



SESSION 1 of 4

The greatest commandment

MEETING AIM

To introduce the idea of loving God as the most important thing we can do with our lives, and to think about how we can practically outwork this love for him.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 22:34-40

BACKGROUND

Love can be an abstract idea for many of us, and loving God can be even more so. Jesus is very kind in the way he breaks down all the different ways we can love God so we can think them through. This session is designed to help the children work out how to show their love to God in practical ways. It will help to make loving God a more concrete idea and will show the children that it isn't all about singing worship songs, but also about the way we live our lives. There are some deep themes in this session, for example "What did Jesus mean by 'soul'?" so be prepared for good discussions!

5 CIRCLE TIME

You will need: a variety of items that will provoke an instant reaction of love or hate (see below)

Welcome the children to your group by name and chat together about the past week. Share in their triumphs and disasters and divulge something from your own life. Ask the children what they love (and hate).

Show the group a variety of items that people either love or hate, for example Marmite, prawn cocktail crisps, a picture of a famous singer, a football shirt, a picture of snow, the *Fortnite* logo, a McDonald's burger or a picture of Simon Cowell. Label one side of the room as 'hot' and one as 'not'. Take turns to hold up and describe each item. Group members have to move to the 'hot' or 'not' side depending on whether they love the item or not.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: paper and pens

Divide the children into teams. Each team must create a name, a logo and a list of ten team rules. Some rules can be funny (for example: "Whenever a person speaks they must floss.") and others more serious ("We won't bully people with our words or our bodies.").

Once they have compiled their list of rules, hold a vote within the teams to decide which is the most important rule and which is the funniest. Bring everyone back together and hold a final vote on the best and silliest rules. Can these be incorporated into the guidelines you have for your group?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a large sheet of paper; a marker pen

Invite each team from 'Intro activity' to stand up and present themselves, sharing their most important and funniest rule with the rest of the group.

Explain that in this session's Bible passage the teachers of the Jewish law asked Jesus: "What is the most important law?" They were trying to trick him into saying something that went against the rules. Ask each team to discuss and decide what they think Jesus' answer was. (Some children might know the 'right' answer. Don't validate any of the suggestions; accept all answers.)

Collate all the answers into one list, writing everything down on the paper. Hold a vote with the whole group to see which answer is the most popular. Then read Matthew 22:34-40 to the group and see who, if anyone, voted for the answer Jesus gave. Chat about what the children think of Jesus' answers.

Wonder together about how easy these two commandments are to follow. What have you done to love God and your neighbour? If the children have any answers, let them share those now. Otherwise, move the discussion straight into 'Chatting together'.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging them to take turns to contribute. You could do this in the small groups you have been using in this session, or all together:

- Why do you think Jesus said that loving God with all our hearts, souls and minds is the most important rule?
- Is loving God really a rule?
- What does it mean to love God with our hearts?

- How do we love God with our minds?
- What did Jesus mean by 'soul' and how can we love God with our souls?
- Who are our neighbours and how can we love them?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: three thin strips of material in different colours per child; pens

Give out the strips of material and tell the children that one represents our heart, the second our mind and the third our soul. Ask the children to think about how they are going to choose to love God with their hearts, minds and souls, then encourage them to write these responses on the strips of material.

Plait the three strips together and make a wristband for the children to wear as a reminder of what they have committed to do. Then chat about what it means to love your neighbour. How can they do that in the coming week? If you have a story about how you have loved a neighbour recently you could share it now.

10 PRAYER

You will need: tubes of toothpaste with three coloured stripes; large sheets of paper

Split the children into groups (you could use the same teams as you used earlier or stay together if your group is smaller). Ask each team to think of a prayer that expresses their love for God using their hearts, minds and souls. Using the toothpaste, they are going to write a 'toothpaste prayer' on the large sheet of paper.

When they have finished writing them, each team takes turns to say their prayer out loud together.

