



Session 1: Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, soul, mind and strength

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?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:28-31

Listening Guide

What the greatest commandment **doesn't** say:

Love the Lord your God with _____ your heart, with _____ your soul, with _____ your mind, and with _____ your strength.

What the greatest commandment **does** say:

Love the Lord your God with _____ your heart, with _____ your soul, with _____ your mind, and with _____ your strength.

1) We are called to love the Lord with _____ of our _____.

Love is an _____.

Loving with _____ and in _____.

Loving our _____. (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:35).

Loving God through loving _____.

2) We are called to love the Lord with _____ of our _____.

Love is a _____.

Loving God through _____ Him, (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Loving God through _____ on Him. (1 Peter 5:7)

Loving God by giving up the _____ of _____.

3) We are called to love the Lord with _____ of our _____.

Love through _____.

Loving God by _____ Scripture.

Loving God by _____ Scripture.

Loving God by what we fill our _____ with. (Philippians 4:8)

4) We are called to love the Lord with _____ of our _____.

Love is an _____.

Loving God through how we invest our _____.

Loving God through loving our _____.

Loving God through your _____.

Loving God in your _____.

But when _____ lives in our hearts, when we _____ with the Spirit, He enables us to do just that: the impossible. With Christ as our example, the Father at our side, and the Spirit guiding us, we can love the Lord our God with _____ our heart, _____ our soul, _____ our mind, and _____ our strength.

Discussion questions

Which part of this commandment do you find hardest: loving the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, or strength? Which part do you find the easiest?

Why do you think that the concept of *all* is so difficult for us? What might be hindrances to us being able to give all of ourselves to Christ?

Continue reading in Mark 12 in verses 32 through 34. How does the teacher of the law respond to Jesus? What is it that makes this teacher “not far from the kingdom of God”?

Further in Mark 12, Jesus is watching people place their offerings in the temple treasury (verses 41-44). What is it that the woman does that catches Jesus attention, and how does it relate to the commandment that He just said was the greatest?

How does your understanding of love change when you read at 1 John 4:7-12? How is our culture’s view of love different from this *agape* love shown by Christ?

Is it easy for you to trust God’s plan for your life? Are you in the driver’s seat or the passenger seat when it comes to control of your life? How do verses such as Proverbs 3:5-6 and 1 Peter 5:7 influence your ability to relinquish control of your life to God?

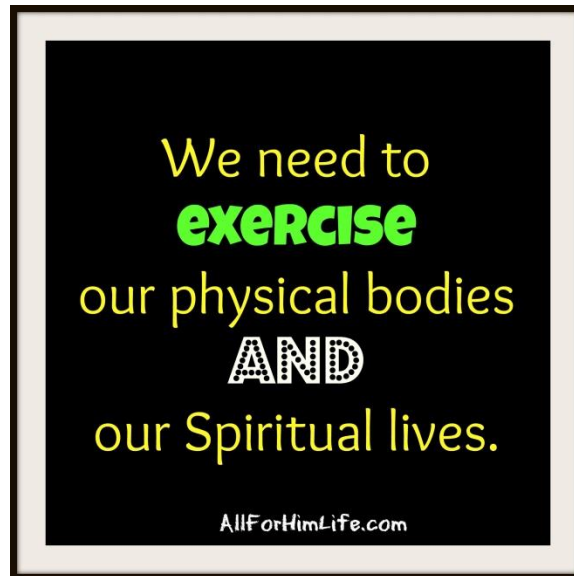
I mentioned that loving the Lord with all of our mind encompasses what we think about, read, watch, listen to, and pull up on our computer screens when no one else is around. Are you filling your mind with things that are glorifying God, loving Him with all of your mind? If you find yourself wondering if you are, talk to a pastor or a trusted friend who can help you.

When we think of strength, we often think of a gym, lifting weights, building up our muscles. What things can you be lifting to be building up your strength in Christ? Consider Ephesians 6:10-18 as you answer.

Spiritual Exercise

I have many friends who are fitness fanatics. They have Facebook groups and workout groups and fitness families and are committed to eating healthier, staying fit, and encouraging others to do the same. It’s a great thing, and I’m grateful for these friends and their enthusiasm for living better physical lives.

