

Love Is . . .

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Welcome to Large Group Openings for the Love Is . . . Rotation! Enjoy your time (about 10 minutes) with kids as you sing, learn, and pray together. Choose a song or two to get things started, move into the object lesson that introduces kids to the story, invite kids to discuss a question with their Shepherds, and finish up your time with a prayer.

Spark Songs

Use one or more of the following Spark Songs during your Large Group Opening. Use them in the order that suits your group's size, format, and time frame.

Spark My World (Track 1, Songbook page 4): Cut out a large paper heart to pass around the group as you sing. When love is mentioned in the song, ask whoever is holding the heart, to hold the heart high in the air, then pass it to the next person in line.

Go Tell It on the Mountain (Track 7, Songbook page 39): Help kids reflect on the words of this song by adjusting the words to respond with questions as you sing. For example, you might sing this more as an echo song: "Go tell it on the mountain (What? Tell what?) Over the hills and everywhere (Where? Over Where?)." Encourage kids to shout out the questions as you sing together.

Jesus Loves the Little Children (Track 11, Songbook page 62): Take digital pictures of all the kids in your group, and display them on a computer screen as you sing Jesus Loves the Little Children.

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook
Spark Song Lyrics Sheets or
Slides



Supplies

CD player
Large paper heart
Digital camera, computer
projector, and computer
screen

Introduce the Story

Set Up: Write a large question mark on the whiteboard or chart paper. Set the dictionaries in the center of the meeting space. Print the letters for the word *love* on index cards (one letter per card, one card per kid).

Welcome kids as they arrive. **I'm glad you are here today! Did you notice the question mark on the board? Good. I have a question for you, and I hope you can help me. Here's the question: What is love? Can you give me some ideas of what love is?**

Write the kids' ideas on the board or chart paper. Discuss some of their thoughts and ideas, and then ask a volunteer to find the definition of the word *love* in one of the dictionaries.

Jesus talked a lot about love, and we hear a lot about love today—in songs, on television, or in movies. Sometimes people say they love chocolate or they love the color red. We know there are different kinds of love, but the love of God is the best love of all!

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Whiteboard or chart paper
Markers
Index cards, 1 per kid
Dictionaries

Shepherd Questions

Pose one or more of these questions to the large group and invite the Shepherds to discuss them with the kids in their small groups. If your group is already small, choose one of the questions and ask the whole group to discuss it together.

- How do you share love with your family or friends?
- What is one way someone has shown love to you?
- Why is God's love so important to know about?

Closing Prayer

Ask Shepherds to help you pass out the index cards. Invite kids to get into groups of four spelling "love." Huddle together holding the cards in the center. Kids pass the love around as you pray by passing their letters to the right each time they hear the word *love*. Practice passing the love, then ask kids to pray with you.

Thank you, Lord, for your love, and for the way you share your love with us every day.

Teach us to love others as you love us.

Remind us to show love to all of the people we meet, even if we may not know them.

Most of all, we thank you for the love of Jesus, your Son, who gave his life for us.

It is in his name that we pray.

Amen.



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Spark Songs

Use one or more of the following Spark Songs during your Large Group Opening. Use them in the order that suits your group's size, format, and time frame.

Spark My World (Track 1, Songbook page 4): Set a candle in the center of the gathering place and light it as you sing this song. Talk about how just this little spark can light the candle and make a beautiful light to watch as we sing. *Before lighting candles, check your local fire codes and your faith community's fire policies regarding the use of open flames.*

Go Tell It on the Mountain (Track 7, Songbook page 39): Display pictures of mountains, either from old calendars or from other resources that you have. Ask the kids to think about how long it might take to climb a mountain, and what they would do once they got to the top. Talk about the echoes you can hear if you shout from the top of a mountain.

Jesus Loves the Little Children (Track 11, Songbook page 62): Practice singing this song. Then check with your nursery director or a teacher of the youngest kids in your church to see if you might bring your group to sing for them.

Introduce the Story

Set Up: Contact a community food bank or housing organization to discover their current needs. Write a letter outlining your faith community's plan to respond to God's love by sharing these supplies with people experiencing hunger or a housing shortage. Tell kids when and where they can bring supplies and when and how your collection will be donated. Send this letter home with kids and place an announcement in your church newsletter, bulletin, or website so the entire faith community can participate.

I have a lot of things here that you probably have at home. Let's see—what kinds of things do I have? Ask a volunteer to come help you sort items and lay them out for everyone to see.

These are all things that (name the organization you will support) **needs to help**

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook
Spark Song Lyrics Sheets or
Slides



Supplies

CD player
Candle or flashlight
Lighter for candle
Pictures of mountains

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Collection basket or large box
Items needed by your local
homeless shelter or food
bank: socks, canned soup,
toothpaste, etc.

people. We know God loves us. We can best show God our love by the way we love and care for other people. One way we can do that together is to collect these things in this big basket (or other container). Start bringing (name some of the items you are collecting) next week. I hope that we can collect a lot of things in this basket to share God's love. Let's see what we can do together!

