

LOVING THE GOD WHO LOVES YOU

Learning the Lasting Value of a Connected Life

How much would you say this pen is worth? It's just a plastic ink pen. We buy them 300 at a time. They are nothing really special. But, how much would the pen be worth that John Hancock used to sign his name in huge letters on the bottom of the Declaration of Independence? It too, was just an ordinary pen at that time. But it would be worth thousands, if not millions of dollars. What's the difference that makes it so valuable? It is the connection to the hand that once held it and to the historic event that it was a part of.

How much is a key worth? It's just a piece of metal with some notches cut into it. It's not really worth much by itself. But if this key starts your car, it begins to have value. If this is the key to a bank safety deposit box where jewels worth millions and millions of dollars are kept, then the key may be very, very valuable.

How much is a human life really worth? Well, it all depends! Just like pen, or the key, the value of your life depends on the connection. A life disconnected from God is a waste. But when life is connected to God, that life begins to have the fullness God intended, the potential, fullness of purpose and direction God intends. ALL life has worth & value, but a life connected with God has FULL value.

How is a life connected to God? God has given us 10 important ways to be connected to Him. He calls them the 10 commandments.

The 10 commandments show us the will, heart, and desire of God. They show us what a life connected with God looks like.

Jesus once described a life connected with God this way: ***“One of them, an expert in the Law, tested [Jesus] with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest***

commandment. [Love God – be connected w/ Him] ***And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*** *Matthew 22:35-40*

The 10 commandments are a description of a life connected with God, and therefore, a life also connected with other people around you whom God has made.

My hope is that as we examine the 10 commandments this summer, you pay close attention. We live in a society that ignores God’s 10 Commandments. They are disregarded, forgotten, thrown out of school, and many churches no longer teach the 10 Commandments because don’t want to offend anyone.

A survey found that 55% of Americans cannot name even 4 of the 10 Commandments. The same survey found that 70% of Canadians could not name even 3 of the 10 Commandments. Canadians are even for ignorant of God’s commands than Americans aye!

This summer, if you join us for this series, and you hear, you think, and you pray over what God is saying through this series, you will find a greater understanding of yourself, of God, and what a life connected with God is like.

Today, we’re going to start with cornerstone commandment, the foundation of all the other commandments. If you keep this Commandment you will keep all the others. Today, we come face to face with the most important issue in what it means to have a relationship with God. Today we come face to face with the biggest issue in having a life connected with God. Today’s commandment addresses the biggest question any human life must face. That question is: What do I do with God? What role does He have in my life? The eternity of every human life depends on how each person answers this question: What do I do with God? Do I ignore Him? Pay lip service to Him? Or give Him my trust, my love, my heart and soul? My all?

The FIRST COMMANDMENT is found in the Bible in the book of Exodus, chapter 20, where God says to us:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God am a jealous God...” Exodus 20:2-5a

Today I'm going to talk to you about the What, the Why, and How of this First Commandment. What, Why, and How. What does it mean? Why should we keep it? And How do we keep this Commandment?

First, the WHAT Of This Commandment – what is God saying?

Basically, God is saying that a life connected with God, a life that lives in His blessing, puts God first. Love God first, best, and most. To say it negatively, we should not love or honor anything or anyone more than God.

Don't worship the sun, the moon, or the stars. Don't worship gods of ancient times like Baal, Molech, or Astarte, or any statues anyone says “bow down to.” For us these days, God' is saying, don't worship false gods of modern times like Allah, Buddha, spirits, or angels. And especially for us here, God is saying don't worship material possessions. Don't bow down to pleasure, fashion, fortune, fame, the applause of people. Don't make getting that position, or having that power the most important thing to you.

Are you worried and anxious? The First Commandment means that God is the One who is control of the universe and He's got your life. You don't have to live with the weight of the world on your shoulders. You don't have to manage and control what happens in your life or in the lives of your family members. Let God be in control. A church member once gave me a sign. I hung it in my office. It reads, “Good morning, this is God. I will be taking care of all your problems today. **AND I WILL NOT NEED YOUR HELP!** So have a good day, God.”

But, you see, we usually trust in ourselves more than God, and the person we love the most is ourselves. The First Commandment

is saying that we should not love or honor anything or anyone more than God.

That's the "Thou shalt NOT" side. That's the negative side of this Commandment. That's the bad stuff to avoid. But every Commandment has a positive side. The positive side is what we should do. It's the good we get to do. And the First Commandment is We should honor God as GOD !

What's a god? What's role of a god? A god is in charge. A God calls shots. He's the provider, and the Boss.

God is asking every person to Acknowledge His existence – that He is real, and live. God wants all people to affirm His greatness as the Creator, the One we should listen to and follow His wisdom, trust His love, direct our highest attention to Him, give Him affection, and give Him our highest allegiance.

