



SESSION 1 of 4

The greatest commandment

MEETING AIM

To think about how we can love God and those around us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 22:34-40

BACKGROUND

Here Jesus sums up the kingdom of God in two short commandments. They are easy to say but much more challenging to put into action. We may have wrestled with these commandments ourselves, but what do they mean for younger children? On the face of it, children might easily access Jesus' words, but for those who are only just learning to share and socialise with others there are some immediate challenges we can help children address.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children to your circle, by name if you can. Share out any refreshments you have brought and chat together about what you have experienced this week. Share any stories from your own life, as appropriate. Ask the children what they have done to show that they love someone (perhaps at home, at preschool or at nursery). Give an example if they need a bit of prompting.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: soft toys; dolls; small-world people such as Playmobil or Duplo

Share out the toys, dolls and small-world people, and encourage the children to play with them in whatever way they wish. They can play in groups or on their own. Join in the children's play, allowing them to lead you rather than directing the play. As you play together, explore the idea of love and how we can show love to others: both those we know and like, and those we don't know (or don't like).

Allow the children to play for as long as they like, or as long as time allows. Observe the children showing love to each other – for example sharing or helping others – and compliment them on doing so.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a Bible

Ask the children to come up with actions to help you tell the story. You will need to have actions for the words 'love', 'God', 'heart', 'soul', 'mind' and 'neighbour'. You might need to explain some of the meanings, but let them take the lead in coming up with actions. Encourage them to be as lively and energetic as they want to. Make sure all the children in the group are able to take part in the actions; don't let anyone be excluded because of difficulties with movement. Practise your actions together.

Once you are happy with all your actions, read out Matthew 22:34-40, encouraging the children to perform them as they hear the relevant words. Repeat this so the children become confident about when to do which action.

Go on to read the passage one more time, but miss out some of the words. Can the children still do all the actions at the right time?

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, giving everyone a chance to answer if they would like to. Try not to guide the children's answers too much or to say that one answer is right and another is wrong. Let them start to draw their own conclusions in terms of what Jesus is saying about love.

- What do you like about this story?
- Is there anything you don't like about it?
- When has someone loved you?
- How can we love God?
- Who do you think Jesus meant when he talked about our 'neighbour'?
- Who do you love?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: EITHER the ingredients for a simple biscuit recipe; baking sheets; rolling pins; cookie cutters; icing and other decorations; access to an oven; a cooling rack; gift bags and labels; cover-up and clean-up equipment OR A4 card; A5 envelopes; art materials

Help the children think about loving others by making something to give away to those around them. Choose whether you would like to make biscuits or cards (what you do may depend on the time and facilities available).

If you're making biscuits, make sure the children wash their hands before they start, and check for any allergies (even though you're going to give these away, you don't

want any of your group to inadvertently eat something they shouldn't as they make them). Make the biscuit dough together according to the recipe you have chosen and use different cutters to make shapes. Bake them, then when they're cool you can decorate them with icing and whatever ingredients you have brought along.

Decide who you're going to give the biscuits to as you work. Pack them into gift bags, write a label and secure the top. Discuss with parents and carers when the children will be able to give away their biscuit gifts.

If you're making cards, show the children the different art materials you have brought. Ask them to think about who they would like to make a card for and why. As you work, chat about how nice it is to receive a card. Help the children write what they would like to say to the person they're making it for inside the card.

Once everyone has finished, put the cards into envelopes and discuss with parents and carers when the children will be able to deliver their cards. You could even find out the relevant addresses and post the cards yourself.

10 PRAYER

You will need: children's praise music and the means to play it; ribbons and flags; tambourines and other child-friendly musical instruments

Before the session, choose some songs with lyrics the children in your group will find easy to sing and can understand. Alternatively, choose music without words for them to dance around to.

Give out the flags, ribbons and instruments. Say that one way we can tell God we love him is to sing songs to him. Play your music and enjoy singing the songs together and dancing. Every so often encourage the children to shout: "I love you, God!" if they would like to.

