

SPEAKING TRUTH

Leader pages on pp. 118-121

THE POINT:
WHEN WE INVITE OTHERS
TO FOLLOW JESUS, NOT
EVERYONE WILL SAY YES.

LUKE 18:18-30

¹⁸ A ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone.

²⁰ You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; honor your father and mother."

²¹ "I have kept all these from my youth," he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he told him, "You still lack one thing: Sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²³ After he heard this, he became extremely sad, because he was very rich.

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²⁴ Seeing that he became sad, Jesus said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!

²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, "Then who can be saved?"

²⁷ He replied, "**What is impossible with man is possible with God.**"

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²⁸ Then Peter said, "Look, we have left what we had and followed you."

²⁹ So he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers or sisters, parents or children because of the kingdom of God,

³⁰ who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come."

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Treasure in heaven (v. 22)– This phrase speaks of an eternal destiny for those who surrender to Jesus as Lord.

Enter the kingdom of God (v. 24)–The key to entering the kingdom of God is a humble confession of the need for God and His forgiveness

Camel...eye of a needle (v.25)– Jesus uses hyperbole to express a rich person buying their way into the kingdom is equally as impossible as this illustration.

Age to come (v. 30)– The age to come will commence with Jesus Christ's coming again and extend into all eternity.

HOW DOES SPEAKING TRUTH HELP OTHERS FOLLOW CHRIST?

On December 23, 2001, during a UCLA college basketball game, UCLA's "Mistletoe Cam" zoomed in on a young couple seated in the stands. As in-game entertainment, the Mistletoe Cam put couples on the screen and prompted a mistletoe kiss. This young man had more in mind than a kiss. With all the fans in the stadium watching on the big screen, he pulled a ring from his pocket and asked his girlfriend to marry him. When the fans understood what was happening, they began to cheer, but there was an awkward silence from the girlfriend. After asking, "Are you kidding?" she abruptly stood up and walked away, making her answer obvious.²

We'll probably never know if this was staged or the real thing, but it does illustrate an important truth regarding proposals: Not everyone will say, "Yes." Sometimes the response is "No," and we might hear it when we invite people to put their faith in Jesus. Knowing this should not discourage us from making the proposal, though. We need to do our part in inviting people to trust in Jesus and then trust Him to do His part in saving them.

So don't be scared to speak the truth! Being a faithful witness is our job, the results belong to God.

Truth is Not Always on the Surface // Luke 18:18-23

Throughout this study, Connecting with Others Like Jesus Did, we have seen Jesus relate to people and share the good news. Through meeting needs, showing genuine concern for others, and even pointing out sin, opportunities to share Christ with others can become available. Another way opportunities become available to share the good news of the kingdom of God is through speaking truth. Jesus demonstrated this in today's session.

Luke told us of a conversation Jesus had with a rich ruler, and we are put on notice from the very beginning that this might not turn out well. Previously in Luke 18:15-17, Jesus made it clear that we receive the kingdom like a little child rather than taking possession of it by doing something. The rich ruler's question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18, emphasis added), seems to indicate he missed Jesus's point.

His question about eternal life isn't a new topic; the kingdom and inheriting eternal life are one and the same. Even so, the question opened the door for Jesus to speak truth to him in three specific ways.



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1. Jesus made it clear that “no one is good except God alone” (v. 19). Obviously, Jesus is God and He is good, but the rich ruler had yet to affirm Jesus’s divinity and mission. By responding this way, Jesus confronted the rich ruler’s understanding that he must do something, presumably good, to inherit eternal life. Today, we use Romans 3:23 to state this truth: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Doing something good won’t change our status as unredeemed sinners.
2. Jesus emphasized the importance of obedience to God’s covenant with His people by referring to the commandments. We might wonder why Jesus mentioned the commands that dealt with our relationships with others instead of the commands that dealt with our relationship with God, but the reason is simple. The ruler’s problem was with the other commandments, especially “Do not have other gods besides me” (Exodus 20:3). So, Jesus wasn’t surprised by the ruler’s response, “I have kept all these from my youth” (Luke 18:21).
3. Jesus’s supernatural discernment was on full display when He said, “You still lack one thing: Sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (v. 22). Jesus made it clear by speaking truthfully. The way to eternal life is through becoming a follower of Jesus. There is no action we can perform that makes us good enough to be allowed entrance into the kingdom. Eternal life is the gift we receive when we follow Jesus in faith.

