



Contending for the Greatest Life Part I

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Series: Contending for the Focused Life

Contending for The Greatest Life Part 1

We have just come off an incredible week, what we call “Week of Impact” and our theme was the “Contending for the Focused Life.”

- We taught, we worshipped and prayed every night.
- Then we went into a 24-Hour War Room of prayer since yesterday morning.
- I feel ready for the new year!! I’m pumped.
- Marcus and I gave five messages on “Contending for the Focused Life.”

2017 Theme: Make Jesus Great

- Inauguration of our new president is this week—new beginning.
- Just finished being together every night.
- Praying for 24 hours.
- So, I’m leaving Revelation this week and next to talk about the new year.
- Nothing could matter more in the Christian life than what I will talk about today.

Once Jesus, the greatest man who ever lived, was being quizzed by Bible scholars, about taxes, marriage, the resurrection, and finally, “Which is the greatest commandment?”

Mark 12:28-30

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?”

Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.

- It’s all here! There are so many implications to this statement yet we forget, we overlook it. It’s too familiar.

- Jesus is saying that in ALL of the Bible—Old and New Testament, this the First and Greatest Commandment!

My Thesis: The greatest man who ever lived gave us the greatest command ever given in order to have the greatest life we could ever experience.

- Nothing excites me more than this statement. I need to renew myself in this commandment.
- I need to contend for this in 2017.
- I need to give myself in a fresh, intentional, focused way! This is the life!
- The Lawyers are trying to tie Jesus up in some theological or religious knot—they are trying to trick him.
 - Ex. Isn't that often what we do in our churches, as pastors we can be the worst. Always trying to argue about some minor point to justify our position. Nothing wrong with a healthy debate about the essential issues like the deity of Christ, the cross and the resurrection, but we often argue over how we do worship or how we pray. Nothing has changed. That's what the scribes are trying to do, but Jesus cuts through the theological haze with this.
- The key to greatness in this life is all found right here! We have grown accustomed to evaluating our life according to our accomplishments and achievements but Jesus says, "Beloved, this is it! This is the greatest commandment—if you follow this, everything just lines up. This is success; this is greatness."
- It's actually all about love! This is the central point of the Jesus discipleship life ... love. That's the heart of greatness—love.
- Jesus, before the scribes, is hearkening them back to the great shema passage in the OT.

- o Moses most important instruction to the Jews going into the Promised Land, this is how you keep your family and values intact.

Deut 6:3-7

**Moses says, 4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!
5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.**

6 “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

In the Moses’s prophetic word, in Jesus’ fulfillment of the word said the same thing, they began with this,

Mark 12:29

Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

- When we read this passage most pastors and speakers just skip this part. But it’s important. It’s the first thing Jesus says is part of the greatest commandment.
- But what does He mean? What does this have to do with love?
- God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One in love. It all starts right here.
- The question by the Scribes is all about us, how we should obey God, but Jesus starts off with God, not us. The first commandment started with God, not us.
- From beginning of time, God was loving the Son and the Son was loving the Father.
- Before man was created God the Father was loving the Son—the Father Son and Holy Spirit are one in love.

- John 15:9 — the week of His death, He references it differently: the Father loves Me and in the same intensity I love you with all of My heart!
 - ***“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.”***
- Again in the final days before His death, the greatest man who ever lived, the Son of Man, the Son of God said this:
 - **John 17:24-26**
“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”
- Wow!! The Lord is One! He is One in love. He has put that love the Father has for the Son, within us!
 - Love is the great unifier in everything.
 - Why is that true? God made it that way, beginning with His love for Himself.
- God brings unity because He is unified—He is one. He is unified in love, don’t miss this!
- It’s the harmony of God’s heart—unity of love. Because He is unified in love, He can give us a unified body—body, soul, and spirit. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one and He created your body, soul, and spirit one in love.
- The Lord God who is one in love then commanded us in marriage that the “two would become one” in love.
- The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit are the great unifiers through love!

- Nothing unifies our lives like love:
 - o A family that loves each other is a unified family.
 - o A church that loves each other is a unified church.
 - o A couple that loves one another have a unified marriage,
 - o Jesus prophesied that this would be the greatest mark of the church that “they would know us by our love for one another.”
- God was unified in love in eternity past, and this is the key to revival, awakening and it’s the greatest life we can live!
- What our nation needs, what our city needs, what our churches need is God’s LOVE.
- Focus on it, pray about it, live in it. Don’t let this escape the primary focus of your life. Contend for it. Ponder it. Battle for it.

This is the great life we can live!

**The Greatest Man who ever Lived
has given us
The Greatest Commandment ever given,
so that we can
Live the Greatest Life ever offered!**

Jesus gives us Four Focused Ways we can Love Him:

4 Focused Ways to Love Him

Mark 12:30

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.

1) Love the Lord your God with all of your Heart

- Do you realize that this is totally impossible!! You can’t love God with your natural heart. Can’t be done.

