

# ***Honoring the Ten Commandments: Monument or Movement?***

## **Leaders Guide**



### **13 online adult Sunday school lessons**

Produced in partnership with the Christian Life Commission of the  
Baptist General Convention of Texas

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**Acacia Resources, a division of Baptist Center for Ethics**  
4219 Hillsboro Road, Suite 210  
Nashville, Tennessee 37215  
(615) 383-3192 phone  
(615) 383-0915 fax  
[www.acaciaresources.com](http://www.acaciaresources.com)

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*An Honoring the Ten Commandments: Monument or Movement?*  
Students Guide is also available from Acacia Resources  
([www.acaciaresources.com](http://www.acaciaresources.com)).

## Preface

What a tragedy it will be if all many people ever know about the Ten Commandments comes from debate over where they can be displayed.

Yet that is likely. The Ten Commandments have gotten unusually wide press in recent years because of the efforts of some people to adorn public buildings with them in the form of plaques, monuments and other decorative displays. Doing so "acknowledges God," they say.

The whole world will in fact be better, some think, if they prominently and widely display the Ten Commandments and remind people of how they are supposed to behave. The mere presence of the words will somehow miraculously and quickly reverse moral decline.

Where one stands on the issue of displaying the Ten Commandments has become yet another litmus test some Christians use to separate the righteous and the unrighteous. Those who argue against publicly displaying the commandments simply do not love the Bible, or love it enough, they assert.

Lifting the Ten Commandments, part of a larger sacred document and story, out of their context reveals incomplete understanding of them and God's purpose in giving them. It lessens, rather than strengthens, their impact.

The Ten Commandments are not powerful because they are part of a public display. Neither are they powerless if governments or individuals fail to acknowledge them.

What does God intend for us to do about the Ten Commandments today? How do we best value them?

First, we should recognize their extreme significance. Of them, scripture says, “God spoke all these words” (Ex 20:1). When God speaks, we ought to pay attention.

God gave the commandments at a momentous time in the life of God’s people, relatively early in their history. These commandments form a crucial marker, one we should not ignore.

Next, the Ten Commandments hold powerful meaning because of who God is and what God has done. God and God’s acts are unparalleled and unprecedented. God deserves and demands our undivided loyalty. God alone has authority to speak to us like this.

Because God is God and God is love, God can and does demand certain ways of living from us. The God who created life knows best how that life should be lived. God knows that we live best when we follow these commands. We and the broader community suffer the consequences when we do not.

Of supreme importance is that we properly and rightly acknowledge and worship God. It matters how we speak to and about God. Attaching God’s name to something carelessly and with impure motives carries serious consequences.

Life is best, God says, when we find the proper balance between work and rest. We can help build the kind of families and communities God desires when we honor and respect people, value their lives and personhood, respect their property and their right to own it, speak truthfully and repress unbridled desires.

Additionally, we should remember that the Ten Commandments were important to Jesus. On one occasion, he summarized them this way: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt 22:37-40).

Jesus did nothing to discount or disparage the Ten Commandments. The ways he related to God and to other people show us the value he placed on them. His quarrels about the Law came when those who closely guarded it placed it ahead of people and their needs, when the Law, not love, motivated attitudes and actions.

We need to understand the Ten Commandments because God gave them and Jesus affirmed them. People of faith honor and best keep them when we live lives that uphold them, reflecting the love of the God who spoke them and the Christ who modeled them in their purest form.

Where do the Ten Commandments belong? Everywhere we go.

How should we display them? Through lives of love, grace, mercy, justice, peace, forgiveness, prayer, sacrifice and service.

*Written by Jan Turrentine, managing editor for Acacia Resources, Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn.*

## Toward a Moral Way of Life Leaders Guide

### Exodus 18:13-26

*<sup>13</sup>The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him for morning until evening. <sup>14</sup>When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" <sup>15</sup>Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup>When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." <sup>17</sup>Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup>You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. <sup>19</sup>Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; <sup>20</sup>teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. <sup>21</sup>You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. <sup>22</sup>Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. <sup>23</sup>If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." <sup>24</sup>So Moses listened to his father-in-*

*law and did all that he had said. <sup>25</sup>Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundred, fifties, and tens. <sup>26</sup>And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves.*

**Theme: This age of moral confusion and competing values challenges us to sharpen our moral way of living.**

### Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ On a large poster, write the following quotation attributed to Elton Trueblood:

**“Beautiful as cut flowers may be, they die because they are severed from their sustaining roots.”**

Prominently display this poster and plan to refer to it as you conclude the Bible study.

- ▶ The following online articles can enhance your preparation and provide additional insights as you guide class discussion:

“This Is a Moral Universe,” ([www.beliefnet.com/story/142/story\\_14266.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/142/story_14266.html));

“Desmond Tutu’s Recipe for Peace,” ([www.beliefnet.com/story/143/story\\_14326.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/143/story_14326.html));

“The Ten Promises,” ([www.thirdway.com/aw/?AID=144](http://www.thirdway.com/aw/?AID=144)).

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

► Point out the example from the nation of Rwanda as found in the Students Guide. Stress that though it was known as a predominately Christian nation, its moral order collapsed and it fell into anarchy and genocide that resulted in the deaths of 1 million of its citizens. Today it struggles to rebuild. Survivors of the horrible crimes hope for repentance from perpetrators and justice for themselves and their families.

