



... VALENTINE'S DAY ...

LESSON PACK



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Idea Starter

4 Biblical Directions to Take the “Love” Theme

Valentine’s Day activities seem easy to create at first glance. Love is the ultimate Christian message, and Valentine’s Day celebrates love. However, there are so many directions that messages about love can take. Here are **four biblical directions to take with the “love” theme**, which can help you narrow down what themes are most important to you and your students;

- **It is better to give than to receive (and that’s what true love does).** Valentine’s Day is a great opportunity to get kids focused on the great feeling of doing unto others. The great feeling comes when someone feels truly grateful or touched over something a child does. Hence, the important starting point with giving projects is not necessarily to focus on what services are most needed. *In this case, start instead with what will elicit the greatest feelings of gratitude that will come back to the children.* If you can manage to invent a giving project where the recipients are truly grateful and the children can see and sense it, that can be the key to changing their lives and make giving an important element.
- **Putting others before yourself is a way of showing love.** Children are naturally self-focused. Games and exercises that make them put others before themselves can help build their “giving muscles” and showing of love. You might consider giving Valentine prizes to the student who shares the most during class, pays the most compliments to others, or who is most helpful. The exercises can be kept simple, so long as you emphasize that these are qualities that we should be working on daily, all year.
- **Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** Discuss with older students the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made. Moms and dads would throw themselves in front of a train to save their own children; Jesus went through a brutal murder for people he had never even met, many of whom were or would have been, among the murderers! That is amazing love, the ultimate Valentine recorded on planet earth. You might ask students tough questions or invent exercises that encourage

them to reflect on their own ability to love:

For whom would you throw yourself in front of a train? Why? Under what circumstances would you do this for a stranger? What do we need to do to reach that level of love in our lives?

- **Corinthians 13: Love is patient, love is kind...** There are actually 15 descriptions that the Apostle Paul applies to the word "love" in 1 Corinthians 13. You can apply them to memorization or ordering games, put them in word scrambles, or have children pick several to put into a special Valentine for someone who has shown them these traits. Use your imagination while applying the 15 traits of love mentioned in the text: Love...

- 1.is patient
- 2.is kind
- 3.does not envy
- 4.does not boast
- 5.it is not proud
- 6.does not dishonor others
- 7.is not self-seeking
- 8.is not easily angered
- 9.it keeps no record of wrongs
- 10.does not delight in evil
- 11.rejoices with the truth
- 12.always protects
- 13.always trusts
- 14.always hopes

15.always perseveres

Scriptures about God's Love for Us:

John 3:16: God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not die, but have everlasting life.

Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:38-39 ... I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Scriptures about Our Love for Each

Other:

Ephesians 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Jesus' Words about Love:

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and

pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

John 15:9-14 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Idea Starter

Ways to Help Kids Give

Adults tend to think of Valentine's Day as a time to pursue love interests or show spouses and betrothed how romantic we are. Kids are not interested in romantic love, and consequently, Valentine's Day tends to be little more than a chance to give out hearts and candy to friends. The holiday provides a great chance for kids to understand God in terms of the only love they are truly familiar with—that of trusted family members.

Here are some concepts you can share about God on Valentine's Day that can help kids love Him like the ultimate parent that He is. Any can be combined with standard art projects that include Valentine's Day hearts, with the concept and Bible verse written on the heart:

God does not sleep. Kids are very aware that they go to sleep before their parents—sometimes hours before. It gives them a feeling of security to know that parents are still awake and are alert to prevent bad things from happening. Kids who awaken in the middle of the night can feel ill at ease. Mom and Dad are slumbering...they can feel lonely and vulnerable. However, God is awake all night. Psalm 121:4 states that “the God who watches over Israel does not slumber or sleep.” Kids who learn to speak to God in the middle of the night when they are unsettled often find that sleep returns quickly and easily—or that they have discovered a great Valentine for lonely times throughout the year.

One cool activity is to have kids discuss things that have bothered them in the middle of the night, and help them develop a plan to talk to God about those things if they wake up. They can create a card that says, “You are my Valentine because you listen to my fears and protect me in the dark.”

God does not blink. Sometimes kids can feel that God doesn't see them. If they fall down, if they are bullied, or if they can't catch on to a sport everyone is playing...all these things can make kids feel that God is distracted by something more important than they are. But God sees all and waits for us all to come to Him with our problems. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place...” In Psalm 139:3-5, the Psalmist says, “You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with

all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue You know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in—behind and before; You have laid your hand upon me.” Knowing that God’s eyes are constant—they do not even blink—can help kids feel His love as constant and eternal.

For an activity, have kids design eyes on black paper with chalk. Fill in around them with hearts and the words, “God is my Valentine because He sees all. HE DOES NOT BLINK.”

God knows how many hairs you have. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 10:29-31, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

One activity that uses this concept is having kids estimate what they think the numbers of the hairs on their heads are. (For fun: some Internet statistics show the average head-hair numbers range between 108,000 and 140,000). Have them draw a picture with their guess and the words, “God knows what the exact number is! That’s why He’s my Valentine!”

God’s love for us is even bigger than our parents’. This is something kids often recite, though they can’t imagine love bigger than their parents. It helps to explain the analogy about Jesus and the train tracks:

Explain it this way:

Parents would jump in front of a train if it meant they could save their own child by throwing him out of harm’s way. Most any parents would gladly sacrifice their lives to save their child. But Jesus loves more.

Some parents might throw themselves in front of a train to save another parents’ kid. Some parents would sacrifice their lives for a child of a friend they loved or a niece or nephew. But Jesus loves more.

Most parents would *not* throw themselves in front of a train to save a dirty homeless tramp who was yelling and calling them names. That’s what Jesus did when He died on the cross. He died to save everyone, even some of the people involved in His murder!

Romans 5:8 teaches that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Kids should *know* Jesus would jump in front of a train in order to save them; that’s essentially what He did when He died on the cross!

Someone who loves us enough to die in our place while we're yet sinners—that person has the greatest love of all and deserves to be the biggest Valentine of all.

Combining with art projects

Any or all of the above concepts can be combined with basic red-heart art projects by including the concept and the verses below.

Scriptures: Making Valentine's for God

Below are scriptures that are well-known for how they state God's love for us. They can be used on Valentine's for God cards.

JOHN 3:16:

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT DIE, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

ROMANS 5:8:

BUT GOD SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.

ROMANS 8:38-39:

... I AM SURE THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS NOR RULERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

1 JOHN 4:7:

BELOVED, LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER, FOR LOVE IS FROM GOD, AND WHOEVER LOVES HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD AND KNOWS GOD.

JOHN 15:9-14:

AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO HAVE I LOVED YOU. ABIDE IN MY LOVE. IF YOU KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, YOU WILL ABIDE IN MY LOVE, JUST AS I HAVE KEPT MY FATHER'S COMMANDMENTS AND ABIDE IN HIS LOVE. THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, THAT MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL. "THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT SOMEONE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS. YOU ARE MY FRIENDS IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND YOU..

