

**Exod. 20:1–17**

*Ps. 19*

*1 Cor. 1:18–25*

*John 2:13–22*

# Ten Commandments

## Goal for the Session

*Children will hear about the Ten Commandments and tell some ways to follow them in their relationships with God and others.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### 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

Children this age appreciate knowing what the rules are and, at times, may seem overly concerned about who is not following the rules exactly. Some children may think of rules as barriers in their lives because they get into trouble when they don't follow the rules. As you discuss the Ten Commandments, emphasize God's love and concern for helping us live well as the people of God. Reassure the children that no one can keep the commandments perfectly. Tell them often that God always is ready to forgive us when we fall short and to give us another chance.

*Gracious and loving God, help me to grow in understanding your Ten Commandments and making them part of my life. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- Colors of Lent booklets (from February 28) or use the directions in the sidebar on page 3 to assemble one for each child
- small table or large box
- purple cloth
- two soft balls
- Bible
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 on card stock
- paper clips
- scissors
- Color Pack 1, 2, 28, 29
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player

### For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 1, scissors, Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: Color Pack 3, scissors
- option 3: drawing paper, crayons, pencils, copies of Resource Sheet 1, old magazines, scissors, glue sticks, stapler (optional)

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, cut out the cards from copies of Resource Sheet 1 (The Ten Commandments) made on card stock, following the directions carefully; fasten each child's set with a paper clip. Make a worship table by covering a small table or large box with a purple cloth and placing Color Pack 1 on it. If you are using option 2 in Responding, cut apart the pictures on Color Pack 3.

Greet the children as they arrive and visit informally with them about rules they have at home and at school.

Gather around the worship table and give each child a Colors of Lent booklet. Remind learners that it is the season of Lent, a time when Christians prepare for Easter. Invite the children to turn to each color as you do and repeat each statement after you:

(Purple) *Remember that Jesus is our king!*

(Green) *Remember how people waved leafy branches / to welcome Jesus.*

(Brown) *Remember how Jesus died on a cross.*

(Yellow) *Remember that God raised Jesus / from death on Easter / and gives us new life too.*

(White) *Remember that in Jesus' name, / God forgives our sins.*

*Thank you, God, for loving us. Amen.*

Sing "You Shall Love the Lord Your God" (Color Pack 28; track 22 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Save the booklets to use next session.

Tell children you are going to play a game. Form two teams and give each team a soft ball. Say, "One, two, three, go!" The children will likely be puzzled. Some may ask, "What are the

**You Shall Love the Lord Your God**

You shall love the Lord your God, alleluia!  
You shall love the Lord your God, alleluia!  
With all your heart and soul and mind, alleluia!  
With all your heart and soul and mind, alleluia!

**Colors of Lent Booklet**

Cut a 3" square from purple, green, brown, yellow, and white construction paper; for each child. Stack in the order listed above. Print "Colors of Lent" on each purple square and staple in the corner.

Be sensitive to any child whose parents are divorced, especially if unfaithfulness may have been a factor. Reassure him or her of God's ongoing love for each family member.

Make this a fun activity. Your goal is for the children to be familiar with the meaning of the Ten Commandments and not to memorize their order perfectly.

rules?" Don't say anything. After a few moments, invite learners to be seated and ask them what would have made the game easier.

Say that the Bible story today is about rules.

**EXPLORING**

Open your Bible to Exodus and say this is where the story of Moses is told. Invite learners to tell anything they know about Moses. Ask them to listen carefully as you read aloud the following story:

The Israelites were God's people. They were living in Egypt, where they were slaves. They worked very hard, and they were tired and sore. They prayed to God to set them free. God told Moses to rescue these slaves.

After Moses helped the Israelites escape from Egypt, God led them through a wilderness to the land of promise. They were camping at the bottom of a mountain called Mount Sinai. There was a cloud covering Mount Sinai. Moses climbed to the top of Mount Sinai and God spoke to him there.

God said, "Moses, I have some important rules for the Israelites. These commandments will help my people know how to live in loving ways with me and with one another. These rules will help you and the rest of the Israelites know how to live in peace as my people." (*Show Color Pack 2.*)

God wrote the commandments on stone tablets for Moses to take to the people.