► Lead adults to consider humanity’s need and quest for moral order through the example of Desmond Tutu, one of the world’s most renowned religious leaders. The now-retired Episcopal archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, worked tirelessly and faithfully to end apartheid and achieve reconciliation with former oppressors.

In his book *God Has a Dream* (Doubleday, 2004), Tutu said that even during apartheid’s darkest days, he remained certain that good would win out over evil. In spite of the discrimination, imprisonments, massacres and other injustices that went on in his country for years, he knew whose laws governed the universe and believed those laws would prevail.

“This is a *moral* universe,” he wrote, “which means that, despite all the evidence that seems to be to the contrary, there is no way that evil and injustice and oppression and lies can have the last word. God is a God who cares about right and wrong. God cares about justice and injustice. God is in charge.”

In an interview about the book, Tutu said “immoral laws and rulers will always topple. ... Our ability to do evil is intimately connected to our ability to do good. One is meaningless without the other. Empathy and compassion have no meaning unless they occur in a situation where one *could* be callous and indifferent to the suffering of others” (“Desmond Tutu’s Recipe for Peace,” [www.beliefnet.com/story/143/story\\_14326.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/143/story_14326.html)).

► Ask adults to respond and react to Tutu’s ideas by asking such questions as these:

- *Do you agree with Tutu’s assessments? Why or why not?*
- *Where does the need or desire for moral order and morality originate?*
- *What causes moral confusion for many people?*
- *Do people who do not believe in or acknowledge God seek moral order and righteous living?*
- *What does it take to establish a moral community?*
- *What threatens the advance of truth and goodness?*
- *How do you define morality?*
- *What is unique about a Christian’s view on morality?*

► Next, lead adults to begin thinking about the need for what we now know as the Ten Commandments by asking them to respond to questions such as these:

*•Why is it important to acknowledge the supremacy of God in building a moral life and community?*

*•Why is respect for others necessary in building a moral community?*

*•Had there not been so much public debate in recent years over the display of the Ten Commandments, do you think you would have given much thought to them? Why or why not?*

*•To what degree do the Ten Commandments help you define morality and the right way to live?*

*•How do the Ten Commandments influence societies and cultures as a whole?*

## **Explore the Bible**

► Summarize for adults the events which preceded God giving Moses the commandments in the Sinai. Remind them of the enslavement of the people of Israel in Egypt, the oppressive conditions under which they had lived and the role Moses played in leading them out of slavery into freedom. Note such milestones as these:

•Moses' birth and rescue by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2:1-10);

•the Israelites' cries to God for help and God's response to them (Ex 2:23-25);

•Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush and God's promise to deliver them (Ex 3:1-12);

•Moses' return to Egypt to deliver the people, his encounters with Pharaoh and his dialogues with God (Ex 4:18-6:13);

•the plagues (Ex 7:14-11:9);

•the institution of the first Passover (Ex 12:1-28);

•the tenth plague (Ex 12:29-32);

•the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 12:33-14:30).

► Point out that shortly after their miraculous escape from Egypt, in spite of experiencing God's provisions and Moses' leadership, the Israelites began to grumble and complain. Though they were being formed into a new nation and had been given a new life, they did not yet know how to live it, though Moses had been providing moral instruction and guidance based on instructions God had given him. Into this conflict stepped Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, and within this context events began to unfold that led to God giving Moses the commandments.

► Read aloud Exodus 18:13-16 and remind adults of how Moses came to be married to Jethro's daughter, Zipporah. Then ask:

*•What did the people want at this point? What did they need?*

*•What were Moses' expressed intentions?*

Call attention to Jethro's assessment of the situation and his advice by asking someone to read aloud Exodus 18:17-23. Then ask:

•*Why do you think Moses was so receptive to his father-in-law's advice?*

•*What leadership qualities did Jethro advise Moses to look for in those who would help him?*

Ask adults to elaborate on and explain the individual qualities Jethro identified: able; fear God; trustworthy; hate dishonest gain. Lead them to conclude why these particular qualities were important for this leadership role at this time. Then ask:

•*What would Moses' roles be once the other leaders were in place?*

► Ask adults to listen for the results when Moses followed Jethro's advice as you read aloud Exodus 18:24-26. Then ask:

•*How did this help set the stage for the people to receive God's commandments shortly thereafter?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Summarize for adults the ideas in "The Ten Promises" by columnist Melanie Davis ([www.thirdway.com/aw/?AID=144](http://www.thirdway.com/aw/?AID=144)). In recalling the dramatic scenes in Cecil B. DeMille's movie, "The Ten Commandments," she notes how many people associate some degree of negativity with them and conclude that "religion is only a bunch of 'thou shall not's'."

Davis helpfully draws from a book by Albert Curry Winn titled *A Christian Primer* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) which suggests that, instead of looking at the Ten Commandments as rules, we instead look at them as ten promises.

"Winn points out that while Christians speak of ten 'commandments,' those of Jewish faith speak of them as the ten 'words'—which is closer to the original Hebrew term. And it is helpful to look at the original setting when these 'ten words' were given to civilization," Davis writes.

