



The Great Commandment

Goal: To learn that the greatest commandment is to love God and love neighbor.

RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

. . . In Mark 12:28–34

When a legal expert asked Jesus what was the most important commandment, Jesus responded: “The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength* [Deuteronomy 6:4–5]. The second is this, *You will love your neighbor as yourself* [Leviticus 19:18]. No other commandment is greater than these” (Mark 12:29–30, CEB).

Jesus’ answer is tremendously important today. These two commandments capsulize what God wants of us and how Jesus showed us to live. The first commandment names God as the One to whom all belongs, and the One we love with the totality of our being, with all that is in us.

The second commandment relates to how we treat other people. The term *neighbor* does not simply mean those with whom we share the same ZIP code! It means all people. All people means all people—without exceptions. All persons are created by God and bear the image of God. So we are connected or related to all—as “neighbors.” God’s grace enables us to love God and love others, which we do in deepest gratitude.

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Children know and understand about rules. Invite them to share the rules they know and then which are the most important ones. They will be able to understand that commandments are like rules, and that God wants people to remember the very important ones. Some children might recall the Ten Commandments. Invite them to respond to this question: What do you think Jesus would say are the two most important rules to remember? Use this question as an introduction to how important it is to remember two things: love God and love neighbors.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

These two commandments that Jesus values can easily be understood by even the youngest children. Children can share examples of what love looks like by talking about how they know they are loved. They know love from family by hugs and kisses. They know love from teachers who encourage them and challenge them. They know love from friends who share with them. Children will also be able to share examples from their lives of how they show love to neighbors. We are reminded that being neighbors means Jesus wants us to love other people we meet.

*Loving God, help me to love you with all I have
and other people in a self-giving way. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 12, 14, 19

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: **SCM 12a, 12b**

choice 2: heart-shaped
cookie cutters,
cardboard heart shapes

Exploring

choice 1: optional items
for a challenge: mittens,
two pairs of tongs, two
clothespins

choice 2: air-drying clay
or salt dough (simple
recipe on p. 129), waxed
paper

choice 3: copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Before the session, cut out the hearts on **SCM 12a** and **SCM 12b** and hide the hearts around the room for use in “Guided Play” choice 1. “Exploring God’s Grace” choice 2 requires more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play

TD **F** **A** **B** **M** **MS**

Greet children as they arrive and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know personally. Tell the parents/caregivers today’s story is about Jesus saying what is the greatest commandment: love God and love neighbor.

Invite the children to choose a guided-play activity to start:

- 1. Hiding Hearts**—Tell the children you have hidden 24 hearts around the room. Invite the children to find the hearts and bring them to you. As each child brings you a heart, read it aloud.
- 2. Play Dough**—Invite the children to play with red, pink, and white play dough. Give them heart-shaped cookie cutters and cardboard heart shapes to use with the play dough. Show them how they can cut out a heart shape with the cookie cutter or use the cardboard hearts to form a heart shape.
- 3. Love Music**—Invite the children to form a circle and hold hands. Play the song “Love”—**MM 24**. Have the children walk in a circle to the right through the lyrics “Christians, this is your call.” Move to the center on “Love your neighbor as yourself”; move out again on “For God loves us all.” Repeat, walking to the left on the next verse through “The gospel in a word is love.” Move to the center on “Love your neighbor as your brother” and move out again on “Love, love, love.”

F *Sometimes children protest that they’re being treated unfairly when it may be only that they’re not getting what they want. When self-interest overrides attempts to be fair, ask them to flip the situation and look at it from the other person’s perspective.*



Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, singing “Praise God, Praise God”—**MM 7**; **SCM 14**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Jesus Calls the Children

MS

Invite the children to repeat after you and follow your motions.

Children short and children tall, (*squat down and then stand up tall*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)

Children big and children small, (*reach up high with one hand, place other hand at knee level*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)

Babies, toddlers, big kids like me, (*rock a baby, hold a hand down by the side of your body as if holding the hand of a toddler, then put your hands on your hips and stand up tall*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)

He calls them all to come, you see. (*motion with your hand to come*)

Jesus loves them all the time. (*hug yourself and then make a big circle in front of you with both arms*)

We Are God’s Family

L

Say the action poem, inviting the children to repeat after you and follow your motions:

You and you and you and you (*point to those in the circle*)
are part of God’s big family. (*hug yourself*)