It’s not just our physical bodies that we need to work out, though. We need to strengthen our Spiritual lives as well.



Jesus' proclamation of the greatest commandment that we've been studying this week is found in almost all of the Gospels, but the one we've been in is in Mark 12. There are four parts to the greatest commandment, but the one we're going to focus on today is the fourth: loving the Lord with all of our strength

Consider the disciples for a moment. Matthew 4 records Jesus calling James, John, Peter, and Andrew to be His disciples. All that the Gospel records Jesus telling them is this: "Follow me! I will make you fishers of men."

I don't know about you, but when Jesus called me to follow Him, and pretty much every day since, I've questioned His plan. I've said, "Wait a minute, God. Do you really mean for me to do that? Are you sure you don't mean this instead?" If I had been even just a fly on the wall on those boats with Peter, James, John and Andrew, I think I would have had a few questions before I just up and left my nets, my boat, and my dad. Oh, and my job, my way to live, the only thing I'd really ever known – to follow this guy who was just starting His ministry.

The disciples left everything they had, everything they knew, to follow Christ. And the Gospels record no hesitation on their part. No questions. Just obedience. I'd like to suggest that this action by the disciples, of giving up everything they had, knew and wanted to follow Christ is the best example of loving the Lord with all of our strength. The disciples' strength was what they knew, what they were good at: for Peter, Andrew, James, and John, it was fishing. They turned

their talents from fishing for fish, to fishing for men. They gave Christ everything they had. But they didn't turn from fishing for fish to fishing for men overnight. They had to learn how to do it, to walk with Christ along the dusty road, see Him heal people and teach and turn over tables in the Temple and feed five thousand people with just a few loaves and fish. They had to *exercise* and *learn* their strength in order to love God with *all* of their strength.

It's not necessarily about what you bring to the table, what you're good at, or what your job is. Those may be part of your strength, but there's more to it than that. You've got to walk with Christ and let Him teach you, help you to build up your strength so that you can love Him with it, serve Him with it.

Think of it like my fitness friends think about staying in shape – you have to keep at it, do it day after day. You have to go to the gym in order to build up those muscles. If you're going to run a marathon, you have to train.

If you're going to love the Lord with all of your strength, you've got to build up that strength. So read the Word of God, study it, memorize it, let it permeate your speech and your actions. Pray unceasingly. Give thanks. Put on the armor of God every morning.

And with His strength, you will be able to love the Lord with all of your strength.

The Greatest Commandment

When we read about the greatest commandment in our first session this week, we stopped at verse 31. Today we'll explore the teacher of the law's response to Jesus, and a widow who Jesus praises for giving everything she had.

The Old Testament law that Jesus quotes is from Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

In Mark 12, the teacher of the law replies to Jesus by telling Him what comes before the greatest commandment in the law, showing that he knows the law, that he has read and committed it to memory. Then he tells Jesus, "You're right. This commandment is greater than every other one."

In the previous two sections of Mark 12, the chief priests and Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus in a lie so that they could arrest Him. When He answers their question about paying taxes to Caesar, their response is just amazement. When He answers their question about marriage after the resurrection, the Scriptures record that they didn't say anything! And yet, this teacher of the law in verse 32 replies to Jesus wisely.

Jesus' reply to the teacher of the law astounds the onlookers, and even causes me to pause: "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to many things in Scripture: a mustard seed, treasure hidden in a field, a man who sowed good seed in a field. Jesus tells us that the only way to the kingdom of God is through being born again, that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a

needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. This passage in Mark 12 is one of the only places that Jesus tells someone that they are close to the kingdom of God.

I don't think that it was just his wise answer that caused him to be close to the kingdom of God. I also don't think that this particular teacher of the law was trying to trap Jesus so that he could find a reason to arrest him. I believe that his question was genuine, and that is part of the reason that Jesus tells him he is close to the kingdom. His attitude and his wise answer are both a part of it.

Later on in Mark 12 (starting in verse 41), Jesus watches people come and put their offerings into the temple treasury. The rich people place large amounts of money into the treasury, while a poor widow comes in and puts in only two copper coins. Jesus calls His disciples to Him, saying, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."

