

Kingdom questions

Planning

Theme

Living every day as first and last

Six weeks in which we recognise the urgency of the gospel message, reading Matthew's uncompromising words as we approach the celebration of Christ the King. Read more about the theme on page 4 and in *Month by month* on the [WEB](#). In *Adult & All Age* we read the Gospel alongside Paul's first letter to the emerging church in Thessalonica.

Week 2 of 6

Kingdom questions

Matthew 22.34-46

Pressure on Jesus is unrelenting and a lawyer now poses a question about the commandments. Jesus answers this readily and responds with a further question – that no one can answer.

This week's reading provides an opportunity to:

- wonder and question to increase our understanding
- recognise the centrality of the commandment to love God and neighbour in Jewish and Christian tradition
- consider who Jesus was as the Messiah
- recognise that the sharing of the gospel is an act of love.

Other Bible readings for this week

RCL Proper 25 Year A,
Leviticus 19.1-2, 15-18, Psalm 1,
1 Thessalonians 2.1-8

Special Sunday

Today is Bible Sunday. A new all-age service, based on Colossians 3.12-17, can be found on the [WEB](#). Further resources for Bible Sunday can be found on the Bible Society website (see [WEB](#) for a link).

Prepare your session

Read **Matthew 22.34-46** and the *Bible notes* on page 36. Choose from the materials to suit the age range, length of session and preferences of your group. Integrate prayers and singing at appropriate moments.

For shorter sessions, use the story opposite and pray *Heart prayers* on page 37.

Prayers

Additional prayers can be found within this weekly material. All prayer text is on the [WEB](#).

A Thessalonian prayer 2

Living and true God,
make us gentle and loving,
caring for one another tenderly
as a nurse holds a baby,
so that the good news of Jesus your Son
is shared more through our deeds than
our words.

Amen.

A 'first and last' prayer

Lord Jesus,
you were there at the beginning of
everything.

Lord, you are the first and the last.

You will be there at the end of
everything.

Lord, you are the first and the last.

You are the most important one in my
life.

Lord, you are the first and the last.

Amen.

A prayer for knowing God better

For those with doubts and questions,
we pray to you, O Lord.

For those who always need to be right,
we pray to you, O Lord.

For those who are trying to understand,
we pray to you, O Lord.

Guide us all to know you better.

Amen.

Music

See [WEB](#) for key to abbreviations.

Sing

All of my heart (KS)

Bind us together

Can we love one another (CHY, HON, KS)

Father, we adore you

God's love is deeper

Have you ever had (KS)

I will offer up my life

Love the Lord your God (JP, KS)

Matthew twenty-two (JP, KS)

Open our eyes, Lord

Listen

'Love the Lord your God', Lincoln
Brewster on *Let the Praises Ring: The Best
of Lincoln Brewster*: [www.youtube.com/
watch?v=U8mr839-TVs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8mr839-TVs)

Gather

Prepare the space

Display the gold crown from last week
on the purple cloth in the centre of
your space. In front of the crown place a
'heart': a 3D ornament (safe for handling)
or a homemade 2D coloured cardboard
heart shape.

Gathering activity

You will need: pre-cut heart shapes [WEB](#);
felt pens and stickers with which to
decorate them. Invite everyone to
decorate a heart as they arrive.

Gathering prayer

Lord Jesus, you came and lived among us.
You showed us the best way to live.

Be with us as we gather together.

Show us how to love you and other
people.

Amen.



Open the Word

Based on Matthew 22.34-46
Bible notes are on page 36.

With very young children

A chance to play with things that help us to explore the commandment to love.

You will need: small paper hearts; (see [WEB](#) for template), sequins and sparkles, glue sticks; a large sheet of paper with the word 'God' in a large decorated heart in the centre.

Share this simple paraphrase and actions.

Jesus said: 'Love God
(point up)

and love each other.'
(gesture round the room)

Repeat so the children can join in.

Invite the children to decorate the paper hearts and help them to write their names and the names of people they know on the hearts. Stick the hearts around the 'God' heart on the large sheet of paper. You could end by reading all the names.

