



## PREPARATION

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Spend the week studying Matthew 22:34-40, especially verse 37. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

**DETERMINE** | which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group

**PRAY** | for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

**FOCUS ON THE MAIN POINT** | Loving God with your whole self is seeking a relationship with Him and treasuring Him above all things.

### ◦ Remember the 4 Rules for Small Group Discussion

1. **Confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
2. **No cross-talk.** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
3. **No fixing.** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
4. **Sharing.** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

## INTRODUCTION

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As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Many of us look for a fresh start in the New Year. When we evaluate our lives, we see areas we'd like to address or adjustments that need to be made. We all want to live a better, more fulfilled life. To get there, we know we need to make changes.

Jesus tells us the secret to living a better, more fulfilled life is focusing on what's most important—loving God, yourself and others. These three things are the Big Rocks that give you solid ground to stand on in a world of distractions. And, when we focus on these things, we put ourselves on the path towards real and lasting change.

What does it look like to stand on these rocks in real life? That's what this series is all about. With Matthew 22:34-40 as your guide, your group will explore what it means to love God with your whole self, to love yourself in a healthy way and to love others as God does.

**Do you make New Year's resolutions? If so, what are they typically about?**

**If you could change one thing about your spiritual life this year, what would it be?**



## LEARN

Divide Matthew 22:34-40 between group members and read the story of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees together. After this, split the group into pairs and retell the story in your own words.

**Now, answer the following question: What do Jesus' words tell you about God?**

*Select 3-5 questions to discuss as a group.*

### ◦ Loving God is in your design.

A fundamental truth about God is that He is relational. Before creation, God existed in perfect relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; each member of the Trinity loved and served the other members wholly. When God created us, He made us with the capacity to enjoy a personal relationship with Him.

To know God and have a relationship with Him is in your design. God wants you. He wants your heart. He wants your soul. He wants your mind. He wants all of you.

**Do you find it difficult or easy to see God as relational? Explain your answer.**

**Read Ephesians 1:3-14. How does this passage reveal God as relational?**

### ◦ Loving God is treasuring Him.

To love God is to value Him above everything. When you treasure something, you give it honor and importance in your life. If you treasure someone, you do things to please and delight them; you go out of your way to praise them for who they are to you.

Jesus tells us our hearts follow what we truly treasure (Matt. 6:21). Whatever matters most to us is going to get our attention. If you treasure money and security, all life's decisions will orient around making and saving money. If you treasure prestige or acclaim, your identity will be determined by the ever-changing opinions of others.

Jesus wants you to treasure that which is supremely valuable—Himself. To treasure God is to worship Him as worthy of our praise and honor. All other treasures are little tin gods; they cannot satisfy us the way God does.

**Read Psalm 16:11. How does David treasure God in this psalm?**

**What are the 'little tin gods' the world calls us to treasure? How does God show Himself to be a greater treasure than these things?**

### ◦ Loving God is a choice that flows out of affection.

To love God is to choose Him above everything. But our love is more than a choice. It comes from the overflow of your affections. In other words, you choose God, because you delight in Him more than anything; He alone captures your heart and devotion.



## LEARN [Cont'd]

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Just as a spouse forsakes all others in marriage, we, too, forsake all others in our relationship with God. When we love God this way, we don't look for fulfillment or satisfaction outside of our relationship with Him.

**Consider a time when you felt closest to the heart of God. What was it about that time that stirred your heart with affection for Him?**

**How do you keep your heart from looking for fulfillment and satisfaction outside of your relationship with God?**

## LIVE

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*Select 1 question from this section to answer.*

To live out the greatest commandment demands all of us. Think of your relationship with God as Jesus moving into your life's house. As a good host, we give Him a tour of our home and show Him to the guest room. But Jesus stops us and says, "No. I don't just want the guest room. I want the entire house. In fact, I'd like to gut this entire place and renovate it. How does that sound?"

When Jesus says to love God with all your heart, soul and mind, He means that your whole person is committed to God. Loving God with your whole self requires full submission to Jesus as Lord of your life. Anything short of this fails to live out the greatest commandment. Jesus cannot truly be Lord if He only has half of your heart.

**What would it look like for you to make God the primary pursuit and desire of your life? How would your life be different than it is now?**

**Is there a part of your life that you are reluctant to give up to God? If so, what keeps you from giving it up?**

## LEAD

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*Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.*

If you love God with your whole self, there's no area of life off-limits to Him. Your love for God should be on display everywhere—at home, at work and in your community. The most powerful evangelistic tool is a life consumed with love for God. If you want to lead others to Christ, show them what a life of total devotion to God looks like.

**Do you agree or disagree with the statement that "the most powerful evangelistic tool is a life consumed with love for God"? Explain your answer.**



## LEAD [Cont.'d]

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What practical things could you do to make your love for God more evident in your home, workplace and community?

## PRAY

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Praise God that He is relational and gives us an all-satisfying relationship with Him through Jesus. Confess your inability to love and obey Him apart from His grace. Pray that He would become your ultimate treasure and greatest delight.

## FOLLOW UP

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Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

Have you experienced the relational character of God in your life this week? If so, what happened? What did God teach you through your experience?

Memorize Matthew 22:37 and consider ways you can incorporate this command into your daily life.

## COMMENTARY

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- **Pharisees.**

The Pharisees were an influential group of Jewish leaders in the 1st century who were known for their religious devotion and strict observance of the Mosaic Law. The term Pharisee “comes from the Aramaic word **פְּרִישׁ** (*prsh*), which means ‘to separate,’ ‘divide’ or ‘distinguish.’”<sup>[1]</sup> In Jewish society, Pharisees were revered and honored for their piety. They are often associated with other groups such as the Sadducees, scribes and chief priests. In the gospels, the Pharisees represent that which is anti-Christ (i.e., everything opposed to Him) and act as the literary foil to Jesus.

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1. Bradley T. Johnson, “Pharisees,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).



## COMMENTARY [Cont.'d]

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### ◦ **The first and greatest commandment.**

Jesus quotes the Old Testament in his response to the Pharisees. He cites the Shema, the ancient Israelite confession of faith (Deut. 6:4-5). The second part of the confession is a command for the Israelites to be wholly devoted to God by loving Him with all heart, soul and might (Jesus includes 'mind' in his interpretation of the command). It was common for Jews to repeat the Shema twice a day.

### ◦ **Love.**

Jesus' use of the Shema reveals love as the overriding motivation for obedience in the life of the believer. Jesus will go on to say that love for God and neighbor comprise the entire message of the Law and Prophets (v.40). The point is that obedience to God's commands comes from the heart. This is the great distinction between true and false religion; the Pharisees observed God's law outwardly, but their hearts were far from Him (see Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in Matt. 23:13-39).

The Apostle Paul cites love as the greatest Christian virtue in 1 Corinthians 13. Like Jesus, he also says love fulfills the law (Rom. 13:8-10). Love fills us with a sense of gratitude towards God for His great love and provision in our lives.

### ◦ **With all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**

These are not given as exclusive categories. Rather, they represent the total devotion required to love God in every capacity. It is important to note that, to love God this way is impossible apart from divine intervention. Thankfully, God gives us a new heart and puts His Spirit within us to give us the ability to obey His commands (Ezek. 36:26-27).