I don't think it's a coincidence that this story comes so soon after Jesus' conversation about the greatest commandment with the teacher of the law. The poor widow is an example of someone who loves the Lord with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength. She gave everything. All of it. The wealthy gave larger sums of money, but she gave everything she had to live on. This meant more than all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices, because she was living out the greatest commandment of all: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

What ways can you find to love the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength today?



Session 2: Because He Gave It ALL

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Matthew 26:39-42

Listening Guide

Paving the way for Jesus was _____ the Baptist

Jesus ministry on Earth starts by Him calling the _____

- They got to see Him perform miraculous _____ and _____
- They got to _____ Jesus, _____ Jesus and _____ Jesus
- But they also had to see Him _____
- And then they got to see the _____ tomb: He is risen!

The subtle difference in Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane

First prayer: My Father, _____, may this cup be taken from me.

Second prayer: My Father, _____ for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it.

We have been called to _____ of our lives to Christ

For _____ have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

And _____ are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus
(Romans 3:24)

Discussion Questions

This week we focused on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the foundation of our faith. The cross is the center of our faith, the center of our lives. But without the resurrection, the cross is of no value. Without the resurrection, our faith is in vain. Without the resurrection, striving to live all of our lives for Christ is futile. Praise God that the resurrection is true, and that our Savior lives!

If you had been able to walk with Jesus on Earth and hear His words, touch His cloak, and see the miracles He performed, what do you think would have resonated with you most? Seeing Him? Touching Him? Seeing the miracles that He performed?

How did John the Baptist prepare the way for the Lord, fulfilling the prophecies found in the Bible?

What are the subtle differences between Jesus' first prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and the second prayer? How do His words and His actions portray His surrender to the will of the Father?

Lent is traditionally known in the Christian calendar as the forty days preceding Easter (including Sundays, it's actually 46), beginning on Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday commemorates the frailty of the human race, and focuses our attention back on the God who gave His life for us. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return," the priest says as he places the ashes on your forehead in the shape of a cross. A common practice is to then give something up during lent, a food or a time-consuming activity such as Facebook. If you think of Lent as a time to prepare for and experience the Lord's suffering and surrender, how do you see this act of giving something up as a helpful practice? As a potential hindrance?

What ways can you think of that we can surrender all of our lives to Christ? Which parts of your life are easy to surrender? Which parts are hard?

Luke 23 records the response of the centurion standing at the foot of the cross. “Surely this was a righteous man,” he says. What about Jesus death on the cross could compel him to say this? Refer to the other Gospels as you answer.

Read Romans 3:21-26. What two essential truths does this passage highlight?

You have been justified through faith in Jesus Christ alone by grace alone in Christ alone. No works that you do will justify you. No songs that you sing, no church that you attend, and no matter how many sermons you preach – nothing you do will ever justify you in the eyes of the Father. Only the shed blood of Christ can justify you. Do you ever try to do things to earn God’s favor or to earn this justification?

Read Matthew 13: 44. How does it make you feel to think of yourself as the treasure in a field that Christ, in His joy, left everything – EVERYTHING – to redeem?

Lent Is About Surrender

Lent is not about giving up coffee so that you can kick that caffeine addiction or chocolate so that you can lose weight or Facebook so that you can spend less time addicted to your phone. Don't get me wrong, all those things are good. But lent isn't about giving things up that will make your life better, healthier.

Lent is about surrender.

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus surrendered to the will of the Father. In the days and hours leading up to the garden of Gethsemane, even Jesus struggled to surrender to the will of the Father. He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will," and then, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matthew 26:39, 42). But surrender He did.

He surrendered to the will of the Father, by saying, "Not my will, but yours be done." He surrendered His whole life, His entire ministry to the Father – all of it, every last minute of it. He surrendered control of His situation to the Father, knowing that His plan was greater. He surrendered to the cross, to the most brutal death known to man. Lent is about surrender.

Surrendering all of our lives to Christ, not just part of it.

Surrendering our plans for our lives, letting God's will prevail.

Surrendering the illusion of control, giving God control of our lives.

Surrendering to the cross.

