

December 2

Lesson 1 (NIV)

LOVE AND OBEY GOD

DEVOTIONAL READING: Mark 12:28–34

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:

Deuteronomy 6:1–9

DEUTERONOMY 6:1–9

¹These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ²so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk

about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”



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KEY VERSE

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

OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Unit I: God Is Worthy of Our Love

LESSONS 1–5

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount the instructions from Moses to the Israelites found in today's text.

2. Tell why the intentional teaching of the faith to the next generation is so crucial in today's world.

3. Suggest practical ways to apply the commands of [Deuteronomy 6:6-9](#) in a contemporary setting.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

A. Sunday School Every Day

B. Lesson Context

I. Priority of Obedience ([DEUTERONOMY 6:1-5](#))

A. Great Responsibility (vv. 1, 2)

B. Great Promise (v. 3)

C. Great Commandment (vv. 4, 5)

II. Priority of Teaching ([DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9](#))

A. Private Devotion (v. 6)

B. Persistent Discussion (v. 7)

Monsters and Opportunities

C. Personal Discipline (vv. 8, 9)

The Crucial Factor

Conclusion

A. Intentional Instruction

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Boaz *Bo-az.*

mezuzah *muh-zoo-zuh.*

Papua New Guinea *Paw-pyoo New Gih-nee.*

Pentateuch *Pen-ta-teuk.*

phylacteries *fuh-lak-tuh-reez.*

shema (*Hebrew*) *shih-mah.*

Introduction

A. Sunday School Every Day

A 7-year-old boy who had never been to church was invited by a friend to come along with him one Sunday morning. The boy found himself quite taken by the Bible lesson, the activities, and other features of the class. So excited was he that when the class was over, he told the friend who invited him, "This was great! I wish there could be Sunday school every day!"

That boy's wish is very similar to what Moses proposed to the Israelite parents in today's lesson text from [Deuteronomy 6](#). The principle at issue there is still valid and vital for Christians today.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Deuteronomy records Moses' farewell address to the second generation of Israelites following the exodus from Egypt. The first generation had perished in the wilderness because of unbelief that God could lead them to

of unbelief that God could lead them to conquer the inhabitants of the land of their destination ([Numbers 14](#)). With the first generation having passed from the scene, the second generation—on the verge of entering the promised land of Canaan—needed the Law of Moses explained anew. Indeed, the word *Deuteronomy* comes from two Greek words that mean “second law,” in the sense of “repetition.”

Portions of Deuteronomy are similar to what we find earlier in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). This is to be expected since God had established his covenant with the first generation of Israelites at Mount Sinai and had given his commandments and laws through Moses to the people ([Exodus 24:3–8, 12](#)). For example, the Ten Commandments, which were foundational to the covenant, are recorded both in [Exodus 20:1–17](#) and [Deuteronomy 5:6–21](#). Other laws in Deuteronomy reflect the circumstances that the people would face once they entered Canaan (such as the laws regarding war in [chapter 20](#)).

Deuteronomy begins with Moses’ review of the history of the nation to the present, including the first generation’s disobedience. But Moses also reminded the people of God’s faithfulness and of the power he had previously demon-

strated in helping a portion of the people conquer lands east of the Jordan River ([Deuteronomy 2:24–3:11](#)). That same power was to guide the second generation in completing the conquest of the territory west of the Jordan.

Those of the second generation, however, were required to avoid the unfaithfulness of their predecessors. [Deuteronomy 5](#) concludes with an exhortation to the people to obey the Lord faithfully and “do not turn aside to the right or to the left” ([5:32](#)). The exhortation continues in today’s lesson text.

I. Priority of Obedience

([DEUTERONOMY 6:1–5](#))

A. Great Responsibility (vv. 1, 2)

1. These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,

It’s possible to draw technical distinctions among *the commandments, decrees and laws* of the Lord, but it’s their cumulative weight that is intended. Two crucial responsibilities regarding this totality of the Lord’s desires are stressed. The first involves Moses’ obligation *to teach* the people. In that and other senses, Moses has served as the mediator between them and God. The people even had requested

this because of their terror at hearing the Lord's voice speak the Ten Commandments "out of fire" ([Deuteronomy 5:22, 26](#)).

