

Exod. 20:1–17

Ps. 19

1 Cor. 1:18–25

John 2:13–22

The Ten Commandments

Goal for the Session *Children will discover God’s loving ways through the Ten Commandments.*

■ 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 setting in Exodus places the Decalogue (meaning the “Ten Words”) at the beginning of the lengthy covenant passage known as the Sinai pericope (Exodus 20:1–Numbers 10:10). Its position in the text bespeaks its primary importance. This is categorical law, setting forward the principles essential for the viability of a community. It 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 Decalogue begins with four commandments aimed at establishing a right relationship between God and the elect people. The remaining verses regulate relationships between persons.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” George W. Stroup

One of the central convictions of Jewish and Christian faith is that human life is to be lived before God and that such life has an order and structure, constituted by God’s commandments. It is important to remember that the Ten Commandments presuppose Israel’s history and its understanding of covenantal life before God. They guide us as we journey in our life before God and our life with our neighbors. They do not show us what we must do or how we must live in order to receive God’s covenantal grace. They light our way and show us how we should live as people who have already been freely given God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Craig Kocher

The Commandments come as a gift from God to the people of Israel to structure their common life, and to shape individual lives that are worthy of the God who has rescued them and with whom they are in covenant. To be bound in covenant with God is to be set free to live as God’s people. There is an internal logic to the Commandments that is both compelling and beautiful: The way we attend to God shapes the way we attend to our neighbor. In other words, faithful worship of God leads to proper love of neighbor.

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara Brown Taylor

These practices are not kindly suggestions. They express the purposeful will of God for God’s people. Those who ignore the divine teachings do so at their own peril—not because God is standing over them with a hammer, but because the teachings describe the way of life. To ignore them is to wander into the ways of death instead. The Ten Teachings also constitute a kind of trust exercise about the nature of reality; they challenge all other readings of reality. *Trust me, God says. Those other teachings are not good for you. The life you think they bring you is not real life.*

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Exodus 20:1–17

Focus on Your Teaching

Children generally think that rules keep them from doing what they want to do. They have to go to bed at a certain time. They can play outdoors at school only during recess. They can hardly wait to be grown-up so they can do what they want. While one session on the Ten Commandments may not change their minds, they have the opportunity to see how these rules from God can help us be more faithful to God and to care for one another.

Caring God, I pray that as I prepare this session I might also come to a better understanding of how the Ten Commandments show us your love. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- purple cloth
- battery-powered tall white candle and 6 battery-powered votive candles
- offering basket
- Bible, bookmarks
- newsprint, marker
- Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*; CD player
- Resource Sheet 1, 3
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 4, 29, 30
- index cards

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, current newspapers, scissors
- option 2: paper, marker, tape, beanbag or small object to toss
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, colored construction paper, markers
- option 4: Color Pack 30; *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*; CD player; copies of Resource Sheet 2

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, print each of the Ten Commandments on a separate index card, including the number. Use the shortened version of the commandments on Resource Sheet 2 (The Ten Commandments). Be sure to use the numbering used by your church. If you have more than ten children in the group, make additional sets. Make a copy of Resource Sheet 2 for each child, cut out the list you need, and recycle the rest of the page. If you are using option 2 in Responding, prepare the game as described in the activity.

Welcome each child. When you are ready to begin, have the group arrange the purple cloth in the middle of your learning space. Place on it Color Pack 1 and 2, the offering basket, the Christ candle and votive candles as described on Resource Sheet 3 (Lenten Rituals), and the Bible. Have the children sit down. Receive the offering. Point out the purple cloth, signifying the season of Lent. Ask:

✠ What do you know about the season of Lent?

Supplement what they recall with the information on Resource Sheet 3. Ask a child to find Lent on Color Pack 1. Notice that Lent ends on Easter.

Follow the Gathering Ritual on Resource Sheet 3.

To help the children focus on the theme for this session, ask:

✠ What rules are necessary for things to go well at your school?

