



LESSON 1: THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That according to Jesus, loving others is second only to loving God. It's a crucial part of being who God wants us to be.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: Evaluate their own attitudes toward loving others, especially in light of what it says about how they love God.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 22:34-40

Supporting Scripture: 1 John 3:10

OVERVIEW: Your students live in a world of lists like honor roll lists, who made cheerleader lists, and lists of things to learn for tests. They're also bombarded by the media with lists of greatest things like sports moments, funny videos, and current fashion fads. Many lists are based on personal preference or opinion, and may vary from person to person. But when Jesus speaks, especially when He is asked to list the most important commands, He speaks truth. Jesus gave a list when He was asked by the Pharisees and Sadducees to name the greatest commandment. In this lesson your students will see what Jesus' response was and what this means in the context of their daily life. When Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love God and love others His list immediately became our list. The lesson on The Greatest Commandment will guide your students to see that loving others is not only a good thing but, along with loving God, the most important thing.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Your Image Teacher Prep Videos are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your "Jesus And Your Image Lesson 1 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

• <https://youthministry360.com/pages/jesus-and-loving-others-teacher-prep>

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details give you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by “context”?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By “context” we mean at the very least helping students know who wrote the book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **What's The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a “big picture” understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

- **Author:** Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his gospel.
- **Time frame:** Most people hold to Matthew's gospel being written in the late 50's or 60's AD, though there are some who think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- **Purpose:** Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

THE SETTING

Matthew 22 takes place after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and not long before His trial and crucifixion. Toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, the Pharisees and Sadducees were looking for ways to trap Jesus into saying something for which they could have Him arrested.

Matthew 22 includes three key questions the religious leaders used to try and trap Jesus:

- **Should we pay taxes?**
- **Will there be marriage in Heaven?**
- **What is the greatest commandment?**

As you'll see in this lesson, not only were the religious leaders unable to trap Jesus, they were consistently reminded of how powerful His teachings were.

THE MAIN POINT

Teenagers today live in a “summation world” where thoughts are expressed in a short social media post or even a short video. With that in mind, your students should love the idea that Jesus took hundreds of Jewish laws and summed them up in six words – love God, love others, love yourself... in that order! Today's lesson will help your students understand that the best place to start in a study of loving others is to see what Jesus had to say about the subject. We'll see that Jesus summed up perfect fulfillment of the Law through the commands, “love God and love others.” Loving God is primary, of course. But it's notable that loving others was second on Jesus' list. You'll help students grasp why this is so important and help set the stage for a great discussion on what this looks like in their lives.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called The Lead-In; the Bible study section called The Main Event; an application-focused segment called The Last Word.

THE LEAD-IN

- **Goal:** To help students identify some of the greatest things in their lives in order to transition to the study of the Greatest Commandment.
- **Set-Up:** Print out the “Lesson 1 Lead In Activity Sheet” (contained in your lesson 1 folder) so that each student has one. Also, provide a pen or pencil for each student. Or if you would rather do the activity as a group discussion, arrange to display the categories either on a dry-erase board, or by showing the PDF on tablet or projector. You can also display the sheet digitally to help in the discussion.

FIRST, ask if anyone has ever seen a sign in a restaurant declaring that the eating establishment was voted “Best Restaurant In Town” or “Best Ribs In The City” or something similar. Inform students that it’s pretty common for newspapers, magazines, or websites to run contests each year letting readers choose “the greatest” in many different categories. Explain that in this activity, you’re going to let them come up with their own “greatest list” of things that are important to them.

NEXT, make sure each student has a copy of the Lesson 1 Lead-In activity sheet. Allow students to do them individually, in groups, or work through the list as a class. It’s up to you. However you facilitate it, make sure you have a moment where students can share their answers and engage in a little lively debate about whether or not they agree or disagree with their friends’ choices.

