

**Education Convocation 2025**  
**“Cultivating the Whole Person”**  
**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

Please remain standing for the reading of the word. You can turn in your Bibles if you have them to Deuteronomy 6: 4-9.

*<sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.<sup>Ⓦ</sup> <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

Let us pray.

Heavenly father, as we come to this greatest of commandments, I pray, Lord, that you would give us understanding. Give us minds that understand the things that are written here. Give us hearts. Lord, we pray that you would hear the voice of the Shepherd in the midst of these words of Scripture, dear Lord, and that you would ultimately give us mouths that respond with worship, and hands that respond with doing the work that you have called us to in this world. So in Christ's name we pray.

Amen.

My name is Scott Redd. I'm the new lead pastor here at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. If I haven't met you yet, it's great to have you here. Please grab me after the service. I'd love to meet you in person, but it's a special honor to be able to speak to this back to school night, as it were. This convocation of the school year. I myself am quite interested and have spent a good bit of time in education. When I was working on my MDiv, I was teaching, 10th grade, at a school in Orlando. And then later on, when I was doing my PhD, one of the ways I got to pay the bills, but it ended up becoming much more than just that was that I got to write the curriculum and teach in our high school program at our church as well, of course, later going on and working in seminary, so, and graduate theological education. So I keep and hold the calling of being an educator in high esteem.

And as we mentioned already, education is about so much more than just conveying ideas. And that's why I wanted to turn our attention this evening to this passage that the greatest of teachers calls the greatest commandment. I mean, how can you go wrong on a convocation

night to look at Deuteronomy six four through nine? This is a passage that Jesus, when he is talking with his interlocutors, during his ministry in Judah and in Galilee, if someone said, if he asked someone, what's the greatest commandment? They all know what it is, and he agrees with them. And it's what we find here in Deuteronomy six.

Now, since you are educators, I do feel as if I need to do some teaching tonight. So by the end of the night, you're going to learn a little bit of Hebrew. Okay? Don't hold it against me, but you're going to learn a little bit of Hebrew. And here's the first word that you're going to learn. And it's just because I'm going to keep saying it. If I don't tell you what it is, it's just my habit. This passage in the Bible, Deuteronomy six four through nine, has been known for millennia. Okay, this is not new information. This has been known for millennia as the shama. Now, some of you I know this. You've heard this before in a Sunday school or in a Bible study. But I just want to tell you, because I will call this the summer while I am talking about it. And I can't help it. It's just stuck in my head that way. So the word shama. Okay, say that with me. Shama. Okay. That word is just an imperative verb. And you know what it means? It means here. It's just the first word of this prayer. Here. Oh, Israel, Shammah Israel I don't I will handle, I don't I hard okay, Shama, listen here. Jesus Christ himself as a as a second temple Jewish observer of the Old Testament would wake up in the mornings, might quite likely and say, Shama Israel, I don't know how you would recite this in his rising up. He would recite it in his sitting down. We know, because that was common practice in those days, and we also see him do it even as he's about to be betrayed and he's praying to the Lord. He can't help it. The shama just comes out. So we'll come back and look at that in just a minute.

So what is this? What is Deuteronomy six? Why is this a value? And I want to argue it's because this really is, as Christ and his followers say, this really is the greatest commandment. This is the beating heart of the old covenant. Now it's given immediately after the Ten Commandments in the book of Deuteronomy. If you know Deuteronomy, you know the Ten Commandments come in chapter five, and they act kind of like a table of contents for the rest of the book. So it comes immediately afterwards. We've just been given the Ten Commandments, and now we're given this statement of belief that really is both an undergirding of all of the Ten Commandments -- is kind of a theological foundation that all of the Ten Commandments spring out of -- but also in some ways is a is an explanation or an explication of that first commandment. There's only one God. Don't have any other gods. There's only one.

You see how the summa Deuteronomy six is kind of unpacking that for the people of Israel, and it's important. It's an important thing to learn. After all, the fact of God's oneness God is one would help the people of Israel as they are about to go into the land, which is what's happening in Deuteronomy.

