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MAY , 2021

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

I led one of our church's small groups in our community for 8 or 9 years. We met on Thursday evenings for about an hour and a half. We started the group with about 20 people attending each week, and with my outstanding leadership we ended with about 6. That kind of replicated my experience as a pastor. Which reminds me of a story: Two old country preachers chanced to meet after many years. One said, "I heard that you got another church, Zeb. How is it doing?" Zeb said, "It's doing great! It's dying slower than any church I ever pastored."

One of the valued members of our cell group was a big guy named John. John was learning-challenged and had worked in a series of minimum-pay jobs during his life. John was a new Christian when he joined our group, and he brought the recorded music for us each week. John loved to worship, and he picked out beautiful worship songs for us. John became an usher in our church and we were very proud of him.

And John kept reporting experiences that he had with God that amazed us. During the past winter he told us about one of those experiences. He said that one morning he woke up early and read his Bible like he did every morning. He said he became so filled with emotion that he stood up, lifted his hands up to heaven and said aloud, "I love you, God!" After breakfast he went out to drive to his job for his cousin who had a carpet business. He said the windshield of his pickup was covered with frost, and written on the windshield were the words, "And I love you!"

Have you ever had a crazy experience like that? Have you ever felt, experienced God's love for you in some way that is hard to put into words? And you had to express your love and adoration to Him in some way: perhaps by stretching your hands up to heaven and telling Him you love Him; perhaps by stretching prostrate on the floor and weeping, telling Him how grateful you are for His saving you from your sins, addictions, fear, resentment, depression; perhaps by singing to Him; or dancing; or in some other off-beat way?

That is what God wants from you. He wants a genuine, emotional, personal, heart-felt love from you.....because that is the way He feels toward you. And He wants it to be expressed in some way. I have some friends whose grown children have turned their backs on them, on their own mother or father, and won't have anything to do with them. God feels so strongly about this kind of thing that He addresses it in the Big Ten. Remember that the 5th Commandment says, *Honor your father and mother* And of course God understands that sometimes there have been dark situations in the past that have deeply wounded children: divorce, abandonment, and even abuse. But if there is alienation in your family, I hope you will pray and ask God what He would have you do.

Just as there are many grown children who have turned their backs on their father or mother, there are many more that have turned their backs on their Father in heaven. If you don't understand that this grieves the heart of God, you don't understand the message of the Bible at all.

Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest commandment of all?" His answer makes it crystal clear: *The greatest commandment of all is that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And a second commandment is like it, that you love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* (Mark 12:28, Matt. 22:34)

Wow! Jesus said that all the revelations, teachings, laws, commandments that God gave to Moses and the prophets over a 1,500 year period were summarized in these two little commandments. And St. Paul reiterates this statement in Romans 13:8-10 - *He who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.*

Is your heart overflowing with love toward God and toward people? Many times I have struggled to feel any love at all toward certain people, and many times I have realized that my heart was cold and even resentful toward God. Oh, my! This is a constant struggle for the people of God. From Samuel down to Malachi, the prophets all said that God's heart was broken because His people had turned away from Him. And in the New Testament, remember what Jesus said about the church in Laodicea, whose "*hearts were neither hot nor cold*" toward God. (Rev. 3:15) They had simply put God out of their minds and didn't think about Him anymore.

So what do we do when we realize that we are not loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and instead of loving certain neighbors we would like to smack'em in the mouth?

I can't find a what-to-do list in the bible answering this question, but I hope the following points will be helpful:

- (1) Remember that we are not talking about salvation. We are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the cross. When we believe in Him as our Savior and Lord, we receive eternal life. To believe in Him is not simply a mental belief in His existence, but a heart belief that involves repentance from our self-centered life and a turning to Him as Master, Leader, King. It's a decision to follow Him.
- (2) Remember that we are not saved by our love for Him, which changes like the weather. We are saved by His love for us which is like a mighty Rock, steady and unchanging.
- (3) Hebrews 10:24 says, *Let us consider how we may spur one another on (or stir one another up) toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.....as you see the Day approaching.*
- (4) In a time of personal and national shaking, King David wrote: *I have set the Lord before me.....and I will not be shaken.*
- (5) Many children have come to Christ during a Vacation Bible School. Many adults have come to Christ or found hope and direction from God during a revival or a retreat or a time of fasting and prayer. These are simply times when people turn away from life's distractions and focus on the Lord.

What is the secret ingredient in obeying the Great Commandment, and in coming back to Him when we have wandered away? I believe it is in focusing on His love for us and setting our will to repent and return to Him.

I have always wondered, Why did Jesus command us to love God and people? You can't command someone to love. You can command them to obey you if you have the authority and power to force them to do it, but you can't force them to love you. And God never tries to force anyone to love or to obey Him. He just loves them even to the extent of sending His Son to die for them and then waits for them to respond to His love.

