

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
Mother's Day, May 13, 2018

Your True Purpose: Love the LORD Your God

**“The LORD your God” or “The LORD our God”
appears 50 times in Deuteronomy 1 – 5.**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

Do you love your mom? Why?

Or if you don't love your mom, why not?

There is something within us that says, “I should love mom.” The same is true of God. There is something within us that says, “I should love God.” But sometimes moms disappoint us. And sometimes God disappoints us. That makes it really hard to love them.

Yet when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he responded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind.”

Why love?

Why should we love God when sometimes he disappoints us? It is on Mother's Day when I think of so many disappointments. Husbands and dads take their wives for granted. Women are reminded that God never gave them children. Death has taken away a child or a mother.

How are we to love a God who disappoints us?

When Jesus said the greatest commandment was to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind,” he was quoting from Deuteronomy 6. So I went back to that passage and read the first five chapters of Deuteronomy. As I was reading, I noticed that a special name for God kept recurring. Read it yourself and see if it doesn't jump out at you: “The LORD our God” or “the LORD your God.” It occurs 50 times in those first five chapters of Deuteronomy. It is pretty obvious that the Holy Spirit thought that name for God was important. And as we look at that name, we see what makes God worthy of our love, even at those times when it seems he has disappointed us.

First of all, he is called the LORD in all capital letters. This is God's personal Savior name. It is only used for the God of the Bible. God is a generic term. Baal was a god that people of Moses' day worshipped. Allah is a god that people today worship. But there is only one “the LORD.”

That personal name is his Savior name. It comes from the phrase, “I am that I am.” The LORD is unchanging and independent. “I am that I am.” That is true of all of God's characteristics, but it

is especially comforting to think of his love as unchanging and independent. That makes his love unconditional.

As you read Deuteronomy 1 – 5, you see that the Israelites didn't deserve his love. They worshipped the golden calf. They grumbled and complained. They didn't trust the LORD to protect them.

The LORD didn't love the Israelites because they were the greatest or the best. He loved them simply because he chose to be merciful to them.

The same is true of us. Just as we may feel that our mothers or fathers disappointed us sometimes, we have disappointed others, and we have disappointed God. We have failed to do all the good that we should have done. We have done bad things we know we shouldn't have. You know those times when God must shake his head in disgust toward us.

Yet he loves us. God so loved the world that he gave his Son. Jesus coming into the world, the Son of God to die for us, is proof positive of his unconditional love.

Not only is he the LORD of unconditional love. He is also the God of limitless power.

The Israelites saw that. The God of limitless power humbled the most powerful nation on the earth. God sent 10 plagues that devastated Egypt. When the most powerful army of the world threatened to destroy the Israelites at the edge of the Red Sea, the God of limitless power opened up the sea so the Israelites could walk through on dry ground. Then they turned around and saw that vast army drown in the depths of the sea.

This is the God whom we are called upon to love, the God of limitless power. The God who raised his Son from the dead on Easter is the God who is able to handle any possible problem that we face.

But that limitless power can be frightening. What if he uses that power against us? But he is not only the God of limitless power, he is also "your God," the God who has bound himself to you by promise. In a few moments we will step forward to receive the Lord's Supper. There Jesus will give you his body and blood that seals the new covenant to you. And what is one of the terms of this new covenant? "I will be their God and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

This is the God who calls upon us to love him, who invites us to love him, because he is the LORD, the God of unconditional love, the God of limitless power, the God who has bound himself to us by a promise.

How love?

But how are we to love him? How do you love someone or something that you can't see? How do you love someone who has everything?

This special name can guide us.

How do you love the LORD, the God of unconditional love? Often if we love someone, we don't want to admit that we have failed them. But God's unconditional love invites us to come and admit to him our failures. That is what we do when we confess our sins to him.

Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity. But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

In this confession of sin we are loving him by admitting he is exactly the kind of God we need.

We love the God of limitless power by trusting that power. Don't you think David was showing love when he trusted God as he went up against Goliath. "The battle is the LORD's" (1 Samuel 17). We love God when we trust that he has limitless power to help us.

We love God by trusting that he is our God, that he has bound himself to us by promise. His actions don't always make sense to us, but we love him when we submit to his will, when we pray, "Not my will but yours be done." "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

How do I teach love?

On this Mother's Day, our minds turn to this question: How do we teach this love to others? And it is not just mothers or fathers, grandmothers or grandfathers, uncles or aunts. Anyone who is old enough to understand my words is called upon to teach others. People are watching you and learning from you very early on. I love seeing the Faith Families meet after chapel in our school. Don't you suppose the Kindergartener is looking in awe at the 8th grader who knows her name? Or a chapel buddy just five years older... you are a teacher. But how do we teach love?

We go back to this special name "the LORD our God."

