

L.I.F.T.

P.O.D. STUDY GUIDE

WEEK ONE - LOVING GOD



INTRODUCTION

THE COMMAND AT THE CENTER

The **L.I.F.T.** series begins with **LOVE** because loving God is not simply one Christian discipline among many. According to Jesus, it is the command from which everything else flows.

Before we talk about becoming like Christ, fighting the good fight of faith, or learning to trust God through uncertainty, we have to begin with the orientation of our hearts toward God Himself.

The biblical command to love God is rooted in one of the most important passages in the entire Old Testament: **Deuteronomy 6:4–9**, traditionally known by its opening Hebrew word, *Shema*, meaning “**hear**” or “**listen.**”

Deut. 6:4-9

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”



The biblical idea of “hearing” involves more than receiving information. It carries the expectation of response. God was calling Israel not simply to know something about Him, but to live according to what they had heard. That is why the declaration of who God is is immediately followed by the command, “**You shall love the LORD your God.**”

Israel was commanded to love God with **heart, soul, and might**. Rather than describing three isolated parts of a person, these words communicate total devotion. The heart encompasses our thoughts, desires, and decisions; the soul points toward our whole identity; and might includes our strength, capacity, and resources. God was not asking Israel for a religious portion of life. He was claiming the whole person.

Verses 6–9 bring that love into everyday life. God’s Word was to be discussed at home, taught to children, remembered while traveling, and present at the beginning and end of each day. This remains reflected in Jewish practice today through the regular recitation of the Shema and traditions such as the *mezuzah* on doorposts and *tefillin* used in prayer. The point is powerful: loving God was never intended to be confined to a worship gathering. **It was to permeate life.**



Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall 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, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

Jesus begins His answer with the Shema: **"Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God..."**

Jesus reaches back into Israel's ancient confession and places loving God at the center of discipleship. He then joins it with the command to love one's neighbor. **Everything else is built upon these two loves.**

Christian discipleship therefore cannot ultimately be reduced to church attendance, doctrinal knowledge, spiritual activity, morality, or ministry involvement.

All of these matter, but Jesus brings us to a more searching question:
Do I love God?



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Deuteronomy 6 places loving God in ordinary activities such as sitting at home, traveling, going to bed, and getting up. What would loving God throughout ordinary life look like for us today?



1. LOVE CHANGES WHAT WE VALUE

2 Samuel 23:13-17

Then three of the thirty chief men went down and came to David in the harvest time to the cave of Adullam, while the troop of the Philistines was camping in the valley of Rephaim.

David was then in the stronghold, while the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. David had a craving and said, "Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!" So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord; and he said, "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.



David's water from Bethlehem represented desire, memory, and comfort. Yet after his mighty men risked their lives to obtain it, David could no longer view it as something simply to consume. Its cost changed its value, and David poured it before God as worship.

Romans 12 takes this principle deeper for the New Testament believer. After spending eleven chapters describing what God has accomplished for us through Christ, Paul says,

“Therefore...by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.”

Notice the order: **mercy comes before sacrifice**. We do not surrender ourselves to persuade God to love us. Because God has already demonstrated His love and mercy toward us, surrender becomes our response.

This is the difference between worship and religious bargaining. We don't sacrifice so God will owe us something. We surrender because He is worthy.

In Matthew 6, Jesus says **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** What we continually invest ourselves in eventually captures our affection. Our calendars, spending, attention, ambitions, and priorities can therefore reveal things about what we love that our words sometimes conceal.



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Romans 12:1 connects our sacrifice to “the mercies of God.” How does understanding what God has already done for us change our motivation for surrendering our lives to Him?

2. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What might our time, money, energy, and attention reveal about what we truly value?



LIFE APPLICATION

Take an honest inventory this week of your time, attention, resources, and ambitions.

Rather than beginning with, “What do I need to give up?” begin with a better question: **“How can what God has placed in my hands become worship?”**

Loving God does not necessarily mean abandoning everything valuable; it means refusing to allow anything valuable to become untouchable by God.



2. LOVE OUTLIVES IMMEDIATE RESULTS

1 Chronicles 29:1–5

Then King David said to the entire assembly, “My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is still young and inexperienced and the work is great; for the temple is not for man, but for the Lord God. Now with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, and the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, onyx stones and inlaid stones, stones of antimony and stones of various colors, and all kinds of precious stones and alabaster in abundance. Moreover, in my delight in the house of my God, the treasure I have of gold and silver, I give to the house of my God, over and above all that I have already provided for the holy temple, namely, 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the buildings; of gold for the things of gold and of silver for the things of silver, that is, for all the work done by the craftsmen. Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?”

