the core of Jesus message. When he said repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. If you love me. You will obey my commandments. These are what he was talking about. Pretty simple. Not easy. But simple. We fulfill this mission. This goal. By choosing. To follow Jesus. Like we talked about last week.

Out of our decision to follow Jesus. To put ourselves under his care. As the master. We are the apprentice. As we take that step. It starts up here.

[11 : 44] I think for all of us. When we started that journey. There wasn't love there. I came to Christ. Because I didn't want to go to hell. I didn't love God. I just knew I had a need.

That he would fulfill. But as I put myself under his yoke. As I became his apprentice. The next value emerged. I learned. How deeply God loved me.

As we've been talking about. And then I loved him in return. I reciprocated that love back to him. We need to cultivate love of God. God. So. Our first value.

Is we're following Jesus. Our second one is we're cultivating. Love of God. In the weeks ahead. We'll talk about cultivating love. Of others. We'll talk about. Making disciples.

And seeking unity. But these values. As we. Take them in. Make no mistake. This is what God wants you to do. In order to see. That.

[12 : 44] Mission become reality. And you will become. More like Jesus every day. It'll change your life. This is life. Changing. Truth.

And. Other people. Will come in. Because they want it too. Because it's pretty amazing. It's pretty awesome. So as we look at these things.

One last thought. And then we'll actually get into. This particular value. When God is behind something. There's a beauty to it. And a wholeness. As I was thinking about.

Our mission statement. And then these five values. I began to realize. There is. A depth to them. Like if you look at a flower.

And you see the individual petals. And each petal. Has a beauty. Uniquely its own. But when you put them together. The flower together. Has its own beauty. And then you. You smell the fragrance of that flower.

[13 : 48] And you see. How all the elements. Work together. To create something. That's amazing. And so this. All of it together. Is greater. Than each. Separately.

The whole is greater. Than the sum of its parts. And that's true. Of these values. They feed each other. They're also the steps. Of our spiritual growth. We choose to follow Jesus.

We begin to love him. We learn in loving him. We express that love. By loving others. We start to make disciples. Because that's the highest expression. Of love for another person. And then we seek unity.

Within the body. We strive. To be marching together. That's a progression of growth. They're also ingredients. They're beautiful.

Because God is in them. And that's what we're looking forward to. So today. We're going to talk about the heart of it. And frankly. The most difficult for me to teach on.

[14 : 47] Because I think we're going to spend all of eternity. Talking about this one. You've heard me say it before. I'll say it again. Ephesians 2.7. God is going to spend all. All of eternity.

Revealing his kindness to us. In Christ. And I only have a few minutes. So fasten your seatbelts. So Matthew chapter 22.

Starting at verse 34. But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. They gathered themselves together. One of them a lawyer asked him a question. Testing him. Teacher. Which is the greatest commandment of the law? And Jesus said to him. You shall love the Lord your God. With all your heart. And with all your soul. And with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets. Let's pray together.

[15:49] Father. Father. I was thinking as. Tim was leading us in singing this morning. About.

Second Corinthians 5.14. That the love of Christ compels us. Your love for us. Compels me. It pulls me forward.

My love for you. Compels me. It drives me forward. God. As we. Step into this holy place. As we walk on holy ground.

Holy Spirit. I pray. That you will overcome. My inadequacy. My inability to communicate.

Such great truth. God. That you would speak in the heart. Of each person listening. That something.

[16:54] Would grab a hold of them. And lift their eyes to you. To realize how deeply. You love us. And then because of that. Little kernel of truth.

That they would turn and love you more. And cultivate greater and greater and greater love for you. God we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. So let's look at Matthew 22.

This. Is a scene that we talked about. In Mark. When we were doing the Mark series. It was Passion Week. Jesus went into the temple. People. And there was a line of people.

Who wanted to take their crack. At. At Jesus. Because nobody liked him. So if you remember. The Pharisees took a shot. The. The group of the. Of the Jewish leaders took a shot.

The Sadducees took a shot. And then this is the last. And by the way. Jesus beat them all. He answered all of their questions. In ways that they just couldn't answer. Or a few. And then this is the last one. This is not a man.

[17:52] Who is a truth seeker. Who wants to know the truth. This is a theology. Theological snob. Who's trying to catch this. This young rabbi. This upstart. With a hard question.

That's the motive. They're trying to catch Jesus. And so he asked them. What do you think is the greatest commandment of the law? I'm sure he's an attorney. A lawyer.

He knows the law. And I'm sure he had an answer in mind. He had a particular series of proofs.

That he wanted Jesus to lay out. And if Jesus didn't. He would be considered unworthy.

Because that was ultimately. What they were trying to do with Jesus. So. In comes this guy. You can imagine a man who's dressed sharp. He's smart.

He graduated. What is it? Magna cum laude. Or sumo cum laude. I don't know which one is higher.