While Moses was indeed angry when he returned from the mountain and saw the way the people had been living and acting, she says, "that is not the context in which God gave the ten words. In fact, even though Moses is angry, God is patient and Moses makes a new set of tablets. So rather than thinking of these pronouncements as ten rules laid down by an angry God, Winn says it is perhaps more accurate to look at these ten 'words' from God as ten 'promises' for what it will be like to live now as God's free and much-loved people."

These ten words from God are liberating, Davis concludes. Live like this, God says, and you will not do things that dishonor God and devalue others. "When worded as promises the traditional 'ten commandments' are revolutionary pledges of peace, goodwill and a description of society that we have not attained yet," Davis says. "Still, it is something to strive for. As commandments, they offer good moral rules for society. As promises, they are a little more world-shattering."

Instead of murder, she says, we would live with a profound respect for life; instead of adultery, we would live in relationships of commitment and faithfulness. Instead of stealing, coveting and trying to get what others have, we would live contentedly.

► Call attention to the poster and read aloud the statement from Elton Trueblood: "Beautiful as cut flowers may be, they die because they are severed from their sustaining roots."

Suggest that the Ten Commandments help form the sustaining roots of our moral lives. When we cut ourselves off from them, both our relationship with God and our relationships to others suffer irreparable harm.

Encourage adults to be open to looking at the Ten Commandments thoughtfully and objectively in the coming weeks as you consider their role in your lives.

## Approaching the Ten Commandments with Care Leaders Guide

### **Exodus 19:16-20:2**

*<sup>16</sup>On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup>Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup>Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. <sup>19</sup>As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. <sup>20</sup>When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. <sup>21</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to break through to the LORD to look; otherwise many of them will perish. <sup>22</sup>Even the priests who approach the LORD must consecrate themselves or the LORD will break out against them." <sup>23</sup>Moses said to the LORD, "The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.'" <sup>24</sup>The LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let either the priests or the people break through to come up to the LORD: otherwise he will break out against them." So Moses went down to the people and told them. <sup>20</sup><sup>1</sup>Then God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>I am the LORD your God, who*

*brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;*

**Theme: We honor the Ten Commandments when we study them and integrate them into our daily lives.**

## Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ The following online article provides the basis for the suggested closing comments as you teach this lesson. You may want to read it in its entirety as you prepare:

“Baptists Were Right to Reject Commandments Resolution” ([www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=1377](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1377)).

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Ask adults who have seen the 1999 movie “The Cider House Rules” or read the John Irving novel on which it is based to describe the significance of the title to the story. Focus discussion on the rules to which the title refers by relating the following information:

Part of the story line involves an orchard owner who employs migrant workers during the picking season. He posts some rules of conduct in the cider house where the workers stay. Although he wrote the rules, he doesn’t necessarily live by them. The rules are more concerned with his liability than with the workers’ well-being.

When one of the workers who can read finally reads aloud the rules for the other workers, they laugh, because they have broken them and probably will break them again. One of the workers asserts that the rules don’t apply to them because they didn’t make them and they can’t read them. The workers have their own ideas about what is right and wrong.

- ▶ Lead adults to contrast the “cider house rules” with the Ten Commandments by asking such questions as these:

- *How are the Ten Commandments different from the cider house rules?*
- *What was the basis for the cider house rules?*
- *What was the basis for the Ten Commandments?*
- *Why did the workers have trouble obeying the cider house rules?*
- *Why do people have trouble honoring the Ten Commandments?*
- *To what degree do you think people make moral decisions based on personal taste and lifestyle, versus values and beliefs that are deeply integrated in their lives?*

- ▶ Point out that what makes the Ten Commandments different from rules such as those posted by the orchard owner is that they were established within the framework of a covenant relationship. God gave the Ten Commandments to people with whom God had an established relationship. Within the framework of such a relationship, the commandments became not just a set of rules but instead guidelines

for effective community living. Today we best honor them not when we post them on walls but when we learn what they mean and integrate them into our daily patterns of living.

## Explore the Bible

► Remind adults that Moses' task involved more than leading the people from one physical location to another. He also had the responsibility of helping them think in new ways and become a new people with a new way of life. It was uncharted territory.

► Ask someone to read aloud Exodus 19:1-6 and lead adults to answer these questions:

- *What assignment did God give Moses?*
- *What was the conditional promise God made?*

► Read aloud Exodus 19:7-9a and note the people's response to Moses' instructions: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do" (v 8). Then ask:

- *To what were the people actually agreeing?*
- *On what basis was this agreement made?*
- *Why did God tell Moses God would appear "in a dense cloud" (v 9a)? What effect would that have on the people?*

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 19:9b-15. Using the scripture and information from the Students Guide, list God's detailed instructions designed to make the people holy, ready for an encounter with the Almighty. Then ask:

• *Do you think the people were aware of the magnitude of what they were about to experience?*

• *Why do you think God gave such specific instructions of this nature?*

Then, read aloud Exodus 19:16-25 which details God's appearance before the Hebrew people. Point out Moses' critical role, at one moment talking to God; the next, delivering instructions to God's people.

