

The Essential Commandment

A Disciple's Guide to Loving God and Others

by Greg Ogden (IVP:2011)

A book review by Jack De Vries

How does one go about making disciples? This has been a question I have kept at the front end of my years of pastoral ministry. Not just helping people embrace Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour, but completing the mission Jesus has given us: teaching people to obey everything he has commanded us (Matthew 28:20).

A monumental task? Not really. There are good resources available. It is as simple as reading the Bible with someone and discussing with them what you are reading. And praying through what you have discovered in God's Word. I have used the Heidelberg Catechism on many occasions with enquiring disciples; it is packed full with a good overview of Biblical teaching. But one of the best resources I have used has been Greg Ogden's book, *Discipleship Essentials*. I have been using this with people since it first came out, over 25 years ago. I just finished going through this book with two growing disciples in the church I attend. Ogden's other book, co-authored by Daniel Meyer, *Leadership Essentials*, has been a welcome resource to disciple leaders in the church. Well, you may now want to take a look at *The Essential*

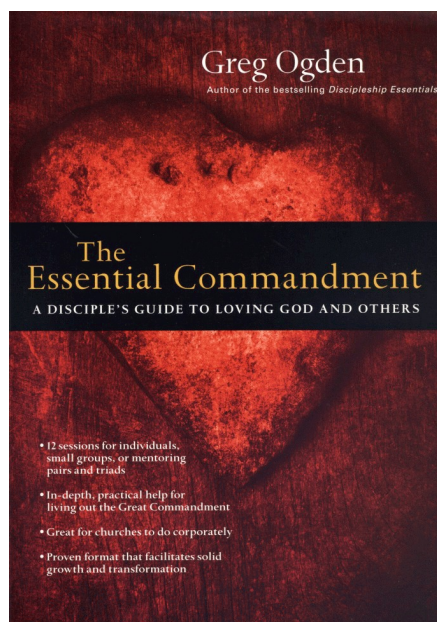
Commandment. Published by IVP, it's the latest by pastor and author Greg Ogden. What I appreciated about these resources is the thoroughly Biblical focus, the helpful readings, the Q&A format, and the memory work given. Each time I have gone through these workbooks with people I have deepened my own journey as a Christ follower.

The Essential Commandment is an insightful and practical study of the Great Commandment. Ogden introduces this workbook by pointing out that when Jesus declared that "we are to love God with everything we've got and love our neighbors in the same way that we cherish ourselves...*He actually thinks we can be like him.* Jesus actually believes that it is possible for frail and deeply flawed human beings to focus our complete affection on God and others." (13)

Like Ogden's other two books, *The Essential*

Commandment is not a textbook aimed at simply increasing knowledge. It is a workbook divided into 12 sessions and can be used by individuals, in small groups, or through mentoring in pairs and triads. The set of topics follow the parts of the great commandment:

1. Love God
 - a. with all your heart
 - b. with all your soul
 - c. with all your mind
 - d. with all your strength
2. Love your neighbour as yourself



Each of the 12 chapters includes

a core truth: serving “as the nugget around which each lesson is built”

a memory verse: allowing “God’s viewpoint on life to slowly become ours”

an inductive Bible study: guiding the “discovery of reality from the only perspective that counts...the Bible”

a reading on one aspect of the Great Commandment: providing a “contemporary discussion of the eternal core truth that will challenge our lifestyle and stimulate our thinking”(11)

I highly recommend this latest book by Ogden as a tool for discipleship. Ogden’s first book, *Discipleship Essentials*, is one of the best resources for new believers. *Leadership Essentials* is excellent to use with leaders of all stripes. *The Essential Commandment* would be great to use with believers, helping them to grow in faith and obedience in all areas of life. I am using this book with two younger men, meeting fortnightly as a triad, completing one chapter each time we meet.

If you have never engaged in discipling others, don’t be dismayed. Ogden provides some instruction to help one get the most from his book, *The Essential Commandment*. For example, he recommends meeting in triads or quads, which I affirm. The dynamics are so much better. This workbook, like Ogden’s other two books, is also well designed. It brings together three conditions which create the climate for the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual growth:

1. The unchanging Word of God
2. Transparent relationships
3. Mutual accountability.

Ogden writes: “When the truth of God’s Word is at the heart of self-revealing, intimate relationships rooted in mutual accountability,

you have the necessary elements for Spirit-motivated transformation. This took provides the structure for these three elements to come together. Add to this discipling unit a vision for equipping followers of Jesus to pass on the faith from one generation to the next, and you have the components to renew a ministry from the bottom up.” (8)

I am reminded of the prayer found in Psalm 71, one of my readings in my daily devotions this week, this prayer: “*Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation.*” (18) Jesus’ command in Matthew 28 underscores the fact that the prayer of Psalm 71 is not just for senior believers, but all Christ followers. We are to pass on faith and obedience to the next generation. Any one of Ogden’s discipleship workbooks are excellent resources to do exactly that: “declare God’s power to the next generation.” Why not find two or three people who are not being disciplined in the faith, give them a copy of *The Essential Commandment*, begin meeting, and you will find that the greatest commandment leads to the greatest life possible. And as you pray the prayer of Psalm 71:18, God will provide the ability to disciple others. He will not forsake you; Jesus will be with you till end of time.

About the author:



Greg Ogden (D.Min., Fuller Theological Seminary) is a writer, speaker and discipleship teacher living in Monterey, California. He was formerly executive pastor of discipleship at Christ Church of Oak Brook in Oak Brook, Illinois. Previously he was academic director of the doctor of ministry program and associate professor of lay equipping and discipleship at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. For twenty-three years he served as a pastor with the Presbyterian Church, USA.