



07

SESSION SEVEN

The Commandments (Part I)

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will listen to God's declaration of love for Israel, and see how that declaration of love led to the giving of His law. The Israelites needed to understand God's love and what He expected from them. They needed to know God more fully and understand what it meant to live in a covenantal relationship with Him. Through God's law, we can see the holiness of God as well as His redemptive love for us, and as we obey, we reflect the holiness and love of God to the world.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 19:1-6; 20:1-11

THE POINT

The first four commandments reflect God's desire to be first in the hearts of His people.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

- **Who makes the rules in your house? Do you ever try to “bend the rules”? Why or why not?**

Read aloud the first four commandments in Exodus 20:1-11. In Exodus 20, God was literally “laying down the law” after delivering the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. The first four commandments He gave are all about our relationship with Him. Call on students to share what each command means.

- **What are some things we put before God in our lives? (boyfriend/girlfriend, championships, success, etc.) What are some things that would pass for idols today? (money, celebrities, etc.) How do we misuse God's name? What might prevent us from keeping the Sabbath day holy?**

Emphasize that the very first commandment says to have no other god but God the Father. We honor God the Father through our love for Jesus. Without a relationship with Christ, we cannot have a relationship with God. Without Christ in our hearts, following the commandments is empty and without meaning.

- **In what ways does your life reflect your love for God? Is there a particular commandment that you need to work on? Explain.**

Option 2

Set up some simple board games around the room. As students arrive, invite them to play the games. After a couple of minutes, encourage each student to modify the rules in his or her favor. For instance, if a player with a blue game piece lands on a space that says, “Go back two spaces,” let that player change the rule to something like: “Whenever a blue token lands on a space that says to go back two spaces, they get to move forward two spaces instead.” Allow a few more minutes of play, then call time.

- **Did you enjoy getting to make up your own rules when it came to playing these games? Did you like the fact that your opponent could make up his or her own rules too? Why or why not?**
- **Was it easier to play the game following the rules set by the game maker? Why?**
- **Is there anyone in this world you would trust to set the standard of right and wrong for everyone? Why or why not?**

Read aloud Exodus 20:1-11. Point out that God's first words, “I am the LORD your God,” emphasized His sovereign lordship and right to give these commands. Today, the Ten Commandments continue to clearly state God's love for His people as well as His expectations for how we should honor Him in the way we live.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

The first four commandments reflect God's desire to be first in the hearts of His people.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land

PLOT

God communicated truth to the Israelites when He gave the law to Moses. The children of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness and had grown weary. God's great victory on their behalf at the Red Sea was a distant memory, and they desperately wanted to settle in the land that God had promised. However, the people of Israel were not prepared to enter the promised land. The work that God was doing among them was not yet finished.

In this session, we will listen to God's declaration of love for Israel and see how that declaration of love led to the giving of His law. The Israelites needed to understand God's love and what He expected from them. They needed to know God more fully and understand what it meant to live in a covenantal relationship with Him. Through God's law, we can see the holiness of God as well as His redemptive love for us, and as we obey, we reflect the holiness and love of God to the world.

GOD REMINDS HIS PEOPLE OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR THEM

Israel had suffered in the oppression of Egypt for a long time. God delivered them in epic fashion, but now they were again in a state of waiting. The people were worn out, frustrated, and needed to hear from the Lord. That's when God called Moses up to Mount Sinai so He could deliver His Word to the people. God's message is found in Exodus 19:1-6:

In the third month, on the same day of the month that the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, they entered the Wilderness of Sinai. After they departed from Rephidim, they entered the Wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness, and Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain: "This is what you must say to the house of Jacob, and explain to the Israelites: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now if you will listen to Me and carefully keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although all the earth is Mine, and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation.' These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites." (Ex. 19:1-6)

When we think of Moses on Mount Sinai, we usually think of the Ten Commandments. But it's important to put those commandments in context. God reassured the people of His love and protection when He spoke of delivering the Hebrews by carrying them on eagles' wings. God told Moses to remind Israel that He was the One who delivered them from their bondage to the Egyptians and brought them to Himself. In delivering Israel, God was putting His character as Redeemer on display.

