

*Deut. 34:1–12*

*Ps. 90:1–6, 13–17*

*1 Thess. 2:1–8*

*Matt. 22:34–46*

# The Greatest Commandment

**Goal for the Session**      *Children will explore the greatest commandment and its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Matthew 22:34–46

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Patrick Gray

This reading contains two discrete units. As is so often the case in Matthew’s Gospel, both involve Jesus in a verbal joust with the Pharisees. To the first question Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5. This formula is the second part of the Shema, the standard prayer that all pious Jews are to recite daily. To this he appends Leviticus 19:18, a citation popular among early Christian writers (Romans 13:8, James 2:8), but never combined with the Shema in this manner. All the law and the prophets “hang” on these two commands. The image conjured is that of a branch hanging from a tree or a door on its hinge.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Timothy A. Beach-Verhey

In quoting the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–5), Jesus points out that the aim of the law is to orient one’s entire life toward God. However, one cannot love God without loving what God loves! While the scribes and Pharisees used the law to place severe limits on those whom they were obliged to recognize as their neighbors, Jesus joins these texts in order to smash all the limits and boundaries of neighborliness. Jesus proves himself to be the true and faithful interpreter of Scripture, silencing his critics with knowledge and wisdom. Jesus is the Messiah who loves his enemies, who loves as God loves, who is “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Earl F. Palmer

It is the Monday of Holy Week. Jesus lives and teaches in the tension between Sunday’s acclamation and Friday’s execution. He has faced the opposition of religious leaders throughout his ministry, and that opposition only grows stronger in the first part of this chapter. Yet Jesus takes the risk of hearing the lawyer’s question out and answering it in good faith. Sometimes the gospel provides people with a powerful answer to difficult questions. Sometimes the gospel provokes people to even deeper questions. The answers are a gift of the Spirit, and the questions may be, too.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Allen Hilton

When Pharisees ask Jesus which commandment is the greatest of all, his answer defines the central calling of the faithful for all time: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul, and . . . mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). Here, Jesus opens a window to divine priorities. The One who touts these two love commands is no mere rabbi. This is Messiah, God’s Son, Lord. Our hearts are drawn to the heavenly voice that boomed five chapters back: “This is my Son . . . listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5).

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Matt. 22:34–46**

## Focus on Your Teaching

Children often have a hard time connecting the baby at Christmas with the man in the Gospel stories. Through this brief episode between Jesus and the lawyer, the children will hear about Jesus' Jewish childhood and how it may have influenced his teaching as an adult. The use of teaching pictures as you tell the story will help them make the connection visually. The Golden Rule provides an occasion to have the children memorize a piece of Scripture, and in a fun way.

*God, who calls us to love you and others, I hold fast to your love as I seek to love each child in the group. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- Christ candle
- matches
- green cloth
- offering basket
- Bible
- Singing the Feast*, vol. 1, CD player
- Color Pack 1, 7, 15, 16, 17
- Resource Sheet 1

### For Responding:

- option 1: sample card, plain index cards, pens or pencils, colored markers, newsprint
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pencils, yellow crayons or markers
- option 3: construction paper or craft foam sheets, copies of Resource Sheet 3, scissors, glue, markers or crayons
- option 4: Bible, *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1, CD player

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*In advance*, print the gathering litany on newsprint or poster board if that has not been done.

As you greet the children, welcome each one and ask about their lives. Have the group help you arrange the green cloth on the worship table and add a Christ candle (white pillar candle with a symbol of Christ etched or drawn on it), an offering basket, and a Bible open to the Gospel of Matthew.

When all the children are present, gather at the worship table. Note that the green cloth means the church is in the Ordinary or Common Time, a part of the church year when there are no special days, a time when we think about what it means to follow Jesus. Invite a child to point to this season on Color Pack 1.

Light the Christ candle. Invite the children to explain that this candle represents Jesus the Christ and the light he brings into the world. If you wish, have a child gather the offerings.

Recall that the gathering song for these weeks is “Bim Bom” (track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1). Note that the words *bim* and *bom* have no meaning, but the words *Shabbat shalom* are Hebrew for “peaceful Sabbath.” As you play it, encourage the children to join in the simple lyrics.

### Bim Bom

Bim bom bim bim bim bom  
Bim bim bim bim bim bom.  
Bim bom bim bim bim bom  
Bim bim bim bim bim bom.

