

## Loving Him Completely

**Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength** (Deuteronomy 6:5).

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:4-9

**Song:** “I Love You, Lord”

Mary Slessor was uneducated, yet she felt God’s call to West Africa for mission work with people whose ways could be brutal. In spite of the danger, she spent most of her life among them, sharing the gospel of Christ. She loved the Lord with her heart, soul, and strength.

By contrast, what does an ordinary person like me have to offer God? I’m not an evangelist or a missionary. I haven’t walked in dangerous places to share God’s Word. However, when I use my unique abilities to serve the people He brings into my life, I’m loving Him with my heart. When hardships come but I continue to praise Him, I’m loving Him with my strength. When I begin and end each day with prayer and Scripture reading, I’m loving Him with my soul.

Loving the Lord with *all* our heart, soul, and strength is possible when we pull ourselves away from worldly distractions so we can focus on Him. In our own willpower we cannot achieve the goal of giving Him our all, but “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

**Father**, I want to love You the way You deserve, so I’m asking that You guide my thoughts, my motivations, and my actions to enable me to give all of myself to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## He Hears Us

**[Jesus said,] “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray . . . to be seen by others”** (Matthew 6:5).

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

**Song:** “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

I admired the prayers I heard from our minister, my husband, and folks who have been attending church their entire lives. They knew how to talk to the Father. I didn't. When I became a Christian and began attending church, I couldn't pray aloud. I'd never heard spoken prayers when I was growing up, except for “God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food” and the bedtime prayer that begins “Now I lay me down to sleep . . .”

Jesus told His followers not to pray like the pagans who babbled on and on (Matthew 6:7). As I learned more about prayer, I knew that I couldn't babble if I *wanted* to; I was too embarrassed to pray in public. But eventually verse 8 spoke to me: “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Once that truth hit home, I no longer worried about my method of praying. I simply asked, “Help me, Lord,” knowing He understood what I needed.

Eventually I could pray out loud in Sunday school without worrying what other people thought about the way I expressed myself. Isn't it wonderful that we don't need an elaborate vocabulary for the Lord to hear us? He hears our hearts.

**Father**, thank You for hearing my prayers, spoken and unspoken. Help me to boldly express Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Bearing Fruit

**[Jesus said,] “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2).**

**Scripture:** John 15:1-8

**Song:** “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

George Whitefield (1714–1770) set out to be an actor. At an early age he was seen to have an amazing talent on the stage. He loved drama and dropped out of school at age 15 to pursue his passion. But God had other plans for him. Because of difficulties at home with his stepfather, Whitefield began reading the Bible to find answers to his problems. This began a spiritual awakening that caused him to rethink acting and pursue ministry instead. Although he had no money for college, he went to Oxford as a kind of servant to wealthy students. In this way he was able to attend classes, and there he met Charles and John Wesley, who helped encourage his faith.

George Whitefield, with his outstanding speaking voice, became an evangelist who was said to have preached to over 10 million people. It seems the Lord cut off his aspiration to be an actor in order to nourish his preaching ability instead, producing much fruit for God’s kingdom.

When our plans don’t succeed, it’s entirely possible that the Father might be pruning us to bear fruit for His kingdom in some other way. One thing is certain: we can trust God’s good plans for our lives.

**Father**, please prune away whatever is not useful to You and allow my life to be fruitful in the way You desire. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A New Heart

[God said,] “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:26).

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 36:25-30

**Song:** “Create in Me a Clean Heart”

As a young adult, I was friends with a flighty, irresponsible woman. But she was also full of life and made me laugh. I loved being around her; she was my role model. I was emulating her the day I didn't call my favorite aunt to cancel our lunch date and simply didn't show up. Later, when I saw how hurt Aunt Judy was, I realized I didn't want to be the kind of person people couldn't count on, the kind who didn't think how their actions affected others. So I changed my life course.

When God gives us a new heart and puts in us a new spirit, He is giving us the opportunity to be the best we can be and to fulfill His plans for us. In Ezekiel 36:27, God says, “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.” Our new heart leads us to follow where He leads.

