

**Faith  
&  
Family**

Connecting the Community to the Christ

**Connect**

A Ministry of Victory Baptist Church

## **Loving God With Your Whole Being**

**by Pastor Mike Ennis**

*“The main thing is to keep the main thing  
the main thing.”*

Sometimes we get overwhelmed by the responsibilities of life. Everyone has an opinion and they are trying to tell us to do this and do that. We must floss, or our teeth are going to fall out, we must exercise, or we are going to die on the spot. We must eat the right kinds of foods and of course there are all kinds of foods out there that are going to kill us, we must keep our cars and houses clean, change oil, mow the grass, on and on and on. Then we who care about pleasing God and doing what He wants must consider all that the Bible teaches that we are to do and not to do! There is a lot of information in this book, it is all important. But if we could somehow simplify what God wants from us and prioritize that it would be very helpful. What is the main thing, what is first, what should our priority be? The short answer is that we are to love God with our whole being. Matthew 22:37 (AV)

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,**

**and with all thy mind.** This is what Jesus said in answer to the question “What is the great commandment in the law?” A.W. Tozer said, “As God is exalted to the right place in our lives, a thousand problems are solved at one.” The right place in our lives is to love Him supremely, but what does it mean to love God?



In order to answer that we must consider the word love itself. In our culture love is used in many ways. We love everything from food to cars, to experiences. We use the word love for sex, infatuation, family love, etc. But the word love from Matthew 22 is translated from the Greek **(See Love page 3)**

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## As Clean As Mud Can Make You

By Graham Insley

(A Dramatized Account of Obedience-Ed.)

The man looked at the dry scabs spreading on his hands. Leprosy! It was now clearly seen, and his heart was breaking from the separation that must come because of the disease. Soon it would move to his feet and he must part from his family and friends to save them from catching it. But there was one last chance.

Elisha was said to be someone who could perform miracles. Even heal leprosy. A man with



a strange God and terrible power. Well, today he would find out; in a few hours he would be at his door. Let him prove himself. Let him come out, shout, demand his God turn up, put on a great show and perform one of his miracles.

A few short hours later His voice was in full uproar. “Come out I say. Shout and babble all you like but lay your hands on me and heal me.” The only response was a shaking, frightened servant who appeared at the door.

Naaman angrily shook the side of his cape. “Does he know who I am? Tell him. Make him

come to the door.”

“He said to go and bathe in the Jordan, sire. He will not come down. This is his message.”

“What do you mean this is his message?”

Naaman’s voice was like a whispered thunderstorm, all threat but not yet a rolling clash. “Tell him to come down at once or I will come up.”

“No sire. To the Jordan you must go. Dip seven times. That is what he said, sire.”

“Come. We go home. Why waste our time here?”

Naaman turned his small company back towards Syria, complaining to all who would listen as he traveled home. “Dip myself in filthy water. Why his instructions are as clear as the mud that flows pretending to be a river. How can I get made whole in unclean waters? Are not Abana and Pharpar cleaner than all the waters here.”

“Master,” his servant hesitatingly put forward, “these rivers of Damascus are clean waters. But if this prophet told you to do something mighty, would you not do it? Come, dip yourself in the Jordan. What is there to lose?”

“What is there to lose? Everything. Why, I don’t know what I will catch in this strange muddy water. It doesn’t flow clear like our rivers. It is filthy, full of rubbish and human waste. Abana is clear to drink, this putrid Israelite river is as clear as mud.

“No matter, lord, would it hurt to do as he says. I’m sure we can find a cleaner spot where you can quickly end this affair, and at least see.”

“Oh, come then. Let us get this over with.”

**(See Mud Page 4)**

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**(Love from Page 1)**

word agape. When the world speaks of love it is mostly an emotional or accidental thing. “We have fallen in love”. But the agape is not an emotional type love and it is certainly not accidental or something which you do not have control. It is volitional, that is it is something that you choose. John 14:15 (AV) <sup>15</sup> *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

This is the same Greek word, agape. If ye agape me, keep my commandments. This makes it plain that this is not something you feel but something you choose. If you love me choose to show it by obeying me. Another example that this love is volitional is found in the sermon on the mount. Matthew 5:44 (AV) <sup>44</sup> *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;* Same word, agape. Agape your enemies. How many of you have warm fuzzy feelings towards your enemies? How many of you are going to accidentally love you enemies? If we are to love our enemies, whatever it means, it means that we do so by choosing to love them.