They're having a bit of a pep rally in the steps of Moab, right before they go into the land and conquest. And Moses is reminding them, this is how you ought to stay secure and safe from all of the temptations that you're going to run into when you enter into the land. Remember, don't forget the Lord is one. The Lord is our God.

So what does this teaching mean? Well, it seems odd to have more than one point in a sermon about the summer. After all, the whole point of the summer is about the oneness of God. So let me give it to you in this way. Let me give it to you very simply. This is what Deuteronomy six is teaching us. The greatest commandment in Deuteronomy six. In the shema God is calling his people to an integrated life of covenantal affection. He's calling his people to an integrated life of covenant affection. See, this is the logic of it. If the Lord is one, if he is indeed unique and singular than his people are called to respond to him in kind, each one is called to an integrated, not a fragmented life.

That's an important distinction here, and it's important throughout the rest of Scripture because this needs to be said. Ever since the fall, there's a thing that was introduced when sin came into the world. There was this kind of fragmentation and division. We see it right away where God and humanity have been dwelling in communion in the garden and having this kind of loving, enterprise of naming animals and working together. Suddenly now the Lord who comes in the cool of the day to be with his friends, who he has made here in the garden as he's walking in the cool of the day, he calls for the man and the woman. But where are they? They're hiding - covering themselves because with sin, fragmentation enters into the world and fragmentation can only be maintained. And we see it all the way back at that. At the beginning, it can only be maintained by careful secrecy and deceit.

But you see, what Moses is saying here in Deuteronomy six is that the Lord has not abandoned this integration project. He has not abandoned his call for us to be whole in him, to be complete in him. As a matter of fact, he is about the work of restoring our wholeness, restoring our integrated life with him, breaking apart the fragmentation that pushes against it.

So let's look at the logic of the shema. Let's just work through the ideas here. Now notice first of all, it starts with who God is – hear o Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. Okay, so we get two ideas about God. First of all, he's our God. Second of all, he's one. Well, what does that mean for him to be our God? Does that mean that we own him? Is he is he someone who I can, I can, I can carve into a little idol and put in my back pocket and say, He's my God, I own this God. This is what Isaiah is making fun of in Isaiah 43:4-8. And he talks about the idol maker who's whittling out the little idol, and then he puts the little idol on the mantel and he bows down and he says, oh, my creator. And Isaiah says, you just created him. And now you're calling him your creator. He says that how God is our God. Actually know the way that the Lord is. Our God is not because we own him, but because he has entered into a relationship with us. That is

a binding relationship. You see, the Lord has entered into a relationship called covenant with Israel. And not only therefore, can he make claims on Israel and tell Israel how they ought to live and what they ought to do and what he is doing through them.

But interestingly and kind of radically, if you think about it, the creator of the universe, by entering into covenant with Israel, is inviting Israel to make claims on him, saying, you can pray to me in my name and I'll hear you. I promise you can come to me and ask for the things that I have said that I will bless you with. And guess what? I'll hear you and I'll give them to you. You can come before me, and I won't cast you out. Even though you deserve to be cast out. I'll welcome you in and I will love you because I am your God and you are my people. So notice that's the first step of the Shema. The Lord is our God.

But then he goes on to say, even more than that, he says, the Lord is one. Now that can be translated in a couple of ways, and depending on which Bible you have, it's either the Lord is one or it could be the Lord is our God, the Lord alone, or it could be only the Lord is our God. These are all ways that we can translate it, but those are all different ways of saying the same thing. God is our covenant God. He is our God, and he is that alone. He is singular in his role as our covenant God. Now, many theologians rightly point to this being an early expression of monotheism, and it is that. And yet we have to recognize it's an expression of monotheism. But in a much more kind of interesting way than just saying there's only one God. This is actually a response to the way that people thought about gods back in those days. You have to understand that gods were understood to be kind of out there in the world as and showing up in the different ways in which nature kind of acts into our lives.