Open your Bible to Exodus 20:1–17, saying that God's Ten Commandments are found here and that God's people today still live by these rules. Place a set of commandment cards cut from Resource Sheet 1 (The Ten Commandments) in the center of the group. Read each one aloud. Clarify the meaning of any words, as needed. Work together to sort the commandments into two groups: commandments that tell us how to live well with God and commandments that tell us how to live well with other people. Ask:

✠ What kind of world would it be if everyone obeyed these rules?

Give a set of cards from the resource sheet to each child. Invite learners to read them in unison with you. Discuss:

✠ Why do you think God gave us the Ten Commandments?

✠ How might the Ten Commandments help us love God?

✠ How might the Ten Commandments help us love other people and live with them in peace?

Explain that no person can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly. When we make a mistake or a poor choice, we can ask God to forgive us. God will forgive us and give us another chance.

Show Color Pack 2 and invite learners to imagine Moses and the Israelites singing along with them as they sing “God Is So Good” (Color Pack 29; track 6 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). You may want to add a stanza: *God gives us rules. (Repeat twice.) God’s so good to us.*

EASY  
PREP

### God Is So Good

God is so good,  
God is so good,  
God is so good,  
God’s so good to me.

God answers prayers,  
God answers prayers,  
God answers prayers,  
God’s so good to me.

God cares for me,  
God cares for me,  
God cares for me,  
God’s so good to me.

God, you’re so good.  
God, you’re so good.  
God, you’re so good.  
You’re so good to me.  
You’re so good to me.

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Commandment Game** Learners will have fun becoming more familiar with the Ten Commandments. Have children spread out their set of commandment cards from Resource Sheet 1 (The Ten Commandments). Explain that you will read some rules to them. If a rule is one of the Ten Commandments, they should jump up and down. If it is not, they should stay seated. Read aloud the rules on Resource Sheet 2 (Commandment Game), pausing after each one for learners to respond. After playing, invite learners to tell which commandment they think may be easiest to keep and which may be hardest. Ask each one to tell one commandment he or she will work at following this week.
- 2. Commandment Skits** Children will act out ways they can obey some of the commandments. Form four pairs or small groups. Give each one a picture cut from Color Pack 3. Make sure each group knows what the words say. Tell pairs to plan how to act out a way they could obey this commandment. After a few moments, have each group read its commandment and act out its scene for the group. Have groups switch pictures and plan a new scene.
- 3. Commandment Picture Display** Children will illustrate ways people can obey the Ten Commandments. Distribute drawing paper, pencils, and crayons. Invite each child to choose a commandment from your set of cards (from Resource Sheet 1 [The Ten Commandments]) and glue that commandment card to his or her paper. Invite learners to think of things people might do to obey the commandment. They can draw pictures of these activities or cut pictures and words from magazines to show these activities and glue them on the paper. (Some children may need to illustrate more than one commandment, and you might do one or two yourself.) After all have finished, invite learners to show their pictures to the group. Create a display, putting the commandments in order. Option: Staple the pages together into a booklet to have in your learning space.

## CLOSING

Gather with learners around the worship table. Have them arrange a set of cards cut from Resource Sheet 1 (The Ten Commandments) around Color Pack 1. In unison, read each one aloud.

Pray aloud, asking learners to repeat each line:

*Be with us, Lord, through Lenten days.*

*Be with us, Lord, in work and play.*

*Be with us, Lord, through day and night.*

*Be with us, Lord, 'til Easter shines bright. Amen.*

Say to each learner: “God loves you, (*name*).”

## The Ten Commandments

**Directions:** As you look at Exodus 20:1–17 in your Bible, you will note the heading says, “The Ten Commandments.” However, the Bible does not say how to number them. For example, look at verses 2–6: do they contain one or two commandments? Because of this uncertainty, churches vary in how they number the Ten Commandments.

Make a copy of this page on card stock for each learner and two copies for yourself. Cut out the cards. Keep the ten cards that name the Ten Commandments as listed in your church catechism or worship book and discard the remaining card. If you are not sure about this, ask your church educator or pastor.



<b>The Ten Commandments</b>	Worship only God.	Do not worship idols.	Use God’s name with respect.
Remember to honor God’s Sabbath day.	Respect your parents.	Do not kill others.	Be faithful in marriage.
Do not steal.	Do not tell lies about other people.	Do not long for things that belong to other people.	Do not tempt people to be unfaithful to their families.