✠ What rules are important for our group to learn together?

As they suggest rules, write them on newsprint. Explain that the Bible story today is about rules from God.

Jesus Loves Me

Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
In his love we shall be
strong.

Refrain:

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves me! This I know,
As he loved so long ago,
Taking children on His knee,
Saying, "Let them come to
me." (*Refrain*)

Jesus loves me, still today,
Walking with me on my
way,
Wanting as a friend to give
Light and love to all who
live. (*Refrain*)

You may put a
bookmark at the
beginning of Mark and
one of a different color
at Exodus.

Option: Older
children could make
a display with these
stories and their ideas
about whether a
commandment is being
broken or kept to report
to the rest of the group
or to post in a place
where the congregation
will see it.

EXPLORING

Ask a child to get the Bible from the worship table and open it to Mark, a Gospel in the New Testament. Ask:

✠ Who are the stories about in the Gospels of the New Testament?

Encourage the children to think of people mentioned in the Gospels in addition to Jesus. Recall with the group that the story in the previous session from Mark was about Jesus and the disciples. Then have a child turn to the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. Ask:

✠ What stories do you remember from the Old Testament part of the Bible?

Some children may recall the story of Noah and the flood from the First Sunday in Lent. Explain that the stories of the Old Testament were stories that Jesus would have heard as a boy. The story today is from the second book of the Old Testament, Exodus. Have a child find Exodus 20. Have Color Pack 3 and 4 and Resource Sheet 2 (The Ten Commandments) ready. Tell the story from Resource Sheet 1 (A Family Story). After the story, ask:

✠ Why do you think this is an important story for God's people?

Review the Ten Commandments with the group. Distribute the cards with the Ten Commandments prepared earlier. Have learners stand in a line in order of the commandments. Have the children read aloud their commandments, one at a time, in order. For fun, have them read aloud their commandments at the same time. Ask the children to trade their cards and line up in order again. Have them read the commandments in order. Trade the cards and read the commandments two or three more times, asking the children to always get a new commandment.

If you have fewer than ten children, include leaders or give some children more than one commandment. Conclude Exploring by asking:

✠ Why do you think the Ten Commandments are important for us today?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice.

- 1. In the News** One way to answer the concluding question in Exploring is to look at current events. Provide several recent newspapers for the children to look through. Encourage them to find stories that illustrate how people are keeping or breaking one of the commandments. Give them copies of the Ten Commandments from Resource Sheet 2 (The Ten Commandments). Ask each child to select one news story and be prepared to tell which commandment is being kept or broken. Gather the group and have each child report with a sentence or two about the news event and the corresponding commandment.

**EASY
 PREP**

2. **Ten Commandments Game** This game combines learning the Ten Commandments and helping the children relate them to their lives. Use the list of commandments from Resource Sheet 2 to create a large floor game board. Write each commandment on a sheet of paper and tape the sheets in a grid (design of your choice) on the floor. Have the children take turns tossing a beanbag or other small item onto the grid. Wherever it lands, the child who tossed it reads the commandment and names a time when he or she would need to follow that commandment. For example, for “Do not tell lies about other people,” the child might say, “Don’t text untrue things about someone.”
3. **Commandment Signs** Ask the learners to recall signs they have seen in public places that tell what we can or cannot do, such as a sign on a restaurant door that says *No bare feet*. Some signs use symbols or shapes to give the message, such as a stop sign, which is recognized by shape and color without reading the word on it. Have the learners create signs for commandments. Provide markers, colored construction paper, scissors, and copies of the Ten Commandments from Resource Sheet 2. A sign might simply say *Worship God* on a church shape or a stop-sign shape might have the word *Stealing* on it. Post their signs around the learning area and look at them together.
4. **Song** The song “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (Color Pack 30; track 11 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*) can be seen as telling about living according to the Ten Commandments. Sing it together. Have the children read the Ten Commandments from Resource Sheet 2 in unison and discuss which commandments are implied in each stanza. Work as a group to compose new stanzas that reflect other commandments, and then sing the song with the added stanzas.

**I’m Gonna Live
 So God Can Use Me**

1. I’m gonna **live* so God
 can use me
 anywhere, Lord,
 anytime!
 I’m gonna **live* so God
 can use me
 anywhere, Lord,
 anytime!
2. ** work*
3. ** share*
4. ** care*

CLOSING

Gather around the candles. Light the Christ candle and the votive candles, if necessary. Follow the Closing Ritual on Resource Sheet 3 (Lenten Rituals). Sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (Color Pack 30; track 11 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*).

Extinguish the candle.

As you say good-bye, give each child a copy of the Ten Commandments from Resource Sheet 2 and encourage them to talk about the commandments with their families. Encourage them to return for the next session.

Save Resource Sheet 3 (Lenten Rituals) to use each Sunday in March.

A Family Story

The children were delighted to find Granddad Micah sitting under the big tree. They knew when he sat there he would tell stories to them. They sat on the soft grass next to him.

“We’re ready,” said Sarah. “Tell us a story about the people of God.”

Granddad Micah cleared his throat and began:

“This is one of the most important stories about God and our people. It happened long ago when our people had left Egypt. Who remembers why they left Egypt?”

The children shouted, “We were slaves in Egypt and God rescued us. Moses led our people across the hot and dusty desert.”

“You are so right,” he said. “That is an important story, too, and this story took place as they were in the desert. One more question before I tell the story. What is this long journey from Egypt called?”

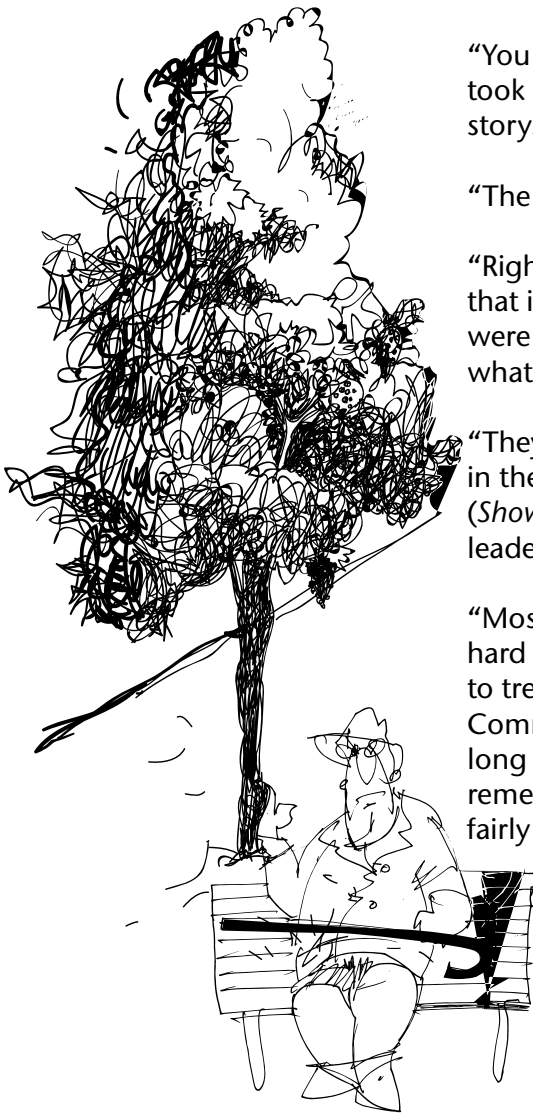
“The Exodus!”

“Right again. I think you are ready for the story. You probably remember that it was a very hard journey. The people lived in tents. Sometimes they were hot and thirsty and often they were hungry. But God always provided what they needed.

