



Learn to Love

MATTHEW 22:34-40



GOAL

Based on Jesus' commandment to love, youth explore ways to love themselves and their neighbors.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Holy One, ground me in your love. Open my heart and allow it to love the youth you have entrusted to my care even more deeply. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Following Jesus means letting love lead all of our actions and words. Ideally, the call to love shapes our thinking. We hope love becomes habitual and instinctual to our way of life, but it can become so only with continuous action and reaffirmation. Learning to love means striving to love unconditionally and forgiving ourselves (and others) when mistakes are made.

THE BIBLE STORY

Matthew 22:34-40 comes as the Sadducees and Pharisees question Jesus, seeking to trap him and discount him as a reliable prophet.

The question at the heart of this Scripture is law. Jesus answers the question "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" by saying the greatest commandments are about love: love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. Above all else, love should dictate how followers of Jesus interact with God, with this world, with others, and with themselves. Jesus goes on to say that the commandment to love should be at the heart of all law.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

This is a tricky passage for youth who are still wrestling with their own identities. The assumption in the passage is that we love ourselves and should love our neighbors with the same enthusiasm. The challenge is that youth often struggle to love themselves. For youth, transitions come quickly, values presented by families are challenged, relationships with peers are unsteady, and youth are constantly given expectations for their abilities and skills that they may or may not be able to meet.

The key to unlocking this practice of love is focusing on acceptance. Encourage youth to love others despite the flaws of others and their own feelings of inadequacy. As youth recognize their call to love others, they learn to love themselves. In loving themselves, they embrace loving God and this world that God created.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Several activities require advanced preparation. Determine which ones you will lead and prepare accordingly. If you show one of the videos in the "Finding the Practice Then and Now" section, read carefully to prepare before the session.
- Youth may need affirmation in this session of just how difficult it is to love themselves and others. Before beginning, acknowledge for yourself the complications involved in loving others. Think about how you will encourage youth to love themselves.

GETTING STARTED

- Colorful construction paper
- Scissors

PREPARING FOR CLOSING ACTIVITY A C

Similar to previous sessions, have youth cut out hearts from colorful construction paper. This time, however, cut out enough for each participant to have three hearts for the closing activity in addition to a few extras. Hearts should be large enough to write a name on them.

As youth gather and cut, start conversations by asking simple questions about things that interest the youth in your group. As you collect the hearts, ask someone who was at the last session to recap the conversation and activities from the previous sessions. (Reminder: In session 1, they read about how people came to follow Jesus and talked about how they respond to this invitation to follow. Session 2 explored Jesus' words about him being the vine and we the branches and how we follow Jesus together, not alone.)

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Pens


CIRCLES OF LOVE CT C

Pass out copies of Resource Page 1, asking youth to fill in the circles. After giving participants a few minutes to complete this activity, ask them:

- Which circle was easiest to fill in? Why?
- Which circle was hardest to fill in? Why?

Invite a few volunteers to tell what they wrote in their most difficult circles. Encourage an exchange of ideas.

- Copies of Resource Page 2
- Pens
- Timer

 Familiarize yourself with the board game “Scattergories” before leading this activity. Make copies and cut up each resource page into thirds.

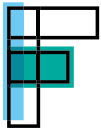
GROUP SCATTERGORIES G

Game setup:

- Form two groups (three groups if you have more than ten people).
- Instruct each group to stand single file behind a line on the floor.
- On a table at least 6 feet away, place enough copies of Round 1 from the resource page and instruct each team which copy they are to fill out. Include one pen per team.
- Choose a letter from the alphabet
- Set a timer for three minutes.

To play the game, participants take turns running across the room, filling in one of the items on the paper with an answer that begins with the letter you announced. They then run back to tag the next teammate in line. At the end of three minutes, no more answers can be written.

