

The Theology and Design of the

***LOVE FOR GOD SCALE***

*(VERSION 2)*

Michael Zigarelli, Ph.D.  
Regent University

[michzig@regent.edu](mailto:michzig@regent.edu)

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**“Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”**

It doesn't get any more fundamental than this. In the New Testament, this is the first commandment, as taught by Jesus Himself (Matt. 22:37), and in the Old Testament, this is the Israel's credo (Deut. 6:5). This is the bedrock of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the consummate answer to the timeless question: “what is the purpose of life?” It is the Bethlehem Star, so to speak, for those of us sojourning toward Christ-likeness: if you want to be a disciple, follow this command to love God with your whole being.

But even though this is foremost among Christian tenets, legions of Christians, regardless of tenure in the faith, seem to be confused by it. That confusion is largely a result of how we think about what it means to “love” someone. To us, “love” connotes affection: we love our spouse, our kids, our parents, our pets, and so on, and by that, we mean that we have a strong, emotional feeling for them.

When it comes to loving God, though, what is directed in the Great Commandment is not exactly this type of love. This is the source of our contemporary confusion with the Commandment. Jesus does not teach here that we must *feel* love for God in the same emotional, affectionate way that we feel love for our families. Rather – and allow me to be slightly technical for a moment – Jesus calls us to “agape” love for God. That's a Greek word that has less to do with emotion than it does with *disposition*.<sup>1</sup> Jesus taught that to love God is to be humble before Him and to order your life around Him. To flesh this out further, that means at least three things:

- ✠ to humbly surrender our lives to God's will
- ✠ to pursue relationship with God
- ✠ to share that relationship with others, freely and transparently

This directive to “love God,” you see, is a call to *right relationship* and *right actions*, not to right emotions. So, based on this theology, the Love for God Scale (LGS) is designed to measure these three indicators, rather than one's affection for God.

Please note, though, that the LGS is not intended to be a comprehensive, definitive instrument for assessing our love for God. Indeed, no survey tool, much less a self-report tool, could fully capture this latent and complex dimension of our existence. Rather, the LGS is designed to afford us a glimpse at some of the relevant measures of our love for God, yielding a rough estimate of what matters most, and pointing users to some pathways to a deeper, more faithful, and more fulfilling relationship with God.

The three indicators of love for God, as measured by the LGS, are defined in the table below. To estimate each of these dimensions of love for God, a respondent is presented with six sets of three statements and asked to select the statement in each set that

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture scholars have underscored the theology that nowhere in the New Testament does God insist that we feel an emotional love for Him. When the writers of the Bible want to describe that sort of love, they use a different word (*phileo* in Greek). *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* clarifies the distinction: “phileo is never used as a command to men to love God...agapao is used instead” (1996 edition, p. 382).

describes him or her best (hence, in all, there are eighteen sets of three statements in the LGS). The respondent’s answers are then averaged to yield scores for “humility before God,” “relationship with God,” and “fearless faith.”

INDICATOR	DEFINITION
<p><b>HUMILITY BEFORE GOD</b></p>	<p>To be humble before God means, straightforwardly, to acknowledge His place as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of our lives. It is the disposition that we are created for God’s purposes – that we belong to Him, not to ourselves. In the language of the first Beatitude, it is to be “poor in Spirit” (Matt. 5:3). And if that humility is genuine, it manifests itself as surrender, as obedience to God’s will.</p> <p>Obedience is humility in action, the extent to which we actually follow God’s commands. In fact, scripturally-speaking, it is a fundamental gauge of our love: “This is love for God: to obey His commands” (1 John 5:3; cf. also 2 John 6, John 14:15). Similarly, in the Old Testament we read of the centrality of this calling to godly living: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13; cf. also 1 Sam. 15:22, Psalm 15)). The life of one who loves God is a surrendered life – a life of humbly doing things God’s way, rather than doing things our own way.</p>
<p><b>RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD</b></p>	<p>God does not call us to venerate Him from a distance. Quite the opposite, He calls us to an unremitting, life-long quest to know Him and to be in relationship with Him. The person who deeply loves God yearns for God’s presence in his or her life. The psalmist captured this disposition well when he wrote: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God” (Ps. 42:1). Accordingly, pursuit of relationship with God entails more than an interest in God, it is a longing for God’s companionship, a longing to be with God and to hear His voice. This longing is best evidenced by the practice of disciplines that grow relationship with Him (disciplines such as fervent prayer, daily worship, and regular Bible reading). The life of one who loves God is a life of passionate pursuit to have more of God.</p>
<p><b>FEARLESS FAITH</b></p>	<p>Those who love God are appropriately overt about it. We should not fear the condemnation of man, the jeopardy to social relationships, or the family schisms, because “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). As God-pleasers, not man-pleasers (Gal 1:10), we should not conceal our relationship with Him, but instead, we should look for opportunities to share it (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus said that if we confess Him before men, He will confess us before God (Luke 12:8), but if we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us when he returns (Luke 9:26). Just as the prophets and disciples who loved God sacrificed their reputation and suffered persecution for their faith, those of us who love God today should be boldly transparent, no matter what others may think of us. The life of one who loves God is a life of fearless faith, regardless the cost.</p>