

The Book of Deuteronomy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: The Shema: Love the Lord Your God

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal center of this lesson is the oneness of God and the wholehearted love He requires. "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" is not a dry statement of arithmetic; it is the ground of exclusive, total devotion. Because God is one, love for Him cannot be divided or shared with rivals. Jesus Himself names this the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38), and so we present it not as an outdated Israelite slogan but as the abiding summit of what God asks of every human heart, then and now.

The lesson also aims squarely at the formation of the student's daily life and household. Moses ties faith to ordinary moments and to the deliberate teaching of children, and he warns that prosperity, not persecution, is often faith's greatest threat. We want the student to feel both the beauty of wholehearted love and the real danger of forgetting God when life is comfortable, and to leave resolved to remember the Lord and to pass Him on.

Finally, we keep the gospel in view. Israel's redemption from Egypt is the pattern of the greater redemption in Christ, and the closing question of the child (6:20-25) shows that faith is passed by rehearsing what God has done. We teach our children, and remind ourselves, by telling the story of redemption, now centered in the cross and empty tomb.

Question 1

Student Question:

What is the Shema (6:4-5) confessing about God, and why does Moses ground the command to love God in the truth that "the Lord is one"?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Shema begins, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (6:4). This single sentence is the bedrock confession of the faith. Against a world crowded with many gods, Israel confesses one God, the Lord, who is unrivaled and undivided. The oneness of God is not merely that there is numerically one deity, but that He is the single, undivided, supreme object of His people's allegiance.

From that confession flows the command: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (6:5). The logic is tight. Because God is one, love for Him must be whole. A divided god could share our hearts with other gods; the one Lord

claims all of us. Heart, soul, and strength together reach for the whole person, inner affections, very life, and full capacity. Nothing is held back.

This is why Jesus, asked for the greatest commandment, answered with the Shema (Matthew 22:37–38; Mark 12:29–30). He did not invent a new ethic; He named the one that had always stood at the summit. Loving God wholly is not one duty among many; it is the duty that orders all the rest. Every other command is an outworking of this one.

For us this remains the highest call. The oneness of God still grounds exclusive, total love. We are not asked merely to acknowledge God, attend to Him on occasion, or fit Him into a busy life. We are asked to love Him with everything, because He is the one Lord and there is no other (Romans 15:4 reminds us this instruction is for us).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The oneness of God as the ground of undivided love
- Heart, soul, and strength: the whole person engaged
- Love for God as the command that orders all others
- Jesus naming the Shema the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37–38)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God's oneness demand wholehearted love?
- What do heart, soul, and strength together cover?
- Why did Jesus reach back to this verse as the greatest command?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus calls loving God with all your heart, soul, and strength the greatest commandment. Honestly, what competes for the love that God asks to have wholly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God asks for all the love, and that is precisely what we find hardest to give. Our hearts are prone to divide. We love God and we love comfort, reputation, security, pleasure, control, and a hundred smaller things, and we are tempted to keep the throne crowded so that nothing has to be surrendered.

The honest question is not whether you love God at all, but what competes. For some it is success, the need to be impressive. For others it is a relationship, a fear, an addiction, a screen. Jesus said no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24); the heart that tries to love God and a rival ends up resenting one of them.

Wholehearted love is not summoned by guilt or willpower; it grows as we behold the love of God for us. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). The path forward is not to grit your teeth and try to love God more, but to gaze at how He has loved you in Christ, and to deliberately remove the rivals that crowd Him out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The divided heart and crowded throne
- Naming what specifically competes for our love
- The impossibility of serving two masters (Matthew 6:24)
- Love for God grown by beholding His love for us

Discussion Prompts

- What most often competes for your love of God?
- Where is your heart trying to serve two masters?
- How might gazing at God's love rekindle yours?

Question 3

Student Question:

How does Moses say these words are to be kept and passed on (6:6–9), and what does this reveal about how God intends faith to take root in a life and a household?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses says the words must first be internal: "These words which I command you today shall be in your heart" (6:6). Faith is not first a matter of doorposts and rituals but of a heart gripped by God's word. Only then does he turn outward to how that internal reality saturates a life.