► Call attention to Exodus 20:1-2a and note that God spoke these words just before those we now know as the Ten Commandments. Also note how carefully God prepared the people to receive the commandments, through amazing sights and sounds from nature and through messages delivered by Moses. Only when God had prepared the people to receive them did God deliver the Ten Commandments. They grew out of a faithful, covenant relationship.

► Allow adequate time for your class to discuss answers to the five questions in the section "A New Moral Order" in the Students Guide. Note particularly the last question and the concluding remarks in that section.

## Apply Biblical Truth

► Remind adults of the fierce debate that raged over then-Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore's attempts to display the Ten Commandments in public buildings. During the 2001 meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, an angry man stood and berated Alabama Baptists for their failure to pass a resolution affirming the public display of the Ten Commandments.

“It’s a sad day in the state of Alabama when the largest denomination, the spiritual leaders of the state, could not get enough votes to support the Ten Commandments,” Dean Young, director of the Christian Family Association, said. Young was a key supporter of Moore’s.

Young had written the resolution in question. The state convention’s Resolutions Committee determined that Alabama Baptists had already affirmed the Ten Commandments and that it was unnecessary to do anything else about the issue.

Young persisted in trying to get his resolution passed, going so far as to use a complicated parliamentary procedure to try to change the standing rules of the convention. That attempt also failed.

► Conclude by reading aloud or summarizing the following thoughts on this issue by Alabama pastor and EthicsDaily.com columnist Jim Evans:

“From that Young concluded Alabama Baptists did not support the Ten Commandments. Of course the idea of Alabama Baptists being soft on Scripture is nonsense. That would be like saying fish are wishy-washy about water.

“Baptists take this stuff seriously,” Evans continued, noting Jesus’ summary of the Ten Commandments known as the Great Commandment and Baptists’ commitment to the Great Commission.

“The Great Commandment and the Great Commission combine to create a blueprint that defines Baptist purpose and action. It prompts them to feed the hungry, care for homeless children, strengthen marriages, care for the elderly, teach English as a second language, provide tutors in public schools, teach adults how to read, provide educational programs about youth violence, provide disaster

relief, offer counseling services, provide medical services, meet basic health needs and provide education about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and gambling.

“In other words, every day, in a hundred different ways, these believers put the Bible on display in their lives and in their churches.”

# Only God

## Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:3

*You shall have no other gods before me.*

**Theme: God demands complete and uncompromised loyalty.**

### Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ The following online article can enhance your preparation and provide additional insights to stimulate class discussion:

“The Quest for a Christian America,”  
([www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=2134](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2134)).

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Begin by asking adults to suggest occasions that have marked a major shift in thinking by a nation, culture or society. For example:
  - Christopher Columbus and other explorers eventually proved that the world is round, not flat, dispelling long-held notions that go back as far as Hebrew scripture.

- In 1630, Galileo published his theory that the Earth not only moves, but that it revolves around the sun. This flew in the face of popular thinking, including the position held by the Church that said that the universe revolved around the Earth.

Ask adults to recall other such examples, and lead them to discuss the concept of changing ways of thinking by asking:

- *How difficult was it to dispel the commonly-held notions?*
- *How long did it take for the new way of thinking to take a firm hold?*

▶ Stress that the idea of only one God represented a major shift in thinking for the people of Israel. In order for adults to understand the significance of this and of God’s demands for complete allegiance and uncompromised loyalty, lead them first to understand the extent to which polytheism dominated the world’s religious systems. Convey ideas such as these:

While people throughout history have tried to express ideas about a force or forces behind everything, the idea of one God—monotheism—was a new idea to the people of Israel. In fact, everywhere they turned, they encountered other people and cultures with numerous gods and goddesses. Polytheism, not monotheism, characterized the religious systems of the ancient world.

A careful reading of scripture supports the idea that Israel’s faith was not monotheistic from the beginning. The people of Israel developed faith in God alone over a period of time. In fact, they continued to struggle with the idea of “only God” years into their existence as a nation.

Polytheism represented a way for people to understand and explain life and how it worked. They believed that the sun, moon, earth and other physical parts of the world were either gods or goddesses or were controlled by different gods. They even believed that different deities were behind natural happenings like floods and political conditions such as wars. They also believed that inequalities among people, such as one person's good fortune and another's disaster, were caused by different gods. The various gods often took on human characteristics.

Polytheism became a fairly well-developed system in which the different gods were related to each other and categorized into families and generations. Stories and myths helped people understand these relationships. Over the years, depending on circumstances, the various gods might change names and might increase or decrease in terms of their significance or power.

Because there were so many deities, there was "something for everybody" in the ancient world in terms of god. People could pick and choose their gods cafeteria-style, depending upon their personal interests, affinities, needs and circumstances. The idea that a single God could meet all their needs was foreign to them.

► Using information from the Introduction in the Students Guide, encourage adults to think in new ways about the commandment to "have no other gods." Suggest that in trying to identify our idols, our "other gods," we tend to think in physical, not spiritual terms. While that is easier, it is not very accurate.

### Explore the Bible

► Acknowledge that while God's demand to be the only God for Israel seems to us to be the only appropriate

response in light of all that God had done for them in delivering them from slavery, it was still a difficult concept for the people to grasp. It was simply unlike anything they had ever considered. It demanded a completely different way of ordering and understanding life and the forces that controlled life. In fact, the people had always considered that a number of forces controlled life; this new way of thinking meant that only one force—Yahweh—controlled life.

