



*Louise George*

Gil and I currently live in Nampa, Idaho. We have logged forty-eight years in pastoral and missionary service with Northwest Yearly Meeting. It's been a continual learning and growing experience as we've walked alongside so many people over those years. This past year God has led me to give serious consideration to God's command to love him with all our hearts, minds, and souls. Jesus was adamant that this, along with loving one's neighbor as oneself, comprised the greatest commandment. I am challenged to be actively involved in doing that, knowing that obedience is the highest expression of my love for God.

This picture was taken in Santa Fe, New Mexico, earlier this year. The confluence of food, cultures, and art draw us back again and again.

*BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 6:3-9*

The words of Deuteronomy 6:3-9 have been hovering in my mind for months. The persistence of this teaching calls me to pay attention. Those words shout out to me: “Listen to this, Louise! Pay attention!” I understand it’s an imperative. A command. An order. I also understand that the message is not just for the Israelites approaching the promised land; it is for me and for you.

Though I know God is giving an order—a very important order—I wonder why it’s so easy to give a nod to the command and then walk away. I wonder why we *assume* we are obeying the command, while only giving lip service to it.

I’m reminded of the many times I argued with my mother after she told me to do something (or not do it). I’d whine and ask why. Inevitably she’d end the discussion with these words: “Because I told you to!” (How many times have I said the same to my own children?)

Inherent in those five words is a plea to trust the wisdom of one who knows better than the child. God, speaking to his people, exudes the same force: *Pay attention because what I am telling you is not only important, but it will save your lives.* Within those words is the expectation of trust and obedience to the One who is in authority, to the One whose wisdom exceeds that of the most brilliant of his creation.

A commandment is to be obeyed; it’s not an option, however much we may think it is.

*SONG: I Surrender All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, help me to obey because you know what I don’t.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 4:1; 30:4-6, 19-20*

Deuteronomy is the script of Moses' last lecture. In the Cambridge tradition, a retiring professor's last lecture is an opportunity to summarize what they consider to be the most important lesson. Moses knows a lot about God, having seen his astounding and personal interventions on the part of the Israelites. He has stood in God's presence and heard God speak. He's learned obedience through experience. Now, standing on the precipice of a fulfilled promise for his people and his own impending death, Moses has one message: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (6:5). Why? "So that you and your children may live" (30:19).

*To live* is the justification attached to the command that the Israelites love God first and foremost. Eternal life was a blurry concept in Moses' day. The continuation of life through their children was an image of everlasting life they could understand. Obeying God's commands promised *life*, a continuing life as far as they could imagine. We read in Deuteronomy that we should follow God's commands so that:

- you may *live and increase* (8:1).
- you will *live* (30:16).
- it may go well with you and your children and you may *live long* in the land (4:40).
- you may *live and prosper* (5:33).
- you may enjoy *long life* (6:2).

"Choose life," Moses says, "for the Lord is your life."

*SONG: Trust and Obey*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, never let me forget that obedience to you brings life.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 6:5, 25*

God's command for the Israelites to love him with all their heart, soul, and strength was not a request with an opt-out button. It was an imperative. He ordered. He made his expectations clear. The Israelites were to love the one and only God. As if Moses didn't already give this commandment significant importance by insisting that those words be on their hearts and impressed on their children, Jesus proclaimed that it was the greatest commandment of all, along with that of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Somehow, as clear as this instruction is, actually loving God seems hard to accomplish. How *do* we love God? What does it look like to actively love God? We can say we love God, we can sing of our love for God, and we can experience emotion that makes us believe we are demonstrating love for God.

We get a hint of how to love God in verse 25 when Moses admonishes his people to be careful to *obey* all this law. The reminder to obey God's commands is repeated throughout Deuteronomy. But it's Jesus who tells us how it's done. In John 14:23 he says, "Anyone who *loves* me, will *obey* my teaching." The last verse in chapter 14 is Jesus' own testimony: "So that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me."

Our love for God equals obedience. Jesus loved his Father and obeyed, and he calls us to the same obedience: "If you love me, obey my commands" (John 14:15 NIRV).

*SONG: Only Trust Him*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, my prayer is that I will love you by doing exactly what you have commanded me.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Mark 12:28-34*

Many years after Moses' farewell address, a teacher of the law asked Jesus which of the commandments was most important. Jesus replied that no commandment was greater than loving God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, as well as loving one's neighbor as oneself. The teacher then went a step further by acknowledging that loving God was better than sacrifice. Jesus saw this man's heart and recognized how close he was to going beyond the letter of the law to embracing obedience with his heart, soul, mind, and strength. As Jesus pointed out, that invisible curtain between physical adherence to the commandments and internal heart response to the giver of the law is how close he was to the kingdom of God.