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SESSION 2 of 4

God loves the world

MEETING AIM

To understand how God showed his love to the world and explore the depth of this love.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 3:16-21

BACKGROUND

Many of us, children included, need a reminder of the sacrifice God made in order to show his love to the world. We can easily minimise and take it for granted. Allow time for the children to explore God's sacrificial love in this session and provide opportunities for them to understand how they can show this love to others.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children to your group by name and chat together about the past week. Share in their triumphs and disasters and divulge something from your own life. Ask them to think of a film, book or food they love the most without telling anyone else. They can then mime this (charades style) to the rest of the group.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: two large hearts made out of thick card; clothes pegs; string; bucket
Before the session, hang up the two hearts at opposite ends of the room. Attach ten pegs to each one. Put some pegs into the bucket and place it in the centre of the room.

Divide the children into two teams and stand each team in front of one of the hearts. At the signal to start, the teams must attempt to add pegs to the other team's heart either by taking them from their own and attaching them to the other team's heart or by taking from the bucket. They must also defend their own heart to prevent others from attaching pegs. The team with the fewest pegs on their heart at the end is the winner.

Give the teams three minutes to play the game. Monitor the game carefully to ensure

that the children play fairly and safely. Play as many times as the children would like to, or as time allows.

15 BIBLE STORY

You will need: an ornate-looking plate (from a charity shop – don't use an actual family heirloom); a well-used plastic plate; Bibles
Before the session, prime a helper to interrupt you with the tatty plastic plate after you have shown the ornate plate to the group.

Show the group the ornate plate and explain that it is an antique—a precious family heirloom. You could even tell them that you took it on *Antiques Roadshow* and found out it was worth £5,000! You have to be very careful with it because it's so special. Big up the plate as much as possible.

Your primed helper interrupts you by presenting the tatty plastic plate. Pretend to completely fall in love with the plastic plate and make a show of all its qualities. Your helper should explain that you can have the plastic plate in exchange for the antique plate, under one condition. You have to break the antique plate.

Have a hands up vote. What would everyone do? Keep the antique plate or break it in return for the plastic one? Dither for a while, then drop the antique plate and smash it on the floor.

Explain to the children that this is what God did for us. He sent Jesus, his precious and much-loved son, to 'break' and die for our less than perfect world. Why? Because he loves us, just as you loved the plastic plate, and wants to know us.

God did this because he loves the whole world.

Give out the Bibles and help everyone find John 3. Read verses 16-21 and ask the children if the plate illustration helped them understand what Jesus is saying in these verses. (It will have helped some but not everyone, so don't try to over-explain it to those who didn't find it helpful.)

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging them to take turns to contribute. You could do this in small groups, or all together if you don't have many children:

- What do you think of what Jesus says here?
- How can we know how deep God's love is for the world?
- Who does the Bible mean when it talks about 'the world'?
- How can God use us to show this kind of love to others?
- What do you want to say to Jesus?

- What do Jesus' words tell us about God?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: seven paper plates; felt-tip pens; laptops or other devices; access to the internet

Divide into seven smaller groups or pairs. Give each group a paper plate and a continent: Europe, Asia, Africa, Antarctica, Australasia, North America or South America. (If your group is small, give each group more than one continent and plate, or do this activity together.)

Ask the children to do some research about their continents by going to websites such as Open Doors (opendoorsuk.org) or Operation Mobilisation (om.org/en). Encourage them to decorate their plates with the following:

- The name and a rough picture of the continent.
- How many people live there.
- How many people in that continent are Christians.
- What can we pray about for them.

10 PRAYER

You will need: plates from 'Creative response'; John 3:16 written out for children to read and use

Dot the plates around the room. Encourage the groups to go and pray for the different continents and read John 3:16 over each continent. They can use the declarations below or say their own prayers:

"For God so loved [insert the name of the continent] that he sent his one and only Son, that when people from [continent] believe in him they will not die but will have eternal life."

"We declare God's love over [continent] and pray for them to know how deep and strong and high and wide this love is, so that they might believe in him and have eternal life."