Lesson

Love is a Commitment, Not a Feeling

Note: This lesson doubles as a snack!

Lesson Capsule

It's important to teach children at a young age that love is not just a "gooey feeling." While the "gooey feeling" may be present at times and is lots of fun when it shows up, real love is a *commitment*. When the "gooey feeling" breaks down into mush, real love will still be present because it is committed. Kids will learn from playing with eggs that turn nasty the true meaning of love.

Household object

Eggs

Materials

- Egg salad (amount dependent on class size; use your favorite recipe, but remember that kids like egg salad more dry than gooey usually)
- Two raw eggs
- Ritz crackers or other hard crackers for dipping
- Small mixing bowl
- Card board box (big enough to contain the mixing bowl)
- Serving Spoon
- Small plates
- Napkins
- Marker Pen

Preparation

1. Either make at home or buy enough egg salad so that each of your students can have a heaping tablespoon in which to dip their crackers.
2. Bring to class two raw eggs along with the egg salad and the box.
3. Put the egg salad in the box. Hide it so students don't know what's inside, and put the box aside until you need it.
4. Paint on the two raw eggs a smile face.
5. Put the raw eggs in front of you in the mixing bowl.

Lesson

Hold up one of the raw eggs so that the smile facing is toward the students.

This is my good friend, Sally. I love her so much that Sally and I want to be Valentines. Here's what I love most about Sally:

She's very smooth and shiny. She never stops smiling. She sure doesn't talk too much; she lets me do all the talking. I tell her all my problems and she listens very patiently. Would one of you like to have a friend like Sally?

Take a volunteer from your students who should come to the front of the other room. Give the student the second egg.

This is Georgia. Look how big she's smiling. I think Georgia really likes you. Let me tell you what Georgia likes about you:

List some nice qualities about that student, like his/her friendliness, smile, loyalty, talents, big heart, etc.

Georgia likes you so much! Would you like to get a Valentine from Georgia?

Student should say yes.

A valentine means that you love somebody. But what exactly is love? Let students name some traits.

In America, we tend to think of love as a "gooey feeling." To many people, it means that we feel joyous or grand when the person we love is around. That is surely part of it. BUT!

Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." He was referring to dying on the cross for us. Do you think Jesus felt all gooey and great when he was dying on the cross? No, it was gross and beyond awful.

Sometimes our friends do things that are really, really annoying. They take things without asking, or get us in trouble, or leave a mess in our rooms. Do we stop loving them at that time? We shouldn't.

If we do, then that's not really love. You see, *true love* is not a feeling. Sometimes a great feeling accompanies real love. But feelings come and go.

***True love is a commitment.* You commit to loving your friend and forgiving her when she does something wrong.**

Shut your eyes for a moment and think of a really good friend that you have. Give them a moment.

Do you forgive that person when they do something really, really annoying? Let them think and respond.

Do you commit yourself to being with that person even if their life gets really hard? Let them think and respond.

Because we are celebrating love on Valentine's Day, we are talking about true love. True love endures.

Nudge the student with the egg. **Let's test our love. Let's see what we can do when our friend gets a problem in her life. Can we stick with her? Are we committed?**

Drop Sally into the mixing bowl so that her shell breaks.

Oh, Sally! Look at the mess you've made! Why, you've been hit by a car! Your shell is broken! You can't play outside with me now! Do I still want to be your friend?

Let the students observe as you pick the pieces of the shell out.

Nudge student with the egg.

Georgia is going through a phase where she doesn't like to share. It's really, really annoying because you share everything with her. You find out something interesting about Georgia. Before she moved into your neighborhood, her house burned down! Now she's afraid. Every time she shares something, she feels like she did when all her possessions were getting burned up! Georgia is psychologically wounded.

Nudge the student's hand until she "gets it" and drops the egg in the mixing bowl beside Sally and breaks it.

Georgia, you're just a big ole selfish, broken mess! I'm sorry your house burned down, but that's not my problem! The fact that you won't share with me, that's my problem!

Is that the type of thing we say to a hurting friend, if we are committed to loving them? No.

Pick the pieces of Georgia's shell out.

But how do we be friends with these guys now? How do we "love" them when their lives are just a mess?

Let me tell you how. First, we pray hard for them. That brings Jesus into their lives.

Bring out your box.

If we persist in our kindness, we are doing what 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love does. It says love is...

Put the mixing bowl in the box. Close the lid again quickly. Wave your hands over the top magically.

**Love is not easily angered;
it keeps no record of wrongs;
does not delight in evil;
rejoices with the truth;
always perseveres in times of
trouble.**

If you pray for a friend in times of trouble and don't give up...if you stay committed, their sloppy messy lives "harden back up." They don't stay a mess.

In fact...due to your love and persistence and prayers...they become something stronger, something better than they ever were without out you....

Bring the container of egg salad out of the box.

Jesus said that no man has any greater love than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends. Be there for your friends and family. Love them, pray for them, be committed to that love even when they are annoying you to death.

In turn, they will become better people, of greater substance.

That, my friends, is the true meaning of being a Valentine.

Serve egg salad on plates with Ritz crackers.

If any student doesn't like the idea of "eating Georgia and Sally," say, ***If you really love your friends, they have ways of becoming a part of you. Let's let Georgia and Sally become part of us by enjoying the taste of their love. They're nutritious and will help us love our real friends more.***

Object Lesson

Making Jesus Our Valentine

This lesson doubles as a Valentine's Day Snack!

Valentine's Day is about love for one another. Students should know that loving God enables them to love others even more because of how he loves us. This lesson using peanut butter and jelly shows how, when we rely on Jesus, we love others more as well.

Note: If you have a student in your class with a peanut allergy, exchange peanut butter with marshmallow spread!

Household object: Peanut butter and jelly

Materials

- Jar of peanut butter
- Jar of grape jelly
- Bread, enough for each student to have two slices
- 2 spreading knives
- 1 knife sharp enough to cut bread into heart shapes, or heart shaped sandwich cutter.

Preparation

Cut the crusts off of bread and cut each slice into heart shapes.

Lesson

Put some peanut butter on a spreading knife and hold it up for students to see. **This peanut butter? It's a little like I was before I began to love Jesus. I didn't know where I belonged.** Wipe just a tiny bit on your sleeve or your cuff. **Is this the right place for me? No... How about here??** Wipe some on your thumb. **Does peanut butter belong on your clothes? Or on your thumb? No. I didn't belong in some of the crowds I was hanging out with. I felt useless...like I was trying to be something I wasn't meant for. Sometimes, I would get very, very close to those people.** Bring your thumb up close to your mouth. **But people would get too close, and realize that something wasn't right.** Lick the peanut butter off your thumb and mush it around in your mouth before swallowing. **Once I let people get close, it seemed like I was always getting hurt. I felt swallowed up in their ways! Or people would say stuff..."You stick to me too much!" "You're a tough nut to swallow!" I just**

couldn't figure out why I always felt like I didn't fit in in this world. One day I cried out to God.

"God! Nobody loves me! I'm a terrible misfit! Heeelp me, please!"

