

The Greatest Commandment

Lesson At-a-Glance

Scripture Reference
Matthew 22:34-46

Lesson Focus
Jesus gives us simple rules to live by.

Bible Memory Verse
“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . [and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 22:37, 39

Gather (10 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Arrival Activity Kids make and decorate a list of class rules.	Spark Activity Pages, Spark Coloring Pages	Poster board, pencils, crayons, markers, colored pencils
Circle Time Kids play a simple game to introduce today's story.	Spark Song CD, Spark Songbook	Music source
Opening Prayer Kids ask God to help them follow their class rules.	None	Class Rules poster from Arrival Activity

Open the Bible (15 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
The Greatest Commandment Story Kids read the story out loud together.	Spark Story Bibles, Spark NRSV Bible	None
Keep It Simple Kids organize the Ten Commandments through the lens of the Greatest Commandment.	Leaflets	Pencils, crayons

Activate Faith (15 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Love Is an Action Kids write or draw ways they can obey the Greatest Commandment.	Leaflets, Spark Bible Stickers	Pencils, crayons, markers
Jesus Says Kids play a modified game of "Simon Says."	None	None

Send (5 minutes)

	Spark Resources	Supplies
Closing Conversation Kids look at their class rules and compare them to the Greatest Commandment.	Leaflets	Class Rules poster from Arrival Activity
Closing Prayer Kids thank God for teaching them how to live.	Spark Family Pages	None

Bible Background

The Hebrew Scriptures are grouped into three literary categories: Torah (or the Law of Moses), Prophets, and Writings. The Torah is the first five books of the Bible. The Prophets include the books from Joshua through 2 Kings, except for Ruth, and Isaiah through Malachi, except for Lamentations and Daniel. Ruth, Lamentations, and Daniel are part of the Writings, along with the remaining books of the Old Testament. Jesus had grown up learning these scriptures. From an early age, he engaged with teachers in the synagogues and temple. In this story, Jesus is being questioned by the Jewish authorities who are trying to trap him. They know all the Jewish laws from the Hebrew Scriptures and are testing Jesus. Jesus silences them by stating the law of love, which makes all the rest of the laws relative. The law of love is the lens for understanding God's laws and *all* laws.

Why This Story Matters

Kids are inundated by rules and regulations every day, through institutionalized education and a complex society. Sometimes it's hard to keep track of how to do everything "right." A firm grasp of the Greatest Commandment gives kids a surefire benchmark against which to check their decisions every day. If they're following the law of love, they can trust that they're making the right choices.

Gather (10 minutes)

Arrival Activity

If some kids arrive earlier than others and you need a lesson-based activity, make copies of the Activity Page and Coloring Page and set them out for kids to try.

Today we're going to make a poster listing all our class rules. What rules do you think we should write to make sure we all have a good time in Sunday school together? Encourage the kids to come up with a list, help them write out the rules on a piece of poster board, and then let the kids decorate it with crayons and markers.

Spark Resources

Spark Activity Pages
Spark Coloring Pages

Supplies

Poster board
Pencils
Crayons
Markers
Colored pencils

Circle Time

Before kids arrive, make a lengthy list of complicated tasks. For example: Stand up, walk around the room three times, jump up and down seventeen times, walk the other direction around the room six times, turn in place clockwise twice, then counterclockwise twice, and sit down.

Look at our Class Rules poster that you made. Is this a lot of rules, or just a few? Do you think you could remember them all? Why are rules like this important? Accept answers. **We're going to talk more about our class rules later. Now we're going to play a game.**

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook

Supplies

Music source

Tell the kids you're going to give them a list of things they need to do in a certain order. You're going to give them the entire list before they start, so they need to remember them all. Then give them an impossibly long list of tasks to do. Keep going until someone interrupts and says, "That's impossible!" Or if you finish your list, simply ask the group if anyone thinks they could remember all that.

The Jewish people lived by a list of 613 different laws, or commandments, that they believed they had to follow in order for God to love and take care of them! It was nearly impossible to do! Only people who studied the law their whole lives even knew what all the laws were and how to follow them. Jesus came for all people and had a very different message: God loves you no matter what. You can't earn God's love by following a whole bunch of different rules. This scared the people in charge. They were afraid that people would follow Jesus instead of them and they wouldn't get to be in charge anymore! So they were always trying to get Jesus to say things to get himself in trouble. For instance, in our story for today, they asked Jesus which of the laws was the most important.

Jesus, of course, had the right answer, because he was God! He took all 613 laws and combined them into just two. Do you think you could remember to do two things if I told them to you? Jesus said that if you do these two things, you will be following *all* of God's laws! The people in charge didn't like that very much!

We're going to read what those two most important commandments are in our story today.

MUSIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Song 1: "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy" (tracks 10 and 27 on Spark Song CD, page 55 in Spark Songbook)

Song 2: "The Love Round" Sing this camp song based on the Greatest Commandment. It's also known as "The Love Canon."

