

HSM Small Group 2022 Spring Schedule-Juniors

January 12	First Week Back! Get Reacquainted!!
January 19	Room for Doubt
January 26	Room for Doubt
February 2	Room for Doubt
February 9	Room for Doubt
February 16	Serve Night!!
February 23	Room for Doubt
March 2	Room for Doubt
March 9	Room for Doubt
March 16	SGL Training this week! (No Small Groups!)
March 23	Spring Break! (No Small Groups!)
March 30	Room for Doubt
April 6	Room for Doubt
April 13	Room for Doubt
April 20	Room for Doubt
April 27	Room for Doubt
May 4	Final Celebration!!

Lesson 1 Leader Guide

“Learning to Love Others—and God”

Let’s Kickoff



Overview: This lesson has THREE video segments:

1. **Intro animation, “She Loves Me Not” (c. 1 min.):** Show this first. Watch for the PAUSE icon in the video. Then do the kickoff.
2. **Lesson, part 1 (c. 19 min.):** Watch for the PAUSE icon. Discuss items 1–3 in Let’s Interact.
3. **Lesson, part 2 (c. 7 min.):** Discuss items 4–7 in Let’s Interact.

Remind students that they have access to a **Student eGuide** for each lesson.

Do what you can to encourage students to follow up during the week with the sections on “Let’s Do Something,” “Let the Spirit Speak,” and “Let’s Go Deeper.”

Remember that exclusive leader information or instructions is given in **SHADED TEXT BOXES**. To print them properly, you must select “print backgrounds” as a print option.

SHOW OPENING ANIMATION, “She Loves Me Not” (c. 1 min.):



- How can you tell if someone likes you—or if they don’t?
- What can you do, if anything, to try to get someone to like you or to like you more?
- Do you think it’s possible to LEARN to like someone?
- Do you think it’s possible to learn to LOVE someone? (We’re not talking romance here.)
- **Big point:** We can learn to love God.

LEADERS: After the animation, have a brief discussion on the questions above. Prompt each student to think about themselves—personally.

“What could you do to try to get someone to like you, especially if they don’t know you or don’t like you to start with? (We’re not talking about romance here.)

Eventually, help your students see the value of the following points. To lead others to learn to like you more, you could communicate:

- Who you really are. What is your actual character (not what others say about you)?
- You really care for them.
- You are a good person with many great qualities (e.g., kind, compassionate, loyal).

- You want to have ongoing communication with them.
- You are trustworthy and loyal. You keep your promises.
- (Brainstorm other ideas.)

We want students to see that these same considerations are *true for God*. HE wants to be our friend and wants us to *love* Him more every day.

In this series of lessons, we will see why we should learn to love God more. We will learn more about WHO God really is, what He's really like, what He has done, how He is unique, and why He is worthy of our love.

Let's Learn



Leaders: Continue the lesson video for Part 1.

"She loves me. She loves me not. She loves me. She loves me not." I pulled off a flower petal with each sentence. I thought the last flower petal would answer my question: "Does she love me or does she not?" Unfortunately, she often did not love me. So, I grabbed a different flower and tried again.

Have you ever gone through that exercise? Maybe you've used the magic 8-ball. You ask a question and then turn the 8-ball over for the answer. It offers various responses like these: "Better not tell you now." "Most likely." "You may rely on it." "Reply hazy. Try again."

I didn't really believe the flower or the 8-ball, but they sometimes gave me encouragement, if not just some entertainment. Even so, I was often very frustrated! Sometimes, I really liked a particular person who just didn't like me back. What could I do, if anything, to get this person to like me?

As an activity, the 8-ball game can be played online at <https://legomenon.com/ask-magic-8-ball-game-online.html>.

Maybe you've experienced the same thing. You like someone, but they just don't seem to like you back.

Let me turn all this around and say that there is somebody who likes you. But sometimes you just don't seem to care. Maybe you don't realize how much this person likes you, or maybe you don't understand how you should respond or why you should like him back.

I'm not talking about little boys or little girls. And I'm not talking about romance or anything sexual. But I am talking about a real person who really likes you. In fact, he really **LOVES** you. And this person wants you to love him in return.

Of course, I'm talking about God. And, I'm talking about *you*. Some of you may already love God—a lot. Some of you may love God a little. Some of you may not love God much at all. Some of you may not think God is worth loving. Some of you may not believe that there is a God to love.

Whoever you are, I'm convinced that you can **LEARN** to love God more than you do. But **WHY** should you want to? And **HOW** can you learn to love God more?

In this lesson and the ones to follow, we are going to consider those important questions. Let's begin by looking at God's message in the Bible.

I. Commandments in the Bible

A. The “greatest” commandment among many others.

At the time of Jesus, the Jewish rabbis (teachers) had determined that the total number of Old Testament commandments was **613**. Of these, 248 were positive (things “you should” do) and 365 were negative (things “you should not” do).

They argued over which commandments were the greatest. This may have prompted the question posed to Jesus in Mark 12 and in Matthew 22 when a scholar asked Jesus about the most important commandment of all. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Jesus says **the “most important” commandment of all is to LOVE God.**

Incidentally, many rabbis thought that the **“least important”** commandment was in Deuteronomy 22:6, “If you come across a bird’s nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young.”

