

Thank you to Tom and Emerson at Franklin Road and Eric at Shelby Street for bringing us great sermons the last two Sundays. We are so blessed to have godly, wise, gifted pastors who bring us the Word week in and week out. Today I get to preach the fourth and final sermon in our series called “All.” If you haven’t been here, the entire series has been based on a time in Jesus’ life when a teacher asked Him what the most important command in the entire Bible is. Jesus replied that the most important command is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.” Because Jesus said this is the most important teaching in the entire Bible, it’s important that we give proper attention to it.

We’ve been working with our son to memorize Scripture. He’s only two so he doesn’t have that many verses memorized, but this is the very first one we taught him. To help him with it we gave him fun action steps. Love the Lord your God with all your *heart*, all your *soul*, all your *mind*, and all your *strength*. At this point, he strains with all his might—dial that back a bit buddy, you don’t want a hernia. We’ve already talked about what it looks like to love God with our heart, soul, and mind; today we get to focus on what it looks like to love God with all our strength.

Oftentimes, when we think about loving God with our strength, our tendency is to think about our physical strength, like how many pounds we can lift or how fast we can run. The Bible tells us the strongest man who ever lived was Samson. One time Samson knocked over an entire building simply by pushing against it. That’s not the kind of strength we’re talking about. We aren’t talking about the kind of strength that wins you a UFC fight, an arm-wrestling match, or a cross-fit competition. When the Bible talks about loving God with our strength, it’s not talking about doing push-ups for Jesus.

In the Old Testament passage Jesus quotes from, the word for strength is a unique word: “me’od.” The literal definition is “very” or “muchness.” In Hebrew, the idea isn’t about how much weight you can lift. It’s more like an adjective describing something as “big” or “great.” Or it can be an adverb, saying that you do something really well. Here’s the point: what is the very best thing about you? What are you best at? Where do you excel? What is the most compelling thing you have to offer? Whatever it is, love God with that part of your life. Many employers these days have their employees take a StrengthsFinder test, which is not about which muscle group in your body is the strongest. It’s about your unique gifts, talents, and abilities—you are an achiever, a communicator, a connector, or a developer; you have discipline, focus, or ideas; you bring positivity or strategic thinking or empathy. Not every one of us has *strength*, but we all have strengths, things that we are defined and characterized by. God wants us to love Him, to serve Him and honor Him and bring Him glory, with those areas of our life. Those strengths are gifts from God. And God wants us to use them to love Him.

Let’s turn our attention to a parable in Matthew 25:14-30 that Jesus told His disciples about honoring Him with what’s been entrusted to us.

(The Kingdom of Heaven) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. “Master,” he said, “you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.”

His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

The man with two bags of gold also came. “Master,” he said, “you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.”

His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. “Master,” he said, “I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”

His master replied, “You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here you have a scenario where a master entrusts substantial wealth to his servants. In Greek, a talent was a bag of gold worth about 20 years’ wages. Let’s use a round number and say that every bag of gold is worth a million dollars. That’s a lot of money. He gave the first person five million, the second person two million, and the third person one million. The first two people put what had been entrusted to them to work. They used it, they invested it, they made a return. They knew they were stewards of something they had been given and they honored the one who had given it. The third person didn’t. He was given something of great worth, of incredible value, and instead of putting it to use, he sat on it; he squandered the opportunity. Jesus said, “You didn’t have to take a huge risk—you could have put it in the bank to collect interest, but you did nothing with what I gave you.” The consequences were severe. Did you see what Jesus called him? A wicked, lazy servant. Not only did he not get a reward, but he also got a very severe punishment.

Here’s what I want us to see: God has given every one of us areas of strength. Some of you have been blessed with leadership skills, others are unbelievably creative, others are nurturing, others are great with their hands, others are encouraging. We all have these specific areas of talents and abilities. They are God-given gifts. And God wants us to use those gifts to bring Him glory. He wants us to activate and deploy those gifts as an expression of our love for Him. None of us wants to be in the situation of the last servant, taking our talents, skills, and strengths and wasting them. We want to be like the first two, using what God has given us to make an impact—for God’s glory, but also because at the end of our lives there is going to be an account. We are going to have to talk to God about what we did with everything He gave us, and we want that to be a good conversation. God wants us to put every strength, every talent, every ability He has given us to use for Him. I want to highlight four specific ways we should do that.

