

**Exod. 20:1–17**

**Ps. 19**

**1 Cor. 1:18–25**

**John 2:13–22**

# The Big Ten

**Goal for the Session** Youth will claim the Ten Commandments as God's gift for honoring God and preserving community.

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### 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

Though most rules and laws exist to create safety and order, teenagers typically view rules as restrictive and limiting as they try to find their way in the world. As parents, caregivers, and youth leaders know, young people often push boundaries and rebel against rules that don't make sense to them. This session helps young people explore the fact that, instead of being restrictive, God's law guides us in living an abundant life by honoring God and enjoying the blessings of Christian community.

*Holy God, as we continue to move through this season for reflection and change, help me guide young people so they may live their lives as reflections of your grace. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- plain paper
- markers
- blindfolds
- newsprint
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- construction paper
- scissors
- Internet-connected device (optional)
- situation cards cut from Resource Sheet 2
- Christ candle (white pillar candle)
- lighter

#### For Responding

- option 1: construction paper, scissors, markers
- option 3: index cards, pens

#### For Film Connection

- Internet-connected device

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, write these words on separate slips of paper: tree, cat, house, happy face, salt shaker, boat, sun. Cut five sheets of construction paper in half lengthwise, making 4½" x 12" pieces.

Form pairs of participants. Place a blindfold on one person in each pair and give that person a blank sheet of paper and a marker. Give the other person a paper with an object written on it. The person with the paper is to read it and help the blindfolded person draw that object on the paper. However, the blindfolded person is the only one who can draw on the paper. When all are finished, give each pair an opportunity to present their picture to the rest of the group. Discuss these questions:

- ✿ Why was it important for the person without the blindfold to give clear instructions? How would the outcome have been different if no one gave instructions?
- ✿ In what ways can guidance make our lives easier and more fulfilling?

Explain that, as the church continues through Lent, in this session participants will consider the guidance that God offers to God's people.

Pray:

*Almighty God, as we gather around your holy Word, be with us. May our thoughts and words be a blessing to you. Amen.*

The heading 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? Consult the list of Ten Commandments in your church catechism or worship book. If needed, adjust the numbering of the commandments in these activities to match the numbering used in your church.

Option: Search YouTube for Exodus 20:1–17 and watch a video together about the Ten Commandments.

**EASY  
PREP**

To simplify this activity, have participants use a familiar tune, such as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

## EXPLORING

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

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Definitions). Read about each commandment one at a time and explore these questions for each one:

- ✪ Does this commandment refer to our relationship with God or our relationships with each other?
- ✪ How does this commandment give shape to our lives?
- ✪ From what does this commandment set us free? What does it set us free to do?

Form groups of two or three. Assign each group one or more of the Ten Commandments so that each commandment is assigned to one group. Give each group markers and a 4½" x 12" piece of construction paper for each assigned commandment. Have groups create bumper stickers for their assigned commandment(s) that include a catchy phrase and an engaging layout. When all are done, give pairs an opportunity to present their bumper sticker(s) to the rest of the participants. Display the bumper stickers in order.

Place the situation cards cut from Resource Sheet 2 (Situations) in a small basket. Have a volunteer select a situation and read aloud the situation and the corresponding commandment’s bumper sticker on the card. Have the volunteer explain whether the situation violates the commandment. Then, have the rest of the group vote on whether they agree. Continue until each participant has had a chance or all the cards have been used.

Explore these questions:

- ✪ How are the Ten Commandments a gift to us from God?
- ✪ In what ways do these commandments honor God and help us preserve community?

## RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

- 1. Getting Specific** Call the participants’ attention to the bumper stickers from Explore. Give each person a sheet of construction paper and markers. Have participants create a bumper sticker that depicts a specific way in which they can honor God or preserve community by paying special attention to one of the commandments in the week ahead. When all are done, give participants an opportunity to read and explain what they wrote.
- 2. Making Music** Form pairs of participants. Have each pair create and present a song or rap that depicts specific ways in which the Ten Commandments can be applied to their lives by honoring God and preserving community. If possible, arrange for an opportunity for the participants to present their songs or raps to another group in your faith community or in an upcoming worship service.

3. **Interviews** Ask: How can the Ten Commandments help you honor God and preserve community this week? Distribute index cards and pens. Have the participants write this question on their cards. Have participants agree to ask two or three people this question in the next twenty-four hours and to send the responses to you. Compile the responses and send all of them to the participants in the week ahead.

## CLOSING

Form groups of two or three. Give each group one or more of the bumper stickers from Explore until all of the bumper stickers are distributed. Have each group create a short sentence prayer based on their bumper sticker(s) that asks for God's guidance in implementing that commandment in the world.

If open flames are not allowed in your building, use a tall white battery-powered candle.

Set the Christ candle in the middle of the meeting space and gather the participants around it. Light the candle and explain that the candle reminds us of the light of Christ that cannot be put out. Even in the dark days of Lent that light shines as a symbol of the redemptive hope we are called to live. Place the bumper stickers next to the Christ candle.

