

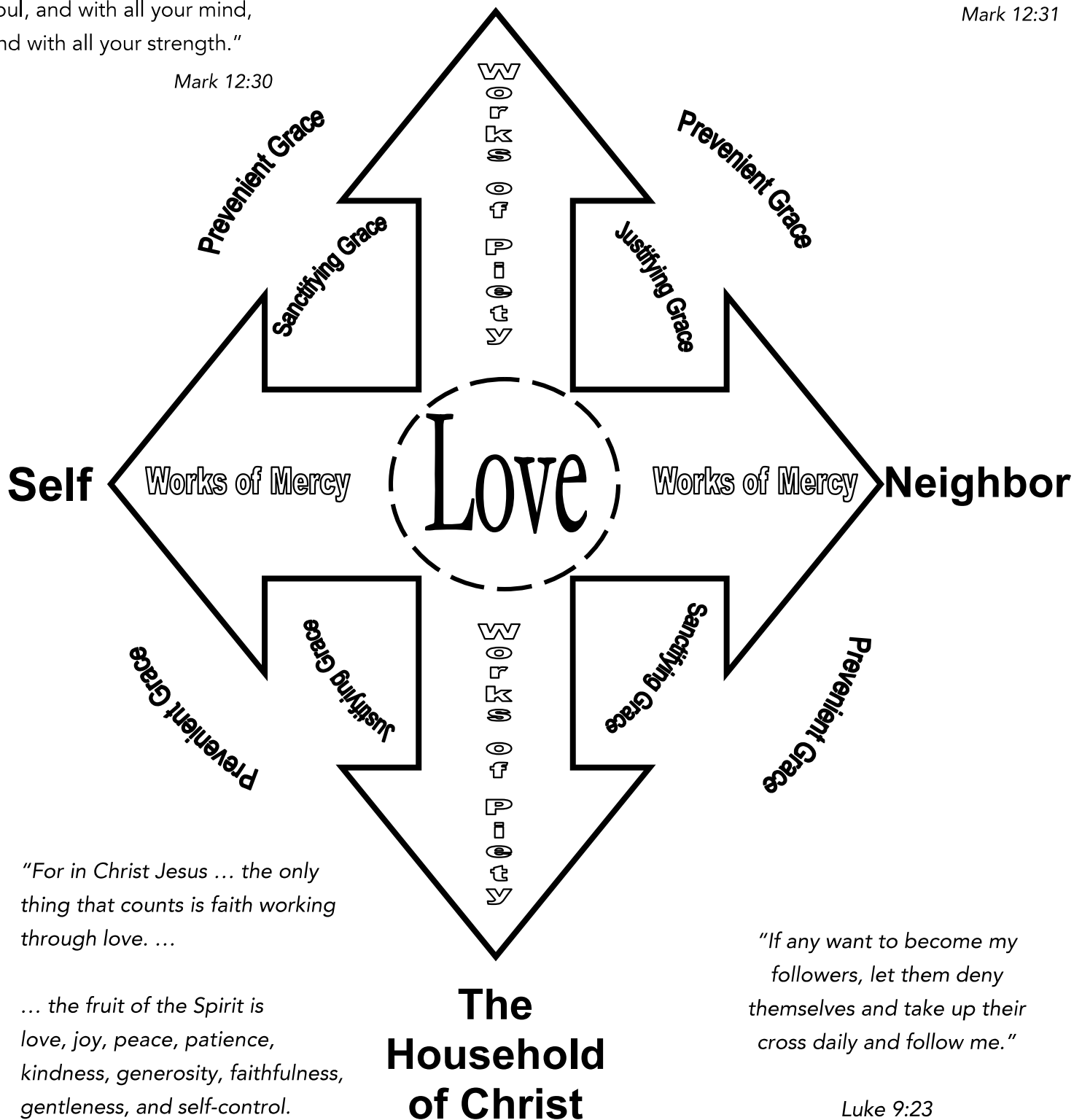
The Shape of Discipleship

Jesus said ... "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Mark 12:30

... And a second is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Mark 12:31



The Shape of Discipleship

The diagram above illustrates the shape of the Christian life. Christians are cross-shaped people living cross-shaped lives. The cross corresponds to the way of Jesus summarized by him in the Great Commandments (Mark 12:29-31; Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:25-37).

God has given us the gifts and practices needed to live the way of Jesus. The vertical beam of the cross represents the divine-human relationship. The works of piety (prayer, worship, the Lord's Supper, Scripture, & fasting) are the means of grace God gives to grow and mature in loving God. The horizontal beam represents the relationship between self and neighbor (those whom God loves). The works of mercy (feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, witnessing for Christ, etc.) are the means of grace God gives to love our neighbor as ourselves and, in the process, live out our love for God in the world which God loves.

At the center of the cross is Love, which is the nature and name of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By God's grace we are drawn into the love of the Triune God which makes this cross-shaped life possible and which draws us closer to God by drawing us closer to one another.

Because God is love (1 John 4:16) the cross-shaped life is surrounded by grace that is prevenient (preparing), justifying (restoring), and sanctifying (sustaining). Grace brings us to Jesus and empowers us to respond to his love by living his way. As we faithfully respond to God's grace, we are opening ourselves to receive more grace. The works of piety and mercy are the holy habits through which God conveys grace into our lives. In turn, we become channels of grace for the world.

In the four corners of the page are the guiding Scriptures that summarize the way of Jesus. At the top of the page is Mark 12:29-30 (the vertical dimension of discipleship) and Mark 12:31 (the horizontal dimension of discipleship).

In Luke 9:23 Jesus tells the people about the cost of following him. The cross Jesus calls his disciples to take up is the cross displayed on this page. The cross of discipleship is obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ summarized in Mark 12:29-31.

The Apostle Paul describes in Galatians 5:6; 22-23 the nature and outcome of discipleship. The nature is "faith working by love" and the outcome is holiness of heart and life. These marks of holiness are what Paul calls "fruit of the Spirit" and John Wesley calls "holy tempers." When Christians strive to live the way of Jesus, grace sets them free to become fully the persons God created them to be. Their character becomes a reflection of the character of Jesus Christ.

It is this shape of discipleship that small groups aim to form in their participants. This is a lifelong process of nurture, accountability, instruction, challenge, and prayer. Much more than a social club or a book study, small groups aim for participants to become formed into disciples who are constantly growing in sanctifying grace through works of piety and mercy. Small groups encourage one another to grow in grace day by day, through sharing times of celebration and times of grief, in extending challenge and in compassion.