

The Compass

for Finding Our Way in the World

- a hike through the apologetic of Perfect Love -

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INTRODUCTION

For the past few years, a shocking statistic has been circulating like an electric current through the leadership of today's church: Thousands of young people are leaving the church every year. Christian Bookseller's Marketplace reported in July 2004 that 8 to 9 million 20-year-olds had made a mass exodus from the church. These are young people who grew up in our churches memorizing scriptures, learning Bible stories, being taught how to pray and worship. What happened?

I don't presume to know all the reasons why people leave the church. It's a complex issue. But I do have a strong suspicion that while we have taught our children how to be Christian, we've not taught them *why*. As a result, when they emerge into a pluralistic society, which is what America has become, they are confronted with a variety of beliefs, many of which are quite attractive. It is not unusual for a Christian to realize that many of his friends of different faiths are kinder, more accepting of him, and less condemning than many Christians he knows. They ask why he's a Christian. He wonders himself.

At the same time these statistics were beginning to surge throughout Christendom, I began helping a missionary friend write a book that was the culmination of his 44 years of teaching about Christ in Asia, especially Thailand. Ken Rideout, in The Truth You Know You Know, presents an apologetic (defense of the gospel) that explains why Jesus is the answer to every person's search for Truth, and explains it in a way that our global, pluralistic culture can understand. After spending a year immersed in his teaching, I realized one day that for the first time I knew why I believed. And I knew that children and young people should have a chance to learn this apologetic so they will be equipped to deal with pluralistic philosophy.

For teens and young adults, I wrote Love Trumps Karma. Then I wrote Bridgequest, a curriculum which helps younger students, grades three through five, understand this apologetic on their level, while at the same time gaining a general understanding of some of the most popular world religions and/or philosophies. Then I decided kids might need an in-depth look at the simple apologetic by itself. It's something that bears repeating and deepening in a variety of ways. So I wrote this curriculum, The Compass. During this thirteen-week study, while learning the apologetic in new and fun ways, you will make a wall chart of a compass that points to God, who is Perfect Love, our "true north" and the direction of our lives. Kids will also learn this apologetic with hand signs, which will help them remember it as well as share it with friends. Enjoy!

WALK THROUGH A LESSON

1. Scripture and Compass Concepts

The lesson for each week begins with a scripture and a simple “Compass Concept.” You may use the scripture as a memory verse if you wish, or you may use it to support the concept for the day. In each lesson, there is a specified time at which a student is asked to read the scripture.

2. Introductory Activity

You can begin your introductory activity as soon as the first student arrives, guiding others to join as they come into your room. This activity serves two purposes. First it gives students something fun to do from the first moment they arrive. Second, it starts thoughts and conversations about the day’s concept. Talking is encouraged. Questions are welcome. Get to know your students. Make it your goal to discover something interesting and special about each of them.

3. Base Camp

Students come together as a group in front of the compass wall display.

- What’s the Good Word? This is a time to read the scripture for the day. Occasionally the scripture reading is postponed until a more appropriate time.

- Mapping the Trail: This is the time to introduce and discuss the day’s Compass Concept as well as the Bible story or main passage for the day.

- The Compass: You will add the compass pointer to the wall compass and learn hand motions for the apologetic.

- Prayer: Choose a student to lead a prayer of blessing for the day’s activities.

4. Exploring the Trail

These are activities to reinforce the concepts. If you divide into groups for these activities, you will need one teacher/facilitator for each group. The way your class uses these groups will depend on how much time you have and how many children there are in your class.

If you have: then:

- A few children - do as many of the activities as you can in the time you have.
- Over 10 children
and lots of time - divide into three groups
 - send one group to each discovery center
 - let each group rotate to a different center as they finish activities
 - each child gets to go to each center during class time

- Over 10 children but little time - Choose the one or two activities you think your students will enjoy most, or the one that communicates what you want to emphasize for the week. Divide them into groups for discovery centers, and once they are there do not rotate. Instead, let each group do the one or two activities you have chosen.

5. Campsite Council:

If you have time, gather as a large group at the end of the class time to ask and answer questions and discuss the theme and/or other issues on the students' minds. There are probably more questions in this section than you have time to ask, but it's better to have more than you can cover than to run out and scramble for something else to do or talk about.

You will also review the scripture for the day, the compass point, and the hand motions for the apologetic. Then you or a student may close your class time in prayer.

Room Decoration:

On one wall, you will be making a compass poster. Each week you will also bring a backpack and one hiking accessory, which will be an object lesson. You may use these objects as part of the "set." If you want to decorate even more, find ways to make your classroom look like a trailhead or campground with camping gear and items from nature all around.

TO ADAPT FOR OLDER STUDENTS:

This curriculum can be used as a framework for students older than fifth grade. If you feel the activities are not challenging enough for your students, you will need to either make them more challenging or come up with activities more appropriate to your group. Check Group Publishing Company's resources for books that contain fun activities for older students.

