

LOVING GOD (2)



WHICH WORKS? (3)

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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Loving God (2)

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Welcome to *Loving God (2)*

All the good works we do in loving our neighbors must flow from our love for God; and this, too, is expressed in various good works.

We continue here our discussion of those works that express our love for God and that enable us to grow in love for Him. Loving God is not simply an attitude of our heart. While love for God begins within, in our soul, like all love it comes to expression in actions – good works.

In Part 2 of our study on loving God, we'll consider the remaining works whereby we love the Lord and grow in love for Him – so that we'll be ready and willing to love our neighbors at every opportunity.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

And if you find this study helpful, please let us know. How have you benefited from this study? Go to our website, www.ailbe.org, and use the Contact Us button to share your story.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Loving God's Appearing

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4.8

You better watch out!

How often as children were we reminded of a great coming event, which we looked forward to eagerly, anticipated with joy, thought about almost constantly – especially beginning in the fall – and were warned to be prepared for, lest our hopes be dashed?

We even sang about it: “You better watch out, you better not cry; you better not pout, I’m tellin’ you why...”

Anticipation of great happiness can have overpowering and guiding effects in one’s life. As children, the prospect of Santa’s coming could rouse us to excitement, conjure visions of good things, and perhaps even lead us to dress up our behavior a bit – especially as the great day of visitation drew closer.

Santa, of course, is not real. But we could become stirred up about the prospect of his coming. God, on the other hand, *is* real, and He is really coming again when our Lord Jesus returns in glory to finish His great work of redemption.

We love God when we look forward to His appearing, not like children, eager for Santa’s fleeting boon, but like true saints, longing for the Presence of Christ in His glory, to see Him as He is, to be made like Him, to enter into the fullness of His joy, and to spend all eternity in glorious and perfect surroundings and holy company, basking in and celebrating His abundant beauty, goodness and truth.

Paul wrote that those who love the appearing of our Lord, the coming again of Jesus to receive us unto Himself, will not be disappointed. For the completion of His transforming work awaits us at that time, when we shall finally know as we are known, and love as we are loved (1 Cor. 13.12).

We love God by devoting ourselves to those works that increase eager anticipation of and preparation for His appearing, His coming again in glory. What are those good works of love for God?

Meditate on His appearing

We ought to *think and meditate and pray* about the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.11-13; Tit. 2.11-14). This is not to condone vain speculation on the times and seasons preparatory to His coming. Jesus Himself has forbidden all such futile prognosticating (Acts 1.7). But, as we see in Revelation 19, for example, the coming again of our Lord Jesus will be breathtakingly spectacular and glorious, filling the skies, rending the heavens, and issuing in shouts of victory that will be heard the whole world ‘round.

There follows then the separation of those who know the Lord and long for His appearing from those who do not, and a glorious wedding feast when we, who are the bride of Christ, are united at last and forever with our heavenly Groom.

We love God as we are “looking for and hasting the coming day of God,” letting our souls thrill in anticipation of the heavenly consummation that awaits us.

Prepare for His appearing

We must also make sure that we are *preparing* for that great day. Peter asked, in the light of the day of God, “what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness”? John agrees, saying, with a view to

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the appearing of the Lord, “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3.2, 3).

Peter and John refer to the *work* of sanctification, by which Christ is formed in us as we lay aside our old self and work hard to learn Jesus and walk in His yoke (Phil. 2.12; Eph. 4.17-24; Matt. 11.28-30). One of the purposes of the many offerings and sacrifices commanded in God’s Law was to remind the people of Israel of their sinfulness, and of their constant need to work at the holiness God requires. Jesus has fulfilled all those sacrifices, of course, so that we need no longer practice them. But they serve to remind us that we must be constantly vigilant about the condition of our souls, repent and offer ourselves anew as living sacrifices to the Lord (Rom. 12.1, 2), and work at our sanctification, always with a view to the soon appearing of our Lord.

Encourage others in His appearing

The appearing of our Lord in glory thus serves to excite our souls with hope and to energize us for sanctification. No wonder Paul exhorts us to *encourage one another* with the prospect of the Lord’s return (1 Thess. 4.15-18). We should talk and share and pray about the coming of Jesus, and help one another to make progress in preparing for His coming by our example and mutual edification.

When we’re excited about something that we love, we’ll want others to be excited, too. Sharing and speaking together about the appearing of our Lord can kindle deeper love for Him and greater encouragement to live for Him in the present.

Celebrate His appearing

The psalmist wrote that the prospect of the Lord’s coming sets all creation about *celebrating* with joy (Ps. 96.11-13). Surely we should do the same. Singing, praying and praising the Lord, and readying ourselves daily for His coming can help to stoke the joy of that great day, and excite us to greater love for God, Who has prepared this great gift and boon for us.