You know, if a storm cloud comes over the hill, they'll say, oh, that must be a god. That's Bael. He's the these are the Thunder Cloud God. Or if I'm growing my vegetation in the field, they say, oh, this is Dagon, the, the vegetation god. Or if I'm on the coastline of Philistia and I'm worrying about the coastal tides breaking over the dunes and flooding my fields with saltwater, they say, oh, that's got the god Yam. And I have to pray to your so that I'll be protected from those waters. And yet notice throughout the Old Testament, how is the Lord continually presenting himself, continually saying, I'm not the God of just one natural phenomenon? As a matter of fact, many of these names occur in Genesis one, and we hear about the sea in Genesis one. It's called Yam. That's the name of the of the sea deity. But notice in Genesis one it is not a deity, it's just a thing. Okay? You have the heavenlies, you have the clouds. But notice the heavenlies in the clouds are not a god, they're just a thing. The sun is not a god. It's just a thing because there's only one God, one creator. That's the kind of God that the Lord is.

Our covenantal God is a God who has one. Now it's not only one. He's also singular. Okay, let me tell you what I mean by that. You may notice in the Bible, when you're reading in the Old Testament stories and someone is going to a pagan temple, they'll go to, for instance, the

Temple of Bael in Hebron and if they don't get the thing that they want, they can go down the road to the Temple of Bael in Peor. As a matter of fact, you'll have different Bael mentioned in the Old Testament. You'll have bael Hebron, you have bael Gaza. You can have bael from all over these different cities because these are really different versions of Bael. As a matter of fact, if I want Bael to give me something and I ask him and he doesn't give it to me, I can go to the bael down the road and maybe he'll give it to me.

You notice, by the way, in the story of Abraham, there's a sense in which Abraham seems to think that the Lord acts this way, too. It's kind of limited to jurisdictions -- Abraham is in the land and he's been called out and ends up in the Promised Land, and there he's serving the Lord. But then the Lord calls him to go down into Egypt. And you remember what he does? He comes up with this plan to protect his wife and his family from the king in Egypt. It seems as if he thinks that the Lord won't have power there. The maybe only the Lord has power in Canaan. But if you go to Egypt and you're now subjugated to the Egyptian gods, like Amon-Ra and Anubis and Nut you have to you have to worry about those gods and not about the Lord.

And yet, what does he find out? As soon as he gets to Egypt, he finds out that the Lord is God there too. This would mean something to Moses audience who's listening to him say that the Lord is one. They would have seen how the Lord reigns in Egypt just as much as he reigns in Israel. You see, our God is one. He is indivisible. He is not fragmented himself. He he's not broken into many different parts, but he is singular and whole. And that tells us something about how we ought to respond to him. He's our covenant God, and he is one God.

Now notice, let's follow within this theology of the Shama. So he's our God. He's one. Now notice what happens. This faithful theology leads us to a faithful affinity here, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one. Therefore you shall respond in kind because he's your covenantal God. What should you do? The only proper way to respond to a covenantal God love him. That's the that's the emotion of covenant -- love. You know him -- now Love him. But not only supposed to love him, we're supposed to love him in a manner that is appropriate for a God who is one. Love him with all of yourself. Love him with your heart and with your soul and with your strength.

Now bear with me as a Hebrew teacher. Okay? We're going to talk about those words for a minute because of the King James, which is a great translation. We all say heart, soul and strength or heart, soul and power or effort or something like that. But listen, I just want to talk about these words for a minute. So the first Hebrew word you learned was shama. Here there's the second Hebrew word. You're going to learn. It's the one that's translated heart. Okay. It's the word lev. That's the word for heart. Now, we have to be careful here. Because ever since the Greeks came on the scene, we think about the heart as being the seat of the emotions. Right? You know, I love you with all my heart. Okay. my heart goes out to you. Means my emotions --