Week 1

GREATER THAN HUMAN

“The greatest of these is love.” – 1 Corinthians 13:13

Scripture: “God is love.” 1 John 4:8

Compass Concepts:

God is greater than humans.

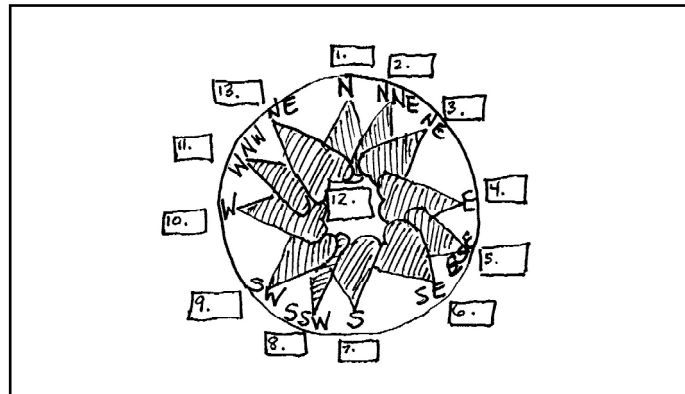
A human’s highest, best thought or feeling toward another person is love.

So if God is greater than humans, He must be greater than our highest thought, love.

God is Love. He loves perfectly.

Love is personal. So God must be a person, a being, not just an impersonal force.

Before class: Prepare a wall display of a Compass. Cut a circle 12” or larger from white posterboard. (A 12” pizza pan or round serving tray works well as a template.) Mark the directions as shown below. Make four copies, on colored paper, of the compass points (page 6). You will add one heart-shaped compass point per week, except for one week, when you will label the center. You will also need one copy of each of the direction labels (pages 7 and 8). You will also add one of these to the compass every week. The finished compass will look like the illustration below.



Completed Compass Chart

Note: If you want to give each student a real compass at the end of this thirteen-week study, you may want to shop for them now. One place to order them is at www.campmor.com. As of this writing, carabiner compasses cost \$1.99 each there.

Introductory Activity - Guess the Drawing

You will need a dry-erase board or chalk board. As students arrive, ask them to think of something that is stronger than humans or lasts longer than humans. Each student keeps his answer a secret. Now students take turns drawing their answer on the board. This is similar to the game “pictionary.” As soon as other students think they know what’s being drawn, they call out the answer. You can play this in teams if you want, scoring one point for a team if they can guess what their team member is drawing within one minute. (Or 30 seconds as a challenge.)

Base Camp

You will need a Bible marked at 1 Corinthians 13:13 and 1 John 4:8, a dry-erase board or chalk board, one compass point copied from page 6, direction label #1 copied from page 7, tape or temporary plastic adhesive like Plasti-Tak, a backpack, and a walking stick (this can be a dowel or a broomstick or a stick from a tree). Place the Bible and other small items listed above in the backpack. Wearing the backpack, and carrying the walking stick, gather all students together in front of the Compass poster.

- Mapping the Trail

Say: This season, we’re going to look at life as a hike. How many years have you been on this hike? According to the Bible, who was the oldest man? (Methuselah) How long did he live? (969 years; Genesis 5) That’s a long hike! According to the Guinness World Records, the oldest man ever was from Japan and lived 120 years and 237 days. The oldest woman was from France and lived 122 years and 64 days. That’s still a long hike!

How many people have lived and died on this planet Earth? (billions)

Do you think any of them thought they would physically last longer than trees or stars or (name some of the things the students drew)?

What do you think most of them would answer to this question:

Is God greater or less than you? (On the board, write God > *humans*. Or choose a student to be the scribe for you. Make sure the students understand the > symbol.)

What’s a human being’s highest or best thought or feeling toward someone else?

(Love.) Romantic love? (“Sexual” love, if you and your students are open to the word.) Love, as in “I love chocolate”?

What kind of love are we talking about? (Kind, encouraging, forgiving love, the kind you should expect from good family and good friends.)

Do humans always act in perfectly loving ways? (No.)

So *Humans = imperfect love* (draw a heart with a jagged line down the center).

Now if God > humans, and humans at their best = imperfect love,

then God > *human love, imperfect love*.

God = Perfect Love (draw a whole heart).

Is love personal (shared between persons) or impersonal (shared between things)?

(Personal. A pencil can't love you. A chair can't love. A book can't love.)

So if God = Perfect Love, then is God a person or a thing?

Some people say God is just an impersonal force, an "essence" or energy.

But if God is greater than humans, and God = Love, can He be just *impersonal* energy?

(Leave this on the board for review at the end of the lesson.)

