



NG Study Guide: Matt. 22:34-46 “The Kingdom’s Greatest Commandments” [5.28.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** *Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Calvary Nexus’ *mission:* We are a movement of Jesus’ followers devoted to loving God and our neighbors. Our mission and our values flow from the Great Commandments. Our *values* are:

1. **We are followers of Jesus.** We desire to submit every realm of our life to Him.
2. **We love the Bible.** It is God’s word. We are committed to learning it and living it.
3. **We create margin for what matters most.** Life is too complicated. We purposefully make space in our lives so we can be with God, our families and our neighbors.
4. **We come together and go together.** Every weekend we gather to glorify God and then decentralize to saturate our community through gospel centered Neighborhood Groups.

Q1 *How do the Calvary Nexus’ mission and values resonate with you?*

A. The Great Commandments [34-40]

After entering Jerusalem four days before the Passover (and the Cross), Jesus asserted authority to declare what is and is not acceptable worship and faith. The religious leaders seek to undermine Jesus by a series of difficult questions about: taxes, the resurrection, and now the greatest commandment.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus silenced the Sadducees in their question about the resurrection [23-33], so they come together to plan to trap Jesus [34-35]. The lawyer [35] is an expert in the Mosaic Law. His question is a test or trap in the sense that he does not really want to learn or even examine Jesus' theology. The purpose is to undermine Jesus' authority, because they presume that no matter how Jesus responds they can accuse Him of neglecting other important commands. The lawyer refers to Jesus as "Teacher" [36] which is a polite greeting, but is distinct from Rabbi (master) or Lord (Messiah). The question is, "which *is* the greatest commandment in the law?" [36]. The Old Testament has 613 commandments, 248 "positives" (do) and 365 prohibitions (don't do). Interestingly, there are 613 Hebrew letters in the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20]. Which is the greatest commandment?

1. Love God supremely [37-38]

You are called to love God with all that you are, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Jesus quotes from Deut. 6:4-5, the premier prayer of Judaism referred to as the *Shema*. The heart is associated with emotions, soul is the spiritual realm, mind is the intellect, and strength is the body sphere. Deuteronomy is Moses' swansong where he would remind Israel of all that God had done for them in delivering them from bondage in Egypt, how God had redeemed them to Himself, cared for them in the wilderness, and all that God would do for them in giving them the Promised Land. In light of who God is and all that God has done, it is only reasonable for us to respond by loving Him as the master passion of our lives. In the New Testament [NT] it is only reasonable to love God supremely because of the gospel. God has delivered us from bondage to sin, redeemed us to God at the cross, cared for us in this life and given us eternal life with Him. We receive greater spiritual blessings than the Promised Land through yielding our life to God through faith in Christ. It is important to note that what follows in Deut.6:5-9 is God's instruction that parents are to teach God's commandments to their children.

Q2 How has participating in a Neighborhood Group [NG] helped you to grow in your love for God?

2. Love your neighbor as you love yourself [39-40]

Jesus was asked the greatest commandment (singular) but volunteers the second, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" [Lev. 19:18]. It is interesting that neither of these commandments are part of the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20]. The second great commandment is linked to the first such that they cannot be separated. You cannot properly love others without loving God and you cannot truly love God without loving others [Jn. 13:35]. Jesus observed that these two Great Commandments were the distilled essence of all the Law and the Prophets (i.e. all that God had spoken to man) [40]. In the parable of the Good Samaritan [Lu. 10:25-37] Jesus helped us to discover *who* is our neighbor. To the Jews of Jesus' day, a neighbor (*pleision*) was a fellow countryman, and would likely be a friend or someone in common. Jesus made clear that the neighbors we are called to love will often have little in common with us (including religious beliefs). We must also appreciate that loving "neighbors" is related to but distinct from loving others or one another. And neighbor also has a geographic proximity idea. Somehow as Christians we have been able to assume that we are living the Great Commandments without even knowing, befriending and building relationships with people who live near us. In the post-Christian

culture that we live in, most people are unlikely to be receptive to the gospel without building a prior genuine relationship. We can build relationships in countless ways including, but not limited to: getting to know their names, offering to help, asking for help, listening to their story, sharing coffee or a meal, and praying with or for them. Certainly, the greatest demonstration of love is displayed by God at the cross through the gospel. Accordingly, as relationships are developed and as prompted by God's Spirit, we must look to share the gospel with neighbors where we live, work, study, and play. This is not a project or program, but a value that God has commanded us to live.

Q3 How has being in a NG helped you to grow in your love for neighbors where you live, work, study, and play?

B. Jesus' authority as Messiah [41-46]

1. Jesus has the authority of God to command you to love God and neighbors.

Jesus asks them a question [41]. "What do you think about the Christ?" [42]. It is a good question for us to consider [see also, Matt. 16:13-18]. What authority does Jesus have to decide the greatest commandment(s) and tell you what to do? Jesus asks, "Whose Son is He?" And they provide a partially correct answer that Jesus is a descendant of King David [2Sam. 7:16]. A correct understanding of Jesus' identity is critical to yielding to His authority. The cults and all false religions misidentify who Jesus is, just like the religious leaders on Jesus' day. When David wrote Ps. 110:1, by God's inspiration, he refers to the Father as Lord (YHWH) and the Messiah as Master (Adonai) [43-44]. Parents don't call their children Lord or Master. Thus, the Messiah must be more than a mere human [45]. Jesus is not only human as the Son of Mary, but He is also the Son of God and God in the flesh [Is. 7:14, Is. 9:6]. The religious leaders were unable to answer, and realize His wisdom. So, they stop trying to trap Him with their questions [46].

Conclusion: Your willingness or unwillingness to love neighbors relates to love for God and submission to His authority. We don't want to rationalize, justify, or deny that reality. It is not about introverts and extroverts, or good or bad neighbors, or how much time we think we have. It is really about yielding to Jesus! **Here are some next steps to consider:**

- 1. Pray:** Pray and ask God to help you love Him and neighbors better. Pray for your neighbors.
- 2. Create margin:** Look to create margin in your life for more time with God, family, and neighbors.
- 3. Belong:** Participate in a Neighborhood Group.
- 4. Build:** Grow as a disciple and/or as a leader prepared to lead a Neighborhood Group.
- 5. Befriend:** build relationships, and share Christ's love with your neighbors where you live, work, study and play.

Q4 How does your willingness or unwillingness to love neighbors relate to love for God and submission to His authority?

Q5 What might your next step(s) be?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Let a neighbor know that you pray for your neighbors. Ask if there is anything that you can pray for on their behalf.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. Feel free to use an icebreaker question or activity** to get to know one another better.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.