To love God means that we choose to love Him. This, after all, is what God has wanted from man all along. Adam and Eve were giving one rule in the garden. Genesis 2:16–17 (AV) <sup>16</sup> *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:* <sup>17</sup> *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou*

shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Adam and Eve were given a free will to choose. The choice was bigger than to eat or not to eat, the choice was to obey God and demonstrate love to Him or to choose the fruit for selfish reasons and show love to themselves. Loving God is a choice that you make. Loving God means surrender. Loving God means choosing to totally surrender ourselves to Him, our heart, soul, mind, and body. Agape love is “to totally give over to something”. To love God means that we totally give our lives to Him.

(See Love Page 4)



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**(Mud from Page 2)**

Naaman was surprised when he pulled up beside the Jordan. The water looked very clean, not at all like he expected. He looked at the sparkling edges as they ran their course and smiled.

“These waters don’t look bad at all. We will away to the edge; I will strip while you keep watch.”

Slowly removing his outer garment, Naaman entered the cool waters and shivered from their touch. One... two... three times he dipped his head under the water. Feeling nothing, he headed back towards the bank.

“No, master.” The servant’s racing heart did not prevent him from speaking out. “Seven times he said. You can defeat armies, lord. Surely you can do something so simple.”

With a huge sigh, Naaman turned again to deeper water. Four... five... six times he again dumped his whole head beneath the flow. “Nothing. There is no change.” The scabs looked as they did before. “One more time, lord. Just one more time. That will be the full seven then and we will see how clean these waters can make you.”

Again, Naaman did what he had to... and rose from the water with perfectly healed skin. “It’s truly a miracle. Instructions that seemed so strange have made me whole. Why would this God of Israel heal me? I am an important man in Syria, we worship Rimmon, yet I cannot do that anymore. I now know there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. Yet, my master still bows to Rimmon. The way forward is full of danger and confusion. Muddy waters indeed. Come, we must seek answers from this Elisha, my skin may be clean... but the future is now as clear as mud.” ◇

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**(Love from page 3)**

Matthew 22:37 (AV)

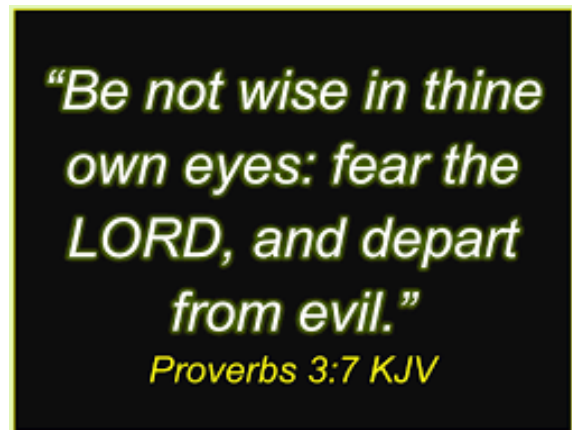
<sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.** There is no room here for divided affections or allegiance. As Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters” Matthew 6:24

If I asked you if you loved God most of you would say “Of course I do.” But let’s look at this honestly. Can you say that you have surrendered yourself to Him? Do you seek to put His desire, His will ahead of your own? Are you consumed with what He wants for your life or what you want out of life? Can you say that you desire His will above your own happiness?

Loving God means no longer living for ourselves. Loving Him means complete selflessness. It means dying to self.

Romans 12:1 (AV) <sup>1</sup> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

**(See Love Page 5)**



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**(Love from page 4)**

This is not possible for an unbeliever. The ability to love God is given us the moment that we place our faith in Christ. God Himself, who is love, comes into our hearts. 1 John 4:7-8 (AV)

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. <sup>8</sup> He that loveth not knoweth not God; **for God is love.** Romans 5:5 (AV) <sup>5</sup> And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

**As believers we have the capacity to choose to love God; however, it is not automatic. We must choose to love Him with all our being, heart, soul, mind and strength. This is the main thing that we must keep the main thing.**