Here’s the first: we love God with all our strength by serving our family. God gave every one of us a family. We have parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, nieces, nephews, grandparents, or perhaps

grandchildren. God gave us a family. And God wants us to use the strengths He has given to us to love the people in our household. “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

How many of you have seen or used one of these before? (See sermon video for photo.) Until 2 ½ years ago, I had no idea what this was. For those of you in the same boat as I was, this is a device that allows you to suck the snot out of your kid’s nose. Is it disgusting? Yes. But one of the ways I can love God with all my strength is by using the strength of my lungs to clear out the nasal passages of my little girl, who isn’t old enough to blow her nose yet. One of the ways I love God with my strength is by pushing my son in the swing, and reading my kids books before they go to bed, and using my creativity to make up stories about princesses and dragons and knights and giants. I am not always great at this, but one of the best ways I love God with all my strength is by putting my phone down when I come home from work so I can more fully engage with Keren and the kids. Many of you know that Keren has chronic back pain, so I love God with all my strength by sweeping the floor and doing the dishes and rubbing her shoulders at night.

Two of the things I personally love to do are hunt and golf. If it was up to me, I would probably golf 1-2 times a week, but ever since I had children, I golf 1-2 times a year. I love to hunt. During hunting season, I would prefer to be in the woods 10-15 days a season; now that I have children, 3 or 4 days is all I do. And it’s not hard for me to give up time doing things I love for my family. I love my family, and they deserve my very best resources. Loving our families is one of the most important ways we love God with our strength. If I take the best of my time and the best of my energy and only do the things that I love for my entertainment, I think God would say to me, like the master said to the servant in the parable, “That’s not why I gave you those resources, so you can spend them on yourself, getting a lower handicap, harvesting a bigger buck. I gave you those resources so you could invest into your family, shape the character of your children, lovingly lead and serve your wife!

Many of you love God with all your strength by caring for your aging parents or grandparents. That is a beautiful, God-honoring thing to do with your strength. Many of you invest hours into praying for your family. That is a beautiful, God-honoring thing to do with your strength. Many of you, specifically since the pandemic, have been homeschooling your children. That is a beautiful, God-honoring thing to do with your strength. I can’t help but think about my mom. For a decent portion of my childhood, she raised five kids as the only parent in the house. She had to work two jobs to provide. Her jobs weren’t glamorous. She wasn’t her pursuing the job of her dreams. She often came home with sore feet and headaches. But every time she clocked in and clocked out, she was loving God with her strength by providing for us. I want all of us to take a moment and think right now—how can I, right now, in this season of my life, express love for God by serving the family He has given me? Remember, the Bible says if we don’t take care of our household, we have denied the faith, and are worse than those who don’t believe in Jesus.

The second way we love God with all our strength is by serving our employer. Most of us have careers and professions. We spend roughly 40 hours a week at work. And though we are there serving our employer, God wants us to realize that no matter what we do, whether we are teaching a class of kindergartners, or providing medical care for patients, or selling cars, or building a home, we are to serve at work as if we were serving the Lord himself. Colossians 3:23-24 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

When you go to work, you are taking the talents God has given you and deploying them for the good of your employer, and hopefully for the good of the community that your employer serves. If you are an architect, you serve God with your strength by designing beautiful and safe buildings. If you are an accountant, you serve God by crunching numbers and filling out spreadsheets and reconciling expense

reports with accuracy and excellence. If you are an owner or CEO, you serve God by providing great jobs for your staff, by leading your company with character and integrity, and by communicating with honesty and humility.

I have a friend who is a financial advisor. He not only serves God by helping his clients manage and invest their resources, but he also recently decided to take a portion of his company's profits and sponsor children through Compassion International. As his company does better and better, they sponsor more and more children. How incredible is that? A lot of folks are focusing only on accumulating wealth, but he is trying to shift the focus to providing for widows and orphans with wealth. He is loving God with his strength.

I was getting a cavity filled two weeks ago. I laid back in the chair while someone drilled in my mouth for 15 minutes. It wasn't my favorite experience in the world. But the entire time the doctor was drilling, I was praying for my dentist, thanking God that he was caring for me, fixing my cavity, helping me get better. The entire staff at the office served me. My teeth are healthy now. In caring for their other patients, the entire dentist's office was loving God with all their strength.