And it is to saturate everything. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (6:7). The four moments, sitting, walking, lying down, rising, frame the whole day. Faith is not quarantined to formal worship; it is woven into ordinary life, the table, the road, the bedtime, the morning.

The signs on hand and forehead, and the words on doorposts and gates (6:8–9), make God's word visible and constant, a reminder bound to action (hand), thought (forehead), home (doorpost), and community (gates). Whether taken literally or figuratively, the point is total permeation: God's word everywhere, all the time.

This reveals how God intends faith to take root: from a heart, into a home, through ordinary conversation, across a whole life, and down the generations. It is not transmitted by occasional formal instruction alone but by a parent whose love for God spills naturally into everyday talk.

Paul echoes this when he tells fathers to bring up children in the instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith first internal, in the heart, then outward
- God's word woven into ordinary daily life
- Signs and doorposts: total permeation, not compartmentalized faith
- Faith passed from heart to home to the next generation (Ephesians 6:4)

Discussion Prompts

- Why must the words be in the heart before the doorpost?
- What do the four daily moments teach about faith and life?
- Where could God's word permeate your home more?

Question 4

Student Question:

Who in your life is watching how you treat God's words, and how intentionally are you passing your faith to the next generation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Someone is always watching how you treat God's words: children, grandchildren, younger believers, neighbors, coworkers. Faith is more often caught than taught, absorbed from a life that visibly treasures God before it is ever explained in a lesson.

Moses assumes parents who are themselves gripped by God will naturally talk of Him along the way. The most powerful catechism is a parent's unforced delight in the Lord, a faith that shows up not only on Sunday but in how disappointment is handled, how money is spent, how forgiveness is given. Children read the difference between performed religion and real love.

Ask yourself honestly how intentional you are. Faith does not pass on by accident or by osmosis from a culture that no longer believes; it must be deliberately handed down. Whom has God placed in your reach? What ordinary moment this week, a meal, a drive, a bedtime, could become a place to talk naturally of the Lord you love?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith more caught than taught
- The watching eyes of the next generation
- Authentic love versus performed religion
- Intentional, deliberate transmission of faith

Discussion Prompts

- Who is watching how you treat God's word?
- What does your everyday life teach them about God?
- What ordinary moment could you redeem for faith this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

What is the specific danger Moses warns about in 6:10–12 when Israel enters the good land, and what does it reveal about the human heart in times of plenty?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses paints the coming blessing in lavish detail: “great and good cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things which you did not fill, wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant” (6:10–11). Everything is gift, none of it earned. And precisely there lies the danger.

The warning is sharp: “when you have eaten and are full, then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (6:11–12). The peril is not famine but fullness. Hunger drives people to God; satisfaction tempts them to forget Him. The very gifts meant to provoke gratitude can become a reason to ignore the Giver.

This reveals something sobering about the human heart: we are more spiritually endangered by comfort than by hardship. In need we cry out; in plenty we drift. The gifts crowd out the Giver, and we begin to feel self-sufficient, mistaking God's provision for our own achievement (a theme Deuteronomy 8 will press even harder).

The remedy is built into the warning: remember. Remember the Lord who brought you out of bondage. Israel was to anchor present blessing in past redemption, refusing to let prosperity erase the memory of grace. For us, the Lord's Supper each first day of the week is exactly such a deliberate act of remembering, lest fullness make us forget the cross.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every blessing in the land received as gift, not earned
- Fullness, not famine, as faith's great danger
- Gifts crowding out the Giver
- Remembering redemption as the guard against forgetting God

Discussion Prompts

- Why is prosperity more spiritually dangerous than hardship?
- How do good gifts tempt us to forget the Giver?