But this guy probably graduated higher. He's a valedictorian of his class. What's the greatest commandment of the law?

[18:50] Smart guy. He says to Jesus. That's his tone. And Jesus says. Of course. The greatest commandment. Is this.

You shall love the Lord your God. With all your heart. With all your soul. With all your mind. And then he gives him a bonus answer. Which we'll talk about next week.

And then he concludes this section with. On these two commandments depend the whole law. And the prophets. We're going to spend the rest of our time. In Deuteronomy chapter 6.

Because Deuteronomy 6. Is what Jesus was quoting. Now you can certainly turn there. Or it'll be up on the screen. Behind me.

So Jesus was quoting. Deuteronomy chapter 6. Verses 4 and 5. Hear O Israel. The Lord is our God. The Lord is one. That's the beginning phrase.

[19:47] Jesus did not quote that. You shall love the Lord your God. With all your heart. With all your soul. And with all your might. That. Those two verses.

Those two sentences. Are the centerpiece of Jewish theology. That. Is the basis upon which. All other theology is built.

For the Jews to understand the law. To understand God's work with them as a nation. It all comes down. To these two verses. And I want to share with you something. That stuck out.

To me. That I never saw before. I kind of read over verse 4. To get to verse 5. Hear O Israel. The Lord is our God.

The Lord is one. Now here's why that matters. Imagine. You're not. A 21st century person. Who lives in a world. That has four.

[20 : 41] Major religions. Three of which. Are monotheistic. Judaism. Christianity. And Islam. All believe in one God. God. But you're not there anymore.

Now. You're hundreds of years. Before Christ comes. And you're in a culture. That has never heard. The term monotheism.

They don't understand. The idea of one God. It's a foreign concept. What they believe. Is that. Oh my goodness. We've had the coldest weather.

We've ever had in Dubuque. We need to pray to the God of winter. To get that fixed. We need to pray to the God of snow. To stop it. We need to pray to the God of spring.

To prepare the soil. And all that. For the time. When we'll do our planting. We need to pray to the God of fall. You see where I'm going. We've got this. This pantheon of gods.

[21 : 41] That was the norm. Now where they were ahead of us. These ancient people. Was they recognized. That this world is more than we can see. It's a spiritual place.

But they thought. That they had to please all these different gods. In order. To have a life that was healthy. That was thriving. Really what they wanted to be.

Was to be left alone. By these gods. And for those gods. To just do their jobs. But those gods didn't really get along. So imagine. You know the stereotype.

Of a Thanksgiving dinner. Where you've got. An aunt maybe. Who's a blue dog Democrat. And an uncle. Who's a Reagan conservative.

Or to the right of Reagan. And you've got. Tension in one cousin's marriage. And this other. Cousin doesn't. Take care of their kids.

[22 : 36] And the kids are running roughshod. And you've got all this chaos. Going on. And it's crazy. And it's loud. And it's not particularly fun. And it's not very thankful. Welcome to life.

As a polytheist. That's how. That's where it's like. But what Moses. Is telling the people. What God is telling him to say. Is critically important. Hear oh Israel.

The Lord is our God. I'm going to introduce you to. Our God. The Lord is one. Now if you think about it. Turn in the pages.

Of your mental Bible. To the story of Jonah. Jonah's. Running away from God. He's in. They're on the Mediterranean. There's this huge storm.

And all the guys. All the sailors. Are making offerings. To their different gods. Because they're. Polytheists. And they turn to Jonah. And they say.

[23 : 31] Hey dude. Do you know. You need to pray to your God. Who is your God. And Jonah says. Well. I serve. This God. The maker of heaven and earth.

The one God. Who is above them all. And look at. It's interesting. I never caught this before. Never really thought about the motive. But what do the sailors do.

When they hear Jonah's report. Uh oh. We've been praying. To the minor leagues. You report. To the God of gods. The king of kings.

The lord of lords. And you're disobeying him. And we're helping. They recognize. The power. And the authority. Of one God.

God over all. That's the God. Who loves you. That's the God.

[24 : 31] Who sent his son. To die on the cross for you. That's the God. Whose Holy Spirit resides in you. If you're in Christ. We serve one God.

Monotheism. The idea that there is one God. Who has the authority. To create. Has the authority. To tell us what is right and wrong. To tell us how our lives. Should be ordered.

One God. And that's the God who loves you. Hear oh Israel. The Lord is our God. The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God.

With all of your heart. And with all of your soul. And with all of your might. Now we could spend time parsing. The difference between the Hebrew word for heart. And the Hebrew word for soul. And the Hebrew word for might or strength.

But we don't need to. It's really interesting that if you look at Jesus' answer in Matthew. He uses subtly different language. If you look at the parallel passage in Luke.

[25 : 28] There's different language still. All centered around this verse. I'll make it simple for you. It doesn't matter. What exactly does heart mean?

