

A Deeper Walk with God

What Does it Look Like to Love God the Way He Wants to Be Loved?

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 12 verse 28. I had a relationship with a guy in business, a publishing relationship. He's in that 15 years younger than me range. One day he sent me an email, and he said, "Pat, what is the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God?" Since he's in the publishing business, I wrote him back. I said, "Who wants to know and why?" He wrote back basically, "Me." He said he was writing for himself. I wrote him back, and I said, "Well, how do you see it? What do you see the scripture's saying about what is the most important thing that a man can do in his life?" I'm just going to ask you, take a little poll. Throw out some answers. What do you think is the most important thing that you, as a man, can do in your relationship with God? Yeah?

All right. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. What else? Surrender, Obedience, Serve others, Get acquainted, Glorify God, Stay connected, Pray, Spend time in the word, Serve him, Sacrifice.

What else? What is it? Love your fellow man.

Love your fellow man. Love your neighbor. It's interesting. In about 60 seconds, we surfaced all of these different things. How many of you are now bordering on exhaustion thinking about how you're going to be able to do all of these things? Yeah? We're going to delve into that this morning, and we're going to be talking about this most important thing and what it really is all about. Then, the series is **A Deeper Walk With God**. That's where we're headed here. First, we're going to do a couple of shout outs. We have a group called **The End-Time Men of God**, led by Victor Rose in Milwaukee, eight to 10 guys. They're just getting started with us. They're going to be meeting once a month at the leader's home. Victor writes, "Real men living real lives for Christ. We are bold yet humble men who pattern our lives according to the Master's plan."

We want to welcome The End Time Men of God. Then, today's area director shout out goes to **Roger Thompson**, who was a pastor in the Twin Cities area for three decades. Roger is now the area director for the Twin Cities. Roger says, and I'm going to read, "I'm passionate about reaching men because a spiritually growing man has a direct impact on his marriage, his family, and the community. Growing men are the key to healthy and vibrant churches as well. What more strategic investment could there be?" I wonder if you would join me, and let's give a very warm, rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Roger Thompson and to The End Time Men of God. Rousing, rousing, yeah. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, guys. We're honored to have you as part of the study.

What is the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God? The title of today's message: **What Does It Look Like to Love God the Way He Wants to Be Loved?** You should be at the text Mark chapter 12 starting at verse 28. There's one other place where this is captured in the synoptic gospels, which are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It's also located in Matthew, which is kind of interesting

because the version here in Mark is longer than the version in Matthew. Yet, Mark is the shortest of the gospel, 16 chapters. Matthew is 28 chapters. Mark just moves along like a rapid river. Matthew is more like a wider river that moves a little bit more slowly. You would have thought perhaps that Matthew would have taken the longer version, but Mark really focuses on this issue that we're talking about in this text in the deepest way.

In verse 28, "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating." This is a debate that had just taken place between some of the Sadducees and Jesus. "Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer." Note that the motives of this man who is getting ready to ask Jesus this question are probably similar to my friend, Rob, who asked me the question. He says, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Isn't this the same question that my friend Rob was asking? What is the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God? Same question asked a different way, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" What's the most important thing? Now, before we read the answer, let's just think about what Jesus could have said.

Jesus could have said anything because he is the incarnate God. He could have said, "Keep the 10 commandments, baby." He said, "I already told you the golden rule. Do the golden rule, man." He could have said service, obedience, worship, neighbor love. He could have said whatever he wanted to say. It's his prerogative to say whatever he wants, and he's answering the question, "What is it that is the most important of all these things?" Verse 29, "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" That is called the Shema. It's one of the oldest Jewish exclamations, the beginning of many prayers, S-H-E-M-A. What it was, it was a declaration that we worship a monotheistic God. God is one. He's monotheistic. There are not many gods. There's one God, and this was an important statement in the early history of the nation of Israel.

Then he says, "Serve the Lord your God with most of your heart, most of your soul, most of your mind, and some of your strength." We already sort of answered the situation that brings this text into existence. That situation was that there was a sincere man, a man like you and you, a sincere man who wants to know, "What's the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God? What's the most important commandment? Tell me what it is." Now, this is interesting. Why does the Holy Spirit choose to preserve this particular text that we're reading today, which I've just misread? Why does the Holy Spirit choose to preserve this text? It's for the very reason that many men, even without thinking about it often, subconsciously, unconsciously often, actually are living as though it reads like I misread it.