God goes on to talk about His love and protection for them in Exodus 20:1-2:

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. (Ex. 20:1-2)

This tells us that the Ten Commandments are not a list of rules from a rigid and uncaring taskmaster. They are from a loving Father who rescued His children from slavery.

TIMELINE

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

- **Why is it important for all believers to recognize that the God who spoke these words is the same God who delivers us today?** (p. 48, PSG)

In a moment of great weariness and uncertainty for the children of Israel, God was reassuring His people that He loved them enough to rescue them, and He had not forgotten them. They were safe, and they should trust Him completely. God loved the people enough to show Himself in the law. By telling Israel about Himself through the law, God was establishing a clear understanding of how to know and please Him. The law removed any ambiguity and showed them what God's holiness looked like applied to the context of their lives.

GOD SHOWS HIS PEOPLE WHAT A HEART THAT LOVES HIM LOOKS LIKE

Once God had prepared the people to receive the law by reminding them of His love and how they belong to Him, He delivered the law to the people. The latter part of Exodus 19 recounts an awesome display of God's power and presence. Against the backdrop of fire and smoke and trembling earth, God allowed Moses to stand on the holy ground He occupied on Mount Sinai, and He gave him the law.

As we've seen, God reminded Israel again that He was their God and that He alone had delivered them out of Egypt. The lesson is simple: God deserves our full devotion simply because of who He is. Watch how the first two commandments reinforce this important truth.

Do not have other gods besides Me. Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' sin, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commands. (Ex. 20:3-6)

God has no rival, and He has called people to demonstrate their loyalty by giving no one and nothing else greater devotion than is given to Him. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve fell to the temptation to "become like God." In this first commandment, God turns right side up what was turned upside down by human sin. Giving God the place He rightly deserves in our affections is necessary for every action, thought, and relationship.

The second command amplifies the first. In our sin, we who are made in God's image turn around and seek to make Him into ours. We fashion idols and put our trust in them, hoping they will make us significant and bring us salvation. The apostle Paul identified this desire in Romans 1:21-23: "For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their

thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.”

The desire to deify anything but God comes from a heart that is always striving to compete with God for first place. Left to our own devices, we will always choose to exalt ourselves and wrap our lives around things we believe will fulfill us. Our hearts have to be remade and empowered by something outside of ourselves—something that can break our sinful tendency to worship things that are inferior to God.

In the next two commandments, God gives a picture of what will flow out of a life fully devoted to Him.

Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses His name. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates. For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy. (Ex. 20:7-11)

Let’s look at the third commandment for a moment. Do you see how seriously God takes the misuse of His name? We may have grown up thinking this command is only about cursing or swearing oaths in God’s name, but we should realize that revering God’s name means much more.

To revere God’s name means we will not use His name recklessly. When we use God’s name to speak about Him or for Him, it is serious business.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, we are called “ambassadors for Christ” and told that God is appealing through us on Christ’s behalf for the world to be reconciled to Him. We are the ones who are present in every situation speaking for the King. Using God’s name well means speaking it in ways that will cause people to want to know Jesus and follow Him.

In verses 8-11, God commands a rest day each week. In commanding His people to keep the day holy, the Sabbath was to be set apart by both action and inaction. The other six days of the week were dominated by work to provide sustenance and to keep order. But God called for a pause in activity that provides time for us to rest so that our focus can be on Him.

As Christians, we believe Jesus Christ has freed us from the technicalities of Sabbath law, since He is the rest for our souls (Col. 2:16). Still, there are principles in this commandment we would do well to remember:

TIMELINE

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART I)

The burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings are explained.

ATONEMENT SACRIFICES (PART II)

The sin and restitution offerings are explained.

MOSES’ FAREWELL ADDRESS

Moses’ final instructions to the children of Israel.

