



## 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/jesus-and-your-image-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.



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.

Help your students see that loving God would have always been at the top of the GREATEST COMMANDS list for any law-abiding Jew. What Jesus did was also put the importance of loving others as equally important. Tell them that you now want to help them see why Jesus put such a premium on loving others.

**THEN**, read or have a student read Matthew 22:40. This one verse really brings the entire passage together in an exciting way so to get the students to understand the meaning here **say the following**:

• **Jesus said to love God and others is the greatest commandment because first, all the other commandments are based on those two things. Some theologians believe this to mean that the Old Testament law is founded on a person's love for God and love for others. So if you love God and others you will fulfill the law. Next, Jesus said that the demands of the prophets are based on loving God and loving others. Since the prophets in the Old Testament used the law to point out sin and wrongdoing at different times in history, Jesus' great commandment covered the words of the prophets as well. We might even say that loving God and loving others sums up just about all of the Bible's ethical and moral teachings.**

**NEXT**, help students see that since love summed up all the laws and since love was what would help a person keep the law, then love must be the fulfillment of the law. Explain once again that keeping the law was what made a person right with God in the Old Testament. Now **ask this question**:

- **What changed when it came to being right with God in the New Testament?**

**Answer:** Jesus' death on the cross forever paid the penalty for our sin nature so the need to constantly keep the old sacrificial law was done away with.

- **What does John 3:16 say was the motivating factor behind God sending His only Son to die for our sins?**

**Answer:** God so LOVED the world. The love of God perfectly fulfilled the old law requirement of a sacrifice once and for all.

**THEN**, help the students see that Jesus said loving God and loving others was the most important commandment. He demonstrated love for others through His death and resurrection which brought loving God to a personal and intimate level. In this way, Jesus took the concept of loving God and perfected it. He did the same thing for our ability to love others. **Say something like**:

- **In Christ, our ability to love God and love others has been made real. Not only do we see Christ's perfect model as an example, but we are also empowered by the Spirit to love others as Christ did.**

**NEXT**, read or have a student read 1 John 3:10 and ask if anyone sees a connection between this Scripture and the passage from Matthew. **Ask**:

- **Sum up what John is saying here.**
- **How does John equate loving others as an essential aspect of who God's children are?**

**Answer:** John puts this idea of loving others on the same level as "doing right." John basically states that being a righteous person is also being a loving person. John simply reinforces this by saying if a person doesn't love others they must not love God.

**FINALLY**, transition into the Last Word by **saying something similar to the following**:

- **We opened this study with an activity where we listed great things. We found out that many times something that is labeled great is merely someone's opinion. When Jesus talked about great things He spoke from more than just opinion. He was teaching about both earthly and eternal truth. Loving others is the greatest commandment along with loving God. It is more than just a good idea. Loving others is a way of thinking and a way of living that expresses our love for God by loving His people. Now let's see what love for others should look like if we really live it out each day.**

Make sure no one has any questions, then move to wrap up the lesson with the Last Word.

## THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students evaluate their own attitudes toward loving others, especially in light of what it says about how they love God.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a dry-erase board, or some other way to list some ways to express the command to love others.

**FIRST**, write the words "Love God" and "Love others" on a dry-erase board in a way that will allow you to write under each word. Explain to students that you want them to think first of some ways they can live out the great commandment by expressing their love to God. Allow the students some time to call out some answers which may include the following:

- **Read the Bible, pray, attend church, worship, praise God, tell others what God has done in your life, follow God's calling in your life, obey Him, trust Him, etc.**

*Take some time to talk over all the answers and discuss how that helps express love for God.*

**NEXT**, turn their attention to the "others" side of the board and ask them to think of ways they can live out the great commandment by loving others. Write their responses on the board which may include the following:

- Go on mission trips, help with local ministry projects, sponsor a child through Compassion International or World Vision, encourage teenagers at school, help out at a soup kitchen, etc.

*Again take a few minutes to discuss the answers on the board and how those things help in obeying the great commandment to love others.*

**THEN**, tell them you want to add one more thing to the "Love God" side of the board and write the words: Loving Others. Explain that the neat thing about the great commandment is that when we love others it is a way of showing our love for God. Ask if anyone can tell you why that statement is true. Answers may include the following:

- **People see the love of God when we minister to their needs.**
- **Since God created all people when we love His creation we are expressing love to Him.**
- **If God impresses us to show love to someone we are obeying Him which is a way we love God.**

**NEXT**, allow the students to think of a way the group can work together to show love to others through some type of ministry action. Here are some ideas to get the ball rolling:

- **WINTER:** Participate in the Souper Bowl of Caring on the first Sunday of February. See [www.souperbowl.org](http://www.souperbowl.org) for more information.
- **SPRING:** Plan a cleanup day to help older people in your church get their yards ready for the summer.
- **SUMMER:** Collect backpacks and school supplies and distribute them to needy children before the new school year.
- **FALL:** Encourage each student to pack a shoebox for Operation Christian Child. For more information go to the website [www.samaritanspurse.org](http://www.samaritanspurse.org).

Be sure to have some follow-up time after the ministry event and allow students to talk about their experiences in loving others. Keep in mind that many times students will say that the ministry experience was actually an incredible experience with God, which reinforces the point of this activity.

**FINALLY**, remind the students that loving God/loving others is what Jesus identified as the greatest commandment. Tell them when they show love to others they not only are ministering to the needs of people but expressing a deep and intimate love for God.



If there are no more thoughts or questions, close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Social Media, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU...

*Do you have questions about a lesson?*

*Something that worked particularly well you want to share?*

*Something that didn't work you want to bring up?*

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at [feedback@youthministry360.com](mailto:feedback@youthministry360.com).