Shepherd Questions

Pose one or more of these questions to the large group and invite the Shepherds to discuss them with the kids in their small groups. If your group is already small, choose one of the questions and ask the whole group to discuss it together.

- Has someone you didn't really know ever shared love with you?
- What is the kindest thing someone has ever done for you?
- God's greatest gift to us is Jesus. What is your greatest gift to God?

Closing Prayer

Pray together, basing your closing prayer on the words in 1 Corinthians 13.

Dear Lord,

Help us to remember that love is patient and kind, love believes in people, love thinks the best of people, and love is forgiving. Help us to be ambassadors of your love in our words and actions, especially at times when it seems hard to love others.

**In Jesus' name,
Amen.**



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Spark Songs

Use one or more of the following Spark Songs during your Large Group Opening. Use them in the order that suits your group's size, format, and time frame.

Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord! (Track 8, Songbook page 44): This song can make a good aerobic workout! Divide the group of kids in two and have one group leap as high in the air as they can, while singing the "Hallelujah" part. The other group leaps up while singing "Praise Ye the Lord."

Jesus Loves Me (Track 14, Songbook page 76): Write the letters that spell *Jesus* on 8 1/2" x 11" (21.6 cm x 28 cm) cards. Ask younger volunteers to hold up the cards to spell *Jesus* every time you sing his name.

All Night, All Day (Track 13, Songbook page 70): Have each kid draw a sun on one side of a piece of paper and a moon and stars on the other side. Have kids lift their papers to show the appropriate pictures while singing this song.

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook
Spark Song Lyrics Sheets or
Slides



Supplies

CD player
Paper
Markers

Introduce the Story

Set Up: Fill the basket with candies and set it in the center of the meeting space. Make a tally chart on the whiteboard or chart paper to tally the kids' favorite kinds of candy. *Before serving any food, always check with caregivers for kids who have food allergies. Provide an alternative if necessary.*

Look at this basket of candy—do you see any kinds that are your favorites? Good. I'd like us to find out what your favorite kind of candy is. First let's look at all of the different kinds and be sure we know what they are.

Take time to take each candy out of the basket and identify it, so that kids will know what to choose as their favorites. Then lift each up and have kids raise their hands if this is their favorite. Tally the results.

Now I have another question for you: would you say you really like this candy, or would you say you love it? Sometimes we say we love something that we like a whole lot. Is this really what love is?

Remind kids about the organization for which you are collecting donations.

You may want to share the candy together after the closing prayer.

Spark Resources

Spark Songbook

Supplies

Assortment of candies in a box or basket: chocolate bars, licorice ropes, gum, lollipops, etc.
Whiteboard or chart paper
Markers

Shepherd Questions

Pose one or more of these questions to the large group and invite the Shepherds to discuss them with the kids in their small groups. If your group is already small, choose one of the questions and ask the whole group to discuss it together.

- What is the difference between liking something a lot and loving it?
- Can you love things, or can you only love people?
- How do we show love to the people in our lives?

Closing Prayer

Gather the kids in a circle and have them hold hands as you pray the closing prayer.

**Thank you, God, for so many differences in this world—people, candies, colors, sizes, personalities, and so much more! We are all so different, but we do have many things in common, most especially loving you!
Amen.**

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Spark Songs

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Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord! (Track 8, Songbook page 44): We can praise the Lord with our voices, our bodies, and our prayers. Bring instruments such as maracas, tambourines, shakers, and rhythm sticks to accompany this song as you sing together. Sing one phrase, and then have the instruments play the other.

Jesus Loves Me (Track 14, Songbook page 76): Learn the American Sign Language for this song (Spark Songbook page 81) and teach the signs to the kids. Practice just the signs first, and then sing as you sign.

All Night, All Day (Track 13, Songbook page 70): Post a piece of mural paper on the wall and let kids use markers to draw pictures of day and night as you sing.

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook
Spark Song Lyrics Sheets or
Slides



Supplies

CD player
Rhythm instruments
Mural paper
Markers

Introduce the Story

Set Up: Set drawing paper and markers around the meeting table where kids can draw comfortably.

L-O-V-E. Love is an important word, especially for God's people. There is one chapter of the Bible that we sometimes call the Love Chapter. It's found in 1 Corinthians 13 and is a letter Paul wrote to the people who lived in a town called Corinth. The letter is all about love, and how we should treat other people. Let's think about all of the ways that we can show and receive love from other people.

Let kids share some of their thoughts or ideas. Then give them paper to draw or write these things down. Display their work where you gather or in a hallway in the church so that other people can see and think about the importance of love for God's people. Encourage older kids to write friendly challenges for adults who see this work. For example, "How do you show love? I share God's love when I . . ."

Remind kids, that they share God's love when they add to your collection for (*name of local organization*).

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Drawing paper
Markers

Shepherd Questions

Pose one or more of these questions to the large group and invite the Shepherds to discuss them with the kids in their small groups. If your group is already small, choose one of the questions and ask the whole group to discuss it together.

- What is one way you know God loves you?
- How do we show God's love to others?
- Who is the most loving person you know?

