

Matthew 22:34–46

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ “The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”?”

⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9

4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.** ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Leviticus 19:17–18

¹⁷ “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself**: I am the LORD.

Psalms 110:1

A Psalm of David.

The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. Have you ever cheered for or supported a rival?

Pastor Ray gave the example of the recent Canadian national team, made up of players from different teams who are usually rivals. He caught himself cheering for Brad Marchand. If that name doesn't ring a bell for you, check out this article titled "13 years later, Brad Marchand continues to torment the Vancouver Canucks" (<https://www.boston.com/sports/boston-bruins/2024/02/09/brad-marchand-boston-bruins-vancouver-canucks-stanley-cup/>) or watch the Canucks give Marchand "a holiday hug" (<https://youtu.be/TPIayrDEVeQ>).

Maybe you cheered for a rival team because your favorite player switched teams. Perhaps you and your sibling were always at odds with each other, but mom says you need to play together.

In this week's sermon, two rival religious groups work together in an attempt to take down Jesus.

2. What do you think is the greatest law or rule in Canada?

If you grew up in a country with a national religion or atheism, you probably cherish freedom of religion (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art2a.html>). If you grew up in a restrictive country, you may love the ability to live and visit anywhere in Canada as well as come and go when you want (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art6.html>). If you're of a certain age, perhaps you're thankful for the Canada Pension Plan Act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-8/FullText.html>). Maybe you've seen many cases of food poisoning in less regulated countries, so you're glad we have food safety laws.

What law or rule really makes a difference in your life?

In this week's sermon, Jesus tells us about the greatest commandments in God's law.

3. Did your family have a cardinal, unbreakable rule?

Some families *always* eat dinner together or *never* wear shoes at home. Perhaps your parents emphasized academics ("No playing before finishing your homework!" or establishing your own identity ("Don't worry about what's popular. Be yourself!"). Were your parents very disciplinary ("If you break the rules, somebody gonna get a hurt real bad!") or very gracious ("No matter how bad you mess up, you can always come back to us!")?

If you're a parent, what's the most important rule for your family?

In this week's sermon, Jesus boils down all the rules and laws in the Bible into two basic commands.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. What's a potential danger in picking and choosing what laws and rules to follow?

Some possible dangers could include:

- **Disagreement.** Our idea of what's important varies, so what might be unimportant to me might be very important to you. If you play games, you may have experienced conflicts when trying to define house rules. Can you stack +4 on top of a +4 (<https://www.rd.com/article/draw-four-rules-in-uno/>)? What happens when you land on Free Parking (<https://dicenboard.com/game-guides/monopoly-free-parking-rules/>)? People go nuts over these inconsequential game rules. Imagine rules that have actual consequences.
- **We'd get hurt.** There's an expression that "regulations are written in blood," because many rules exist because people died without them. We have lots of rules of the road, such as seat belts, car seats, and speed limits, because of the high number of traffic fatalities.
- **Penalty.** You might not agree with the laws about fishing and hunting limits, but you'll still get fined or even arrested for going overboard. Law enforcement is supposed to enforce all laws.

5. Can someone love God but not neighbor or love neighbor but not God?

This may seem like a silly question, but you can see it around if you look. Many people say they love God, read their Bibles, worship on Sundays, and more, but they're unloving, unkind, and uninterested in serving others. I once worked with an older pastor who proudly told me, "I don't do visitations unless you're dying or having a baby." He only talked to me when the office Wi-Fi was dead. Does that count? He was into preaching, teaching, and getting respect, but he didn't care about people or their needs. Does his coldness towards people indicate something about his love of God?

There are also lots of non-Christians who aspire to love the people around them. Atheists, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus volunteer and do charity. Although their actions are loving, can they be loving by God's standards?

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

6. Who were the Pharisees?

As Pastor Ray mentioned, the Pharisees were a group of people all about following God's law. They wrote out the 248 DOs and 365 DON'Ts, totalling 613. Imagine trying to follow 613 rules that govern your day-to-day life! Not only that, the Pharisees loved to pick apart and define every nuance. For example, God commanded His people to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). They came up with 39 categories of "work" (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/102032/jewish/The-39-Melachot.htm). Modern-day Jews who continue this legalist mindset debate whether one can tear or flush toilet paper on the Sabbath (<https://outorah.org/p/74173>). God wanted His people to rest, but instead, they're worrying about the smallest, inconsequential things.