If the children can remember their actions from 'Bible story', encourage them to do the actions for 'love', 'God', 'heart', 'soul' and 'mind'.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

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SESSION 2 of 4

God loves the world

MEETING AIM

To think about how much God loves us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 3:16-21

BACKGROUND

This most famous of passages is central to our faith, yet it contains mysteries that younger children will struggle to understand. However, it is enough at this stage of faith development to discover that God loves them a great deal. Some children will come from families full of love, while others will live in less loving homes and may struggle to get a glimpse of a God whose love is unconditional. Be sensitive as you lead this session and help the children respond to God's love.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children to your circle, by name if you can. Share out any refreshments you have brought and chat together about what you have experienced this week. Share any stories from your own life, as appropriate. Ask the children if anyone has done something for them this week that showed them they are loved. Give an example if they need a bit of prompting.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: soft toys; dolls; small-world people such as Playmobil or Duplo; hospital and doctor play equipment

Share out the toys and encourage the children to play with them in whatever way they wish. They can play in groups or on their own. Join in the children's play, allowing them to lead you rather than directing the play. As you play together, explore the idea of looking after other people, both medically and in families. How do people show that they love you? (You could carry on your conversation from 'Circle time' as you play.)

Allow the children to play for as long as they like, or as long as time allows. Chat about what it feels like to be looked after and loved.

5 BIBLE STORY

You will need: toys from 'Intro activity'
Ask the children to choose two of the toys from 'Intro activity' to take part in your retelling of today's Bible story. Sit everyone in a circle and tell the story using the toys the children have chosen:

One night, a man called Nicodemus decided he was going to talk to Jesus. *Place one of the toys in the centre of the circle.* He didn't want anyone to know what he was doing. That's why he went at night.

He walked from his house to where Jesus was. *Walk the toy around the circle. Children could take part, walking the toy in front of themselves before passing it to the next person in the circle. Don't rush this; let the children take as long as they need.*

Eventually, he found Jesus. *Place the other toy next to the first so they look like they're talking to each other.* He had so many questions! Jesus told him all about God's plan to help his people. And then he said: "God loves everyone in the world so much! He sent his Son..." Jesus was talking about himself! "...so that those who believe in him can live with God for ever."

Shall we think about that for a minute? God loves us so much! He sent Jesus to show us how much God loves us. *Place the Jesus toy in the middle of the circle.* Jesus told his friends all about God and what he is like. God wants us to be with him. *Pick up the Jesus toy and pass it around the circle.* As you hold the toy, try to think about being loved by God. Then pass it along to the next person and say: "God loves you so much!"

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, giving everyone a chance to answer if they would like to. Try not to guide the children's answers too much or to say that one answer is right and another is wrong. Let the children draw their own conclusions about how much God loves them.

- What do you like about this story?
- Is there anything you don't like about it?
- What do you know about God?
- If you could ask Jesus anything, what would you ask?
- How does it feel to be loved?

15 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: black paper; pencils; child-safe scissors; tissue paper in different colours; PVA glue; clear cellophane gift wrap

Give out sheets of black paper and encourage the children to draw a large heart in the middle. They should leave a border of 5cm around the heart. Help the children cut out the heart, making sure they leave the border intact.

Give everyone a piece of cellophane gift wrap the same size as the black border and help them stick the border onto the cellophane, leaving a clear heart-shape in the middle. Share out the tissue paper and show the children how to tear small pieces and stick them onto the heart to create a stained-glass mosaic effect. As you work, talk about what Jesus said to Nicodemus and what it means that God loves us. It might help the children to hear what this means to you.

Once everyone has finished and the glue is dry, stick the hearts up against a window so you can see the light shining through. At the end of the session, encourage the group to take their hearts home and put them up on a window. Every time they look at the heart they can think about how much God loves them.

5 PRAYER

You will need: battery-operated candles / tea lights

Give each child a battery-operated candle / tea light. Show them how to switch it on and then place it in front of them. As they look at the light, ask the children to think about what they want to say to God. Leave a moment of silence for the children to do so. This might not be very long, depending on how restless the group is, but make it last as long as you can.