We should sing about the Lord’s appearing in our corporate worship and private devotions, since singing engages the affections, warms the heart, and can strengthen the conscience for greater resolve in preparing for that great day.

Warn other of His appearing

Finally, we must *warn others* of the coming day of the Lord. We are like watchers on the wall. We know what’s coming, what the end will be, and what the final disposition will be for all those who trust in Jesus, as well as for those who do not. Our duty is to warn our neighbors, whether or not they receive our words, lest we ourselves be found wanting when the Lord appears in glory (Ezek. 33.1-9).

Some aspect of the coming day of the Lord should be part of our Gospel presentation. We invite those to whom we bear witness to consider the glory of eternal life with Jesus; but we also warn them of eternal condemnation if they choose not to receive the Lord.

We love God by loving His appearing. And the harder we work at loving the soon appearing of our Lord, the more our love for Him will increase.

For reflection

1. How do you typically think about the return of our Lord Jesus? How might you improve your vision of that coming great day?
2. Why is it important to encourage one another about the Lord’s appearing?
3. Why should we include the Lord’s appearing in our presentation of the Gospel?

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Next steps – Transformation: Pray with joyous anticipation through the vision of Christ's return in Revelation 19.

2 Loving God's Praise to the Generations

*I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations;
Therefore the people shall praise You forever and ever. Psalm 45:17*

Favorite things

Perhaps we all have things in our lives which have come down to us from previous generations. A precious keepsake? A cherished watch? A saying or timely quip (my dad used to say about his boys, when they did something right in a sporting event: "Well, a blind hog'll find a ripe acorn every now and then." I say it to this day!)?

Doubtless, too, you have some favorite things you would like to pass on to the generations that succeed you. A great book. An old car. An appreciation of winter. Some songs or forms of music. Maybe a piece of jewelry or a beloved work of art that has been passed down to you.

We want those we love to enjoy the things we love. So we tell them our favorite stories, read them our favorite books, sing songs we learned in childhood, help them understand the glories of classical music or traditional hymnody, share our favorite poems.

We do this, as has been done for us, because we love our children and grandchildren, and we want them to share in the things we love most. And when we love God most of all, and rejoice to be in His Presence and Word, to delight in His great salvation, to glory in His works, and to look forward eagerly to His coming again in power – when we love God in all these ways, we will want to pass on praise and love for God to the generations that come after us, whether they are in our family or simply among that rising generation which will succeed us on this planet.

We love God by loving to see those who will come after us loving and praising Him as well. How can we grow in this expression of love, so that the Name of the Lord will be remembered, loved, and praised in the generations that succeed us? Let me briefly mention five ways.

Worship

Worship is infectious – alas, for good or ill. If in our worship we are bored, dour, distracted, and not quite with it; if we grumble about this or that aspect of worship; or if our focus in worship is on ourselves and what we think worship should do for us, that attitude will be communicated to other worshippers, including some in the generation that will succeed us.

But if we worship in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24), having prepared well, keeping our focus on Jesus Christ in His exalted glory; if we bear in mind that worship is what we're made for and where we find our most complete and satisfying purpose in life; if in the Presence of God we are humble and joyful; and if we worship wholeheartedly when we are assembled for worship, and throughout each day as living sacrifices, this is the attitude toward worship we will convey to the generation to come.

Teach

All Christians are called to teach and make disciples (Heb. 5:12; Col. 3:16; Matt. 28:18-20). Those who received the Law of God from the hand of Moses were instructed to teach their children, formally and informally, to love God by loving Him according to His Word (Deut. 6:1-9). That mandate continues in the New Testament (Eph. 6:1-4).

God has bestowed on us a great legacy of saving words and sovereign works. We who love His Word and

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works must take care to help the rising generation do so as well (Ps. 78.1-8). Just as we teach our children to take responsibility for their things, use good table manners, speak clearly, do their homework, and assorted other matters, so we must not fail to teach them how to praise and thank God. By praying for them and with them, leading them into the Word of God, teaching them great songs of the faith, and helping them take their place in the community of believers, we can help many in the generation that succeeds us to praise God and live for Him, as we have sought to do.

And by making the most of every opportunity to share, teach, and encourage our fellow believers, we increase the likelihood that praise to God will spread among our fellow believers, and through them to the rising generation.

Evangelize

The work of evangelism also provides opportunities to extend the praises of God to the next generation (Acts 1.8). Proclaiming the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom is every believer's responsibility. That doesn't mean that we all become preachers; rather, we all have a Personal Mission Field in which to show Jesus and tell His story to the people around us. By building relationships with others, getting to know them, praying for them, serving them with good works, and letting them get to know us, we can create opportunities and pathways along which the Good News of Jesus can travel little by little.