With children

In this story, a leader asks a question, and then Jesus asks a question.

Talk about

After reading the Bible story to your group, use these discussion points.

- What's the most important thing in your life at the moment?
- Who or what do you love with all your heart? What about with your soul and mind? What do you think is the difference between heart, soul and mind?
- What question would you ask Jesus?

With young people

Ideas to explore the Bible reading are on page 36.

It's complicated

based on Matthew 22.34-46

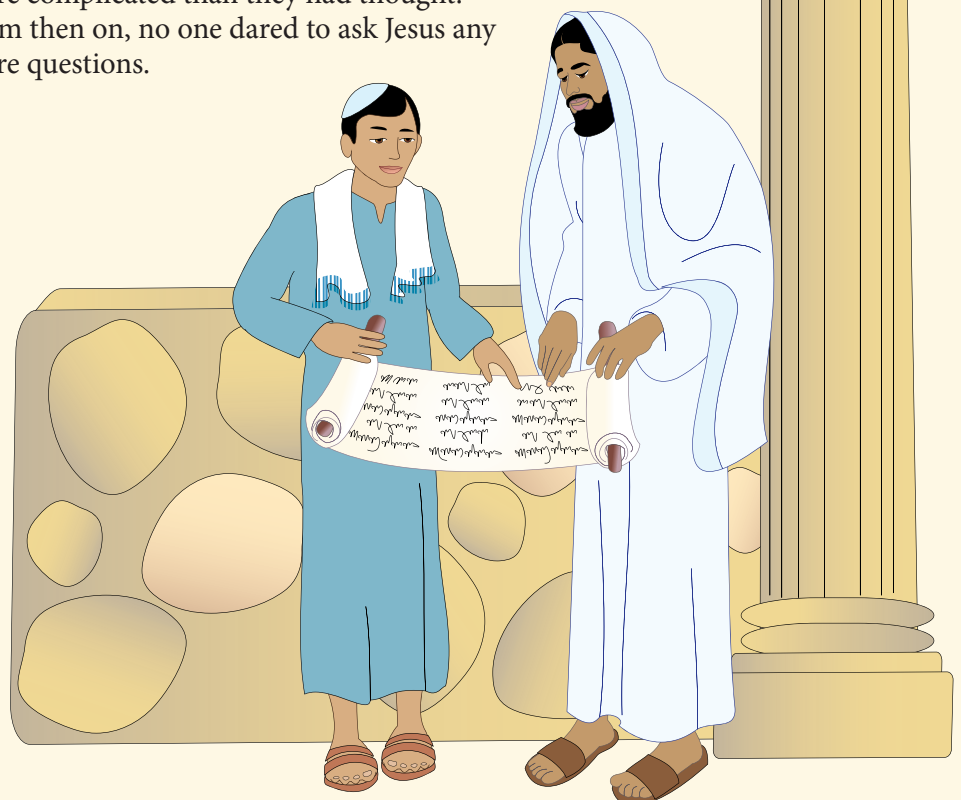
Sometimes it is really hard to understand life and to see what is most important. Some people who lived at the time of Jesus were waiting for God's Messiah, God's Chosen One. They were sure that they knew what the Messiah would be like, because they had read the Scriptures. They thought the Messiah would be just like them. When they met Jesus, he made them angry because he was not the kind of Messiah they had expected. So they used to ask him questions to try and catch him out, and to show that he had not really been sent by God.

One day, a leader asked Jesus: 'What is the most important commandment?' Jesus answered: 'The most important commandment is to love God with the whole of yourself. And the second commandment is like it: love your neighbour as much as you love yourself. These two together show you what the Scriptures really mean.'

Then Jesus decided to ask a question himself. He knew that some people did not believe he was the Messiah because he did not come from the right place. So he asked them: 'Whose son is the Messiah?'

The leaders answered confidently: 'The Messiah will be the Son of David – King David of Jerusalem will be among his ancestors.' The leaders thought that this question was really easy because they knew the answer from the Bible. But Jesus pointed out that the Bible says more than one thing about the Messiah. King David himself calls the Messiah 'my Lord'. Jesus asked: 'If David calls him "Lord," how can he be David's Son?'