## Commandment Game

**Directions:** Read each statement aloud. If it is one of the Ten Commandments (marked with \*), learners will jump up and down. If it is not a commandment, they will stay seated.



Don't be a tattletale.

Put your bicycle away when you finish riding it.

\* Respect your parents.

Wear a helmet when you ride your bike.

\* Worship only God.

Brush your teeth twice a day.

Do not be late for school.

\* Do not steal.

\* Do not long for things that belong to other people.

Remember to smile when you meet someone.

\* Use God's name with respect.

Don't touch things that don't belong to you.

\* Remember to honor God's Sabbath day.

Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

\* Be faithful in marriage.

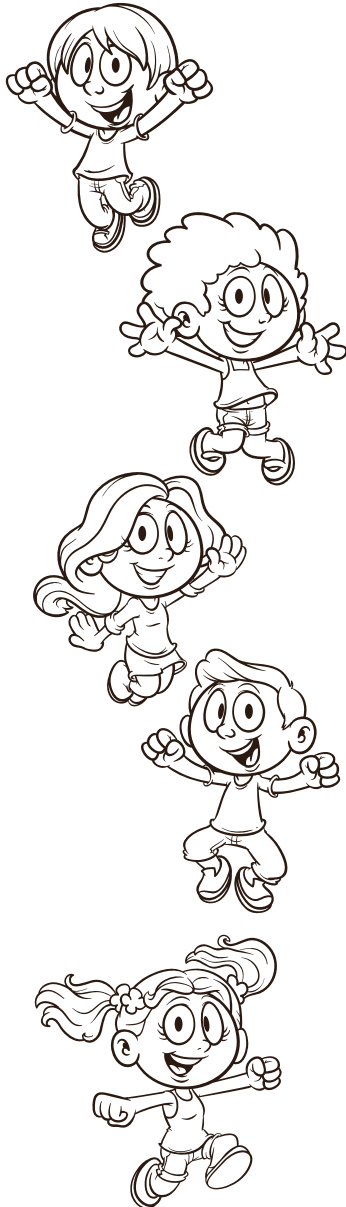
Remember to fasten your seatbelt.

\* Do not kill others.

Take turns on the swings.

Come when your parent or your teacher calls you.

\* Do not tell lies about other people.



**Exod. 20:1–17**

*Ps. 19*

*1 Cor. 1:18–25*

*John 2:13–22*

# God's Commandments

**Goal for  
the Session**

*Children will learn about God's laws known as the Ten Commandments and make them their own.*

## ■ 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.

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**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Exodus 20:1–17**

## Focus on Your Teaching

The attitude toward rules may vary widely in a group of children from ages five to twelve. Younger children may struggle with them, but rarely question them. Older children often ask why a rule is necessary. At the same time, children seem to be able to adapt their behavior to the rules wherever they are. The rules at home may differ from the rules at school, which are not the same as the rules at church. However, as they explore the Ten Commandments they may find there a basis for all the rules they encounter.

*God of love, bring me to a love for your rules, a love that I can impart to the children. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- newsprint marker
- purple cloth
- Christ candle
- matches
- Bible, bookmark
- offering basket
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- decks of cards
- game spinners
- Resource Sheets 1, 2
- scissors
- Color Pack 3, 4

For Responding

- option 1:  
paper, markers,  
commandment cards  
from Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: newsprint,  
marker, yellow and  
red construction  
paper, scissors, black  
markers
- option 3: Resource  
Sheet 2, ten .5  
liter plastic bottles,  
permanent markers,  
small ball
- option 4: *Singing the  
Feast*, 2020–2021;  
CD player

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, place a bookmark at Exodus in the worship table Bible. Print the Gathering litany, which will be used throughout Lent, on newsprint. Follow the directions on Resource Sheet 2 (Ten Commandments) to prepare the commandment cards for Exploring. For option 2 in Responding, draw some common traffic sign shapes on newsprint.

As the children arrive, ask them to set up the worship table with the purple cloth, Christ candle, offering basket, and Bible. When everything is ready, play “Kum Ba Yah” (track 15 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Invite the children to hum along with the music. Light the Christ candle and lead the children in this litany:

**Leader:** *Jesus Christ is the Light of the World.*

**All:** *Whoever follows Jesus has the light of life.*

**Leader:** *God, we are happy to be here to learn more about Jesus.*

**All:** *Amen.*

Receive the offering. Point to the purple cloth and explain that it lets us know that it is the season of Lent, the weeks that lead to Palm Sunday and Easter. Extinguish the candle.

