

Today's Suggested Schedule—January 2024, Week 1

Today's Bible Story: I Want to Know What Love Is (Greatest Commandment) • *Matthew 22:36-40*

Today's Key Question: What are things you're expected to do?

Today's Bottom Line: Love God and love others.

Monthly Memory Verse: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. Luke 16:10 (ESV)

Monthly Virtue: Responsibility—Showing you can be trusted with what is expected of you.

Basic Truth: I should treat others the way I want to be treated.

Before kids arrive, take a few moments to pray for them. Pray for those who might visit your group for the first time. As you start the new year, pray that God will help you love others the way God loves them. Ask God to bless the conversations you have with your kids as you lead them to see how loving God and loving others is one of the most responsible things we can do.

Check out our Pinterest page here <https://bit.ly/447HSZi> for a visual on some of the activities.

SMALL GROUP (15 minutes)

SOCIAL: Providing Time for Fun Interaction

Just for Fun

LARGE GROUP (35 minutes)

STORY: Communicating God's Truth in Engaging Ways

WORSHIP: Inviting People to Respond to God

Hang Time

Welcome/Opener

Worship

Bible Story (Communicator Script)

Key Question

Prayer

SMALL GROUP (25 minutes)

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect

Story Exploration

Application Activity: Take a Snapshot

Bible Story Review: Bible Story Extension and Discussion Questions

Memory Verse Activity: Verses to Take with You

Prayer Activity: Make It Personal with Prayer

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

Parent Cue Card (Print or Email)

Devotionals for Kids

Parent Cue App

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Use this if kids have questions about following Jesus.

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word gospel. Clarify that the word gospel means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.

God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.

We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)

God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.

Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.

We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

If a child has expressed interest in following Jesus, please let the parents know so they can be a part of the conversation that their child is having about faith.

What Now?

If you put your trust in Jesus Christ and believe in Him as the One who forgives your sins and makes it possible for you to know God, we are so proud of you! There is no greater single decision that you could make.

We believe that baptism is an important next step for you. Baptism is your way of telling your friends and family, “Hey, I'm a follower of Jesus!” If you're interested in learning more or participating in baptism, talk to a staff member about the next steps you should take.

SOCIAL: Providing Time for Fun Interaction (15 minutes)

1. Just for Fun

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share with others and build on their understanding

What You Need: Offering container

What You Do:

- Welcome kids by name to Small Group with a high-five or fist bump!
- Invite kids who have brought an offering to place it in the offering container.
- Direct the kids to sit down in your group space.
- Ask: “Do you have a pet at home?”
- Ask the kids who have a pet:
 - What kind of animal is your pet?
 - What’s your pet’s name?
 - How old is your pet?
 - Tell a brief story that explains how that pet became part of your family.
- For the kids who do not have pets at home, ask:
 - If you could have any pet in the world, what would it be, and why?
 - If you have no interest in having a pet, explain why.

2. Opening Activity

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need: Index cards, pens (or pencils)

What You Do:

- Give each kid an index card and a pen (or pencil).
- Ask: “What are some responsibilities when you are a pet owner?”
- After a kid shares an example, instruct them to write it on their index card.
- Inform the kids not to specify which animal they’re thinking about as they write—to write a more general responsibility.
 - For example: “Feed it,” and not “Feed my dog.”
- If some kids are stumped and don’t come up with responsibilities, suggest some that were not mentioned.
- Direct them to write that responsibility on their index card.
- Other examples might include:
 - Feed it.
 - Give it a bath.
 - Give it water to drink.
 - Take it on a walk.
 - Clean its cage/tank.
 - Pick up poop.
 - Sweep its hair off the floor.
 - Let it outside to go to the bathroom.
 - Clean its litter box.
 - Pick up its toys.
 - Play with it.
 - Take it to the vet for a check-up.
 - Give it annual or monthly medicine (shots, flea or heartworm prevention, etc.).
- Make sure each kid has a responsibility written down on their index card.
- Collect all the index cards.
- Spread out the index cards on a table or floor space where everyone can see them.
- Choose a kid in the group to name any animal that could be a pet.
- Invite the rest of the group to discuss and sort the index cards in order of importance, based on what kind of care that particular animal would need.
- Repeat with more pet animals as time allows.