Shabbat shalom!  
Shabbat shalom!  
Shabbat, shabbat, shabbat,  
Shabbat shalom!

Then lead the group in this gathering litany:

**Leader:** Loving God, be with us today.

**Children:** We have come to learn about you.

**Leader:** Teacher Jesus, we want to follow your teachings.

**Children:** We have come to learn what you teach.

**Leader:** Holy Spirit, we look for your help.

**Children:** Amen.

Extinguish the Christ candle.

Show the group Color Pack 17. Ask:

✠ What do you think is happening in this picture?

✠ Does it remind you of things you have done to show kindness or help to others?

Invite some children to tell about ways they have helped others. Suggest that they keep these times in mind as they hear the Bible story for this session.

Enlist older children to show the pictures when you ask for them.

## EXPLORING

Explain that the story is about Jesus when he was a boy and when he was an adult. Tell the story, using Resource Sheet 1 (Let's Ask Jesus). Have Color Pack 15, 7, and 16 ready to show at the appropriate times. Listen to the children's ideas of what happened next at the end of the story.

Explain that these two commandments that Jesus remembered are sometimes called the Golden Rule. Ask:

✠ Why do you think they have been given this name?

✠ Why do you think these two commandments are so important to remember?

Help the group memorize, learn by heart, this simple version of the two greatest commandments: *Love God. Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.* Here are some fun ways to help in the memorization.

**Phrases** Begin with "Love God," having everyone say it. Add "Love your neighbor." Then add "as much as." Add "you love." Finally, add "yourself." By this time, many of the children will be able to say it.

**Clapping Rhythm** After saying it together a couple times, say it together as you clap a rhythm for the words.

**Various Poses** Stand on one foot and say it. Put your hands on your head and say it. Invite the children to suggest ways to stand or pose as they say the Golden Rule together. Do this several times and they will know it.

Suggest that they keep these words in their hearts, and the Responding options will suggest ways to help them remember them.

**RESPONDING**

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

**1. Acts of Kindness Cards** Christians love God and their neighbors by showing acts of kindness. This option encourages children to give thought to such acts as well as encourage others to do the same. Explain that they are to do something nice for someone secretly. Ask:

- ✿ What are some things you might do?
- ✿ For whom might you do something kind?

When the children have some actions in mind, further explain that they will leave a card for the person, asking them to do something for three other people and leave cards for them. Show the children a sample card. Provide plain index cards and markers for the children to make three to use during the week. Print this message on newsprint for them to copy: *You have received a secret act of kindness. Pass it on. Do something kind for three people and give each one a card like this.*

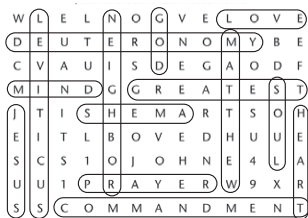
Children who enjoy math may want to calculate how many acts of kindness will be done if everyone in your group does three and leaves three cards.

For younger children, provide cards with the message for them to decorate with crayons or colored markers.



**2. Word Puzzle** This option reinforces the words of the Golden Rule and is handy to have when children finish another option. There is also a hidden message when the puzzle is solved. Provide copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Greatest Commandment Puzzle), pencils, and yellow crayons or markers. The directions are on the page, but younger children may need some help to get started.

**Puzzle Solution**



We love because God first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

**3. Mini-banners** These banners can be as simple or elaborate as you wish. Construction paper or craft foam sheets are the background. Each child will need a copy of Resource Sheet 3 (Greatest Commandment Banner), scissors, a background sheet, and glue. Provide colored markers or crayons to decorate the word shapes. Help children who need assistance to arrange the words in order. Glue them in place. Read the banner with each child as it is finished. Talk about where to put it at home so it will be a reminder of the greatest commandment.

- Song** One way to show love for God is to praise God with song and dance as recorded in the Psalms. Read Psalm 150 aloud. Point out the joy and praise to God expressed through music and dance. Play “We Are Dancing in the Light of God” (track 21 on *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1) and the children will instinctively move to the strong rhythm. Invite the children to praise God by dancing to the song. If you are concerned that their exuberance will get out of hand or the space is crowded, explain that they are to dance in one place, moving their bodies to the rhythm of the music.

## CLOSING

Gather at the worship table and light the Christ candle. Invite the children who made banners to show them to the group.