7. How was the lawyer's question a test?

Earlier in this chapter, the Pharisees “plotted how to entangle [Jesus] in his words” (22:15). The Pharisees were pro-independence from Rome but teamed up with Herodians (pro-Roman Jews) to talk about paying taxes to Caesar (22:16-17). They hoped that Jesus' words would get the Jewish people or the Roman government angry. Later that day, the Sadducees gave him a wild hypothetical situation to challenge His on resurrection (22:23-27).

After those two trick questions, the Pharisees send one of theirs to stump Jesus. If Jesus says one law is the most important, they can always say, “Well, how about this law?”

This wasn't a new debate topic. Some religious teachers taught that you should follow all the laws because you don't know which laws get which rewards or that all laws were equally important (Midrash Tanchuma, Eikev 2). Another taught, “Which is a brief passage upon which all fundamental principles of Torah are dependent? “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6).” (Berakhot 63a).

8. What happens when we don't love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind?

As Pastor Ray said, “We turn inward. We become more self-centered. More unhappy. We spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about our desires and our feelings. It's all about us. We no longer see our neighbour. Love grows cold. Eventually, we implode.”

How many of us struggle with anxiety because we don't trust in God? We may read the Bible in the morning, but are we using God's Word to really inform our actions? We love productivity hacks, YouTube gurus, or our own genius to get us through the day. Techniques can't overcome our sinful tendencies. The smartest experts can't predict future uncertainty. We will go from strategy to strategy, never finding rest.

How many of us suffer disappointment because we love our spouses, hobbies, or jobs, expecting them to bring us fulfillment, joy, or purpose? Yes, we give our hearts to God to make us happy on Sunday morning, but our heart really belongs to other things the rest of the time.

First, that's cheating. God often used the image of infidelity when His people tried to love God and other gods at the same time. That would be like me romantically loving my wife and other women. “Honey/babe (my wife doesn't like being called either), you don't understand! Yes, I love and am married to those other ladies, but I love you more than them!” I don't think that would fly.

Second, other things will always lead to a disappointment spiral. The non-God objects of our love will never provide what we're looking for. When it doesn't, we'll try to love them more. What happens when alcohol doesn't drown out the pain? We drink more or try harder substances. What happens when money and materialism don't make us happy? We try to get more money or find other things to buy.

9. Pastor Ray said, “If you are breaking internally today, know that God, in his infinite love and abundant mercy, is present, putting his hand out to you. Your suffering is not meant to destroy you, but to break you open to Him. Your suffering is an opportunity to turn upward to the living God, Jesus himself.” How can God use our suffering to turn us towards Jesus?

Not all suffering is because we don’t love God enough (e.g., Jesus’ suffering on the cross), but often it is. Here are some ways it can turn us to God. Here are two ways. Can you think of any others?

Exhausting Resources. We’ve tried to find joy and fulfillment by loving everything besides God. Relationships (familial, romantic, sexual, etc.), hobbies, alcohol, drugs, materialism, and more. When those things all let us down, we realize God is the only option left.

Revealing Holes in Our Love. Sometimes, we don’t realize the fragility of our love until something happens. We think we’re all in for God until there’s a job opportunity that prevents us from being part of the church community, new friends who make us feel embarrassed about being Christian, or our love of God simply grows cold because we’re not stoking the flame.

10. How can we tell if we’re loving others as ourselves?

It’s fascinating that it’s not just “love others,” because that’s pretty vague. To love others as ourselves provides a benchmark that’s fluid in that it can differ from person to person. It’s also something we can test. You could ask yourself, “If they treated me the way I treat them, would I love it?”, “Would this be how I want to be treated?”, “If I were in that situation, how would I want people to love me?”.

You can also dig deeper beyond simple actions to the attitude behind them. For example, we have different love languages, so we may not all want to be loved the same way. That means some people may need a big hug from you, while others would hate it. BUT, we all want people to understand our love language and love us that way. “I’d like people to love me the way I resonate with, so I’ll love them in a way that resonates with them.”

11. Is loving our neighbor as ourselves easy or hard?

Loving your neighbor as yourself requires action. Here’s a story about Shammai and Hillel, who were famous religious teachers during Jesus’ time. (The Torah is the first five books of the Bible, a.k.a. the Books of Moses, the Pentateuch, the Law.)