All of that is the meaning of these simple words, ***You shall have no other gods before Me.***

That's the WHAT. Naturally the next question you'd ask is "WHY?" Why does God give us this commandment? WHY is God so interested in cornering the market on our allegiance?

Is this commandment arising out of the heart of an insecure God who "just can't share you with anyone else?" NOT AT ALL! This Commandment comes out of the heart of a God who LOVES you and wants something so much better for you than for you to chase after other gods!

There are two reasons why we give God the ultimate place, ultimate love in our lives: first, because we WANT to, and second, because we NEED to.

Why do we WANT to love God first, best, and only? Because He saved us. God begins the 10 Commandments by mentioning the fact that He saved the people of Israel. They were nobodies. They were slaves to the most powerful nation on earth at that time which was Egypt. They were not educated, wealthy, or sophisticated people. No, there was nothing attractive that drew God to them. Instead, God *chose* them. He loved them just for the sake of His

covenant long ago with their ancestor Abraham. God chose Abraham as the man through whom God would eventually send the Savior of the entire world.

The People of Israel did not liberate themselves. Do you remember the 10 plagues? Through Moses God did amazing miracles that finally brought the Egyptians to their knees. The Israelites came out of Egypt through the parted Red Sea. God even destroyed the entire mighty Egyptian Army by causing the waters to flow back and drown every Egyptian soldier, horse, and chariot driver.

What I am saying is God's grace is the motivation to keep the 10 Commandments. *Exodus 20:2* is the verse before the 10 Commandments, and there God says, ***"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."*** God reminded the people that HE SAVED THEM. Their response was to be letting God be most important in their lives.

If someone SAVED your life, how would you respond to that person? Imagine you were drowning and someone pulled you out and revived you. Or imagine you were dying, then someone donated a kidney you needed to give you life. How would you respond to that person? Wouldn't that person become real important to you? For many people, when they are saved the person saved takes on a whole new attitude and lives his life thereafter for the one who saved him.

You've been saved. By Jesus! How do we respond? We respond by loving Him. Trusting Him. Wanting to know Him more. Living to serve God and His people. We respond by telling others about our loving God. We say "thank you" to God with our offerings and in our worship. All of these ways we respond to God's love are the actions God asks of you in the Ten Commandments.

WHY do you give God the ultimate place and the ultimate love in your life? Because He SAVED you! And therefore we cannot help but love and serve this amazing God who has saved us.

Not only has God saved you. We also WANT to give God the ultimate place in our lives because of His on-going, daily love that

provides you with all that you have and are! Psalm 147 speaks about this.

“Celebrate and sing!

Play your harps for the Lord our God. The psalm writer is saying we thank and praise God. Why? Here are the reasons:

***He fills the sky with clouds and send rain to the earth,
So that the hills will be green with grass.***

He provides food for cattle and for the young ravens, when they cry out.

He makes your city gates strong [so that you can live in peace] and blesses your people by giving them children.

God lets you live in peace, and He gives you the very best wheat.

As soon as God speaks, the earth obeys.

***He covers the ground with snow like a blanket of wool,
And He scatters frost like ashes on the ground.***

At His command the ice melts, and the wind blows, and streams begin to flow” Psalm 147:7-9, 13-16,18

Why do we WANT to love God first, best, and only? Because He’s given you house, and home; food and clothes; family and friends; luxuries and wealth unknown before in the history of the world. And best of all, God has given you His Son, Jesus! How can I HELP but love a God like that? How can I HELP but want Him in 1st, best & only spot in my life??

Why? Why do we keep the First Commandment and give God the ultimate place and love in our lives? Because we WANT to, in response to all His love for us.

AND we NEED to love Him first for our own good. You see ***God knows that whatever else you give your ultimate allegiance and affection to will only lead to terrible destruction and disappointment – now and in eternity!***

In other words, whatever you put in first place in your life that isn’t the true God, will not come thru for you when you need it the most. It will not come thru!!

This is described for us in Psalm 115. Anything other than God will not and cannot come thru for you.

“Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

That’s really clear than any other god, any thing put in first place in your life that is not the true God will not come through to help and save you. Now, comes the stinger. False gods, in whatever shape they come, are not only useless. They actually harm you. Listen to these powerful words: ***Those who make them will be like the, and so will all who trust in them.”*** Psalm 115:3-8

Why do we NEED to love God first, best, and only? Because all other gods are false, empty, useless. They mislead people. False gods DISCONNECT your life from God.

There is ONLY ONE true God in heaven. His name is not Allah, Budah, not god of mysticism or Eastern philosophies, not goddess of mother earth. Not the god that a person just makes up in their own heart and mind so that what ever they believe in is god for them. NO!

