

Exod. 20:1–17

Ps. 19

1 Cor. 1:18–25

John 2:13–22

For Our Own Good

Goal for the Session *Tweens will consider how the Ten Commandments express God's love for us.*

■ 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

Although they will sometimes chafe at them—an expected and healthy part of adolescent development—twens can appreciate that some rules and regulations truly are laid down “for their own good” and the good of broader society. And nearly all twens feel guilt or remorse when they do things that go against these norms of their families, church, and school. This session encourages learners to develop new appreciation for the Ten Commandments as they explore how God “lays down the law” for humankind out of love and concern for our well-being.

Thank you, God, for loving me enough to set such wise limits. Help me grow in appreciating how your ways lead to freedom. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- purple cloth
- large white battery-powered candle
- wide ribbons from February 18, 25
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 4, 29
- newsprint, markers
- fine-tipped permanent markers
- 20" length of wide red ribbon
- Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: paper, pens or pencils
- option 2: newspapers, magazines
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, supplies listed there

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Greet twens as they arrive. As you gather the group, invite volunteers to arrange the purple cloth, candle, Color Pack 1, and the wide ribbons from Closing in previous sessions in the center of your meeting space. (If your group did not meet on February 18 and 25, provide a 20" length of purple ribbon and a 20" length of blue ribbon to drape over the cloth.) Ask a volunteer to light the candle. Recall that the Christian church is in the season of Lent. The color for Lent is purple, a color of repentance. Lent lasts for 40 days (excluding Sundays) and is a time to think about our relationship with God and how it might change the way we live. Take a quiet moment for twens to silently consider an answer to the question printed on Color Pack 1.

Offer this prayer:

Blessed are you, Holy God! Teach us your Commandments and, by your Spirit, keep us true to them as we follow our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Ten Crazy Commandments). Recruit volunteers to read aloud each law. After each one is read, ask for a show of hands to indicate how many learners think the law is true and how many think it is false. (*Answers: 2, 5, 6, and 8 are false.*) Discuss:

✠ Think about the rules and laws in your family, school, and community. Which seem unnecessary or silly? Which do you consider essential? Why?

EXPLORING

Pointing to the wide blue ribbon from the February 25 closing, ask learners who were present last week to recall the story (Mark 8:31–38). Remind the group that Jesus set a high standard for disciples. Today’s Bible story explores how God’s expectations are also a gift.

Display Color Pack 2, 3, and 4. Ask tweens to identify the biblical character and the event portrayed (*Moses receiving and presenting the Ten Commandments*). Invite learners to compare and contrast the images, considering what the artists might feel about the Commandments.

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? Bring the list of Ten Commandments from your church catechism or worship book and teach learners the way of numbering them used in your church.

Challenge the group to work together to list the Ten Commandments, recording the list on newsprint. It’s OK if they cannot name them all or if this activity yields more than ten! Option: If your group enjoys friendly competition, form teams of three and award a round of applause to the team that is first to list the Ten Commandments correctly.

Ask learners to find the first page of Exodus in their Bibles, helping one another as needed. Review the “big picture” plot of Exodus—God works through Moses to lead the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt and to the land of promise. Now, have the group turn to Exodus 19:1–8, verses that “set the stage” for the story of the Ten Commandments. Ask a volunteer to read aloud these verses. Discuss:

- ✧ Why should the Israelites obey God’s word? (v. 4)
- ✧ The word *covenant* means God’s binding promise to the Israelites. What does God promise will happen when the Israelites obey God? (vv. 5–6)
- ✧ How do the Israelites respond to the message that Moses brings from God? (vv. 7–8)

The Ten Commandments also are listed in Deuteronomy 5:6–21. One difference in Deuteronomy is the reason given for resting on the Sabbath (vv. 14–15). As an extra challenge, invite learners to wonder how this reason for Sabbath complements the reason given in Exodus 20:9–11.

