



The Great Commandment

Goal: To consider why Jesus asked us to keep the great commandment.

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, 12a, 12b,
12c, 12d, 12e, 12f, 12g, 23,
24

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

Responding

Claiming

old magazines and
newspapers

Celebrating

SCM 12c, 12d, 12e, 12f,
dice

Praying

heavy paper, watercolor
paints

Extra

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” and “Praying God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **C** **L**

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of Christ be with you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words.

Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Offer a candle, a green cloth, a Bible, and **SCM 12a** and **SCM 12b** to be placed on the worship table.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities, and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Invite a volunteer to practice reading the Scripture passage for today’s reading.

Play a game of “But why?” Invite children to name rules that must be followed at home, at school, at church, on the ball field, on a play date, or in a card game.

Each time a child lists a rule (stop at a stop sign, share, keep your hands to yourself, and so forth), lead the rest of the group in saying, “But why?” as they shrug their shoulders and extend their palms. The point is to encourage them to determine why the rules they follow are important.

Comment that today’s Bible story is about Jesus offering the most important rules (commands) for living faithfully.

Singing

Play and sing “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus”—**MM 16**; **SCM 24**.

Praying

Turn on the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence with us. Invite all of the children to close their eyes and breathe deeply. Encourage them to imagine being with Jesus when he taught how God wants us to live and love.

Invite the children to join you in this echo prayer:

Dear God, /
thank you for the grace of your son, Jesus, /
who taught us how to love well. /
Help us to love you /
and others faithfully. /
Amen. /

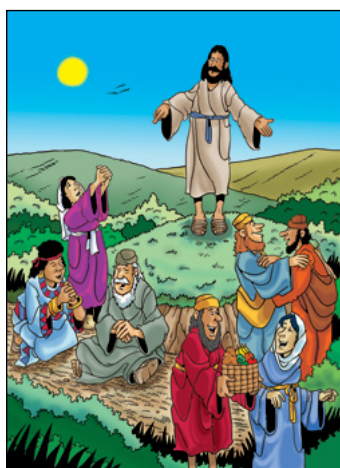


Preparing to Hear the Story

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Invite children to tell what the word *commandment* means to them. Ask them to name some commandments that they know. Some children may be familiar with the Ten Commandments.

Tell the children that these commandments, and many other rules in the Old Testament, were the rules and laws that people were to follow, and that Jesus would have known very well what the commandments and laws were. Wonder together why these commandments are so important.



Today's story 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

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Invite a child to find Mark 12 in the Bible. Have a volunteer read Mark 12:28–34. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the worship center.

Hand out **SCM 12c, 12d, 12e, 12f, and 12g**. Invite each volunteer to hold up their picture at the appropriate times as they hear the story again. Prompt if needed. Read **SCM 12** or listen to the story audio. Place the pictures on the worship table.

Reflecting on God's Grace

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Display **SCM 12g** and have children read it aloud together. Learn the following body motions to go with the words. View motions at www.handspeak.com.

- ✎ Love (*cross arms over chest*)
- ✎ God (*place right hand, palm facing left, moving hand from forehead height down to chest height*)
- ✎ All (*place left palm facing chest and move right hand around left, ending on inside of left palm*)
- ✎ Heart (*tap over heart with middle finger of right hand*)
- ✎ Soul (*raise right hand from open left palm, like pulling a thread*)
- ✎ Mind (*tap on forehead with right pointer finger*)
- ✎ Love (*cross arms over chest*)
- ✎ Neighbor (*move back of right hand toward left hand facing out in front, then take both hands and place them facing one another about a foot apart*)
- ✎ Yourself (*move right thumb toward chest*)

Repeat the verse several times, using the words and motions. Ask:

- ✎ What does it mean to love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul? (Explain, if necessary, that *soul* means with one's whole self.)
- ✎ Who did Jesus mean when he said “neighbor”?
- ✎ What do you think it means to love your neighbor as yourself?
- ✎ Imagine that, after hearing Jesus identify these two most important laws, someone in the crowd asked, “But why?” What would Jesus have said then?



Singing

Sing “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”—**MM 13; SCM 23**. Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace



Provide old magazines and newspapers, construction paper, glue sticks, and scissors. Allow children time to cut letters, or whole words if they can find them, from newspaper/magazine headings in order to glue to their paper the words: “Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.” Offer that it is OK for all of the words/letters not to be the same size, color, or font—in fact, that will make the image of the words more interesting.

As they work, ask:

- ▼ How can we show love to God?
- ▼ How do you show others that you love them? Family? Friends? People you don’t know that well?

Encourage children to take their creations home and to place them somewhere as a reminder that Jesus has asked us to keep these two commands as a way of living faithfully.



Celebrating God’s Grace



Create a gameboard. Use **SCM 12c, 12d, 12e, and 12f** from the worship table. Lay them out on the floor, placing blank sheets of paper between them. You could place two to four blank sheets at random between images; do whatever works best for your space and group.

Encourage children to write other “commands” on the blank sheets, such as “do 3 jumping jacks,” or “stand on one foot,” or “recite today’s verse,” and so forth. Be sure to create “Start” and “Finish” spaces as well.

Once the gameboard has been created, line up the children shortest to tallest. Allow the child in the front of the line to roll the dice and move that many spaces forward.

If they land on the heart, mind (brain), or soul or whole self (boy with arms uplifted) image, they should voice a way that they can love God with their heart, mind, or soul or whole self. Upon landing on the neighbor image, children should offer one way they can love their neighbor as they love themselves. Offer suggestions if a child seems stumped.

Take turns until all the children have made it to the finish block.

Secure the pages to the floor with tape to avoid children slipping.



Praying God's Grace



Provide heavy paper, watercolor paints, and paintbrushes. Ask:

- ▼ What do you imagine the world would be like if everyone followed the two commandments that Jesus said were most important?
- ▼ How would you feel if the world were like what you are imagining?
- ▼ Imagine how God would feel if the world were like that.

Invite children to create a painting that represents their image of what the world would be like if we all followed these two commands. Ask them to work silently. Once the children are done, offer a prayer asking God to make these images a reality here on earth.

T *Transition times vary, so plan accordingly. Cleanup may require only a short warning while hand-washing may require more warning and time. Use a song or short activity to signal the change.*

Extra Activity



Ask a volunteer to read the scenarios on **GN 1**. Invite children to suggest endings that would reflect loving God and loving neighbor as self. Allow time for them to draw their response in the space on the right.

While the children work, ask:

- ▼ How do your endings show love for the neighbor?
- ▼ How can you show love for God in these situations?



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite all of the children to gather, and lead them in cleaning the worship space.

Pray this litany together. At each response, invite children to say and use motions to the verse they learned earlier: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

God, we are thankful for your teachings.

Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

We see many people who are in need.

Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

These people live nearby and far away.

Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

Help us to remember to . . .

Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

Amen.

As the children leave, bless each one, saying, “(Name), God loves you! Share the love of God.”



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).

	<p>A family has just moved in down the street. They have a child your age. This morning you heard some of the neighbors talking about this family, saying that the dad has been in prison. Now you're not sure you want to get to know them.</p>
	<p>At breakfast this morning, you hear your parents talking about an apartment building fire in a nearby city. Several families lost everything they owned.</p>
	<p>While you were out playing, you see that dogs have gotten into Mr. Hunter's trash and scattered it all over his yard. You've tried to be nice to him before, but he is grumpy to everyone.</p>