my feelings go out to you. And. Yet, I would point out, do you notice in Scripture there is not in the old Testament. Rather, there's not a big difference made between the heart and the mind. The lev of the heart is the inner person. Think about the Father in Proverbs, teaching the son and saying, pay attention to what I say. Put my teachings on your heart. What's he saying? Memorize them. Bring them inside. Put them on the inner parts of you. You see, you can you can imagine how Israelites like we do recognize that there is an inner self. I can be in a room. I can be saying things and talking and doing things. And yet I have an inner life. I have thoughts, I have ideas, I have opinions, and yes, sometimes those things are emotions. But often, more often than not, those things are just thoughts. They're just ideas. It's just reasoning. It's a matter of fact. It's not until the Hellenization of the ancient world that you get people making a distinction between heart and mind. As a matter of fact, when Jesus talks about this passage in the New Testament, have you noticed how sometimes people add the word mind to the text of the Shema? Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all your soul, all of your strength, and all of your mind. Think what's happening there is that actually those people are translating this idea of heart, and they're unpacking it in a Hellenization context, saying, I'm not just talking about the emotions, I'm talking about reason too. This is the realm of the teachers and not to form the hearts, the inner lives of the people who are put under our care.

So the first word is this the lev. The lev, the inner self is meant to be directed towards the love with covenant. It is towards the Lord with covenantal love. But then we get to this next thing, this translated soul. Okay, now this Hebrew word is nefesh. Okay, so you're that almost no first syllables, very short for syllable nefesh. So that with me nefesh perfect good. Lev - nefesh. What is the nefesh? Well, the nefesh is an interesting word too, because it kind of it its base, it means something like my throat. Okay, so that's interesting. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart. And then with all of your throat. But it has a meaning that kind of develops in the ancient world to me. Something more like, your appetite, your desire. Okay. Truths. Okay, I mean that, but then it really settles in with this meaning of your person, okay? Your person. So the King James isn't wrong to translate its soul. However, it's soul in a way that we don't often use the word soul anymore, though it does show up. It's the old way of using the word soul. It does show up from time to time, sadly, when planes crash and when ships sink. We have a way of saying, when you hear that a plane crash, you hear someone say, there are 185 souls on board right now. Notice what they're saying. Is not there 185 ephemeral spirits on board. They're not saying that. They're saying they're 185 people on board. You see, the nefesh is where you end in the world begins.

There's a recent translation of the Old Testament, some very good one by Robert Alter. He teaches out at UC Berkeley. He's an excellent Hebrew scholar, Jewish scholar. He translates this text and he translates nefesh as body. That's not a bad translation. It's not it's not the whole thing, but it's not a bad translation.

It's a matter of fact. I would argue that Moses tells us what the nefesh is because look what he says in the very next section after he says, love the Lord your God with all of your lev your nefesh and your mode. We'll get to that in a second. What does he say? Therefore put these words on your heart, okay? Memorize them. Put them on your inner self. Bind them to your hands. Put it on your face. Right. Bind it to your person. See, our bodies matter even in the Old Testament.

Paul's not saying a new thing when he says, be careful what you do with your body. It matters what you do with your body. It matters what you do with your person, because that's supposed to be devoted to the love of the Lord.

Well, lev and nefesh. Heart and soul, heart and person, heart and self. Those are kind of easy words to work with. This last one is a toughie. Okay, the word is meod, It also has a very short first syllable, just meod. Now here's the thing. This is a very common Hebrew word in the Old Testament.

It actually is an adverb, and it can be translated almost everywhere. It occurs in the Old Testament as very. It means very, very. If you're very strong, you're strong meod. Okay. If you're if you're very holy, you're, holy meod, if you're very wise, you're chokmah meod, you're very wise. And yet notice he's using it here like it's a noun. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your person and all of your very.

Now, I wish I could say we can look at other languages like Aramaic or eukaryotic or something, and it will shed a light on what this word means, but we can't. This is a unique Hebrew thing, so the best thing that we can do is go look at other translations, look at those old translations like the Greek and the Aramaic.