The other responsibility is placed on the people themselves: they must actually *observe and do* what God has said, in faithful obedience to his words. Similar twin duties are found in the Great Commission, where Jesus commanded his followers to teach those whom they make disciples to "obey everything I have commanded you" ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)).

2a. so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you,

Today's lesson text is perhaps best known for the command to love the Lord (see [Deuteronomy 6:5](#), below). But it is noteworthy that here, just three verses before that command is given, the importance of fearing the Lord is emphasized.

The *fear* mentioned in the verse before us implies a deep reverence for who God is. He, the God of Scripture, is holy, loving, righteous, faithful, and all-knowing—to name just a few of his attributes. Fear of the Lord acknowledges that we must come to him on his terms, not ours.

The commands God has given are not for the second generation of Israelites

alone. They are intended to be taught to succeeding generations. Every generation will need to see itself as having the solemn responsibility of conveying the faith to those who follow them. That will be the teaching generation's most important and enduring legacy.

What Do You Think?

How will your commitment differ, if at all, between teaching natural descendants and descendants "in the faith" ([1 Timothy 1:2](#))?

Digging Deeper

How will teaching methods be the same and different for those two types of descendants?

2b. and so that you may enjoy long life.

The promise of long life is specifically tied to honoring one's father and mother in [Deuteronomy 5:16](#). In the verse at hand, it is linked to the people's general obedience to God's commandments. This promise may be understood not so much in terms of an individual's life span but of the nation's span of existence in the promised land (compare [Deuteronomy 4:26; 11:9](#); etc.).

B. Great Promise (v. 3)

3a. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you

and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

While obedience will be the key factor in the people's continued residence in the promised land, the primary reason they are going there at all is because of what the covenant-keeping God *had promised*. That promise goes back to God's covenant with Abraham ([Genesis 12:1-3](#)).

This description of *a land flowing with milk and honey* occurs 18 times in the Old Testament in a positive sense of a promise and/or description. This is the eighth such usage. The first is found in [Exodus 3:8](#), where God spoke to Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. This highlights the abundance that awaits the Israelites in the promised land of Canaan in contrast with the "iron-smelting furnace" of Egypt ([Deuteronomy 4:20](#); [1 Kings 8:51](#)). Amazingly, rebellious Israelites applied the description "land flowing with milk and honey" to the Egypt of their servitude rather than the land of their destination ([Numbers 16:13, 14](#))!

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to help us continue in the Lord's commands?

Digging Deeper

Which Scriptures have you personally

found most helpful in this regard?
Why?

C. Great Commandment (vv. 4, 5)

4. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

This verse is of supreme importance in the Old Testament (see on v. 5, next). It is still referred to as "the shema," which is the Hebrew verb for *hear*.

Because the Hebrew verse does not contain any verbs for "is," the exact rendering of the verse has been subject to much discussion. As it appears in Hebrew, the verse literally says, "Hear, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord, one."

Some students suggest that the word for *one* may also be rendered *alone*; however, *one* is the most accepted translation (though many translations include "alone" in a footnote as a possible rendering). Certainly the oneness of God that this verse declares implies that he alone is God, and there is no other.

This is affirmed elsewhere in Scripture ([Psalm 18:31](#); [Isaiah 44:8](#); [45:22](#); [1 Corinthians 8:4-6](#); [Ephesians 4:6](#)). Such a belief stands in stark contrast to the pagan religions of the Old Testament world, which are characterized by belief in many gods. The fact that the singular God has clearly revealed his will eliminates the guesswork and uncertainty that

nates the guesswork and uncertainty that accompanies belief in many gods.

What Do You Think?

How can we guard ourselves against living as though there are, in effect, many gods?

Digging Deeper

In that regard, what choices will you have to make concerning your responsibility to warn others vs. your need to pay attention to your own temptations? (Resources: [Ezekiel 33:7-9](#); [Matthew 7:1](#); [Romans 14:4, 10, 13](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:11](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15](#); [1 Timothy 5:20](#); [Titus 3:10](#); [James 4:11, 12](#).)

5. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

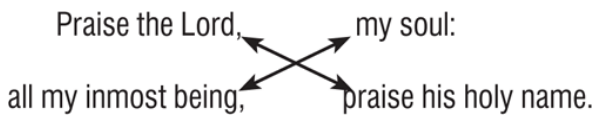
This, the appropriate human response to God, is what Jesus declared to be “the first and greatest commandment” ([Matthew 22:38](#)): to love him without any reservation, to love him with the totality of one’s *heart* and *soul* and *strength*. Indeed, on this and the command to love one’s neighbor “[hang] all the Law and the Prophets” ([22:40](#)).

The commandment to *love the Lord your God* is foundation for maintaining residence in the promised land. The word *heart* in Hebrew usually refers to the center of human life, and that is the

sense here. The heart is seen as the seat of the intellect and the will. One is often said to think or reason in the heart ([Proverbs 23:7](#); [Mark 2:6-8](#)).

Scripture also uses the term *soul* differently than how most understand it today. In Scripture, the word often describes one’s entire identity. The parallelism in [Psalm 103:1](#) (lesson 3) is insightful:

Praise the Lord, my soul:
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.



As is typical of Hebrew poetic parallels, the two thoughts of the first line are reflected again in the second line using different words.

The Hebrew word behind the translation *strength* is frequently rendered “very” in other passages (example: [Deuteronomy 30:14](#)). This sense of “exceedingly” is present here as well. One will never achieve fully this objective in this life, but the blessing comes in the quest.

II. Priority of Teaching (DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9)

A. Private Devotion (v. 6)

6. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

To love God with the devotion described in the previous verse implies

keeping his words treasured within their hearts. The psalmist recognized the importance of this when he wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).

Some students propose that the Old Testament is concerned primarily with an individual’s outward actions and with conformity to a rigid code of rules, and that there is very little concern for the inner person. This verse disproves such thinking. God has always been concerned about the condition of a person’s heart (compare Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:31; Joel 2:13; etc.).

B. Persistent Discussion (v. 7)

7. Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

God’s words are not a treasure to be hoarded in one’s heart. This treasure is to be communicated to others, specifically to the *children* in a household. The expressions concerning how this is to be done are framed as opposites: (1) sitting indoors vs. walking outdoors and (2) lying down to sleep vs. awakening from sleep. These imply that any time a parent has the opportunity to offer further instruction in the ways of the Lord, he or she should not let it slip away.

Virtually any set of surroundings can serve as a classroom in which children can be taught God’s words. An atmosphere of constant teaching will eventually spark questions from the children, a scenario described in Deuteronomy 6:20–25.

What Do You Think?

What changes can our church make in its teaching of children so they won’t abandon the faith when they leave for college?

Digging Deeper

Which is better: to shelter children from exposure to false beliefs or to allow the exposure in order to inoculate the young minds against the falsehood? Explain.

MONSTERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

“Daaddy,” called the little voice at 2 a.m. “I’m scared.” After I painfully dragged myself out of bed, I discovered that our 5-year-old son was afraid of monsters in the closet.

I tried the scientific approach first: “Joshua, you know there’s no such thing as monsters. Have you ever seen one?” It didn’t work, so I tried the practical approach: “Joshua, if you see a monster come out of your closet, just yell and I’ll come running in. I’ll beat up that monster. I’ll kick it right out of the house!” He

giggled, but quickly turned serious again: “I’m still scared.”

Finally the text of [Deuteronomy 6:7](#) flashed through my sleep-deprived mind. I winced. These were the precious, irreplaceable opportunities I had to teach my son about God and about walking in faith. Where should he turn when he felt vulnerable and afraid? to science? to pragmatism?

“Joshua, you know that God loves you. And he is bigger and more powerful than everything. He hears us when we ask him for help, and he will never leave us alone. He tells us that we don’t have to be afraid of anything, because he will be right with us no matter what.”

After I reminded Joshua of a few comforting verses of Scripture and rubbed his back, he fell asleep. Then I offered a prayer for myself: *Lord, next time help me to think of you first, so my children will learn to think of you first too!*

—D. G.

C. Personal Discipline (vv. 8, 9)

8. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

As the years passed, some practiced this imperative in a literalistic way: they placed passages of Scripture in small leather boxes (called phylacteries) and wore them on arms and foreheads. By the

time of Jesus, this practice had become a way to flaunt one’s devotion to God publicly ([Matthew 23:5](#)).