The leaders realised that understanding the Messiah was more complicated than they had thought. From then on, no one dared to ask Jesus any more questions.



Bible study and response with young people

■ Beforehand, read **Matthew 22.34-46** and **1 Thessalonians 2.1-8**. Read and print out a copy of the Bible Study sheet for each group member. There are additional Bible notes on the [WEB](#).

■ In the session, read the Bible passages together, and look at the *Bible notes* and *Make connections* sections. Use this conversation spark to provoke first reactions from the group:

What are the questions that bug you about God and Christianity? Are there some answers you've never been satisfied with, or questions you've never dared ask before?

■ For the *Explore* section –

You will need: printouts of the passages, one per person; paper and pens; Bibles and Bible commentaries, if possible, to enable the young people to look up background information. You will be responsible for time-keeping once you have prompted the young people (in pairs or small groups) to write down all the questions they have about what the passage means. Then collect in the top five questions from each group, and read all of these out loud.

■ Encourage people to respond to their discussion using the response activity below or the options on the next page.

Respond

Love the Lord your God **YP** 10 MINS

Reminding ourselves of the greatest commandment

You will need: plastic wristbands (see *Further resources* on the [WEB](#)), or ones made from strips of paper joined with glue or a stapler; marker pens.

- In verses 37-38 of today's passage, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6.4-9, words that form part of the Jewish *Shema*. Deuteronomy 6.8 instructs the Jewish people to bind these words 'as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates'. Explain to the group that they will do the same with wristbands.
- Invite everyone to take a wristband and to write the words 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind' on it with the marker pens. You may like to play the song 'Love the Lord your God' (see *Sing*) during this activity.

Kingdom questions

Matthew 22.34-46 and 1 Thessalonians 2.1-8

Bible notes

Jesus' first answer was very familiar to his audience. It is the quote from Deuteronomy 6.4-9 that forms the first part of the *Shema*, the central prayer from the Jewish prayer book (Siddur) that is said at both morning and evening prayer. They are often the first words of Scripture that a Jewish child will learn, and may be used as a bedtime prayer. His second quote, from Leviticus 19.18, would also have been familiar. It was common for rabbis to debate Scripture and the importance of the commandments, so in one sense this was not an unusual question. The difference with Jesus is that the answer is not legalistic but emphasises love. The Thessalonian reading this week shows us that sharing the gospel is about sharing ourselves in practical love.

The Pharisees hoped to trick him, but Jesus turns the tables by questioning them. Again he refers them back to familiar Scripture (verse 44 quotes Psalm 110.1). It's a classic conundrum – if the Messiah is the son of King David, how can he also be David's Lord, seated at God's right hand? It's the answer of a politician and a teacher; Jesus isn't trapped into saying something that would get him into trouble, and he's making them work it out for themselves.

Make connections

Familiar words can be comforting, anchoring and helpful when teaching. Publishing led to the loss of our oral tradition and new technology is changing our reliance on the written word. Jesus' use of familiar words must have reassured his followers that he spoke with some authority. How do we learn and use familiar words from Christian faith and popular culture?

Today's teaching methods can be traced back to this method of question and answer, dialogue and debate. This passage is like Prime Minister's question time in the British parliament, with different parties trying to catch each other out! Sometimes Jesus seems to speak in riddles and the answer is not immediately obvious to us, as he is himself interpreting Hebrew Scripture in rich ways, with layers of meaning. How can we use questioning and wondering to help us understand the Christian Bible and make sense of big theological questions such as 'Who is the Messiah?'

Explore

This Matthew passage is great for provoking discussion; just remember, it's OK not to have all the answers!

Divide into pairs or small groups and read the passage together. Make a note of all the questions you have about what the passage means.

After about ten minutes, the leader will collect in the top five questions from your group and then you can discuss the answers together. It is unlikely you will agree about everything, but make sure you understand how everyone reached their answer and why they think that.