They mistake that Christianity is a task. Many men think that my standing with God depends on my obedience. My standing with God depends on my service. I had better do everything I can to make God happy or at least avoid his wrath. A lot of men end up thinking that serving God to the best of my ability is the most important thing. Is there value in that? Sure. Is it important? Sure. Is it the most important thing? No, it's not. Let's read the text the way it actually is supposed to be read, the way that Jesus said it, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength." I see three things here. First of all, I see clarity. For anyone who has ever wondered, "What is the most important thing that a man can do in his relationship with God?" this, the Holy Spirit has preserved this and allowed us to have complete clarity about what the most important thing is.

Even the 10 commandments don't help clarify this. The first commandment is, "Thou shalt have no other gods but me." The second commandment is, "You shall make no idols." Well, those are really

good, but those are things that I shouldn't do. What should I do? You see? The first thing that I think we see in this text is an absolute obvious clarity about what the most important thing we should do is. There are other texts too. You can't love both God and money. It's love God. It's not love God, and it's okay to have a little idol over here on the side. It's just love God. That's it. The second thing, after clarity, I think that we see here is the intensity with which we are to bring the loving of God, all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, all of our strength, the totality of our being, every ounce of energy that you have, the sum of your strength, absolutely nothing to be left in reserve, everything, all of it to the loving of God.

When I first captured this idea in my own walk, was early on in my journey, and I knew that I deserved by justice something far different than I was getting by mercy. I had no illusions. I knew what a sinful man that I was, how egotistical I was, how prideful I was, how materialistic I was, how controlling of my wife I was, how lustful I was. You name it, I knew it. One of the reasons I'm so passionate about God today is because I'm so honest about the kind of man that I actually was. I'm not sugarcoating it as I move on in years. In fact, I was just telling somebody over here, two days ago, I tell my wife, "I have no trust in human nature." I do not because I know myself. I don't care how high you go in your spiritual journey, how far forward you go. You always still have the flesh warring against the Spirit and the Spirit against flesh. That's just part of the deal.

Early on, I knew how undeserving of grace that I was. I did. I figured that it was up to me to prove that God had not made a mistake by giving me mercy. I jumped in with both feet, obedience, service, worship, good deeds, you name it, trying to pay off a debt that I actually didn't owe anymore. The debt had been forgiven, but I was still trying to pay off the debt. You should have seen me, man, because I'm actually just a naturally disciplined person. I don't get any credit for being that way. The person who gets the credit for being disciplined is the person who's not disciplined, then they substitute discipline for a lack of natural discipline. I don't get any credit for that because I'm naturally disciplined, but, man, when I set my mind on this idea that I'm going to pay off this debt that I felt like I owed but I didn't owe, I just began tearing them up, man, sharing my faith, witnessing to guys, starting Bible studies, trying to be a godly husband and be there for my kids every time, man.

This is true. I never, ever, ever missed. I was in business for myself, so I could do this, but I never, ever missed a single game, recital, any kind of thing, nothing, ever. I was at every single one of those deals. Count me in because I'm going to prove to God that he didn't make a mistake by saving me, you see. I even, in the month that we started this Bible study, I wrote in the front of my Bible, "I want to live the rest of my earthly life for the will of God," and really meant it, still do. I was all in. At the 14-year mark in my spiritual journey, I was so exhausted, I was so worn out that I remember going to a men's retreat up in North Carolina and sleeping through the whole thing. Then, I end up in a business crisis of my own making, but it still was painful. I remember one morning just writing out like a psalm, a psalm, my own little psalm, like Psalm 27, Psalm Pat.

I was reciting to God. I said, "Lord, you know how hard I'm trying to be a man after your own heart, to have this deeper walk with you. You know how I'm trying to be a good husband, a good father. You know I've acted with absolute integrity, absolute integrity in business. You know how I've tried to be a faithful steward with the finances. You know how generous I've been. You know all things. You remember every door I have ever held for any little old lady ever. You know all these things, but, God, I'm just so tired. I'm so weary. Lord, I need some relief here." The Lord spoke to me, and he said, "Pat, nothing you do will ever make you good enough for me to love you. I love you because I made you." Boom. I finally, for the very first time ever, understood God's grace. That radically transformed my life.

I'm sure that many of you, hopefully most of you, I wish all of you, have that same story or will by the end of today.

That day and through this text that the most important thing that we can do is to love God with everything that's within us leads us to today's Big Idea. The Big Idea today is this. I've been making these longer big ideas lately. I said, "You know what I need to do? I need to get this down to something that is actually can be remembered and repeated." That's what today's Big Idea is. It's very simple. **Loving God is a relationship, not a task.** The idea here is that when we say that we love God, it doesn't mean that we demonstrate that by what we do, but rather that it's a relationship that we have with him.