This verse has its intended (and much more powerful) impact when interpreted symbolically. The word *hands* represents one’s actions, which are to be guided by God’s words. The phrase *on your foreheads* means allowing his words to be a constant source of instruction.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take today to implement the principle of verse 8?

Digging Deeper

How will you ensure that your witness (see [Matthew 5:14–16](#); [1 Timothy 4:12](#); etc.) does not become holier-than-thou showmanship (see [Matthew 6:1, 2, 5, 16](#); [23:5](#); etc.)?

9. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

This commandment also came to be interpreted in a literalistic way. Some Jews today attach near the entrance of their home a mezuzah, which is a small container in which Scriptures are placed. (The word *mezuzah* is the Hebrew word translated here as *doorframes*.)

As with the previous verse, this imperative has its intended (and much more powerful) impact when applied symbolically. To write God’s commands

on the posts of one's house means living by them consistently at home in the family setting so that children can learn from their parents' example.

The word *gates* may refer to the place in town where business is typically conducted and where important decisions are made. An example is found in [Ruth 4:1-10](#), where Boaz meets with elders at the city gate to announce his intentions to marry Ruth. Thus, the key message of the verse is this: apply God's commands in everyday circumstances, not just in "religious" settings.

The power of the symbolic interpretation should not lead us to think that a more physically literal interpretation is of no value. Indeed, the two approaches may interact in positive ways. Smartphones serve as "doorframes" and "gates" of our lives in various ways. Various apps can be used to "write" a Bible verse of the day as a popup on one's smartphone "gate" for the user to read as the day begins.

Parents need creative ways to impress God's words on the minds of their children, and today's technology can be used to reinforce important spiritual principles and Bible lessons. The more that parents can keep God's words before their children, the more likely those words will be remembered and obeyed.

THE CRUCIAL FACTOR

In 1971, the leadership of the Summer Institute of Linguistics initiated 510 Bible translation projects. The projects resulted in varying degrees of success in producing growth in churches, so an in-depth study was undertaken to identify what methods were the most fruitful. The methodology involved four years of investigating reports from 15 translation programs in Mexico, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea.

One factor was discovered to have been crucial to all the successful programs; that factor was *personal relevance*. When people saw that God and his Word were relevant to them and their needs, they responded to the gospel. People began to see this relevance when Christians lovingly pointed to the God of the Bible in ways that connected with those needs. That's the power of seeking guidance from Scripture in every circumstance of life.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: [page 127](#)) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Winter Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 2629119 from your supplier.

How well are you living this out as an example to others? Behind that, how well are you living it out when no one but God can see?

—D. G.

Conclusion

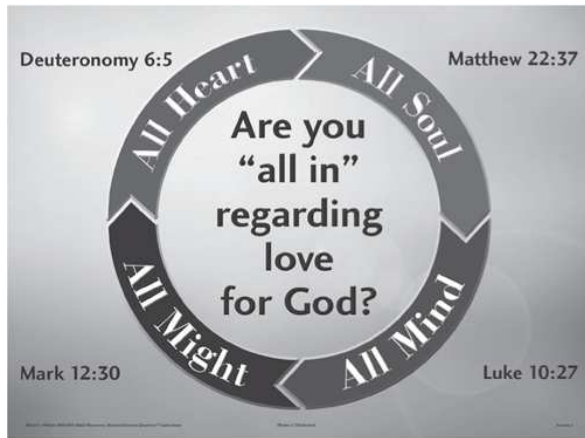
A. Intentional Instruction

God's desire for the Israelites was that his commandments be passed from generation to generation. This was to happen through the faithful, consistent teaching and modeling of those commandments in various settings. This is a key principle within today's text.

Western culture at one time was characterized by such a respect for teaching biblical principles. I grew up in the late 1950s and the 1960s, when much of children's television programming featured occasional references to the teachings of the Bible. One example is the old "Mickey Mouse Club." I can remember playing records of songs from that show on our phonograph at home. Those songs included titles such as "Do What the Good Book Says" and "Proverbs" (referring to the biblical Proverbs). The lyrics of such songs can be heard on file-sharing websites. Many of us are aware that the Charlie Brown Christmas special of 1965 featured a discussion of [Luke 2:8-14](#). Of course, no such material would be permit-

ted on a network children's program today!