Loving God requires total abandonment of self. It requires us to take God's words into the core of our being, responding to God's instruction with humble acceptance that God knows what is best for us. My being, the part that is uniquely me, is given back to my Creator. My brilliant ideas and logistical strategies fall flat compared to God's supreme knowledge. My will, (and my ability to choose and act on my choices) no longer matters when I love God with every part of myself.

Ways we might try to gratify our physical impulses may have no place in the kingdom of God. Self strives to control both ourselves and others, but surrendering our being to God allows his Spirit to control, resulting in abundant life even here on earth.

*SONG: Jesus Is Lord of All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, there's nothing I want more than giving every part of my being over to you.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Luke 10:25-37*

In this familiar story about the man known as the good Samaritan, Jesus vividly reveals the difference between physical adherence to the law and the response that reveals God's heart. The story is in response to a lawyer's question designed to corner Jesus: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" When this expert in the law correctly quotes the command that was well-known to every Jew, Jesus affirms that he is correct, that loving God with heart, soul, strength, and mind, as well as one's neighbor will grant life. At this point in the story we sense a breath-holding pause because now who has backed whom into a corner?

It's obvious that there's a bit of squirming here while the expert in the law stands before the all-knowing eyes of Jesus. In verse 29, we are told that he "wanted to justify himself," so he asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus tells the story about a traveler who had been robbed, beaten, and left for dead. First a priest and then a Levite walked by, carefully avoiding contact with the man they assumed was dying or dead. A third man, a Samaritan, saw the beaten man and took pity on him. He felt the man's pain. His compassion led to action, which included binding up his wounds, transporting him, paying for his care, and follow-up.

"You want eternal life?" Jesus implies: Do what the Samaritan did. Respond out of God's merciful heart, not the legalism of the law. God's merciful heart knows no race, gender, religion, nor class. Go and do likewise. That's a command.

*SONG: Cleanse Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Show me, Lord, the unmerciful attitudes and actions of my heart, and my attempts to justify myself.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Mark 10:17-27*

In a different story, another religious man came to Jesus, asking the same question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Because we get to view these narratives from a longer perspective and with much more understanding, my heart constricts a bit when I hear this question being posed to Jesus. Whether asked from innocence or arrogance, no one is prepared for the penetrating gaze of Jesus into each of their hearts. Each time, Jesus’ response is specific to the heart’s need. The law can never expose the heart; only God can.

Jesus’ response this time isn’t the same as we read in yesterday’s passage. Instead Jesus recites four of the ten commandments, to which the man revealed his life-long commitment to obey the law religiously. Jesus then gave a surprising prescription for eternal life: “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Looking into this man’s heart, Jesus saw an obsession with earthly treasures, a man who scrupulously followed the requirements of the law, but couldn’t get beyond the thin line between physical life and kingdom life. His hold on what is only temporary kept him from possessing what is eternal.

It’s not just money that separates us from God’s kingdom life, it can be reserving part of my heart for other desires. Or trusting my intellect over trust in God’s omniscience. Or perhaps a decision to choose for myself whom to love and whom to reject. Or choosing temporary treasures over kingdom treasures.

*SONG: Take My Life, and Let It Be*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I long to live fully for you, being wise enough to choose kingdom life over physical pleasure.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 6:1-12, 20-25*

Deuteronomy 6 draws us again to the legacy that Moses instructed the Israelites to leave for their children. These were people who had witnessed both God's miraculous intervention in their lives and the consequences of God's displeasure in response to their disobedience. Out of their personal experience with God, that testimony is a treasure to be carefully passed down to each generation so that the lessons learned might not be lost—but more importantly, so that their children would revere and worship the one true God.

“Impress them on your children,” Moses says in verse 7. *Impress* means to leave a mark on their hearts as permanent as carving initials on a tree. Passing on our own testimony of God's intervention in our lives is an indisputable responsibility of every adult, with or without children. Our lives must speak of our commitment to love God with everything in us, not only in words, but by actions of mercy and love.

If given an opportunity to deliver our own last lecture, what might it be? Would it reflect Moses' God-given command to love God unreservedly? Do we live a testimony of having chosen to live life in the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of the world?

The legacy I most want to leave for the children in my life is a testimony to having discovered the one true God, and that he is exactly who Jesus says he is. That's the God I love and worship and strive to obey. As Moses said in verse 25, and Jesus confirmed in Matthew 5:19-20, “that will be our righteousness.”

*SONG: Find Us Faithful*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Jesus, for revealing your Father to us, for letting us know him because you allow us to know you.*

—Louise George