Without explanation, form groups of four and give each group a deck of cards and a game spinner. If there are six or fewer in the group, keep them together. Tell them to play a game as you go about preparing something for later in the session. If they have questions, tell them to work it out among themselves. After a few minutes, stop the game and ask them how they enjoyed it. If they did manage to put a game together, ask:

✿ What did you have to agree on before you could play?

If they were not able to play a game, ask:

✿ What did you need to do to be able to play a game together?

Explain that today's Bible story is about rules for playing and living together as God's people.



### Kum Ba Yah

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum  
ba yah!  
Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum  
ba yah!  
Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum  
ba yah!  
O Lord, kum ba yah!

Come by here, my Lord,  
come by here!  
Come by here, my Lord,  
come by here!  
Come by here, my Lord,  
come by here!  
O Lord, come by here!

Jesus went about doing  
good;  
Jesus went about doing  
good.  
He told everyone God is  
love;  
God cares for you.

Providing information  
about the Bible helps  
children understand  
how it is put together  
and the idea of many  
books within one  
volume.

### God Is So Good

God is so good,  
God is so good,  
God is so good,  
God's so good to me.

God answers prayers,  
God answers prayers,  
God answers prayers,  
God's so good to me.

God cares for me,  
God cares for me,  
God cares for me,  
God's so good to me.

## EXPLORING

Invite a child to get the Bible from the worship table, open it to the bookmark, and read the name of the book. Recall that the story from the previous session was in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Today's story is from Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Rules for the People). Ask:

✠ Why did the people need God's rules?

Read the definition of *commandment* on Color Pack 4, and display it to continue the classroom dictionary.

Show the group the cards of the Ten Commandments made from Resource Sheet 2 (Ten Commandments). Read each card and talk together about what it means. Turn the cards facedown on a flat surface. Invite the children to select one card each. (If there are more than ten in the group, do this another time to include the rest or ask some children to work in pairs.) One at a time, they read their cards aloud and name something they would do to follow that commandment. Encourage the group to help children who are unable to think of something on the spot. If a child selects the card about being faithful to a spouse, suggest that she or he think about being faithful to their family. Make this activity more about exploring each commandment than giving "right" answers.

Look at Color Pack 3 together. Ask:

✠ What title would you give this picture?

✠ What might Moses be ready to say?

Sing "God Is So Good" (track 6 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*), adding a stanza with "God gives us rules." To move to Responding, suggest that God's rules or commandments are so important that people try to memorize or remember them by heart.

## RESPONDING

If possible, provide two options so children have a choice. Select one that is more challenging for children who are able to work on their own.

**1. Art Display** Children will interpret the commandments for life today through illustration. Invite the children to select a commandment and draw a picture of how to follow it today. Suggest that they write the commandment at the top or bottom of the paper first, copying it from the commandment cards used in Exploring. As they finish, create a display with the illustrations. Group illustrations for the same commandment together. Look at the display together, inviting each child to tell about his or her interpretation of the commandment.

EASY  
PREP

For a complete list of traffic and road signs go to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Road\\_signs\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Road_signs_in_the_United_States) for signs.

2. **Rules for Life Journey** Children will interpret the commandments as rules for today using traffic signs. Show the traffic sign shapes drawn on newsprint. Talk together about what each shape means. Form pairs and have each pair create at least two signs based on two different commandments. For example, a triangle yield sign might be changed to “yield to God” as an interpretation of “Worship no other gods.” Provide yellow and red construction paper, scissors, and black markers. When all the pairs have completed their signs, invite each pair to show its signs to the others. Perhaps they can display the signs around the church.
3. **Ten Commandment Ten Pins** Games are a fun way to learn the Ten Commandments. Here the children play ten pins to review the Commandments. Have the children number the plastic bottles from one to ten and decorate them with markers. Set up the bottles in a triangle shape. Have the children take turns rolling a small ball to knock down the ten bottles. After each turn, the child selects one bottle that was knocked down to tell how to follow that commandment or rule today. Keep Resource Sheet 2 (Ten Commandments) handy to find the number of the commandment. If the same bottles are consistently knocked down or chosen, rearrange them.
4. **Music** Music and rhythm provide a framework for recalling the Ten Commandments. Have the children sit on the floor in a circle. Select one child to be “It.” Play “God Is So Good” (track 6 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) as It walks around the outside of the circle, tapping each child lightly on the head in time with the music. When the music stops, It says to the last child tapped, “Tell me a commandment.” The child must say one of the Ten Commandments. That child then becomes It.