“Another time a non-Jew came before Shammai and said, “I will convert if you can teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot.” Shammai pushed the non-Jews aside with the ruler that was in his hand. The non-Jew came before Hillel and Hillel converted him saying, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor, that is the entire Torah, the rest is just commentary, now go and study.” (Shabbat 31a)

Note that his version of the law is about not doing things. It's inaction. It's (relatively) easy to not do bad things to people. But to do good? That can be hard. It takes sacrifice.

It's easy to love the lovable (Matthew 5:46-47), but God calls us to go and actively love the people around us, whether they're lovable or not.

Always Unlovable. Some people are always hard to love. They only care about themselves and ignore your needs. They're so critical toward you and have nothing nice to say. They're so annoying, always getting on your nerve or letting you down. Perhaps after reading those descriptions, someone came to mind. Can you love them how you would like to be loved?

Circumstantial Lovability. Sometimes, lovability comes and goes. It's easy to love when others are being loving or lovable. It should be easy to love your husband when he does a romantic gesture like buying you flowers, takes care of the kids so you can have a night to yourself, or applies deodorant, you know, the strong one. But when he disagrees with you, keeps you up at night with his snoring, or leaves the toilet seat up again, can you still love him the way you would want to be loved? It's easy to love your children when they're being little angels. When they're fighting with each other, refusing to go to bed, or painting the walls with the spaghetti dinner you spent an hour cooking, can you put yourself in their shoes to see how they need to be loved in that moment? When your co-workers are working hard, doing their part of the project, and making your job pleasurable, you can extend plenty of love. When they're being rude, delaying your assignments, and making you regret your job, can you think about their needs to love them?

12. Where can we find the ability to love others as ourselves?

As Pastor Ray said, "New life in Jesus empowers us by the Spirit to love God and love our neighbour. The Spirit births this desire within us, to live the way God intended us to live."

Our ability to love God is from God. God knows that we cannot fully love Him or others without His help. Not only that, but it's also only with God's enablement that we can love those we naturally don't want to love. The basic, fundamental truths of the Gospel can help us here.

By Grace. We have congenital sin, and we can't do anything about it. By our nature, we can't not sin. Therefore, God had to give us life and save us (Ephesians 2:1-9). Since we still struggle with sin, we continually need to rely on God's grace to love. Ask God to empower you to love others because it's impossible for you to do it on your own. You still need grace.

While Enemies. When we try to justify our hatred of someone, let's remember that Jesus loved so much He died for us *while we were still His enemies* (Romans 5:6-9). He loved His us, His enemies, so we could be His family. It shows us that God's standard of love extends to enemies and that love can turn enemies into friends.

Greatest Love. Jesus told His disciples that the greatest love is laying down one's life (John 15:13). Jesus didn't love us by doing what was convenient to Him. He made a great sacrifice for us by dying on the cross.

Bearing Burdens. Jesus died on the cross to carry the weight of our sins and due punishment on His shoulders (1 Peter 2:24). In doing so, we don't have to face the wrath of God for our sins. In a similar vein, Paul tells us to carry each other's burdens to fulfill Jesus' teaching (Galatians 6:2). We can love others by helping them in their weaknesses.

Empathy. Jesus didn't serve us in whatever way He felt. He sympathizes with our weakness (Hebrews 4:15). We see in the Gospels that when He loved people, He addressed their needs. He didn't give sight to the already seeing or feed the 5,000 who were already fed. When we love like Jesus, we love people based on their needs.

Intercession. Amazingly, Jesus is interceding for us right now (Romans 8:34). We can also pray for others as well, especially when we don't know what we can do.

13. Who in your life is unlovable? How can you seek God's help to love them?

It's easy to think about whom we naturally love. Discussing that would probably be a waste of time and won't help us grow. So, whom do we struggle to love?

Is there a co-worker you avoid in the halls whenever you catch a glimpse? Does a family member make your blood boil when they come to mind? Do you ever catch yourself having revenge fantasies? Be honest.

What can you do to ask God to enable you to love them? Do you need to be reminded of God's mercy for you? Do you need a heart-softener or a God's-eye-view of them? Are you in need of Godly reminders and support?