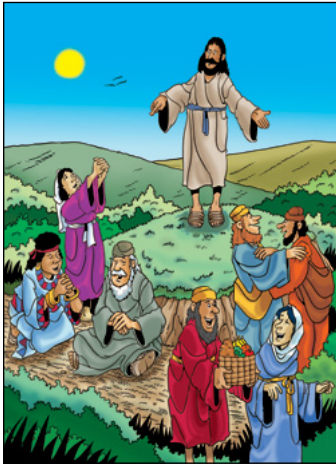
I stretch my arms to hold you all, (*stretch your arms around each child on each side*)

a great big circle we will be. (*all hold hands together*)

God’s arms reach around the world (*stretch arms out wide*)
and hold each child in loving care. (*hug yourself*)

For God gives us all we need each day (*pat your head on top*)
and God loves it when we share. (*hug yourself and then stretch your arms out wide*)

T Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as hugging self, stretching arms wide, jumping up and down, and so forth.



Today's story from Matthew's Gospel can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Hearing the Story

Open the Bible to Mark 12 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about Jesus saying what is the greatest commandment: love God and love your neighbor.

Read **SCM 12**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

Teach the children the motions for "Love God with hearts (*hand covering heart*), souls (*cross arms and hug self*), minds (*both index fingers point to head*), and strength (*make 'strong arms'*)" and "Love your neighbor (*reach hands out in front of you*)."

Read the story again and invite the children to make the hand motions when Jesus says the greatest commandment.

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Love God, Love Neighbors Relay Game

MS

Before the session, cut out two large hearts.

Help the children form two teams. Place the hearts on the floor at one end of the room opposite the two teams at the other end of the room.

The first person on each team will walk, crawl, hop, skip, or do another motion you call out to get to the other end of the room and pick up the heart. While they are doing the motion, the other children should encourage their teammate by repeating, "(Name), love God!" When the player is headed back to the group, indicate a new motion. Their teammates now cheer them on by repeating, "(Name), love neighbors!"

Play continues and each player must place the heart back on the floor at the other end of the room before picking it up and returning. The game ends when all have made it across the room and back.

For a challenge, the children can pick up the heart: wearing mittens, with a clothespin, with tongs, with a tape donut on their finger, or in other ways.

MS

Make sure children with mobility issues are included in all activities. Find ways to adapt activities to ensure all are able to fully participate, such as instead of saying walk, crawl, hop, and so on, simply say move to the other side of the room.



Simple Salt Dough Recipe

1 cup flour
 $\frac{3}{8}$ cup salt
 $\frac{3}{8}$ cup hot water

Combine ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Knead dough for 3 minutes or so. If dough is sticky, knead in a pinch or two more of flour.

Use “wonder” questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

2. Love God, Love Neighbors Medallion



Before the session, either obtain air-drying clay or make salt dough using the recipe in the sidebar. Prepare an example or two and allow at least 24 hours to dry.

Tell the children that they are going to create a wearable reminder to love God and love neighbors. Give each child enough dough to create a small ball. Show them how to roll the ball in their hands.

When all have made a ball, ask them to set their ball on a piece of waxed paper and a small plate and flatten it with the palm of their hand, making a disc. Invite them to press their thumb on the dough, making an indentation. As they do this, have them repeat, “Love God.” Show them how to turn their thumb to another angle and press it on top of the other thumbprint, forming a heart. While they do this, have them repeat, “Love neighbors.”

Use a drinking straw to poke a hole in the top of the medallion. This will need to dry overnight. Using a sample medallion, show the children how to string a length of yarn through the hole and tie a knot at the ends. Send the children home with a length of yarn, and encourage everyone to finish their medallion and wear it as a reminder of the rule Jesus taught us: “Love God, love neighbor.”

3. Sharing the Greatest Commandment



Cut out the heart shape from GN 1 for each child. Give each child a heart shape and read what is printed on it: “Jesus says, ‘Love God and love your neighbor.’” Invite the children to decorate their hearts. Tell the children to share their hearts with members of the congregation at the end of the church service or during fellowship time.

LG *Providing opportunities for children to welcome others, offer help, and express generosity helps build their confidence. This also helps them learn that they are gifted members of your community.*

4. Coloring Page



Hand out copies of GN 2 and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture of Jesus teaching about love. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- I wonder, “How will the religious leader from the story show love to others?”
- I wonder, “How can we love God?”
- I wonder, “How can we love our neighbor?”

LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Call the children together, singing “Jesus Says God Cares for Us”—**MM 12; SCM 19**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

Remind the children that Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God and love your neighbor. Ask them how they will show love for God and love for their neighbor this week.