► Point out that except for Christianity, Judaism and Islam, most of the world's religions today are polytheistic. Hinduism, Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism, as well as tribal religions in Africa and the Americas, are characterized by polytheism.

Then ask:

• *How do you think polytheism affects people's ideas about what is right and wrong?*

► Read aloud Exodus 20:3. Briefly summarize the inherent problems with this text related to translation and punctuation, as explained in the Students Guide.

Note that the text assumes that there are alternatives to God and suggests that the first issue people of faith must confront is how they will place these alternatives in relation to God. Lead adults to discuss this idea by asking such questions as:

• *Are there alternatives to God? If so, what are they?*

• *Are our alternatives to God the same as those for the people of Israel?*

- *Monotheistic faith was a strange and difficult idea for the Israelites. Is it difficult for people today? Why or why not?*

► Compare and contrast the English understanding of this commandment with the Hebrew understanding. Note that our understanding of this command is usually quite simple: No other thing or idea should be afforded more importance than God. Then ask:

- *How did the Israelites' understanding of this commandment differ from ours?*

Explain that to the Israelites who first heard this command, the meaning was much fuller and deeper, and it was attached to the concepts of honor and shame. The people had endured much humiliation and shame as a result of their captivity in Egypt. God had been faithful to them and had delivered them from that awful circumstance. Israel owed that same faithfulness and highest honor to God. For them to bring other gods into the presence of Yahweh would create shame and would cause rifts in their newly-formed relationship with Yahweh.

Then ask:

- *What do we bring into God's presence that suggests a divided loyalty on our part and thus brings shame to God?*
- *What do we try to introduce alongside our relationships with God that appears to be an alternative to God?*

► Note the insights from the Students Guide that suggest we are usually less than sympathetic with the ancient He-

brew people and their understanding of God and God's ways. Remind adults that God's actions on their behalf were not always immediately clear. Just as it was difficult for them to perceive and understand God, it is also sometimes difficult for us.

Suggest that religious "signs" appear in all sectors of our society: education, health care, business, politics. Yet not all of these signs point exclusively to God, nor do they honor God. In fact, they sometimes bring shame to God because they become more important than God and demand loyalty from us ahead of that which we give to God alone.

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Read aloud this comment from the Students Guide: "I have no idea what my idols are. I am afraid this is probably because they look like the real God to me." Then ask:

- *How closely can you relate to this confessional statement? Is it true for you as well?*
- *What does this commandment say about how we orient our lives toward God?*
- *How effective are laws in keeping us from "having other gods" before God?*

► Summarize the concluding ideas in the column "The Quest for a Christian America," by Jim Evans ([www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=2134](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2134)). In it, Evans notes how many Christians believe that the best way to infuse a nation with Christianity is "by means of a political takeover of the institutions of government. Christianity will be enacted not by a choice of the heart, but by the force of law."

Evans points out how other such efforts have historically failed. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for example, John Calvin tried to make Christianity the civil government in Geneva, Switzerland. “What he and his followers discovered is that while it is possible to control by force what people do and say, it is not possible to force belief. The 20<sup>th</sup>-century secular religion of Marxism found out the same thing.

Close by relating these concluding comments from Evans’ column:

“Investing our hope in the symbols and practices of our faith is a good thing. Healing and transformation can and do follow their proper use. But they cannot be forced into service. We cannot expect the power of God to work simply because we pass a law, build a monument or say a prayer. It’s not that simple. The effort to enact faith by means of law is an example of what the New Testament describes as ‘holding to the outward form of godliness, but denying its power.’ The power of our faith to heal and transform only happens when people are able to embrace it freely, without coercion. It does not work any other way.”

## No Idols Leaders Guide

### **Exodus 20:4-6**

*<sup>4</sup>You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquities of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

**Theme: God demands complete distinction from any other.**

### **Before You Teach**

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

► The following online articles can enhance your preparation and provide additional insights to stimulate class discussion:

“You Shall Not Worship Me This Way”  
([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/114/24.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/114/24.0.html));

“Image Is Everything” ([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/114/53.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/114/53.0.html)).

### **As You Teach**

## Introduce the Lesson

► Guide adults to begin thinking about the second commandment by relating this incident:

When the 5,280-pound Ten Commandments monument was finally removed from public view at the Alabama Judicial Building in August 2003, a protester on the scene yelled, “Get your hands off our God!”

Although his outburst differed from the other protestors who remained calm but committed to their position, it did raise a disturbing possibility. Ask:

*•In their attempts to uphold the importance of the Ten Commandments, did some people actually cross a line and break one of them?*

*•When this man screamed, “Get your hands off our God,” was he guilty of idolatry? Have some public displays of the Ten Commandments become idols?*

► Acknowledge that the second commandment is one of the most unclear of the ten for many people today. Some people ignore it because they relegate idols and graven images to the era in which this commandment was originally given. Others ignore it and consequently break it because they do not understand it.

Suggest that we can best understand this commandment in relation to the commandments which immediately precede and follow it. Like the first, “You shall have no other gods before me” (v 3), this one recognizes the widely accepted worship of other gods common during that time.