Collect the Scattergories pages and read the answers out loud. Teams get a point for each correct answer (that both fits the category and starts with the correct letter) that is not duplicated by any of the other teams. At the end of each round, count the number of points each team earns and set out the next round's answer sheet. After three rounds, declare one team the winner! Ask if participants noticed one topic that came up frequently in the Scattergories categories (love!). Share with them that *love* is what we will be talking about today!



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF LOVE

C AT

Form groups of two or three youth, giving each group a sheet of paper and a pen. Give each group three minutes to write down “ten commandments” of being a teenager. These aren’t necessarily things that adults teach youth, but they are rules (perhaps even unspoken) that most teenagers live by. For example, one might say “Thou shall not leave a library book unreturned.” (The Elizabethan language isn’t necessary.)

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 22:34–40 aloud to the group.

Invite youth to look at the commandments that they have said govern their lives. Ask them to rewrite any commandments that might disagree with Jesus’ definition of the law of love. Afterward, discuss these questions:

- ➔ Did you have to change any of your commandments? Which ones and why?
- ➔ How would this world be different if everyone was intentional about making LOVE the law?
- ➔ How would our lives be different if they were governed by love?
- ➔ How would it feel if others always treated you with love?

-
- Paper
 - Pens
 - Bible



These questions may elicit big feelings from youth who have just been through a break-up or are feeling betrayed by a friend. Allow space for tears or anger that is not harmful. Invite youth who have a reaction to these questions to share if they wish. If they choose not to share, that’s fine. Check on them via text or email later in the day or the next day to see if they want to talk further.

LOVING YOURSELF

QC A

Have participants sit in a circle, making sure that they have something to press on while writing (a table or a book/clipboard if they are sitting on the floor). Give each participant a sheet of paper and invite them to write their name in large letters in the center, leaving at least a 2-inch border around the edge of the paper. Prepare a sheet for any youth who are absent.

In each of the four corners, have participants write something about themselves that they are proud of. It can be something about their appearance, but encourage them to put things that they have worked hard at or that they enjoy. If a youth can’t think of something, ask other youth to help them fill it out.

Ask youth to continue to hold their paper while you read Matthew 22:34–40 aloud to them. Discuss the following questions, allowing some time for them to speak up and answer:

- ➔ What does loving your neighbor as you love yourself mean to you?
- ➔ Is it ever hard to love yourself? Why?
- ➔ What do you do to feel better when you feel especially self-critical?

-
- Paper
 - Pens



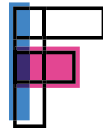
This activity works best with participants who know one another fairly well. If your group does not have a high level of trust, consider skipping the step where they write on one another’s paper.

Ask the youth to consider that God loves them at all times and that, in this Scripture, Jesus assumes that they *do* love themselves. That’s why Jesus encourages the same love for others. Ask the youth to think about what God might say to them in their moments of self-doubt and to write that above their names on the paper.

When youth have finished, ask each person to pass the paper one person to the left. As each participant gets a new sheet of paper, they will write something they love about the person whose name is in the middle of the paper. During this final part of the activity, insert the sheets of paper for those who are absent into the papers being circulated. As each person finishes one affirmation, they continue to pass the papers one person to the left until everyone has had the opportunity to sign each person’s paper.

To conclude this activity, you may do one of several things. Consider:

- Allow participants to read what others have written about them and take the sheets home.
- Collect the sheets and mail them to participants in a month or two.
- Have each participant hold their sheet while you pray a prayer that you write or this one: “Holy God, bless each person in this room. Remind them that they belong to you and that you created them to be your beloved creatures. When we all love ourselves and one another, we are seeing this world as you created it to be. Amen.”



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

- Audio recording and copies of lyrics for “All You Need Is Love” by the Beatles



If youth are already familiar with this song, invite them to make a music video to the music with their smart devices instead. Tech-savvy youth can easily do this in 10–15 minutes.

REVOLUTIONARY LOVE



Before the session, go to lyrics.com, search for “All You Need Is Love,” and print the lyrics for participants.

Prepare to play a clip of “All You Need Is Love” by the Beatles.