Hebrews 11:13–16

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.



David desired to build the Temple, but God determined that Solomon would complete it. David could have withdrawn from the project because someone else would receive the privilege of building it. Instead, he invested enormous resources because **he delighted in what belonged to God.**

Hebrews 11 gives us an even broader perspective. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and others lived by faith while looking toward promises whose complete fulfillment extended beyond their lifetimes. Some **“died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance.”**

This challenges our tendency to measure faithfulness only by immediate results. God's Kingdom operates across generations.

We benefit from prayers someone else prayed, sacrifices someone else made, and seeds someone else planted. In turn, we are called to plant seeds whose full harvest we may never personally witness.

Jesus said in John 4:37 that **“one sows and another reaps.”** Kingdom faithfulness is bigger than personal recognition. We can pray for children whose stories are still unfolding, disciple people without knowing how God will eventually use them, and serve without needing our names attached to the results.

Ego asks, “Will I get to see the results?” Love asks, “Does this matter to God?”



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Hebrews 11 describes people who remained faithful even though they did not see every promise fulfilled in their lifetime. How does this challenge our definition of spiritual success?

2. Where might God currently be asking you to continue planting, serving, praying, or investing even though you haven't yet seen the harvest?



LIFE APPLICATION

Identify one Kingdom investment that has become discouraging because you have not seen enough progress.

Instead of measuring it only by visible results, evaluate whether God has called you to remain faithful in it.

Pray specifically for endurance and commit yourself again to the process. **Faithfulness is never wasted simply because the harvest is delayed.**



3. THE GIVER BECOMES GREATER THAN THE GIFT

2 Kings 5:14–17

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, “Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Naaman said, “If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules’ load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord.

Psalm 73:25–26

Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

John 17:3

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



Naaman came to Israel because he had leprosy and wanted healing. Yet after God healed him, something greater happened. Naaman declared, **“I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.”** His need brought him searching for a miracle, but the miracle introduced him to God.

There is nothing wrong with coming to God with our needs. Scripture invites us to pray for healing, provision, restoration, direction, and breakthrough. But God does not want our relationship with Him to end with what He can provide.

Psalm 73 expresses the deeper destination: **“Whom have I in heaven but You?... God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”** A “portion” could describe someone's allotted possession or inheritance. The psalmist is declaring that when everything else is stripped away, **God Himself is his inheritance.**

Jesus takes us even further in John 17:3: **“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”** Eternal life is not merely endless existence. At its center is knowing God.

We must therefore guard against allowing God to become merely the means by which we obtain something else. We certainly seek His hand, but we must also desire His heart. **The miracle may introduce us to God, but God is greater than the miracle.**



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Psalm 73 says that God is our “portion.” What would it practically mean for God Himself to become our greatest treasure rather than simply the source of the things we treasure?

2. John 17:3 describes eternal life as knowing God. How would our prayer lives change if knowing God became as important to us as receiving answers from God?



BRINGING IT HOME

The Shema brings us back to the central issue: **“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”**

Everything we have studied tonight flows from that command. Loving God reaches our treasures because He asks for the whole heart.

Loving God reaches our investments because He asks for our whole strength. Loving God reaches our deepest desires because ultimately He calls us into relationship with Himself.

Personal Reflection

What currently competes most strongly for my affection toward God?

Where is God asking me to love Him through faithfulness rather than immediate results?

Have I become more focused on something I need from God than on knowing God Himself?



This week, choose one deliberate practice that puts the Shema into everyday life. Rather than simply adding another religious activity, intentionally bring God into an ordinary part of your day.

Talk with Him during your commute. Turn a meal into thanksgiving. Discuss Scripture with your family. Give something valuable as worship. Spend time with God without asking Him for anything. The goal is to begin removing the artificial boundary between our “spiritual life” and the rest of life.

The Shema calls us to something far greater than having God somewhere in our lives. **It calls us to build our lives around the God we love.**

Prayer

Father, You alone are God, and You have called us to love You with all that we are. Teach us to hear Your Word in a way that produces obedience and to obey You from hearts that genuinely love You.

Let our worship extend beyond songs into our time, resources, relationships, decisions, ambitions, and everyday lives. Give us the faith to invest in things whose results we cannot yet see, and teach us to remain faithful when the harvest seems delayed. Most of all, keep us from loving Your gifts more than we love You. May knowing You become the greatest treasure of our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