Remind the class that the Israelites were not only learning to live physically in a new place; they were also learning to live spiritually in a new way. They were God’s chosen people, related to God through the covenant. As part of that covenant, God demanded to be the one and only God they acknowledged, worshipped and served. This was a new and strange concept to them, and one with which they struggled for years. Always nearby were images of the gods of their neighbors. The temptation not only to worship these gods but also to create a physical representation of their God was great.

► Acknowledge that difficulty in understanding and applying this commandment has led some people throughout history to an extreme reaction known as iconoclasm, or the destruction of sacred religious images. Note that very early in the history of Christianity, people began rendering representations of sacred beings and events. Along with this came growing concern that these images would be worshipped in addition to or instead of God.

Call attention to instances of iconoclasm such as those during the Reformation, when reformers destroyed altars, statues, crucifixes, organs and just about anything else they believed might detract from sole focus on God.

As columnist Elesha Coffman noted, “Anyone who has accidentally broken a keepsake or argued with a spouse over the placement of a picture (wall or dumpster?) knows how strong the bond between a person and an image can be. From this, and from history, it becomes obvious that neither the creation nor the destruction of images will ever stop. Wherever powerful emotions collide, something’s likely to get broken” (“Image Is Everything,” [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/114/53.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/114/53.0.html)).

Point out that while this kind of extreme reaction to visual religious images has softened over the years, many are still suspicious of them and question their role in worship.

► Ask:

• *How do you feel about visual images in the worship of God? Do you think they enhance worship, or distract people from it?*

• *What about other physical components of our worship, such as music? Is there a danger that these can become idols?*

## Explore the Bible

► Begin a closer examination of the second commandment by reading aloud Exodus 20:4-6. Note the King James Version's use of "graven image" instead of "idol" for the Hebrew word *pesel*, which means a carved or shaped image made for use in the worship of deity.

Remind adults again of the connection of this commandment to the first and their relationship to the worship of God. Then ask:

• *What exactly was God prohibiting, and why?*

Note the very human tendency of people throughout history to try to explain or define God in human terms. God's prohibition reminds us that God cannot be limited to a visible, controlled image or place. Nothing can serve to represent the God who created all things. Nothing our human hands can make can adequately express the divine nature. God can demand this exclusivity and distinction because God is God and there is no other like God.

► Ask adults to identify the three prohibitions and the consequences for honoring and ignoring the prohibitions in this commandment. Then ask:

• *What reason does God give for not bowing down or worshipping idols?*

• *How do you interpret God's self-description as "a jealous God"?*

Point out that when the term *jealousy* is applied to Yahweh in Hebrew scripture, it is always used in contexts in which the people's loyalty to Yahweh is in question.

► Suggest that we, as finite human beings, sometimes tend to shape God into images with which we are comfortable and which we can manage. We long to express our experiences with the holy in ways that engage our senses; they are, after all, how we experience much of life.

Lead adults to discuss how we can adequately and faithfully worship an infinite and boundless God without resorting to idolatry by asking such questions as:

• *In what ways do we create boundaries around God as we worship?*

• *Can our attempts at worship sometimes restrict or constrain God? If so, how?*

• *Can our places of worship become idols?*

• *Can elements of our worship become idols? In what ways?*

• *Are we sometimes guilty of idolatry in terms of the language we use in talking about God? How?*

- *Do visual and oral images for God have a place in our worship? How do we determine which are pure?*

- *What should be the aim or goal of our worship?*

► Note the consequences of disobedience to this commandment and its long-term effects; then ask:

- *What do these consequences reveal about the nature of God?*

- *What do they say about families and communities of faith?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Lead adults to consider how we can give God the unique distinction God demands by relating some of the following ideas from *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* by Harold M. Best.

“Idolatry,” Best says, “is the difference between walking in the light and creating our own light to walk in” ([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/114/24.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/114/24.0.html)). We can do this in a number of ways, including our assumptions about art, music, beauty and quality.

While we should seek to do all things as beautifully as possible and not neglect beauty and quality, Best says, “for us to assume that our versions of beauty...afford quicker access to God is to commit a fatal error.”

Best reminds us that “nothing is an idol until we make it into one, [and...We can easily make an idol out of the results we want our art to produce....[A]nyone using any kind of art can

compromise the gospel by choosing art primarily for the results it produces, rather than to glorify God.”

Worship style can also become idolatrous, Best says, and reminds us that God cannot be confined to one language, style or form. “The glorious thing about God’s grace,” he says, is that God can “take an idol and, without destroying it, turn it into nothing in order that it can be changed into merely something to be offered back to him through Christ.”

► Close by challenging adults with this thought from Best’s book:

“There is a fine but absolutely clarified line between authentic and idolatrous worship. The line is not drawn by the things that we use but by what our mind and heart choose to make of them. Our prayer should always be ‘Search me, not the artifact.’”

