

Middle School / High School Sunday School Lesson

Based on Mark 12:28-34 — "Going the Distance"

Length: 30–40 minutes

Age Group: Middle School / High School

Overview

In Mark 12:28-34, a scribe asks Jesus a big question: **"What is the most important commandment?"**

There were hundreds of religious laws and rules, but Jesus made the answer simple: **Love God with everything you have, and love your neighbor as yourself.**

This lesson challenges students to think about what it really means to follow Jesus. It is possible to **know about God without actually living for God**. We can sit next to the "charging cable" without ever plugging in. We can know what the Bible says without putting it into practice.

Jesus calls us to do more than start the race. He calls us to **go the distance** — to keep following Him, loving Him, loving others, using the gifts He has given us, and not giving up when things get difficult.

Key Takeaways

1. **God wants all of us.** Loving God means giving Him our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 2. **Loving God changes how we treat people.** When we love God, His love should overflow into our relationships with others.
 3. **Knowing isn't the same as doing.** We can know what the Bible says without actually living it out.
 4. **God has given each of us gifts and abilities.** We don't have to wait until we're older to serve Him.
 5. **Don't stop short.** Following Jesus is a lifelong journey. When things get hard, keep going.
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Opening Icebreaker

"Almost There!"

Time: 5 minutes

Ask students:

- Have you ever almost finished something but wanted to quit right before the end?
- Maybe it was a video game, school assignment, sport, workout, book, or something else.
- What made you want to quit?
- What helped you finish?

Then say:

"Sometimes the hardest part isn't starting something — it's finishing. Today we're going to talk about what it means to keep going in our faith and not stop short."

Read the Scripture

Mark 12:28-34

Time: 5 minutes

Have a student read the passage aloud, or divide the passage among several students.

As they listen, ask everyone to pay attention to this question:

What does Jesus say is most important?

After reading, ask:

- What stood out to you?
 - What words or phrases did you notice?
 - Why do you think Jesus chose these two commandments?
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Section 1 — What's Most Important?

Mark 12:28-29

Time: 5 minutes

The scribe asks Jesus which commandment is the most important.

There were hundreds of laws and religious expectations, but Jesus doesn't give a complicated answer.

He says:

Love God.

Ask:

1. Why do you think Jesus made loving God the number one priority?
2. What are some things that can become more important to teenagers than God?
3. Can something good become a problem if it becomes more important to us than God?
4. What does it actually look like for a student to love God?

Leader Thought

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Students live in a world filled with distractions — sports, friends, grades, social media, gaming, music, relationships, activities, and future plans.

None of those things are automatically bad.

The question is:

Where does God fit in?

Jesus isn't asking for a small part of our lives. He says to love God with **everything we have**.

Section 2 — Love God with Everything

Mark 12:30

Time: 7 minutes

Jesus says:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Break the verse into four parts.

Heart

What you love and desire.

Ask:

- What are some things teenagers really care about?
- What does it mean to put God at the center of what you care about?

Mind

What you think about and believe.

Ask:

- What kinds of things fill your mind during the day?
- How can we include God in the way we think and make decisions?

Strength

What you do with your abilities, energy, and time.

Ask:

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- How can you use your talents or abilities for God?
- Do you have to be an adult before God can use you?

Soul

Who you are on the inside — your whole self and relationship with God.

Ask:

- Is Christianity just something we do on Sundays?
- What's the difference between "going to church" and actually following Jesus?

Key Point

God isn't asking for **Sunday-only Christianity**.

He wants our:

Heart. Soul. Mind. Strength.

In other words:

All of us.

Section 3 — The Charging Cable

Mark 12:31-33

Time: 7 minutes

Jesus immediately connects loving God with loving people.

He says:

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

Illustration

Ask students:

"What happens if your phone is sitting right beside a charger, but you never plug it in?"

It doesn't matter how close the phone is.

It won't charge.

In the same way, we can be:

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- Sitting in church
- Going to youth group
- Carrying a Bible
- Knowing Bible verses
- Listening to Christian music
- Knowing all the "right answers"

...and still not actually live out what Jesus teaches.

Ask:

1. What is the difference between knowing about Jesus and actually following Jesus?
2. What does it mean to "plug in" to God?
3. What are some ways students can put their faith into action?
4. Why is loving other people sometimes harder than loving God?

