



## ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP

### LESSON 1

## THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

### LESSON AT A GLANCE

**WONDER TRUTH:** God Wants Us to Love Him and Love Others

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 22; 25

**GOD'S BIG STORY:** An expert in the law asks Jesus which is the most important commandment, and Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to love others.

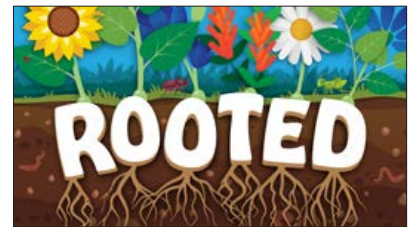
**WORD OF WONDER:** Jesus replied, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind.' This is the first and most important commandment." —Matthew 22:37–38

### CURIOSITY

### BELIEF

### FAITH

- Welcome Question: Some things just go together, like peanut butter and jelly. What things do you think should go together?
- Curiosity Questions
- Word of Wonder: Matthew 22:37–38
- Word of Wonder Activity
- Discussion Questions for Younger and Older Kids
- Small Group Prayer Time
- LARGE GROUP
- Responding in Worship: Ways We Can Love



Rooed Elem Spotify playlist

### INVITATION

**We invite you to pause, listen, and shift your gaze toward the Father ...**

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**WORD OF WONDER:** Matthew 22:37–38

Hold up your arms and put them in the shape of a cross. One arm points vertical, the other, horizontal. This simple illustration reminds us that God wants us to love Him (the vertical arm) and love others (the horizontal arm).

What would happen if, while you were holding your arms up like this, one of the kids in your ministry poured a jug of juice on your topmost fingers? Would it simply drip down your arm, or would it splash out on the kids around you? Obviously, it would splash out. This is an even better illustration of God's love! When He pours His love onto us, it naturally splashes out to other people. Love for God and love for others go hand in hand. Read Matthew 25:31–40. When we follow Jesus, God gives us power through the Holy Spirit to love like Jesus, including the ways Jesus describes in these verses.

Have you ever sensed God's love splashing down all over you?

He loves you completely, exactly as you are. You don't need to do more or be more for Him to love you. Letting God's love flow through you to your neighbors is as simple (and sometimes as hard) as living in the splash zone of God's love for you.

—Christie Thomas

Children's Ministry Volunteer and Author

Contributor to Wonder Ink

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**FOUNDATION BUILDING BLOCKS**

**WHO?**

Pharisees were influential Jewish men who promoted their religious traditions based on their interpretation of the Law of Moses. In this story, a Pharisee who was an expert in the Law tried to trap Jesus in His words by testing Him with a question.

**WHAT?**

Jesus teaches that the two greatest commandments are to love God and love others. The Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands, which go hand in hand. Jesus equates loving others and meeting each other's needs with loving and serving Him.

**WHERE?**

Jesus was in Jerusalem. The Pharisee in Matthew 22 questioned Jesus while He was teaching in the temple courts. By Matthew 25, Jesus had left the temple and was teaching His disciples on the Mount of Olives, east of the city across the Kidron Valley.

**WHEN?**

These teachings happened during the week leading up to Jesus' death. Jesus was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast with His disciples. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 looks ahead to the judgment at the end of history, when God's kingdom comes in its fullness.

**CONNECTING TO GOD'S BIG STORY**

For all eternity, God is love. He gives of Himself for the good of others. God's love changes our hearts so we might be found walking in love on the day of Christ's return. This will show that we love God and belong to Jesus.

## Small Group

**Spark curiosity, encourage exploration, and get kids thinking about the wonder of God.**

### LESSON AT A GLANCE

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**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 22; 25

**WORD OF WONDER:** Matthew 22:37–38

## Pre-Service Connection (15–20 min)

**RESOURCES:** **Coloring Page**, whiteboard, poster paper, or butcher paper, writing utensils

Small group leaders should be seated in place in their small groups 20 minutes prior to service time. Have play stations with various board games, activities, or use games from the extra Games & Activities Guide to keep children occupied and engaged WITH you. This time is important to build relationships, welcome new kids, and keep structure in the room - you should be an active participant with them!

