

MWPC Small Groups

October – November 2021



*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.
And as for you, you shall love the LORD your God with
all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

The Shema Study

Mt. Washington Presbyterian Church

mwpc-church.org

Welcome to Small Groups

**Let us consider how to provoke one another
to love and good deeds,
not neglecting to meet together. . .
but encouraging one another
Hebrews 10:24-25**

When the Holy Spirit came upon people, transformation happened. It not only changed their understanding of Jesus but inspired them to relate to each other with more profound love and care.

As those early Christians discovered, small groups are a great place to deepen relationships, grow in our faith, and promote Christ's mission in the world. In small groups we can genuinely be known in an intentional, Christian community.

The subject of this small group study is the *Shema*. This important and well-known Jewish prayer packs a lot of meaning into just a few words. Becoming more familiar with the original Hebrew words can enlarge our understanding of what it means to love God fully.

Why is this important?

Knowing and loving God is how we can experience the fullness of life. When we align our hearts with God's, we will naturally care about what God cares about and fulfill our roles as God's partners in bringing about creation's flourishing on the earth.

Our thanks to the Bible Project for the graphics and videos. You can find them online at bibleproject.com. The background and discussion questions were written by Pastor Debbie.

Week 1: Shema / Listen



*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.
And as for you, you shall love the LORD your God with
all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Opening Questions

1. What are the qualities of a good listener?

2. Would your friends describe you as a talker or a listener?

Background

The Jews pray the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) every morning and evening as a call to listen and respond to the affirmation that Yahweh alone is the one true God. The appropriate response is to love God with our entire being.

Jesus agreed when asked about the greatest commandment in the Hebrew Bible. He answered the question by quoting the *Shema* (Matthew 22:37).

Watch and Discuss

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/shema-listen/>

Explore what the word *shema* means

1. What stood out to you about what the word *shema* means?

2. How different is this from the way you use the word listen?

Read and Reflect**Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9****Reflect**

1. How do you hear God's voice in your life?

2. How do you tend to respond to God?

3. What are some ways you can remind yourself of who God is on a daily basis?

Check-In and Prayer Requests

Week 2: YHWH / LORD



*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.
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all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Opening Questions

1. As a kid, were you more obedient or more rebellious?
2. Give us a childhood story that illustrates your attitude toward authority.

Background

The Bible has many names for God, but the primary one is YHWH or Yahweh. When you see the word LORD in the Old Testament, this capitalized word is the English translation for YHWH. To the Jews, so sacred is the name YHWH that it is not said aloud.

Different from the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, the meaning of YHWH describes God as the one who has authority over all human life. Therefore, as the LORD of all, YHWH is to be respected, obeyed, and honored.

Watch and Discuss

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/yhwh-lord/>

Explore what the word *Yahweh* means

1. What stood out to you about what the word *Yahweh* means?

2. How does the Jewish treatment of the name of YHWH challenge the Christian treatment of the name LORD? How do you think this impacts our understanding of God as LORD?

Read and Reflect

Read Exodus 3:1-15

Reflect

1. If you were Moses, how would you have responded to this vision and the LORD's command?

2. What do you notice about the LORD's character?

3. How do you experience the LORD's care for you?

Check-In and Prayer Request

Week 3: Ahavah / Love



*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.
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Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Opening Question

1. What are your primary love languages? Words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, acts of service, gift-giving?
2. What do you imagine God's primary love language to be?

Background

The Bible has diverse stories and descriptions of love. The most powerful one is the concept of infinite, inclusive, and enduring divine love.

Most of us give love in response to a benefit we gain. When we don't get what we want, we withhold, punish, and make demands.

God's love, on the other hand, transcends transactional categories. It is a love that endures rejection, disobedience, open rebellion, and ridicule. God embraces everyone!

Watch and Discuss

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ahavah-love/>

Week 4: Lev / Heart



*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.
And as for you, you shall love the LORD your God with
all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Opening Question:

1. What does it mean to be a whole-hearted person?

2. Who do you know like that? What are they like?

Background

The biblical concept of the heart is far more than the organ that pumps blood in your chest. For the ancient Hebrews, the heart was the center of human thought, emotions, and motivations. In other words, your heart is the essence of who you are. Utilizing the full range of your feelings and thoughts, the heart guides and persuades you.

Even so, the heart can be deceived, broken, and set against God's best purposes. The heart can also be selfish and evil, which can lead one to harm others.

Watch and Discuss

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/lev-heart/>

Explore what the word *lev* means

1. What stood out to you about what the word *lev* means?

2. How is this different from how you use the word heart?

Read and Reflect

Read Psalm 26

Reflect

1. How does the Psalmist depict integrity as the consistency between thoughts, feelings, and actions?

2. What drives you more – your thoughts or your emotions? How do you struggle with the integration of mind and heart with the choices you make?

3. This week, how can you love God with your whole *lev*?

Check-In and Prayer Requests

Week 5: Nephesh / Soul



*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.
And as for you, you shall love the LORD your God with
all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Opening Questions

1. What do you think happens when someone dies?

2. Describe what you believe is the relationship between body, mind, and spirit.

Background

According to the dictionary, the soul is the intangible essence of all human beings. However, for many Christians, the soul is the realm of the spiritual life – something that lives on after death.

In Jesus' day, the soul was much more. Because the Israelites didn't have the Greek understanding of the separation of spirit and the physical realm, they held that the material and spiritual essence could not be known apart from one another.

Watch and Discuss

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/nephesh-soul/>

Explore what the word *nephesh* means

1. What stood out to you about what the word *nephesh* means?

2. What are the implications to our spiritual lives when the soul includes our physical being rather than simply a ghost that lives inside us?

Read and Reflect

Read Psalm 94:16-23 in the NRSV translation

Reflect

1. Read the psalm substituting
 - *entire being* for the word *soul*
 - *affection and actions* for the word *love*
 - *mind, emotions, and motivations* for the word *heart*

How does your expanded understanding of *ahava/love*, *lev/heart*, and *nephesh/soul* deepen your insight in the Psalmist's experience of God's care?

2. What would loving God with your *nephesh* look like? How can you grow in dedicating your entire being to God?

Check-In and Prayer Requests

Week 6: Meod / Strength



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Opening Questions

1. What do you love more than anything else in the world?

2. How do you show your love and affection for this thing or person you treasure?

Background

Translating from one language to another is always a challenge. Often, concepts and meanings don't have a one-to-one correlation with a word in English. Strength is one of these challenges.

In the English translation of the Shema, strength is a noun. However, in Hebrew, the word is an adverb. Thus, it is used to intensify the meaning of the word it modifies. "Very" is a common translation. Standing alone, as it does in the Shema, it means to love God with all your possibilities, abilities, and capacities.

Watch and Discuss

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/meod-strength/>

Explore what the word *meod* means

1. What stood out to you about what the word *meod* means?

2. How do you interpret strength when considering how to love God with all your *meod*?

Read and Reflect**Read Joshua 1:1-9**

The Hebrew words for strong and courageous mean to be strengthened. However, one means to be firm and the other to be brave. In Joshua 1:7, the word *meod* modifies both words, which means that you must be very committed and very resolute in your trust in God.

Reflect

1. How can you apply these principles in your life?

2. How have you grown during this small-group experience?

Checking In and Prayer Requests