

Exod. 20:1–17

Ps. 19

1 Cor. 1:18–25

John 2:13–22

God's Life-Giving Law

Goal for the Session *Third- and fourth-graders will learn about the Ten Commandments and their value to God's people.*

■ 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

Children know about rules! They live with them at home, at school, on athletic teams, and elsewhere. They understand the importance of having rules to guide them and to help them treat one another fairly. Some children may not know the Ten Commandments. Many contemporary laws in society have their roots in God's Law. This session is an opportunity to explore these ancient, foundational laws for God's people. During Lent, Christians explore the meaning of faithful living. The Ten Commandments offer a good summary of where to begin.

Gracious God, giver of life, thank you for the Commandments. Steady me as I follow this path to fullness of living with you and the people around me. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ❑ purple cloth
- ❑ white battery-powered Christ candle
- ❑ 6 battery-powered votives
- ❑ Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 29, 33
- ❑ *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*; CD player
- ❑ copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- ❑ Resource Sheet 3
- ❑ Bibles

For Responding

- ❑ option 1: drawing paper, markers
- ❑ option 2: newsprint, markers, index cards, masking tape
- ❑ option 3: mobiles from previous sessions, poster board, markers, scissors, hole punch, string

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Ten Commandments) for each learner. Cut the lists apart, and use only the list that most closely matches the way your church's catechism or worship book lists the Commandments. If you are using option 2 in Responding, prepare the game board by copying the list of the Ten Commandments you are using from Resource Sheet 2 on newsprint, leaving one key word out of each one. Write each of those key words on a separate index card. Place the ten index cards facedown on a table, and put a rolled piece of masking tape on the back of each one.

As learners arrive, invite them to arrange the purple cloth in the center of your meeting space. Have them place the candles and Color Pack 1 on the cloth, arranging the six votive candles in a cross shape with the Christ candle at its center, as shown on Resource Sheet 3 (Lenten Rituals).

Gather the group around the candles. Point to Color Pack 1 and tell learners that this is the Third Sunday in Lent. Ask them to tell what they know about Lent, referring to Resource Sheet 3 as is helpful. Follow the "Gathering Ritual" on Resource Sheet 3. Sing "Prepare the Paths" (Color Pack 29; track 17 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*).

Begin a conversation about rules by asking:

- ✠ What rules do you have to follow at home? At school?
- ✠ What will happen if you do not obey these rules?
- ✠ Which of these rules seems most important?
- ✠ Why do you think there are rules like these?

Prepare the Paths

Prepare the paths, prepare
the paths,
Make ready God's way of
justice.

Prepare the paths, prepare
the paths,
Make ready God's way of
justice.

Smooth the rough roads,
smooth the rough roads,
God's salvation is coming.
Smooth the rough roads,
smooth the rough roads,
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EXPLORING

Tell learners that the Bible reading for today is about rules. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (On Mount Sinai). Ask two volunteers to read aloud the story, alternating paragraphs.

Ask:

- ✪ Where were the Hebrew people being kept as slaves?
- ✪ Who led the Hebrew people to freedom?
- ✪ Where did they live and journey for forty years after they left Egypt?

Show Color Pack 2, and explain that it is a current photo of Mount Sinai. Ask:

- ✪ What happened at Mount Sinai?

Show Color Pack 3, and explain that an artist made these to look like the stone tablets Moses might have had.

- ✪ What was written on the stone tablets Moses had?

Give each learner a Bible. Review how to find Exodus in the table of contents, turn to the first page of Exodus, and use the chapter numbers at the top of the page to find chapter 20. Encourage learners to help one another find Exodus 20:1–17. Tell the group that these verses give the Ten Commandments. Read aloud this text as learners follow along in their Bibles. Discuss:

- ✪ What is a commandment?
- ✪ Which verses tell us how to honor and respect God? (vv. 1–11)
- ✪ Which verses tell us how to honor and respect other people? (vv. 12–17)
- ✪ What rules in your family, school, or community remind you of the Ten Commandments?
- ✪ What happens when people do not follow the Ten Commandments? (Reassure children that, while there are consequences one must face when breaking a commandment, when we ask God for forgiveness God will give us a fresh start.)