Put the heart shaped bread on the table. **God came right away.** "Well...hi, God. What are you doing here?" God told me...

Shake the bread slice a bit. **"[Your name], the reason you don't fit in the world is that you were born for a love relationship with me first. When you love me first, then you'll have a better fit with others. I love you. I want you to try loving me!"**

So for days...slowly spread the peanut butter on the bread...I talked to God. I thanked Him for his friendship and all the stuff He gave me, like parents and a house. I listened for Him. I wanted to hear what He would say. He *always* loved me and told me so.

Bring the bread toward your mouth. **With God, I wasn't so sticky. I didn't cling to people. I didn't say things that made me a 'tough nut to swallow.'** Take a little tiny bite. **I was still a little bit clingy and a little bit hard to swallow, what with my strong taste.**

But I managed to attract a really nice friend. Her name was Lisa. I told Lisa about God and she listened.

Bring out another piece of heart-shaped bread. **God showed up for Lisa.** Pick up the jelly jar and put some on the knife. **She told God that she felt never fit in either. She said people told her she was sickeningly sweet and had no backbone.**

He told her that's because she's supposed to fit with him first. Spread the jelly on the other heart. **She said she felt 'spineless' and drippy and was always shaping herself to fit others. He said, "Well, now that you know [your name], why don't you guys love each other through me? Together we can be strong..."**

Put the two pieces of bread together to make the peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

With my friend Lisa, I'm not a tough nut to swallow. She smooths me out. With me, she knows she doesn't have to be sickening sweet. I balance her out.

Turn the sandwich over and over. **But the most important thing is...Lisa and I both love God. He keeps us together. He makes us strong and balanced. On Valentine's Day, let's remember that the most important to love is God...who loves us...who gave us**

**His son to die so that we could live forever
with Him. Let's remember that He is
what keeps friendships together, helps us
find the right Valentine's here on earth,
and keeps us balanced and strong.**

Object Lesson

Paper Cups

MESSAGE:

We're all a little like paper cups—not worth much until we're filled up with something. Valentine's Day is a time to be filled with God's love and spread it around.

RELATED SCRIPTURES:

1 John 4:8

OBJECTS NEEDED:

Enough paper cups for yourself and every child; a pitcher of lemonade containing enough for every student to have a glass and perhaps a refill. (Pink would be great, given the holiday!)

PREPARATION:

Fill the pitcher with ice cold lemonade and hide it in a cabinet. Pass out one paper cup to each child and keep one for yourself.

LESSON:

We often hear the statement: God is love. 1 John 4:8 says, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." I want to love like God loves. That's what He wants from us. But how do I do it?

I know I should always love my kids. And I do. But some days, when they're arguing or making huge messes, I just don't feel it. How about you? Do you *always* feel like you love your brothers and sisters?

Answer: No.

The Bible says sometimes Jesus needed to give an important speech like the Sermon on the Mount. Other times he would know he was coming to a place where he would have heal a lot of people. He would do something so he could give away God's love to those people. Do you know what that was?

Let them take guesses.

Jesus would retreat somewhere quiet, and He would pray to God. What exactly is prayer?

Let them guess. Correct answer is "talking to God."

We can ask God for things, surely. But for some of us, that's the only time we try to "get with" God is when we want something. Sometimes, a better answer is to just sit and try to feel how much He loves us.

Hold up your empty cup.

Some days, I feel like this cup. I'm a good item. I could drop and not break. But what's the problem with this cup right now? *Hold it upside down and right side up.*

Let them guess. Correct answer is "there's nothing in it."

There is a poem, and the first lines go like this:
A bell's not a bell till you ring it.
A song's not a song till you sing it.

What can we say about a cup? A cup isn't a cup until...

Correct answer: "Until you fill it."

Go and bring out your pitcher of frosty lemonade. Hold up your own cup.

This pitcher is a lot like God, and the lemonade inside is a lot like his love. God holds all the love. When we pray and ask Him to just come and talk to us, He brings his love.

Bow your head as if to pray. Father, the Bible says you love me. That is such great news. How *much* do you love me?

Pretend to be God and answer in a whisper: "I love you so much that I gave my only begotten son. Now, you can come up to heaven someday and spent eternity with me, and that makes me happy."

Wow. I am starting to feel God's love!

Pour a little lemonade into your cup.

That was fun. I think I'll go back for more. Father, sometimes I get scared in the middle of the night. How can I know you're there with me?

Pretend to be God and answer in a whisper: "I love being there with you at night [say your own

name]. My word says, “The God of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.’ I watch over you all night. And do you know what else my word says? ‘I will give my angels charge concerning you, so you won’t even stub your toe.’ My angels enjoy watching over you [say your own name].”

WOW. I’m feeling God’s love now.

Pour some more into your cup.

Father, I know my parents love me. Is that how you love me? Is it sort of like that?

Pretend to be God and answer in a whisper: It might be hard for you to understand, but I love you *more* that your own parents. Yup. My word says, ‘Can a woman forget the baby she is nursing? She is more likely to forget her own baby that I would be to forget about you for a moment.’

Pour into your cup so that now it is full.

With just a little time spent with God and hearing His word, I am filled up with God’s love.

Being filled with God’s love means I now have love to share with... (name of the student to your

right).

Pour all of your lemonade into [student’s] cup.

Don’t drink from it yet! I have a little more to share on love before we’re allowed to drink! I could have been a little selfish and kept some of that love for myself, couldn’t I? But the rest of that poem goes like this:

I believe what the wise men say
Love's not love till you give it away!

I want to give away *all* my love on Valentine’s Day, and that’s not a problem...why not? There’s plenty more love where that came from.

Refill your own cup from the pitcher.

God has enough love to go around for all of us. If we share it, we can always get more where it came from. [Name of student whose glass you just filled with your glass]...I want you to pass all of God’s love onto the next person.

If she doesn’t quite understand, show her how to pour all her lemonade into the next child’s cup.

Pour all the lemonade you just refilled with into that first child’s cup. Refill from the pitcher.

Repeat, having the last child with a full cup fill up the empty cup of the child next to him. Then, the next child can refill his cup.

Keep reminding them not to drink yet! Say repeatedly, "Now pour all your love into the cup of the person beside you" until every child has a full glass.

While you are in the process of filling all cups:

Sometimes we spill a drop, don't we? Even if we're being careful. We're not as good as God is with our love. But that's okay. Spots dry.

Even if we spilled our whole cup on the floor, what could happen?

Answer: We could get a new cup and fill it.

There's always enough of God's love to go around. You'll notice that as our cups get filled with God's love, what's happening to the love in the pitcher?

It's getting smaller.

But God's love doesn't really get any smaller. How does God fill up on love? We don't really understand that. We know that He never stops loving. It's probably something like...He goes

off to the heavenly spigot, puts more love in His jug and adds more love powder. We don't really know and we don't have to. God says that he loves us more than our moms and dads do, and we can believe it without understanding it.

Once everyone has their full cup: See? What happened was that I spent time with God, in prayer and in his word, and I was filled up with his love. Once I was filled, I could pass it on to you, and you could pass it on to each other.