I remained friends with the fun-loving woman, but my eyes were opened to her flaws. I no longer wanted to be like her. Instead, I wanted to be like Jesus, who is *always* reliable. He allows me to be full of life and laughter—and responsible at the same time.

**Father,** thank You for giving me a new heart and putting in me a new spirit. You have made me new, and I desire to serve You all the days of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Through God's Eyes

**At whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things** (Romans 2:1).

**Scripture:** Romans 2:1-8

**Song:** "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?"

I married at 19, became pregnant almost immediately, and gained 50 pounds during the pregnancy. To my surprise, only 15 pounds came off after giving birth. A year later I'd only lost an additional ten pounds. An unmarried friend incessantly nagged me about "letting myself go." Her judgmental attitude caused me to avoid her.

Years passed before I ran into her again at a department store one day. She seemed embarrassed as she avoided eye contact with me. She was carrying two toddlers and a lot of extra weight. *What goes around comes around*, I thought, but then I realized I was judging her just as she'd judged me.

In today's text, the apostle Paul warned people who thought they were morally superior and who were hypocritically passing judgment on everyone else. The truth is that at the foot of the cross, all are in need of God's grace, and there we are all eligible to receive it by faith. God is impartial; He loves us all. And He, the righteous judge, is the one who "will repay each person according to what they have done" (v. 6). No one is qualified to condemn others. Only God is eligible to judge in such a way. And only He can save us.

**Father**, forgive me for judging others hypocritically. Help me to love people as they are, forgiving them when they've hurt me. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Making a Difference

**There will be . . . glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good** (Romans 2:9-10).

**Scripture:** Romans 2:9-16

**Song:** “Make Me a Blessing”

Most people remember Rosa Parks as the woman on a bus who would not be moved on a bus in protest against the injustices of racism. She is sometimes called the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement.” From the time of that incident in 1955 and all through the 1980s, Parks was busy with speaking engagements about her experiences as a black woman. She donated most of her speaking fees to college scholarships for young black students. Rosa Parks continued doing good, helping people all of her life. In her 1992 autobiography, she wrote that the Lord gave her the strength to endure whatever she had to face.

My friend Marge passed away at age 104. She lived her entire life feeling as though she’d never accomplished anything worthwhile. Yet everyone who knew her talked about how special she made them feel. Even though she’d lost her hearing, she hadn’t lost her ability to hug, to compliment, and to love. All worthwhile! Although Marge never felt important, I believe she was doing God’s work by making others feel cared about.

Rosa Parks has a prominent place in history, something most of us will never have. However, we have a place of honor in God’s kingdom as we follow the path God has planned for us and do good according to His will.

**Father,** thank You for people who spend their lives making a difference. Help me to do the same. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Toward Integrity

**You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?**  
(Romans 2:21).

**Scripture:** Romans 2:17-29

**Song:** “Let Others See Jesus in You”

“Why do you write devotionals?” someone once asked me. I must admit, the question caught me off guard and made me think for a moment. I’ve dreamed of being a writer since childhood, and now in my seventies, I am finally reaching that goal. The money I make is insignificant, but making those few dollars feels as if it validates the value of what I have to say. I confess that pride at having my name in print *has* gotten in the way of my primary desire to glorify God. That’s the truth about me.

The apostle Paul challenged the teachers of the law to come clean, to acknowledge the truth about their hidden sin and stop their hypocrisy. He asked whether they were teaching others the truth about the law while they themselves simultaneously broke the law in their personal lives. Paul knew there was a discrepancy between their apparent righteousness and their real motives.

As Christians, we need to come clean about the inconsistencies between our professed beliefs and how we live day-to-day—including hidden actions, thoughts, and attitudes. Our relationship with Christ requires accountability and demands action. In faithfulness God’s Spirit calls us to confess our sin and to live in a way that truly glorifies God.

**Father,** I need integrity. I want to come clean today about what gets in the way of glorifying You. Help me change so I can live in truth. Thank You for the grace and strength You provide so I can walk in Your ways. In Jesus’ name, amen.