To make the game more difficult after a few rounds, make new rules, such as “A commandment cannot be repeated until all ten have been named” or “Say the commandment while hopping on one foot.”

### Behold, I Am with You

Behold, I am with you,  
*(Behold, I am with you)*  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go, *(And will keep*  
*you wherever you go)*  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go. *(And will keep*  
*you wherever you go)*

Behold, I am with you,  
*(Behold, I am with you)*  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go, *(And will keep*  
*you wherever you go)*  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go. *(And will keep*  
*you wherever you go)*

### CLOSING

Play “Behold, I Am with You” (track 2 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) as children gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

Sing “Behold, I Am with You” several times to prepare for the closing prayer.

Pray the following prayer, pausing after each line for the group to repeat it:

*Be with us, God, through Lenten days.*  
*Be with us, God, in school and play.*  
*Be with us, God, each day and night.*  
*Be with us, God, 'til Easter light. Amen.*

Thank the children for coming and encourage them to return next week. To each child, say: “(Name), remember God’s commandments this week.”

## Rules for the People based on Exodus 20:1-17

Many, many years went by after Abraham and Sarah had a baby boy. Many more years passed by the time God's people had become a great number. Then God called Moses to be a leader of God's people, who were now called the Israelites.

They were in trouble. They moved to Egypt when they had no food. Life was good at first, but then Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, made them slaves. He forced them to make bricks to build his buildings. God heard the cries of the people in slavery. So God and Moses led the people out of slavery in Egypt. They began a long, long journey to a new home.

When they were slaves in Egypt, the people could only do what Pharaoh told them they could do. They never decided anything for themselves. They were told when to work and where to work, when to eat and when to sleep. Everything was done by Pharaoh's rules.

Now the people were on their own. No more Pharaoh's rules! That was really good, but they didn't know how to live together and work together without those rules. They didn't remember how to be God's people. God saw that life was confusing for the people, and God decided to help them. They needed rules for living together. They needed reminders about being God's people.

God asked Moses to bring his brother Aaron to the top of the mountain, Mount Sinai. God met with them there. When Moses and Aaron came down from the mountain, they had two stone slabs with rules from God for the people. The rules were:

1. Worship no other gods.
2. Don't make anything to look like God.
3. Use God's name carefully.
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. Treat your mother and father well.
6. Don't kill.
7. Be faithful to your husband or wife.
8. Don't steal.
9. Don't lie or tell lies about others.
10. Don't want what belongs to someone else.



God's people try hard to follow these same rules today. We call them the Ten Commandments.

## Ten Commandments

Look at Exodus 20:1–17 in your Bible. The heading is probably The Ten Commandments. However, the commandments are not numbered or organized by single verses. Look at verses 2–6. Is that one commandment or two? This uncertainty has created a difference in the way churches number the Ten Commandments. Check with your pastor or educator to get the numbering used by your church and denomination.

Adjust the commandment cards below and use the cards that match your numbering.



<b>The Ten Commandments</b>	<b>Worship no other gods.</b>	<b>Don't make anything to look like God.</b>	<b>Use God's name carefully.</b>
<b>Keep the Sabbath day holy.</b>	<b>Treat your mother and father well.</b>	<b>Don't kill.</b>	<b>Be faithful to your husband or wife.</b>
<b>Don't steal.</b>	<b>Don't lie or tell lies about others.</b>	<b>Don't want what belongs to someone else.</b>	<b>Don't do anything to encourage someone to be unfaithful to their family.</b>

**Conversations on  
Exodus 20:1–17**

*Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.*

*Idea!* Watch “What If There Were No Tomorrow?” ([bit.ly/GroundhogDayNoTomorrow](http://bit.ly/GroundhogDayNoTomorrow)) from *Groundhog Day* (1993; PG). Discuss the common messages confirmed by the study of the Ten Commandments and the film clip.

**WHAT is important to know?**

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. (*W. Sibley Towner*)

- ✠ How would you explain the two parts of the commandments to a teenager?
- ✠ Why are laws important for the Israelites in their relationship with God and one another?

**WHERE is God in these words?**

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. (*George W. Stroup*)

- ✠ How are the Ten Commandments a gift from God?
- ✠ What does Sabbath teach us about God?

**SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?**

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. (*Craig Kocher*)

- ✠ How do you think the commandments give healthy boundaries to a person’s life? A community’s life?
- ✠ From what do the commandments set us free? What do they set us free to do?
- ✠ How does your understanding of loving God and loving neighbor inform your commitment to “deepening holiness”?

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

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. (*Barbara Brown Taylor*)

- ✠ What are ways you can deepen your relationship with God and other people through attention to the commandments this Lenten season?
- ✠ In what ways is Exodus 20:1–17 a prophetic call to the church as it responds to the realities of human needs?

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

**Exod. 20:1–17**

*Ps. 19*

*1 Cor. 1:18–25*

*John 2:13–22*

# The Gift of the Ten Laws

## **Goal for the Session**

*Heeding God’s gift of the Ten Commandments, adults will practice ways to live in right relationship with God and with one another.*

## ■ 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

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**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**  
*Exodus 20:1–17*

## Focus on Your Teaching

Our lives are circumscribed by laws, rules, and regulations. Most adults understand the necessity of laws that benefit the safety of the community, such as observing speed limits, though we may still occasionally break those laws. We may grudgingly acquiesce to other laws that we know benefit the community, such as paying our income taxes. When it comes to laws that define our lives together as a Christian community, we may be less clear about their function. This session is an opportunity for adults to consider the practical implication of the Ten Commandments.

### YOU WILL NEED

- six candles
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 14, 2021

### For Responding

- option 1: ten prepared newspaper sheets, Resource Sheet 2, markers, tape
- option 2: paper, pens
- option 3: for each mobile: one 4" x 18" poster board strip; two 3" x 6" strips, two large tablet shapes, yarn or string, scissors, one or more hole punches, markers

The Ten Commandments are sometimes referred to as the Ten Words, because they are the foundational words for life as God's people. The word *Decalogue* comes from a Latin word meaning ten words.

*Holy God, guide my planning and my teaching, that I may open doors to understanding. Amen.*

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, arrange six candles on a table in the shape of a cross. For option 1 in Responding, prepare separate sheets of newspaper, each with one commandment. For option 3, prepare materials for mobiles. For the closing, post the following on a piece of newspaper: "Lord, have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law."

Welcome participants and introduce any newcomers.

Ask participants to line up along a continuum, with one side of the room representing strong agreement with the statement, "I am in favor of displaying the Ten Commandments in public places," and the other representing strong disagreement. Invite volunteers to explain their position. Ask:

✠ What is the value in posting the commandments on the courthouse lawn or in the statehouse? What might be an alternative?

Explain that the debate over posting the commandments causes many to overlook the deeper ways these commandments should function. Today's session will focus on the purpose and function of these rules in our faith tradition.

Light all six candles representing the weeks of Lent, a time of reflection and repentance in preparation for Easter. Remind participants that you are lighting all six candles representing the six weeks of Lent, and then extinguishing an additional candle every week until all six are dark. Today is the third Sunday in Lent.

Sit in silence for a few moments, then extinguish three candles. Read Psalm 19:7–8, part of today's lectionary psalm.



Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

*O God, open our minds to new insights as we explore your Word. Guide our reflections as we move further into Lent. Amen.*

## EXPLORING

Invite participants to close their eyes and listen for any new insights that emerge as you read the focus scripture aloud. After reading each commandment, pause for a few moments so that adults can reflect silently. Afterward, invite participants to respond to the following:

- ✪ Something that surprised me . . .
- ✪ Something new that I had never thought of before . . .
- ✪ I have questions about . . .

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Exodus 20:1–17). Invite adults to read silently the “What?” and the “Where” excerpts. Ask them to name some salient points from the excerpts. Discuss:

- ✪ The “Where?” excerpt notes that the two tables are inseparable, that it is a mistake to reduce the commandments to either ethics or theology. What does this mean?
- ✪ What are the implications for how the Ten Words guide and shape our lives as Christians?