Let's remember on Valentine's Day where love really comes from. If we want to share God's love and God's power in our lives, it all starts when you speak *directly to Him*.

Raise your glass in a toast. Here's to God's love on Valentine's Day! Now we can drink!

CONCLUDING PRAYER:

Father, thank you for loving us more than our parents, more than we can possibly understand. Help us to spend time with you and get filled up with your love. Help us on Valentine's Day to share it. Amen.

Game

Helping Saint Valentine!

Students will compete in teams to get all members of the opposing team out of the game.

Materials

- **About ten medium sized rubber balls**
- **Duct tape**

Preparation

1. Place a line of duct tape about fifteen to twenty feet long on the ground.
2. Place balls on top of the line.

Introduction

Love on Valentine's Day is more often than not confused and complicated. We often think that in order to show or tell someone we love them, we have to do it in a big way. But that's not the case. If you're having trouble expressing your love to someone, the easiest way to start is by putting them first, like we will do in our game!

Instructions

6. If possible, divide students into two even teams.
7. Have each team stand on one side of the duct tape line.
8. Designate one student per team to be Saint Valentine.
9. When you say "Go!" students will charge the line to try to get as many balls as they can to their side of the court.
10. They will begin to throw the balls to try to hit players on the opposite team.
11. Players may not hit above the waist.
12. A player is out if they get hit by a ball or if a ball they threw is caught by someone on the other team.
13. Once a player is out, they must sit on the floor.
14. The players who are Saint Valentine will have to go around their side of the court to tag players who are sitting.

15. Other players must remain on their side of the court at all times.
16. Players must protect their Saint Valentine.
17. If Saint Valentine gets hit, then the game is over.
18. Once all players on a team are sitting, then the game is over.

Conclusion

1 John 4:76 says, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” We sacrificed our own spots in the game to help Saint Valentine. We put St. Valentine first instead of ourselves. It was easy and kind. Expressing your appreciation for someone doesn’t have to be a big and grand gesture. It can be something as simple as saying you like their outfit today or congratulating them on a good test grade. It might sound corny, but the little things *do* count. God wants us to remember this on Valentine’s Day especially, but every other day as well. He wants us to show we care for and love one another.

Game

Circle of Love

This game will help students learn that God wants us to love one another as He has loved us and it will help them get into the mindset of loving their neighbors—especially those kids sitting right there in class!

Materials

- One sheet of paper for each student
- One writing utensil for each student

Object

Students will create homemade Valentines for each other by passing around a card about each child.

Introduction

On Valentine's Day, we are more sensitive to celebrating our love for one another. For one day, we try to not be so short-tempered with each other and we are more accepting of one another's flaws.

However, we should keep in mind what God does for us each day. That is loving us no matter what. God forgives all the bad we do when we are sorry. Let's try to apply that type of love to each other for this 'game.'

Instructions

1. Have children sit in a circle or side by side.
2. Give each child a piece of paper and a writing utensil.
3. Have them write their name on the top of their piece of paper.
4. Have them pass their piece of paper to person sitting on the right side of them.
5. When you say go, each child will write down one thing they love about the person whose paper they are holding.
6. When everyone has written down one thing, they will pass the paper to the right.
7. Repeat step 5.
8. Repeat steps 5 and 6 until the papers are with their rightful owners.

9. Let everyone enjoy what others have said about them!

Closing

John 15:12 says: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”
Now, each of you should have a nice homemade Valentine in front of you from your classmates—take it home and enjoy thinking all week about how special you are to God and your classmates.

Craft

Love Calendar

As Christians we should practice being Valentines all year! We will use paper hearts to help students remember that love.

Material

- Sheet of poster board
- Black flow pens
- Red construction paper
- Ruler

Introduction

There are many legends that explain why we celebrate St. Valentine's Day.

One common legend is that St. Valentine was a Christian priest who married Christians when the Romans forbade Christians to marry. While he was in prison, the Roman emperor, Claudius, tried to convert him to paganism. Valentine not only resisted, he attempted to convert Claudius to Christianity!

He was jailed and sentenced to death for his efforts. In honor of the great saint, we should all celebrate our love for one another every day of the year, not simply on Valentine's day. We can't cram one year of love into one day of the year.

Instructions

1. On a sheet of poster board draw three horizontal lines that are evenly spaced, and two vertical lines also evenly spaced. You will now have twelve squares.
2. Label the top of each square with the name of each month beginning with January, and ending in December.
3. Under the month in each square, write the day of the week that the 14th day falls on. For example: In January, write "Saturday, January 14th."
4. Cut out 12 red hearts from construction paper.

5. On each heart write something you will do for someone, either a good deed, or an expression of your love. For instance, "Today I will tell Mom I love her," or "Today I will thank my teacher for helping me," "Today I will pray for the children suffering from famine."
6. Now paste each heart next to the day and date in each square.

Conclusion

Put your calendar in your bedroom to remind you to remember the 14th of every month. It will help you remember that we should be Valentines all year long!

Remember 1 John 4:7-8: Beloved, let us love one another...For Love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He that doesn't love, doesn't know God, for God is love!"

Craft

Love Butterflies

If you're looking for something other than red tissue hearts on Valentine's Day, Love Butterflies is a perfect alternative. The red and pink wings are shaped like hearts, and a butterfly symbolizes eternity (as opposed to the caterpillar, which symbolizes life on earth). A Love Butterfly, when given as a gift, implies that the love between the sender and recipient will be for all eternity, like God's love for us, like our love for our parents, and their love for us!

Material

- Empty toilet paper tube
- Red construction paper
- Pink construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue or paste
- Pipe cleaners
- Pen, marker, crayons, or pencil
- Elastic band
- Candy
- Pen, marker, crayons, or pencil
- Elastic band

- Stapler
- Candy
- Glitter glue (optional!)



Teacher Preparation:

At least a week before doing this craft start saving used toilet rolls and/or asking other teachers to save theirs. Paper towel rolls can be cut in half and used if that works best for you.

Introduction

Your Love Butterfly symbolizes eternal love, like God has for us. When you give your Love Butterfly to your parents or guardian for Valentine's Day, tell them that your love for them is eternal, because you love through Christ, and

His love is eternal for us. 1 John 4:7 tells us “Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.”

Instructions

- 1.**Place the toilet paper tube right side up on a piece of light cardboard and draw a circle around the tube. Make it a little bigger than the end of the tube.
- 2.**Fold the edges of the circle around the bottom of tube and glue or paste the cardboard circle to the tube. Use elastic band around the bottom edge to help keep cardboard circle securely attached.
- 3.**Cover the tube with pink construction paper to make the body of the bug.
- 4.**Cut two red hearts from construction paper. On each heart write something nice. For example: “I love You” “You make my heart beat faster” “To the greatest Mom in the world” “Be my Valentine.”
- 5.**Staple or glue the pointed edge of two hearts together so they look like wings. Now glue the “wings” to the body of butterfly.
- 6.**Draw a happy face on its body.
- 7.**Use pipe cleaners to make antennae for the butterfly and attach to top of tube.
- 8.**Fill the “love butterfly” with small candies such as M&M’s or candy hearts.
- 9.**Write “Eternal Love” across the very bottom with marker pens or glitter glue.
- 10.**Have children give their Love Butterfly to their parent or guardian!