Lent is about surrender. When was the last time that you surrendered your entire life to Christ – not just the parts that are easy? When was the last time you surrendered to the will of Christ, His good, pleasing, and perfect will? When was the last time you surrendered control to the One in control of it all?

What if, this Lenten season and all the days after it, we strove to do what Jesus did – surrender?

What if we gave up coffee so that, instead of spending the time making it in the morning, we

used that time to pray for the strength to surrender? What if we gave up chocolate so that every time we thought about eating it, we instead prayed for God to help us give up control of our lives? What if we gave up Facebook so that we could use that data and time to read the Word on our lunch break, praying for the will of God to be evident in our lives?

I think we'd see a big change in the way we live our lives, in how we see God working in our lives. Because surrender is what we have been called to, and it's hard. Christ, our example, surrendered to the Father, to the cross. With His help, surrender is possible. Surrender.

Alone With God

It should be no surprise to me that when I unlock my apartment door when I come home from work that it is empty. The dishes that I didn't wash yesterday are still in the sink – unwashed. The laundry that I unceremoniously dumped on my living room floor (with every intention of folding it) is still in a giant pile. It should be no surprise to me that my apartment is empty and the only thing greeting me when I come home is silence.

After all, I do not have a house-elf to do my dishes and fold my clothes. I've got to do that all on my own.

After all, I'm a single graduate student, living alone. There shouldn't be anyone there to greet me when I come home. (If there is someone there, then, Houston, we have a problem.)

I like my solitude, most of the time. I like my quiet home, with the soft running water of my fish tank the only noise (well, other than my upstairs neighbors). I don't even mind doing the dishes or the laundry, though there are days a house-elf would be handy.

But there are other days that I wish for company. For someone else to be there when I get home. For the loneliness to go away. For my Friday nights to be filled with something other than work. There is a difference between being alone and being lonely, though. But that's a topic for another time. Being alone is a good thing.

I'm reminded in the Scriptures that we all need some time to be alone, to pray in solitude. Jesus, after being with crowds of people for many hours, would send His disciples on ahead of Him and retreat to a quiet place to pray. Even Jesus needed some time to commune with His Father, seeking His will and His direction – away from the crowds and the people who were the center of His ministry.

As He was preparing for the greatest sacrifice of His life, Jesus went a little farther off to pray. He asked His disciples to keep watch, to stay awake, to pray with Him. But when He returned to them, He found them sleeping! He wakes them, telling them that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and asks them once more to keep watch and pray. When they again fall asleep, He simply leaves them, weary of heart and of soul. Knowing what He must do, and what is coming at that very hour, He wakes them after He prays a third time, and tells them that His betrayer is near.

I think in our culture, we have lost the sense of being alone with God. We are constantly distracted by something – probably more than one thing. When we finally sit down for some

quiet time with God, we set our phone on the table, and it starts buzzing at us – with Facebook notifications and text messages and e-mails. We find it difficult to just let the phone go unanswered for two minutes, let alone twenty.

It is necessary for us to be alone with God sometimes. We need to take a step back and recharge our batteries, so to speak. That doesn't mean that we need to come home to an empty house or kick everyone out of a five-mile radius around you. Sometimes being alone with God involves putting in your headphones and turning on some music and walking down the street, talking with God. Sometimes it means walking away from the crowd of people ten minutes early to spend some time listening to God. Sometimes it means turning off the phone, the computer, and the tablet – for a whole day. Sometimes it means taking a break from the busyness of the city and going to the wilderness for a few days to really be alone with God.

The myriad of ways that you can be alone with God are easy to write on paper. But they must be something that you choose to do, especially in our people-driven culture. Choose to be alone with God for a period of time this week. Listen to what He would say. Sing songs of praise to Him. Tell Him the desires of your heart – He already knows them, but He wants to hear them. Be alone with God sometimes. Even Jesus went off a little ways alone to pray.



