



'Worship at home' Sunday October 29th 2023



We come to worship a God of love, who we find in the holy spaces and the ordinary places of our lives, sometimes in unexpected ways. As we reflect on the call to love God and to love each other, you are invited to draw or roughly cut out the **shape of a heart from a piece of paper** and find a **pen** to write on your heart.

Opening

God, we know you are with us.

From everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

You have showered your love upon all generations, since the beginning of time.

From everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Guide us now through this time of worship, and into the week ahead.

From everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

*from Psalm 90 by Laura Jaquith Bartlett
on Worship Elements <https://www.ministrymatters.com>*

We are each invited into relationship with God, and with each other. The ancient Israelites held the Ten Commandments as boundaries to guide these relationships, and to shape how they lived.

What are the guiding principles which shape how you live?

Each of those commandments were seen as important and sacred, and as ancient Israelite society developed, many other instructions were added. Some clarified existing commandments, others were intended to keep people in good relationship with God, or to protect the underprivileged and disadvantaged. Over time, however, guidelines can turn into rules that must be blindly followed, and we become caught up in them. We make additional rules in order to cover every possible situation. The instructions that are intended for protection and to make life fair can become restrictive.

The author of Matthew reports increasing opposition towards Jesus from the Pharisees, who had started trying to trick Jesus into a debate. One day, he was asked which commandment was the most important, a question which had long been debated by Jewish scholars.

Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together, and one of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to trap him with a question. "Teacher," he asked, "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and most important commandment.

The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Good News Bible



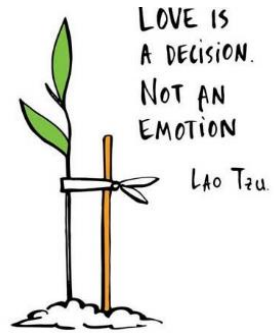
In this response, Jesus challenged the legalism of the Pharisees. Elsewhere, Jesus is recorded as stating, ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*** *Matthew 5:17*

Jesus was not saying that the Ten Commandments were unimportant. If we love God and love others, then we also live out the Ten Commandments, with lives of love and grace. Theologian Thomas Long suggests that Jesus sees the law very differently from the Pharisees, and his response, rather than understanding the law "as rules and regulations," emphasizes "love"; the law is "about really loving God and one's neighbour, not about figuring out how to avoid stepping on cracks in the legal sidewalk."

Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion

We sometimes take love to mean a warm fuzzy feeling of wellbeing and gratitude, or physical attraction. However, Jesus is talking about “biblical love” which seems less about what we feel and marked more by “stubborn, unwavering commitment.”

Matthew, Interpretation



Jesus asks us to commit ourselves to loving, as a choice which then shapes how we feel, and our actions towards others. This type of love has the potential to transform lives, reorder our society, and change the very core of our being.

First and foremost, we are called into relationship with God, which then prompts a practical response. When our lives are shaped by love, we then look out for, welcome and accept others, including the stranger, the outcast, and those we don't get along with. When we love all people, and not only those we like, we show care, kindness and compassion, always seeking justice, forgiveness and hope.



On one side of your paper heart, write the word “**GOD**”.

Prayerfully reflect on your own life.

In what ways does your life show love for God?

Write these responses on your paper heart.

On the other side of your paper heart, write “**OTHERS**”.

In what ways does your life show love for others?

Write these responses on your paper heart.



In what ways do the activities and priorities of your faith community show love for God, and for others?

Add these responses to those you have already written.

Pray that God will lead you and your community deeper into a life of love.

Loving God, and loving others, is not always easy.

Love brings vulnerability.

Love risks leading us into difficult relationships.

Love sometimes means putting our own agenda aside for the needs of others.

**What challenges do you find
in the call to love God, and to love others?**

Name these before God, and ask God to help you learn to love more fully.



We love because God first loved us. 1 John 4:19

The gift of love and grace we receive from God brings with it a responsibility for right and ethical living. This is our call, and this is our hope.

Prayer: You call each of us to love you with all our heart, all our soul, and with all our strength, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. We confess that we do not always find this easy. We get our priorities mixed up and find ourselves too distracted to love. We confess that we too often follow the ways of the world, seeking power, status, wealth, rather than love. We confess that often we care for ourselves more than others, putting our own needs before theirs, rather than showing love. We confess that we may find it easy to love those who are close to us, our family and our friends, but we don't always show love to those we don't like, those who hurt us, or annoy us, or are different from us. You call us to treat all with love and compassion, to care for widows and orphans, to advocate for those in prison, to welcome strangers. To love you with our whole heart, soul and strength means to seek justice, and bring comfort and hope to others. May we choose to live in this way, knowing that doing so will change us. We pray in Christ, Amen.



Closing: May we know the transforming love of God, the compassion of Christ, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to love our neighbour in all we do. Amen