Craft

Valentine Friendship Bracelets

Most children have either given or received a friendship bracelet—where they get one charm and their best friend gets the other. They'll be making Valentine bracelets, only this time, Jesus will get the second charm in a magical ceremony.



Materials:

- White craft foam sheets
- Red ribbon
- Beads or sequins
- Hole punch
- Scissors
- Glue
- Ruler
- Self-stick Velcro tabs
- Bottle with a cork or tightly screwing lid

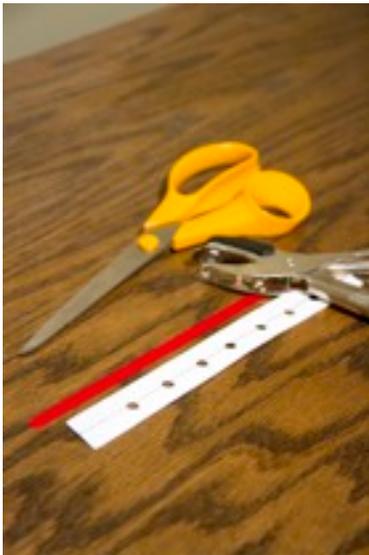
Introduction:

We often spend Valentine's Day giving candy and love gifts to others. But how about Jesus? He is our best friend, whether we're thinking of him like that or not! Today, we'll make friendship bracelets—the type where you have one charm and your best friend gets the other. We're going to give half our charms as a love offering to Jesus.

Instructions:

- 1.** Cut a piece of craft foam 3/4 x 7 inches for band.
- 2.** Place band around the wrist to size, leaving about one inch of overlap. Cut off any extra length.
- 3.** Use a ruler to mark a line down the center of the band.
- 4.** Use the line as a guide and then use hole punch to punch holes about 3/4 of an inch apart on the line.

- 5.** Cut a piece of the red ribbon a little longer than the band.



- 6.** Weave the red ribbon through the holes. Wrap and glue the ends of the ribbon to the back side of the bracelet.
- 7.** Make heart shapes and/or flower shapes from red construction paper. Glue one to the center of the bracelet. Keep the second one separate.
- 8.** Place self-stick Velcro to ends of the band.



Conclusion:

I know of a little girl who wanted to give Jesus a rose once on Valentine's Day. She left it in a bush in the back yard and told Jesus that she loved Him and to please come and take it. Well, guess what? The next day when she came back, it was gone! Some say the wind blew it...but the little girl knew Jesus had something to do with it not being there.

Jesus is like that. Our best gift to Him is our good behavior and our love for him. Everyone has an extra charm that matches the one on your bracelet. I'm going to pass the "Jesus bottle" around. Everyone put your extra charms in. When the basket gets to you and you put your charm in, tell Jesus one reason that you love Him.

Do it yourself first as this can be an awkward assignment for kids, who are used to hearing how much Jesus loves them, but may not be used to thinking of themselves as a partner in a love relationship. Here's an example:

Jesus, I love the way that I can sense Your presence every time I think of You. I love how You are always near and how You love it when I speak to You. I enjoy our

conversations and can't wait to see You someday. In the meantime here is my love charm. I am wearing the other on a bracelet to show my love for You. Please take yours up to heaven. I'm sure You have a lot of jewelry up there, but this is a gift from me because I love You so I hope You can wear it.

Screw the top tightly on the bottle. You can do some amazing little ceremonies with the bottle, or you can simply tell the children what you are going to do with it. Here are some ideas:

- If you live near a large body of water, you can throw it into the surf.
- If you live near a mountain, you can throw it over the side.
- If you live near a forest, you can bury it.
- If you live in a city, you can leave it in an alley, where it will be safe and nobody will step on it, or you can line the charms up individually outside a window ledge that is windy.
- If you live on a farm, you can release the charms individually onto a field and let the wind carry them.
- You can put the charms in a helium balloon and send it off to heaven.

Rest assured—and assure your children—that Jesus heard and that He will come and take away His gifts when the time is right!

Craft

Love Bug Pins

For teachers who are crafty and looking for an extra special Valentine craft, love bugs might be a great alternative to tissue paper hearts. While the craft requires a bit more time and some craft store materials, the message of loving others and loving Christ will shine through!

Materials:

- Large size spoon (a soup spoon works well) - one per student
- Plaster of paris
- Small wiggle eyes
- Red paint
- Pin back (available in craft stores)
- Small magnet (optional if bug will be refrigerator magnet instead of pin)
- Clear acrylic spray or glaze
- White craft glue
- Newspaper
- Water
- Scissors
- White construction paper
- Pencil or thin black marker
- Plastic knife
- Spoon and bowl to mix plaster



Introduction:

Today we're going to make a special Valentine for God and then wear it ourselves to show His love for us.

One thing we know is that next to God, we tend to feel very small. God's people are often compared to the smallest or most vulnerable of animals. In Matthew 18, Jesus calls Israel his "lost sheep." In John 21, Jesus encouraged the Apostle Peter to help people by saying, "Feed my lambs."

Sometimes in the Bible, men are even referred to as cute little bugs! Isaiah 40:22 says, "He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers." We need to think of ourselves as God's little love bugs. We may be small, but we are precious to Him. Let's make love bugs with special messages about God's love....

Instructions:

Note to teacher: As it takes about thirty minutes for plaster to dry, begin this craft at the start of the session and finish at the end of the class session.

- 11.**Place spoon on newspaper.
- 12.**Mix the plaster according to instructions on package.
- 13.**Fill spoons.
- 14.**Pop plaster out of spoons by pressing the outer edges with a plastic knife.
- 15.**Place on the newspaper and then paint bug red. Allow to dry.
- 16.**Glue wiggle eyes onto the bug.
- 17.**Cut small circles from white construction paper
- 18.**On each circle write one word. When words are read together they will spell a short sentence. Example: GOD ♥ ME...I ♥ GOD.
- 19.**Glue circles to back of bug.
- 20.**Glue the craft pin to the back of the bug



21. Spray with acrylic sealer or glaze and let dry.



Snack

Love Cookies

This snack comes with a lesson on the word “honor,” from “honor thy mother,” and all the meanings behind it. **Teacher’s words are in bold!**

Materials

- 1 large sugar cookie for each child
- White icing
- 1 small tube of brown icing with a fine point
- 1 small tube of red icing with a fine point
- 1 small paper plate or napkin for each child
- 1 sandwich bag for each child

Preparation

The teacher should prepare a sample for the children to see before they start this project.

Instructions

1. Give each child two sugar cookie
2. Ice each cookie with white Icing.
3. With the brown icing write an “I” at the top of the cookie.
4. With the red icing make a heart in the center of the cookie.
5. With the brown icing write “MOM” at the bottom of the cookie.
6. Eat one and put one aside in a baggie for Mom.