Session 3: God Is Good ALL The Time

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Listening Guide

God is _____ ALL the time

Good does not necessarily mean that:

- God _____ the situation the way _____ want Him to
- The _____ comes
- There will be a _____

God's good falls into the _____ plan

God's good is what He _____ with the bad

Three practical ways that we can start changing the way we view our circumstances and start seeking the good from the bad circumstances even while we're in the midst of them:

1) _____

Joy is more than _____

Joy is more than _____

Joy is an _____ emotion of an _____ gratitude because of _____ regardless of _____ circumstances

2) _____

Keep a _____ dialogue with God

3) _____ in all circumstances

Count your _____ and give _____

Discussion Questions

When you hear the phrase ‘God is good all the time,’ what is your first reaction – is it true or false? What circumstances and situations in your life has convinced you of this?

Which example (Chapman family, Mark Hall, Louis Zamperini) was most difficult for you to see God’s goodness in? Why?

Which examples was easiest for you to see God’s goodness? Why?

Can you think of any other examples of people in your life or in the spotlight who have had bad things happen to them and have yet been able to say that God is good all the time?

How would you define God’s goodness? How is that different from and similar to the view we have of goodness here on earth?

Of the three ways to start changing our focus (rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances), which one seems the most difficult to you? Why?

Take a moment and re-read 1 Peter 1:6-9.

- 1) Why does the writer say trials have come? Do you view trials and struggles in this light? Why or why not?
- 2) The joy that the writer describes is ‘inexpressible and glorious.’ Do you find your joy in Christ to be inexpressible and glorious? Why or why not?
- 3) Verse 9 tells us why that joy is inexpressible and glorious. Write a prayer that praises God for His faithfulness in our salvation in light of this verse.

Do you find it hard to pray without ceasing? What might make it more natural to pray without ceasing?

Are you prone to getting stuck in all of the bad things that happen during the day and forgetting to give thanks to God? If you are, how can you remind yourself to count your blessings and to give thanks in all circumstances? If you are not, how do you keep yourself focused on giving thanks in all circumstances?

God Really Is Good All The Time

Sometimes when we're in the midst of a tough circumstance, a difficult season of life, or when something terrible happens – the death of a child, a senseless bombing, or a national disaster – it is hard to see God working it out for good.

I'll be the first to say that I've asked God why He allowed me to have CF, and what He's doing with it. I've finally given God control and said, "Do with me what you will. Not my will, but yours be done."



I've seen some of God's goodness in recent years, and begun to see a little bit of His plan for me. But there are times when I still get sucked into the dark, deep pit of despair. Recently it has come in waves rather than drops of rain, but this particular pit has been in my work.

I have the unique privilege to work and study an aspect of my own disease. As you can imagine, there are good and bad things about working on my own disease.

There are days when the bad outweighs the good. There are days when the good outweighs the bad. Lately, the bad has outweighed the good. It's just been hard, for a number of reasons that I don't want to elaborate right now. Suffice it to say that I've wondered if I can do research in this field long-term.

Whenever I see a talk or poster at a conference that deals with CF research, I make a point of saying, 'Thank you' to the researcher. I usually say something along the lines of, 'Thank you for the research you do. It means so much to patients, parents, doctors and nurses that are affected by CF. Thank you for doing what you do.'

Today, I was at a CF clinic routine visit, and one of the nurses asked me how my research was going. The staff knows that I work on CFRD, and so I told her that I had some exciting results that I just presented at a conference. She got really excited and asked to see one of the devices that I had in my purse from the conference, and took it out into the offices for show and tell.

The doctor came in, asked how my research was, and so I told him the same thing that I'd told the nurse. And you know what he said? "That's amazing! On behalf of patients, doctors, and families affected by CF, thank you for doing this work. Thank you."

God truly is good. All the time.

When I'm sitting here wondering how God is using me, how to get out of this particular pit, how He is using it for good: He brings me into places like this.

He uses other people to encourage me. Just from a few simple words from my doctor, I was reminded that God really is good, and that He does have a plan. That what He has called me to do right now, He will give me the strength to do. That where He has called me to be right now, He will be with me. That even when it seems impossible, nothing is impossible with Him.

I still don't have all the answers to my questions. I still don't understand so much of His plan. But I do know this: God is good. All the time.

Even If

Have you ever prayed for something, something big - and waited and waited and waited for God to grant your request, and then been devastated when it felt like He didn't come through? Maybe you've been praying for the financial means to buy a house, healing for a child or a parent or yourself, for the opportunity to change jobs, for God to bless your family with a child, for God to bring a friend into your life that might become something more, for that ministry event you're planning to be well-attended.

