



Session Objective

Participants will explore the sovereign love of God and how God loves us regardless of our imperfections.

Faith Statement

Question 8. How do you understand the love and power of God?

Through Jesus Christ. In his life of compassion, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, I see how vast is God's love for the world—a love that is ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it.

Question 9. What comfort do you receive from this truth?

This powerful and loving God is the one whose promises I may trust in all the circumstances of my life, and to whom I belong in life and in death.

—Study Catechism: Full Version



Engage

Have participants brainstorm the following questions. Note any similarities in responses, such as lack of belief, anger, mistaken understandings, feeling unlovable, or bias.

- What separates us from who we are and what we would like to be?
- What separates us from understanding and being connected to each other?
- Do we ever feel separated from God, and if so, what keeps us apart?
- How can we overcome such separations?

Invite the group to join you in an opening prayer.



Explore

Read John 3:16 and ask participants to answer five questions—who, what, where, when, and why—about the verse. Use the following for discussion:

- Which of the 5 W's was hardest to answer and why?
- What were the reasons reported as to why God did this?
- Is one of the following reasons more important than the others?
 - To show us God's love.
 - To show us God knows what it is like to be human.
 - To show us what God is like.
 - To show us what to believe.
 - To give us eternal life.

Have participants read Romans 8:36–37. Explain that Paul, the writer of the book of Romans, tries to show how great and persistent God's love is by listing things that can't keep God's love from us. Ask participants to rewrite the passage in their own words, substituting things from their own lives that can't keep God's love from them.

Have participants share their paraphrases with each other after they have finished.



Express

Introduce the song by saying, "Imagine this song as God's message to you." Play the song "Home" from the CD "The World from the Other Side of the Moon" performed by Phillip Phillips. Ask participants to share using these questions:

- What line or lines in the lyrics spoke to you and why?
- If you had to express God's message as expressed in the song in one sentence, what would that sentence be?
- What are the "demons" that may fill us with fear?
- What would help us know we are not alone?



Exit

Have the participants say in unison to each person using their name, "God loves _____. God sent Jesus to be with _____." For example, "God loves Emily. God sent Jesus to be with Emily." Then it would be the next person's turn.

Ask each participant to consider making this kind of declaration, only silently, for a few hours this week for whomever they encounter during those few hours: "God loves _____. God sent Jesus to be with _____." For example, when they met their friend Fernando, they would say or think, "God loves Fernando. God sent Jesus to be with Fernando." The commitment would apply to strangers they see as well. "God loves that homeless person. God sent Jesus to be with him."



I Know We're Supposed to Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves, But What If I Don't Love Myself?

Leviticus 19:18; Colossians 3:12-17



Session Objective

Participants will discuss how the love we are to show one another is the love God has for us. God loves us even when we feel unlovable, and through the Spirit we can still show God's love to one another.

Faith Statement

We believe that the new life takes shape in a community in which we know that God loves and accepts us in spite of what we are.

We therefore accept ourselves and love others, knowing that no one has any ground on which to stand, except God's grace.

—Confession of 1967, Inclusive Language Text (9.22)



Engage

Hand out paper and pencils or pens. Have participants divide a sheet of paper into two columns. At the top of one column put *Lovable*. At the top of the other put *Unlovable*. Ask participants to write down what is lovable and what is unlovable about themselves. Explain that no one will have to share any answer they choose not to. After allowing time for participants to write their answers, discuss the following questions:

- Which column was easier to complete and why?
- Which column had the most answers?
- Is it easier to affirm or criticize ourselves and why do you think so?
- Are there common answers or similarities on either list? (Again, no one has to share any answers that would make them uncomfortable.)
- Does God want us to criticize ourselves

Invite the group to join you in an opening prayer.



Explore

The passage in Leviticus 19:18, “. . . but you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” is found in a number of places in the Bible. Ask participants to look up the following passages: Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8. Have them read some of the verses both before and after the verse to see the context in which it is expressed. Ask participants to discuss the following questions:

- Are there any similarities in the passages?
- Are there any other words used with these in more than one passage?
- To whom are the words being spoken?
- Who is being pointed out as a neighbor in some of the passages?



Express

Think of several service projects that participants could do that would let them offer help or kindness to others. Present these and ask for participants' suggestions as well. Brainstorm the projects and have participants choose one. These can be as simple or as complex as leaders and participants would like. Help participants evaluate the time and resources needed. The project can be one that the group itself completes or one in which members ask for congregational participation.

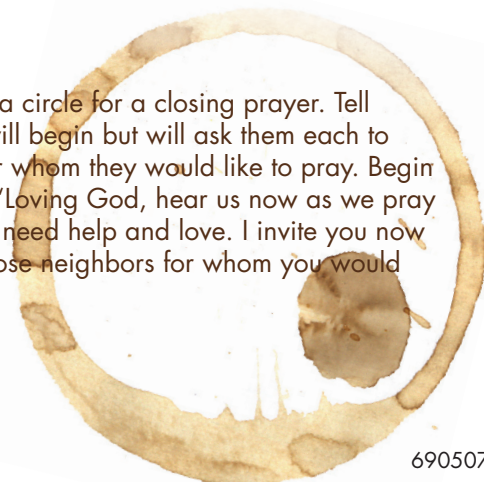
Examples that have been used include:

- The HUGS Project—Groups collect hats, underwear, gloves, and socks for people in a homeless shelter.
- Heifer International—(heifer.org) Heifer allows groups to give needed livestock (bees, goats, rabbits, chickens, cattle, and so forth) to help families in impoverished countries become self-sustaining.
- Souperbowl of Caring—(souperbowl.org) Groups collect food and funds for the hungry.