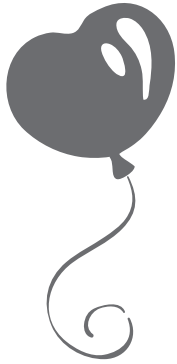
Lead the children, or invite a child to lead, in saying the Golden Rule.

Sing and dance to “We Are Dancing in the Light of God.”

Pass a brief benediction around the circle, such as “Love God by showing love to others this week.”

As you say good-bye to each child, encourage the children to return for the next session.

**Let's Ask Jesus**  
**Based on Matthew 22:34-46**



When Jesus was a child, he learned about God from his parents and the teachers in the synagogue. They read the Hebrew Scriptures, the books we have in our Bible as the Old Testament. (*Show Color Pack 15.*) Because books and scrolls with their Bible were expensive, Jesus probably memorized many parts by heart. One verse that everyone knew was in Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verse 5. (*Open Bible to it. Read from Bible or the translation here.*)

**So love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.**



Jesus probably learned this verse by heart too. It is in the book of Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18. (*Turn to Leviticus. Read from Bible or the translation here.*)

**I am the Lord, and I command you to love others as much as you love yourself.**



Many years later, when Jesus was a grown-up, he remembered those two verses. He was teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. (*Show Color Pack 7 and 16.*)



On this day, he had already been teaching for quite some time. He and the temple leaders had had an argument about who gave Jesus the right to teach about God. You may remember that the temple leaders didn't want to upset the people, who liked Jesus' teachings. Now the Pharisees, a group of Jewish men who studied God's law, saw that other Jewish leaders had been silenced by Jesus' words to them. So they decided to ask Jesus a question to test him.



One of them, a lawyer, went to Jesus. "Tell me, teacher," the man said, "what is the greatest commandment in all of God's law?"

Without taking time to think about his answer, Jesus said, "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. That is the greatest commandment in all of God's law." Sounds like Deuteronomy 6:5, doesn't it?



But Jesus didn't stop there. "And the other commandment that goes with it is: Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself." Just like Leviticus 19:18, isn't it? "In these two commandments are all the laws of God and all the words of the prophets."



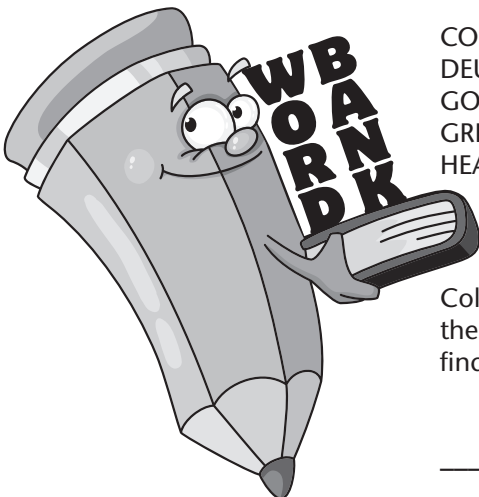
The Gospel of Matthew doesn't tell us what the lawyer who asked the question said or did. What do you think happened next?



### The Greatest Commandment Puzzle

Review Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:36–40 as you solve this puzzle. Look side-to-side and up-and-down to find each word in the word bank. Circle the words in the puzzle. Hint: some letters are used in more than one word.

W L E L N O G V E L O V E  
 D E U T E R O N O M Y B E  
 C V A U I S D E G A O D F  
 M I N D G G R E A T E S T  
 J T I S H E M A R T S O H  
 E I T L B O V E D H U U E  
 S C S 1 O J O H N E 4 L A  
 U U 1 P R A Y E R W 9 X R  
 S S C O M M A N D M E N T



COMMANDMENT  
 DEUTERONOMY  
 GOD  
 GREATEST  
 HEART

JESUS  
 LEVITICUS  
 LOVE  
 MATTHEW  
 MIND

NEIGHBOR  
 PRAYER  
 SHEMA  
 SOUL

Color the letters and numbers you did not use with a yellow crayon or marker. Read the yellow letters and numbers from left to right, beginning with the top row, to find a hidden Bible verse. Write the seven words of the Bible verse here:

\_\_\_\_\_ . (1 John 4:19)

October 23, 2011

Multi-Age  
Resource Sheet 3

**Greatest Commandment Banner**

**The Greatest  
Commandment**

**neighbor**

**Love**

**as you**

**God.**

**yourself.**

**your**

**love**

**Love**