**DID YOU KNOW?**

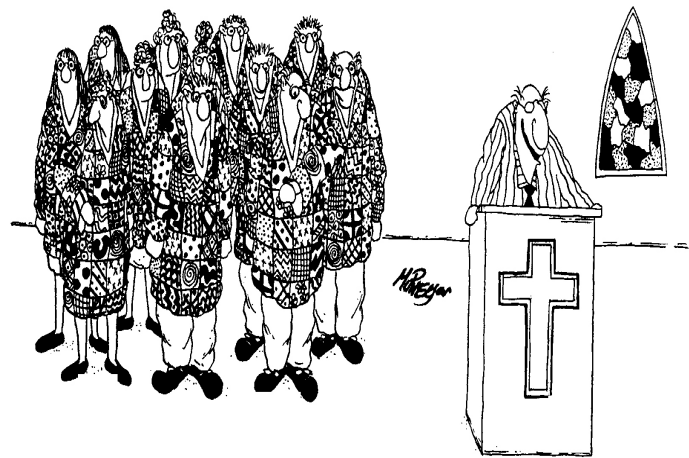
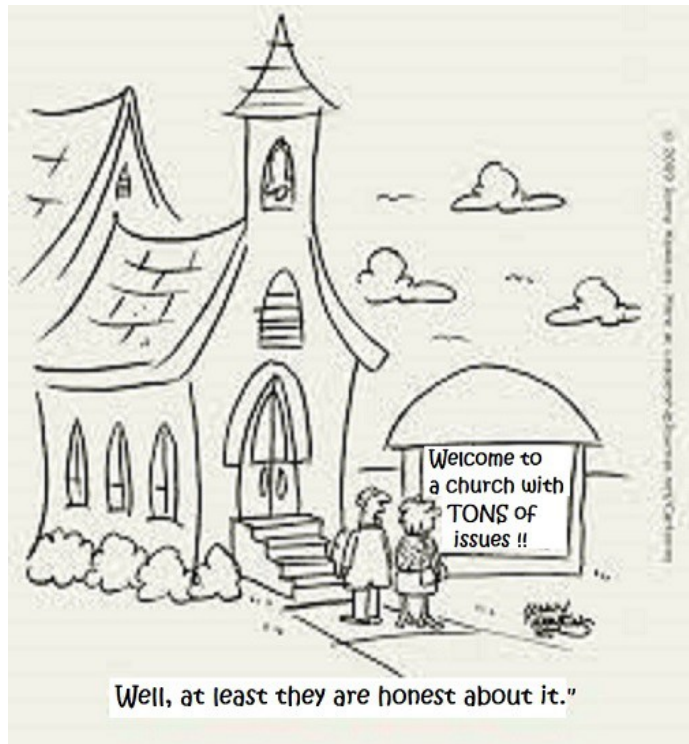
Studies show that people who overthink tend to create problems for themselves that weren't there to begin with.

The human brain can only stay focused on one task or person for 7-10 minutes before they lose interest

During the Middle Ages, being a bad musician was a public offense and lousy musicians were tortured.

There are about 1 trillion bacteria on each of your feet.

**LAUGH A LITTLE**



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# The Footprints of Jesus

E. Claude Gardner

Jesus is "our everything" and we also sing, "O what a Savior!" He is our "prophet, priest and king" and also, our example. Jesus wants us to follow in His footprints. He left us an example of suffering, but truly He is an example in everything good. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

The world idolizes (and some Christians do also) celebrities. However, the only perfect model is Jesus. He is perfect and honorable in every aspect of His life. The more we read of Him the more readily we agree with the centurion at the cross - "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54).

In the classic, *In His Steps*, Charles Sheldon tells of a person who was confronted with a problem and resolved it by asking, "What would Jesus do?" This is solid advice when faced with any decision or dilemma. We should sing the little song: "Be like Jesus this my song; Be like Jesus in the home or in the throng; Be like Jesus all day long." We can go wherever Jesus would go, read whatever Jesus would read, see

whatever Jesus would see, and try to do whatever Jesus would do. He is "the way" (John 14:6). Also, Christianity is called "the way" - it is the way of life as we follow Jesus (Acts 9:2, 24: 14). Can we follow others? Can we imitate the example of others? Yes, conditioned on their pointing us to Jesus (1 Corinthians 11 : 1 ; Matthew 5:16).

Why do we need the footprints of Jesus? It is imperative for us because we are not wise enough to choose our changes. Men ignorant of God or rebellious toward Him are groping in this world of darkness (Jeremiah 10:23). Also, we need Jesus because He is the only way to God (Matthew 11 :27). Without Him none can go to heaven to be with God. Jesus said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me " (John 14:6). The way, the narrow way, is made plain by the footprints of Jesus. The way of holiness is prepared for us (Isaiah 35).