The Gospel is the greatest reason we have to praise God, as we have seen. And we do praise Him for Jesus and His saving work, day by day. Others will do so as well if we can help them understand the Good News and lead the way for Jesus to open their hearts and minds to His love. We must be faithful to work the ground of our Personal Mission Field and sow the good seed of the Kingdom by words and deeds, as often as we can. The Spirit of God will do the rest. It's not our job to lead anybody to Christ. Our calling is to make the Good News known; God will do what He pleases each time His Word is sown in the hearing of others (Is. 55.10, 11).

Missions

Similarly, we should support the work of missions, through our church, by our own giving, and, as the Lord leads, taking part in missions activities and endeavors (3 Jn. 1.5-8). Praying for and supporting missionaries, staying in touch with them, encouraging and praying for them, and learning about God's work through them, can help to ensure that, in places we never may visit, the praise of God will reach to many, in this generation and for the generations to come.

Legacy

Finally, bring all these activities together into a legacy, a life and works of praise and honor to God, that can benefit others now, and have staying power and lasting effects into the generations to come (Ps. 45.17). Let this be your vision. Let a legacy of praise to God inform your prayers, guide your daily planning, shape the good works you do each day, and be the focus of your prayers as you retire each night.

Let your legacy be one of loving God with all your soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Be a living sacrifice of praise to God in all you do, and you will pass His praise – and heartfelt love for Him – to many in the generation to come.

For reflection

1. Why should believers care about the kind of legacy they leave? Who are the people who will be affected by your legacy?
2. What are you doing at this time to ensure that your legacy includes praise to God among the rising generation?
3. What opportunities does your church afford for you to help the rising generation learn to praise God?

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Next steps – Preparation: Spend time with the Lord in prayer, asking Him to give you a vision and understanding of the legacy He wants you to leave to the next generation. Work on preparing that legacy day after day.

3 Loving God's Calling (1)

You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2.10-12

"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Matthew 21.31

The parable of the two sons

In the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21.28-32) Jesus taught an important lesson about the Kingdom of God. The question He addressed is implied: "Who will enter and enjoy the benefits of life in the Kingdom of God." The answer is clear: Not those who *say* they will, but those who actually *do*.

But a second question is even more implicit: Which of these two sons loved and honored his father?

The father called his sons to *work* in the vineyard, to take up the tools and skills, and invest the time and effort required to allow the vines to produce fruit. Each son was called to work, and the specific work to which he was called related to bringing forth fruit on the vines.

The first son declined to go: "He answered and said, 'I will not'". However, "afterward he regretted it and went." He had a change of heart. He decided to do what his father requested, no doubt because he felt guilty about not showing proper love and honor to his father.

The father approached the second son with the same call to work. "And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go." Everyone who heard this parable from Jesus knew how to answer His question. The first son, who experienced a change of heart toward his father – who decided to reciprocate his father's love and respect his wishes – was the one who "did the will of his father" by taking up the work to which he'd been called.

Jesus applied this teaching to His audience. All those who heard the call of God through John the Baptist and Jesus, to turn from their sins and take up "the way of righteousness" would certainly "enter the Kingdom of God." The religious leaders, who merely talked a good talk, but did not do the *works* characteristic of those who have embraced the Kingdom-and-glory calling of the Lord, would be left on the outside.

Put another way: If we love God as we say we do, we will embrace His calling, and all the work it requires.

Called to the Kingdom

God has called us to His Kingdom and glory. The Kingdom of God is that holy spiritual realm where Jesus rules, by His Word and Spirit, to increase righteousness, peace, and joy on earth as it is in heaven (Rom. 14.17, 18; Matt. 6.10). We enter this Kingdom by grace through faith, as the Spirit of God brings the saving work of Jesus to bear on our souls, and we repent of our sins and believe the Good News about Jesus and His Kingdom. But having entered by grace through faith, we take up the works which this Kingdom requires (Eph. 2.8-10).

Entering the Kingdom – or supposing we have entered it – is one thing; laying hold on it is quite another. In Matthew 11.12 Jesus said, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." The fourth century Church Father, Cyril of Alexandria wrote this about Jesus' instruction: "Whoever hears and loves the sacred message takes it by force. This means that he

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uses all his eagerness and strength in his desire to enter within the hope.” If we love this message and our Lord Who proclaims it, we will use all our eagerness and strength to enter, enjoy, and work for the advance the of the Kingdom.

John Calvin (1509-1564) was even more pointed: “The greater part of men were no more excited than if the Prophets had never uttered a word about Christ, or if John had never appeared as his witness; and therefore Christ reminds them, that the violence, of which he had spoken, existed only in men of a particular class. The meaning therefore is, A vast assembly of men is now collected, as if men were rushing violently forward to seize the Kingdom of God; for, aroused by the voice of one man, they come together in crowds, and receive, not only with eagerness, but with vehement impetuosity, the grace which is offered to them. Although very many are asleep, and are no more affected than if John in the wilderness were acting a play which had no reference to them, yet many flock to him with ardent zeal. The tendency of our Lord’s statement is to show, that those who pass by in a contemptuous manner, and as it were with closed eyes, the power of God, which manifestly appears both in the teacher and in the hearers, are inexcusable. Let us also learn from these words, what is the true nature and operation of faith. It leads men not only to give, cold and indifferent assent when God speaks, but to cherish warm affection towards Him, and to rush forward as it were with a violent struggle.”