- Invite them to wear their wristbands and conclude together in prayer.
- Invite everyone to keep their wristbands on for the coming week as a reminder.

Live in faith

Encourage everyone to do at least one loving action for someone every day this week.



Respond to the Word

Based on Matthew 22.34-46

See p.35 for ways of presenting the Bible reading.

Wondering Heartfelt love

 + C + YP 15 MINS

Talking about how we share love

You will need: 10-15 printed pictures of different 'hearts' (do an internet search for 'love hearts' or 'pretty hearts').

- Invite the group to sit in a circle and help you scatter the heart pictures in the middle of the circle.
- Invite each person to choose the heart they like best.
- Ask them:
 - I wonder why you chose that heart.
 - I wonder what that heart means to you.
 - I wonder how our family, carers and friends show us that they love us.
 - I wonder how we show our family, carers and friends that we love them.
 - I wonder how we can show love to people who might need our help.
 - I wonder who we find it hard to show love to.

Play Sharing Jesus' love

C 10 MINS

A game to identify some of the ways we share love

- Invite the group to sit in a circle. Ask everyone for suggestions for sharing Jesus' love with other people.
- Invite the group to chant, 'Jesus came to share his love; we share his love by...' You may like to clap it.
- Ask for a volunteer to move round the outside of the circle in time with the chant.
- When the group says 'by...' the volunteer should tap someone on the shoulder. That person will then describe one way they can share Jesus' love with other people.
- The original volunteer sits down in the second person's place. The chant starts again and the second person then goes round the circle and taps someone on the shoulder. And so on, until everyone in the group has played the 'tapping' role.

Think Riddles

 + C + YP 10 MINS

Unravelling trick questions

You will need: for VYC: a copy of *Rumpelstiltskin*; for C + YP: printouts of some riddles and puzzles (see *Further resources* on the [WEB](#) for links).

- Remind the group that in today's story, Jesus was asked a question to test him.
- With very young children, read the story *Rumpelstiltskin*, in which the miller's daughter has to solve a riddle in order to keep her baby. Afterwards, talk about the story and the riddles in it. How were the riddles solved? Do the children have any favourite puzzles?
- Ask older children if they know any riddles (e.g. What is black and white and read all over? A newspaper!). Share any that you know, or print them out beforehand from the internet and test the children. Can they invent any of their own?

Sing and dance Love the Lord your God C + YP 10 MINS

Praising God in song and dance

You will need: a recording of the song 'Love the Lord your God' and the means to play it; space to do a circle dance (or free dance if it is preferred); a Bible.

- Invite the group to sit in their own space in the room.
- Sing together, 'Love the Lord your God' (see *Sing*), or play a recording.
- Explain that the commandment to love God and our neighbour is important to both Christian people and Jewish people.
- Read Deuteronomy 6.4-5. Explain that these words are special to the Jewish people. Read Matthew 22.37-38. Explain that these words are special to Christian people.
- Play and sing the song again a number of times.
- Invite everyone to join in with a circle dance, or make up their own free dance to the song.

Pray Praise the Lord your God

 + C + YP 10 MINS

Making a heartfelt gesture

You will need: the crown and heart from *Prepare the space*; decorated hearts from the *Gathering activity* (see also template on the [WEB](#)); pens; a bowl of heart sprinkles from a party shop (enough for a small amount each).

- Gather the group round the crown and heart from *Prepare the space*.
- Invite the group to write the name of someone on the heart shape that they decorated at the beginning of the session (see *Gathering activity*).
- Invite everyone to think how Jesus might help that person.
- Go round the circle inviting each person to put their prayer heart beside the crown and heart. They can say the name of the person aloud or not, as they wish.
- Invite each person to take a small amount of the sprinkles from a bowl and sprinkle them on their heart, saying, 'Jesus, be close to and bless (add name). Amen.'

Send out

Live in faith

Ask the children to look for ways they can show the love of Jesus to other people this week.

Pray

Lord Jesus,
be with us as we follow you this week.
Help us to love you and to love other people.
Amen.