Comment that obeying the Ten Commandments will identify Israel as a people who represent God and act as God’s presence in the world. Ask learners to turn to Exodus 20:1–17. Allow time for them to read the verses silently, then work as a group to confirm and correct the group’s listing of the Ten Commandments made earlier. Once the list is complete, discuss:

- ✧ What does God’s “jealousy” for Israel’s loyalty tell us about God? (v. 5)
- ✧ How do you react to God’s warning of punishment and promise of love in verses 5–6?
- ✧ What does it mean to use God’s name wrongly? (v. 7)
- ✧ What reason does God give for resting on the Sabbath? (v. 11)
- ✧ What is the promise connected with honoring one’s parents? (v. 12) In what way does this promise apply to God’s people today?
- ✧ How do the commandments in verses 13–17 contribute to social well-being? To what extent do the rules in families and communities today reflect these commandments?

Finish Exploring by discussing:

- ✧ Do you agree or disagree with this statement: The Ten Commandments express God’s love for us. Why?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Shall/Should Not** To increase understanding of the meaning of the Ten Commandments, form pairs and ask each pair to choose one commandment to explain by turning positive commandments into negative ones and vice versa. For example, the negative commandment about misusing God’s name (Exodus 20:7) might be explained as, “You shall praise God with your words, and you shall speak to others about God’s love.” The

EASY
PREP

positive commandment to honor parents (Exodus 20:12) might be explained as, “You shall not intentionally ignore or make fun of your parents.” Ask pairs to read what they write to the entire group. Then discuss what new insights this activity has provided into the importance of the Commandments in their lives.

- 2. In the News** To illustrate the continued applicability of the Ten Commandments, ask each tween to find a story in a newspaper or magazine in which people either keep or break one of the Commandments. Ask learners to summarize their stories for the group, identifying the commandment(s) at stake in each one. If the story is about a commandment kept, ask: “How did obeying the commandment lead to good in this situation?” If it is about a commandment broken, ask: “If the individuals involved had kept the commandment instead of breaking it, how might the outcome have been different?”
- 3. God’s Sweet Law** To celebrate the Ten Commandments as God’s loving gift, learn about Shavuot. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (God’s Sweet Law) and ask a volunteer to read aloud the information about Shavuot. Work together to make one of the recipes. As you cook, remind the group that Shavuot is not a Christian holiday, but learning about it and enjoying foods associated with it can remind us that we, like our Jewish brothers and sisters, believe it is important for God’s people to delight in obeying God’s law.

When selecting the recipe, keep in mind any food allergies the children have.

During Lent you will add a ribbon to the worship space each week, creating a rainbow by Easter. Keep these wide ribbons to use in upcoming weeks.

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem.

CLOSING

Gather around the candle, and invite tweens to quiet themselves by singing “Dona Nobis Pacem” (Color Pack 29; track 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*). Drape a 20" length of wide red ribbon over the cloth. Mention that Christians associate red with Jesus’ blood and with the Holy Spirit. Jesus fulfilled God’s law for us; the Spirit empowers us to keep God’s law.

Ask:

✠ What word, phrase, or image from today’s story will you remember, and why?

Provide fine-tipped permanent markers for tweens to write or doodle their responses on the ribbon.

Offer this prayer:

Great God, may we trust you at all times and hope in you alone. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

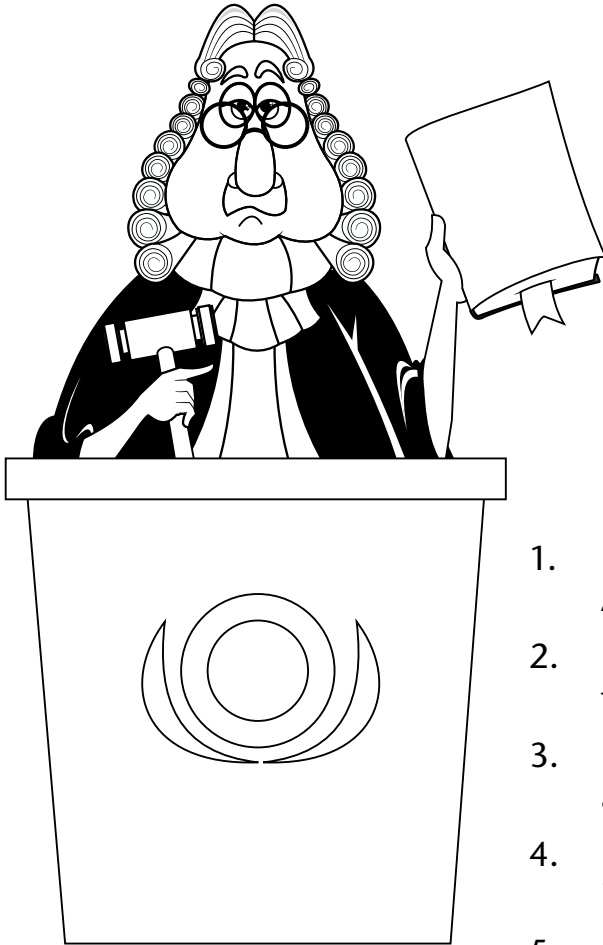
Speak this blessing to each tween:

(Name), God bless you as you go out to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor as yourself.

March 3, 2024
For Our Own Good

Tweens
Resource Sheet 1

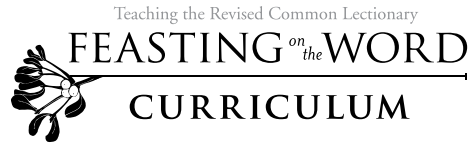
Ten Crazy Commandments



There are some strange laws! Some of the laws listed here are entirely made up; others, however, either actually once were or still are “on the books.” Can you tell the true laws from the false ones?

1. It is illegal to hold bear wrestling matches in Alabama.
2. In Arizona, private individuals may own only female camels.
3. In Alaska, it is illegal to give alcoholic drinks to a moose.
4. It is illegal to ride a bicycle in a swimming pool in California.
5. It is illegal to own a pet armadillo in Texas.
6. In Connecticut, it is illegal to jump rope on a public sidewalk.
7. It is illegal to fish from a camel’s back in Idaho.
8. In Maine, all electric hand mixers must be registered with the state.
9. It is illegal to let a gorilla ride in the back seat of a car in Massachusetts.
10. Women in Vermont must have their husbands’ written permission to wear false teeth.

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Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

God's Sweet Law

The LORD's instruction is right; it makes our hearts glad. His commands shine brightly, and they give us light. . . . They are worth more than the finest gold and are sweeter than honey from a honeycomb.

—Psalm 19:8, 10, CEV

I obey your word instead of following a way that leads to trouble. You have been my teacher, and I won't reject your instructions. Your teachings are sweeter than honey.

—Psalm 119:101–103, CEV

Shavuot (shuh-VOO-oat) is a Jewish holiday. It is also called the Festival of Weeks. This holiday celebrates God's gift of the Law, which was given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. This Law includes the Ten Commandments. One Shavuot custom is to eat dairy products and sweet treats. Some say this practice points to the biblical description of the sweetness of God's commandments. It also points to the description of the land of God's promise as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:17). Shavuot is not a Christian holiday, but we can learn about it and enjoy foods associated with it. Like our Jewish brothers and sisters, we can delight in God's Law.

לא תדצח
לא תנאף
לא תגנב
לא תענה
לא תחמד

Sweet Fruit

Supplies: measuring spoons, mixing bowl, paring knives, small plates, spoons

Ingredients:

- 2 bananas
- 1 pint strawberries, washed
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup maple syrup

1. In small mixing bowl, mix sour cream, sugar, and vanilla.
2. Peel and slice bananas. Slice strawberries.
3. Gently mix fruit into the sour cream mixture.
4. To serve, place a spoonful of fruit on a small plate and drizzle a little maple syrup over it.

אנכי יהוה
לא יחוח
לא תשא
זכוד את
בבד את

Two Tablet Sandwiches

Supplies: table knives, small plates

Ingredients:

- 2 graham crackers per person
- 1 jar marshmallow fluff
- 1 small bag shredded coconut
- 1 bottle chocolate sprinkles

1. Place two graham crackers side-by-side on a small plate, as a reminder of the two stone tablets on which God wrote the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 4:13).
2. Spread marshmallow fluff on one of the crackers.
3. Sprinkle the fluff with coconut and chocolate sprinkles.
4. Place the other cracker on top to make a sandwich. Eat and enjoy!