

One truth shared: The Christian loves God above all.

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 10:37-39

Love God above All

What do you love the most in your life? Your parent(s)? Your sibling(s)? Your BFF? Your boyfriend or girlfriend? Mr. Fluffers your 5-month-old puppy who sheds hair like he's going bald (but you love him anyways)? Sports? Music? Video games? Your phone? (*Please don't say your phone!*) So many things to love! But what in your life do you love the *most*?

Our God is so good and gracious that he opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing (Psalm 145:16). But not only that, most of us have WAY more than we could ever want, need, or desire. Our list of blessings is longer than the line for the bathroom at a Taylor Swift or Beyoncé concert. It is simply incredible how he blesses us with so many good things. Be careful though! Very quickly *good* things become *god* things.

God's First Commandment is: You shall have no other gods. Martin Luther explained that commandment quite simply: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Any time we put something in front of God in our hearts or minds that becomes a god to us. That's easy to recognize when it's a statue of Buddha or a false religion like Islam. But that's *really* hard to see when it's a regular part of your daily life.

Ever been in a situation with friends or at work when you know you should have said something, you should have done something different, you should have let your light shine—but you didn't? Could it be that you love your reputation or the opinion of friends or peers more than God? How does your screen time compare to your Scripture time? Do you scroll through YouTube or TikTok more than you scroll through the Bible? Could it be that you love technology, or specifically your phone, more than God? Do your actions with your boyfriend or girlfriend or what you look at online match up with God's guidance for purity? Could it be that you love your desires and cravings more than God at times?

How many examples might we identify where we fail and fall short of God's expectations? How many times have we made *good* things into *god* things?

Thank God that we have a Savior who has loved us with an everlasting commitment! Jesus set aside his glory, his power, and his crown to come here to this world for us. He showed a committed love that was not distracted or deterred. He marched all the way to Calvary for you and for me so that the Father could open his arms in forgiving love to us. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1)

God's love for us can be life changing. The more we see his love and commitment to us, the more we become committed to him. Jesus words in this devotion from Matthew 10 are very difficult to process. But then we see his loving arms stretched out on a cross and his victorious empty tomb. That is the Savior that we love more than anything, even good things. We love Jesus more than family, friends, sports, music, and even our phones. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you loved us with a selfless, self-sacrificing love that put us first. Help us to be so committed to you that we always fear, love, and trust in you above all things. Amen.

Foundation Teen Facilitators Guide

Year A – Proper 8

Define Christian

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Love God above All

Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- What are some of the things that you love the most in your life?
- Why? What do you love the most about those things?

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.*

Identify some ways that you see those *good* things becoming *god* things. How do you see Satan using those things to push God to the side at times?

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.*

- Jesus' words in Matthew 10 for this devotion are very difficult to consider (not loving father or mother or son or daughter more than him). Why would Jesus use such extreme examples in asking us to love and follow him?
- What do you think is the most dangerous thing in your life as a teen right now that you are tempted to love more than Jesus?
- What do you think will be the most dangerous thing in your life *15 years from now* that you might be tempted to love more than Jesus?
- Agree/Disagree: The most difficult thing to *not* love more than Jesus is myself. Explain your answer.

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the "connecting question" above.*

Discuss ways that we can have a proper Christian perspective on life. How can we love the good things God blesses us with, yet at the same time love Jesus more than all of them? What will help with this? How can we help each other to do this?