- What practices of remembering guard your heart?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where do you see in yourself the tendency to forget God when things are going well, and to remember Him chiefly when you are in need?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We pray hardest when we are desperate. In the crisis, the diagnosis, the lost job, the wayward child, we cry out to God with our whole hearts. Then the crisis passes, the comfort returns, and prayer thins out. The pattern is so common we hardly notice it: we remember God chiefly when we need Him and forget Him when we feel fine.

Moses names this tendency before Israel ever sets foot in the land. He knew that the same heart that wept in Egypt could grow cold in a vineyard. The question for us is whether our devotion rises and falls with our circumstances, hot in need, cool in plenty, rather than steady in the love of God for His own sake.

The cure is deliberate remembrance and gratitude in the good times, not only the hard ones. Build into your week intentional thanksgiving that names God as the Giver of the very comforts that tempt you to forget Him. Worship is meant to be the steady act of a remembering people, weekly gathering around the table of the Lord precisely so that fullness never makes us forget the cross.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Praying hardest only in desperation
- Devotion that rises and falls with circumstances
- Forgetting God in plenty, remembering Him in need
- Deliberate gratitude and worship as the cure

Discussion Prompts

- Does your devotion rise and fall with your circumstances?
- When did comfort last cool your love for God?
- How can you practice gratitude in the good times?

Question 7

Student Question:

What does it mean to fear the Lord, serve Him, and not put Him to the test (6:13–19), and how do these commands guard true worship and trust?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses gathers the response God seeks: “You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name” (6:13). To fear the Lord is not cringing dread but reverent awe that takes God seriously as God, the beginning of wisdom. It issues in service and in exclusive loyalty, refusing to go after other gods (6:14), for the Lord is “a jealous God” (6:15) who will share His glory with none.

Then comes a key command: “You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted Him in Massah” (6:16). At Massah Israel had demanded that God prove Himself, quarreling, “Is the Lord among us or not?” (Exodus 17:7). To test God is to put Him in the dock, to demand He perform on our terms before we will trust Him. It is the posture of unbelief dressed up as a reasonable request.

Jesus quoted this very verse to the tempter in the wilderness (Matthew 4:7) when invited to throw Himself from the temple and force God’s hand. He refused to test God, choosing instead to trust the Father’s word. The contrast is striking: Israel tested God in the desert and fell; Jesus, the true Son, trusted God in the desert and stood.

These commands guard true worship and trust. We are to do “what is right and good in the sight of the Lord” (6:18), driving out rivals and keeping His commandments, so that it may go well with us. Reverence, service, exclusive loyalty, and humble trust instead of demanding proof: this is the shape of a heart rightly related to the one Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of the Lord as reverent awe, not cringing dread
- Service and exclusive loyalty to a jealous God
- Testing God as unbelief demanding proof (Massah)
- Jesus refusing to test God in the wilderness (Matthew 4:7)
- Trust and obedience as the shape of true worship

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between godly fear and mere dread?
- What does it mean to put God to the test?
- How did Jesus model trust where Israel modeled testing?

Question 8

Student Question:

When have you been tempted to “test” God, to demand proof or to bargain, rather than to trust and obey Him, and what was underneath that temptation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We test God more often than we admit. We bargain: God, if You do this, I will believe, or serve, or give. We demand signs before we will trust. We treat unanswered prayer as evidence against Him. Underneath the testing is usually a refusal to trust His word unless He performs on our schedule and our terms.

At Massah the people had real thirst, yet their sin was not asking for water but demanding that God prove He was among them, as if His past deliverance counted for nothing. We do the same when we let one hard providence erase a history of faithfulness, putting God on trial rather than trusting the God who has already shown Himself good.

The opposite of testing God is trusting Him. Jesus answered the tempter not with a sign but with settled confidence in the Father's word (Matthew 4:7). When you are tempted to bargain or demand, the deeper need is to remember what God has already done and to rest in His proven character. Trust is not the absence of questions; it is the refusal to put God in the dock.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Bargaining with God and demanding signs
- Letting one hard providence erase a history of grace
- Testing God as the opposite of trusting Him
- Resting in God's proven character instead of demanding proof

Discussion Prompts

- When have you bargained with or tested God?
- What was underneath that demand for proof?
- What has God already done that calls you to trust?