Learn the kids names, and make sure they all know yours too!

Warmly welcome new friends, and introduce them to your group. *Allow quieter kids who don't engage with the board games to color. Involve them in the curiosity questions.*

### As kids arrive..

Invite them to write/draw the answer to the Welcome Question: on the designated board:

**“Some things just go together, like peanut butter and jelly. What things do you think should go together?”** Set out sheets of paper and colored pencils.

### While kids are playing in their opening activity groups..

Pose the following “I’m curious” questions. Say “I’m curious...” before each question and give kids a chance to think about and answer each one. After each question, consider having kids share their ideas with a neighbor before you call on one or two of them to share with the group.

- **Why do you think some things “just go together”?**
- **Think about your favorite things that go together. What changes if you take one of those things away?**

## Small Group Begins

After the Opening Activity, Large Group Leader will begin small group time by reading the Welcome Question aloud and inviting everyone to open their Bibles and begin.

## WORD OF WONDER

Jesus replied, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind.’ This is the first and most important commandment.”

—Matthew 22:37–38 (NirV)

**Leader Tip:** For Younger Kids. Consider using the prek Word of Wonder for this series.

### Word of Wonder

**SUPPLIES:** Bibles (1 per kid); **Word of Wonder Poster** (1/SG)

The **Word of Wonder** for the **Rooted** series is **Matthew 22:37–38**. These words sound familiar because they’re the response Jesus gave to the expert in the law about the greatest commandment! Let’s read the **Word of Wonder** together.

Invite kids to open their Bibles to Matthew 22:37–38. Read the verses several times together, encouraging kids to whisper-shout the things we’re supposed to love God with (heart, soul, mind). Explain that the word soul refers to the fullness of ourselves—our physical bodies and emotions. Gather kids to talk about these questions:

- How do you think we can love God with all our hearts? with all our souls? with all our minds?
- What might stop us from loving God with all our hearts?

**Notes!** Invite kids to write/copy the Word of Wonder on their note page each week to practice!

### Word of Wonder Activity

**SUPPLIES:** cardstock (may want to use multiple colors), scissors (prep only), baskets or other containers (1 per small group), masking or painter’s tape (optional)

**RESOURCES:** **Word of Wonder Puzzle Sheet NirV** (1 per small group) [Rooted Elementary Spotify playlist](#) (optional)

Ahead of time, print one copy of the Word of Wonder Puzzle Sheet NirV for each small group. For this activity, small groups can compete against each other or work together to put the verse together. If small groups will be competing, print each copy of the Word of Wonder Puzzle Sheet on a different color of cardstock. Cut each sheet into 6–8 pieces for younger groups, 12–16 pieces for older groups. Place each verse set in its own basket or other container. If doing this activity as a relay, tape a line on the floor along one side of your space.

**Leader Tip:** For Older Kids. Straight cuts are often more difficult to put together. Consider cutting their puzzles as straight diagonals.



If doing this activity as a relay-style competition, place the baskets containing each group's puzzle pieces opposite the taped line on the other side of the space. Have small groups line up behind the line. When you say, "Go," one kid from each group will run to the basket, get a puzzle piece, return to the group, and tag the next person in line. Once groups have all their pieces, they will put their puzzles together to form the Word of Wonder and read it together aloud. The first group to put their puzzle together and read the verses out loud wins!

If you're not doing this activity as a competition, give each group its basket containing the puzzle pieces. Invite them to put the puzzle together to form the Word of Wonder, reading the verses together when finished. Be sure you or another leader is available to help younger kids read the verses.

Consider playing upbeat music from the [Rooted Elementary Spotify playlist](#) throughout the activity.