Distribute copies of one of the lists from Resource Sheet 2 (The Ten Commandments), saying that the list is a simpler way to read the Ten Commandments. Read the sheet in unison, clarifying the meanings of key words as is helpful. Ask:

- ✪ How important do you think these rules are for God's people today?
- ✪ Do you agree or disagree with the statement "God gave us the Ten Commandments to make our lives work better"? Why or why not?

Encourage children to take the list of the Ten Commandments home and review them with their families.

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use.

- 1. Commandment Signs** Ask learners to imagine that the Ten Commandments are signs—like those we might see on a road or in a public place—indicating what to do and what not to do. These signs help us on our journey as God's people. Review some of the signs that children see often. What symbols are on the signs? What shapes and colors are used? Form pairs to design commandment signs, giving them drawing paper and markers. Ask each pair to choose one of the Ten Commandments (use Resource Sheet 2) and then design a sign that tells people to obey that commandment. Have each pair show its sign, asking the group to guess which commandment it is. Display these signs and challenge people in your church to guess which commandment each sign represents.
- 2. Commandments Relay** This game can help children learn the Ten Commandments. Post the prepared newsprint at one side of the meeting space and place the index cards at the other. Form two groups, each group standing in its own line by the table with the index cards. The first players in each line pick a card from the table and go to the newsprint chart to place it in the correct commandment. Group members can shout clues. Players return to their teams and tag the next one in line, who chooses a card and runs to the chart. Play continues until all words are placed correctly. The group that places the most cards is the winner. Remove cards from the chart and play again as time allows.
- 3. Lenten Mobile** Help mark the weeks of Lent by having each learner make a mobile. Each week during Lent, a different symbol will be added. (If you did not begin the mobiles on February 18, use a wire coat hanger or two crossed and tied dowel rods to make the mobile base.) For this week, add a symbol of the Ten Commandments. Have learners cut out the shape of the clay tablets from small pieces of poster board, referring to Color Pack 3 as needed. On this shape, children can either write out the Ten Commandments as listed on Resource Sheet 2 or just write the numbers 1 through 10. Have children punch a hole in the symbol and use string to tie it to the mobile.

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*

Save Resource Sheet 3
(Lenten Rituals) for use
in upcoming sessions.

CLOSING

Gather the group in a circle around the candles. Light the Christ candle and all six votives. Pass around Color Pack 2, inviting children, in turn, to hold the picture and say one way it reminds them of today's Bible story.

Follow the "Closing Ritual" on Resource Sheet 3 (Lenten Rituals). Sing "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" (Color Pack 33; track 11 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*).

Say good-bye to learners by name, telling them that you will keep them in your prayers and asking them to pray for you, as well.

On Mount Sinai

The Hebrew people, our ancient mothers and fathers in faith, once were slaves in Egypt. They were forced to do hard work for the Egyptian pharaoh (king). They had to make thousands of bricks. They had to build many buildings. The Hebrew people cried out to God: “Set us free!”