Say: "Thank you, God, that you love us so much." Then encourage the children to add in their own prayers. They could copy yours or say their own.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

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SESSION 3 of 4

God is Love

MEETING AIM

To begin to consider that our friendship with God is all about love.

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 John 4:7–21

BACKGROUND

This famous passage describing how God is love can be confusing for younger children, but that doesn't mean they can't discover more about God and themselves through exploring it. Try to draw out the idea that God is love and loves us. That means we should love as well. This desire to love others comes not out of obligation but from an overflow of God's love. This generosity of spirit comes easily to younger children, much more so than to adults. How can we foster this innate spirit of love and not squash it?

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children to your circle, by name if you can. Share out any refreshments you have brought and chat together about what you have experienced this week. Share any stories from your own life, as appropriate. Ask the children where they have experienced love this week. This could be at home, from friends or at church. Have an example ready from your own life to get the ball rolling if needs be.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: sand-play equipment; water-play equipment; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Show the children the sand and water-play equipment and let them choose which they want to play with. (If you have limited space or resources, just provide one play option.) As the children play, encourage them to write or draw in the sand. Alternatively, they should try to pour water over their hands. Join in with the children's play and let them direct you in how you play.

After a few minutes, chat about how the sand or water feels on their fingers. Then ask them how it feels to be able to play with all their friends.

10 BIBLE STORY

Teach the children this action rhyme, which explores the session's Bible passage:

God is love. *Clap three times.*
 God is love. *Clap three times.*
 We love others. *Point at the others in the group.*

Because God loves us. *Hug yourself.*
 God is love. *Clap three times.*
 God is love. *Clap three times.*
 God loves us so much. *Move your arms in a wide circle.*

That he sent his son Jesus. *Shout: "Hooray!"*
 God is love. *Clap three times.*
 God is love. *Clap three times.*
 We haven't seen God. *Cup your hand above your eyes and look around.*
 But if we love others, God lives in us!
 Because God is love! *Clap and cheer!*

Say the rhyme together and do the actions as many times as the children want. They might not be able to remember all the words, but that's OK. You're introducing the idea that God is love, and that this is a happy, amazing thing. It will be enough for you to share the words and for the children to enjoy clapping and cheering. As you show love to the children they will experience God's love for them.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, giving everyone a chance to answer if they would like to. Try not to guide their answers too much or to say that one answer is right and another is wrong. Let the children draw their own conclusions about how much God loves them.

- Who do you love?
- What does it feel like to love someone?
- What does it feel like when someone loves you?
- What do you know about Jesus?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: simple colouring sheets; crayons and felt-tip pens

Before the session, find some simple colouring sheets that focus on God's love (there are many available online). Alternatively, create your own. Draw the outline of the letters of 'God is love' at the centre of an A3 sheet of paper, then decorate the surrounding space with simple patterns and hearts. Make sure the shapes and patterns are large enough for small hands to colour in.

Give out copies of the colouring sheet to the children and enjoy spending time colouring together. The idea is not to complete the colouring sheet, but to provide space for the children to process their ideas and chat together.

Carry on your discussions from 'Chatting together' or simply let the children talk about whatever they would like to. By listening to them, hearing about their concerns and what they love, you're showing God's love to them. Likewise, by demonstrating sharing and helping you're showing how to love others.

10 PRAYER

You will need: people shapes cut from card (pre-cut shapes are available from craft shops or online); felt-tip pens

Share out your card people and ask the children to think about someone they love. Help them to draw that person on one side of the card.

Ask the children if they have fallen out with someone. It could be a sibling or someone at school or playgroup. Invite them to draw that person on the other side of the card person.

Once everyone has finished, ask them to look at the card person. Say a simple prayer thanking God for the person it represents, leaving space for the children to name the person (either out loud or in their heads).

Ask the children to turn the card person over and look at the picture of the one they have fallen out with. Initiate another simple prayer to say sorry for falling out with this person. Ask God to help you make it right.