Jesus invited the rich ruler to “come, follow Me.” It was an invitation that had the power to change this man’s life forever—an invitation for the very thing this man was seeking eternal life. But it was also an invitation for this man to leave behind his wealth and possessions in order to gain Christ.

Speaking the truth of the gospel can be challenging in our culture today. In America, the religion of “Me-ism” is strong. Our emphasis on self as the center of the universe gives us permission to choose whatever we want to believe. The issue of truth is secondary for some because truth violates their freedom to choose.

Truth will invariably demand yielding and adjusting one’s life to it. It is for this reason that believers must be willing to speak the truth about such an important issue. The truth is that eternal life can only be found in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It’s not something we acquire; it’s a gift we receive because of God’s grace and forgiveness.

WHY WAS SELLING ALL HE OWNED TO FOLLOW JESUS NECESSARY FOR THE RICH MAN?



DIGGING DEEPER MORE MONEY, MORE PROBLEMS?

Having wealth without becoming consumed by it seems to be an age-old concern. There is a temptation to place gaining and maintaining wealth above everything else. Scripture warns about this, notably in the parables told by Jesus. Responding to siblings disputing over an inheritance, Jesus tells a story about a rich man, who while planning to build bigger barns to store his crops hears God say that his life would end that very night (Luke 12:13-21). In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells a story about a rich man who dies and finds himself in torment, while a beggar named Lazarus dies and is carried to Abraham’s side. The antidote to hoarding wealth is maintaining a spirit of generosity. Joyfully sharing what one has prevents a person from becoming attached to possessions and helps those in need. The apostle Paul reminds us that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). This teaching is only aimed at the rich. Anyone, regardless of economic status, can be consumed and owned by money and a scarcity mindset.

How generous are you in sharing your time, talents, and treasures?

Truth Hits Everyone Rich and Poor // Luke 18:24-27

Here's an uncomfortable truth: wealth can hinder us from receiving God's grace. It's important for us to understand why. The Bible makes it plain that wealth itself isn't necessarily the problem. 1 Timothy 6:10 says "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." It's the love of money that causes problems rather than money alone. What is it about the love of wealth that gets in the way of receiving God's grace? Simply stated, wealth can make us believe things that aren't true. Here are just a few examples.

Wealth can give us a false sense of security. To be sure, wealth can assist us in meeting our needs and taking care of ourselves and those we love. But it can also cause us to believe that wealth can meet every challenge and defeat any threat that intrudes upon our lives.

Wealth can give us a false sense of freedom. For many, this is the attraction of wealth. Wealth can feed that desire to satisfy self, but unfortunately the desire is insatiable.

Wealth can give us a false sense of validation. Wealth for some is the proof that they are somebody. It validates them as a person of value and a credible voice to listen to.

When wealth deceives a person to believe that they can fix any problem, do whatever they want, and are a force to be reckoned with, the need for grace is diminished. Wealth isn't an obstacle to God's grace when we simply possess it; it's an obstacle when wealth possesses us.

So serious is this issue that it caused Jesus to say, "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 25). Jesus was saying it is impossible for a rich person possessed by and trusting in wealth to enter God's kingdom. When wealth has become a person's god, everything else takes a backseat, including the one true God. God has made it clear: He must be first. He demands total allegiance and loyalty.

The disciples understood what Jesus meant, which prompted the question, "Then who can be saved?"



(v. 26). It was common to view wealth as God's blessing on a person, which was equated to proof of a right standing before God. If this rich man, who was obviously blessed and favored by God, can't be saved, then what chance did the disciples have? Then who can really be saved?

What man cannot accomplish, God can. It is impossible for man to negotiate, buy, or earn entrance into the kingdom, but God can grant it to the one who is willing to leave behind any and all false gods that compete for the worship and honor that belongs solely to God, so that God takes His rightful place on the throne of the heart.

HOW CAN WEALTH HINDER OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

Truth Pays Temporal and Eternal Dividends // Luke 18:28-30

There must have been times during Jesus's earthly ministry when His words confused and confounded the disciples, and this was one of them. Peter said what the others were probably thinking: "Look, we have left what we had and followed you" (v. 28).

The Bible verifies the truth of Peter's statement. Peter, a fisherman, left his trade, his means of income, and his family to follow Jesus. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, left a lucrative family business to join Jesus and follow Him. Matthew,

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also known as Levi (as mentioned in Luke 5:27-29; Matt. 9:9), was considered a traitor by his fellow Jews because he worked as a tax collector for the Roman authorities. Despite his wealth and status, he left his lucrative position to follow Jesus. We can safely assume that each one chose to leave behind those things that were their sources of security so that they could follow Jesus.