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SESSION 3 of 4

God is love

MEETING AIM

To explore what it means for us to know that God is love.

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 John 4:7-21

BACKGROUND

In a world full of social media 'likes' and attempts to prove to others that we deserve to be loved, the truth is that God is love. He created love, he is the sustainer of love and he loved us before we could even try to prove it! Today's session delves into this truth, applying it to the lives of the children and giving them time to think about how we can live in the light of God's love.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children to your group by name and chat together about the past week. Share in their triumphs and disasters and divulge something from your own life. Ask the children what their favourite sweets are. Make a tally to see which is the group's overall favourite.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a list of items (see below)
Divide the children into two teams (or more depending on the size of your group) and send each one to a different corner of the room. Ask each team to nominate a 'runner'. When you shout out the name of an object, the first team to bring it to you is the winner. Stand at an equal distance from each team. Sometimes they might need to carry the whole person to you!

Use this list and add your own ideas if you would like to: a hair clip; brown hair; a left shoe; a blue sock; button; blue eyes; something red; a T-shirt; shoelace; a 10-year-old; a necklace; a song (the whole team must come to you and sing it together).

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: heart-shaped sweets (such as Haribo); swiss rolls; cans of squirty cream; table knives; trays; cover-up equipment and clean-up; a Bible

Check for food allergies before this session and make sure you have appropriate food for the children in your group. Be aware of hygiene issues as you do this activity.

Divide the children into groups and give each some heart-shaped sweets, a swiss roll, a knife, a can of squirty cream, a plate and a tray. In their groups, challenge the children to cut and shape the swiss rolls into the word 'God' on the tray and cover the cake in a thick layer of the squirty cream.

Read 1 John 4:7-21 aloud to the group. Every time they hear the word 'love' they should stick a heart-shaped sweet onto their cake word so that eventually it looks as though it has been written with hearts.

Count the number of heart-shaped sweets on the cake word. Does each group have the same number of sweets? The number of sweets may depend on the translation you have read out. You might want to read the passage again so the groups can check they have the right amount of sweets. Wonder together what this tells you about God. What does this passage tell us about Jesus? Provide space for the children to give their initial thoughts.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Cut the cake and eat it together as you ask the children the following questions, encouraging them to take turns to contribute:

- What was your favourite part of this Bible passage?
- How do you think the people John was writing to felt as they read this bit of his letter?
- Why do you think God wants us to know how much he loves us?
- Why is Jesus described as the 'saviour of the world'?
- What does knowing that God is love mean to you?
- How does knowing that God is love change the way we live our lives? How does this story challenge us as disciples?

15 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: pens; paper; tablets and / or smartphones (if possible, use one device per small group, but if not, one for the whole group will be fine)

Before the session, download the AutoRap app onto each device. The app is free for basic use.

Split the children into groups and give each one a device, as well as pens and paper. (If you have a small group, work together.) Encourage the children to create a rap that expresses a response to the Bible passage. They might want to choose

one of these statements or come up with something of their own:

God made us because he wants to be friends with us; There is nothing that can separate me from God's love; When God looks at me, he smiles; God's love goes on and on for ever; God sent Jesus to die for me because he loves me so much.

Once they have composed their rap they can speak it into the app. If they have time, they could do several. Give them five minutes to come up with the rap, then play them back to the rest of the group.

If you don't have access to any devices such as smartphones or tablets, provide some basic percussion instruments so the children can create a rhythm for their rap. Alternatively, write poems rather than raps and read them out.

5 PRAYER

You will need: reflective music and the means to play it

Encourage the group to get comfortable, then play your reflective music. As the music is playing, ask the children to talk to God about what they have discovered today. It might be a confirmation that God loves them, having explored that idea before. It might be that this is the first time a child has heard that God is love and that he loves them. For those whose home lives are not full of love it might have brought up difficult feelings. Be aware of all these possible responses.

After a few minutes, finish with a short prayer thanking God for being love and for loving us. Ask him to help you love others this week. Let the group know they can talk to you (or another adult they trust) about anything they might have thought about during the session.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Love is...