Finally, wave the paper people in the air and shout: "Thank you, God, for loving us!"

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Love is...

MEETING AIM

To think about how we should love each other.

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 13

BACKGROUND

This well-known passage about love comes from a place of conflict. Paul was appalled by the lack of love those in the Corinthian Church were showing each other and felt the need to spell out exactly what being a loving community means. The children in our groups are learning how to be together: how to share, how to consider the feelings of others and how to take into account their needs. In exploring this passage we're emphasising the fact that we should love others because God first loved us.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children to your circle, by name if you can. Save your refreshments for 'Bible story', but chat together about what you have experienced this week. Share any stories from your own life, as appropriate. Ask the children when they thought about the feelings of others this week. Have an appropriate story from your own life to get the ball rolling.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: simple, age-appropriate games

Before the session, choose some games that will involve the children taking turns or sharing. There are many simple board games that would be appropriate.

Show the children the games you have brought and choose some to play. Enjoy playing them together, and as you do so try to catch the children being considerate, sharing and taking turns well. Compliment them on showing love to each other.

At the end, congratulate the winners and commend everyone for playing well.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: cushions; blankets or rugs; refreshments; a child-friendly Bible translation

Work together to create a storytelling space with the blankets, rugs and cushions. When you are happy with what you have made, sit in your space and share out your refreshments. Go on to tell this story:

Once there were two friends, Olivia and Noah. Olivia and Noah lived next door to each other. They loved playing hide and seek and baking cakes together.

One day, Olivia and Noah were at Olivia's house. They were playing with Noah's teddies. Noah had a favourite teddy called Fluff. He'd had Fluff ever since he was born. They had set up all their teddies around a blanket and were enjoying a picnic together, like we are today!

Olivia was about to give Fluff a cup of tea when Noah shouted: "No!" Olivia was surprised as Noah didn't usually shout at her. Before she could do anything else, Noah rushed over and snatched Fluff away. "I'm going to feed Fluff. He's mine!" Noah said.

Olivia was upset. She started to cry, but then she got angry. "I don't want to play with your teddies any more," she shouted. "They're stupid. My teddies are much better than yours!"

"Go and play with your teddies, then," Noah said. He ran around the picnic blanket, picking up all his teddies. Olivia went up to him and kicked him. Noah cried out in pain. They were both crying now.

Noah's daddy came into the room: "What's going on in here?" he asked them both.

Once you have finished the story, ask the children what the two friends did wrong. What would they say to Noah's daddy about what happened? After they have told you what they think, ask the group if Olivia and Noah love each other.

Explain to the children that Paul, a friend of Jesus, wrote about what it means to love each other. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 to the group. Ask the children if Noah and Olivia followed Paul's advice.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, giving everyone a chance to answer if they would like to. Try not to guide the children's answers too much or to say that one answer is right and is another wrong. Let the children draw their own conclusions on how to love each other as God loves them.

- How do you show other people you love them?
- Have you ever fallen out with a friend? How did you sort things out?
- How does it feel when someone is mean to you?
- How can you show other people you love them this week?
- How can you show people that God loves them?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: large sheets of paper; art materials; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Give out the large sheets of paper and show the children the art materials (if you have the time and space to use paint, make the effort to do so). Encourage the group to draw or paint their response to the story and the Bible passage. This could be a picture of them playing with their friends, helping a family member or sharing something with someone who is in need. Only give the group suggestions if they are struggling to think about what to create.

Draw your own picture and chat about what the children are creating as you all work. Once you have finished, let the children tell you about their pictures if they would like to. Chat about how easy it is to love people. Sometimes it's easy to love people when they are being nice to you, but not when they're being horrible.

5 PRAYER

Sit the children down in the storytelling space you made for 'Bible story' and ask them to think about a time when they haven't loved others as God loves them. Leave a pause where you are all silent for as long as the children can manage (this might not be long, but that's fine), then say sorry to God for not loving that person and ask him to help you put things right.

Ask the group to think about how they can love others this week. When can they share? Where can they support others? How can they be patient? Ask God to help you all love others more.

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