## Small Group Discussion: Younger Kids

**SUPPLIES:** Bibles (1 per kid); Bible Story Picture (1/SG)

Help kids use the table of contents in their Bibles to find Matthew 22. As kids find the passage, explain that in today's reading Jesus had been teaching many people and showing them what God is like. Some leaders didn't like what Jesus was doing, so they asked Him tricky questions to try to confuse Him. In this part of the Bible, someone asks Jesus what the most important rule is, and Jesus gives a very wise and loving answer!

Read Matthew 22:36-40 and 25:31-40 aloud. Then discuss the following:

**Notes!** Have kids turn to the Notes Pages on the back of the Coloring Sheet and write the Scripture and any words that stand out to them.

- **According to Jesus' words in our Word of Wonder, what three things are we to love God with?** (heart, soul, and mind) **How are we to love our neighbors?** (as ourselves)
- **Jesus wants us to show love to people who are considered "the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine"** (Matthew 25:40). **Who is Jesus talking about?** (people in need, such as people who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, in need of clothes, sick, in prison)
- **When we do something for someone in need, who does Jesus say we are also showing love to?** (Jesus)
- **Have you ever cared for someone in need? Share about it.**
- **Why do you think loving God and loving others go together?**

Loving God and loving others are a big deal. Jesus says that all the commandments in the Old Testament that help people honor God and live good lives are based on these two commandments (from Matthew 22:40). **They go together—you can't have one without the other. Loving God and others are both the easiest and hardest things to do as we seek to follow Jesus. Let's talk with Jesus now and ask for His help.**

**Make It Inclusive!** If kids in your group struggle to answer open-ended questions, consider rewording questions into true/false format. For example, ask, "True or false? When we do something for someone in need, Jesus says we are also showing love to Him."

## Prayer Time: Younger Kids

Ask if anyone would like to share a prayer request (both needs and celebrations). Write down any requests; then invite the group to pray together. Ask Jesus for His help to find ways to love Him and love others this week.

## Small Group Discussion: Older Kids

**SUPPLIES:** Bibles (1 per kid), Bible Story Picture (1/SG)

Help kids use the table of contents in their Bibles to find Acts. As kids find the passage, explain that in today's reading Jesus had been teaching crowds of people and performing miracles, showing God's love and power. Some religious leaders didn't like what He was doing, so they tried to trap Him with tricky questions. In this part of the Bible, one of them asks Jesus which commandment is the most important, and Jesus gives an answer that helps us know how to live and love every day.

**Turn to Page 3 of this guide and help kids understand the context of this passage.**

**Invite everyone to read Matthew 22:36 aloud together. Then read verses 37–40 (Jesus' words) aloud as the kids follow along. Next invite everyone to flip a few pages over to Matthew 25 and follow along as you read Jesus' words from verses 31–40. Then discuss the following:**

**Notes!** Have kids turn to the Notes Pages on the back of the Coloring Sheet and write the Scripture and any words that stand out to them.

- **According to Jesus' words in our Word of Wonder, what three things are we to love God with?** (heart, soul, mind)
- **What do you think it means to "love your neighbor as you love yourself"** (Matthew 22:39)?
- **Jesus wants us to show love to people who are considered "the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine"** (Matthew 25:40). **Who is Jesus talking about?** (people in need, such as people who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, in need of clothes, sick, in prison)
- **Have you ever cared for someone in need? Share about it.**
- **When could it be hard for you to love someone?**
- **Do you think we can love God without loving others? Why or why not?**

Loving God and loving others are a big deal. Jesus says that all the commandments in the Old Testament that help people honor God and live good lives are based on these two commandments (from Matthew 22:40). They go together—you can't have one without the other. Loving God and others are both the easiest and hardest things to do as we seek to follow Jesus. Let's talk with Jesus now and ask for His help.

**Make It Inclusive!** If kids in your group struggle to answer open-ended questions, consider rewording questions into true/false format. For example, ask, "True or false? According to Jesus, we are to love God with our heart, soul, and mind."

