

Exod. 20:1–17

Ps. 19

1 Cor. 1:18–25

John 2:13–22

Rules to Love By

**Goal for
the Session**

*Youth will explore the Ten Commandments as ways to love
God and neighbor.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Exodus 20:1–17

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” W. Sibley Towner

The Decalogue comes to us almost as a kind of legal credo, fundamental to what individual Israelites understood was expected of them as people of God. *The first table of the law (vv. 1–11)*. The pericope begins with four commandments aimed at establishing a right relationship between God and the elect people. Like all the commandments, these are addressed to an individual Israelite in the second person singular, though of course they are intended to regulate community life. *The second table of the law (vv. 12–20)*. The remaining verses of the Decalogue offer categorical imperatives that regulate relationships within the elect people of God.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” George W. Stroup

It is important to remember that the Ten Commandments presuppose Israel’s history and its understanding of covenantal life before God, because, especially in Christian circles, the Ten Commandments have all too often been reduced to moral principles. Although Christians differ on precisely how the Ten Commandments are numbered, all agree that the commandments are in the form of two tables, of which one has to do with how people are to live before God and the second with how they are to live with one another. That the commandments are given in two tables has great significance for Jewish and Christian life. The two tables differ, but they are also inseparable. Hence it would be a profound mistake to emphasize one and ignore the other, to reduce the commandments to either ethics or theology. Because the two tables should not be understood apart from one another, so too theology and ethics are inseparable.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Craig Kocher

As the Ten Commandments were given to the people of Israel as a gift to shape their love of God and one another, the journey of Lent comes as a gift to mold the witness of the church. It is an opportunity to confess the ways we have squandered God’s gifts, to renew the vibrancy and faithfulness of our worship, and to increase our love of neighbors near and far. Like the Commandments, Lent is not about religious moralism. Rather, Lent is a journey of deepening holiness shaping lives in the image of Christ to praise God and live in friendship with one another.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara Brown Taylor

If nothing else, stories and traditions like these remind Christian interpreters of the Ten Teachings that these teachings have been around a long time. They are never our possession, any more than the God who uttered them is. Instead, we stand among a people counted as God’s peculiar possession, set apart by holy speech and practice for the mending of God’s holy world.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Exodus 20:1–17

Focus on Your Teaching

Societies establish rules and laws to create and maintain safety and order. However, most teenagers may view rules as arbitrary and punitive—things that take the fun out of life! At the same time, young people respond to healthy boundaries when they are offered in love and mutual respect. Parents and sports teams set up rules to protect the young and to enhance their lives. Help young people explore and claim God’s law as a guide for living an abundant life. Encourage them to see abundance in their relationships with God and neighbors bound by love.

Holy God, help me guide the young people so they may live their lives as reflections of your grace. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- crayons
- scissors
- newspapers and/or magazines
- white pillar candle
- matches or lighter

For Responding

- option 1:
paper, markers,
Commandment Cards
- option 3: markers,
colored construction
paper, scissors,
Commandment Cards

For Film Connection

- computer with
Internet access

For review of the Exodus and the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, see Exodus 14–20.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome the youth as they arrive. Invite a discussion of the last week and its highs and lows. Ask the youth when and where they sensed the presence of God.

Print the title “Our Rules” on a sheet of newsprint. Invite the youth to list rules that govern a sports activity, such as soccer. Soccer rules might include the size and shape of the field, placement of the goals, placement of the players, and use of hands. Look together at the rules the participants listed. Ask:

- ✠ Which rules are easy to follow? Which are not? Why?
- ✠ Why do we need rules?

Explain that today is the third Sunday in Lent. The Old Testament reading for today highlights the theme of finding guidance for renewal in our relationships. Pray:

Almighty God, as we listen to your holy Word, be with us as a light in the darkness. Amen.

EXPLORING

Introduce the study of the Ten Commandments by reminding the youth the order of events of the Exodus. First, God led the people from bondage to freedom. En route to Canaan, the people spent time in the wilderness learning how to be a free people. Brainstorm with the group the kinds of difficulty people who had been captive would find once they were freed.

Explain that God gave the Ten Commandments to the newly freed people to help them establish healthy boundaries in their relationships with one another and with God.

Don't feel that you have to read all of the statements. You'll know when the youth are ready to move along.

Lead the participants in listing on a sheet of newsprint as many of the Ten Commandments as they can recall without looking at a Bible. Then have participants read Exodus 20:1–17 together to discover any commandments that they omitted and to check the correct phrasing of the commandments on the list.

Explain that you will read a series of situations from Resource Sheet 1 (Commandments Today). With the newsprint list as reference, challenge the youth to identify the commandments that best apply to each situation and to determine if the statement indicates the commandment is being honored or broken. Some answers are obvious, but other situations may bring a difference of opinion. Ask for each side's rationale.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Commandment Cards). Invite the youth to color and cut out their cards. Review the commandments as depicted on the cards and explore these questions for each one:

- ✧ If you were to rephrase the commandment by starting with "Love your . . .," how would it read?
- ✧ How do you think this commandment gives healthy boundaries to a person's life? To a community's life?