All of this *makes sense* to us. In other words, we just sense that it's right. God's Spirit confirms to our human spirits that, yes, *this is true*. Ask a student to read 1 John 4:8.

A hiker can depend on a good walking stick.
And we can depend on the fact that God = Love.

- The Compass

Over the next few weeks, on this part of our hike together, we'll be making a chart of a compass. Which direction does the needle of a compass point? (north) So our first compass point will head that direction. (Ask a student to stick on one compass point, top side down, point at N. Ask another student to stick direction card #1 just outside the circle, as shown in the illustration.) Read it together.

We'll also be learning some hand signs. The first is thumbs up. What do we mean when we give someone a thumbs up? ("good job," or "we're #1") Who is really #1, the greatest? (God) So for this hike, a thumb up will mean *God loves perfectly*.

- What's the Good Word?

Ask a student to read 1 John 4:8 and 1 Corinthians 13:13.

Talk about how this affirms that though we have other good feelings, the greatest is love.

- Prayer

Exploring the Trail

1. Haikus

Material: plain printer paper (colored if you want), pens, markers, pencils, and a sample haiku written out on paper, posterboard, or white board:

Big round moon above.
Stars that dance in darkness high.
You are greater, God.

Do: Ask students if they know what a haiku is. If they do, let them describe it. If not, tell them that haiku is a Japanese form of poetry. The first line has five syllables, the second

line has seven, and the third line has five. Usually the haiku is about nature, but it doesn't have to be. It also does not need to rhyme. Ask a student to read the sample haiku. Then ask students to write their own haikus, always using "You are greater, God" as the last line. If someone gets stuck, you can brainstorm with the whole group to help create the haiku. Students may use one piece of paper per haiku and draw designs around the borders. Read them aloud now or at the end of class when you gather as a group. Post these on the wall in the room or outside in the halls for parents to read.

Discuss: Brainstorm the kinds of things that outlive humans. (If someone writes a book – or a haiku – their writing and the ideas in their writing may outlive them. The Bible is an example.) Discuss why we believe that God loves perfectly. Review the thumb-up sign: *God loves perfectly.*

2. Making Our Mark

Material: clay or play dough, toothpicks, styrofoam packing peanuts or marshmallows, chenille wire (pipecleaners), paper clips, other "sculpture" material, paper plates, hand wipes, Optional: one or more books that show famous artwork (sculptures, paintings, architecture, pottery). To avoid controversy or distraction among students, avoid books with nudes, or else show the pictures you want the students to see instead of letting them peruse the books on their own.

Do: Give each student a paper plate and clay or play dough. Ask them to create a sculpture on the paper plate out of the available material. Show pictures of famous artwork.

Discuss: Discuss how humans have always tried to create things that outlive them. Why? Sculptures and paintings live on after their creators die. What other human accomplishments live on after we die? (music, bridges, roads, inventions of all kinds, discoveries, photographs, etc.) Are all these inventions and creations permanent? What can happen to them? (They get destroyed or lost or worn out or replaced by greater inventions.) God is greater than all these. Love is greater. Review the thumb-up hand sign: *God loves perfectly.*

3. Personal and Impersonal: The Question Game

Material: none

Do: Choose one player to be the "thinker." He or she secretly thinks of an object or a person everyone knows, then tells everyone whether he's thinking of something *personal* or *impersonal*. (You may remind them that *personal* means it's a person, *impersonal* means it's a thing.) The other players then take turns asking questions that have a yes or no

answer to try to discover what the person or object is. Any player can guess the object or person when it's his turn. If he guesses incorrectly, he can't ask any more questions or make another guess. But if he guesses correctly, he becomes the next thinker. If no one guesses correctly, the thinker wins that round and chooses who will be the next thinker.

Discuss: After the game, have a brief discussion reviewing whether love is personal (shared between persons) or impersonal (shared between things). Remind them that things can't love. Some people say God is just an impersonal force, an "essence" or energy, a thing. But if God is greater than humans, and God = Love, can He be just impersonal energy? Review the thumb-up hand sign: *God loves perfectly.*

Campsite Council:

If you have time to review, gather as a large group and discuss your hikers' findings. Ask:

What is the most interesting thing you discovered today?

What is something you learned that you didn't know before?

Go to the diagrams you drew on the board during Mapping the Trail.

Remind the students, or ask them to remind you:

God > humans.

Humans = imperfect love.

So God > human love, imperfect love.

God = Perfect Love.

Ask if love is personal or *impersonal*?

So if God = Perfect Love, then is God a person (a living being) or a thing?

Review the compass point, the scripture for today, and the thumb-up hand sign: *God loves perfectly.*

Pray, admitting to God that He is greater than we are and thanking Him for loving us perfectly.

(Leave the walking stick and backpack in the classroom, or bring it back next time. Over the course of this season, you will be accumulating hiking equipment as object lessons and leaving them as part of the classroom "set.")