Many non-believers falter in their understanding of following Jesus. In their view, following Jesus means memorizing a list of dos and don'ts—and the don'ts far outweigh the dos. They see following Jesus as a burden, embracing a lifestyle that requires sacrifice and service. And it certainly couldn't be fun. With that view in mind, they logically ask, "Why would anyone choose to live their life that way?"

Jesus wanted His disciples to know that their choice to follow Him would not go unrewarded (vv. 29-30). Jesus mentioned a specific benefit: "eternal life in the age to come." We consider benefits we will receive when we look for a new job or choose a health insurance plan. But as important as these benefits are, they pale in comparison to the benefit Jesus offers us. He offers eternal life in the age to come, and when we receive that benefit, these others won't matter.

DID YOU KNOW?

Following Christ involves giving up some things. Anyone who wants to be a disciple of Jesus needs to do so with eyes wide open. On one occasion after predicting His death and resurrection, Jesus said, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Being a follower of Jesus will cost us something. Jesus has not called us to give up anything without having done so Himself, however. The apostle Paul, quoting an ancient Christian hymn, says that Christ emptied Himself of the perks of His divinity and then "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). So, when we give up comfort, habits, friends, or anything else to be disciples, we are following the example set by Jesus Himself. But what He gives us far outweighs what we give.

Biblical Truth: As followers of Christ, we must count the cost of discipleship.

What are you holding on to that keeps you from being a fully devoted follower of Christ?

WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED BY FOLLOWING CHRIST?

LIVE IT

Is there anything preventing you from following Christ?

It's time to put aside anything that hinders you from being a disciple. This may be difficult, but the benefits of following Christ outnumber the burdens. Also, remember that you're not doing this alone. The Holy Spirit is empowering you to follow Christ, and fellow believers are around you to encourage you along the journey. Choose one of the activities below to increase your awareness of the benefits that are available when we choose to follow Christ.

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- **Walk.** Pray and thank God for giving you the gift of eternal life. Humbly praise Him for it.
- **Run.** Write down the many ways God has been good to you and keep the list handy. In the future, whenever you remember an instance of God's goodness or He blesses you again, record it.
- **Soar.** Identify those things that can easily take God's rightful place in your life. Develop an action plan to put them aside and replace them with a godly discipline.

DAILY READINGS

1. IS IT WORTH IT?// MATTHEW 16:26

With a prevalent societal focus that encourages people to focus on acquiring large amounts of wealth, it can be difficult for believers to navigate through the haze of adequate financial sufficiency. How does one identify when the pursuit of financial stability has reached targeted success? A struggle exists between balancing the desire for financial gain and the necessity of seeking spiritual treasure. Often an over pursuit of material things that make us feel physically secure can result in a spiritual unbalance. We must be willing to ask God's guidance in identifying unmet needs and issues that might be fueling an over focus on materialism. Unhealthy financial pursuits can result in spiritual bankruptcy for the believer.

God wants us to experience the wealth of His gift of eternal life.

2. WHAT IS YOUR PRIORITY?// MATTHEW 6:33

Those who focus on material wealth may discover "how hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:24). What we are willing to give up in order to gain a victorious life in Christ? Do we hold onto our material possessions as a lifesaver, or do we lay hold to the One who saved our life? Jesus provides essential steps that ensure our priorities remain aligned with His priorities. He encourages believers to seek God and have the right motives and objectives. When our desires and ambitions take precedence over the Word of God, they become a barrier to walking fully in the grace of God.

God's grace is enough to supply all our needs.

3. CHOICE WISELY// HEBREWS 11:6

God rewards His children for faithful adherence to His Word. Not only does He ensure that our needs are met, but He consistently rewards those who diligently follow His word. Our choices have both positive and negative consequences that will either draw us closer to Christ or lead to

separation. Choices that reflect our love of Christ and desire to follow His truth, lead to life-fulfilling outcomes. Choices that reflect our reluctance to follow Him lead to life-damaging outcomes. Our choices speak loudly and identify the things that have importance in our lives. We must cling to actions and behaviors that speak to the truth of the gospel. It is the voice of that truth that will lead others to an eternal reward.

We must choose actions and behaviors that speak to the truth of the gospel.