Have each group say the prayer(s) that they created and send the participants with this blessing:

*May you always strive to honor God and preserve community by living in God's commandments.*

Extinguish the candle.

## ■ ENHANCEMENT

### FILM CONNECTION

*Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (2007; PG-13) depicts groups that battle for control of the seas. If your church has a viewing license, show a clip from the film ([bit.ly/FOWPirates1](https://bit.ly/FOWPirates1)) that begins with the captains handing over their pieces of eight and ends after the declaration of war by Elizabeth (after she has been elected Pirate King).

Explore these questions:

- ✪ How does the Pirate Code give order to the court?
- ✪ What does the code provide the captains?
- ✪ What would have happened if they had not followed the code?

March 3, 2024  
The Big Ten

Youth  
Resource Sheet 1

## Definitions



“We only have a few rules around here,  
but we really enforce them.”

### Exodus 20:1–3

The first commandment does not deny the existence of other gods. It states that the people of Israel own their sole allegiance to the Holy One, who brought them out of Egypt.

### Exodus 20:4–6

The second commandment prohibits the making of idols, whether to worship other gods or to worship YAHWEH. The great I AM cannot be controlled or put in a box.

### Exodus 20:7

The third commandment is a continuation on the theme of the first two. The name of God is sacred and should not be used to manipulate God through magical or frivolous means.

### Exodus 20:8–11

The fourth commandment is not a designated day for worship, but a day for rest blessed by God. It is a day spent reconnecting with God the creator.

### Exodus 20:12

The fifth commandment is not addressed to children but to adults. It is a reminder to honor those generations who have come before them.

### Exodus 20:13

The sixth commandment is translated as “you shall not murder.” It refers specifically to homicide, but does not address war or capital punishment as long as certain rules are followed.

### Exodus 20:14

The seventh commandment deals with family integrity and the legitimacy of children. The community is disrupted when the family legacy is passed to questionable heirs.

### Exodus 20:15

The eighth commandment protects private property.

### Exodus 20:16

The ninth commandment is not just about trivial lying, but about perjuring oneself in court.

### Exodus 20:17

The tenth commandment moves from outward actions to inward thoughts. Coveting something is more than just thinking about “how cool” another person’s possessions are. It is about holding an excessive desire that can lead to obsession and destructive action.

## Situations



|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>First Commandment</b>   | In order to make more money, a large company cheats a smaller company.                  |
| <b>First Commandment</b>   | Struggling with drug addiction.   |
| <b>First Commandment</b>   | Being friends only with those who like the same type of music as you.                   |
| <b>Second Commandment</b>  | Drawing a picture of God.   |
| <b>Second Commandment</b>  | Praying to a statue.  |
| <b>Second Commandment</b>  | Creating a worship space in your home.  |
| <b>Third Commandment</b>   | Texting OMG to someone.   |
| <b>Third Commandment</b>   | Getting so hurt, mad, or scared that you don't remember what you said.                  |
| <b>Third Commandment</b>   | Praying to God for something frivolous.   |
| <b>Fourth Commandment</b>  | Going skiing instead of to church.  |
| <b>Fourth Commandment</b>  | Shopping on Sunday, which means that you are causing someone to have to work on Sunday. |
| <b>Fourth Commandment</b>  | A doctor saving a life on a Sunday.   |
| <b>Fifth Commandment</b>   | Arguing with your parent or caregiver.  |
| <b>Fifth Commandment</b>   | Ignoring the needs of the elderly.  |
| <b>Fifth Commandment</b>   | Treating your grandparents with disrespect.   |
| <b>Sixth Commandment</b>   | Fighting a war.   |
| <b>Sixth Commandment</b>   | Causing a car accident where someone dies.  |
| <b>Sixth Commandment</b>   | Paying someone to kill someone else.  |
| <b>Seventh Commandment</b> | Cheating on a spouse.   |
| <b>Seventh Commandment</b> | Having a longtime flirtation with someone else.   |
| <b>Seventh Commandment</b> | Having an online relationship with someone else.  |
| <b>Eighth Commandment</b>  | Taking money from your mom's purse without asking.                                      |
| <b>Eighth Commandment</b>  | Taking sugar packets from a restaurant.   |
| <b>Eighth Commandment</b>  | Not giving back change when going to the store for your grandmother.                    |
| <b>Ninth Commandment</b>   | Repeating a rumor about someone without verifying it.                                   |
| <b>Ninth Commandment</b>   | Twisting a story so that it makes you sound good.                                       |
| <b>Ninth Commandment</b>   | Denying you saw something because you're scared.  |
| <b>Tenth Commandment</b>   | Wanting someone's iPhone so much you can't think of anything else.                      |
| <b>Tenth Commandment</b>   | Wishing you had a nice car like your friend.  |
| <b>Tenth Commandment</b>   | Admiring someone else's home.   |