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We are in the book of Deuteronomy today- part of our Garden to City series. Some of you have been thrilled to join me in calling it, “Dude”-eronomy. We’ve said that the book is a series of sermons that Moses gave at the end of his life. Today we read from chapter 6 of this book and it’s a very important section, known as the Shema. This is the Hebrew word for “listen,” the first word of verse four. *“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.”* It’s the core confessional text of the Jewish people. We’re familiar, in this area, with confessional language. Some of us have said of few of these. *“Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.”* The Shema is Israel’s daily confessional, and with good reason. In this passage we have a concise description, not just of belief about God, or a general understanding that He exists, but of how we can *know God*.

“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” What does that mean, exactly? The dominant belief in the time of Moses, was that there were many gods, and where you lived determined which of those gods you worshipped. Every region had its own god, and every country had its gods: The mountain god; The god of the sea; etc. etc. I would suggest that the dominant belief of today is that there are also many gods.

Last week we spoke about the most common belief about God among my generation and Millennials: moral deism (the belief in a distant god who is not concerned with us very much, but who will give us what we want if we behave in a moral way), but today there is a dominant belief system that actually overrides any religious belief at all and it’s called Moral Relativism (the belief that everyone has the right to believe in god as it is meaningful to you.).

But in our text, God is saying, “no.” There’s only one real God. *The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.* We don’t shape Him. He shapes us, right? That’s what we learned last week too. There is only one God and we are dependant on Him, not the other way around. He’s real. He exists. As much as gravity is real or death is real, God is real. He exists whether we believe in Him or not, but if we want to really know God then we have to know Him as He truly is, we can’t just make up who we want Him to be. We say, here at Harbor, that we know God as He reveals Himself to us in the pages of Scripture.

Some of you might think that view sounds narrow. “You seriously believe there’s only one true God and the God of the Bible is it?” It’s actually not such a narrow view. You believe that there’s only one “you,” right? If someone came up to you and said, “Hey, I’m going to write a book about your life.” We’d probably have to get over the shock of that idea, but then I’m guessing we’d be curious. “What are you going to put in there?” “Well, I like to think of you as an astronaut. In my version of your life you’re brilliant at cooking but terribly abrasive in all your relationships.” Ok... So you reply, “I’m scared of heights, I microwave all my meals and I actually think I’m a nice person.” But the person says, “Well that doesn’t matter. I like to think of you like this.” We would be incredibly frustrated with that person, right? Why? Because there is a reality to who you are that someone writing a book about your life would need to honor.

If God exists, than if anything, He’s more real than you or I. What’s wrong with suggesting that we need to get to know Him as He really is? We don’t get to make Him up for ourselves. We don’t know Him unless we know Him as He truly is.

If any of you still feel that this is still too narrow, let me help you with an ironic truth. Ironically, the God your heart most desperately needs is a God your heart didn't create. Your heart is in desperate need of a God you did not conjure up for yourself. Let me explain. At some point in your life you are going to feel worthless (we all experience this feeling of insignificance), and how can a God you *know* you invented come and tell you that feeling is wrong and that you're valuable? At some point you're going to feel guilty (burdened by the weight of a mistake or a poor choice), and how can a God you know you made up, how can that God come and say, "you're forgiven"?

The deepest need of our hearts is not for a God we invent, but for a God we discover.

Once we know Him, He begins to transform our lives. That's the second thing the Shema says. "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.*" (That's with every aspect of who we are.)

As modern people, using the word "love" the way that we think of the word "love" makes this a little weird. How do you command someone to love? Isn't love a feeling? But that's the point. If love is primarily a feeling, then when you love someone you're only "loving" with a part of yourself. But the command here is to love God with your whole life.

If you want to know what that means, here it is. There are two tests where you can tell if you love God with your whole life (life transformation).

First look at verses six through nine again.. It's talking about how your individual life has changed.

6 *And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today.*

7 *Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. 8 Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Do you see what that says? In the home and on the road means your private life *and* your public life. On the hands and on the head means what you're thinking on the inside and how you're behaving. When you go to bed and when you get up, that's every moment of your life. And to write these commands on the doorposts means they're for the family but to write them on the gates means that they apply to the economic, political and civic life of the entire society.

This is what these verses are saying. If you love God with your whole heart, it means you'll love God with your whole life. You don't just love Him on the weekends. We don't just love Him in our private life and behave in a non-committal way in public. You won't love God with just this person but not that person (because you don't want them to think you're a fanatic). In other words, this love weaves its way into every fabric of your life. We should be constantly asking this question, "How does who God is and what God says affect this?" How I think here. How I act here. Everything. We want every nook and cranny of our lives to be transformed by the love of God.

So, the first test is to see if this calling has transformed every aspect of your individual life, but that's not all. It's also a call to transform every aspect of our lives as a collective. Us. Everyone. How we relate to each other. "*Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.*"

God is not just calling you as an individual to love Him. God is calling individuals who love Him to form a community that loves Him. If you want to know what that means there's a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 10 (10:17-19) that says, **17** "*For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He*

is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed. 18 He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. 19 So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.