What You Say:

“Pets are a huge responsibility, aren’t they? (*Pause for responses.*) No matter what kind of pet you have, there’s a list of things you should do in order to give it the care it needs. But each one of them requires different priorities when it comes to caring for them. **[Transition]** Today in Large Group, we’ll see that God made it pretty clear what our priorities should be for how we live our lives.”

Lead your group to the Large Group area.

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Story Exploration

The religious leaders had the chance to ask Jesus anything, and they tried to trick Jesus. They did not like that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, and they really didn't like the way He threatened their power and authority. But Jesus spoke with wisdom and authority. When the religious leaders asked Jesus about the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 from the Old Testament. The religious leaders would have been very familiar with this Scripture, and they could not argue against it. What question did Jesus ask the Pharisees? Look at Matthew 22:42. [Allow kids to read the verse and respond.] Jesus asked, "Whose Son is the Messiah?" And how did they answer? They said that the Messiah is David's son. Then Jesus reminded them of Psalm 110:1, where David called the Messiah "Lord." Jesus asked the religious leaders why David would call the Messiah "Lord" if the Messiah were his son. Jesus helped the religious leaders realize that the Messiah is both a human (the son of David) and the Son of God (David's Lord). The religious leaders could not respond to that, so they stopped questioning Jesus.

The religious leaders were amazed after listening to Jesus. Matthew 22:46 says that from that day on, no one dared to challenge Him again. When the religious leaders questioned Jesus, He answered with wisdom and power, as only He can because He is the Messiah, the Son of God in flesh. He is the Word of God who came to show us exactly what God is like. He has authority in heaven and on earth.

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

- Why did the religious leaders ask Jesus questions?
Were they really interested in what Jesus was teaching? Lead kids to recall that the religious leaders were only questioning Jesus to try to catch Him doing something wrong. Jesus knew what they were trying to do and answered them with wisdom and authority.
(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Luke 20:22-26.)
- How can we see Jesus' wisdom and authority in the way He answered the religious leaders?
Help kids recognize the religious leaders thought they had come up a question that would trap Jesus. They thought however He answered, there would be a problem with it; however, Jesus saw beyond their craftiness and answered with wisdom and power.
(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Luke 20:25.)
- How can we answer life's questions with wisdom?
Help kids recognize that we can find the answers to life's questions as we spend time with the Lord through prayer and reading His Word. When we hide God's Word in our heart, we too can answer with wisdom.
(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Ps. 119:105.)
- What are the greatest and second greatest commandments? (to love God with all we have and to love others as ourselves, Mark 12:29-31)
- How can we answer with wisdom if people challenge our knowledge of God or the Bible?
Help kids see that the source of wisdom is God Himself. Remind them that God gives wisdom generously to all who ask Him for it in faith. [See James 1:5.] Explain that we gain wisdom by studying God's Word, praying, gathering with other believers, and following the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- When is it difficult to trust Jesus' wisdom and authority? Guide kids to speak honestly about their lives. Acknowledge the difficulty of trusting Jesus in hard or sad times. Help them see that

we can trust Him even when we do not understand His plan or why difficult things are happening.

1. Take a Snapshot

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need: “Pet Love Languages” Activity Page, tape, pen (or marker)

What You Do:

- Use the tape to hang up the six pieces of the “Pet Love Languages” Activity Page on the wall in your group space.
- Choose a kid to be your tally mark maker.
- Give that kid the pen (or marker).
- Ask: “What are some ways you can show love to the people in your life?”
- Invite kids to take turns sharing these ideas with the group.
- Examples might include:
 - Offer to take out the trash.
 - Play a game with a younger sibling.
 - Write an encouraging note to a teacher.
 - Save up your allowance to purchase a gift for a friend.
 - Snuggle with your parent on the couch while watching a movie.
- Each time a kid shares an example, invite the kids to discuss which sign from the “Pet Love Languages” Activity Page the example corresponds with.
- Emphasize the kids should pay more attention to the caption below each image to decide which ones most relates with each example given.
- Direct the tally mark maker to draw a tally mark on the sign from the “Pet Love Languages” Activity Page that best correlates with the way that action shows love to someone.
 - For example, if a kid gives the example of: “Offer to take out the trash,” the tally mark maker would place a mark on the sign that says “Helping Others.”
- Direct the tally mark maker to also add a mark to the sign that says “GOD” every time a mark has been made on any other sign.
- Continue letting kids share examples as time allows.
- Make sure each kid shares at least one example.
- After each kid has shared, point out how many tally marks are on each sign—save the “GOD” sign for last.
- Say: “Every single time we choose to show love to people, we are also showing love to God at the same time.”
- Say: “We’re all wired to feel loved in different ways. God made us this way! Some of us prefer to snuggle on the couch with a parent, while others may feel most loved when they get to go on evening walks with a friend or grownup they trust. It’s important that we’re aware of the ways that people we care about will best receive the love we have to give them.”

[Make It Personal] Share with the group which way from the “Pet Love Languages” Activity Page makes you feel the most loved. Give an example of a time when someone showed you love in this way. Explain how it made you feel.

2. Bible Story Extension

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

- Choose a kid to go first and be your first actor.
- Select an action from the following choices:
 - Sweeping the floor
 - Washing the dishes
 - Giving a gift to someone
 - Playing a game with a brother or sister
 - Giving someone a hug
 - Folding laundry
 - Sending someone a card
 - Cheering for a friend at their soccer game
 - Feeding the dog
 - Making someone a cake
- Whisper the action to the actor so the rest of the group doesn't hear what you're saying.
- Instruct the kid to act out the action without making any noise.
- Direct the rest of the group to raise their hand if they have a guess for what the actor is doing.
- Instruct the first kid who guesses correctly to be the next actor.
- Repeat until you have gone through the entire list, or as time allows.
- Ask:
 - Was it easy or difficult to act these things out?
 - Is it easy or difficult to do them in real life? Why or why not?
 - Is it always easy to love the people in our lives? Why or why not?
 - What are some ways we can show love to God?
- Say: "In Matthew 22, Jesus told us that we are to love God and love others. This can be challenging—especially when we have people in our lives who are difficult to love. When it's hard to show someone love, you can ask the Holy Spirit to help you show God's love even when it's not easy!"

3. Discussion Questions

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share with others and build on their understanding

What You Need: No supplies needed

What You Do:

Ask:

- What are things you're expected to do?
- What makes you feel loved?
- How can you show love to God?
- What does love have to do with responsibility?
- How can Jesus help us love others?

4. Verses to Take with You

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need: Dog food bowls, cereal (or pom-poms), masking tape, Bible, and prepared zip-top sandwich bags

What You Do:

- Empty each prepared sandwich bag of “Dog Food Relay” Activity Page pieces into the bottom of a dog food bowl.
- Pour enough cereal (or pom-poms for a non-food version) in each bowl to cover up the pieces of paper.
- Stir the cereal (or pom-poms) and paper around to shuffle it all together.
- Place each prepared bowl at one end of your group space.
- Use masking tape to mark two “Starting Lines” at the opposite end of the space across from the bowls.
- Choose a volunteer.
- Hand the volunteer a Bible.
 - Ask the group if Luke is in the Old or New Testament. (*New*)
 - Remind the kids that since Luke is in the New Testament, that means it will be found in the back half of the Bible.
 - Explain that the New Testament begins with the four gospels.
 - Ask: “Can anyone name the four Gospels?” (*Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*)
 - Remind kids that this month’s verse is found in Luke, so now they know the verse is in the first portion of the second half of the Bible.
- Invite your volunteer to look up Luke 16:10 and read it out loud for the group.
- Divide your group into two teams.
- Assign each team a typical dog name—like *Team Fido* or *Team Snoopy*.
- Direct each team to line up behind the “Starting Line” opposite from one of the dog food bowls.
- Instruct each kid one at a time to walk on their hands and knees—like a dog—until they reach their bowl, use their hands to sift through the cereal to find a piece of paper, and run back to the end of their group’s line with the paper.
- As soon as a kid gets back to their line, direct the next kid on the team to do the same thing.
- Share that each kid can only grab one piece of paper at a time from the bowl.
- Instruct the teams to continue until every piece of paper has been retrieved from their bowl.
 - If using the NIV version, there will be 20 pieces.
 - If using the NIV version, there will be 14 pieces.
- Once a team has all their pieces of paper, instruct them to work together to put the words from Luke 16:10 in order.
- The first team to complete the verse in order wins!
- Invite each team to recite Luke 16:10 together.
- Instruct the entire group to say the verse together.
- Ask:
 - What’s something little you have been trusted with?
 - What’s something large you were trusted with as a result of being trusted with something little?

