

GC2:

The Second Greatest Commandment

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Mark 12:31



This Bible study is the second in the GC Trilogy and focuses on the second greatest commandment given in both the Old and New Testaments. Here, we seek to understand what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves and explore ways we can grow ever closer to the Lord in obedience to this command.

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The GC Trilogy

GC1: The Greatest Commandment
GC2: The Second Greatest Commandment
GC3: The Great Commission

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Session One: GC2 Defined

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he answered with not only the greatest commandment (GC1), but also included the second greatest commandment (GC2).

Read Mark 12:30-31.

1. What is GC1, and what is GC2?

From our GC1 study, we learned:

2. These are not suggestions; they are _____ . What does that mean?
3. God must be our _____ for us to have any capacity or willingness to obey his commands. What does this mean, and what needs to happen to establish this relationship with God? (See Romans 10:9.)
4. We must realize God's _____ for us to _____ God, or anyone else. What does this mean?
5. Can we obey GC2 if we have no regard for GC1? i.e., can we love our neighbor as ourselves without loving God with our whole being? Explain your answer.

GC2 originates from Leviticus 19:18, which follows a lengthy list of laws designed to safeguard against taking advantage of one another.

6. Write out Leviticus 19:18.
7. Who is this command being given to? How are we recipients of this command also? See Romans 4:12 and 16.

- 8. What are a few situations where you might want to take vengeance or bear a grudge?**

- 9. Do you think this verse defines loving your neighbor as yourself in the confines of not taking vengeance or bearing a grudge? i.e., you are obeying this commandment as long as you are not taking revenge or holding back forgiveness. Why or why not?**

Let's look closely at GC2, which in Mark 12:31 is stated as, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

10. The love Jesus speaks of is not a feeling or an emotion; it is an _____. What does this mean?

11. Who are we supposed to love, and what does that imply? (We will drill down into this in a future session.)

12. To what degree are we to love our neighbor, and what does that mean to you? (We will study this more later.)

13. List below any conditions and/or exclusions where/when GC2 does not apply, and explain your answer.

Session Two: As Yourself

GC2 states that we are to love others as we love ourselves. Therefore, loving others depends on, or is to the degree, that we love ourselves. If we struggle with loving ourselves, we will struggle to truly love others.

What does it mean to love ourselves? Certainly, GC2 is not advocating egotistic or selfish attitudes. And, it seems unlikely to be promoting the 1970s psychological mantra of, “I’m OK, you’re OK.” Let’s explore the biblical view of self-love.

1. **We learned in the GC1 study that we can't love God with our whole being unless we realize his love for us. Look back at the GC1 study, Session Two, Question Four (page 5). List below one of the verses that resonated with your spirit, and why it connects with you.**
2. **Can we love ourselves (in the biblical way) without realizing God's love for us? Why or why not?**
3. **Fill in the table below to paraphrase each verse and how that verse helps to understand why we can love ourselves.**

Scripture	Paraphrase	Why I Can Love Myself
Psalm 8:4-5		
Psalm 139:14		
Luke 12:6-7		
1 Corinthians 6:19		
Ephesians 1:4-5		
Ephesians 2:10		

Based on these Scriptures (and there are many more we could have looked at), we see the tremendous love God has for each one of us. If God loves us so much, who are we not to love ourselves? That would be like telling God his love is misplaced, and our reasons for not loving ourselves carry more weight.

Even when we fully grasp God’s love for us, our sinfulness, weaknesses, setbacks, and doubts can sometimes make us think that we are not worthy of love, and we struggle to love ourselves. As we continue through our Christian walk with the Lord, we can become angry – even hateful – toward ourselves when we fall into the same sins over and over again, commit sins that we thought we would never be tempted by, remember past sins we have committed, or do not see the spiritual growth that we hoped for. We can also judge ourselves as

undeserving of love for not living up to expectations, for missing opportunities, for the decisions we have made, among many other things.

4. Is God's love for us based on how good we are or what we do for him? If not, what is God's love for us based on?

5. Fill in the table below for how God treats us when we come to him in humble confession of our sins, and how, then, we should treat ourselves.

Scripture	How God Treats Us	How We Should Treat Ourselves
Psalm 103:12		
Hebrews 8:12		
1 John 1:8-9		

6. Read 1 Corinthians 4:3-5. What does Paul mean when he says that he does not judge himself, and how does this apply to each one of us?

God wants us to learn from our sinful failures and setbacks, confess our sins, ask for forgiveness, and take the steps of repentance. However, using them as a mental flogging tool to extract self-judged penance is like telling God that Christ's death on the cross for our sins and his forgiveness is not sufficient. We must forgive ourselves.

7. In GC1, we examined 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 to explore the behavior and attributes of love. Revisit these verses and complete the following promise to yourself.

To love myself, I will endeavor to be _____ and _____ to myself. I do not need to _____ or _____ to feel affirmation, because God's love is sufficient for me. I therefore will not be _____ or _____. I do not need to insist on my _____, nor be _____ or _____ to myself or others, because I can trust that God's way is the best. I rejoice in the _____, that because God loves me, I can _____ my whole being. I can therefore _____ with myself when I fail, _____ in God's Spirit within me when I doubt myself, assuredly _____ that God is finishing the work in me he started, and _____ my weaknesses and setbacks knowing that when I am weak, Christ is strong in me.