- **It acknowledges that we are not God.** When we pause to rest, we are acknowledging that we have limits and need rest. God rested to show His completion of creation. We rest because we are frail and less than God. When we are always pushing to do more and achieve more without resting, we can actually be rebelling against our created limitations and creating an idol of our own strength and endurance.
- **It acknowledges that we trust God.** When we stop working to rest and focus on God, we are acknowledging that we trust God to provide for us beyond our ability to provide for ourselves. Overworking and failing to rest shows that we do not trust God to do His work to sustain us.
- **It acknowledges that we need God.** It is far too easy to take our focus off God in the busyness of life. Reserving a day for worship causes us to stop and refocus our attention and affections upon God and to acknowledge His rightful place in our lives regularly.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Through the law, God pulled back the veil of heaven to give us a significant glimpse of Himself. He shows us His holiness and helps us to see our utter hopelessness to fulfill the demands that His holiness requires apart from the work of Jesus on our behalf. It is only at the cross that we can find the fulfillment of the law. When we repent and believe on Jesus for our salvation, He becomes our righteousness and satisfies the law for us. He is the One who put God's glory first, the One who perfectly revered His Father's name, and the One who became our Sabbath rest.

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus extended this vocation to the church when he said, "Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." As we seek to live out the law in the power of Christ, we are to show others the way to God.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God Is One

The Bible affirms that God is one, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, otherwise known as the Shema. In both Old and New Testament times, the advocacy of monotheism (belief in one God) was contrary to the surrounding culture. Where most cultures practiced polytheism (belief in multiple gods) or henotheism (the worship of one god with the belief in multiple gods), the people of God knew, based upon God's self-revelation, that Yahweh, the Lord, was the only one, true God.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Like Israel, how has God given you evidence of His love and rescue of you? How is your life a testimony to the character of God as a deliverer?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some of the good things in your life that you struggle against making an idol?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways God's name is misused today? Why does God take this so seriously?** *We misuse the name of the Lord in many ways—flippantly, untruthfully, and hypocritically. Flippantly—when we use God's name by cursing and swearing or without sincerity. Untruthfully—when we speak about God in ways that are not true and tarnish His reputation or misrepresent His will. Hypocritically—when we damage the testimony of God by failing to demonstrate the worthiness of God's name in our lives.*
- **How has this session challenged you in thinking about the command to keep the Sabbath? What are the benefits of being reminded of the three principles that were discussed?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God, and the remaining six commandments deal with our relationship with other people. This ordering of God first and then others is important. When you think about it, our relationship with God will determine the quality and extent of our relationships with other people. If that first relationship is healthy and centered on Jesus, then the grace, mercy, and love received in that relationship will carry over into relationships with other people.

- **How might your own relationship with God influence your relationships with other people?** *One example is forgiveness. If we have received forgiveness from God for our sins, we are likewise to forgive those who have sinned against us. (See Matt. 18:21-35; 1 John 4:11.)*
- **What might this look like in your own life moving forward?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HEART

You and I may not struggle with making statues or images of gods to give our attention and devotion, but we should be on guard for idolatry in its more subtle forms. An idol can be anything or anyone that we give first place in our lives. In fact, the most common idols are good things that we make ultimate things. The first two commandments remind us that God is a loving and jealous God who will tolerate no rivals to His throne. He must be first in our lives.

- **Why is it right for God to demand first place in our hearts?** *Put simply, God has that right because He is God. Not only that, but God is deserving of that place within our hearts. He is the Creator of all good things, even the Creator of joy itself, and putting Him first in our lives is the way things were intended to be.*
- **What are some ways you might identify personal idols in your own life?** *Like a doctor who asks diagnostic questions to determine what may be wrong, sometimes it is helpful to ask ourselves simple questions that might reveal the condition of our hearts. Those questions might be: "What do I feel I need in order for life to be good?" "What makes life worth living?" "Where do I turn for comfort?" etc.*



HANDS

God calls us to live in such a way that demonstrates to others that He is in first place in our lives. Part of doing that will involve wanting others to know and experience the joy that comes from having God as first place in their lives as well.

- **Why is personal idolatry a hindrance to our mission and message as Christians?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways you have been challenged to live differently because of this session?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session and the next, point out item #9 to the students, which contains an artistic poster of Moses holding the Ten Commandments and casting a shadow of the cross, which symbolizes the Christ Connection made in the sessions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject