

Exod. 20:1–17

Ps. 19

1 Cor. 1:18–25

John 2:13–22

God's Laws for Us

**Goal for
the Session**

Third- and fourth-graders will talk about the Ten Commandments and consider how these teachings will shape their lives as children of God.

■ 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

Children in third and fourth grade like to know the “rules”—for a game, the classroom, their families, or life in general. Learning the Ten Commandments can help to shape the way they think about life’s rules. They are able to begin making the distinction between rules that guide their relationship with God and those that guide their relationships with others. Emphasize that God’s love for them comes first; they cannot “earn” God’s love by keeping any rules. Instead, God’s commandments are given in love as a guide for living safe, productive lives in ways that bring joy, rather than sadness.

Dear Lord, help me to hear the Ten Commandments anew and strengthen me to follow them each day. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- purple cloth
- Christ candle, matches
- Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock
- scissors
- paper clips
- pencils
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 28
- Bibles
- sticky notes
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: Color Pack 2, paper, markers, pencils
- option 2: Color Pack 3
- option 3: Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, cut apart the strips on Resource Sheet 1 (Rules) and hide them around your learning area. Make copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Ten Commandments) on card stock; follow the directions carefully and make one set of cards for each child. Use a paper clip to hold each set together. If you are using option 3 in Responding, preview the film trailer at bit.ly/TheCroodsTrailer.

Welcome the children by name. Invite them to find the slips of paper you have hidden around the room. After everyone has arrived and all eighteen rules have been found, invite the children to spread the purple cloth in the center of your learning space and place a Bible and the Christ candle on it. Remind learners that this is the season of Lent, a time when we learn more about Jesus’ life and reflect on our relationship with God. Pray aloud, asking learners to repeat each phrase:

Dear God, / thank you for the stories of your people / we read in the Bible. / Help us learn to be more like Jesus / in all we say and do. / Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Invite the children to read aloud the rules they found and tell if each is a rule they have at home or at school. Comment that rules often help to keep people safe or make things fair.

Discuss:

✠ What are some other reasons there are rules?

Say that today’s Bible story is about God’s rules for living.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and help the children find Exodus 20. Read aloud the following information to set the scene:

The book of Exodus tells the story of Moses and the Israelites. The Israelites were God's people. Long ago they lived in Egypt, where they were slaves. They prayed to God to set them free. God sent Moses to rescue them.

After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, God led them through a wilderness to the land of promise. They stopped at the bottom of a mountain called Mount Sinai. Moses climbed to the top of Mount Sinai and God spoke to him there.

God said, "Moses, I have some important commandments for you and the Israelites. These commandments will help my people know how to live in loving ways with me and with one another. They will help all of you live in peace."

Read aloud Exodus 20:1–17 as the learners follow along in their Bibles. Place Color Pack 2 and 3 in the center of the group, explaining that these posters have key verses from today's reading. Ask learners to take turns reading aloud the verses, first from Color Pack 2 and then from Color Pack 3. After each verse, discuss:

- ✪ What are God's people instructed to do in this verse?
- ✪ What are some things a person could do to keep, or follow, this commandment?

Please read the directions on Resource Sheet 2 to make sure you follow your church's way of numbering the Ten Commandments.

Distribute sets of cards cut from Resource Sheet 2 (The Ten Commandments) and pencils. Tell learners to mix up their cards and then put the Ten Commandments in order, referring to Color Pack 2 and 3 as needed. Invite them to check one another's work and then have them number their commandment cards in order from one to ten.

Point out that the commandments on Color Pack 2 guide us to having a healthy relationship with God and the commandments on Color Pack 3 guide us to having healthy relationships with other people. Invite learners to stand. Tell them to stretch their hands toward the ceiling when you read one of the God-focused commandments and to stretch their hands out to their sides when you read one of the commandments focused on relationships with other people. Read aloud the commandments randomly from Color Pack 2 and 3, pausing after each one for learners to stretch toward God or toward one another. Afterward, discuss:

- ✪ Why do you think the commandments about our relationship with God come first?

Take a moment to wonder together about what shape your community, your nation, and the world would be in if everyone lived according to the Ten Commandments. Ask:

- ✪ In what ways do the Ten Commandments shape or guide your life as God's child?

Emphasize that God's love for us comes first; we cannot earn God's love by keeping the commandments. In fact, it is impossible to keep them perfectly. Even though we fall short, God still loves us and will forgive us.

EASY
PREP

Reassure learners that no one can follow the Ten Commandments perfectly. God knows this and is ready to forgive us when we fall short. We can always apologize to God and ask for another chance.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Shaped by Loving God** Learners will detail ways Exodus 20:1–8 shapes their lives as God's children. Hold up Color Pack 2 and invite learners to read the verses in unison with you. Ask them to offer ideas of how God's people follow or obey these commandments. Distribute paper, markers, and pencils. Ask learners to choose one of these commandments and list or draw things they might do to honor or obey that commandment. When all have finished, invite learners to tell about their drawings or lists. Discuss: What might change in your life if you were able to keep these commandments all the time?
- 2. Shaped by Loving Neighbors** Learners will enact ways to keep the commandments that God gave to guide their relationships with others. Hold up Color Pack 3 and invite learners to read the verses in unison with you. Form pairs and assign each pair one of these commandments. Tell pairs to make up a short scene or skit to illustrate a way to obey the assigned commandment. After five minutes for planning, ask pairs to act out their scenes. After each pair finishes, ask the group to identify which commandment was being illustrated. After all the skits, discuss: How might following these commandments make you a better friend? A better son or daughter?
- 3. Crood Family Rule** Discussing a contemporary film will help learners consider the role of rules—God's commandments and human rules—in their lives. Introduce the movie *The Croods* as a story about a family rule. View the trailer for this film at: bit.ly/TheCroodsTrailer. Discuss the father's rule: "Never leave the cave." Why did the father think this rule was important? How did this rule shape the way the family lived their lives? How did each family member respond to this rule? What happened when Eep's curiosity led her to break the rule? What is the difference between the Ten Commandments and human rules? When are they alike? When are they different?

CLOSING

Gather around the purple cloth and light the Christ candle. Place Color Pack 1 on the purple cloth. Sing "You Shall Love the Lord Your God" (Color Pack 28; track 22 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Invite the children to tell what they will remember from the story of the Ten Commandments. Ask the group to choose two or three responses to summarize on sticky notes. Have a volunteer place them around the poster. Pray aloud:

*Thank you for being with us, loving God. Shape us by your Commandments.
Amen.*

Say to each child: "(Name), let your life be shaped by God, who loves you. Go in peace."

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!

Rules



Directions: Cut these apart and hide them around your learning area.

No dessert until you finish your dinner.	Finish your homework before watching TV.	Don't hit your brother/sister.
Chores must be finished before playtime.	Don't talk back to adults.	Do your best.
Don't cheat.	Always tell the truth.	Make your bed every morning.
Don't run indoors.	Look both ways before you cross the street.	Tell someone where you are going before you leave.
If it isn't yours, leave it alone.	Don't call people names.	Don't chew with your mouth open.
Don't waste food.	Don't use swear words.	Volunteer to help before you are asked.

The Ten Commandments

Note to teachers: The heading in the Bible for Exodus 20:1–17 specifies “The Ten Commandments,” but not how to number them. For example, do verses 2–6 contain one or two commandments? There are slight differences in the ways that denominations list the Ten Commandments. Make a copy of this page on card stock for every child and cut it apart. Keep the ten cards that name the Ten Commandments as listed in your church catechism or worship book and discard the other. See your pastor or church educator if you need help with this.



The Ten Commandments	Respect your parents.	Do not long for things that belong to other people.
Respect God's Sabbath day.	Do not lie.	Do not misuse the Lord's name.
Do not steal.	Do not worship idols.	Be faithful in marriage.
Worship only God—do not worship any other gods.	Do not murder.	Do not tempt people to be unfaithful to their families.