THEN, lead students in a brief discussion by asking questions similar to the following:

- **Why do you think there was disagreement about some of the greatest topics?**
- **Why do you think the list should have been titled “my greatest list” instead of “the greatest list”?**
- **Do you think most of the things on each person’s list are opinion or fact? How do you know?**

Point out that the media loves to publish lists of things they think are the greatest, from cars and cell phones to movies and songs. A recent Google search of “The Ten Best” resulted in over 25 million results. Explain that it seems everybody has an opinion about the greatest things in our world. Sometimes there will be agreement, but many times people will not see eye to eye because the lists are usually based on opinion instead of fact.

FINALLY, transition to the Main Event by **saying something like the following:**

- **This activity helps us see that there are a lot of opinions about what things are the greatest, and much of it is personal preference. But what about when fact and truth override opinion? Today you are going to discover that Jesus was presented a chance to create a “greatest” list. But His list goes beyond opinion. Let’s dig in and find out about Jesus’ list.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that according to Jesus, loving others is second only to loving God. It’s a crucial part of being who God wants us to be.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, tell your students that this is the first of four Bible studies on the subject of Jesus and loving others. Explain that you're going to help lead them to look at what the Bible says about loving others and more specifically what Jesus had to say about it. Tell them that over the next few weeks they will discover some great truths about loving others like why it is hard to love some people, who Jesus identified as "the least of these", and why God chose to make loving others a priority. Then say that the journey of discovering what it means to really love others begins with this lesson on what is commonly referred to as the greatest commandment.

NEXT, give some context to the passage in Matthew chapter 22 telling them that a group of Jewish religious leaders called the Pharisees and the Sadducees despised Jesus. These men were comfortable with their system of laws and standards and hated the fact that Jesus was preaching a new message that challenged their authority and that threatened their political standing in the community. Tell the students that this confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders took place toward the end of His earthly ministry. Explain that these men wanted to try and trap Jesus into saying something they could accuse Him of in hopes of getting rid of Jesus. This entrapment took the form of three questions in chapter 22:

- **Is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government?**
- **Will there be marriage in heaven?**
- **What is the greatest commandment?**

THEN, begin the Bible study portion of the lesson by reading or having a student read Matthew 22:34-36 and point out the following to your students:

- **The two groups mentioned here were similar but had some major differences when it came to the law. The Pharisees believed the interpretation of the laws given by Moses was more important than the actual laws while the Sadducees did not trust interpretations of the law. Both groups were very influential and both hated Jesus.**
- **When the Sadducees could not trap Jesus with questions, the Pharisees gave it a try. Ask if anyone can tell you the question they asked Jesus. (Answer: What is the greatest commandment?)**
- **There were over 600 commands or laws Jews were to follow and a list of the greatest might have been a good question since there was always a difference of opinion on which laws were the most important. The intent here was certainly to get Jesus to say something they could use against Him instead of seeking out an honest answer.**

NEXT, read or have a student read Matthew 22:37-39. Begin the discussion here by asking the following questions:

- **Why might the command to love God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind be familiar to the Pharisees? Does it sound familiar to you?**
Answer: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is part of what orthodox Jews call the "Shema" (from the Hebrew word "hear"). The Shema includes this passage and is kind of a daily statement of faith for observant Jews. Certainly, Jesus' audience would have recognized God's words originally spoken through Moses. You may want to read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.
- **What did Jesus say about these verses?**
Answer: He said it was the first and greatest commandment.
- **What was the next commandment on Jesus' list?**
Answer: Love your neighbor as yourself.
- **Why was this addition significant?**
Answer: Jesus summed up God's heart for people in these words.



THE JESUS STUDIES

You need to be reminded of the issues teenagers deal with as they try to live out their faith in a world that's often opposed to their core beliefs. Navigating these issues can be rough. Teenagers get so many mixed messages; the world says one thing, their friends may say another. And we hope they know enough about their faith to know how to make sense of it all. We hope...

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THE JESUS STUDIES

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