4. MOTIVATION MATTERS// COLOSSIANS 3:23

There is an expression that states that "it's not what you say, but how you say it." Our words and actions should be motivated by love, obedience and faithfulness to God. Our attitude matters and impacts how we share God's word to others. God loves a cheerful giver. We should give our time and service with a heart motivated by the joy of the Lord. As David writes in Psalm 19:14, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable unto you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." Believers must challenge themselves to temper their words to assure that they reflect the heart of the Father.

When we trust the power of God's Word, it has the grace to change lives.

5. GRACED TO SPEAK TRUTH// 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Many people struggle with the fine line between speaking truth and giving grace. While the Bible teaches us to be honest and truthful, we are admonished to speak the truth in love. Our words can encourage or tear down. We are called to be salt and light. We are responsible for every idle, flippant and careless word and similarly every purposefully spoken word. Proverbs teaches that life and death are in the power of the tongue. Our words must be tempered by grace and guided by a desire to lead others to solace in the Lord.

Words have the ability to create a beautiful pathway to salvation in Jesus Christ.

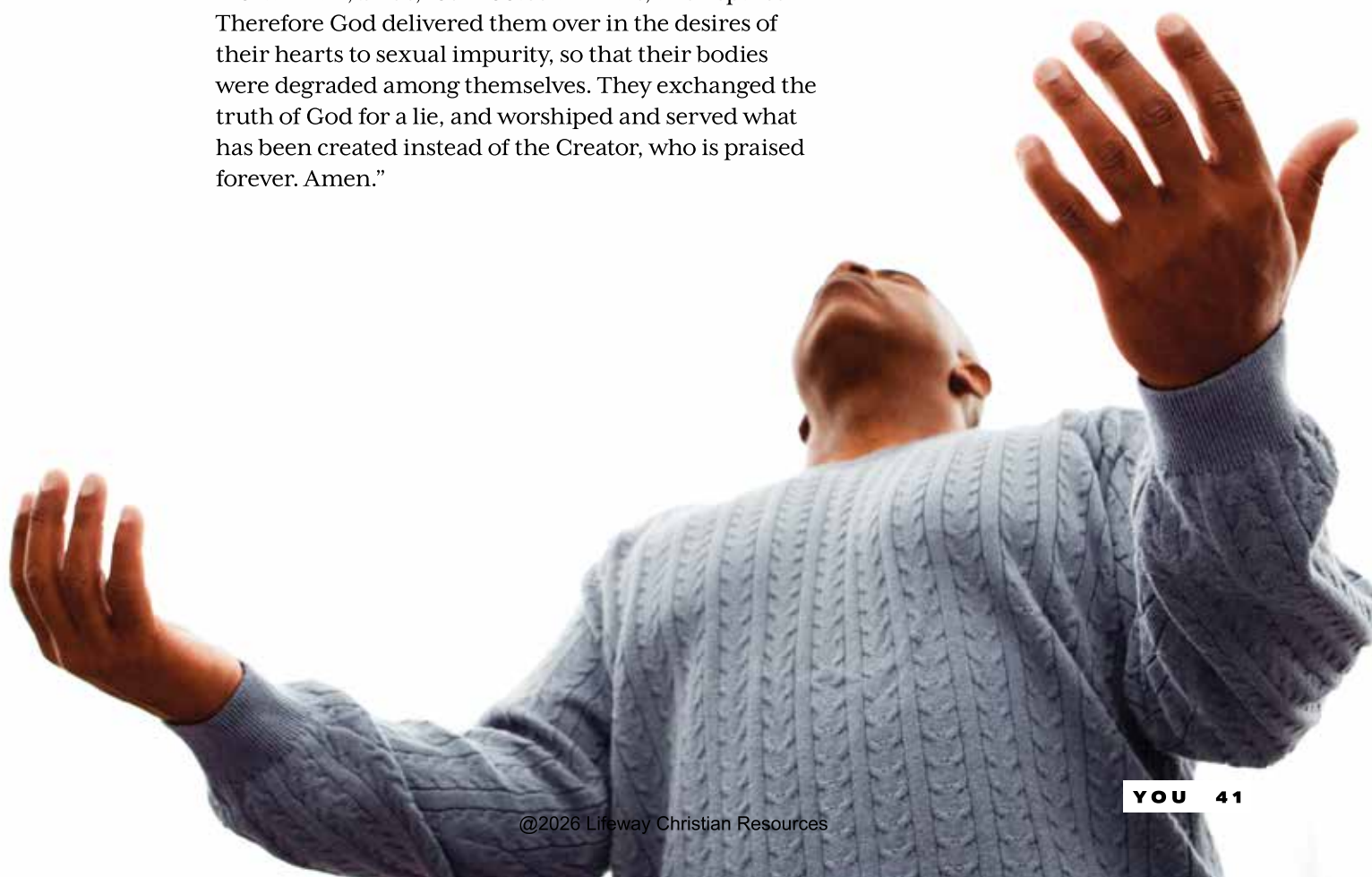
Vertical Connection, Horizontal Impact

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Men and women are the only part of God's creation that worship. You will never see a pack of dogs having a prayer meeting; a pod of dolphins singing; a flock of birds touching wings for group prayer; or a swarm of bees preaching. No, but Ecclesiastes 3:11 reports of God, "He has also put eternity in their hearts..." Isaiah 43:21 affirms, "The people I formed for myself will declare my praise." God has placed in the hearts of humans the urge to worship.

People on every corner of the earth, in every land, lifetime and language, have made worship a part of their experience. Some worship the God of the Bible, others worship the soil, the stars, the spirits, the stuff, or the self. Romans 1:22-25 declares:

"Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen."



Humans have an internal sense and longing for a vertical connection with the eternal that is not shared by any other creature of God's creation.

God wants a vertical connection with all of His creation.

God embedded this longing for a vertical connection in us because from the beginning, the God of creation wanted a relationship with His creation. In fact, God built in safeguards for this relationship before he created the cosmos. "For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5).