Mark 12:30	Matt 22:37	Deut. 6:5
“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. ”	“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind. ”	“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ”

When we compare the Gospel accounts to Deuteronomy, a notable difference can be noticed. What is that?

The primary difference is that Mark and Matthew refer to the **MIND**, while Deuteronomy does not.

Note to Leaders: There are also some slight differences between Mark and Matthew. Mark includes “strength,” but Matthew does not. A later lesson will discuss the issue of “differences” in the Gospel accounts. At this point, if students raise this issue, you can offer the following points: (1) Differences are not necessarily contradictions, and the presence of such differences does not mean that the accounts are not reliable or not authoritative. (2) The Gospel writers do not have to give the *exact same words* for them to be reliable and authoritative. The main idea is still clear. (3) It’s likely that the Gospel writers were drawing from how Jesus expressed this in different situations at different times.

B. Why the apparent difference between Deuteronomy and the Gospels?

Why is there an apparent difference between what the Gospels say and what Deuteronomy says? What’s going on here? Was Jesus having a bad day? Was Jesus trying to quote Deuteronomy but just made a mistake? Did he have a memory lapse? Was he even aware of this passage in Deuteronomy?

One thing is clear: Jesus was definitely very familiar with this passage in Deuteronomy. In fact, it was, and still is, probably the most famous passage in all of the Hebrew Bible (or what we now call the Old Testament). This passage is called the *“shema,”* which is the Hebrew word for “hear” (the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4). Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with, “Hear, O Israel” Then

Deuteronomy 6:5 gives what Jesus later considers to be the “most important” commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul*, and with all your *might*.”

Here’s an important point: When Jesus adds the word “mind” to this commandment, he is not saying anything different from what the Old Testament passage already meant. **The Hebrew word for “heart”** (*leb*; pronounced “lay-bawb”) **in Deuteronomy 6 already includes the idea of the MIND.** The Hebrew word for “heart” does not just refer to one’s inner *feelings*; it includes the *mind*.

To understand what’s going on here, it’s helpful to know that Deuteronomy 6 would have been expressed by Moses *in Hebrew* about 1300 years before the time of Jesus. Moses and his audience would have understood that loving God with the *heart* includes the idea of loving God with the *mind*. But in Jesus’ day, while the Jewish scholars used Hebrew, most Jewish people spoke *Aramaic*, not Hebrew. (Aramaic was a kind of dialect of Hebrew.) As a result, they were not as familiar with what the Hebrew really meant.

So it’s as though Jesus and the Gospel writers did not want their audience in the first-century to miss the point that is clear in Hebrew: God commands us to love Him with our heart, soul, strength, and *mind*!

This is especially important for us today. We often want to get very excited about God and have emotional highs in our worship and singing—and this is very good. However, what is frequently neglected is the *mind*.

C. God commands us to love Him.

How can God *command* us to love Him? What would you think if someone said to you, “I command you to love me! And do it right now!” We *can’t* just turn love on like that—at least if love means that we have to *feel* a certain way toward that person. We can’t be commanded to *feel* joy or to *feel* sorrow. It just doesn’t work that way.

So when God commands us to love Him, He is not commanding us to have a *feeling* of love. **The command to love God calls us to a DECISION, not simply to a FEELING.**

When God commands us to love Him, “love” refers to a *decision* we make—and keep making—to give God priority over everything else in how we live. Love is not a *feeling* we have or don’t have. In this sense, we can “love” someone—including God—even if we don’t completely FEEL love toward that person. Of course, we should want our feelings to follow, but loving God begins with a *decision*. And we have the power to make that decision. Do you *want* to love God?



LEADERS: PAUSE VIDEO.

Discuss items 1-3 in the “Let’s Interact” section. Use your judgment on how much time to use.

After the discussion, continue with Part 2 of the lesson video (about 7 minutes). After Part 2, do discussion items 4-7.

II. Loving God with your Mind

We are commanded to love God with *all* we are: our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But let's focus on some Bible passages that emphasize the importance of the mind.

In **Romans 12**, the apostle Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed *by the renewal of your mind* ..." (12:2).

In **2 Corinthians 10**, he says, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (10:5). That will require the use of the mind.

In **Romans 8**, Paul says that "to set the *mind* on the flesh is death, but to set the *mind* on the Spirit is life and peace. For the *mind* that is set on the flesh is hostile to God ..." (8:5-6).

Compare this with Philippians 3:19 where Paul refers to people whose "end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

All of this paints a clear picture: **The Greatest Commandment directs us to love God with EVERYTHING we are:** our soul (or deepest desires), our heart (our deepest feelings and emotions), our strength (which includes our bodies), and our mind (which includes our thoughts, our imagination, and our knowledge).

What's most important is not merely whether you attend church regularly, whether you know basic facts about Bible people and Bible stories, or even whether you believe that Jesus is God's Son. While these are all important, the *most* important thing is to *love* God. Believing the right things without loving and submitting to God is not enough. As James says, "Even the demons believe" (James 2:19).