And one thing that we notice as we look at the Targum, those are the Aramaic translations and, and in commentaries where we look at the Greek, which is known as the Septuagint, one thing we notice is this when they're translating this word, you know how they translate it. They translate it as property, wealth. What you own. Actually, interestingly, they use words that mean something like our English words estate or capital.

Even when the Greeks translated to Dunamis, which is where we get the word dynamite from. Okay, that's power, right? Which is where the King James gets the word strength when it says all of your strength, the power. But it's not power like my physical muscles. It's power like my effect in the world. I think about a king's strength. It's not in his personal, you know, it's not like he lifts weights or something and works out. What is it? It's his army. It's as wealth that's his treasury. It's his castle. See? What are we seeing here? We're seeing this kind of emanating love. It begins in the heart. It goes out to the person and extends to what we might call the estate or the capital. The outward effect. I like to translate this as something to wordy, so it wouldn't work for

a Bible translation, but it means something like this your outward effect in the world around you.

You see, Israel is being told what you do with your time and your energy, and your wealth tells you something about where your heart is. As a matter of fact, I believe that when Jesus in the sermon on the Mount says, where your treasure is, there your heart is also, he's just flipping around the logic of Deuteronomy six. He's expounding any saying so go look and see where your time and your energy is. That will tell you where your heart lies.

You see what God is calling us to in the Shema. And Deuteronomy six is a kind of wholeness of person that is directed toward the love of the Lord. There's no internal differentiations. There are no free states within the kingdom of the self, but rather they are all devoted to the love of God.

The covenantal love that we're called to was to infiltrate the whole symbolic space of the self, just like the glory cloud filling the temple so that the priests come running out screaming. The love of God is supposed to fill the human life so that our hearts are filled with it. Our persons are filled with it. Everything we do and then our outward effect. Yes, our capital. And that doesn't just mean our physical property. Of course, in 21st century America, we all think, okay, so I'll give it the offertory. I understand, but it's not just that, it's all of your capital. It's your relational capital. It's your creative capital. If you're a good teacher, it's your teaching capital. If you're a good actor, it's your capital in acting, it's your intellectual capital. Whatever the Lord is given, you should be directed towards loving him.

Well, how do I do that? How do I integrate my life? Well, Moses tells us right here. It says, memorize it, put it on your heart. Take it all in. You see, when you take in the word of the Lord. And when you then speak it out in the classroom, when you speak about it with children, when you speak about it, when you're rising up and when you're laying down, when you speak about it, when you're out on business trips and you're walking about on the road, you are being formed by Scripture. This is, at the end of the day, what Christian pedagogy is. It is to be conformed to Scripture in your inner self, in your person, and in your outward affect in the world. As a matter of fact, once you realize this theology of Deuteronomy six, you will not miss it. It is throughout the whole of Scripture. This is the problem that Saul has when he gives that unfaithful sacrifice in 1 Samuel 15. It's the problem that Solomon runs into when he sees his heart divided by the other gods of his wives, and he stops building the temple. How do we know his heart's been divided even before the narrator tells us? He stops building his temple. And then what does he do? He begins building mansions for himself and for his wives. It's the same thing. We see this coming out in Ahab's life, where Ahab presents himself as a faithful, and yet he's mixing worship of the Lord with worship of Baal. It's the same thing that we see when Jeremiah is writing to the exiles and he says, don't you know when you seek the Lord, you'll find

him, but you gotta seek him. With what? Again, quoting the Shama, you know, seek him with your whole heart. Jeremiah 29.

As a matter of fact, the New Testament is quite taken up with the Shama.