They love the Father’s gift of the Kingdom (Lk. 12.32) who devote themselves to obtaining it, advancing in it, increasing its presence, realizing more of its fruit, and doing whichever good works are required to see that glorious and holy realm increasing on earth as it is in heaven. These are the works that bring out the glory of God (Matt. 5.13-16).

Called to the glory of God

But not for our own glory. We’re not trying to earn anything from God by going into His Kingdom vineyard, eager and determined to bring forth the fruit of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your Name give glory” (Ps. 115.1) is the cry of all who have truly entered the Kingdom and taken up its work with holy violence.

We want to see God’s Name exalted, God’s Presence more palpable among us, God’s righteousness increasing, and the fruit of God’s Spirit flowing like rivers of living water into all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities (Jn. 7.37-39).

But this doesn’t just happen. It happens when we *bear* our Father’s call to enter His Kingdom and live for His glory, and we *go* with resolution, exertion, persistence, and joy to *do the works* that bear Kingdom fruit. The world is the Lord’s field (Matt. 13.38), and He has sent each of us to a portion of it (Jn. 20.21) and called us to do the good works He has before ordained. If we love God, we will do more than simply give lip-service to His Kingdom and glory. We will repent of anything that has kept us from doing the works of the Kingdom, and we will go into our world every day, in everything we do, prepared by His Word and Spirit, grounded in His Law and grace, and zealous and ready to do and maintain those works that bring forth Kingdom fruit on earth as it is in heaven (Tit. 2.14; 3.1, 8, 14).

God has called you to His Kingdom and glory. He will know that you love Him, and you will prove your love for Him, as you do the works which characterize His Kingdom and bring glory and honor to His Name.

For reflection

1. We are not saved by works; but we are not saved without them. Explain.
2. How can we know which works will advance the Kingdom of God?
3. How can we make sure God gets all the glory for our good works?

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Next steps – Transformation: Commit your day to the Lord, and go into it prepared to do the good works that characterize His rule in your life.

4 Loving God's Calling (2)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." Matthew 28.19

We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. 2 Corinthians 10.13

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11.1

Called to God's Kingdom and glory

The love which believers have toward God engages every aspect of their lives – heart, mind, conscience, words, and deeds – in expressions of adoration, gratitude, and glad obedience to His will. God has called us to His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12), where righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are the hallmarks of our experience. We love God by loving His Presence, Word, salvation, works, creation, and soon appearing – all of which we enjoy and increase in as we seek and advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

By our *works* we glorify God and further His Kingdom – works of worship, service, witness, and growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. The more we work – *not to be saved but because we are saved* – the more our joy in the Lord increases, because He engages us with His Word and Spirit, transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ and drawing us more fully into the glorious gladness of our Savior (Heb. 1.8, 9). The more our gladness in the Lord increases, the more we love Him; and the more we seek to express our love for Him in all the ways He has appointed unto us.

We do not have to go far to fulfill this calling. Indeed, we only need to look around us every day, right where we are, whatever we're doing, whomever we're with; and there and then we may glorify God and seek His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, in even the smallest, most everyday activities of our lives (1 Cor. 10.31).

It's the "of our lives" aspect that needs more attention for most of us. For we are called to the Kingdom and glory of God not merely when we are in church, or not just as we are involved in some program of service or growth, or should we happen to go to some distant land for the sake of the Gospel. We are called to the Kingdom and glory of God in every part and sector and activity and role and relationship "of our lives"; and it is here, as we take up our calling each day, that we demonstrate our love for God Who has called us.

Watch where you're going!

We've all been given this admonition at one time or another, and in various ways: "Pay attention to what you're doing!" "Watch out there!" "Take care." "Keep your eyes on the road!" "Watch where you're going!"

It's a familiar admonition, and it's very important that we do watch where we're going. Because *as* we're going wherever we're going, we have *work* to do.

English translations of the Great Commission (Matt. 28.18-20) routinely fail to capture the sense of the word typically translated, "Go". In the Greek, this is not a verb – so it doesn't indicate action. It is a participle, and the function of the participle is to *describe*. It should be translated "As you are going..." The work we have to do *as we are going* is to "make disciples". Making disciples is the work we do to love our neighbors as ourselves, as we shall see in upcoming installments. But we will only take up the work of making disciples if we love Him enough Who commands us to take up this work. When we love Jesus, and as we are growing in love for Him, making disciples will be the most natural thing for us to do, because loving Him, we will become *like*

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Him, and making disciples is what He spent His earthly sojourn doing.