We can't control our feelings, but we can control our actions. David said again and again, I will praise the

Lord, I will set the Lord before me and think about Him, I will trust the Lord, I will worship the Lord. It's a matter of the will. I assume that is what God is commanding us to do.

God loves us passionately. He wants you and me to love Him back. He is so thrilled and pleased when we become emotional and cry out, "I love you, God!" He might even write on our car's windshield, "And I love you!"

HOW I LEARNED TO FIGHT HATE WITH LOVE

(In the March, 2021, issue of Charisma Magazine, Joshua Lindquist, an evangelist who lives in Minneapolis, wrote about his experience when George Floyd's life was taken by a police officer and how God brought good out of that evil. The following is greatly condensed.)

"When this all went down, I was away from home, in the Washington, D.C., area. Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, 15 minutes from my house in St. Paul, Minnesota. My neighborhood became a war zone. I was scheduled to go to Portugal, and I didn't want to go back home to the war zone.

I asked God, "What do you want me to do?" As a white man, I felt that I would be useless there. But I felt that the Holy Spirit said, "Love, serve and use your gift to unite people to see revival. Call the church out of hiding and into the battle like Gideon in Judges 6." A friend, a powerful Black preacher named J. T. Thomas, called and asked me to come and assist him, and that was my confirmation.

A church located on the same street as the George Floyd memorial site allowed us to set up a stage in front of their building. People poured into the area from all over the world, mainly unbelievers. I'll never forget the first night. More than 1,000 people were at the memorial site. The gospel was proclaimed by a team of Black preachers. Hundreds of hands went up to receive Jesus - people from every background - atheists, anarchists, Muslims and many ethnicities. Many were weeping and getting hit by the power and love of God. Deliverance was taking place, hearts were being healed of pain and confusion.

At that point, we did not have a baptismal. The pastor of the church down the street allowed us to set up their baptismal on site. We found out that before George Floyd died, he helped his pastors carry a baptismal into the street for people to be baptized. I thought, What better way to honor this man than to see baptisms

happen at this memorial. A Black pastor, Charles Kaniku and his wife took the lead in the revival meetings which lasted for about 60 days straight. Almost every night you would see people of every color in each other's arms, crying and forgiving each other of racism and division.

I could write books about the supernatural unity and miracles I saw at the George Floyd memorial revival. Thousands heard the gospel, hundreds gave their lives to Jesus, dozens were baptized. Demons came out of many. People came from all over the nation to serve, love and give. Racial reconciliation happened, and the riots in Minneapolis subsided. Inspired by our example, people in other states and even nations began to preach the gospel in public, baptize and engage in racial reconciliation. One example took place in Kenosha, Wisconsin, which was being rocked by riots and strife. A revival broke out and the Kenosha riots stopped.

Sean Feucht, a well-known missionary worship leader, came to the memorial and told our team that it was one of the strongest revivals he had ever seen in the U.S. His inspiration became a tour of 48 cities being rocked by the gospel. I went on this tour and witnessed thousands receive Jesus and thousands get baptized publicly - in America. I witnessed people who were suicidal and depressed run to the altar and get set free. I witnessed anarchists, prostitutes and Satanists give their lives to Jesus. In Nashville, Tennessee, alone, around 500 people were baptized in one night.

Church, we need to be ready. More shakings are coming! When crisis hits, we need to refuse the temptation to hide and, instead, run to the battlefield, unite with other believers, love people and preach the gospel with boldness and power.

what I am doing in your life, even though you don't understand. The ultimate challenge is to keep focusing your eyes on me, no matter what is going on around you." (1 Peter 5:5-6), John 14:6)

"There is no randomness about your life. Every moment is alive with My glorious presence to those whose hearts are intimately connected with Mine. As you give yourself to a life of constant communion with Me, you will find that you simply have no time for worry. You are freed to let Me direct your steps, enabling you to walk along the path of peace." (Luke 12:25-26; Jude 14-15; Luke 1:79)

"Let me teach you thankfulness. Begin by acknowledging that everything - all your possessions and all that you are - belongs to Me. Some of My most precious children have been laid aside in sickbeds or shut away in prisons. Others have voluntarily learned the discipline of spending time alone with Me. *My Word is a lamp to your feet and a light for your path.*" (Hebrews 12:28; Psalm 19:1; Psalm 119:105)

"When some basic need is lacking - time, energy, money - consider yourself blessed. Your very lack is an opportunity to hold onto Me in unashamed dependence. The truth is that self-sufficiency is a myth perpetuated by pride and temporary success. Health and wealth can disappear instantly, as can life itself. Rejoice in your insufficiency, knowing that *My power is made perfect in weakness.*" (James 1:2-3; 2 Cor. 12:9)

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JESUS CALLING

(Following are a few excerpts from the devotional book, Jesus Calling, by Sarah Young.)

"When things don't go as you would like, accept the situation immediately. If you indulge in feelings of regret, they can easily spill over into resentment. Remember that I am sovereign over your circumstances, and *humble yourself under My mighty hand.* Rejoice in