Introduction: It’s essential that we routinely ask ourselves some variation of the bottom line question of life. Something like, “What is the one thing that the whole thing is really about?”

When Jesus was asked what the most important command was, He quoted the passage we’ll be looking at today, Deuteronomy 6 and then added a second piece. (We’ll get to that.) Deuteronomy 6 is often called the “Shema” which is Hebrew for “to hear” and today, we want to hear what it might say to us.

Context: The children of Israel are on the hills of Moab about to enter the Promised Land. Their parents have gone from slaves to escaped wanderers to doubters. Now that generation has passed away and their children have entered Canaan. Moses, their leader (though not permitted to enter the Promise Land because of his punishment—see Numbers 20:8-12) receives instruction from God to give the people.

It’s especially important to remember that they were about to enter into a season of nation-building, culture-making, and community-formation! As a result, the book of Deuteronomy becomes a form of their constitution, and it is all rooted on the instructions that Moses has received from God.

Deuteronomy 6:1-12
1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.
10 When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, 11 houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, 12 be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

O – Take a few moments to re-read the passage. Count the number of verbs in the first 9 verses; identify the central teaching and the support teaching; what is the main point here?

I – What are the reasons that Moses offers for the “Shema?”
(verse 2)

I – As we continue to unpack the context, how does this teaching contrast to how the parents of Moses’ current audience raised them?
(Their parents were slaves in Egypt and these hearers now were either born in Egypt or in the wilderness. Though they were being raised with a narrative that included the patriarchal stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they were also raised alongside the influences of Egypt’s narrative.)

I – What do you think is the significance of verse 4?
(The concept of a monotheistic God called Yahweh was “breaking news.” In contrast to the paganism and polytheism of Egypt and Canaan, Israel was going to be the first to believe in one God. Second, it serves as a call to unity.)

I – Moses’s preface to the “Shema” could be simply summarized as “There is one God, and you already know Him.” Then the command in verse 5 is given. Of all the things that could have been said, why does God direct Moses to begin here?
(The love of God is the foundation of obedience to the Lord, kindness and service to others and understanding of self.)

A – Following the “Shema,” Moses is giving both symbolic and practical instructions of when and how to love and how to grow in that love for God (vs. 6-8). How would we contextualize those verses today? (Or imagine how Moses would say it today.)

A – As mentioned in the introduction, in Mark 12:30-31, Jesus quotes the “Shema” when asked what is the greatest of commands. In light of our conversation, why does Jesus add the piece of loving your neighbor as yourself and what does that mean for all of us Spirit-led, loves of God following Jesus?
a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
b. Complement these questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?)
c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching” rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.