

Worship Message
August 23, 2026

Today we're stepping into two moments in Scripture that are separated by centuries, but tied together by one simple question: **What does it look like to put God first in real life — in our lives — right now?**

Let's start with Exodus.

When we meet the Israelites in Exodus 20, they're standing at the foot of Mount Sinai. They've just come out of Egypt — and Egypt wasn't just a place, it was a system. A system that told them their worth was measured in bricks, labor, and how much they could produce. A system that said rest was for the powerful, not for people like them.

Let me repeat that...rest is not for people like them. That hits close to home.

Because we live in a world that often tell us:

- You're only valuable if you're busy.
- You're only successful if your calendar is full.
- You're only doing life right if you're exhausted.

We live in a world where people brag about how little sleep they get, where kids are scheduled like CEOs, where families eat dinner in the car between activities, and where we measure our days by how much we got done instead of how present we are.

And I'll tell you — I often have those kinds of days that frequently turn into weeks. You know the kind: everything piles up at once. Work, errands, family needs, a home appliance that decided to fail at the worst possible moment. Weeks where I keep thinking, "I'll pray later," or "I'll rest later," or "I'll breathe later." By Thursday, I'm not only just breaking the Sabbath — I am breaking myself.

But God doesn't scold me; God invites me to breathe. He invites me to remember that freedom doesn't look like constant motion. It looks like trust.

So when God says, "You shall have no other gods before me," God isn't just talking to ancient people with golden calves. God is talking to us — people who make idols out of achievement, productivity, fear, control, and the constant pressure to keep up. And those idols? They never stop demanding things from us. But God says, "Let me be first so you can finally breathe."

Then comes the Sabbath commandment. "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." God isn't saying, "Take a day off if you can squeeze it in." God is saying, "You are not a machine. You are not defined by output. Rest is holy."

And I think we need that reminder more than ever. Because today, Sabbath is almost countercultural. Sabbath means turning off the notifications. Sabbath means letting the dishes sit for a minute. Sabbath means telling your calendar, “You don’t get to run my life.” Sabbath means remembering that God is God...and we don’t have to be.

And right alongside the Sabbath commandment comes another one we sometimes breeze past: “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.” We usually hear that as “don’t swear,” but it’s really about treating God’s name with the kind of respect that shows we mean it. It’s about not using God’s name casually or as background noise — not tossing “Oh my God” into a sentence without thinking, or using God’s name to make a point sound stronger than it is. In a world full of quick reactions and throwaway lines, honoring God’s name simply means slowing down enough to remember who we’re talking about. It’s giving God real attention, not leftover attention.

Let me confess something. Most mornings, I wake up and reach for my phone before anything else. Before prayer. Before gratitude. Before coffee. I open the news, email, texts, social media —and within a few minutes, my heart rate is up and my peace is gone. I haven’t even gotten out of pajamas yet, and already I am stressed about things happening at work and three states away. This is not giving God attention. This is “not loving God with all my heart, soul, and mind.” This is loving my phone.

And, here’s a harsh reality....**whatever gets our first attention often becomes our first love.**

I recently attended the **Global Leadership Summit**, a gathering hosted by the Global Leadership Network that brings together voices from business, ministry, education, and public life to help everyday people lead with wisdom and compassion. One of the speakers was **Arthur Brooks**, a social scientist and one of the world’s leading authorities on human happiness (who knew there needed to be an authority of that?). Brooks talked about how we have to »rage.against.the.machine« .meaning the machine of distraction, noise, and constant digital stimulation that pulls our attention away from what matters most. God.

He encouraged us to reclaim the **first hour of the day, mealtimes, and the last hour of the day** as sacred spaces. Not for scrolling, not for reacting, but for **conversation, meditation, and faith** —moments where we transcend ourselves and remember who we are and whose we are.

I don’t think God minds that we have phones. I just think God minds when the phone gets more devotion than He does. Brooks’ words were a good reminder that loving God with heart, soul, and mind sometimes starts with simply putting the phone down and lifting our eyes up.

It doesn’t seem like too much to ask.

Now, let's jump forward to Jesus in Matthew. He's in Jerusalem, surrounded by people trying to trap him with tricky questions. And someone asks, "Teacher, which commandment is the greatest?" And Jesus doesn't hesitate. He says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind." And then he adds, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It's like Jesus is saying, "If you want to understand everything God said at Sinai — the commandments, the prophets, the whole story — start with love."

Love God. Love your neighbor. Everything else hangs on that. And again — this hits home.

Because loving God today might look like choosing prayer before checking your phone. It might look like giving God your attention instead of giving it to the next crisis in your news feed. It might look like trusting God more than you trust your own worry. And loving your neighbor today? Well, that might look like slowing down enough to actually see people. It might look like treating the cashier, the coworker, the neighbor who tests your patience, with dignity. It might look like listening instead of reacting. It might look like choosing compassion over being right. It might look like remembering that every person you meet is carrying something heavy — even if they never say it out loud.

And sometimes loving your neighbor looks like biting your tongue when you really want to say, "Bless your heart," but you know you don't mean it in the nice way.

When God says, "Have no other gods before me," and Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," they're inviting us into a life that is centered, grounded, and free. A life where love — not fear, not busyness, not achievement — is the guiding force. A life where rest is holy. A life where neighbors matter. A life where God isn't squeezed into the margins but welcomed into the center.

This isn't a burden. It is a gift.

So today, may we hear these commandments not as rules, but as invitations. May we let God be first — not just in theory, but in the way we actually live our days. May we rest in the grace of Sabbath. May we love God with our whole selves. And may that love spill out into our neighbors, our families, our communities, and our world.

And if your phone buzzes before we get to the final amen, may God give you the courage to ignore it and bless you with a moment of peace before you give in.

Amen.