- Why are you more likely to be trusted with big things when you've shown you can be responsible with the small things?

5. Make It Personal with Prayer

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Say:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember?
- How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission

What You Need:

"Pet Project Prayers: 1" Activity Page; pens (or pencils)

What You Do:

- Give each kid a copy of the "Pet Project Prayers: 1" Activity Page and a pen or pencil.
- Encourage kids to decorate their pages.
 - They can draw pictures of their favorite animal or choose stickers that remind them of a pet they have at home or are interested in.
- After everyone has had a chance to decorate their pages, instruct them to use the spaces provided to list prayers they may have.
- Direct the kids to write prayers that are focused on how they can love God and others. (These should be brief reminders that will help guide them when they pray at home.)
 - If the kids are stumped, share examples like this:
 - Be kind to my little brother.
 - Sit with the new kid at lunch.
 - Spend time reading my Bible.
- Encourage kids to take their page home and place it somewhere they will see it.
- Challenge them to set time aside in the week ahead to pray each day.
- Say: "Praying doesn't have to be complicated or take a long time. Just taking a little time talking to God each day is a great way to spend time with God and also to stay focused on ways we're trying to love God and others."
- Close your group time in prayer.

GETTING READY

Here's everything you need to know to get ready for this week.

SOCIAL: Providing Time for Fun Interaction (15 Minutes)

Welcome kids and spend time engaging in conversation and catching up. Get ready to experience today's story.

(Choose one or both of these activities.)

1. Just for Fun

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share with others and build on their understanding

What You Need:

- Offering container

GROUPS: Creating a Safe Place to Connect (25 minutes)

Create a safe place to connect and learn how the Bible story applies to real life experiences, through interactive activities and discussion questions.

(Choose as many of these activities as you like.)

Story Exploration – No supplies

1. Take a Snapshot

[Live for God | Application Activity]

Made to Move: an activity that increases the oxygen in the brain and taps into the energy in the body

What You Need:

- Print "Pet Love Languages" Activity Page on paper and cut out, one set for each Small Group
- Tape, one roll for each Small Group
- Pen (or marker), one per Small Group

2. Bible Story Extension

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Imagine: an activity that promotes empathy and facilitates biblical application through role-play and reenactment

What You Need:

- No supplies needed

3. Discussion Questions

[Talk about God | Bible Story Review]

Made to Connect: an activity that invites kids to share with others and build on their understanding

What You Need:

- No supplies needed

4. Verses to Take with You

[Hear from God | Memory Verse Activity]

Made to Play: an activity that encourages learning through following guidelines and working as a group

What You Need:

- Dog food bowls (or other containers or bowls), two for each Small Group

- Cereal that has small-sized pieces or balls that resemble dog food (like Kix or Cocoa Puffs), one box for each Small Group
 - Or pom-poms for a nonfood version
- Zip-top sandwich bags, two for each Small Group
- Print “Dog Food Relay” Activity Page on paper and cut apart, two sets for each Small Group
 - Before group time: Fold each piece of paper from the “Dog Food Relay” Activity Page so it’s small. Place each set in a separate, zip-top sandwich bag.
- Masking tape
- Bible

5. Make It Personal with Prayer

[Pray to God | Prayer Activity]

Made to Reflect: an activity that creates space for personal understanding and application

What You Need:

- Print “Pet Project Prayers: 1” Activity Page on cardstock, one for each kid
- Pens (or pencils), one for each kid

HOME: Prompting Action Beyond the Experience

- Print on cardstock or email this week’s devotionals and Parent Cue cards.
- Tell parents about our additional family resources: **Parent Cue app**