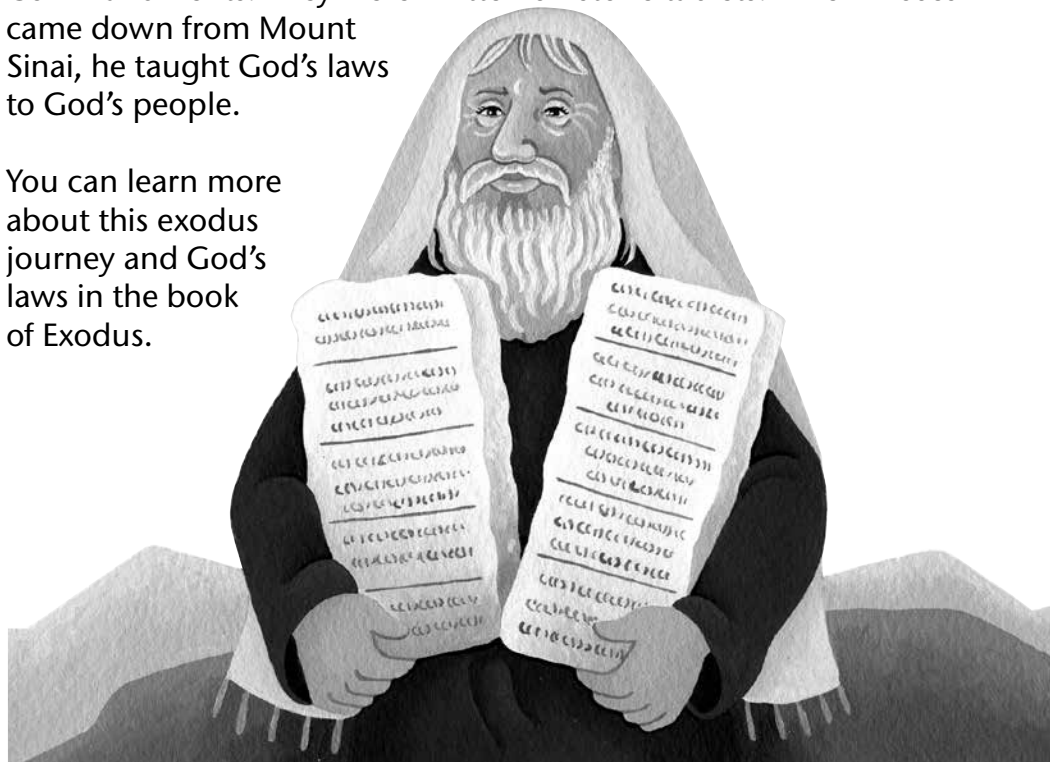
God told Moses to go to Egypt and lead the Hebrew people to freedom. Many times, Moses asked the pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go free.

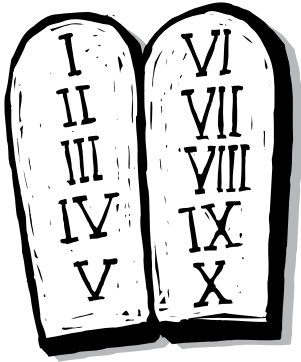
Finally, Moses was able to lead the people across the Red Sea, into a wilderness land called Sinai. Their journey through the wilderness to the land God promised them is called the Exodus.

The wilderness of Sinai had desert and mountains. The Hebrew people wandered there for 40 years. God led them as they moved from place to place. They lived in tents. It was not an easy life. Sometimes they were hungry and thirsty. Sometimes they were angry with God and Moses. But God never stopped loving and caring for them.

One day, the group camped near a mountain called Mount Sinai. Moses went up the mountain to talk with God. While he was there, God gave Moses laws for the people. These laws are called the Ten Commandments. They were written on stone tablets. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he taught God's laws to God's people.

You can learn more about this exodus journey and God's laws in the book of Exodus.





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

The Ten Commandments

(Found in Exodus 20:1–17)

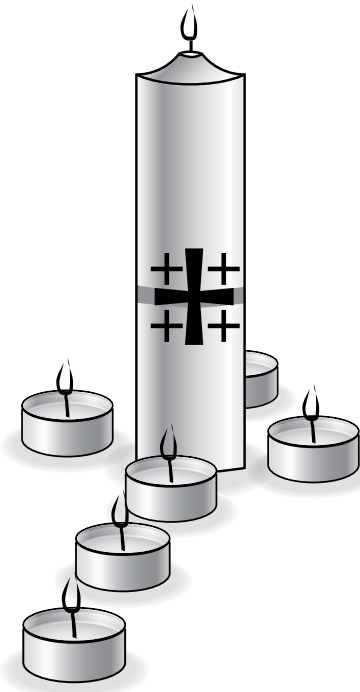
1. Worship only God.
2. Do not make idols and worship them.
3. Do not use the name of God in disrespectful ways.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Respect your mother and your father.
6. Do not murder.
7. Be faithful in marriage.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not tell lies about other people.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

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5. Do not murder.
6. Be faithful in marriage.
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 in holders around the Christ candle to form a cross shape. 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* the song given in the teacher materials.
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 the votive candles as a way of marking the Sundays of Lent. For example, on the First Sunday in Lent, extinguish one votive; on the Second Sunday in Lent, extinguish two 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!