Question 9

Student Question:

When the son asks, "What is the meaning of the testimonies?" (6:20–25), how does Moses answer, and what does this teach us about the place of God's redeeming acts, obedience, and righteousness in the life of His covenant people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses anticipates a day when a son will ask, "What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?" (6:20). It is a profound question: why do we live this way? And notice how Moses answers. He does not begin with rules. He begins with rescue: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (6:21).

The whole answer is a story of redemption before it is ever a list of commands. God saw their bondage, sent signs and wonders, brought them out, and is bringing them in to the land He

swore to give (6:22–23). Only after rehearsing what God has done does Moses speak of what they are to do: “the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always” (6:24). Obedience is the grateful response to redemption, never the price of it. This is the same order we saw in chapter five: God redeems, then He commands.

Here we must read the final verse with care, because it is easily misused: “Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us” (6:25). This is not teaching that Israel earned a standing before God by piling up law-keeping. The verse stands at the end of a paragraph whose whole weight is redemption first. Their right standing flowed from the God who had already chosen and rescued them by grace; faithful obedience was the covenant shape of a life already redeemed, not the wage that purchased redemption.

Indeed, Deuteronomy itself will say plainly that Israel did not receive the land for their righteousness, “for you are a stiff-necked people” (Deuteronomy 9:4–6). Scripture never lets human merit be the ground of standing with God. The Old Law could define righteousness and call for it, but it could not finally produce it in sinful hearts. That is why the prophets longed, and the New Testament announces, a righteousness that is God’s own gift, received through trusting, obedient faith in Christ, not earned by works of law (Romans 3:21–24; Philippians 3:9).

So when our children ask why we live as we do, we answer as Moses did, with the story of redemption, now centered in the cross and empty tomb. We were slaves to sin, and God brought us out with the mighty hand of His Son. We obey, not to earn His love, but because we have received it. We tell the story, we live the life, and we point them to the One in whom righteousness is finally a gift and not a wage. That is how faith, and the gospel itself, passes from one generation to the next.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The child’s question answered first with redemption, not rules
- Obedience as grateful response to grace, never its price
- Righteousness language (6:25) read in its grace-first setting
- Israel not given the land for their merit (Deuteronomy 9:4–6)
- Righteousness ultimately God’s gift, not human merit (Romans 3:21–24)
- Passing the story of redemption to the next generation

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Moses answer the child with rescue before rules?
- How should we understand “it will be righteousness for us”?
- How is righteousness finally a gift rather than a wage?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across Deuteronomy 6, name one specific way Jesus is forming you to love God more wholeheartedly, and what concrete step will you take to remember Him and pass Him on?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Stand back over the whole chapter. We have heard the great confession that the Lord is one, the great command to love Him with everything, the call to weave faith into ordinary life and to hand it to our children, the warning not to let prosperity make us forget Him, the command to trust rather than test, and the story of redemption that answers the child's question. It all circles one center: wholehearted love for the one Lord.

Jesus took this chapter up into His own mouth, naming its command the greatest (Matthew 22:37–38) and answering the tempter from it three times in the wilderness (Matthew 4). To follow Christ is to be formed into a person who loves God like this, not by straining but by beholding the love that redeemed us and letting it claim all our heart, soul, and strength.

So name one specific way Jesus is forming you through Deuteronomy 6. Perhaps He is reclaiming a divided heart, or moving you to remember Him in your comfort, or stirring you to pass your faith on more deliberately. Then choose one concrete step: a rhythm of remembering, a conversation with a child, a rival surrendered. Take it as a response of love to the One who first loved you.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wholehearted love for the one Lord as the chapter's center
- Jesus living out and naming this command (Matthew 22:37–38; Matthew 4)
- Being formed to love God by beholding His love for us
- A concrete step of remembering, surrender, or passing faith on

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter is God pressing on you?
- How is Jesus forming you to love God more wholly?
- What single concrete step will you take, and when?