Discussion

Ask the children if they know what the Bible has to say about their fathers and mothers. Listen to all their answers, then explain.

The Bible tells us to honor our mother and father. It’s one of the ten commandments, number five to be exact. But what does it mean to honor our mother?

Listen to all their comments, then explain.

The word honor is a little hard to explain. The dictionary says that honor means “to pay tribute to someone.” That made me

think how we pay tribute to heroes who have done something very brave. We give a parade for them, or presenting them with a medal.

On Mother's Day we pay tribute to our mothers as way of honoring them for all they have done for us. We may not give a parade for our mothers, but I'll bet most of us presented our mothers with a card instead of a medal. And I'll bet we did something special for her too. Did anybody give their mother breakfast in bed?

Listen to their comments then explain:

When the Bible tells us to honor our mothers, it means a lot of things. Some of the other words the dictionary gave under the word honor included "respect" and "admiration."

Can anyone tell me what "respect" actually means?

Listen to their answers.

Respect means you always treat moms like they're important, almost like queens or female presidents. After all, moms are the president of your household!

Can anyone tell me what "admiration" is?

Listen to their answers. **Admiration means we feel proud of our mothers for all their good accomplishments. We see all the good things they do, and we want to be like them ourselves someday.**

When the Bible tells us to honor our mothers, it means especially that we should tell Mom how we feel about her. Don't forget, when you give her the cookie you made, to tell her how much you admire, respect and love her. That's one way to honor your mom!

Snack

Love of God Cupcakes

This easy Valentine snack takes advantage of God's gift of strawberries – which are shaped like little hearts!

Ingredients

- Any flavor cake mix
- Red food coloring
- Ready-made whipped cream
- Strawberries
- Red sprinkles
- Muffin tin liners

Teacher Preparation

Use prepared cake mix according to directions to make enough cupcakes for class.

Introduction

I have some delicious treats for you to decorate. We will use ready made

whipped cream and strawberries to celebrate Valentine's Day.

And then we'll sprinkle the cupcakes with red sprinkles to remind ourselves that all of our food comes from God. God sprinkles us with his love, as we should love each other during this special day.

Instructions

1. Frost cup cakes with ready-made whipped cream.
2. On each cupcake place a whole strawberry.
3. Top strawberries with a bit of whipped cream.
4. Sprinkle cupcakes with red sprinkles.

Conclusion

Romans 13:10 tell us: "Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." These cupcakes make a great symbol of the things we should try to be while fulfilling the law of love in our lives. We're like the cake--

pretty plain until sweeter things are added to us. God washes us clean. His grace is like the whip cream. He gives us a heart, like the strawberry. Then, we are sprinkled with his love so that we can love others!

Now that we're all sweet...let's eat!

Snack

Action Cookies

The Bible tells us to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves, and Valentine's Day is a perfect time to do this. These "action" cookies, a gift for parents, will help students understand how love actions speak louder than words.

Materials:

- Two heart shaped cookies for each child. This can be done with your favorite cookie recipe and a cookie cutter. However, a large round sugar cookie may be substituted.
- Red icing
- An ample supply of candy hearts that say, I love you, Be mine, etc.

say, I love you, Be mine, etc.

- A 1 inch x 1 inch white cardboard heart
- A red ink marker with a narrow point

Note: The teacher should prepare a sample for the children to see before they start the project.

Instructions:

1. Give each child two cookies—one to eat and one to decorate for the parent who picks them up at the end of class.
2. Ice the cookie with red icing.
3. Make a border around the edge of the cookie with candy hearts.
4. Have each child write a chore on the paper heart with the red ink marker that he or she can do at home for parents, like sweep the kitchen or fold the laundry. Have them commit to actually do the chore you write down.
5. Place a dollop of icing in the center of the cookie.
6. Stand the paper heart in the dollop of icing.

Discussion:

Do any of you know what scripture

Matthew 19-19 is? Let the children answer, then explain. **That scripture is "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."**

Have any of you tried writing a story? Let

the children answer, then explain. **One of the first rules you learn about writing is: Don't tell 'em, show 'em, and I think that is the meaning of the scripture ... love**

your neighbor as yourself. It's one thing to send a Valentine that says "I love you", but the words don't mean much. It's the way we treat our neighbor that matters. How are some of the ways we can show our neighbors that we love them?

Let the children answer, then explain. **Telling someone you love them doesn't mean much. It's the way your treat your neighbor every day, and the kind things you do for them that shows how much you love them. Yes, it's all right to send a valentine to someone, and it's a nice tradition, but it's far more important to show them you love them. And how do we do that?**

Encourage the children's answers about their chore until they seem quite committed to completing it.

So on Valentine's Day, we tell people we love them, but it's more important to *show* them by the kind and helpful things we do for them. Let's all promise to *show* our love on Valentine's Day by doing the chore that we promised.

Bible Science

Change White Flowers into Red Flowers

This experiment will demonstrate how flowers change color when they “drink” water containing food coloring. We can use this experiment to help students understand how the Holy Spirit fills us and changes us slowly over time, if we “stay immersed” in Christ!

(Note: This is such a fun experiment that we wanted to include it; however, it comes to fruition over a couple of days! Fun and easy instructions are provided to do the experiment beforehand, similar to how TV cooking shows are made, and bring in the results for the students after they view the experiment with you.)

Material

- Two vases
- Water
- White carnations, enough for each child to have two, plus four for your demonstration
- Red food coloring
- Paper towels

Preparation

1. Several days before class, buy a bunch of white carnations, enough for every student in your class to have one, plus four for your in-class demonstration
2. Put the four you will use for your classroom demonstration in a separate vase. You're going to keep them white.
3. Clip the bottom of all other stems, so their heads will stick over the top of the vase. Try to cut on a diagonal rather than straight across.
4. Add water and enough red food coloring to turn water bright red.
5. By the time you need to take the vase into Sunday school, all carnations should have red running through them.
6. Pour out the water and take to Sunday school your vases, red carnations, white carnations, food coloring and scissors, so you can repeat the experiment for the children.

7. Refill the vases and put the flowers back in when you arrive.

Instructions

1. Hide the red-colored carnations before the experiment starts.
2. Repeat the experiment for the students, using the four carnations which you have left white.
3. After explaining that you would have to wait a couple of days for these carnations to turn red, bring out the results you got at home.
4. Give each student a red carnation to take home, wrapping the stem in a wet paper towel to keep it moist.

Explanation

Most plants "drink" water from the ground through their roots. The water travels up the stem of the plant into the leaves and flowers where it makes food. When a flower is cut, it no longer has its roots, but the stem of the flower still "drinks" up the water and provides it to the leaves and flowers. When it drinks up colored water, that color will change the color of the flower.

Conclusion

When we immerse ourselves in God's love, we become more like Him. Spiritually, we begin to "look a little like Christ!" Like the flower that absorbs what it drinks, we absorb good or bad, becoming more like Christ when we absorb good. It's like Jesus said in John 5:15: "I am the vine; you are the branches.

Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit." Or in this case, you'll will glow with the red passion of my love for you...!

Bible Science

Find Your Pulse Rate

This little experiment in talking pulses will show students a fun new way to see the heart beating. It will also tell them a little about how our spiritual hearts work similarly to our physical hearts.

Materials:

- Clay or play dough
- Paper match
- Stopwatch or clock with second hand
- Journal
- Pen or pencil

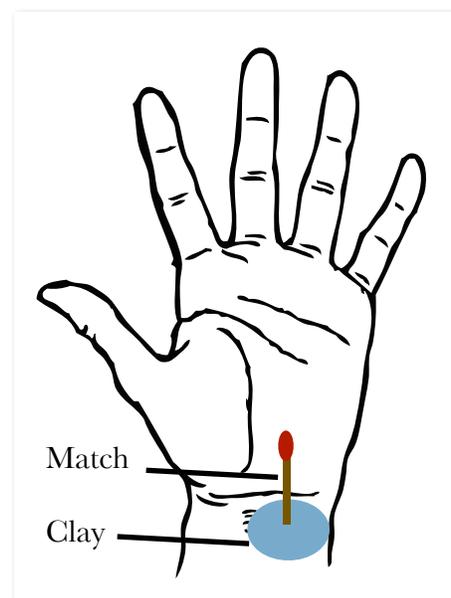
Introduction:

Where is our physical heart located in our bodies? On the left side of your chest. **On Valentine's Day, we often feature "hearts" in cards or in the shapes of candies we give out. But is our heart really shaped like the red hearts we draw and eat? No. Those cute and artsy hearts mainly represent our "spiritual" hearts, with which we love one another and feel God's love for us.**

However, the two types of "hearts" are tied together! Our physical heart can show us a few things about our spiritual hearts. Let's try an experiment to show how...

Instructions:

- 1.** Take a small amount of clay or Play Dough and make a small ball, (about an inch and a half in circumference) and then flatten the bottom of the ball.
- 2.** Use finger tips to locate pulse on the inside of the wrist.



3. Once you can feel the beating of the pulse, place the clay ball over the pulse and then insert the paper match into the ball.
4. After a few minutes, the match will start to slowly vibrate.
5. Use a stop watch or a watch with a second hand to count how many times the match vibrates in one minute.
6. Record the number in the journal. Then, jump for joy and think of something happy for a minute. Recheck your pulse and record that. Compare the two.

Explanation:

The body has what we call a resting heart rate and an active heart rate. When we feel joy, do work or get exercise, our hearts sped up to get more needed oxygen to the brain.

Conclusion:

If we rested all the time, we would not have healthy hearts. We need to exercise, get moving, and feeling awesome feelings like love and joy to get our hearts pumping and keep them in shape.

In this way, our physical hearts are a lot like our spiritual hearts. If we always got everything we wanted and didn't have challenges, our spiritual heart would get soft and weak. We need challenges to get us moving and thinking and feeling. Challenges make us more grateful in the times when we get blessings. So in a strange way, challenges help us feel greater joy and love!

On Valentine's Day, let's keep our spiritual hearts healthy by being grateful for the loving people surrounding us, by finding joyful things to think about, and by building dreams for the future with God's guidance, even if our lives are challenged!

Song

A Valentine from God

Tune: If You're Happy and You Know it...

Oh, I **got** a spec-ial **Val**-en-tine from **God**.

Oh, I **got** a spe-cial **Val**-en-tine from **God**,

And he **said** I do love **you**,

And I **love** your **spir**-it **too**,

I just **love** the Val-en-**tine** I got from **God**

Oh we **have** a spe-cial **cor**-ner in our **heart**.

A **place** where God will **thrive** and not de-**part**.

I can **feel** its presence **grow**,

That's our **soul**, I guess you **know**.

Oh my **soul** lives in that **cor**-ner of my **heart**.

Oh I **got** a special **Val**-en-tine from **God**.

Oh, I **got** a spe-cial **Val**-en-tine from **God**

Oh, it **tells** me God is **love**,

Who sends **bles**s-ings from a-**bove**

How I **love** my spec-ial **Val**-en-tine from **God**.

Song

Valentine is Such a Precious Soul

Tune: She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain

1.

Oh, a **val-en-tine** is **such** a **pre-cious soul**.
And **in** your **life** plays **such** a **spec-ial role**.
It's a **friend** you **trust** and **treas-ure**
Who is **loy-al** **be-yond** **mea-sure**
Oh a **val-en-tine** is **such** a **pre-cious soul**.

2.

Do you **care** as **much** for
Oth-ers as your-**self**
Care-ing **brings** a **spec-ial kind** of **wealth**
When you **care** a-**bout** all **oth-ers**
Bro-thers, **sis-ters**, **dads** and **moth-ers**
Then you **care** as **much** for **oth-ers** as your-**self**.

(Repeat verse 1.)

Parent Handout

7 Mini-Challenges to Get Your Kids to Make Jesus Their Valentine

We've been hearing that God loves us since we first learned John 3:16. What does it mean to love God back? More importantly, how do we explain to our children that we really can love the Ultimate Being whom we can't hear, see, touch or hug? Some Christians will immediately say that loving God means obeying God. But love is more than that. We don't want our kids to miss out on the fact that God adores them, created them to enjoy Him, and looks forward to spending time with each of them. We want our kids to understand that God's love is the only power strong enough to seal our happiness on planet earth.

Valentines Day is a perfect time to talk to kids about our love for God. If you'd like your children to think of God as their ultimate valentine—that is a great goal! But that's not to say such will be easy. Some of the most mature Christians understand the challenges of accepting God's love—and these have even less to do with God's silence and invisibility than with established traditions.

"When I was a little girl, I heard 'God is love' in my church," says one Sunday school teacher of 45 years. "At the same time, I heard that if you played cards on Sunday, you could go to Hell. There were altar calls for various wayward people, and sometimes as a teenager, I got 'nudged in the back' by well intending parishioners in the pew behind me, who were positive I had done something over the weekend for which I was 'guilty' and 'needed to repent.'

What happened was that my idea of 'love' got skewed. I thought a loving God was a grossed-out God, who thought we were all too diseased to get close to. To this day, I find it hard to think that God has any warm and fuzzy feelings toward us."

We've all heard variations of this story. We make jokes about Catholic guilt, scary Protestant archconservatives, and things that happened in the church up the road a generation or two back that can still give us chills. Most of us want to present our kids with a less scary version of God than found in recent generations, yet we also look to provide balance. We want to present God as both loving and lovable, yet we don't want our kids to believe they can do anything they want and there is no price tag on bad behavior.

The big question is, "How can we get our kids to love and trust God?" Valentine's Day is about love...it's about commitment as well as warm and fuzzy feelings toward each other. If kids are going to understand God's love, they need to understand that he feels for them the same feelings we feel for each other—only tons bigger. Love is fun. Love feels good. Any celebration of love should have God at the top of the list.

