

STUMIN

SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

MIDDLE
SCHOOL
FOCUS

SIMPLIFY

JANUARY 10, 2024

Week 1 of a 4-week series
about what Jesus said
matters most

BOTTOM LINE

Keep faith simple.

SCRIPTURE

*"Teacher, which is the
greatest commandment in
the Law?"*

*Jesus replied: "Love the
Lord your God with all
your heart and with all
your soul and with all your
mind.' This is the first and
greatest commandment.
And the second is like it:
'Love your neighbor as
yourself.' All the Law and
the Prophets hang on these
two commandments."*

- Matthew 22:36-40 NIV

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students focus their
faith on what Jesus says
matters most: loving God,
loving others, and loving
themselves

>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: There are many reasons why the Christian faith may feel complicated or complex to your students. There can often be a disconnect in what they know or are taught Christianity is and what they experience or see others live out. That can make faith feel confusing to say the least! Your job this week isn't to answer every question, debate every point, or try to over-simplify what feels hard to understand for them. Instead, it's simply to point them to the words of Jesus Himself—the Greatest Commandment that simplifies what it means to live out our faith.

>> DURING GROUP

This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don't feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.

DISCUSS THIS:

- In your opinion, what is the greatest: food, sport/team, movie.
- What did Jesus say was the greatest? What's one example of something a middle schooler might think is the greatest?
- What do you find confusing? What would help you understand that thing better?
- Do you think faith can be confusing? What is something that a middle schooler might find confusing or complicated about following Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus chose to define the Greatest Commandment the way He did?
- Of the things Jesus calls great, which one is hardest for you: Loving God? Loving others? Loving yourself? Explain your answer.

DO THIS:

Ask your students to look at the last 10 texts or social media posts they've made and answer the following questions to themselves. (If they don't have a phone, ask them to think about the past conversations they've had with family/friends/classmates/teammates/etc.)

- Where did I see love for God?
- Where did I see love for others?
- Where did I see love for myself?
- Where did I see the opposite?

After they've had some time to process these questions, ask everyone to share at least one thing they learned from this activity.

DO THIS:

Hand out the provided activity page and ask your students to fill it out during your time together. Celebrate all the ways your group members are loving well!

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>> DURING GROUP

Create meaningful conversations. Adjust the questions as needed and ask thoughtful follow-up questions as the conversation unfolds. Don't feel like you need to answer every question.

DISCUSS THIS:

- How do you typically respond when faced with a complicated task or decision?
- Why do you think faith can seem complicated at times?
- What parts of your faith do you resist or avoid because they feel complicated or confusing to you?
- Read Matthew 22:36-40. How does Jesus simplify what our faith is about?
- Which part of the Greatest Commandment feels the easiest for you to embrace? Which part feels the most difficult?
- Share with one another some concrete ways you have done each of the following recently:
 - Love God
 - Love others
 - Love yourself

TRY THIS:

This week, challenge your students to pick one of the following phrases and do the activity that goes with it:

- **Loving God:** Write out a list about the things you love about God and use your list to praise God when you pray.
- **Loving Others:** Find an opportunity to serve another person this week—this could be doing an extra chore to help a sibling, helping a classmate with homework, or donating food or winter clothing to Mission Outpost.
- **Loving Yourself:** Write out a list of things that you love about yourself and read the list to yourself whenever you need a reminder.