

The Vertical Journey - Love God.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:35-39)

Jesus came into this world as the son of a carpenter, and as such picked the trade up Himself. If He had been the son of a master chef, things would have been pretty radically different. Well, at least that whole feeding of 5,000 people might have included basil and thyme, with some baby reds on the side or something...

Even though Jesus was not a chef, He was still the master of reduction! He had a way of keeping things simmering, boiling down every conversations around Him until the real essence of His words were seen. Like this moment with the religious leaders of His day. Always trying to prove they were top dogs in keeping rules, they asked Him which rule was the most important. And Jesus boils it down for us.

We were created to know and love God. To love Him with our heart, soul, and mind. All that we have. With a lens like that on life, it radically transforms our actions, habits, thoughts and priorities! Which is the power of grace: We don't have to live for a lesser life of religion. We can embrace the raw, beautiful love of God as it transforms our hearts from being satisfied with rules, and makes us hungry for a holy, pure heart.

Now that's some gourmet food.

The Inward Journey - Grow.

"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18)

Living things grow; they're funny that way. You don't plant seeds and then desert the field, never returning for a crop. No, you tend to it, weeding and watering. Waiting, anticipating the day you see new shoots come up through the earth.

God intends for us to grow in faith the same way.

Faith is something that we partner with God in nurturing. Just like the seed that grows into something beautiful, the strength lies in the seed, the water, sun - all of the parts we aren't! Yet for a fruitful crop, we get involved, doing all we can to remove any hindrance to the seed.

We commit to the study of Scripture (knowledge), praying for insight and the power of God to follow what we learn (grace). We pray for God to search our hearts. We grow in spiritual disciplines, taking seriously Jesus' call to follow Him. And through all of this, the Holy Spirit uses our work as a cultivator, and the truth of God grows in us.

The Horizontal Journey - Love Others.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:35-39)

The horizontal journey requires us to see one thing primarily: You can't separate it from the vertical. They are forever connected.

Some Scriptures in 1 John give us some feel good words like... well, "Liar." Yep. If you read in 1 John 4:20, you find some insights from the Apostle John: "If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."

Our love for God translates naturally into love for man. They are intertwined. It's like faith and works. We are taught in James 2:17 that faith without works (i.e. - deeds, action, etc.) is a dead faith. A real, alive faith produces action. And a real, alive faith in Jesus Christ produces deep love for others.

The essence of the gospel is grace, and grace freely received puts us on common ground with everyone else. Author Steve Brown puts it this way: "Because grace runs down hill, it's very important that you not stake out your territory at the top of the hill." By loving others, we love God, and as we receive love from God, we learn how to truly love others.

The Outward Journey - Serve.

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

It's stark in its contrast now; it was two-thousand years ago, too. Jesus turned his disciples on their head by modeling a life of servant hood. In one of the most beautiful and poignant moments in the gospels, Jesus eats a meal with His disciples, in what would later become known as The Last Supper. You can read all about it in the 13th Gospel of John.

What brings such power to this story is that Jesus knew His time was up. He was aware that His life would soon be ending, and John 13:1 tells us in light of this that, "He now showed them the full extent of his love." He does this by taking the place of a common servant, and washing His followers' feet.

Of course, the disciples were caught off guard, and even replied with refusals (13:6, 8). If their leader was serving, what would that mean for them?

In this moment, Jesus teaches us something very powerful about His Kingdom: "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (13:13-17)

Serving is the foundational work of the Kingdom of God. Regardless of position, gender, experience, leadership, whatever - followers of Jesus Christ serve. Period. We were designed for it. And as long as there is a world of need, there is a place for each of us to do our part.