As Valentine's Day approaches, working with the 7-mini challenges below will help you show your kids how to see God as loving, approachable, trustworthy, and kind. The mini-challenges are not difficult and often just include helping your children understand a certain concept concerning God and our love relationship with him. If you

follow these, your kids will be much closer to the love relationship that you want between them and their creator:

Mini-Challenge #1: Compare God's love to parents' love for your kids. We call God "our heavenly father," but we tend to put the emphasis on heavenly, such that the father part is eclipsed. Some of us feel funny comparing the creator of the universe to a real-life, everyday parent. But kids often come to understand the spiritual realm by comparing things in it to things they understand on earth.

Most kids are aware that their parents would throw themselves in front of a train if it meant they could save their child from being hit. Most understand that their parents love them unconditionally, and nothing they do can destroy that love.

Assure your kids that parents' love is a reflection of God's love, who has been like that since the beginning. God enjoyed giving men and women hearts that resembled his—and he enjoys the notion that parental love shows kids something about himself. Kids should understand that God doesn't make mistakes as parents do, and he loves more than parents can.

Mini-Challenge #2: Encourage your kids to trust God with something. In human relationships, trust is a bonding part of love. It's impossible to love somebody you don't trust, and great relationships are built on trust. No less is true with God; if you can't trust him, it's pretty hard to love him. When your kids come to you with a problem they can't solve, simply say to them, "I'll help you all I can, but let's bring God into this. I really want you to see how he will work in your life—it's important to me." Keep praying for God to help your child and keep reminding your child that you are praying.

Some may say, "What if God doesn't do anything? What if everything remains the same or even gets worse?" What that shows is that you yourself are having trouble trusting God. The best way to gain trust is to watch him work, so stick with it. Speak to God often about this problem and tell Him that you want your child to see his power and devotion. Really listen for what God might say to you.

To think that God would answer this prayer "no, I'm not helping," is to assume that he doesn't care whether your child knows him. While God thinks higher than we think, and while we're often surprised by God's moves, the answer to that question is a resounding yes. He deeply wants your kids to experience his blessings.

Mini-Challenge #3: Don't feel compelled to bring up the crucifixion when talking about God's love. When talking about God's love to kids, resist the temptation to talk about "what he did for sinners," etc. Bring up Christ's death on Easter or in a different discussion. Hearing about violence, bloodshed, death and sin in the same conversation with how God is friendly and trustworthy—this can be a stretch for most any kid. When Jesus let the little children come unto him in Matthew 19, he did not say, "Listen: I'll be shedding my blood on Calvary's tree in a while and I'm doing this wonderful thing because you are so awful."

He enjoyed them. He asked his Father to bless them. He told people to behave like them and believe like them if they wanted to get closer to him.

Salvation messages are quite important, one reason being that the Christian faith is full of ironic twists and surprises. The idea that a violent death and resurrection completed "love" is something our kids should get used to at an early age. However, there is a time and a place.

Mini-Challenge #4: Don't speak about God in clichés. While we love scripture and some traditions that keep our churches grounded, we should make a concerted effort to switch up our language every so often. Christianity is not about certain words; it is about certain concepts. The words we associate with the concepts over the years can become “cliché,” which in any English class means “used so much that they have ceased to leave an image or impression in people’s minds.” What is true about terms like “cold as ice” and “so mad I could scream” is also true about terms like “sin” and even “prayer.”

In a room of ten people, the word “sin” can leave ten different impressions. One person will say, “It reminds me of my Catholic upbringing, things we did wrong, and having to go to confession to get rid of it all.” Another person will say, “I just remember my childhood pastor swingin’ that ‘s-sound’ out like a hissing snake every five minutes: Ssssssssin!”

The word “prayer” for most children will bring up the image of bowed heads and laced fingers and waiting around to feel something stirring while saying things to a silent being. The word “amen” will indicate the ending of a prayer, but not give kids any hint that it was said emphatically by early Christians, meaning “I totally mean this, Lord!”

Switching up your language is not taking something away from our traditions. It is helping kids past the normal reaction to words they’ve heard too often: You are giving new life to important concepts. Instead of sin, say “wrong thoughts and wrong doings.” Instead of prayer, say “talking with God.” Instead of “Amen,” say, “We love you, father—thanks for being with us!”

Mini-Challenge #5: Write out a Valentine to God and leave it at the meadow’s edge.

This is the one practical challenge, presented because it’s fun for kids to give things to God.

God knows children have no money and possessions, and he considers cards from kids as a type of sacrifice. Have them write a poem or letter on a valentine for him. They should state anything they want—something they are grateful for, or something they think is very cool that God created, etc. The idea is that they are talking to him and chronicling that talk.

You may find the messages are so priceless that they’re hard to part with. But because kids enjoy “sending things off to God,” this can create a precious memory for them. Take the valentine and attach it to a helium balloon and let it go. Or put it in a bottle with a cork and send it into the sea. Or put it at the edge of a windy meadow. Kids know that God will come and get it after they turn away. Some may insist that they hope they see him! If they are disappointed in not seeing him, it’s a great time to introduce the concept of the Hebrews in the desert: They had an opportunity to see God, but he was so bright and so loving and so big and strong that they were actually scared! Most any little human would scramble if they saw God’s love coming. It’s too huge for us.

Mini-Challenge #6: Alleviate kid’s fears about talking to God.

One thing kids will hear that may confuse them is that they should “fear God.” Fear has a very negative connotation, and if “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” kids may think that wisdom is something they’re not terribly interested in.

You can clear up any confusion by comparing a fear of God to a fear of a parent whom they are fond of. Many of us had very happy childhoods with good parents. We also remember Dad rising from his chair and clomping down the hall toward us when we were roughhousing or arguing or using bad words.

“Uh-oh! Here comes Dad!” were big words in many houses. And yet, the next day the same

father would be playing checkers with someone or having a game of catch. Often Dad listened to problems and gave good advice. He paid bills and never let us starve.

If you had good parents, you can make your kids understand that “fearing Dad” is part of loving Dad, and kids who don’t have a parent to fear a bit often turn out spoiled and entitled. The same holds true with God and us.

Mini-Challenge #7: Don’t ignore your own love relationship with God. If you want your kids to love God, you need to show them how. You are the best example. There are always ways to up the ante of your love if you have been a Christian for years. Tell your kids, “I had this terrible problem today, and I couldn’t wait to get home and talk to the Lord about it.” Tell them what you believe God said back to you. Tell your kids, “I just like to sit in my garden (den, office, bathtub, kitchen) and talk to God. He is the kindest, most merciful and most loving being in my life. I am so glad he’s my friend.”

When your kids hear magic words like that, they will apply it to their own lives.

Start now working on these seven mini-challenges. Figure out when might be the best time to talk to your kids about how God feels about them and what he wants them to feel. If you plan ahead, you won’t approach when they’re exhausted after two hours of homework or when they’re usually chatting with friends. To give them loving feelings toward God the Father is the greatest gift you can ever give your kids. So it’s great that we have Valentine’s Day, which gives us just the right opportunity!