

Small Group Guide

Based on Mark 12:28-34 — “Go the Distance”

Overview

In this sermon, Pastor Virgil walks through a pivotal encounter in the Gospel of Mark where a scribe asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest. Rather than getting lost in the complexity of over 630 laws, Jesus distills faithful living down to two commanding priorities: love God with everything you have, and love your neighbor as yourself. The sermon challenges us to examine whether we are truly “plugged in” to these commands or merely sitting near them — and to consider what it means to go the distance in our faith without stopping short of the finish line.

Key Takeaways

1. The greatest commandment calls us to love God with our whole being — heart, soul, mind, and strength — not as a religious obligation but as a response to who He is.
 2. Loving our neighbor flows out of our love for God. Without a vertical relationship with God, horizontal love for others is unsustainable.
 3. Comprehending Scripture is not enough. Comprehension must lead to application — we must “plug in” and actively use what God has given us.
 4. God has gifted every believer for a purpose. Using those gifts, even imperfectly, is an act of faithfulness.
 5. We are closer to the finish line than we may realize. Do not stop short. Keep persevering.
-

Opening Icebreaker

Take a few minutes to get the conversation started before diving into the discussion questions.

- Have you ever come close to finishing something difficult — a race, a project, a goal — and almost quit? What kept you going, or what caused you to stop?
-

Discussion Questions

Section 1 — The Complexity We Face (Mark 12:28)

Sunday School Lesson – “Go the Distance” – Adult

1. The scribe came to Jesus with a genuine question, unlike the Sadducees who were trying to trap him. What do you think it looks like to approach God's Word with an honest, seeking heart rather than a defensive or critical one?
 2. Pastor Virgil noted that God originally gave humanity one instruction in the garden, not hundreds of rules. What does that tell you about the kind of relationship God has always wanted with people?
 3. In what areas of your own life do you find yourself adding rules or expectations — either to yourself or others — that go beyond what God actually requires?
-

Section 2 — The Commandment Clarified (Mark 12:29-31)

4. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 — the Shema — as the foundation of the greatest commandment. Why do you think it matters that He starts with the declaration that God is one before getting to the command to love Him?
 5. Jesus says to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Think about each of those four areas individually. Which one feels most natural in your relationship with God right now? Which one feels most neglected?
 6. Pastor Virgil described the cross as the intersection of vertical love for God and horizontal love for neighbor. How does the cross change the way you think about loving the people around you, especially those who are difficult to love?
 7. Galatians 5:14 summarizes the entire law in the command to love your neighbor as yourself. In practical terms, what does loving your neighbor look like in your daily routine — at work, at home, in your neighborhood?
-

Section 3 — Comprehension That Leads to Action (Mark 12:32-33)

8. The scribe did not just repeat what Jesus said — he understood it and affirmed it. Pastor Virgil used the image of a phone sitting next to a charging cable but never plugged in. Where in your spiritual life do you feel like you are near the source but not fully connected?
 9. The scribe recognized that love for God and neighbor is greater than religious rituals and sacrifices. Are there any religious habits or routines in your life that have become substitutes for genuine love and obedience? How do you tell the difference?
 10. Pastor Virgil shared that he was afraid to teach a Sunday school class when first asked, but that stepping out in that small way eventually opened doors he never expected. Can you think of a time when you said yes to something small for God and it led somewhere significant?
-

Section 4 — A Compelling Confidence (Mark 12:34)

11. Jesus told the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." What do you think it means to be close but not yet fully in? What is the difference between intellectual agreement with truth and genuine surrender to it?
 12. Pastor Virgil reminded us that we do not know when our last day will be. How does that reality shape the urgency with which you want to love God and serve others this week?
 13. The sermon closed with the encouragement not to stop short — like the swimmer who gave up within a mile of the shore or the football player who dropped the ball at the one-yard line. What does "stopping short" look like in the Christian life? What are the most common reasons people do it?
-

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice before your group meets again.

- **Heart Check:** Set aside 15 minutes this week to sit quietly before God and ask Him honestly which of the four areas — heart, soul, mind, or strength — you are holding back from Him. Write down what He shows you.
 - **Plug In:** Identify one spiritual discipline you have been sitting near but not fully engaging — Bible reading, prayer, serving, giving, community. Take one concrete step this week to actually engage it.
 - **Love Your Neighbor:** Think of one specific person in your life who is difficult to love. Commit to one intentional act of love toward that person this week, not because you feel like it, but because you are commanded to.
 - **Use Your Gift:** If you have been sitting on a gift or a sense of calling because you feel unqualified, take one small step toward using it. Talk to a pastor, sign up to serve, or simply say yes to the next opportunity that comes.
 - **Pray on the Spot:** Following Pastor Virgil's example, the next time someone asks you to pray for them, stop and pray with them right then and there instead of promising to do it later.
-

Closing Reflection

Pastor Virgil closed the sermon with this challenge:

"Lord, what are you wanting me to do? What are you calling me to do? I know what I've been doing for you, but Lord, how can I serve you more? What giftings have you given me that I haven't even begun to use? Lord, show them to me. Burden me for it. And help me to have the courage to go the distance as I serve you."

Take a moment as a group to pray this prayer together, either silently or aloud. Invite each member to bring one specific request before God related to what was discussed tonight.

Memory Verse for the Week

Mark 12:30-31 — Reflect on Jesus' summary of the two greatest commandments: loving God with your entire being and loving your neighbor as yourself. Consider writing it out by hand and placing it somewhere visible throughout the week.

Guide prepared from the sermon "Going the Distance" preached at First Baptist Church.