III. Learning to Love God

Many of us want to love God more, but we often do not know *how* we can do that. What can we do to learn to love God more?

A. HOW can we learn to love God more?

We can learn to love God in many of the same ways we can learn to love other humans:

- We decide to spend more time with them.
- We listen to them. We talk to them.
- We try to find out who they really are. We examine their character.
- We analyze their actions.
- We determine whether they are trustworthy.
- We consider the benefits of having a close relationship with them.
- We discover ways in which we can show our love for them.

What would be involved if we truly decided to do these things with God? These lessons will guide you on how to love God more.

B. WHY should we want to love God more?

The next five lessons will talk about WHY we should love God more than we do. Here is a preview.

Lesson 2: The Worldview Tool. We'll learn about a tool that can help you love God more.

Lesson 3: God's Incomparable Qualities.. We'll get an overview of who God is and we'll begin to see that He is very worthy of our love.

Lesson 4: God's Love Story. We'll look at the big picture of Scripture and see how persistent and how patient God has been in working throughout human history to show His love for us.

Lesson 5: God as Powerful Creator. We'll consider our universe and how mighty and how wise the creator must be.

Lesson 6: God as Incarnate Savior. We'll examine what it means for God to become flesh in Jesus Christ and how that can save us from our sin.

LEADERS: Based on Part 2 of the lesson video, discuss items 4-7 in "Let's Interact."
[A Kahoot quiz might be available as another option. Check www.learntolovegod.com for Lesson 1 for updates.]

Let's Interact

Use these items for group discussion. If you can't cover them all, focus on the ones that seem most relevant or most valuable.



1. Try to give a one-sentence definition for "love." What is it? How does the meaning change, if it does, when you love a dog, or love a pair of jeans, or love a friend, or love a boyfriend or girlfriend? Is loving God different from loving a very good friend? Explain.
2. Do you think you can LEARN to love someone? Have you ever experienced this? Explain.
3. What are some *similarities* between learning to love GOD and learning to love PEOPLE? What are some *differences*?
4. On a scale of 1-10, how much would you say you devote to your MIND as a Christian or as someone who is considering the Christian faith? (1=least; 10=most)
5. God commands us to love Him with our (1) heart (2) soul (3) strength (4) mind. What would it mean to love God with each one of these? How could you actually do that? What might be involved?
6. What Bible passage in this lesson stands out as especially important or challenging? Explain why you identify this passage.
7. What questions or other comments do you have?

Let's Do Something



Here are some activities to apply this lesson that you can do by yourself or with someone else. Try to do them all before the next lesson.

- Ask one or both of your parents what they have learned about love. Do they think love is something instant? Do they think that we can learn to love someone? How can love grow? What can help it grow? Write down TWO things you learned that might be relevant to loving God more.
- On a 10-point scale, how would you currently rate your love for God in each of these areas? (1 is the least; 10 is the most.)

Heart?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Soul?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strength?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Mind?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Specifically pray that God will help you come to know and love Him more—in your heart, your soul, your strength, and your mind.

Let the Spirit Speak



It is very important to spend time in the Bible to let the Spirit speak. Use the following Scriptures and questions to guide your devotions. Try to complete each one before the next lesson. (It would be great to keep a journal of your thoughts.)

- Read and reflect on **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**. What seems especially relevant to you? Think of two ways you could love God more in your own life. What promises do you see in this passage that might apply to your life?
- Read and reflect on **Mark 12:28-34**. Jesus says “the most important” commandment is to love God. What is the “second” most important commandment? How could you apply this “second” commandment this week?
- Read and reflect on **Romans 12:1-2**. What would it mean if you presented your *body* “as a living sacrifice”? Are you “conformed to this world” too much? What would it mean in your life to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind”?
- Read and reflect on **Romans 8:1-8** and **Philippians 3:17-21**. What does it mean to have your mind “set on the flesh” or “set on earthly things”? What do these passages say about those whose mind is “set on the Spirit” or those who follow Paul’s example?

Let’s Go Deeper

- Check out this video in which the Christian apologist Allen Parr talks about insights related to loving God and drawing closer to God from Psalm 63 (11 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jf5bxcYjFVA>. He emphasizes earnestly seeking God and thirsting for God; being transformed in your life by God’s power; spending time alone with God and confessing your sins; being satisfied with God and not chasing after other things; and thinking about God regularly and trusting in Him.
- GotQuestions.org discusses how loving God is a decision we make. Hopefully you will grow to have increasingly positive feelings and emotions that go along with this love, but loving God is something we should choose to do because God is supremely worthy of our love. Check it out here (4 min): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_K0xfnR6R0.
- Check out the Room For Doubt website and download its mobile app. See <https://roomfordoubt.com> and <https://roomfordoubt.com/app/>.
- Christian scholar J. P. Moreland gives a 43-minute talk and has written a book on how to love God with all of your mind. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3pTZgiqcwM>.



Find his book *Love Your God with All Your Mind* here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Love-Your-God-All-Mind/dp/1617479004/>.

- Specific resources for this lesson series are available at <https://learntolovegod.com>.