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“ Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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 12:29-30

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The Greek here is *ischys*, corresponding with the Old Testament Hebrew *me'od* in Deuteronomy 6:5. Both words describe the ability of a person, their strength, their might. Whatever our capabilities are, we are to use them for the glory of God. In this way, we demonstrate how we love God with all our *ischys*.

Ironically, this is where many leadership books begin — both secular and Christian. There are countless inventories for spiritual gifts, and a large selection of strength/weakness assessments. A person wishing to know his or her leadership *ischys* will have ample opportunity to do so.

But there is an excellent reason this comes *after* loving God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.

It would be all too easy to take our strengths for granted if we did not first realize that the reason we have abilities and talents is that they are gifts from a loving God.



If *diánoia* has us using our minds to deepen and strengthen our roots, then *ischys* is the utilization of our talents, gifts, and abilities to grow new branches and increase our fruit in the world.

Jesus is our leader, our example... and this is exactly how he led. Jesus’s *kardia* — his heart, his core — was firmly rooted in the self-giving love of God. Jesus’s *psyché* — his soul — was demonstrated through his gracious words and actions every day of his life.

His *diánoia* — his mind — was shown in his deep knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures, which he both studied and taught. And his *ischys* — his strength, his abilities — were the most perfect to ever reside in a human form.

In his letter to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...*” It is a phrase strange to the modern ear: “a living sacrifice.” But I believe that is exactly what Jesus is taking about in Mark 12.

To lead as a living sacrifice — a breathing, walking-around-the-world sacrifice — means inviting God into all of who we are, reaching out to God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

#### QUESTION:

What are your spiritual gifts? How are you utilizing your gifts in the church and world? If you are not sure what your gifts are, have you considered taking a class or an assessment to find out? Why or why not?

#### NOTES