Form groups of two or three. Distribute newspapers and/or magazines. Invite youth to find stories that illustrate how people are keeping or breaking one of the commandments. Ask each person to select one story and be prepared to tell which commandment is being kept or broken. Invite each person to report with a sentence or two about the news event and the corresponding commandment. Explore these questions:

- ✧ How are the Ten Commandments a gift to us from God?
- ✧ From what do the commandments set us free? What do they set us free to do?
- ✧ In what ways do these commandments help us love God? Our neighbors?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Tweeting Commandments** Youth will create tweets to explore the Ten Commandments as ways to love God and neighbors. Call the participants' attention to the Commandment Cards from Exploring. Give each person a sheet of paper and markers. Have participants create 140-character tweets that depict ways they will pay special attention to one of the commandments in the week ahead. When all are done, give participants an opportunity to read and explain what they wrote. Challenge the youth to look for opportunities to love God and others through keeping the commandments.
2. **Making Skits** Youth will make skits to explore the Ten Commandments as ways to love God and neighbors. Form pairs of participants. Have each pair create and present a skit that depicts one way in which the Ten Commandments can be applied to their lives. If possible, arrange an opportunity for the participants to present their skits to another group in your faith community or in an upcoming worship service. Invite a discussion of the benefits of keeping the commandments in their lives.

- 3. Commandment Symbols** Youth will make symbols to explore the Ten Commandments as ways to love God and neighbors. Explain that the Commandment Cards from Exploring use symbols and shapes to convey the messages. Invite the youth to create signs and symbols for the commandments. Provide markers, colored construction paper, scissors, and Commandment Cards from Exploring. Post their creations around the learning area, and look at them together. Challenge the youth to remember the commandments by memorizing their associated signs or symbols. Encourage them to look for opportunities to apply one commandment in the coming week as a way of loving God or neighbors.

CLOSING

Give each person one or more of the Commandment Cards from Exploring so that all of the commandments are distributed. If the youth made the cards with commandment symbols, they will use the commandment selected in option 3. Have each person create a short sentence prayer based on his or her Commandment Card(s) that asks for God's guidance in implementing that commandment in the world.

Set the Christ candle (the white pillar candle) in the middle of the meeting space. Light the candle, and explain that it reminds us of the light of Christ that cannot be extinguished. Place the Commandment Cards next to the Christ candle.

Have each person say the prayer(s) that he or she created. Close with this prayer:

O God, help us love you and our neighbors by living in your commandments.

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

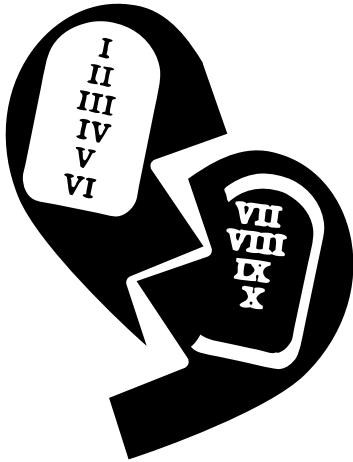
Groundhog Day (1993; PG) depicts a weatherman's experiences as he repeats the same day again and again and again. Watch "What If There Were No Tomorrow?" (bit.ly/3GndhogDayNoTomorrow), and explore these questions:

- ✂ What is awesome about reliving the same day? What is the problem with it?
- ✂ What does the film clip say about rules?
- ✂ What rules are good to follow even if you relive the same day?
- ✂ What do you think is one common message confirmed by the study of the Ten Commandments and the film clip?

March 7, 2021
Rules to Love By

Youth
Resource Sheet 1

Commandments Today



- Going skiing instead of to church (*Fourth Commandment*)
- Fighting a war (*Sixth Commandment*)
- Texting “OMG” to someone (*Third Commandment*)
- Wanting someone’s iPhone so much that you can’t think of anything else (*Tenth Commandment*)
- Cheating on a spouse (*Seventh Commandment*)
- Shopping on Sunday, which means that you are causing someone to have to work on Sunday (*Fourth Commandment*)
- Causing a car accident in which someone dies (*Sixth Commandment*)
- Spending every waking hour thinking about sports (*First Commandment*)
- Drawing a picture of God (*Second Commandment*)
- Twisting a story so that it makes you sound good (*Ninth Commandment*)
- Praying to a statue (*Second Commandment*)
- Praying to God for something frivolous (*Third Commandment*)
- A doctor saving a life on a Sunday (*Fourth Commandment*)
- Arguing with your parent or caregiver (*Fifth Commandment*)
- Admiring someone else’s home (*Tenth Commandment*)
- Ignoring the needs of the elderly (*Fifth Commandment*)
- Paying someone to kill someone else (*Sixth Commandment*)
- Having an online relationship with someone (*Seventh Commandment*)
- Taking money from your mom’s purse without asking (*Eighth Commandment*)
- Taking sugar packets from a restaurant (*Eighth Commandment*)
- Repeating a rumor about someone without verifying it (*Ninth Commandment*)

Commandment Cards