Let me be abundantly clear:

**God ALWAYS answers your prayers.
ALWAYS.
It's just that He doesn't always answer
the way that we want Him to.**

Sometimes the answer we get isn't what we think we need. But it's what God knows we need. With whatever is going on in your life right now - whether it is big or small, wonderful or difficult - take heart that He does hear your prayers, your cries, your praise. Remember that His time is not ours, and that He has a bigger plan.

Kutless sings a song called *Even If*. The chorus says these words:

*Even if the healing doesn't come
And life falls apart
And dreams are still undone
You are God, You are good,
Forever faithful One
Even if the healing,
Even if the healing doesn't come.*

Even if...

...you're still renting an apartment and can't afford a house right now, He is working in it for His glory.

Even if...

...the new job doesn't pan out right now, ask for God to use you where you are right now.

Even if...

...God doesn't heal your son or daughter, put your trust in Him and ask for His strength to get you through each day, and to see the good that comes of your struggle.

Even if...

...you're still single and alone, God's got a plan. And His love is one that will never fail, never disappoint you, and never run away.

Even if...

...you haven't been blessed with a child, run to God, who has it all in His hands. Find comfort in Him today.

Even if...

...one person shows up to that ministry event, remember that God has used you in that person's life. And that was worth it.

Even if...

I will still praise You, because You are good. I will still trust You, because You are faithful.

And I will actively look for the ways that You are working ALL things for the good of we who love you. I will let you use my circumstances, my struggles, my life to bless others, and to work out Your plan in their lives and in mine. Even when the healing doesn't come.





Session 4: Living ALL Of Our Lives For Him

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:17

Listening Guide

Four Ways That We Can Strive To Live _____ Of Our Lives For Him

- 1) Surround yourself with _____
 - Find someone to hold you accountable
 - Get involved in a local church
- 2) Immerse yourself in His _____
 - What are you listening to?
 - Read the Word.
 - Study the Word.
 - Memorize the Word.
- 3) Remember whom you are _____
 - 2 Corinthians 5:14-15
 - Colossians 3:17; 23-24
 - 1 Peter 4:11
- 4) Be _____
 - Hebrews 10:10

Discussion questions

Have you surrounded yourself with a Godly community that you can rely on, can serve in, and can grow in? If you have, what specific aspects of that community do you find most helpful to your walk with Christ? If you have not, what is holding you back from engaging in a Godly community?

Not many of us work in environments where we are surrounded by only people and things that lift us up instead of tear us down. Most of us probably could count our workplace as a mission field. What ways can you surround yourself with Godly people and counsel in your workplace, and how can you be a light in that mission field this week?

What other ways can you think of to immerse yourself in His message? What practical steps can you take every day to keep His Word in the forefront of your mind?

As humans, we tend to look to others for approval, encouragement. There's nothing wrong with that, but when it becomes our only motivation for doing things, then we are off balance. Do you tend to put too much stock in what people think of you? How can you move away from that tendency?

Do you think of yourself as holy? Why or why not?

What is the greatest encouragement that you take away from Peter and Jesus' conversation in John 21?

Who can you be held accountable to in your life to be living all of your life for Christ?

Music

Music has always been a part of my life. I began playing piano when I was in grade school, and still play to this day. I'm not very good, but now I mainly play so that I can sing. Singing has always been a part of my life, too. My parents like to tell the story that they knew I was going to be able to sing when I could sing 'Jesus Loves Me' on key at the age of five. I began learning how to play the flute when I was in fifth grade, taking to it like a fish takes to water. I loved it. I loved playing the simple melodies and the complex runs. In high school, I was a part of the musicals in the pit orchestra and the chorus, I played piccolo in the marching band, flute in the symphonic band, and piano and flute in the jazz bands. I even tried my hand at playing the alto clarinet when I ended up in Freshman band as a junior.

Perhaps it isn't surprising with my musical background that songs tend to stick in my head and stay there. I memorize song lyrics without even trying to. Memorizing Bible verses is harder for me, but something that I'm working on.