“They had been traveling for three months when they came to a mountain in the desert and camped there. Today we call that mountain Mount Sinai. (*Show Color Pack 3.*) It was on that mountain, Mount Sinai, that Moses, the leader of the people, met with God.

“Moses brought messages from God to the people. God knew it was hard for the people to remember that they belonged to God and how to treat one another on such a hard trip. So God gave Moses the Ten Commandments written on two flat pieces of stone. (*Show Color Pack 4.*) As long as they remembered to follow the Ten Commandments, they would remember that they belonged to God and they would treat each other fairly and lovingly. You can remember what they are by these words: (*Read the commandments consistent with your denomination from Resource Sheet 2.*)”

God told Moses many more things and you can read about them and the long journey from Egypt in Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament.



The Ten Commandments

Note to leaders: 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 photocopy of this page for each learner. Use the list that matches the list in your church catechism or worship book most closely. Recycle the other list.

The Ten Commandments

(Found in Exodus 20:1–17)

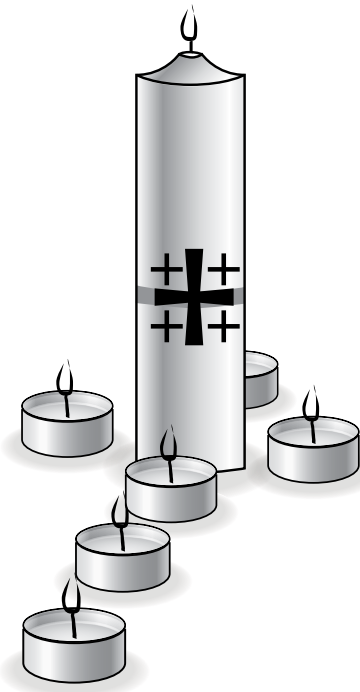
1. Worship only God.
2. Do not make idols and worship them.
3. Do not use the name of God in disrespectful ways.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Respect your mother and your father.
6. Do not murder.
7. Be faithful in marriage.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not tell lies about other people.
10. Do not long to have anything that belongs to someone else.

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7. Do not steal.
8. Do not tell lies about other people.
9. Do not long for things that belong to other people.
10. Do not tempt people to be unfaithful to their families.

Lenten Rituals



Setup

Place six battery-powered votive candles around the Christ candle to form a cross shape. Place Color Pack 2 next to the candle cross as a reminder to be Jesus' followers. Just as we add light to candles as we wait for the Christ child during Advent, during Lent we extinguish candles to show we are aware of the approaching death of Jesus.

What is Lent?

The season of Lent marks the forty days before Easter, but Sundays are not counted as part of the forty days. The Lenten journey is a time to recall Jesus' journey to the cross. Traditionally, Lent is a season of reflecting on God's relationship with us and how following God's Son, Jesus, might change the way we live each day. The color of Lent is purple, the color of repentance (turning toward God) and fresh beginnings.

Gathering Ritual

1. *Light* the Christ candle and the six votives, recalling that it is the season of Lent.
2. *Sing* "Jesus Loves Me" (Color Pack 29; track 14 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*).
3. *Pray aloud*: Faithful God, open our minds to hear your word and let it change our hearts. Amen.

Closing Ritual

1. *Light* the Christ candle and the six votives, if necessary. Then, extinguish votive candles as a way of marking the Sundays of Lent. For example, on the Third Sunday in Lent, extinguish three votives; on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, extinguish four votives; and so forth. On Palm Sunday, extinguish all six votive candles and the Christ candle as a symbol of Jesus' death on Good Friday.
2. *Say*: Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). We will follow Jesus (*complete statement with correct phrase for the date*).
March 3: By obeying God's Law.
March 10: By learning about God's grace.
March 17: By having the covenant of love in our hearts.
March 24: By following our King, Jesus.
3. *Sing* the song given in the Closing section of the session plan.
4. *Bless*:

Teacher: May God bless us, and be with us this week as we follow Jesus.

All: Amen!

Save this sheet to use each Sunday in March.