Opening Prayer

Let's say a prayer together asking God to help us follow our class rules. If you're a reader, you can read them along with me. Pray a prayer that begins, **Dear God, help us to _____, and fill in the blanks with the rules the kids created.** Repeat the phrase until you've gone through all the rules. Invite the kids to join you in saying **Amen.**

Spark Resources
None

Supplies
Class Rules poster from
Arrival Activity

Open the Bible (15 minutes)

The Greatest Commandment Story

Invite kids with Spark NRSV Bibles to each find and sit with a buddy with a Spark Story Bible.

Invite the older kids to look up the story in their Spark NRSV Bibles on page 1087, and the younger kids to find The Greatest Commandment on pages 308–311 of the Spark Story Bible. Older kids can help younger kids when they have found their own pages. **We're going to go around the group and read the story from the Spark Story Bible one paragraph at a time. If you don't want to read today, you can say "pass."** Go around the group until the story has been read.

Find Squiggles together on page 309. What is his face saying about his feelings? (*He looks very worried.*) **Why do you think he looks that way?** (*Because the Pharisees are trying to trick Jesus.*) **Does Squiggles have anything to worry about?** (*No. Jesus quiets the Pharisees with his answers.*)

Spark Resources
Spark NRSV Bibles
Spark Story Bibles

Supplies
None

Bible Memory Verse

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . [and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37, 39

Today's Bible Memory Verse is a long one! But it's a really important one. Let's break it down into little pieces and see if we can memorize the whole thing. Take some time with this one. Practice saying it in short phrases, then longer phrases, then all together. Incorporate actions into each phrase. For example, when you say "Love God with all your heart," point to your heart. For "soul" point to the sole of your shoe. (You may need to explain the pun.) For "mind," point to your head. For "neighbor as yourself," link arms with your buddy.

Keep It Simple

The most well-known of God's commandments to the Jewish people were the Ten Commandments. These Ten Commandments are listed on your leaflet. With your buddy, figure out which category each commandment falls into. Is it a law about loving God or about loving your neighbor as yourself? Draw lines to the correct category. Give kids a chance to complete the activity in pairs, then encourage kids to share their answers with the group.

When kids have finished, invite them to read and discuss the Bible Bits together.

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
Pencils
Crayons

Activate Faith (15 minutes)

Love Is an Action

Now that we know there are two groups of commandments from God that cover all the rules we have to follow, how do we go about obeying them? Work with your buddy to write or draw at least one way you can show love for God and one way you can show love for your neighbor. Remember that everyone is your neighbor! Give kids a chance to work together to complete the activity. Encourage kids of all ages to share their lists or drawings. You may wish to have some buddy pairs act out their ideas for other kids to see.

Ask for volunteers to read the Did You Know? items aloud. Invite kids to place a sticker or special mark next to the item they found the most interesting.

Spark Resources
Leaflets
Spark Bible Stickers

Supplies
Pencils
Crayons
Markers

Jesus Says

There are lots of rules out there, and lots of people we need to listen to. Sometimes it can get confusing, but Jesus gives us the best rules to live by. We're going to play a version of "Simon Says" called "Jesus Says." Explain the basic rules of "Simon Says." Have all the kids stand facing you. Give them a simple instruction such as, "Hop on one foot." If you start your instruction with the words "Simon says...", they need to follow the instruction. If you don't start your instruction with the words "Simon says...", they should not follow the instruction. If they don't follow your instruction when you say "Simon says...", or if they do your instruction when you don't say "Simon says...", they are "out" and should sit down. **Once in a while, I'll say "Jesus says, 'Love God and your neighbor!'" When I say that, no matter what you're doing, stop and high-five the person next to you while shouting, "Praise God!"** All the kids who were "out" should do this too, and they are now back "in." Practice it a few times before starting the game with the kids. Encourage older kids to help out younger kids.

Spark Resources
None

Supplies
None

Send (5 minutes)

Closing Conversation

Look again at our class rules. Which ones do you think are rules about loving God, and which ones are rules about loving our neighbor? Go through the list with the kids and categorize. If all or most of them fall under loving our neighbor, encourage the kids to wonder why that might be. **When we show love to our neighbor, that's a way of showing love to God too!**

Now look at the Faith on the Go! ideas on your leaflet. Ask someone to read #1 out loud. Then have the kids look at their ideas from the Love Is an Action activity on their leaflet. Encourage all the kids in the class to try at least #1 in the coming week.

Spark Resources
Leaflets

Supplies
Class Rules poster from
Arrival Activity

Closing Prayer

Distribute Spark Family Pages to kids and direct kids to look at For Families to Do Together under Live It. Encourage them to make a poster with their families, like the poster they made in class.

Let's end with a prayer thanking God for helpful rules. After each line I say, jump up and shout, "Thank you, God!"

God, you teach us how to live. (Thank you, God!)

You make the rules easy to understand . . .

You teach us how to love you . . .

You teach us how to love each other . . .

You call us to take care of others . . .

You are good all the time!

Invite the kids to join you in saying **Amen.**

As you say goodbye to kids, make sure they take home the leaflet and Family Page.

Spark Resources
Spark Family Pages

Supplies
None