# Misusing God's Name

## Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:7

*<sup>7</sup>You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.*

**Theme: Invoking the name of God for any purpose outside the nature and character of God is wrong.**

### Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

► Begin by asking adults to respond frankly to these questions:

- *How many times each day do you hear other people use God's name? Within what contexts do these uses occur (on the job, at school, in other public arenas)?*
- *As you watch television; listen to the radio; attend, watch or participate in sporting events and watch movies, how do you most often observe that God's name is used?*

- *What effect does hearing God's name used like this have on you? What effect do you think it has on your children, grandchildren or others over whom you have influence?*

- *How many times each day do you speak God's name? Within what contexts do you do so?*

► Acknowledge that the use of profanity, including misuse of God's name, is commonplace. What was once prohibited on television is now standard fare. What at one time would make most people blush or wince now seems to be acceptable to many. Even very young children regularly parrot phrases they hear others say that invoke God's name with careless disregard for who God is. To many, it seems *God* is just another word, and unfortunately for some, *God* is one of any number of words in an arsenal of profanity.

► Read aloud Exodus 20:7; then ask:

- *What do most people think this commandment prohibits?*

Note that the common interpretation of this commandment is that it is a prohibition against the use of profanity. While this is true, it is an incomplete understanding. In reality, God prohibits the use of God's name for any purpose outside the divine will. When we use God's name flippantly or casually; when we attach God's name to our selfish ambitions; when we speak of God apart from sincere expressions of faith; when we couch gossip in the form of prayer requests; we break this commandment.

Suggest that in order for us to understand what is involved both in misuse and proper use of God's name, we need to

understand more about the uniqueness of Israel's faith, and ours.

## Explore the Bible

► Remind adults that names in the ancient world were far more than a form of identification. Names carried with them something of the nature and character of the person. This was true not only for people but also for the many deities that various peoples and cultures recognized.

So, when a person spoke the name of a particular god, it was with the belief that this god would display its powers. With a plethora of gods for all sorts of occasions, the people believed that all they had to do to get a particular god to “deliver” was to invoke that god's name. If they needed a victory in a battle, gods existed for that purpose, they believed. If they needed a good harvest, they called on other gods with other names. The practice was full of superstition.

With this background in mind, ask:

- *How was Israel's God different?*
- *Why was it important to God that God's name not be confused with any of the other deities?*

► Describe the ancient practice of “invoking” as explained in the Students Guide. Then ask:

- *Why was it so important to God that the people not use God's name like they did the names of the other gods?*
- *What does this prohibition teach us about the divine will? about God's character and nature?*

- *What is really at the heart of this prohibition?*
- *How are we to understand this prohibition today?*
- *In what ways do people today struggle with this commandment?*

► Read aloud Exodus 20:7 again, noting particularly the warning in the latter half of the verse. Then ask:

- *What are the results for those who “make wrongful use” of God's name?*
- *In light of the broader understanding of the prohibitions of this commandment, who is not guilty of breaking it? What should we do when we know we have wrongfully used God's name?*

► Note that this commandment, like most of the others, is stated negatively. Encourage adults to list some positive re-statements of this commandment in light of their understanding of its broader interpretation. Suggest that they state these as though God might state them and indicate how God expects us to invoke the name of the Almighty. Write their suggestions on a chart or board. Prompt their thinking with suggestions such as these:

- *When you speak of me, speak thoughtfully and reverently.*
- *Call upon me regularly, humbly and with faith. I am faithful.*
- *Talk to others about me and tell them about my love and faithfulness.*

- *Ask only things of me that are consistent with my nature and character.*

- *Ask me to do my will.*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Ask:

- *How does a more complete understanding of this commandment affect how we pray for ourselves? our children? other family members? our church? our nation? our world?*

- *Is God obligated to bless us or anything for which we pray simply because we attach God's name to it?*

- *What responsibility do we have when we attach God's name to something and ask God to bless it?*

► Remind them of the case before the Supreme Court (under consideration at this writing) involving Michael Newdow and the Elk Grove (California) Unified School District. Newdow, an atheist, sued the school district because he didn't want his daughter to say the words "under God" in the pledge of allegiance.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Newdow's favor, saying that the words violated the constitutional mandate for separation of religion and government. The court then ordered that schools in California and eight other western states stop using the words "under God" in the pledge. This decision resulted in a storm of nationwide protests and pages of legislation designed to overturn or otherwise get around the decision.

The Supreme Court can either uphold the lower court's findings or rule against their decision. Polls indicate that the majority of Americans favor leaving the words *under God* in the pledge of allegiance. If the Supreme Court overturns the lower court's ruling, most Americans, it seems, will be pleased. To do so, however, the court will essentially have to decide that the word *under God* are so void of meaning that no harm is done by leaving them. Ask:

- *What is your reaction to this conclusion? When people decide that God's name is irrelevant, isn't that a form of taking God's name in vain?*

► Challenge adults to consider how we can influence the ways we and others use God's name and show the reverence for God's name that God demands.

## Remember the Sabbath Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:8-11

<sup>8</sup>Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup>But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

**Theme: God commands that we achieve proper balance between work and rest.**

### Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ Consider carefully how you will guide discussion related to this commandment, and plan to allow more time than usual for practical application as adults struggle with how they can realistically observe it in a culture that praises and even demands 24/7 productivity.
- ▶ The following online articles can enhance your preparation and provide additional insights to stimulate class discussion:

“Receiving the Day the Lord Has Made, Part 1”  
([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/111/41.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/111/41.0.html));

“Receiving the Day the Lord Has Made, Part 2”  
([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/111/42.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/111/42.0.html));

“Rediscovering the Sabbath”  
([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/7ta/7ta38a.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/7ta/7ta38a.html));

“In Today’s Culture, What Does It Mean to Keep the Sabbath Holy?,” by Lauren F. Winner  
([www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2004/001/14.16.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2004/001/14.16.html));

“Take Back Your Sabbath”  
([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/011/31.42.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/011/31.42.html)).

