

The Greatest Commandment

Grades
3-4

LOVE

MATTHEW 22:34-40

What's happening in this story?

First, it should be noted that the Pharisees in this passage were not asking innocent questions. They were hoping to trap Jesus. Second, if you ask Christians, "How many commandments are there?" most will answer, "10." But first-century Jewish people would have answered, "There are 613." With so many commandments to keep track of, there was always a desire to organize and prioritize them, so the Pharisees' question was not new. But Jesus gave a profound response. Jesus pointed out that all 613 commandments came from one source: Loving God with all your heart and soul and mind.

What does this story mean for kids?

Kids who have been part of a faith community have likely started to learn about the Ten Commandments. Hopefully, they are learning that the commandments are not just a list of dos and don'ts. Rather, they are guides to living a meaningful and full life—another way in which God provides for and blesses us.

Why this theme?

Love for God and neighbor is the focus and purpose of all the commandments. Kids may struggle to memorize the ten most famous commandments (imagine trying to remember all 613!), and words like *adultery* and *covet* are well beyond them at this age. How fortunate that when we know "Love God; love others," we know all we need to know!

AGE LEVEL TIP

Kids this age are just beginning to figure out that rules are more than things they can't do. They are a way for people to be together in God's love. "Love God and love others" sounds simple. Carrying it out can be challenging.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- White paper
- Pencils
- Markers
- Pens
- Scrap paper

LESSON SUPPLIES

- Timer
- Chart paper

Do some kids arrive early? Try this.

Set out paper and pencils. Ask kids to write down all of the rules they can think of. What rules do they follow at school? Church? Other places they go? Have them draw a small heart next to any rule that has something to do with love.

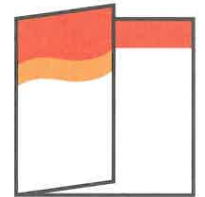
Circle up with kids for an opening conversation.

In the Old Testament, God gave the people of Israel Ten Commandments, rules that helped them learn how to get along with each other and live in relationship with God. Do you know any of them? Give kids a moment to recall some of the Ten Commandments. See Exodus 20:1-17 for a refresher. Today we'll hear about how Jesus reminded the people which commandments were most important: the ones about love. God loves us always, and because of God's love, we are commanded to love God and love others.

Pray together: Loving God, help us to show your love to others, even when it's hard. Thank you for always loving us. Amen.

Pass out leaflets and markers.

How did you get to church today? Whether you walked, biked, or rode in a car or bus, the people who brought you here followed traffic rules because they love you and want you to be safe. Sometimes traffic rules are communicated on signs like the one on your leaflet. If you could make everybody follow one rule, what rule would that be? Write it on the traffic sign. It doesn't have to be a traffic rule. Make up any rule you want! Give kids time to write rules and share them. How do some rules help us live and play together? Does the rule you made up do that?



Gather kids around the screen where you'll watch the video.

What chores are you assigned at home? Do you do them without being reminded? In today's video, Ruby is unhappy about all of her chores. Let's watch to see what happens when Mimi helps her out.

View Episode 5, "Tough Love," on the Year Gold Spring, Grades 3-6 DVD.

Ask kids these questions about the video:

- Why did Ruby think rules weren't for her?
- Why do parents make rules, according to Mimi?
- What rule or expectation do you have now that you didn't have when you were age six?
- How do you respond when someone gives you a new rule?
- I wonder why Ruby thought that love wasn't going to get any easier.



Open your Whirl Kids Study Bibles.

Today's passage is from the book of Matthew. It's in the New Testament in the Gospels and Acts section of the Bible. If this is your first time reading from Matthew, invite kids to check out the book introduction and comic on page 1156.



For Jewish people, all of God's laws and commandments are important. In today's story, a tricky lawyer tests Jesus' knowledge of God's laws and commandments. Instead of falling into the lawyer's trap, Jesus responds by pointing the lawyer back to the most important commandment: love God with all your heart and soul and mind.

Help kids find Matthew 22:34-40 and read it in this creative way together: Go around your group and invite kids to name the *most important* rule their parents have given them. **Think about that rule while we read aloud together.** Ask for volunteers or take turns reading the verses around the circle.

Invite kids to check out what Ruby says about Matthew 22:36-40.

Ask these questions after you read the story.

- What did Jesus say was the greatest commandment? And what commandment is just like the greatest one?
- I wonder what Jesus meant when he said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"?
- How can one commandment or rule include many commandments or rules?
- What are some ways you "love yourself"?
- What changes in us when we follow Jesus' command to love others like we love ourselves?

Make your mark on the Wall Chart.

Look at the chart and find the theme for today. Give kids time to find the word *Love*. What was the number one commandment again? **Love God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.** Invite each kid to draw either a small heart or a small "#1" in and around the box by *Love*.



BIBLE BIT

The term *law* in this passage includes commandments and the statutes and rules concerning temple rituals, relationship guidelines, health code, dietary restrictions, and more.

WATCH IT AGAIN

If you watch the video again, think about how Ruby might act differently if she thought of her many possessions as opportunities to love others.

OUR CHURCH

This story underlines the connections between Old Testament laws and Jesus' message of love. How do kids see law leading to love in your church?

RESPOND 10

Open leaflets and pass out pens, pencils, and scrap paper.

Set out a timer and chart paper. Tear off leaflet square.

1. **Jesus said the number one commandment is to love God and love others. We can follow that commandment in our homes every day with the people we live with.** Set a timer for two minutes. **On the house on the leaflet, write as many ways you can think of that people who live in your home show love to God and to each other. What loving actions do you see and do? Don't write inside the door. Stop when the timer sounds.**
2. **Look at what you wrote. How can you put all these actions into one rule that your family follows? Write it on scrap paper.** Encourage kids to help each other. Help them think through their ideas and avoid easy "church answers," such as "Do what God says."
3. **Look at your rule. Is the word *love* or *loving* included?** Give kids time to add love to their rule, if they wish.
4. **When you're ready, write your one rule in the door outline on the leaflet square and on the chart paper.**
5. Invite kids to take turns reading aloud one rule from the chart paper (*not* the one they wrote).
6. **Who makes the rules in your home? How would they be surprised by your simple rule that is based in love for God and each other?**

LAUNCH 10

Circle up with kids for a quick review.

Jesus wasn't trying to show off to the lawyer or the Pharisees. He just shared a way that makes it easier for everyone to understand how God wants us to live together in love. When we focus on others rather than ourselves, it's easier to let love be the only commandment or rule we need to follow. Is it easier or harder to follow one *big* rule or many small rules?

Return to the leaflet panels.

Invite kids to think of ways they can reflect God's commandment of love. **In the mirror, write one way people will see you following God's commandment of love this week.**

Send kids out with a blessing.

Circle up with kids. **God blesses all of us. And that means me** (place a hand on your chest). **And that means you** (place your other hand on the shoulder of the kid next to you). Each kid passes the blessing by repeating those words and actions. When the blessing makes it back to you, say, **Go and bless the world.**

Thank kids for coming today. Remind them of the Family Square on the other side of the leaflet.