That's an amazing text, especially considering the current conversations around refugees and immigrants. Do you understand what God saying in these verses? It's not enough to bring this love for Him into our personal life, it must affect our awareness of others too. God actually goes so far as to say this partiality and caring is for the immigrant and the foreigner. Do you know what that means? God says, "I want not the slightest whiff of racism to be in the community of those who love me. And if there is (if you do show partiality- which is prejudice; if you do discriminate on the basis of nation or culture or race) you've forgotten who you are. You were foreigners in the land of Egypt. You were slaves. You were despised. You were marginalized and I delivered you."

What's God saying? He's not just saying don't be racist. He **is** saying that, but what He's actually saying is, when we discriminate, it shows we haven't fully experienced His grace. It shows we don't fully know that we're sinners saved by grace. We either haven't experienced it or we don't understand what we've experienced, or we haven't thought it out in every area of our life.

When you take a look at what it says in chapter 10- the broad context there- is that we are to love God with all our heart and soul and when we do we will love the foreigner and the orphan and the widow. We clothe them. We feed them. We show no partiality. What that says is, once you've experienced the grace of God (the deliverance of God), you will never wield power in the same way. In God's community, power is the benefit of others- relationally. It's shared.

Look at your life. You've got some skills. An expertise. That's power, you know. And there are two ways you can use that power. You can spend every moment of your life leveraging that power for yourself (humoring yourself; making money for yourself; accumulating), or you can leverage that power for the community in which you live. Serving. Giving. Sharing. If you spend your life using the power that you have to benefit those who have less than you, a lot of people are going to think you're insane. But what you're actually doing is you're using your power relationally. According to this text, if you don't, you're being unjust. Everything we have is a gift of God. You could have been born blind on the streets of Calcutta and then how much would all of your hard work have gotten you? But you weren't.

We are called to love God with our whole lives. It's a command both individually and collectively. We take the love of God and let it transform our lives and our communities. If we only look to God when we're in trouble, or when we need some kind of support, then we are not loving Him with all our heart and soul and strength.

Do you know how we can do this? How do we work God into every corner of our lives? Look carefully. It says, **6** *And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. 7 Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.*"

Do you know what that means? Community. Let me tell you how you're really going to change. There are lots of people who say, "Come to Harbor." Or "Listen to one of the messages and hear what we're learning." Verse seven doesn't say, "listen" it says, "talk." There are plenty of people who take great notes and have learned all of this great knowledge at Harbor but their lives don't change because they don't make themselves available to be in community with other people who love God and are trying to work out what it means to live for Him.

Transformation does not occur through listening alone. It comes through talking too. Have

conversations with people who you are willing to open up with- people who believe in this same God- and when you do it will allow you to wrestle with the real life questions that come up as we are learning about Scripture. That's what our Journey Groups here at Harbor exist for- to provide you an opportunity to connect in conversation with others who are trying to grow in their faith too. We can talk about sex, money, our thought life, our home life, and we can begin to be shaped and molded into people who reflect the heart of God. Journey Groups are a great place for these conversations to take place, but they're not the only option.

Proverbs 27:17 says, *"As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend."* It's who we spend time with, not just who we listen to, that changes you and makes you who you are.

This has been true in my life. In fact those words, "iron sharpens iron" are tattooed on my waist. When I was in college, I moved into a house with six of my friends. We were seven college seniors and I can't believe anyone trusted us enough to let us rent their place. We called it "The Vatican" because all seven of us were single at the time. I lived there for over a year there with my friends as we each completed our ministry degrees. The conversations we had together, sometimes until late at night, about faith, and life, and everything in between, were every bit as formative to who I am today, as the classes I took to learn how to be a pastor. All seven of us have "iron sharpens iron" tattooed on our bodies, because that was our commitment to one another and that's what God was doing in our midst.

Our relationships matter. Who are you surrounding yourself with on this journey of faith? Who are you having conversations with and giving permission to sharpen you and shape you as you seek to reflect the heart of God?

In Matthew's account of Jesus life (Mt. 22) some of the teachers of the law were trying to trap him and they asked Him, **36** *"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"*

Jesus answered by quoting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6.

37 *Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."*

38 *This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* **40** *The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."*

The entire law is based on these two commandments. Loving God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind; and loving our neighbor as we do ourselves- these sound like such simple commands, and yet they are anything but easy. So if they are difficult to keep, and since none of us can obey them fully, why should we even try? The answer is not, "we obey the law otherwise God will get us," or "We obey the law so that God will take us to heaven," or "we obey the law so that God will bless us." No.

Think back to what we read in chapter 10 of Deuteronomy.

We live lives of love (toward God and toward others) because He has delivered us.

We were never slaves in Egypt, but we were slaves to sin. Our disobedience and our inability to fully obey the commands of God left us in a desperate place- separated from God, broken, lost, without hope – and God was not content to leave us in that lowly condition. Jesus Himself, God in the flesh, demonstrated complete obedience to the command to love and He gave His life in exchange for ours. He died- faultless and blameless though He was- He bore our sin and shame- though He had none of His own- and on the cross He demonstrated for all time the lengths to which our God is willing to extend Himself on our behalf.

Don't you see, we love because He first loved us. We obey because our God has delivered us.

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