And it's what He has sent us to do as well (Jn. 20.21). So it's a good idea that we watch where we're going, wherever we're going, and whenever we're going where we're going, so that we make the most of every opportunity for making disciples (Eph. 5.15-17).

Your calling, your sphere

In the Kingdom and for the glory of God, they who love God with all their soul and strength mirror His mission to the world by devoting themselves to the work of making disciples.

Paul said we are to imitate him and Jesus as we work to fulfill our calling. Jesus was sent to a particular time, place, and people for the work of proclaiming the Kingdom and making disciples. In 2 Corinthians 10.13, Paul said as much about himself. He understood that, within the Kingdom and for the glory of God, he had been assigned a *sphere* that took in certain places and people and everything that had to do with making disciples within that sphere.

We each also have a sphere, which we will refer to as our [Personal Mission Field](#). It is *Personal* because each of us has a unique calling, to unique places and persons, times and situations. No two believers have the same Personal Mission Field, although our mission fields frequently overlap and interact. Our Lord Jesus Christ has sent you *personally* to a portion of His field where, as you are going, your work is to make disciples.

This sphere is a *Mission* because we have been *sent* there by Jesus Himself: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (Jn. 20.21). Missionaries are those who are sent to a specific people for a specific time to accomplish a specific work. Every believer is sent by Jesus to a sphere in His Kingdom, a sphere replete with people, culture, and opportunities to glorify God. This sphere, or field, is where we carry out our mission to make disciples as we are going. And it is in carrying out that mission that we express love for God and reach out to our neighbors with His love, to love them as we love ourselves.

Our sphere is a *Field* because it is part of the larger field of the world, which is the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13.36-43). In that field we have *work* to do, all of which falls under the rubric of making disciples. As we go into our field every day, we go like Jesus, to demonstrate, proclaim, and bring near the reality of His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, with the intent of encouraging and leading others to lay hold on that Kingdom, and enter the joy of the Lord. Not everyone will, of course, and making sure *any* of them do is not our calling. Our calling, as we are going, is do those works of love that make disciples. Making people disciples is what Jesus does; but when He does it, He does it through people like you and me.

If we love God, we will embrace our calling from Him, work to understand it fully, prepare ourselves to fulfill it diligently, and go about our work, as we are going, to make disciples of all the nations.

For reflection

1. How would you explain to someone else what your Personal Mission Field is?
2. How are we imitating Paul and Jesus when we embrace the calling to our Personal Mission Field?
3. "Making disciples" defines our posture toward the people around us. Does this mean everyone is going to become a follower of Christ? Explain.

Next steps – Transformation: If you've not done this recently or before, watch [this brief video](#) on Personal Mission Field. Download the worksheet, map out your Personal Mission Field, and commit the work of this mission to the Lord.

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We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. But "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. 2 Corinthians 10.13-18

The staging-ground for love

Jesus said that two great commandments must guide us in all our doings as His disciples – that we love God supremely, and that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Love is both a disposition of the soul and a way of life, expressed in a raft of actions, as Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 13.4-8, and as John relates by equating love with keeping the commandments of God (1 Jn. 5.1-3). Love, which the Spirit of God bears as fruit from within our souls (Gal. 5.22), issues in good works that express love for God and love for our neighbors.

All this takes place in time, as we have previously discussed. But it also takes place in a particular place and among particular people. The ways we love God come to expression in a sphere – as Paul names it – where we are in contact with a variety of people, and where we fulfill our calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12) in all the roles, relationships, and responsibilities of our lives. As we nurture love for God in all the ways we have mentioned, that love is going to be an identifying trait to the people to whom Jesus sends us every day. They will be able to see how much His Presence, Word, works, salvation, praise, and all the rest mean to us, because they will experience our love for Him in the ways we relate to them.

This is Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 10.13-18. Like Paul (1 Cor. 11.1), each of us has a sphere of influence – a Personal Mission Field – where we practice love for God and for our neighbors.

It's clear that Paul was focused on making his sphere as fully God-honoring as it could be. In our text we see that he was motivated by four specific goals, in the pursuit of which he showed his love for God through the works he did. Let's take a closer look at the four goals Paul mentions here, as these can also become goals for us in *working* our Personal Mission Field as well.

Increase boasting in the Lord

First, Paul mentions *boasting in the Lord* (vv. 13, 15, 17). We know that in Paul's case this boasting took a variety of forms, each of which expressed the love Paul had in his heart for the Lord.

