

Semicontinuous
Deut. 34:1–12
Ps. 90:1–6, 13–17
Complementary
Lev. 19:1–2, 15–18
Ps. 1
1 Thess. 2:1–8
Matt. 22:34–46

With Your Whole Heart

Goal for the Session

Tweens will wonder with the Pharisee how loving God with heart, soul, and mind might change the way we live.

Focus on Matthew 22:34–46

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Patrick Gray

This reading contains two discrete units. As is so often the case in Matthew’s Gospel, both involve Jesus in a verbal joust with the Pharisees. To the first question Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5. This formula is the second part of the Shema, the standard prayer that all pious Jews are to recite daily. To this he appends Leviticus 19:18, a citation popular among early Christian writers (Romans 13:8, James 2:8), but never combined with the Shema in this manner. All the law and the prophets “hang” on these two commands. The image conjured is that of a branch hanging from a tree or a door on its hinge.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Timothy A. Beach-Verhey

In quoting the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–5), Jesus points out that the aim of the law is to orient one’s entire life toward God. However, one cannot love God without loving what God loves! While the scribes and Pharisees used the law to place severe limits on those whom they were obliged to recognize as their neighbors, Jesus joins these texts in order to smash all the limits and boundaries of neighborliness. Jesus proves himself to be the true and faithful interpreter of Scripture, silencing his critics with knowledge and wisdom. Jesus is the Messiah who loves his enemies, who loves as God loves, who is “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Earl F. Palmer

It is the Monday of Holy Week. Jesus lives and teaches in the tension between Sunday’s acclamation and Friday’s execution. He has faced the opposition of religious leaders throughout his ministry, and that opposition only grows stronger in the first part of this chapter. Yet Jesus takes the risk of hearing the lawyer’s question out and answering it in good faith. Sometimes the gospel provides people with a powerful answer to difficult questions. Sometimes the gospel provokes people to even deeper questions. The answers are a gift of the Spirit, and the questions may be, too.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Allen Hilton

When Pharisees ask Jesus which commandment is the greatest of all, his answer defines the central calling of the faithful for all time: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul, and . . . mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). Here, Jesus opens a window to divine priorities. The One who touts these two love commands is no mere rabbi. This is Messiah, God’s Son, Lord. Our hearts are drawn to the heavenly voice that boomed five chapters back: “This is my Son . . . listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5).

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matthew 22:34–46

Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens can be passionate about things that matter to them. They will sacrifice time, money, and effort to pursue whatever cause captures their interest. Today we explore Jesus' teaching about loving God, self, and others with everything we have. What might that look like for the tweens in your group? Will it seem like an impossible thing to do? As you prepare for the session, consider ways you can support these young people as they consider how they might love in the way Jesus taught.

God of love, grant wisdom as I seek to guide this group of tweens in grappling with the implications of Jesus' words. Help me model the kind of love Jesus teaches. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ Resource Sheet 1 from October 22, supplies listed there
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- ☐ scissors
- ☐ Color Pack 8, 18, 29,
- ☐ newsprint
- ☐ markers

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: index cards, pens, colored pencils
- ☐ option 2: several colors of yarn, measuring tape, scissors
- ☐ option 3: Color Pack 30, 31; *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome each tween by name. Encourage learners to talk about their week, naming any joys and concerns. Try to partner any newcomers with learners who attend regularly.

Gather the group by singing “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 29; track 8 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Following the instructions on Resource Sheet 1 from October 22, set the worship table and begin your time together in prayer.

Introduce the focus scripture by encouraging tweens to talk about rules and laws where you live. Include discussion of family or school rules, local traffic laws, or the rules that govern the sports they play. Encourage some discussion about the ways in which laws can be helpful, or not, and which rules or laws they think are most important.

EXPLORING

Introduce the Bible passage for this session as telling of a time Jesus was teaching his followers in the courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem. In the Jewish tradition, learning often included discussion, questions, and debate. On that particular day, a Pharisee came and asked Jesus a question. Invite tweens to tell you what they know about Pharisees, explaining as necessary that they were a religious group who believed that people could serve God best by following the Law of Moses. They would spend many years studying this law. Distribute Bibles and invite tweens to turn to the table of contents. Indicate that the Jewish law was written in the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. There were over 600 laws, or commandments, to follow.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Pharisees Ask a Question). Ask for volunteers to play the different parts and have the rest of the group be the audience. Afterward, invite tweens to guess what Jesus' answer might be.

Looking up Bible passages is a good opportunity to refresh tweens' Bible navigation skills. As needed, review how to use the table of contents and how to locate chapters and verses.

God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *hope* anew;
Light this candle, light
the way,
Bring *hope* into our
hearts today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts
today.

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *peace*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *love*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *joy*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of Christ
anew;
Light this candle, light
the way,
We celebrate new life today.
Christ, be near us as we pray
And celebrate new life today.

Ask learners to turn to Matthew 22:34–40 in their Bibles, assisting as needed. Ask a volunteer to read aloud these verses. Then, in unison, reread verses 37–39. Explain that Jesus combined two quotes from the Law of Moses to formulate this answer.

Form two groups. Cut a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Group Work) in half, and give one assignment to each group. Allow time for tweens to work on their verses, then gather and have each group make its presentation to the other.

After groups present their verses, discuss the passage:

- ✧ What do you think it means to love God with heart, soul, and mind?
- ✧ Why do you think Jesus added the part about loving our neighbors as we love ourselves?
- ✧ To whom is Jesus referring by the word *neighbor*?
- ✧ This story was included in three of the four Gospels. Why do you think these Gospel writers thought it was important to remember Jesus' teaching about the greatest commandment?