Closing Prayer

Teach kids the sign language sign for *love* (Spark Songbook, page 98) and have them use the sign when you pray the closing prayer.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the love you show us every day, and for the love we can show to others. Help us to always know your love, and to be kind, thoughtful, and considerate of the people we work and play with every day.

Amen.

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Spark Songs

Use one or more of the following Spark Songs during your Large Group Opening. Use them in the order that suits your group's size, format, and time frame.

This Little Light of Mine (Track 16, Songbook page 90): Make a list of words you can use to replace *light* in this song. For example, "This little smile of mine." Sing these new verses.

Jesus Loves Me (Track 14, Songbook page 76): Talk about all the ways Jesus loves—including through our families, teachers, pastors, and friends. Encourage kids to share a prayer for these people as you sing this song.

Deep and Wide (Track 12, Songbook page 66): Sing this song once, and then lay a blue rug or blue piece of paper in the center of the room. Have kids sing the song again, jumping over the "river" each time they sing the words *deep* and *wide*.

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook
Spark Song Lyrics Sheets or
Slides



Supplies

CD player
Blue rug or blue piece of
paper

Introduce the Story

Set Up: Display the heart-shaped items you gathered in the meeting space. Set the paper, scissors, and markers on the worktable where kids can use them.

Greet kids as they arrive and let them discover and examine the heart-shaped items you have collected. Invite them to cut hearts from the construction paper as if to make valentines. Tell them to post their hearts on a bulletin board or take them to share with someone they know.

I see you've noticed the hearts I collected. I like hearts because they are symbols of love.

What are some other symbols of love that you know? (*doves, cupids, cross*)

Sometimes when we think of love, we think of weddings and people getting married. But love is more than that. You can love people, pets, actions, and things. Most importantly of all, you can love God.

Tell kids that next week is the last collection week. Name specific items you might need, and encourage everyone to participate.

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Assorted heart-shaped items
Red and pink construction
paper
Kid-friendly scissors
Markers
Basket

Shepherd Questions

Pose one or more of these questions to the large group and invite the Shepherds to discuss them with the kids in their small groups. If your group is already small, choose one of the questions and ask the whole group to discuss it together.

- Have you ever been to a wedding? What was it like?
- If you have a pet, how does your pet show you love?
- What is something you have done to show love to someone in your family?

Closing Prayer


Give a paper heart to each kid. Ask them to write the names of people they love on the hearts. Gather in a prayer circle and put the hearts in the basket in the center as you pray.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for all of these friends who love you, and for all of the ways you share love with others through them. Today we pray especially for our friends as we place their "hearts" in the basket. Pause for a moment. We ask you to watch over and care for them.

Amen.

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Spark Songs

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This Little Light of Mine (Track 16, Songbook page 90): When we share God's love with others, we are sharing the light this song talks about. Sing the song through with traditional motions (pointer finger as the light, blowing it out, using your other hand as the bushel covering the light).

Jesus Loves Me (Track 14, Songbook page 76): Everything we need to know is wrapped up in these words of this song: "Jesus loves me, this I know." Try these words to this familiar tune:

Jesus loves us, you and me,
Everyone that we can see,
Jesus love us, and he gave
His own life for ours to save.

Deep and Wide (Track 12, Songbook page 66): When singing this song, have kids jump up on the word *deep* and sideways on the word *wide*. How fast can you sing this song and not get mixed up?

Introduce the Story

Set Up: Invite someone from the organization you are supporting to talk about his or her work.

Give kids small slips of paper as they arrive and ask them to write something they do in a normal day or week. (*play soccer, check out a library book, ride the bus, etc.*) Collect the slips of paper in the paper bag.

You wrote some things you do during your normal week or day. Let's read some of them. Draw one slip of paper and read the activity shown. Ask each kid to turn to someone near him or her and name one loving way to do this activity and one way that is not loving.

Show the basket (or baskets) of items kids donated. **Thanks for bringing all this stuff.** Introduce your guest to tell kids about the work at his or her organization. Allow time for questions. If a representative is not available, be sure you have the information you need to accurately represent the organization's work.

Spark Resources

Spark Song CD
Spark Songbook
Spark Song Lyrics Sheets or
Slides



Supplies

CD player

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Lunch-sized paper bag
Small slips of paper
Markers
The basket with donations
Boxes or bags to deliver
donations

Ask kids to help you pack the donations into delivery bags or boxes. **God loves us at all times—no matter what we do. These gifts are a loving way to share God's love.**

Shepherd Questions

Pose one or more of these questions to the large group and invite the Shepherds to discuss them with the kids in their small groups. If your group is already small, choose one of the questions and ask the whole group to discuss it together.

- Have you ever been in a situation where it was hard to be kind or loving?
- What did you do next?
- How has someone shared love or kindness with you when you didn't expect it? How did that make you feel?

Closing Prayer


Have kids chant "love, love, love" softly throughout the entire prayer time today.

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for love and for all that you do for us each day. Help us to learn to love others as you love us. We know that may not be easy, but we know that with your help in our lives, everything is possible.

Amen.

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