

## Can you think of ways of practising acts of loving kindness?

The Lord told us, *“Whoever has my commandments and obeys them, he it is that loves me: and he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him”*. John 14:21 (NIV). We may understand in our minds these words but do we feel in our hearts the Lord really loves us and wants communion with us?

**It may help to meditate on this concept and try to feel - experience - that the Lord truly loves you and wants to be with you.**

To love the Lord with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength is to seek to learn of Him, to know His will, and to live and act by His commandments in all our daily lives. To quote from our third quote it is to shun evil, do good and believe in the Lord. The rewards of doing so are freedom from spite, jealousy, hatred, unkindness, unfairness but in warmth, joy and purity. Far from being a commandment to benefit the Lord, this commandment is to benefit us in truly wonderful and beautiful ways, and it was given in and from Love.



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Five Essentials - Aspects of Loving - a focus for the Church  
5th Essential: Part 1: Loving the Lord - with all our heart, soul and strength  
Published by The General Conference of the New Church.  
Downloadable from [www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk](http://www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk)

## Loving the Lord - with all our heart, soul and strength



**‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**

**These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts ... Fear the Lord your God, serve him only ... Do what is right and good in the Lord’s sight, so that it may go well with you.’**

Deuteronomy 6:4-6,13,18

**Dear friends, let us practise loving each other, for love comes from God and those who are loving and kind show that they are the children of God, and that they are getting to know him better. But if a person isn’t loving and kind, it shows that he doesn’t know God – for God is love.**

1 John 4:7-8

**Shun evil and do good and believe in the Lord from all your heart and in all your soul and the Lord will love you, and will give you a love of doing and faith to believe. Then from love you will do good, and from faith, which is trust, you will believe; and if you persevere in so doing, a reciprocal joining [with the Lord] will take place, which will be perpetual, and this is salvation itself and eternal life.**

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The commandment in the first quote from Deuteronomy 6 could sound prescriptive and draconian - you WILL love the Lord your God and not only will you love Him but you will love Him with all your heart, soul and strength, as though there should be no room for anyone or anything else in our lives. Yet Jesus Himself confirmed this commandment as being the most important in Luke 10:27 along with “*and you must love your neighbour just as yourself*” when questioned by the expert in Jewish law. It could sound as though one is being asked to give up everything pleasurable and become incarcerated in some kind of religious prison. Yet that is the paradox and not the case at all.



### **Why do you think the Lord commands this of you?**

In fact loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind is the process by which we become truly free and to enjoy life and life in all its fullness, in ways our own limiting selfishness could not even begin to imagine. The Lord does not demand this love for the sake of ruling or receiving our worship or homage from us. The law is there for our own sakes and for the sake of the rest of the world because God loves everyone and knows what is best for His children. This is the law which, if obeyed, will bring the greatest blessings and happiness to each and all. This command also points out there is only one God and we should have only one God - love and wisdom - in our lives.

### **Pause and reflect on what it means to you to love the Lord with all your heart.**

When and how do you love him with all your soul? Do you love him with all your strength?

The teachings of our church tell us that our states of being - our happiness and our sadness - flow from love. Love motivates and satisfies. Our ruling love will lead, guide and motivate everything we do and say. True happiness results from loving what is good and true and

living our lives accordingly. The other side of the coin is that our unhappiness results from the love of what is evil and false and that which is selfish. Initially evil can seem very attractive and alluring but it sucks you in and the ‘reward’ of evil is even more entanglement in deeper evil to the detriment of all. The higher and holier the object of our love, the greater is our happiness and our freedom from the imprisonment of evil and its hurtful and selfish ways.

### **How can we love the Lord and how do we express that love? Pause and reflect on this concept ...**

In the first quote we read of ‘fearing the Lord’. Is that love? Swedenborg explains that *‘Love that is devoid of reverential or sacred fear is as it were devoid of savour, or is like food unseasoned with salt, and consequently insipid; but love that is attended with fear is like food that is seasoned, but yet does not taste of salt. The fear of love is a fear of injuring the Lord in any way, or of injuring the neighbour in any way, thus of injuring what is good and true in any way, and consequently of injuring the sacred things of love and faith and the consequent worship.’* Arcana Caelestia 3718.

### **If you are reading this in a group you may want to discuss ‘fear of the Lord’.**

What for you is the difference between love and emotion? How do we know we are genuinely loving and not being swept along by transient emotion? Love which is not expressed in the living of our daily lives and our dealing with the people around us is not love. We are the vehicles, the channels, of receiving love and wisdom from the Lord and loving Him is using the gifts we receive from the Lord in the service of others. For example if we carry out our employment faithfully and to the best of our ability then we are helping the Lord by helping others. Couples who have been married a long time and are still in love tend to express that love in acts of kindness to each other rather than gushing words. In our second quote we learn that we need to practise being loving and kind because eventually it becomes a way of life and our motivation.