When we accept the call of the Gospel we follow the Master who makes us useful, as He did Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Matthew 4: 18-22; John 12:26). How are we to follow Jesus? We should follow Him in prayer, service, love, obedience, holiness, and self-sacrifice. Jesus taught self denial and the development of the spirit of sacrifice. This means we must make a complete surrender of our lives (Luke 9:57-62; Matthew 10:28-3 1). The redeemed ones are those who follow Jesus (Revelation 14:3- 5). They are the ones who have heard the voice of Jesus (John 10:4,5,27). . If we "sallow afar off" as did Peter, we will get into difficulty as did he (Luke 22:54). Satan makes footprints. too, but to follow him will lead us to eternal destruction. Our Shepherd leads us in paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3). The Psalmist prayed, "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Psalm 119: 133).

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## Post-Christianity: America at the Crossroads

by Sim Lee

*"..broad is the road that leads to destruction.."*

Matthew 7:13

As a commonly shared belief that used to be as straight as a Roman road, today's Christianity in America is more of a corduroy road with its many political correctness curves and corners, no longer looking like its former self.

Changes that did not just happen on their own, and the Christians of America who fostered those changes, along with others, are a totally changed people as well, compared to those of fifty-years ago. And so it is with time and a people of tolerance.



Almost every decade now requires a re-definition of what it means to be a "practicing Christian" in America for the purpose of studies, with every generation displaying far less commitment to Christian worship than did the generation that preceded it.

Things have relaxed quite a bit, as have the metrics to measure a "practicing Christian", such as (1) do they attend church at least once a month, or (2) do they still self-identifying with charitable acts. Such metrics works for a while,

until they have to be relaxed again with the diminished faith of the next generation.

Through immigration and multi-religion beliefs (mixture) there has come a point where now an entire national majority no longer self-identifies with Christianity, requiring the metrics to become more geographical related:

The rise of post-modernism now has most America now identifying our nation as being a "Post-Christian nation" a they are identifying as being either Non-Christian or Post-Christian, and another set of redefinition is in order for the purpose of accurately tracking religious data and trend analysis.

The Barna group has came up with a set of 16 metrics by which to measure or separate post-Christian influence, numbers or even identify cities that are dominated by Post-Christian populations.

Here are those 16 criteria:\*

1. Do not believe in God
2. Identify as atheist or agnostic
3. Disagree that faith is important in their lives
4. Have not prayed to God (in the last week)
5. Have never made a commitment to Jesus
6. Disagree the Bible is accurate
7. Have not donated money to a church (in the last year)
8. Have not attended a Christian church (in the last 6 months)
9. Agree that Jesus committed sins
10. Do not feel a responsibility to "share their faith"
11. Have not read the Bible (in the last week)
12. Have not volunteered at church (in the last week)
13. Have not attended Sunday school (in the last week)

**(See Crossroads Page 8)**

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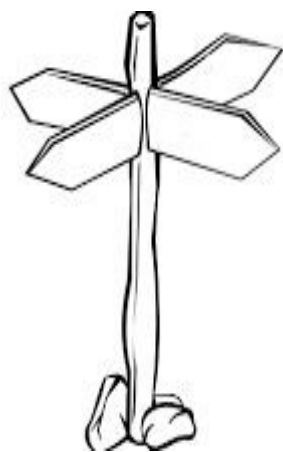
**(Crossroads from Page 7)**

14. Have not attended religious small group (in the last week)

15. Bible engagement scale: low (have not read the Bible in the past week and disagree strongly or somewhat that the Bible is accurate)

16. Not Born Again

To score 9 of 16 indicates a "Post-Christian" individual and a score of 13 or more identifies a "Highly Post-Christian" individual.



**Post-Christian Metrics:**

To qualify as "post-Christian," individuals had to meet nine or more of the following factors . "Highly post-Christian" individuals meet 13 or more of the factors (out of these 16 criteria).

Looking across America, Cities in the Northeast scored the highest for Post-Christian populations:

- Portland, ME (57%)
- Boston, MA (56%)
- Albany, NY (54%)
- Providence, RI (53%)
- Burlington, VT (53%)
- Hartford, CT (52%)
- New York, NY (51%)
- Buffalo, NY (50%)

Such statistics imply that America is at a crossroads. Here is the choice of routes being taken:

(1) Looking down one road we are becoming a diminishing number of Christians who are seeing more changing of the times than any U.S. era/generation before us. Ours is the narrow road.

(2) And looking down the other road, we have an increasing number of Non-Christians and former Christians who are seeing more freedom from religion than any other U.S. era/generation before them. Theirs is the broad road.

We all know where those roads will lead.

\* Barna.com "The Most Post-Christian Cities in America: 2017" - 6/11/2017 - David Kinnaman & Roxy Leestone - Barna Group

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Published by  
**Victory Baptist Church Ministries**  
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Kokomo, IN 46902

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