HOW DOES GOD WANT TO BE LOVED?

I skipped over this first circle, "How does God want to be loved?" We're deep into it now. We have clarity. That's one thing we see in this text. We see that there is an intensity here in this text. Then, we also see that there is relationship here in this text, that loving God is a relationship.

There's a parallel passage. We're done in Mark if you want to go there. Luke chapter 10. It's a different situation, but it's the same subject matter. In the text we just left, it was a teacher, an expert in the law, asking Jesus a question that Jesus answered. In this text in Luke, it's a question that someone asks Jesus, and Jesus is now giving the answer. I said that exactly backwards. Jesus is asking the question in this passage, and the man who had asked the question is giving the answer, whereas in the Mark passage, it was Jesus saying this. Luke chapter 10 verse 25, "On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" Now, this is interesting. What is the most important commandment? What's the most important thing a man can do in his relationship with God? What must I do to have eternal life? Maybe these are related. Certainly, these are related.

Jesus says, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" which is funny because that's the answer I sent to Rob. He said, "What's the most important thing?" I said, "Who's asking?" He said, "Me." I said, "What does scripture say and how do you read it?" I was trying to bait him here to this text, which, by the way, we ended up having a great lunch. It was wonderful. "How do you read it?" Jesus said. Then the man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength, with all of your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself." Then, the good Samaritan goes into place because this particular teacher asked with wrong motives. He's trying to justify himself, so Jesus gives the parable of the good Samaritan.

Then, he moves over to the story in Luke chapter 10 beginning in verse 38 of Mary and Martha. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to Jesus teach. Martha was in the kitchen busy with all kinds of preparations. Mary was *logos*. Martha was *diakonia*, from which we get the word deacon. She was serving. Mary, though, was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to the word. Martha complained bitterly about her sister and said, "Jesus, I'm out in the kitchen doing all this work, and she's out here sitting around taking it easy. Tell her to come help me." What did Jesus say? "Martha, Martha, you are upset and worried about many things, but only one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen it. It will not be taken from her." She was building a relationship, not doing a task. Again, the Big Idea today is **Loving God is a relationship, not a task.**

Another way of saying this is, hey, Mary first. There will be plenty of time for Martha. Get Mary right. There will be plenty of time for Martha. Jesus said, "Only one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen it." It's the relationship. Loving God is a relationship, not a task.

HAS ANYONE EVER LOVED GOD LIKE THAT?

Has anyone ever loved God like this? You know, there's just no way I'm going to have enough time to say everything that I wrote down here that I would like to say. Has anyone ever loved God like that? Well, as it turns out, there have been a lot of people that have loved God like that. Abraham had such faith and love for God that he was willing to abandon his family and go and move to a place that he had no idea. It says that he was going not knowing. He had no idea where he was even going. Moses was willing to suffer mistreatment rather than enjoy the pleasures of being the adopted son in the Pharaoh's house.

Joseph was willing to see that it was God working in the terrible circumstances of his life and was able to say to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Daniel was not willing to bow down to the idol that Nebuchadnezzar had created. Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego, I got their names out of order, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they said... Don't turn there, but this is so good. I just want you to hear this. I want you to hear the word, the Bible, with your own ears. When Nebuchadnezzar said that they needed to bow down to this idol of him, they replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up."

There are men that have loved God with this kind of clarity, this kind of intensity because they had this relationship with him. Job, no man has ever suffered more than Job. When his wife said, "Why don't you just curse God and die?" what did he say? He said, "You foolish woman. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." My personal favorite, Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet who was being persecuted because he would not stop speaking the truth. He was trying to speak the truth into the lives of the leaders of his nation. He was persecuted, arrested, put in prison, put in stocks. When he got released, he filed a complaint with God. He said, "God, I don't understand you. Every day, I do exactly what you say. I call down burning sulfur and hellfire on all these people, and what kind of reward do I get out of it? I get insulted. I'm reproached. This is not fair."

Then, in Jeremiah chapter 20 verse nine, he apparently turns his attention to his own private journal, and he says this. He said, "But if I say I will not mention him anymore or speak anymore in his name, his word is in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in. Indeed, I can not." Wouldn't you like to love God like that? Wouldn't you like to have that kind of clarity, that kind of intensity, and that kind of relationship? Then, Jesus, of course, and Paul and so many others, Jesus is our ultimate model of this, the Big Idea today, that **loving God is a relationship, not a task.**

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO LOVE GOD LIKE THAT?