The fall of humanity in Genesis 3 did not catch God off guard or by surprise. That is why the old preachers would say, "he came down through 42 generations and put on human flesh." These powerful words are found in John 1:14. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." They are in reference to Jesus, Son of God, and his incarnation. The Creator comes into an even more personal relationship with His creation.

It is possible to become so focused on our vertical connection we cease to be like God.

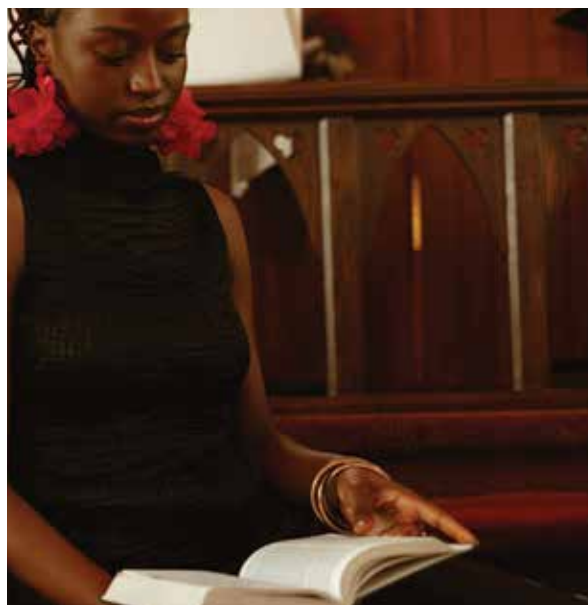
Yes, God wants to have a close meaningful relationship with each of us. He wants us to be and to become like Him, but if our relationship with Him is all we have we have ceased to be like Him.

I remember my mother-in-law often saying, "don't be so heavenly minded you are no earthly good." My mother-in-law may have said it, but this phrase is originally credited to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. and later popularized by Johnny Cash on his 1977 album, *The Rambler*, in the song, "No Earthly Good." The third verse says,

If you're holdin' heaven then spread it around.
There are hungry hands reaching up here
from the ground. Move over and share the high
ground where you stood. So heavenly minded
you're no earthly good.¹

Sometimes we go too far. We were not created to be monks or to live in monasteries where we give all our life, time and attention to our vertical relationship, separating ourselves and shutting out any horizontal interference or distractions. No, save that for heaven. Hear Jesus's heart for us:

"I am not praying that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not





of the world. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:15-18).

The vertical God connection in us, must have a horizontal impact on the creation around us.

We must impact our horizontal with His compassion. 1 John 3:16-18 declares, “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has this world’s goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.”

We must impact our horizontal with His care. 1 John 4:19-21 urges, “We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister.”

We must impact our horizontal according to His command. Matthew 22:36-40 insists, “Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

We must impact our horizontal according to His commission. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Clearly, we cannot do these essential parts of an authentic relationship with God if we are only focused on our vertical connection, we must also live out His horizontal impact.

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"LOVE THE SINNER,

HATE THE SIN"

St. Augustine