Gather around three sheets of newsprint. Print one of the following words at the top of each sheet: *God*, *Others*, *Self*. Brainstorm ideas of ways we might show love to God, to others, and to self. Have tweens use markers to record their ideas on the appropriate sheets. When all ideas have been given, invite everyone to use markers to add hearts to the sheets. Display these in your meeting space, then discuss:

- ✧ Why is it important to love God? To love others? To love ourselves?
- ✧ When might it be difficult to do this?
- ✧ What have you seen others doing that demonstrated love for God, for others, and/or for self?

Show Color Pack 18 and invite tweens to talk about what they see. As needed, ask: What kind of plant might the seedling grow into? How big might it grow? Comment that loving in the way Jesus teaches is a little like planting a seed. We plant seeds of love and then watch them grow. Ask:

- ✧ What seeds of love could you plant this week? What could you do that would show love to God, to others, and to yourself?
- ✧ What might change in our homes, schools, and communities—even in the whole world—as we plant seeds of God's love?

Play some reflective worship music, such as "Music for Meditation" (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Invite tweens to look quietly at Color Pack 18, imagining what might change and grow in their lives as they live the way that Jesus teaches.

**EASY
PREP**

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Secret Acts of Kindness** Today's passage calls us to love with everything we have. Invite tweens to participate in a "Secret Acts of Kindness Campaign." Explain that the idea is to do something kind for someone else without being noticed. When they do this act of kindness, they will leave a card asking the recipient to pass on the kindness. Brainstorm ideas of things that tweens might do for others this week. Give each learner three index cards, and have him or her print the following words on each one: "You have received a secret act of kindness. Pass it on by doing something kind for three more people, asking them to do the same." Decorate the cards if desired. If you have time, calculate how many loving acts will be done if everyone in your group does three kind acts and each of the recipients passes kind acts onto three more people.
- 2. Braided Reminders** Jesus' teaching reminds us to love God, others, and ourselves. Invite tweens to choose three colors of yarn and cut an 18-inch piece of each color. Have them gather the three pieces together and secure with a knot about 3 inches from the end. If necessary, demonstrate how to braid the strands together to make a wristband. Tell the tweens to tie another knot to secure the strands once they have braided enough yarn to fit around the wrist. Have them help one another tie the braid around the wrist and cut off the excess. Encourage tweens to wear their wristbands as a reminder to love in the three ways Jesus taught.
- 3. Celebration Dance** One way of showing our love to God is to celebrate the gifts of music and movement as we worship. Play some lively worship music such as "We Are Dancing in the Love of God" (Color Pack 30; track 23 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024) or "Thanksgiving Rap" (Color Pack 31; track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024), and invite tweens to experiment with different ways to move to the beat as they sing along. Some tweens may feel more comfortable with choreographed steps that the whole group can do in unison. Encourage the whole group's input.

CLOSING

Gather around the worship table and ask tweens to name one thing they learned about walking in God's loving ways today.

Invite learners to place their hands around Color Pack 8 on the worship table. Offer this prayer or one of your own:

God of love, help us to live and love as Jesus taught. Amen.

Lead the closing charge:

Leader: Let us go out into the world to live as Christ's servants, from whom the Lord's message rings out in every place.

All: Amen!

Thank tweens for coming.

For the next session, you will need ten cardboard boxes. Recruit help collecting the boxes.

Pharisees Ask a Question

Pharisee 1: Look—here's your chance; no one is talking to Jesus right now.

Pharisee 2: It would be a good time to say something to him, but why do you even want to ask the question? How long have you been studying the law?

Pharisee 3: Too many years to count.

Pharisee 2: So you would be considered an expert, then?

Pharisee 3: I am.

Pharisee 2: So you should be teaching Jesus! You must know the answer already.

Pharisee 3: That's not the point.

Pharisee 1: What is the point?

Pharisee 3: I want to know if Jesus knows the answer. After all, there are over 600 laws in the Law of Moses. Which one will he say is the most important?

Pharisee 2: We've been debating that question for years.

Pharisee 3: Exactly—let's see what Jesus has to say.

Pharisee 1: It's a tricky question.

Pharisee 3: Exactly!

Pharisee 1: Oh-h-h, very clever! Let's make Jesus join our debate whether he wants to or not!

Pharisee 3: Now you get it.

Pharisee 2: Here's your chance. Ask now.

Pharisee 3: *(raises voice)* Teacher, what is the most important commandment in the law?

Jesus: Well now, that's a loaded question. People have been arguing about that for years! Do you really want to drag me into your endless debates? Very well—here's what I think:

October 29, 2023
With Your Whole Heart

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary
FEASTING on the WORD
CURRICULUM

Twins
Resource Sheet 2



Group Work

DEUTERONOMY 6:5

Find this verse in your Bible and read it. Decide on a creative way to present this verse to the other group.
You might:

- Read it in unison, all together.
- Read it in unison, adding some rhythm by clapping, snapping fingers, or stomping feet.
- Have a few voices reading the verse, while everyone else provides rhythm or “beat box.”
- Have different voices read individual words, building up to a crescendo of voices by the end of the verse to add dramatic effect.
- Have one person read the verse while the rest of the group creates actions and movements to go with the words.

What will you do? Don’t take too long to decide, because you have to practice!



LEVITICUS 19:18

Find this verse in your Bible and read it. Decide on a creative way to present this verse to the other group.
You might:

- Read it in unison, all together.
- Read it in unison, adding some rhythm by clapping, snapping fingers, or stomping feet.
- Have a few voices reading the verse, while everyone else provides rhythm or “beat box.”
- Have different voices read individual words, building up to a crescendo of voices by the end of the verse to add dramatic effect.
- Have one person read the verse while the rest of the group creates actions and movements to go with the words.

What will you do? Don’t take too long to decide, because you have to practice!