We see Paul boasting about the Lord in his *witness* for Jesus, as before the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17.22-31). His love for God's works can be seen in how he thought about those works as witnessing to God's love (cf. Acts 14.17). He and Silas *sang* in a jail cell, and their boasting in the Lord in song became a blessing for many (Acts 16.25-34). Paul boasted about the greatness of God in his letters to the churches (cf. Rom. 11.33-36). He boasted about the Lord before religious authorities and civil magistrates; and he boasted about Jesus and the work God did in and through him to the various churches and pastors who were in his sphere of influence.

One goal for working our Personal Mission Field should be that we want to increase boasting in the Lord. We want people to know we believe in Jesus, and that we love and serve Him, and that He is altogether worthy of such a commitment, and of such boasting as we are able to express. So we take as a goal that the sphere assigned to us shall become increasingly a place of boasting about the Lord.

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Mutual benefit

Second, Paul worked to make his sphere of influence a place of *mutual benefit and edification* (v. 15). He wanted his work, expressed as his love for God, to benefit the people he served by focusing them more on Jesus and helping them to increase in love for Him. He was willing to spend and be spent for the wellbeing of those to whom God sent him (2 Cor. 12:15). He was always working to bring God's praises to the next generation.

But he also looked to those he served to "greatly enlarge" his own work by helping to make that work possible in a variety of ways. Some worked with him. Many prayed for him. Some supported him financially. Those who love God love the work God does through His servants, and they do what they can both to benefit from that work and to help it go forward more abundantly.

Christ to the limits

Paul had written to the Ephesians that Jesus is filling the world with Himself (Eph. 1:15-23; 4:8-10). He saw it as a way of expressing his love for the Lord to make sure that the knowledge of Jesus was spread throughout his own Personal Mission Field (2 Cor. 10:13, 14). Paul often pointed to his own example of what it means to follow Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1), and he made it his business to talk about Jesus wherever he went.

Churches from Antioch in Syria, throughout Asia Minor and Greece, and even to Rome are the evidence that Paul took this goal seriously, to make the knowledge of Jesus known throughout that sphere God had assigned to him. When we're working our own spheres diligently, and in love for God, this will be our aim as well. That doesn't mean we all become sidewalk evangelists, handing out tracts and asking people whether they're saved. But it means that – line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, by good works and gracious words (Is. 28:10; Matt. 5:13-16; Eph. 4:15) – the Presence of Jesus becomes more constant wherever we are, whatever we're doing.

Increasing your sphere

Finally, Paul took as a goal for working his Personal Mission Field that he should try to *extend or increase* his sphere by whatever means he could (v. 16). He networked to meet new people, traveled to new places, and incorporated more folks into his ministry team. Our goal should be the same, that, motivated by love for God and our Lord Jesus Christ, we want to reach more people, in new places, as often as we can, with the Good News of Christ and the loving service of His Presence. We want to encourage and edify more of the Lord's disciples, and we want to reach out to more of the lost, so we seek the Lord daily for this to be the case.

These four goals, embraced, personally applied, and taken up daily, can help us to make the most of the time God gives us for working our Personal Mission Field. Love for God is expressed not only in our private times of devotion and worship, but as we love His work, and declare His praise to the generations, His salvation and His glory; and as we *work* in systematic and consistent ways to help others know as we do the love of God in Christ Jesus.

For reflection

1. What are some ways you might bring more boasting of Jesus into your Personal Mission Field?
2. How would you answer someone who asked a reason for the hope they see in you (1 Pet. 3:15)?
3. What are some things you can do to keep expanding your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps – Preparation: For each of the goals mentioned in this article, set one specific goal for working your Personal Mission Field during the coming week.

6 Loving God's Calling (4)

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom...
Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90.12, 16, 17*

How the Kingdom comes

The great joy of our Lord Jesus Christ is to give the Kingdom of God to His people (cf. Dan. 7.13-18). This Kingdom belonged to Jesus from before the foundations of the world, yet it was only given to Him after He had completed His great work of redemption and resurrection. The Kingdom of God is the cosmic rule of King Jesus unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). The Kingdom of God thus presents a vision of immensity, beauty, expansiveness, growth and development, goodness and hope, compassion and healing, truth and justice that can be known nowhere else.

Jesus received this Kingdom from His Father, and He has given it to us, who believe in Him. It is a Kingdom that grows like leaven, preserves like salt, illuminates like light, transforms like a seed, and will last forever. Jesus commands us to seek this Kingdom as the defining priority of every aspect of our lives (Matt. 6.33); and He instructs us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6.10). He has sent us into the world to continue His work of embodying, proclaiming, and bringing near the Kingdom of God; and He has given us His Spirit that we may have understanding and power to fulfill our calling.

If we love Jesus, we will love the calling He has given to us. We will make the Kingdom turn in every area of our lives, and devote ourselves to boasting about Jesus, growing in Him and helping others grow as well, telling and retelling His Good News as often as we can, and looking for ways to expand that part of the Kingdom which Jesus has entrusted to our stewardship.