This is the heart behind the ministry initiative we are kicking off beginning next year for anyone who is interested called Kingdom Leadership. We want to see the kingdom of God move powerfully throughout Indiana, and we believe that the most strategic way we can see that happen is to resource and equip the people of our church to live on mission 40 hours a week with their vocation. We have over 100 folks signed up for this already. If you'd like to join us, we still have room. Go online and sign up by the end of this month and we'll get you in a group. We are going to do all we can to love God with our strength by serving our employers.

Another way: we love God with all our strength by serving our church. Whatever faith family God has connected you to—for most of you it is The Creek—God's goal isn't simply that you would have a Christ-centered community where you can worship, learn, and grow, but also a place where you can serve and build up the body you are a part of. Listen to what God's word tells us in Romans 12:3-8:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

This passage begins by telling us to think about ourselves correctly. Know who you are. Know the strengths that God has given you. Then what does it say? Use those strengths to serve your church. 1 Peter 4:10 says it this way: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

I had the privilege of meeting a new member of our church a few weeks ago. We went out to lunch, and I got to hear his story. He and his family recently relocated to Indianapolis from another town, where they were attending the largest church in the entire country. They were a part of a very dynamic, fruitful ministry. He is in the military, and he told me that, typically, when they move to a new city it takes a couple months exploring several churches before they decide on one to call home, but when they moved to Indy, they came to The Creek and never visited another church. And then he said: you have no idea

how important the people who hold the doors and greet people are. For so many people, this is their first time here, and those are the folks who make people feel warm and welcome and at home. So for those of you who use your strength to love God by welcoming people, thank you.

I am grateful for those on the security team who help keep everything safe. I am grateful for those on the worship team who lead us in song. I am so grateful for those in Kidustrial Park. I have a one-year-old and a two-year-old, and it means the world to me to drop my kids off in their classrooms on Sunday and see caring adults who will not only care for them but invest into them, pray for them, and teach them Bible stories. I was on a zoom call two weeks ago with three pastors of a church roughly our size. They were telling me that they've had several resignations on their staff recently, but the reasons surprised them. They had people in their children's staff leave their jobs. They were going to stay at the church and serve at the church, but they resigned because of how hard it is, post-COVID, to get enough volunteers to help on Sunday. And I thought, oh, how sad is that. We have an incredible children's staff. And I don't think any of them are planning on resigning, but can I tell you—we have a lot of needs for people to serve in our children's area. Even though our post-COVID numbers have continued to climb almost every week, we only have about 25% of the kids' volunteers we did two years ago. We honestly have a need for people to love God with all their strength by rocking a baby, or checking new families in, or teaching a lesson to our class of third graders. If this is your church home, God wants you to be a contributor, a participant in this place. He wants you to love your faith family, to build up this body, and to help us be the best church we can be.

One final way: we love God with all our strength by serving those in need. When I first wrote this sermon, this wasn't in the message. But the more I prayed on it, the more I realized that, if we are not using our strength to serve people in need, we are leaving something essential out of the priorities of our life. The gospel is not only about the proclamation of the love of God, but also about the demonstration of the love of God. Proverbs 19:17 says: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord." We cannot claim to love God and at the same time turn our eyes or our ears from those in need. The gospel requires us to use our strength, our voice, our influence, our resources to advocate for them.

Listen to this heartbreaking story from a man who reflected on his childhood in the 1940s.

I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it because what could we do to stop it. A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance, and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars. Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews in route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us. We knew the time the train was coming, and when we heard the whistle blow, we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church, we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more. Although years have passed, I still hear the train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me, forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing to intervene.

Thankfully, we don't have a crisis of justice in our day like they did in theirs; that's an extreme example. But students, is there a kid in your class who is constantly bullied? You can love God with all your strength by befriending them and advocating for them. Maybe it's the unborn, or certain minority groups, or refugees, or the impoverished. When we lend to them, we are lending to the Lord. When we use our strengths to serve them, it's God who we are loving with all our strength.

When Jesus walked among us, He used every strength He had to love His Father and to love us. To a world that was confused and directionless, He taught truth they had never heard before. To the lepers who were outcasts and untouchable, He used his arms hug them. When the disciples had dirty feet, He stooped down to wash them. When His ears heard the groans of hungry stomachs, He prayed and miraculously fed them. And as He was mindful of the sins of all humanity, He carried a cross to pay the ultimate price to forgive us. Jesus used His strength to love you. How are you going to use your strength to love Him?

As you receive communion, thank Jesus for using His strength to love you, to serve you, to save you. Pray and ask God to show you a specific strength He has given you, and how He is calling you to love Him with it by serving your family, your employer, your church, or someone in need.