Exit

Gather participants in a circle for a closing prayer. Tell participants that you will begin but will ask them each to mention a neighbor for whom they would like to pray. Begin the prayer by saying, “Loving God, hear us now as we pray for our neighbors who need help and love. I invite you now to offer the name of those neighbors for whom you would like to pray.”





What Kind of People Does God Want Me to Be Around?



Session Objective

Participants will explore the parable of the Good Samaritan and the concept that Jesus calls us to be a neighbor.

Faith Statement

Question 39. How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of prophet?

He was God's Word to a dying and sinful world; he embodied the love he proclaimed. His life, death, and resurrection became the great Yes that continues to be spoken despite how often we have said No. When we receive this Word by faith, Christ himself enters our hearts, that he may dwell in us forever, and we in him..

— Study Catechism: Full Version



Engage

Ask: What are the groups of people and kinds of people in your high schools? Encourage the participants to offer groups that are both formal (band members, orchestra members, theater kids, soccer team members) and informal (loners, cowboys, popular kids).

Discuss these questions:

- How do you know who is in which group?
- Do people in one group associate with people in other groups?
- Can a person be in more than one group?
- Why are people in these groups?
- Are there groups that don't like other groups?
- In which group or groups do the participants place themselves?

Invite the group to join you in an opening prayer.



Explore

Explain that Jesus doesn't give specific instructions regarding what kind of people we should be around, or by whom we should be influenced. Jesus does, however, instruct the Pharisees and us that we are to love him, love ourselves, love others, and be a neighbor to people in our lives. Our takeaway is as simple and as difficult as this: by living our lives according to these words, it will likely follow that we will choose to be around people who help us to live the lives God desires for us.

Invite participants to read Luke 10:25-37 slowly and silently. Use the following questions for discussion:

- Who was definitely a neighbor in this parable Jesus told the Pharisee?
- Who needed a neighbor in this story?
- If you were walking down the road and found a beaten man, would you be a neighbor to the man? If so, how? If not, why not?
- When have you been a neighbor to someone you didn't know?



Express

In a group discussion, ask participants to indicate who are their neighbors and to whom they are called to be a neighbor. As time allows, have participants suggest ways to be a neighbor to individual people on the lists.



Exit

Jesus asked the Pharisee, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The Pharisee said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to the Pharisee, "Go and do likewise." Now that we know that Jesus wants us to be a neighbor, what are some ways we anticipate being a neighbor this week?





How Can I Honor My Parents When I Don't Feel Like I Love Them?



Session Objective

Participants will explore the difference between respecting parents and having blind obedience. They will also discuss how they can model honor and respect so that others (including parents) can express it as well.

Faith Statement

Question 104. What is the fifth commandment?

"Honor your father and your mother."

Question 105. What do you learn from this commandment?

Though I owe reverence to God alone, I owe genuine respect to my parents, both my mother and father. God wills me to listen to them, be thankful for the benefits I receive from them, and be considerate of their needs, especially in old age.

Question 106. Are there limits to your obligation to obey them?

Yes. No mere human being is God. Blind obedience is not required, for everything should be tested by loyalty and obedience to God. When it seems as though I should not obey, I should always be alert to possible self-deception on my part, and should pray that we may all walk in the truth of God's will.

— Study Catechism: Full Version



Engage

Read the following questions and statements one at a time, and ask the group to respond. Tell them before you begin that a thumbs-up indicates a "yes" response and a thumbs-down indicates a "no" response. If their response is ambiguous, ask them to fold their arms in front of them. As appropriate, after each statement or question has been read and responded to, ask participants to comment on their responses. This could likely initiate a lively discussion.

- A youth should never lie to his or her parents—yes or no?
- Is it possible to respect parents and, at the same time, not be blindly obedient to them—yes or no?
- Disagreeing with a parent is the same as not honoring the parent—yes or no?
- I do everything my parents tell me to do—yes or no?
- Because of my parents' maturity and experience, it is possible they know more than I think they do—yes or no?
- God wants me to honor my parents—yes or no?
- Youths should honor their parents even if they don't feel like they love their parents—yes or no?

Invite the group to join you in an opening prayer.



Explore

God didn't give us the Ten Commandments to make us miserable or try to control us. They are a good gift from God because if God's people follow them, their lives will likely be more peaceful, happier, and less chaotic. For example, what might the world be like if no one ever stole anything (Eighth Commandment, Exodus 20:15)?

Read aloud 1 Peter 2:11-17 and the Study Catechism questions and answers 104-106. Have the participants create a list of actions they believe their parents wish they

would do (examples, care for them when they're old or sick, show gratitude for what they have given me and are giving me, communicate with them when my plans change). Invite them to indicate which items in the list they agree to do and those they don't. Discuss reasons the youths answered the ways they did. Ask:

- Does this exercise change the way you would like to interact with your parents? If so, how? If not, why not?



Express

In 1 Peter 2:11-17, God calls God's people to honor everyone. In Exodus 20:12, God calls us to include parents in those whom we honor. On a piece of paper for each participant, using the ink in a stamp pad, each participant is to stamp their fingerprints in whatever configuration they would like in order to illustrate who's who in their families. Add arms, legs, and faces, if desired. Show in the diagrams, using words, arrows, lines, broken lines, and so on, where showing respect and honor exist and where it could be added or improved. Discuss:

- Where do you experience or see honor in your families?
- Where is honor lacking?
- What could be done in a family to bring honor, where it is lacking, to the relationships?



Exit

Offer the following New Testament words as a charge to participants: Go out into the world in peace; have courage; hold on to what is good; return no one evil for evil; strengthen the faint-hearted; support the weak; help the suffering; honor all people; love and serve the Lord; rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.