If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Pray, inviting the children to repeat after you:

A, B, C, D, E, F, G. /
Thank you, God, for feeding me. /
H, I, J, K. /
Hear us pray. /
L, M, N, O. /
Here we go. /
P, Q, R, S, T, U, V. /
Thank you, God, for hearing me. /
W, X, Y, and Z. /
Thank you, God, for loving me. /
Amen! /

As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), Jesus loves you. Love God and love your neighbors. The grace of God goes with you.”

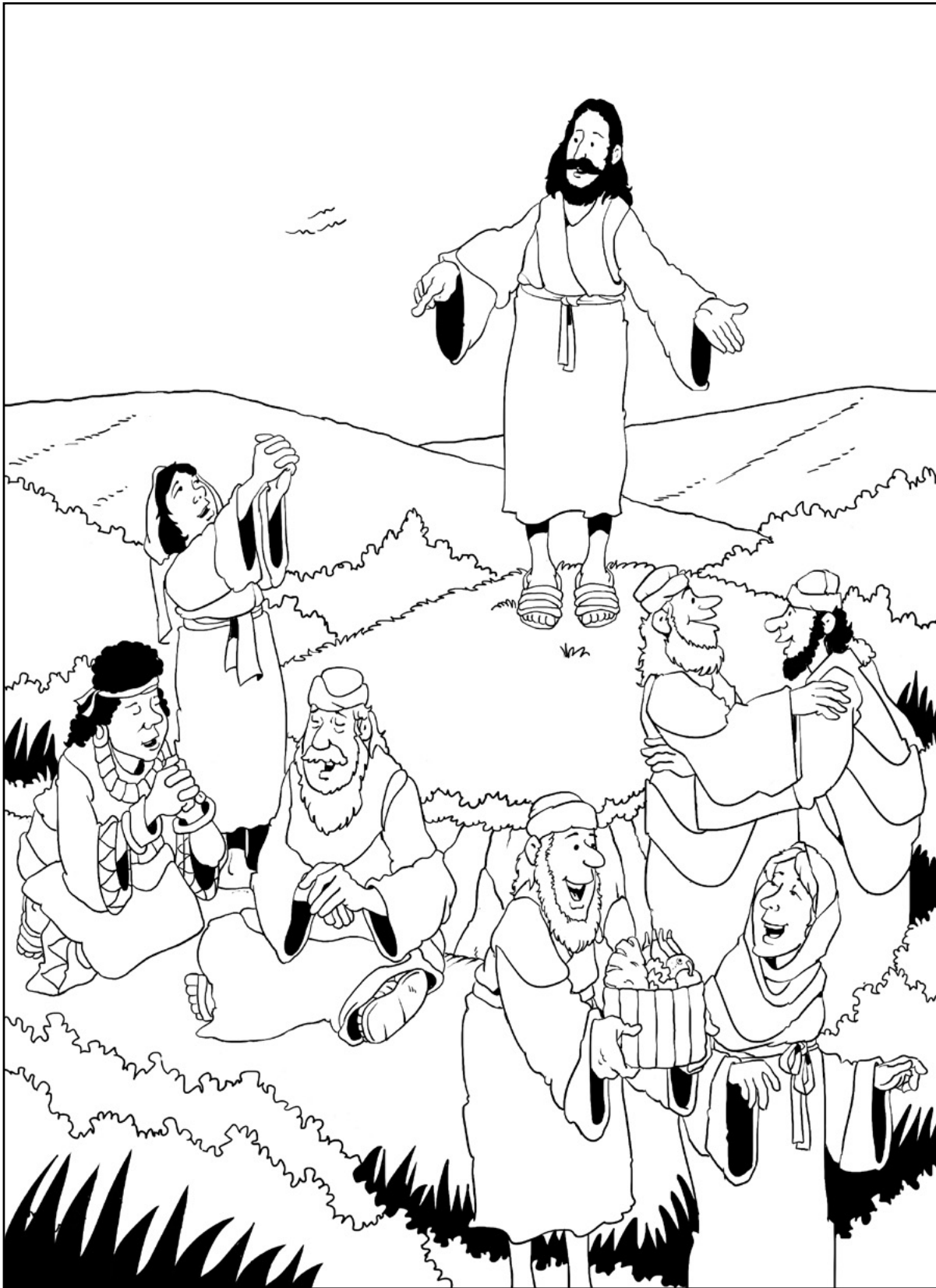


Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).



**Jesus says,
"Love God
and love your
neighbor."**

The Great Commandment



Jesus answers the question, "What is the greatest commandment?"