We teach others to love the LORD of unconditional love by showing unconditional love ourselves. Just as we have certainly disappointed God, others will disappoint us and sin against us. How do we treat them? If we hold grudges and find fault, that will be their picture of God. But if we forgive as the Lord has forgiven us, if we are merciful as God has been merciful, not only are we showing our spiritual children that God is loveable, but we are showing them how to love him as well.

We teach others to love God by telling stories of his limitless power. Why do we want some of the great Bible history lessons burned into the minds of our children? Because we want them to know that they have a God who has the power to help them no matter what might happen to them. Tell and retell those stories of old of God's limitless power. And share stories of how that limitless power has helped you over the years.

And build a relationship. The LORD is your God. Let others see that your relationship with him is the most important thing in your life. For example, let it be obvious to everyone around you

that your relationship with your God is so important that nothing will keep you from being here in worship to strengthen your relationship with your God. If you can't be here Sunday morning, you are here Saturday night or Wednesday night. If you can't be here in person, watch it online.

Let others see that your relationship with the LORD your God is the most important thing. Don't be afraid to pray, just talking to God like a good friend. Lead your spiritual family in prayer. Join with them daily in the Lord's Prayer.

And read God's Word. It made such an impression on me in my youth to see my dad take out the big family Bible and read it cover to cover. It made an impression on me when I saw my mom reading the Bible to prepare to teach Sunday school.

And then build a relationship with your spiritual children. Let them know that after your relationship with God, there is nothing more important. Model God's commitment to them by your own commitment to them.

How do I deal with a failure to love?

After saying all this, I'll be honest, I have just added a huge burden of guilt to my back. Who of us doesn't have to admit our failures? And how many of us struggle because our children or grandchildren or nieces and nephews or others around us have given up the faith? They don't love the LORD our God with all their heart and soul and mind. And we wonder, "Is it my fault? I wasn't the mom or dad or friend or pastor that that person needed."

How do I deal with that failure to love?

We go back to that beautiful special name: The LORD our God.

Claim again his unconditional love. In fact, as you step up to receive Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper, let it be a time when you come and admit your failures and hear him say to you personally, "My dear child, I gave this body and blood into death for you. I knew all the burdens on your heart and willingly died for you. I have and will always forgive you."

Then never stop praying. You have a God of limitless power. He changed your heart. Trust that he can do the impossible and change the hearts of those who have turned away from him.

This week a dear friend of mine said that he had been praying for his wife for over 40 years. He communed with her for the first time recently. And so now he continues to pray for his child... a prayer that he has been offering up to God for 25 years. You have a God of limitless power. Never stop praying.

And hold on to the God who has bound himself to you by a promise. When your children were baptized, God promised you it was a "washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Hold God to his promise that the Spirit would work a miracle in the hearts of those you love. God promises, "My word will not return to me empty but will achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55). He has bound himself to you by promises. Hold on to those promises in prayer.

So let's leave here with a commitment to love the LORD our God, to teach that love to others, and to claim his unconditional love and power in spite of our failures.

To help you do that this week, I'd encourage you to read Psalm 51. David failed. Yet he was forgiven. Each of us has failed in our own ways, whether as a mother or father, a son or daughter or a spiritual mother or father to others. Claim the LORD's unconditional love.

Read 1 Samuel 17. What are you afraid of? What are your fears for your children, your parents, your family or your friends? Love the God of limitless power who can give you and your loved ones the victory.

And memorize this beautiful promise: "My Word... will achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

This is what it means to love the LORD our God with all our heart and soul and mind. Amen.

My Next Steps in Living My True Purpose to Love the LORD My God

Claim his unconditional love: Read Psalm 51 and celebrate the LORD's forgiving love.

See his limitless power: Read 1 Samuel 17 and see that "the battle is the LORD's."

Trust his promises: Memorize Isaiah 55:10-11, "My word... will achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Group Work

1. In Deuteronomy 1 – 5, the phrase “the LORD your God” or “the LORD our God” is repeated about 50 times. Share with the group a phrase that your mother used over and over again when you were growing up.
2. Read Psalm 51. Do you think David loved the LORD his God more before or after his affair? What makes you think so?
3. Parenting can be a guilt-provoking activity as you see that you are not the “perfect parent” you want for your children. How can David’s words in Psalm 51 help you grow as a parent (or as someone who influences those around you)?
4. Read 1 Samuel 17:32-47. What events of the past did David use to assure himself that the LORD his God had the power to save him from Goliath? What events of the past do you use to reassure yourself?
5. Read 2 Timothy 1:3-5. What do you suppose Lois and Eunice did to pass on their faith to Timothy? If you had Christian parents, what did they do to pass on their faith to you?
6. “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul and strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Break up into groups of two or three for prayer. Share an area of your life where you might be questioning the LORD’s unconditional love, God’s limitless power, or struggling to submit to his will. Pray for the needs of someone else in your group.