8. What are some behaviors you could stop doing or start doing this week to grow your love for yourself?

If we do not love ourselves as God's beloved child, we cannot fully love others.

Session Three: Love Your Neighbor

1. Read Luke 10:25-28. What was the situation that prompted the discussion of the greatest commandment, and who recited GC1 and GC2?

Jesus said the lawyer answered correctly, so it must have been known that loving your neighbor as yourself was the second greatest commandment.

2. What does the lawyer ask in verse 29, and why did he ask that question?

3. What do you think the lawyer expected Jesus' answer to be?

Jesus used a parable to demonstrate both who your neighbor is and what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. To fully grasp this teaching, we must first understand the hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans. This enmity started hundreds of years before Christ. In 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, which became known as the Assyrian province of Samaria. While many of the inhabitants were led off into captivity, some Jews were left behind. They intermarried with settlers from Mesopotamia and Syria and were considered half-breeds by the southern Jews in Judah. The Samaritans, however, considered themselves worshipers of the same God. They even attempted to assist in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple when the southern Jews returned from their Babylonian exile in 537 BC. The Samaritans were rebuffed and retaliated by opposing the reconstruction, thereby delaying its progress.

In the 2nd century BC, the Samaritans helped the Syrian monarchs in their wars against the Jews. In 128 BC, the Jewish high priest burned the Samaritan temple on Gerizim. Early in the first century, Samaritans threw human bones into the temple in Jerusalem on the day of Passover. In Jesus' time, some Samaritans would enlist in the Roman auxiliary troops for a chance to legally harass the Jews. Both groups are said to have bribed Roman soldiers to persecute the other. A widely used Jewish proverb stated that "a piece of bread given by a Samaritan is more unclean than swine's flesh." (This material is adapted from an article by St. Sabina Parish.)

Read Luke 10:30-37.

4. What does Jesus want us to conclude about who our neighbor is?

5. There are many other teachings in the Bible about GC2. What do the following Scriptures teach us?

Scripture	Paraphrase	Lesson About GC2
Luke 6:27-31		
John 13:34		
1 Corinthians 10:23-24		

The priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan likely did not begin their day seeking ways to love their neighbor as themselves. The injured man was in obvious need and in plain sight of them all as each went about their business.

6. What reasons do you think the priest and the Levite had for not helping the injured man?

7. Based on your answers above and your own life experience, list below as many reasons as you can think of why we hesitate to (or don't) love our neighbor as ourselves; when we act more like the priest and the Levite than the Samaritan.

The Samaritan was not obligated to help the wounded man; based on the rift between Jews and Samaritans, it would have been more acceptable for him to ignore the man than either the priest or the Levite.

8. Why did the Samaritan help the man? (See verses 33 and 37.)

9. We do not know why the Samaritan was on that road, where he was going, or what his schedule and obligations were that day. Fill in the table below from Luke 10:34-35 for all the ways the Samaritan demonstrated love for his neighbor, and indicate what he gave to do that.

What the Samaritan Did	Time/Money/Resources Given

10. Besides taking time and resources, what did the Samaritan have to risk or overcome to help the Jew?

11. If we encounter a situation where someone has a genuine, obvious need that we can clearly do something to help, but we are not moved by mercy and compassion to take action, it could be that we do not value enough the mercy and compassion God has shown us to override any of the reasons you listed in question #7. What do you think of this statement?

12. How can we realize to a greater degree God's mercy and compassion for us?

Session Four: Application

1. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus compares GC2 to GC1 by saying: "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." How is loving your neighbor as yourself like loving God with all your heart, soul, and might? See Matthew 25:31-46.
2. Aside from obeying GC2 because God commands it, the Scriptures reveal many reasons why loving others as ourselves is the second greatest commandment. Fill in the following table to discover some of these reasons.

Scripture	Paraphrase	Reason for the Importance of GC2
Proverbs 10:12		
Matthew 6:14		
John 13:34-35		
Colossians 3:14		

3. We have learned that the love that is commanded in GC1 and GC2 is an action. It is not a feeling, an attitude, a nice idea, or a good intention. How do the following scriptures reveal ways to put GC2 into practice?

Scripture	Paraphrase	Ways We Can Practice This
Luke 6:35		
2 Corinthians 1:4		
Philippians 2:3		
Colossians 3:12-13		
Hebrews 10:24-25		
James 2:15-17		
1 Peter 4:8-9		

- 4. What are some other ways you can think of that we can demonstrate love for our neighbor?**

- 5. Describe one or two experiences this past week in which someone lived out GC2 to you or someone else.**

Consistently obeying GC2 may seem impossible. And truly, in this life, we will not be perfect in obeying this (or any other) command. However, we can commit to meeting each opportunity God presents to us each day to love others as ourselves with a compassionate heart, putting ourselves in another's situation, and doing for them what we would want done to us.

- 6. What are some ways you can put GC2 in the forefront of your mind as you go about your day?**

In Matthew 22:40, Jesus finishes his instruction of the two greatest commandments by saying, "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." The Law refers to the first five books of the Old Testament, and the Prophets refers to the other 61 books.

- 7. How are the Ten Commandments, plus all the other Old Testament laws and instructions, wrapped up in GC1 and GC2? See Romans 13:8-10**