

**Focus Scripture:**

**Mark 12:29-31**

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Every once in a while as a professor, I have the good fortune to work with a class in which almost all the students are at the top of their game. Right now I have a class of upperclassmen literature majors who are about as good as a class gets. They come to class having read the material not simply because it was assigned but also because they *want* to read it. They are passionate about literature. They read it with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. When I introduce areas of discussion of material, they engage with all they've got—their humor, their intellect, their intuition, their knowledge. I don't have to use my energy to try to draw them out. On the contrary, I sometimes have to cut off the discussion to move on to other issues. At the end of a class session, the students and I have truly learned because we have held back nothing in our desire to get the most out of our time together.

Contrast that with a group of students who calculate the least amount of effort they will need to expend in order to get a particular grade. These students ask questions like, "Do we *have* to know this?," as if the goal of education is to keep the mind as uncluttered as possible with anything other than what absolutely has to be there. Students like this may do enough to pass a course, but for them, class sessions will feel long and boring as they squirm and daydream and refuse to engage.

When it comes to loving God, Jesus teaches in Mark 12:29-31 that his followers are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and "your neighbor as yourself." We are to love God and others not out of mere obligation or tradition. We are not to be followers of Christ who ask, "Do I *have* to do this?" We are to love with all our heart, mind, soul and strength because God knows that is what true connection with him really means. Half-hearted love is not really love at all.

In my discipline of literature and in my Christian faith, I don't want to be like the sluggish student trying to hold back energy and give only the minimum to get by. I want to be like the believer Jesus describes, who loves with everything I've got.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

1. The kind of fully committed love that Jesus talks about in Mark 12 doesn't always come naturally, but it can be cultivated and nurtured. What are some ways one can do that?
2. This reflection uses the analogy of students in a classroom to explore what difference it makes when we not only *do* something, but do it with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Can you think of other areas of life in which this principle especially applies?
3. What long-term differences would it make in your life if you learned to love God and others more consistently with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength?

**Life/Discipline Application:**

What does this passage mean in your school or department - consider the implications of the passage to your day-to-day lives.

**Personal Reflection:**

What does this mean to you - examine the implications of the passage to your own day to day life.