



“ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ you shall love the Lord your God.”

— Mark 12:28-29

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All too often we begin our discussion of leadership with the leader: strengths, weaknesses, experiences, and opportunities. Or with the outward actions of leading: presenting with authority, creating teams, networking. But these are not the best — or even the right — place to start. We need to start exactly where Jesus tells us to: “*Love the Lord your God.*”

If we start anywhere else, we will be easily sidetracked. We can forget why we are in leadership, and who it is that we represent in our leadership.

Love of God.

That’s where we begin... both literally and figuratively.

The Greek word we translate as “to love” — *agapaó* — is completely fascinating. The English version simply does not do it justice: (1) to feel great affection, (2) to feel romantic love for someone, (3) to like or desire, to take pleasure in.¹ *Agapaó* is a much more powerful verb. It is love “based on evaluation or choice, a matter of will and action.”²

In arguably one of the most famous of biblical verses, John 3:16, the author uses a variant of *agapaó*:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

It is only through God’s self-giving love that our leadership in the church and in the world makes any sense at all. And it is a foundation that can give strength to

a leader even in the most difficult of situations, even in the midst of failure and pain. Because we have a God who knows us intimately — all the good and all the bad — and who loves us anyway.

The way God loves us is a conscious choice, not one based solely on “feeling” as implied in the *Merriam-Webster* English definition above. It is because of *agapaó* that God makes the conscious choice to include us in relationship with the Divine. This decision is not based on our worthiness (we would certainly fail that test) or on our diligent effort (how could we ever work hard enough to earn God’s love?).

In human terms, we could look at *agapaó* as the consistent and unconditional love of a parent for a beloved but recalcitrant child. This is the same type of love with which we are called to love God.

The form of *agapaó* that is used by Jesus in today’s scripture is the future tense with indicative mood — *agapēseis* — signifying an established fact set in the future: this is what you shall do. We are called to make the conscious choice to put God in the center of our lives, and to allow God to guide us each step of the way.

QUESTION:

What does it mean to you that God loves you with this kind of *agapaó* love — an unconditional, never-changing, always-present, consciously-chosen love?

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