Embracing and working your Personal Mission Field is how the Kingdom comes on earth. It's how it comes in you, as you embrace the Lord's calling and work at growing in love for Him; and it's how the Kingdom comes into the world, through the good works you do that bring righteousness, peace, and joy into all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

We are all tenant farmers in the field of the world, which is the Kingdom of God. The more faithfully and diligently we work our part of that field, the more we will realize the joy of our salvation, the more we will increase in love for God, and the more His Kingdom will come in and through us, on earth as it is in heaven.

Carrying out this glad calling requires the continuous use and improvement of four disciplines.

The discipline of preparation

First, we must *prepare continually*. None of us comes with all the vision and equipment we need to fulfill the goals of our Personal Mission Field. We must be equipped for such ministry (Eph. 4.12), and this means submitting to God's Word day by day, searching the Scriptures diligently to grow in love for God and to discover the good works essential for seeking and advancing His Kingdom.

In a very real sense, we're always preparing for the Kingdom. We plan our time, so that we make the best use of it (Eph. 5.15-17). We pray about everything, giving thanks and supplicating the Lord for whatever the next

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moment or opportunity may require (Phil. 4.6, 7). We try to learn new skills – how to serve others and build them up; how to use our speech to impart the grace of God (Col. 4.6); and what we must do so that all our work, down to the most ordinary aspect of it, will be excellent and God-honoring (1 Cor. 10.31).

We must prepare each day in prayer, and remain in prayer throughout the day, so that we can draw on the Word and Presence of God to give us the grace we need to serve Him (Heb. 4.16). The better we prepare, the more God will grant us His wisdom, that we may serve Him well as we seek His Kingdom and glory.

The discipline of demonstration

The second discipline is that of *demonstration*. We need to show people the reality of the Kingdom by all we say and do, by how we order our lives, by the various ways we honor God with our possessions, and by the love we show to our neighbors. Jesus has called us to *be* witnesses first of all (Acts 1.8), and this entails living in such a manner that Jesus increases in us, and we and all our selfish, sinful ways decrease day by day (Jn. 3.30).

Unless we demonstrate the reality of Jesus, alive within us, whatever we might *say* about Him will have minimal effect.

The discipline of conversation

But we must talk about Jesus as well, filling our Personal Mission Field with boasting about the Lord, and making sure that everyone to whom the Lord has sent us hears the Good News about Christ and His Kingdom.

So we need, in the third place, to develop the discipline of *conversation*. Conversation is simply two people talking about something they have in common, or want to learn, or are willing to share. Christian conversation should not be merely frivolous, self-centered, condemning, or gossipy. We can learn to use our speech to build others up and to channel the grace of God to them. But this doesn't just happen, and we need to work hard at becoming Christians whose speech communicates hope, brings affirmation, leads the way to hope, and brings comfort, assurance, and encouragement to others.

The discipline of transformation

Finally, we need to have a *transformation* mindset, and work for transformation in everything we do. The Lord Jesus, exalted in glory at the right hand of the Father, is making all things new (Rev. 21.5). We must resist the mindset that says, “good enough”, “status quo”, or “not possible.” All things are possible with God. We can be increasingly transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We can bring transforming grace and truth to bear on the culture in which we are engaged. We can transform conversations, relationships, and everything in our Personal Mission Field if we can learn to think and live toward the exceedingly abundant more of God (Eph. 3.20). His power, at work within us, can lead us into works of transformation that will surprise and delight us, and be a source of grace and truth and Kingdom-coming to our world.

Keep in mind the goals Paul set for us in working our Personal Mission Field. Then take up these disciplines, day by day and situation by situation, and see how the Lord can work in and through you for His glory. If we love Jesus, we'll do whatever it takes to show Him that we love Him. We'll seek to grow in love for Him; and we will in fact grow in love for Him as we embrace His calling and take up the work of our Personal Mission Field every day of our lives.

For reflection

1. In which of these disciplines do you most need to improve?
2. What could you do to make better and more consistent use of these disciplines?
3. How can Christians help each other to be more consistent in working our Personal Mission Fields?

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Next steps – Transformation: Ask God to give you one thing you can do to improve your use of each of these disciplines today.

7 Loving God: Review

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. John 21.17

Love works

We can see in Jesus' interrogation of Peter an outline of what it means to love God. Loving God is the first and great commandment, and it requires the investment of our entire soul and life, in everything we do and at all times. God has made us to love Him, and it is in loving Him that we realize our highest purpose in life and know fullness of joy. We are fools if we settle for anything less than loving God with all our soul and strength, as He has taught us to love Him.

Peter had conspicuously failed in his love for Jesus, denying three times, when push came to shove, that he even knew Him. Now Jesus graciously worked to restore Peter and shore up his love for Him. Three times Jesus asked the lapsed disciple if he loved Him. Three times Peter affirmed that he did: "You know that I love You." "You know that I love You." "You know all things; You know that I love You."