Some have offered this comparison: the church at one time possessed the "home-field advantage" where the culture for the most part was "on our side." Today, the church is in the position of the "visitors," and it is often treated with great contempt and scorn. The increasing secularization of Western culture has made the teaching of biblical principles more challenging, but certainly not impossible. It means that parents must become much more deliberate and intentional in seeing to it that their children are exposed to the virtuous and praiseworthy things that Paul, in [Philippians 4:8](#), says should characterize a Christian's thought life. This includes exercising discernment regarding what children are allowed to watch on television, how they use social media, etc. So much that is available for public viewing is clearly at odds with the principles of loving God and his words that are emphasized in today's text.



Visual for Lesson 1. *Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, "What has to happen for Christians to improve in these areas?"*

In these times that are awash in spiritual darkness and confusion, it is critical that Christian parents take Moses' instructions in today's text to heart—using every opportunity available to reinforce biblical truth to their children and help them see its relevance to daily living. The most influential translation of the Bible for children is the one they see communicated by their parents' example and speech. We should remind ourselves that today's lesson is from the passage that sets forth what Jesus declared to be the "greatest commandment," the focus of which is our love for God (compare [Matthew 22:34-40](#); [Mark 12:28-34](#)).

B. Prayer

Father, we pray for Christian parents to possess the strength and resolve to

stand firm in their faithfulness in teaching their children. May they do so for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The best way to keep the faith is to give it away.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

As the class gathers, invite everyone to enjoy a snack of honey graham crackers and milk. (Provide substitutes for those with food allergies.) As learners enjoy their treats, ask several to share a childhood memory regarding a favorite food.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Like-minded” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Ask learners to complete as indicated.

After either activity, introduce the Bible study by saying, “We are all devoted to various things, whether to certain foods, hobbies, etc. By the time of today’s lesson text, God had already promised to honor the Israelites’ devotion to him by prospering them with a new land ‘flowing with milk and honey’ ([Exodus 3:8](#)).” Hold up a honey graham cracker and cup of milk. Continue: “The Bible’s reference to *milk and honey* symbolizes an abundant land brimming with goodness. Let’s see some implications of that.”

Into the Word

Read [Deuteronomy 6:1-9](#) aloud, then

divide the class into halves that sit opposite each other. Ask one side to role-play being parents and grandparents. The other group will pretend to be young children through teenagers. Read [Deuteronomy 6:7](#) aloud again and say, “We are going to act out conversations we might have about God with our children and grandchildren as we sit together on the sofa or go for a walk. Use ideas from the text for inspiration.”

Invite someone from the *Parents/Grandparents Group* to pose a question or make a statement about following God; then let two or three from the *Children Group* respond with answers or questions. Alternate back and forth on the conversations, allowing opportunity for all the learners to voice a question or answer. If they have trouble knowing what to say, give each group the appropriate handout (you prepare). For the *Parents/Grandparents Group*: 1-What are some of the commandments God wants us to obey? 2-What do you know about God’s promises? 3-Why does God want us to love him with all our hearts? Hand these suggestions to the *Children Group*: 1-Why does God say we’re supposed to fear him? 2-Why are there so many commandments? 3-Why do we have to obey all the time?

Wrap up by saying, “God encourages us to find opportunities in everyday life

to talk about the importance of loving and obeying him.”

low you wholeheartedly. *[Pause to allow students to name them silently.]* In the matchless name of Jesus we pray. Amen.”

Into Life

Ask learners to cite some challenges and benefits of loving God and following after him; jot responses on the board. Then ask the learners to cite Scripture passages that encourage or command a love of God. (Those with smartphones may find the following: [Deuteronomy 6:5; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; Joshua 22:5; 23:11; Psalms 31:23; 97:10; 116:1; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27](#) [negatively, [1 Corinthians 16:22](#)].) Talk about the connection between loving God and obeying his commands. Ask students to share times when they’ve been able to have meaningful spiritual discussions with their children and grandchildren.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Famous Farewell Addresses” activity from the reproducible page for learners to complete as indicated. Remind the class that parting words from those who are wise are instructive for moving forward.

End with prayer. Share: “O Lord, thank you for loving us so deeply and steadily. Help us each day to love and obey you with all our entire beings. Remind us to talk about you and model a devoted faith in you. We present to you these young people we want to help fol-