I think that's part of why listening to Christian music is so important to me. If the lyrics are going to stick in my head, permeate my vocabulary and influence my actions, they'd better be good lyrics – true, trustworthy, lovely and perfect. Don't get me wrong. I don't think secular music is bad. I don't think that you should never listen to it. But for me, if I'm going through a rough time, I'd rather have the lyrics of *10,000 Reasons* running through my head than *All about that bass*.

When a particular song gets stuck in my head, usually God has something to teach me through it. Lately, Casting Crowns' song *Dream for you* has been stuck in my head.

I don't put much stock in dreaming. Mostly because I find that the dreams (as in hopes and aspirations) I have end up getting squashed by the world or by other people. Perhaps that's why I didn't particularly like it the first few times I heard it. Then I actually started listening.

The song talks about David, his dreams of being a 'big-time shepherd someday.' But God had bigger plans for him than shepherding sheep. David was going to be the shepherd king, the one on whom the lineage of Jesus rested. The song talks about Mary, who dreamed of having a family. But God had bigger plans for her: raising a king. Makes me wonder what kind of dreams God has for me.

Because if I allow myself, I do have dreams. But I've got it through my head somehow that if I allow myself to dream, I will just end up disappointed. And then I remember that God's got a

plan. He's got the whole thing worked out – I just have to be willing to let go and let Him work. I just have to be willing to say, "God, do with me and my life what you will. I'm willing to live all of my life for you. Not my will, but yours be done." It's a decision I have to make daily.

One that is easier on some days than others. But His dreams, His plans, are better than mine, no matter how good I think mine are. I think I'll let Him dream for me. Because He is good, all the time, in every circumstance, through every high and every low, and He is faithful.

So come on, let me dream, let me dream for you

I am strong, when you're weak I will carry you

So let go of your plans, be caught in my hand

I'll show you what I can do

When I dream for you

Maybe God doesn't reveal things to you through songs. Maybe it's through Bible study books or direct study in His Word. Maybe it's through conversations with others or the weekly sermon you hear. But regardless of where you hear God speaking, dwell on it. Think about it. Wrestle with it. Talk about it with trusted friends. And then share it with others. Because what God taught you or revealed to you may be something that others need to hear too.

What's God teaching you today?

Wrapping It ALL Up

When I began writing this study, I wasn't quite sure where it would take me. What Scriptures would come alive in a new way, what songs would take on new meaning, and what God would teach me through this study. And now that I'm at the end of it, I can look back and answer some of these questions, as I hope you will too.

I knew what the concept of all meant when I started this study. It's a pretty basic English word, really. Just three simple letters that, when strung together, make up an impossible task. Impossible, that is, without Christ.

It's amazing, really, how much this concept comes up in Scripture.

Philippians 4:13: I can do ALL things through Christ who gives me strength.

Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In ALL your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.

Ephesians 6:18: And pray in the Spirit on ALL occasions with ALL kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for ALL the Lord's people.

Colossians 3:17: And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:23-24: Whatever you do, work at it with ALL your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Romans 8:28: And we know that in ALL things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

2 Corinthians 9:8: And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in ALL things at ALL times, having ALL that you need, you will abound in every good work.

1 Peter 5:7: Cast ALL your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

There are plenty more verses that I could mention that compel us to live ALL our lives for Christ – every aspect of them. It's a tall order, a tough task with Christ. But it's what we are called to. It's part of what we are here for. And when we live ALL of our lives for Christ, people will take notice. They will begin to ask why we live differently. They will begin to wonder why we have so much joy in the midst of struggle and hardship. And our lives will point to the cross, the reason for our hope, the author of our faith, and the sacrifice He paid for us: ALL of His life.

Jesus paid it ALL, ALL to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow. In Him we live and move and have our being, in Him we are made children of God, holy and blameless in His sight. Oh, what a gift His grace is to us, what matchless love we have been shown.

Earnestly seek Him ALL of your days. Love because He first loved us. Be salt and light in this dark world, and strive to live ALL of your life for Him. May He continue to shine through you so that others may see you and know the One who sent you.

Now to Him who is able to do far more than all that we ask or imagine, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)