Notice what Jesus did *not* do at any time. He didn't say to Peter, "OK, that's great, I'm glad we've reestablished that fact. All will be well now." Jesus wasn't preparing Peter merely to *say* something; He was setting him back on track for *work*. Each time Peter answered, Jesus instructed him to carry out the implications of his professed love: "Feed My lambs." "Tend My sheep." "Feed My sheep."

In other words, Peter's love for Jesus would be proved in *works*, works by which he *showed* his love for Jesus and *shared* that love with those whom Jesus loves.

And what if Jesus were to ask us today, "Do you love Me?" What would we expect Him to say to us as we humbly and sincerely answered, "Yes, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

He would tell us, like He told Peter, to get to work.

Loving God

Believers are called to good works, saved for good works (Eph. 2.10), and are to be zealous and ready to maintain good works as the expression of their love for God. And the good works we must above all pursue are those which express and increase that love first of all.

By loving *God's Presence* we hunger and thirst to be with Him, at prayer and daily worship, by singing and meditation, and in nurturing those affections of longing, waiting, desiring, abiding, and celebrating the Lord that rise from a heart truly devoted to loving Him Who has made, redeemed, and keeps us. When our soul pants for the Lord's Presence like a deer for the waters of a stream, we'll know we're increasing in love for Him.

The measure of our love for *God's Word* is in the amount of time we spend in it; the thoroughness with which we read, study, and meditate in it; and the enthusiasm and consistency with which we obey and share the Word with others. Studying God's Word is work. It takes time and effort, and it must be entered into every day. But it's work which, as we do it, both shows that we love God and helps us to increase in love for Him.

God has bestowed on us a glorious salvation, and He surrounds us with a wondrous world in which to unpack that salvation for His glory. We love God as we grow in *His salvation* and enjoy and steward *His*

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creation in ways that glorify Him and show His beauty, goodness, and truth to the world. Our salvation will always be exceedingly abundantly greater than we've ever known it; and His world is filled with more beauty and goodness than we can ever fully discover. But love for God impels us to exercise good stewardship over each of these great gifts, that we might increase in them and realize more of His love.

The more we learn of God, the more we realize how vast and comprehensive are all *His works*, which we will delight to study, learn, celebrate, and explain to others. Creation, providence, redemption, salvation, glorification, building His Church and Kingdom – these wondrous works testify of the greatness of God's love for us. As we apply ourselves to loving these works, our love for Him grows and bears fruit.

All who love God look forward eagerly to *His appearing*, and they make all necessary preparations to be found in good standing with Him when He returns. They will be careful to keep their light shining, to invest the talents He gives them wisely, and to do those works of loving service that show their desire to enter His pleasure when He returns (Matt. 25.1-46). And they will work hard to ensure that the *generations to come* will have every opportunity to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus.

“If you love Me,” Jesus said, “keep My commandments” (Jn. 14.15). Beginning in His Law and roaming throughout all His Word, we discover, embrace, and learn to carry out all the works that Jesus commands as evidence of our love for Him.

Loving God's calling

Peter's calling was as a shepherd in the Lord's flock. He was told to feed and tend the Lord's sheep – to carry out his assigned calling in the Personal Mission Field Jesus appointed for him.

We who love Jesus have that same charge, to make disciples as we are going and to shine our lights, use our talents, and do those works of love which prove our love for God with and for the people to whom the Lord sends us every day.

By having a clear set of goals before us – to increase boasting in the Lord throughout our Personal Mission Field, build others up in Him, bring Jesus to everyone as often as possible, and increase the reach of our ministry – we will never want for opportunities to do those good works that feed and tend the Lord's sheep and shine the light of His grace and truth into the world.

If we will prepare well, make good use of our conversations, show the love of Christ to others, and work continuously for transformation into the image of Jesus, we will fulfill our calling to love God, and we will increase in love for Him as well.

The more we grow in love for God, by consistently attending to the instructions He has given us, the more His love in us will overflow by the Holy Spirit to touch, heal, and restore others (Jn. 7.37-39).

And just as we look to Jesus to teach us how to love Him, so we must look to Him to teach us how to love our neighbors. And it is to this second great commandment, and the good works it entails, that we turn next.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why must love for God issue in good works?
2. Where do you need to improve in your love for God?
3. How can believers encourage and assist one another to grow in love for God?

Next steps – Transformation: Make it part of your daily prayers to ask the Lord to help you grow in love for Him. Focus on all

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the ways He has shown us that we may increase in love for Him. Thank Him for His Word to guide and His Spirit to empower you to love Him more.

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Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to love God's appearing?
2. What can you do to increase God's praise in the generations to come?
3. What is God's calling for your life?
4. What goals and disciplines can help you in working that calling?
5. How would you explain to a new believer what it means to love God?

For prayer:

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Thank you.