MEETING AIM

To think through our ideas of love compared with God's ideas, and to give us areas we can grow in as we love others.

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 13

BACKGROUND

This is a very well-known passage, but in our culture of *X-Factor* judging, social media 'likes' and fake news it's important for us to remember God's definition of real love. It's very different from the definitions we see around us, and we are called to love as God loves. Sometimes this can be surprising and even uncomfortable. Give the children time to explore this passage and process it as you think about how God asks us to love others.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children to your group by name and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about the past week. Share in the children's triumphs and disasters, and divulge something from your own life. Invite the children to describe someone they love. What is it about them that they love? Describe someone else they know who loves them. How do they know this person loves them?

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: slips of paper; red felt-tip pens
Split the children into groups (or work together if you have a small number of children). Brainstorm the question 'What is love?'. Encourage the children to come up with one-word answers and then write this word on a slip of paper, drawing a love heart around it.

Once they have written two or three answers, share them with the larger group. Keep the ideas the children have come up with for use in 'Bible story'.

15 BIBLE STORY

You will need: slips of paper from 'Intro activity'; the phrases below written on paper; a Bible

Before the session, write these phrases on separate slips of paper: Love is kind; Love is patient; Love is never jealous; Love does not boast; Love is not proud; Love does not put others down; Love is not selfish; Love does not get angry easily; Love doesn't keep a list of other people's wrongs; Love does not enjoy evil; Love enjoys the truth; Love always protects; Love always trusts; Love always hopes; Love always keeps going to the end; Love never fails.

Divide the group into pairs. Give each pair a phrase (or more if you have fewer children in the group) from the verse that they must act out to the rest of the group. Give them some time to create their short scene. They can use speech and actions to create a scenario, but must not use the exact words in the phrase.

Once everyone is ready, read 1 Corinthians 13 aloud to the group. As each phrase comes up, the pair who created an action for that phrase should act out their scene. The phrases come thick and fast, so this might take a while. If you're short on time, just give each pair one of the phrases to create a scene for.

Show the children the ideas they came up with during 'Intro activity'. Do any of them match up with our own ideas about love? If any match, place them together. Are some very different? Place the different ones far away from each other.

Chat about the ones that are the same and the ones that are different. Explain to the children that the author of this letter (a man called Paul) was writing to a church in a place called Corinth. They weren't behaving in a loving way towards each other and Paul felt he had to remind them exactly what love meant (and how their actions were empty if they acted without love).

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children the following questions, encouraging them to take turns to contribute:

- Which is your favourite description of love from the Bible passage?
- Which do you find difficult to do?
- How is the love Paul talks about here different from the love we see around us? Why?
- Are there any phrases that made you think about a particular person? Who and why?
- Are there any phrases you'd like to be better at? How can we get better at being kind or not being jealous?
- What does this passage tell you about God and his love?

5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: ping-pong balls; pens
Ask the children to think about the love phrases from the Bible passage, and particularly the areas they would like to improve in. Invite them to take some ping-pong balls and draw emojis on them for those phrases. You may need to help them think of ways they find it difficult to love, for example not holding a record of wrongs about a sibling or choosing to be kind to someone new in the class. They can take the balls home as reminders.

5 PRAYER

You will need: table tennis bats (one per child if you can, otherwise enough for them to take it in turns); emoji ping-pong balls from 'Creative response'; hard surfaces such as a table or the floor

Put the children into pairs (these could be the same pairs as in 'Bible story'). Give them table tennis bats and some of the emoji ping-pong balls. Encourage them to hit the balls back and forward to each other across a table or on the floor.

With each hit of the ball they can ask God to help them love others with his idea of love rather than our own. They can be specific about the emoji drawn on the ball they're playing with or about the areas they identified earlier that they would like to love better in.

Play and pray for as long as you have time and the children are engaged. Finish off with a prayer thanking God for loving us. Ask him to help us love others in the ways we have prayed about.

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