Then, finally, what would it look like for you to love God like that? I'm going to limit this to three analogies.

The first analogy is the analogy of a dog and its master. We have this little, some of you know, a little poofy froufrou lapdog for middle-aged women. I just love this little dog. It's so interesting. I've asked myself a hundred times, "Why do I love this dog so much?" It's because no matter what I do, this dog loves me. I can't do anything to make this dog not love me. This little dog, wherever my wife is in the house and wherever I am, this little dog finds the midpoint between the two of us and then flops down on the floor. As soon as one of us appears, this happened this morning, as soon as I appear, these big

puppy eyes looking at me with this unconditional love and expectancy, "You want to play?" Then, the little tail giving it away, the little tail wagging. This dog just absolutely loves me. That's the first analogy. What would it look like for you to love God like all of these people who have loved God deeply? It's just to come to him with this unconditional love that a dog has for its master.

The second analogy is out of marriage. When you are first married or if you are married, you want to know everything about each other. Everything the other person does is fascinating to you. You're talking about all the big decisions that are going to be made in the future. Then, later, 25 years later, you either are or when you end up getting there, your love is going to change. It's going to be more of a mature love. It's going to be a love based on a deep knowledge and understanding of each other. It's going to be that kind of love where you think each other's thoughts. It's that kind of love where you finish each other's sentences. It's that kind of love where somebody says a half sentence, and you actually know what they meant because of the depth and the time and the experience in the relationship. What would it look like for you to love God like these men that we talked about? Come as a dog. Think of it as the mature love of a marriage.

The third analogy is the father-son relationship. When our grandson was two years of age, he came to me one day, and he said... He had a juice box and a straw. He just looked up at me, and all he said was, "Papa, help me." I've been undone by that kid ever since. It's the first time that he had ever asked me for anything. It was a prayer, if you will. It was the first time that he had ever asked me for help, but the trust that was in his eyes, the uncompromising belief that when he asked for help that he would get it was overwhelming to me because what we had and what we have is a relationship. It's not what he was doing. He was not asking me to do something as a mere task. He was asking me, he was inviting me into a relationship. The Big Idea today is exactly that. **Loving God is a relationship, not a task.**

Before we pray, I want to take a minute, and I want to tell you here and those of you who are online four weeks from today, we are going to kick off a special guest speaker series called Launch. On your tables are these Launch sheets. Hey, Brian. Let's make sure one of these gets posted as a download on the website. Can you take care of that for me? You'll see there are six speakers that are listed here. They'll be on a host of different topics. More information will be coming out about what those topics actually are. Launch, you can see the subtitle: Strategies For Building Your Career and Family. What we are trying to do here is that we've been enjoying this Bible study for years, and we also want to include the next generation of Christian guys in this community in what we're doing.

We want to have something especially for guys in their 20s and 30s to help them get launched in their families and careers a little bit more effectively. What we're asking you to do is to bring your friends, perhaps it's a son or a coworker or whatever is, younger guy in his 20s and 30s. We would love to see, if this works out, we would love to see this become an annual event. We'd love to see, over the years, we just kind of become known, "Hey, if you're a young guy in your 20s and 30s, and you're trying to figure out how to integrate your faith and your life into the community and your family and so forth, this Launch thing, this is just something you need to take in."

Then, also these Reach 3 cards. I don't see them out here. Can we get one of these posted online too, Brian, somehow? Make it happen, please. You can write down the names of three guys that you might want to invite. Jim, why don't you go ahead and pass those out now? Write down three names of guys that you want to invite. Just begin praying about them and thinking about how you might invite them to come. Take this sheet of paper. You can give it to them. We may have some other collaterals. Anyway, four weeks from today, that will begin. For all of you guys who have groups online and so forth, here's

an opportunity for you to include a new generation of Christian guys in your communities as well in your groups. That said, let's pray.

Our dearest Father, thank you for clarifying for us what the most important thing is so we know what the starting point is. Lord, thank you for showing us just how much intensity you want us to love you with and giving us examples of men who have loved you that way and then showing us that it really is about a relationship, that only one thing really is the most important. That's this relationship that we have with you. Lord, I hope each of these men understand that while they will love serving you that they will not understand it as something they need to do in order to pay a debt that they owe, but rather because the debt that they owed has already been paid by Jesus Christ that they will love you with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and then out of the overflow of that do all of these other things that we talked about this morning, the disciplines, the service, the obedience, and so forth, the neighbor love and so forth. Lord Jesus, we ask this in your name. Amen.