

The Great Commandments

By Vern Charette

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Exodus 20:1–17; then read the comments related to Matthew 22:34–36 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Which of the Ten Commandments do you think is the most important? Do you see a pattern with the commandments? How many relate to how to treat God, and how many relate to how to treat your fellow man?

Assignment Two

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9; then read the comments related to Matthew 22:37–38 in the section **It's in the Book**. Give special attention to Deuteronomy 6:4–5. This brief passage is called the *Shema* (pronounced sh'ma), which is the Hebrew word for “hear.” Every Jew grew up quoting this passage numerous times daily as a confession. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What is this confession saying about God and what He demands?

Assignment Three

Read Leviticus 19:18 and Romans 13:8–10; then read the comments related to Matthew 22:39–40 in the section **It's in the Book**. Note that the “golden rule” is actually a quotation from the Old Testament. Prepare to explain Paul's argument that the law is fulfilled by loving God and one another.

Scripture to Memorize

. . . *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* Matthew 22:37–39

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the importance of the great commandments for living the life of a disciple.

Vern Charette is assistant professor of Preaching at Southwestern Seminary. Vern has also continued to serve the local church for well over two decades as an itinerant evangelist. He attributes his full speaking calendar to an overwhelming sense of God's grace and an unflinching commitment to textdriven preaching. With the pathos of an evangelist, Vern has never forgotten how God radically saved him when he was a high school dropout, in trouble with the authorities, and living an immoral life. You are invited to read more about Vern, including his powerful testimony, at www.VernCharetteMinistries.org. Vern is married to Jennifer, and they have a son named Christian.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine that one of your friends came to you and said: "What's it all about? I know the goal of basketball is to put the ball in the hoop. I know the goal of baseball is to hit the ball and run the bases. But what's the goal of the Christian life? It seems that Christians have lots of rules and commandments to obey, but can you simplify things? Can you reduce the Christian life to a couple of things to focus on? It just seems complicated."

What would you tell your friend? Is there a way to simplify the goal of the Christian life?

Read Matthew 22:34–36 out loud.

Studying the Passage

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were always trying to find fault with Jesus. They even tried to trick Him. Since the leaders considered themselves the best at ranking their hundreds of laws, they developed a question they thought would trip up Jesus.

Verse 36. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? Jesus knew what the leaders were doing, and yet He chose to use the question as a teaching time for His disciples. Jesus actually answered the question and gave them the second commandment as well.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share answers to the following questions: Which of the Ten Commandments do you think is the most important? Do you see a pattern with the commandments? How many relate to how to treat God, and how many relate to how to treat your fellow man?

Discussion Questions

Do you think a disciple is bound to obey all the laws in the Old Testament, even the ceremonial laws given to Israel? What is the disciple's relationship to laws in the Old Testament?

On Your Own

In the space below, write out the Ten Commandments by dividing them into the ones that pertain to our relationship with God and the ones that pertain to our relationship with our fellow man. Be ready to share these with the other disciples in your group.

Read **Matthew 22:37–38** out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 37. You shall love. Jesus answered by giving a direct quote from Deuteronomy 6:5. The Hebrews, as well as the Greeks, had divided man into various compartments. Thus, when Jesus used these different terms, He was essentially saying that they are called to love the Lord with the totality of who they are. In today's vernacular we might say we are called to love Him "completely with all that we are." The word for "love" here is the verbal form of the word *agape*, which is a faithful and relentless love.

Verse 38. Great and first commandment. Jesus said this commandment was at the top of His list.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share an answer to the following question: What does the *Shema* tell us about God and what He demands?

Discussion Questions

If a disciple obeyed the command to love God in totality, which of the Ten Commandments would also be obeyed? What would the life of a person who loved God in this manner actually look like? How would this radical love for God impact life? Is it possible to love God like this?

On Your Own

Consider the command to love God. There are sins of commission (things we do that we shouldn't), and there are sins of omission (things we should do but we don't). Ask God if you need to repent for not loving Him in totality. In the space below, write down some of the "idols" that seek to draw your heart away from God. When everyone is finished, share some of your thoughts with your group.

Read Matthew 22:39–40 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 39. love your neighbor. Jesus added the second greatest commandment, often referred to as the "golden rule." This commandment is like the first in that it is vital to the life of the disciple. To love God "vertically" is not enough. Christians are called to love one another "horizontally."

Verse 40. On these two commandments. The commands to love God and neighbor form the foundation for the laws in the Old Testament. If we love God, we will not be idolaters, take His name in vain, etc. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not murder, steal, etc. It's fascinating to see God reduce the laws in the Old Testament to these two fundamental commands.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now explain Paul's argument in Romans 13:8–10 that the law is fulfilled by loving God and one another.

Discussion Questions

If a disciple obeyed the command to love his neighbor, which of the Ten Commandments would also be obeyed? What do you think "love" toward your neighbor actually looks like practically? Who is your "neighbor"?

On Your Own

Think deeply about the command to love your neighbor. Write in the space below some names of the people God has placed in your life for you to love. Are there any people on this list that you find difficult to love? Ask why and then pray for God to give you wisdom in how to show them in practical ways that you love them.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The great commandments passage yields tremendous insight and challenges for living the Christian faith.

- In Matthew 22:34–36, Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment. Although the question was asked to trick Him, Jesus answered the question to teach His disciples a lesson about how they would fulfill the Old Testament law by the simple law of love. The Ten Commandments may be divided into those that pertain to loving God and those that pertain to loving one another. The Christian is no longer under the Old Testament law, but he is under the law of love. This helps explain the Christian's relationship to the law.
- In Matthew 22:37–38, Jesus gave the greatest commandment by quoting the *Shema* passage found in Deuteronomy 6:4–5. He commanded His disciples to love God with the verbal form of the well-known Greek word *agape*, which carries the idea of relentless and selfless sacrifice. The greatest commandment is to love God in totality. A disciple who loves God in this manner will guard against any idol that tries to sneak its way into our lives and thus cause us to sin against God.
- In Matthew 22:39–40, Jesus gave the second greatest commandment, or what has often been referred to as the “golden rule.” The command is to love your neighbor the same way you love yourself. If a disciple loves God and loves his neighbor with the kind of love commanded in these verses, this law of love replaces the laws in the Old Testament. If, for example, you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not murder them, steal from them, etc.

The great commandments provide to the disciple the most fundamental and in some ways simple commands that came from the mouth of our Lord. We are called to love God vertically and love one another horizontally. Though these commands are simple, that does not mean they are easy to obey. Increasing awe and adoration toward Christ, deep gratitude for grace, and the power of the Spirit are the keys to being obedient.

Disciples must constantly guard against the sin of omission when it comes to these commands. We know what we are called to do, but oftentimes we do not love as we should, which is actually a form of sin and calls for repentance. On the other hand, the disciple who loves in this manner will be the most joyful and content person on the planet, for he will know a sweetness of walking with Jesus that few experience.

Follow up Question

What are the great commandments, and how are they significant for living the Christian life?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.