## Prayer Time: Older Kids

Ask if anyone would like to share a prayer request (both needs and celebrations) and write down those requests. Invite kids who are willing to pray aloud for another person's request. End the prayer time by asking Jesus for His help to find ways to love Him and love others this week.



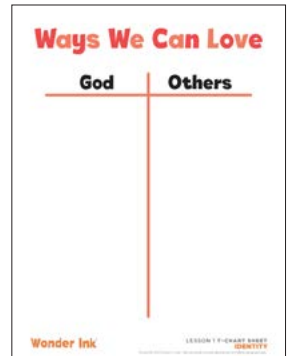
## PAUSE for Large Group time, then continue...

### Responding in Worship: Ways We Can Love

**SUPPLIES:** whiteboard, dry-erase marker, pencils (1 per kid), coloring utensils, clipboards (1 per kid, optional), kid-safe scissors (1 per younger kid, optional), glue sticks (optional)

**RESOURCES:** T-Chart Sheet (1 per kid, plus 1 more), [Rooted Elementary Spotify playlist](#) (optional)

Ahead of time, print one copy of the T-Chart Sheet for each kid, plus one for yourself. If available, clip each sheet to a clipboard. Be sure the whiteboard is located where all the kids can see it. In large letters, write “Ways We Can Love” at the top of the whiteboard. Below those words draw a large T-Chart. Above the left column of the chart write “God.” Above the right column of the chart write “Others.”



Give each kid a T-Chart Sheet and pencil.

**God wants us to love Him and love others. But how? What are some ways that we can show love to God?** Allow kids to give several responses and record them in the “God” column of the T-Chart on the whiteboard. If kids aren’t sure, share an idea or two, like showing God love through singing worship songs or through telling Him in prayer how amazing He is. **What are some ways that we can show love to others?**

Let kids give some responses and record them in the “Others” column of the T-chart. Again, if needed, share an idea or two to get kids started, like sharing a favorite toy or device or helping a sibling with a household task.

**On your sheet you’ll notice the same two columns.** Hold up a copy of the T-Chart Sheet. **This side** (point to the left column) **is space for you to write or draw ways you might want to show love to God.** **This side** (point to the right column) **is space for you to write or draw ways you might want to**

**show love to others. In a moment, we’ll play some music. Listen to the words and spend time thinking of ways you can show love to God and others. Are there things you haven’t done yet that you want to try? There are no right or wrong answers. Just do your best to think about at least two ways you might want to show love to God and two ways you might want to show love to others this week.**



Consider showing kids the Loving God and Others Sheet, which has a lot of pictures of different ways we can show love to God and to others. Those who would like to can take a sheet, cut out pictures that represent ways they want to show love, and glue them onto their T-Chart Sheets. This option is especially helpful for younger kids who are early or pre-readers as well as kids who are neurodiverse or who have learning differences and needs.

**Make It Inclusive!** Some kids might struggle to fill out their T-Chart Sheets on their own, even using the images on the Loving God and Others Sheet. As needed, pair kids with adult or teen leaders so they can dictate their ideas while the leaders write them down. This way every kid will have a completed sheet to take home!

Have coloring utensils available for kids who would like to draw their ideas rather than write. You may want to play “Love the Lord” from the [Rooted Elementary Spotify playlist](#) as kids write and draw on their T-Chart Sheets. Be available to prompt kids with ideas or refer them to the whiteboard if they get stuck.

**Leader Tip:** For Older Kids. Consider encouraging older kids to use this sheet as a chance to journal personal prayers to God, asking for His help in committing to seeking tangible ways to love Him and love others.

After several minutes or when most kids seem to have filled out their T-Chart Sheets, collect supplies and close out the response time with a simple prayer:

**God, we’ve written and drawn ways we want to try to show our love to You and to others. Through Your Holy Spirit, please help us as we try these things this week. Thank You for loving us so well! In Jesus’ name, Amen.**