Pass out copies of the lyrics and play the music. Ask these questions:

- ➔ What is this song about?
- ➔ Why do you think John Lennon wrote it?
- ➔ What is “easy” about love?
- ➔ What is hard about love?

MR. ROGERS AND OFFICER CLEMMONS



Prepare to show the YouTube video “Being Black in ‘Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” (bit.ly/FMMrRogers, 2:32). Tell youth they will see an interview with François Scarborough Clemmons, an American actor who was on a famous show called *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood*. Share with them that Officer Clemmons was one of the first Black people to have a recurring role on a TV show and Mr. Rogers insisted on this role. Also share that the actor, François Clemmons, was gay and, at the time, Mr. Rogers came under much scrutiny for having a gay man as a part of his cast.

Show the clip and draw connections between Mr. Rogers washing Officer Clemmons’ feet and Jesus washing the feet of the disciples in John 13:1–17.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Copies of Resource Page 3
- Markers
- Wall-safe tape

YOU ARE LOVED



Hanging signs on the back of bathroom stalls is surprisingly effective for conveying an important message

Pass out copies of Resource Page 3 and markers. Give youth time to color the sheets. If time permits (and as you feel comfortable), invite youth to hang these signs around the church. You can also hang these around the church at a later time.

LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

X S AM



It may be best to go outside and deliver these bags *after* the closing activity.

- Candy
- Ziplock bags
- Paper
- Pens or colored markers

Set out ziplock bags and candy, asking youth to fill the bags with a few pieces of candy. Then have youth write notes on paper (maybe church stationery) that say things like, “God loves you” or “Thanks for being our neighbor,” and sign the notes with the name of your church. The notes should be encouraging and express love or gratitude toward neighbors. If your church has any “swag,” such as pens or stickers, consider adding those to the bags as well. Create two or three bags per youth.

Go outside and distribute these bags to the porches or cars of those living in the community around your church. If you prefer, deliver the bags to a senior care facility near your church or save them and put them on cars in the parking lot during the next worship service.



FOLLOWING JESUS

THE JOURNEY

Have participants stand in a semicircle facing the wall that you’ve been creating during each of these sessions. Give each youth a marker and three of the hearts they created earlier. Ask them to write a word or phrase on each heart that will remind them of a particular person or group of persons that fits each of these categories. They should write only one of each category. Remind them not to write specific names so that no one else knows who they are thinking of:

- A person (or a group of people) they love
- A person (or a group of people) they are certain loves them
- A person they might find challenging to love personally, but whom they are willing to make a commitment to try to demonstrate more love for

When they are finished, invite them to put all three of their hearts on the wall with wall-safe tape.

Once everyone has finished, close with this prayer or one of your choosing:

God of love, teach us to love you, to love others, and to love ourselves at all times. Give us courage to love those who may be difficult for us to love, and give us joy in knowing that you love us more than we can imagine. Amen.

- Hearts cut out in “Getting Started”
- Markers
- Wall-safe tape

Circles of Love

In the center of each circle, write how you show love to the named person, group, or part of creation.

Self

Friends

School

Family

Church

Community

World

Earth

Group Scattergories

Make as many copies of this page as you have teams. Normally, teams should be three to five persons. Cut each copy along the dotted lines and then collate copies of rounds 1–3 so that you can quickly put the same list for all groups on the table at the beginning of each round.

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Round 1:

Someone in the Room

Book You Love

Something in a Sanctuary

Song You Love

Professional Sports Team

Person You Love

Holiday You Love

Model of Car

.....
Round 2:

Something You Study in School

Another Word for Love

Internal Organ

Band You Love

Someone from the Bible

Phrase That Means “I Love You”

Toy or Game

Something at Summer Camp

.....
Round 3:

Movie about Love

Valentine’s Day Gift

US President

Something with Stripes

Something You Love about Church

Animal

Common Phrase with the Word *Love* in It

Something You Wear

You Are Loved

Copy and cut this page in half in order to have two flyers. Color them and post them around your space.

Good
Loves
You

You
Are
Loved