We see it in multiple ways, and I couldn't get into all of them here. But I would point out just a couple in John 17, when Jesus is about to be betrayed, he's about to go out. He knows he's walking out to his own death. And in John 17 he offers this prayer. It's called the High Priestly Prayer, and it culminates with him praying for us. He says, not only do I pray for my disciples, but I'm praying for those who believe because of what my disciples have said. So he's talking about us, people like us who hear the apostolic faith, and we respond accordingly. And notice what he says. Let them be one father, as you and I are one, I am in you. You are me. May they also be in us. Think about what he's saying. He's saying the Shama has not changed. God is still one. It's not now, father and son. It's two gods or something like that. It's still one God, first person and second person of the Trinity. And as a result of Christ's work, what will happen? He is unifying us, his followers, the followers of God, the followers of the Lord, so that we too may be whole. Let them be one, as I am one with you, father, I in you and you in me. Let them also be in us. How will that happen? Through the power of the Holy Spirit? You see, and this is how the gospel relates to the law. In the Old Testament. Moses tells us, go, love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and strength. But Moses can't accomplish for us the foundation for how we are to do that. He can just tell us, go do it. That's the essence of the law. Go do these things. But what do we find in the gospel? We find Jesus accomplishing for us the means by which we might be made whole, heart and person and outward effect in the world.

Once you see this in Scripture, you really won't be able to unsee it. It's all over. It truly is the greatest of the commandments, and it has something and has meaning for us as educators. What it means for us is that education is not just about conveying ideas to the students, but it has an intensive aspect to it. It's about speaking and conforming and forming the heart. We're not just looking for formalistic learning, but we want to see hearts changed. You see, the Shama tells us that deep learning, lifelong learning is the kind of learning that goes down into the hearts of the student. It's even contemplative in a way. It's about thinking about who we are and our inner people and how we are being transformed.

Notice what the psalmist says in Psalm 139. I think actually in Psalm 139, as he's teaching us repentance, he's teaching us to seek holiness. But notice what he says, search me, O God, and know my heart. See if there's a hurtful way in me. See if there's a damaging, destructive way in me. You do it. I can't, I'll deceive myself every time. But if you do it, you can make me whole. How do I know I'll be whole? Because you will lead me in your everlasting way.

You see, Christian education is about forming people to be desiring wholeness, integration of their inner lives and the best way, the only the only salvific way that that's possible is through repentance and faith. But it's not just intensive, it's also extensive. We're not just interested in the interior of the person, but we're interested in how that interior finds affect in the world around us. We're looking to see all of their strengths stewarded toward the love of the Lord. We want to see that inner self finding expression in the outer self. We want to see those roots bearing good fruit. To use the analogy of Jeremiah and the Psalmist in Psalm one, we want the estate, the relational capital, the things the politicians say, the things that we talk about around the kitchen table. Right? We want our time and our energy to be devoted to the love of the Lord. So it's not just about the interior of the person, it's about the exterior, the outward effect.

So it's intensive. Christian education is extensive. And then lastly, it's doxalogical. It's doxalogical. It is a form of worship. The apostle Paul talks about this in the letter to the Colossians, chapter three, verses 23 to 24. He says this in whatever you do, whatever you do. Colossians do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you Serve the Lord Christ.

Yes, it is true that the means of grace, the sacraments, prayer, and the preaching of the word, that's how we come together and what we might call capital W worship. But I want to remind you as educators, even when you're not in the church service on Sunday morning, even when you're in the classroom, maybe even especially when you're in the classroom, the work that you do is a kind of doxology to the Lord.

We want to give expression to the love that the Lord has put in our hearts, and we want to help our students to also be able to experience that life changing, transforming expression of love that comes from the inner person, right? The word lev okay goes to the person, right? The word refresh, our soul or our person. And then finally out into our outward affect in the world, our state, our capital, that is our ode. We want to see all of this directed toward the love of the Lord.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, as we consider these things, I pray that you would give us wisdom to understand them. I pray for the students who will be in these classrooms for the teachers and the teaching assistants who will be a part of the work, whether it's a BCS or BTS, or in the public schools or the other private schools around the area. Lord, that this year would be a mighty year of people learning, seeing their hearts transformed, that they would see their persons directed towards you, and that they would find great affect of the stewardship of the estate that you have given them and the world around them. Bless these teachers, Lord, I pray that by your grace they would find deep exhilaration in their callings, that they would find a deep satisfaction

as they pursue this call that you have called them to, and that they would see great success in the work that they do. This year. It's in Christ's name we pray.

Amen.