There is only ONE God in heaven and earth. Only one God worthy of your total allegiance.

That one true God is the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who chose to step into human race in Jesus Christ to save the human race.

There is only ONE God. One. One. ONE!!

But here in America today, we’re like the people of long ago, described in 2 Kings: ***“They worshipped the Lord, but they served their own gods.”*** 2 Kings 17:33

A person might sit in church on a Sunday morning, but their real cathedrals of worship are banks, sports stadiums, shopping malls, business, their cabin or vacation or retirement home, the

soccer field, and many other places where he may give his ultimate affection.

A person may go to a stadium downtown, sit in blizzard, pay \$300 for a ticket and parking and food, shout and cheer for several hours until their voice is hoarse. If their team loses they are so upset that they shed a tear. But that same person goes to church sits arms folded, doesn't sing or speak, is not moved emotionally, and complains about the few dollars put into offering plate. **WHAT'S HIS GOD?**

Families will sign son or daughter up for a sports team, pay hundreds of dollars for equipment; travel and pay to stay in hotels for weekends when child playing; not worship that week or several weeks in a row. Playing the sport interferes with getting to know other Christ-followers, participating in worship, being in a class or a group where the child may make friends with other Christians and grow in faith. Here's the question: What's most important to parent? What is the parent teaching the son or daughter about what's most important for the son or daughter's life?

"They worshipped the Lord, but they served their own gods." 2 Kings 17:33

The WHY of this commandment is we WANT to love God first and best, because of all His love to each of us! We also NEED to love God first and best because anything else we put in first place in our lives will not come thru for you.

I trust you're asking yourself HOW can I love and honor the God who loves me first, best and only? HOW can I do that? There are three ways. First,

❖ Love God's SON. Jesus Himself said, ***"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him."*** John 5:21-23

To honor God's Son, agree with God's assessment of your life. You have broken this commandment. Fallen short, sinned.

Trust God. Do not trust in the right things you have done. But trust in Jesus, that is, that you could never do enough right things, you could never live a perfect, spotless life. But IN SPITE OF the bad you've done and the good haven't done, still Jesus came thru for you. He lived a perfect, sinless life for you. He gave His life on the cross to carry all your sins there and put them to death once and for all. Jesus rose again to defeat sin, death, and the power of the devil. He is *with* you always. He forgives all your sins.

To honor God's Son means you stop trusting in what you've done and instead trust in Jesus. Many people attend a worship service. They know about Jesus, but they still believe that what's going to slide them into heaven is the kind of life they've led. Trusting in your own goodness is not loving and honoring God's Son

Loving God's Son means not just KNOW about Jesus, but LOVE Him, really LOVE HIM! For all He has done to save you.

HOW can I love and honor the God who loves me first, best and only?

❖ Second, Love God's WORD

We live in a society saturated with words. Words are coming at you constantly. Cell phones reach you instantly, the internet, TV, emails, text messages, -- We are bombarded constantly from the time we wake up until we go to bed with words and images.

But is every word on the internet true? Can you trust every phone call you receive to not be a scam? You need an authoritative Word you can trust in. You need an anchor for your life, something you know is true and you can count on. That is the Word of God!!

Jesus said, "***Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and put it into practice!***" **Luke 11:28** God's Word is in the Bible.

Today politicians make their decisions based on what the polling data says will get them elected. People make decisions on basis of what earn them more money, cost them less, and give them more luxury or pleasure. MAKE YOUR DECISIONS ON BASIS OF

GOD'S WORD! LOVE His Word. In it you will find peace, strength, comfort, wisdom, courage, inspiration, joy.

HOW do you put God first in your life? Love His Son. Love His Word. And Love God's **AUTHORITY** over your life. This is the issue of lordship. Who runs your life? Let God call the shots. Trust His Word and then obey it. Put God's Word into action in your life.

Thomas a Kempis lived in the 1400's. In his book, *The Imitation of Christ*, he wrote this prayer:

O Lord, there can be no goodness in us, if You withdraw Yourself.

No wisdom can benefit us, if You cease to guide us.

No strength can preserve us, if You no longer defend.

No purity can be secure, if You do not guard it.

No watchfulness of our own can protect us, if You do not keep watch.

If You abandon us, we are soon lost and perish.

But if You come to us with Your grace, we are lifted up to live again.

We are weak, but You make us strong.

We are cold and dull, but by You are we set ablaze.

He's talking about a life connected to God.

Do you want a life of joy, peace, hope, and purpose? That life only comes from one place (one PERSON). It comes from being connected with God.

WHY?

He made you

He saved you

He's fixin' to take you to heaven

LOVE the God who loves You!

Amen.