- When we get saved, do you know that you get a new heart! A new heart is your birthright as a Jesus follower.
- **Jeremiah prophecies of this new work of God in the church, “Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.” (Jeremiah 24:7)**
- **Ezekiel also prophecies similarly, “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. (Ezek 11:19-20)**
- Do you realize that the Bible has more to say about the heart than any other subject? God is massively interested in the condition of our heart.
- This is about being “wholehearted.” It takes courage to be wholehearted, to love God with all of your heart.
 - Courage to be wholehearted. As a matter of fact, “courage” comes from the latin root “cour” where we get the word heart.
 - A Cardiologist is a heart doctor, same root word.
 - Wholehearted disciples are courageous disciples!
 - Wholehearted means “all in”— completely focused on something.
 - Ex. It’s interesting how much media attention is being given to robotics these days. Do you know they can almost produce a robot that can do everything a human can do? Robots that can run, read, pick up stuff, work assembly lines, and now even have intelligence. But there’s one thing they will never be able to produce and that’s a robot with a heart.

- o Ex. Yet many Christians are “religious robots” just going through the motions—working for God, frustrated, depressed, because it’s never good enough, never perfect, never quite what they hoped—robotic Christianity is working for God instead of working with God.
- o Noah Webster, in defining the “heart,” said that is is the “inner part of anything; the core of anything; vital, vigorous part, seat of affections.”
- o Ex. You realize you can cut off one’s arms and legs and if the heart is still pumping they are not dead. You can shoot someone in the head but if the heart is still beating, they are still alive. The heart is the most vital part of our life
- o Jesus wants your heart. He doesn’t need your ministry, your good works, your money. He wants your heart.
- Loving God with all of our heart means a lot of things but functionally it means:
 - o With your emotions. Not emotionalism, but with your emotions!
 - o It means being in love with Jesus. It’s an intimate growing dynamic love relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Enthusiasm: Its an enthusiastic passionate love affection.
enthusiasm—do you know that “enthusiasm’ is a 17th century word that means to be “possessed by God,” “inspired by God?”

- o Wholeheartedly loving God with vigor, passion.
- o Its not about being dutiful and more about being devoted.
- o Ex. I fell in love with Liz over 30 years ago and I just wanted to be with her all the time. In our three years of “dating” we hardly saw each other. But I wanted to serve her, I wanted to help her, I wanted to hang out with her.

- o That's loving with our emotions—it's a "want to" not a "got to."
- o "Got to Christianity" is so hard!
- Set your heart toward God! You have to get in a habit of just saying, "I love you Lord." "Jesus, I cherish you. Thank you for loving me."
- Ex. About 2 years ago, I was at a retreat in the mountains and I came back from a prayer walk and I heard the Lord speak to me, "I love YOU Steve with all of my heart, with all of my soul, with all of my strength." I just wept.
- God loves us with an "everlasting love," that means it never ends. This is the gift of love into our hearts from a God who has always loved you.
- But you have to set aside time each day for this kind of love. I mean it. You have to tell your heart to love God.

The Great Command is a prophecy of God's heart—this is the greatest commandment. It's the destiny of your life. This is how God evaluates our life, based on this one statement.

Abide in it. Contend for it. Don't be content if you're not moving toward this.

- When we close our eyes and push our mind and emotions God-ward, Jesus-ward, you are loving God with all of your heart.
- You just cannot do this without the power of the Holy Spirit. It's engaging your new heart with God's heart.
- You're lining up your heart with God's heart:
 - o This is the new story line—it's not about you being successful, happy, easy life, cool. No this is the story of God—loving with all of your heart.

- o Jesus says this is the “first” and the “greatest” commandment. Moses didn’t say that. David didn’t say that. Jesus gave us a new version of the story line because this is what God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are conversing about. For them, it’s the first and the greatest!
- o When your story line starts to line up with God’s story line, that’s when you are happy, successful, peaceful, and excited. This is the way to get the life.
- o This is the greatest life. Not the easiest life; not the life with the most stuff.
- o God has a dream for you! We are not pursuing the American dream but the Jesus Dream. God has a dream for you and this is it.
- o This is how God defines successful. Did you know that? This is success; this is the story line.
- o When we engage our will and our emotions in loving God, we line ourselves up with the Bigger Story.
- **Ex. Billy Graham in speaking of his biggest regret said, “*I would spend more time in spiritual nurture, seeking to grow closer to God so I could become more like Christ. I would spend more time in prayer, not just for myself but for others. I would spend more time studying the Bible and meditating on its truth, not only for sermon preparation but to apply its message to my life.*”**
- The true definition of our success is are you experiencing God’s love and telling him you love him?
- It takes courage to redefine the meaning of your life. The greatest man who ever lived has given us the great commandment to live the greatest life.

- Set your affections on Jesus today. Let's make a fresh commitment to loving Jesus with ALL of our heart, wholehearted this year. This is the definition of success—how are we doing in loving God.

The Greatest Man who ever Lived has given us the Greatest Commandment, so that we can Live the Greatest Life ever offered!

Next Week: How we love God with our soul, our mind, and our strength.