If you choose more than one activity in a session that calls for forming pairs or small groups, mix it up so that adults are not always working with the same persons.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Two Tables of the Ten Words). Form two groups. Assign to one group the commentary about the first table, and to the second the commentary about the second table. Ask them to read the commentary and then to rewrite each commandment using language that clarifies its meaning. Have groups present their commandments, explaining what they learned about the meaning of each.

To transition to Responding, invite someone to read aloud the “So What?” excerpt. Ask the whole group to reflect on how the gift of the Ten Commandments molds the witness of the church.

## RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

- 1. Choose a Practice** By exploring the deeper implications of the Ten Commandments, adults can identify specific practices to guide them in living in right relationship with God and with one another. Invite adults to review Resource Sheet 2. Form small groups or pairs and assign one commandment to each group. Ask groups to create a list of possible practices to deepen their commitment to the commandment’s intent. Post the lists around your space, and invite adults to move around, reading, making additions, and recording questions. Ask adults to commit to doing at least one of the suggested practices.

**EASY  
PREP**

2. **Create New Analogies** Thinking of analogies for how the commandments function provides adults with new ways to understand them and live them more fully. Tell the group that one analogy for how the commandments work is that they are like boundary lines on a football field, outlining basic expectations for how people should act and serving to protect the community from running out of bounds and falling into ways of living that will destroy it. Distribute paper and pens and challenge adults to come up with other analogies to describe how the commandments function, and discuss these together. Ask adults to reflect on where in their own lives there is work to be done in order to live more fully in relationship with God and neighbor. Encourage them to refer to this analogy as they engage in daily times of devotion and reflection.
3. **Create a Mobile** Creating a mobile in which attention must be focused on balancing the parts provides a visual reminder of how the two tables of the commandments—and the practices of loving God and neighbor—are integrally related. Provide adults with the prepared poster board pieces and other materials. Have them print “The Ten Commandments” on the mobile header. On the two shorter pieces, they should print “Love God” and “Love Neighbor.” On each of the two tablets, they should print the appropriate commandments of the two tables. Assemble the mobiles, balancing them so they hang straight. Display where congregants can see them.

## CLOSING

As is the practice in some congregations during Lent, invite adults to stand as you read the commandments from the Bible. After each one, the group repeats the posted response.

Pray the following:

*Holy God, we give thanks for the gift of the Ten Words. Open us to new understandings of what it means to love you and our neighbor. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 14, 2021, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

## Focus on Exodus 20:1–17

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## The Two Tables of the Ten Words



### The First Table

The first four commandments are aimed at establishing a right relationship between God and the people.

**The First Commandment** does not deny the reality of the gods worshiped by others. From the people of YHWH, though, it demands total allegiance.

**The Second Commandment** condemns the making of idols. God is a “jealous God,” hostile to efforts to get God “in a box,” that is, localized, concretized, easy to manipulate.

**The Third Commandment** moves to forestall manipulation of God by magical or other vain use of the divine name.

**The Fourth Commandment** presents Sabbath not as a day of worship, but rather as a day of cessation blessed by God.

### The Second Table

The remaining verses of the Decalogue regulate relationships among the people of God.

**The Fifth Commandment** to honor father and mother is the only one of the ten to which is attached a promise. This law not only elevates the status of women (by placing the mother on the same level as the father), but also promotes the uninterrupted flow of tradition between generations.

**The Sixth Commandment** is aimed at that form of killing deemed socially unacceptable, homicide. Warfare, capital punishment, or revenge killing were not included here, so long as restraining rules were followed. Jesus later radicalized this commandment by stressing the intentionality of an individual.

At stake in the **Seventh Commandment** are family integrity and the legitimacy of children. Some forms of sexual activity outside of marriage were not understood to be forbidden by this commandment (polygamous relationships with concubines and slaves). Jesus’ radicalization of this commandment rightly stresses intentionality and sees lust as the root cause of adultery.

**The Eighth Commandment** protects private property. This law was not understood to preclude social safety net provisions, such as the right of the poor to glean in the corners of fields.

**The Ninth Commandment** is a bulwark not only against trivial lying but especially against perjury in court.

**The Tenth Commandment** addresses the private and inner moral condition that also threatens community interest. The verb “to covet” includes an element of enactment. To look upon a neighbor’s house or spouse with deep desire is to move into rehearsal and to take steps for action. Inordinate desire or lust are what are prohibited, not mere ambition or fantasy.

—Adapted from W. Sibley Towner, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 74, 77, 79.