Challenge

Give students this sentence:

"If I really love God, then it should affect the way I treat _____."

Have them fill in the blank.

Possible answers:

- My parents
- My siblings
- My friends
- My teachers
- My teammates
- People at school
- Someone who annoys me
- Someone who doesn't like me

Section 4 — Don't Stop Short

Mark 12:34

Time: 5 minutes

Jesus tells the scribe:

"You are not far from the kingdom of God."

The scribe understood what Jesus was saying.

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But being close isn't the same as crossing the finish line.

Ask:

1. What do you think Jesus meant when He said the man was "not far" from God's kingdom?
2. What's the difference between knowing the right answer and actually surrendering your life to Jesus?
3. What might "stopping short" look like for a teenager?
4. Why do people sometimes start following Jesus but eventually give up?
5. What can help us keep going when following Jesus becomes difficult?

Leader Thought

Following Jesus isn't always easy.

There will be times when:

- Friends don't understand your faith.
- You feel left out.
- You mess up.
- You have doubts.
- You don't feel close to God.
- Doing the right thing costs you something.
- You get tired.

But don't stop short.

Keep going.

God is still working in you.

Section 5 — God Can Use You Now

Time: 3–5 minutes

Pastor Virgil shared how he was initially afraid to teach a Sunday school class when he was asked. Saying yes to that opportunity eventually opened doors he never expected.

Ask:

1. What is something you're good at?
2. What is something you enjoy doing?
3. Could God use that ability to help someone else?
4. What's something God might be asking you to do that you're nervous about?

Remind students:

You don't have to wait until you're an adult for God to use you.

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God can use students right now.

You can:

- Encourage someone.
- Pray for someone.
- Invite a friend to church.
- Help someone who is struggling.
- Serve at church.
- Use your talents.
- Stand up for someone being left out.
- Show kindness when everyone else is being mean.

Sometimes going the distance starts with simply saying:

"Yes, God."

Practical Applications

Choose **one** challenge to practice this week.

Love God

Spend **10 minutes each day** this week praying, reading Scripture, or simply talking to God without your phone distracting you.

Ask:

"God, what do You want me to know today?"

Plug In

Identify one area where you know what God wants you to do but haven't been doing it.

Take **one specific action** this week.

Love Your Neighbor

Think of one person who is difficult for you to get along with.

Do one intentional act of kindness toward that person.

Use Your Gift

Think about something you're good at.

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Ask:

"How could I use this ability to help someone or serve God?"

Then find one opportunity to do it.

Go the Distance

Think about one area where you're tempted to give up.

Pray:

"God, help me keep going."

Then take the next step.

Small Group Challenge

"One Thing"

Time: 3 minutes

Have each student complete this sentence:

"This week, I want to get better at _____ because I want to follow Jesus more closely."

Students can share if they're comfortable.

Encourage them to choose something **specific and realistic**.

Examples:

- Pray before school.
 - Read my Bible three times.
 - Be kinder to my brother.
 - Stop gossiping.
 - Invite someone to youth group.
 - Spend less time on my phone.
 - Forgive someone.
 - Help someone at school.
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Closing Reflection

Ask students to sit quietly for a moment.

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Read these questions slowly:

Am I loving God with my whole heart?

Am I allowing God to shape the way I think?

Am I using my time and abilities for Him?

Am I loving the people around me?

Am I plugged in, or am I just sitting next to the charger?

Is there something God is asking me to do that I've been avoiding?

Am I tempted to stop short?

Give students a moment to pray silently.

Then pray together:

"Lord, help me love You with my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Help me love the people around me, even when it's difficult. Show me how You want to use the gifts You've given me. When I want to quit, give me strength to keep going. Help me not to stop short, but to follow You all the way. Amen."

Memory Verse for the Week

Mark 12:30-31

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength... Love your neighbor as yourself."

Challenge:

Encourage students to memorize **Mark 12:30-31** during the week.

Have them write the verse somewhere they will see it:

- Phone lock screen
 - Bathroom mirror
 - School notebook
 - Backpack
 - Bedroom mirror
 - Bible
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Leader's Closing Thought

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The goal isn't for students to leave knowing more information about Jesus.

The goal is for them to leave asking:

"How am I going to live differently because I know Jesus?"

Jesus made the greatest commandment simple:

Love God. Love people.

Don't just sit next to the charger.

Plug in.

Don't just start the race.

Go the distance.