What exactly does soul mean? What exactly does might mean? What matters is that. It's all of our being. You shall love the Lord your God.

With everything you have. Your mind. Your heart. Your hands. Paul told the Colossian church. Whatever you do.

Do it as unto the Lord. And not unto men. That's the idea. It's everything we have. Focused on him. In love. Now remember.

Remember the image. Look beyond the words on the slide. I'm pointing at the wrong thing. You can't see this one. Look beyond the words on the slide. And remember. We're talking about the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[26 : 29] Love your husband. We could legitimately say. Is what Moses was saying to the Israelites. What Jesus was saying to us. When he pointed out that this is the greatest commandment.

We have intimacy with God. Now Jesus ended the statement. By saying. On this. The law and the prophets depend. These two commandments.

Are the foundation for the law and the prophets. What do you mean by that? The law. Was given. To tell us how. To live rightly before God. To put it in broad strokes.

That was the purpose of the law. You want to know how to live. How to follow God. Look at the law. This is what a good life looks like. What was the purpose of the prophets?

To tell the wayward people of Israel. To look at the law. And to go back to God. Both the law and the prophets.

[27 : 29] The law looking ahead. This is where you should be going. And the prophets looking back. Saying. Hey. Knuckleheads. You need to straighten up. Both point to the Lord. And what is the dynamic.

That drives. Our obedience to the law. Or. Or our obedience to the prophets. The love of God. As we love God.

We will be drawn. Closer and closer to him. Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 5.14. The love of Christ compels me. First. It's God's love for us.

Then it's. Our love for him. The love of Christ compels me. Having. Compels me. Having concluded this. That one died for all. Therefore all died. And they live.

No. Longer for themselves. Which is the essence of the law and the prophets. Love is the foundation of the law and the prophets. Everything we do. Derives from this command.

[28 : 32] You can extrapolate. Everything. Extrapolate is to pull out. You can pull out every command. From this. If you do this. You will.

By default. Obey everything else that God wants you to do. That's why this is the heart. God. Now earlier.

When we were singing. Tim quoted to you. 1st John 4.19. We love. Because he first loved us. But here's something that's interesting.

That's not a New Testament principle. That's a God principle. If you've got your Bibles open. Turn over. To. Deuteronomy chapter 7. Or you can look up on the slide.

Tell me if this doesn't. If this language doesn't sound familiar. The Lord.

[29 : 32] Did not set his love on you. Nor choose you. Because you are more in number than any of the peoples. You are the people. The fewest of all peoples. But. Because.

The Lord loved you. And kept the oath. Which he swore to your forefathers. The Lord brought you. Out by a mighty hand. And redeemed you from the house of slavery.

From the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore. That the Lord your God. He is God. The faithful God. Who keeps his covenant.

And his loving kindness. To a thousand generations. With those who love him. And keep his commands. It's the same principle.

It's the same image. Now listen to 1 John 4 again. We have come to know. And have believed the love.

[30 : 32] Which God has for us. And how do we know that? Paul wrote. In Romans 5.8. But God. Demonstrated his love for us. In this. While we were still sinners. Christ died for us.

We have come to know. And have believed the love. Which God has for us. God. Is. Love. Not love is God. Which is what our culture would teach.

Never do something that I'm hesitant to do. I'm going to read an extended portion. I'll type this up and put it on the website later, but I want you to listen. It's easy to tune out when someone's reading to you.

I want you to listen to what Packer says, because I think in this group of sentences are some tools that you can use to cultivate your love for God.

We have some idea, perhaps, what prayer is, but what is meditation? Well, may we ask, for meditation is a lost art today, and Christian people suffer grievously from their ignorance of the practice.

[42 : 54] Meditation is the activity of calling to mind and thinking over and dwelling on and applying to oneself the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God.

It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.

Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God and to let His truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart.

It is a matter of talking to oneself about God and oneself. It is indeed often a matter of arguing with oneself, reasoning oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief, that's wrestling, into a clear apprehension of God's power and grace.

Its effect is ever to humble us as we contemplate God's greatness and glory in our own littleness and sinfulness and to encourage and reassure us, comfort us in the old, strong Bible sense of the word as we contemplate the unsearchable riches of divine mercy displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[44 : 16] make that your goal to meditate on Jesus and to allow your meditation to literally change you and grow that love for God in your heart.

Let's pray. God, we're so little.

Our brains are so small. We think we know so much. We're so cocky. We think we're great because we can take some grains of sand and some precious metals and a drop of oil and make a cell phone.

But when we look at you, God, our minds are completely overwhelmed. You are great. you are holy. We're, we just can't understand.

But we can look at Jesus and see the exact representation of your nature. And I pray, Lord, that as we go into this week that we would go forth with a hunger to know you better, to experience life with you.

[45 : 42] to be so consumed by your love that we can't help but love you back. God, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.