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

▶ Begin by relating the following example from author and Harvard Divinity professor Stephanie Paulsell (*Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*):

A minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Paulsell and her husband chose to send their daughter to a Jewish preschool. Each Friday, the children there help bake challah and light candles, sing Hebrew prayers and greet their teachers and each other with the phrase, “*Shabbat shalom!*”

Paulsell was keenly aware of the coming of Sabbath during this time because on Fridays, the preschool dismisses early and she had to remember to pick up her daughter. It was not always convenient for her, she admitted. But that very fact made her aware “that my daughter’s teachers, along with others across our city and country and world, need time to make their final preparations to welcome the sabbath: to bathe their children and themselves, to dress in

clean and festive clothes, to help each other prepare a clean house and a delicious meal so that, when the sun goes down, they will be ready to cease from working, to light the candles and say the prayers, to sit down together and begin to relax into the rest to which God invites them, week after busy week.”

Jewish friends have confessed to Paulsell that their preparations do not always go as planned: house and children are not always as tidy as they might wish, and sometimes their concerns about work fail to disappear simply because the sun goes down and Sabbath begins. “But even so,” she says, “the sabbath beckons them to enter, and by the time three stars appear in the sky on Saturday night (the traditional way of marking the end of the Sabbath), they have truly rested. . . . Wherever one is on Friday evening, the Sabbath opens its great doors and invites one into God’s own rest.”

We can learn much from our Jewish friends about achieving the proper balance between work and rest, Paulsell asserts, whose centuries of sabbath-keeping teach us “that the sabbath is a time to rest from making, buying, and selling, from profits and losses and the worry they inspire.”

► Ask:

- *How do you recall spending Sabbath as a child? Were Sundays any different for your family than other days? If so, how?*
- *How do your Sabbaths today compare to those of observant Jews? Are Sundays different in your household than other days? How?*
- *Are there things you consciously choose to do and to avoid on Sundays? Why, or why not?*

- *Do you think you keep the fourth commandment as God intends? Why or why not?*

- *What does our culture’s constant need to work and otherwise be “productive” say about the faith it places in God’s provisions?*

- *What does a person’s spiritual discipline of regular rest from work say about his or her trust in God’s sufficiency?*

- *Is there a difference between marking the Sabbath by attending church and “remembering” it and keeping it holy? If so, what?*

## Explore the Bible

► Remind adults that at Creation, God established a pattern of work followed by rest. When God had created everything, God rested, not because God was tired, but because God had ceased to create.

Later, prior to the time God gave the Ten Commandments, the Israelites were instructed to follow God’s example of resting on the Sabbath. They were instructed to gather twice the amount of manna on the sixth day as they did on other days so they could cease from gathering on the Sabbath yet still eat (Ex 16:23-29).

Note that by the time God gave this fourth commandment, the people were instructed to “remember” it, not to institute it, indicating that they had already woven the practice into the rhythm of their lives.

Later, God reiterated the importance of the Sabbath commandment and added that a violation of it was punishable

by death (Ex 31:13-17; 35:2-3). Passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah record the Lord's promise of blessings for those who honor the Sabbath (Is 56:2; 58:13; Jer 17:21-27). Clearly, the Sabbath was important to God, and God expects it also to be important to the people of God.

► Ask volunteers to read aloud the two versions of this commandment; one from Exodus 20:8-11; the other from Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Then lead adults to discuss the similarities and differences by asking such questions as:

- *What behavior does each of the commandments require?*
- *What reason does God give for this behavior in the Exodus account?*
- *What reason does God give for this behavior in the Deuteronomy account?*
- *What does each reason say about God's relationship to humanity?*

► Note that the commandment as recorded in Exodus recalls the Creation story. God commanded the people to rest on one day because God did. The commandment to "observe" the Sabbath in Deuteronomy is attached to the people's experiences as slaves. By ceasing from work every seventh day, the people would recall how God delivered them from slavery, when they couldn't take a day off. They would also insure that everyone over whom they had influence, even their animals, had an opportunity to rest on the Sabbath.

► Note that many Christians have come to equate corporate worship with observing the Sabbath, although Hebrew scripture did not do so. While Jesus often disagreed with

religious legalists over what kinds of activities represented acceptable Sabbath behavior, he observed the Sabbath and declared that he had the authority to interpret it in its fullness. Early Christians observed the Sabbath, later incorporating Sunday worship as a way to commemorate Christ's resurrection. As Christianity grew to resemble Judaism less, Sunday became the one day of week reserved both for worship and rest.

► Recall the story from the Students Guide of the church of very poor parishioners who struggled with how they could keep this commandment because they were unable to find work. Stress that while many people struggle with keeping Sabbath because the economic system demands too much from them, others struggle with keeping it because they cannot find sufficient work.

► Ask:

- *What challenge does this reality present to a community of faith such as ours? What is our responsibility to see that all God's people have the opportunity to participate fully in keeping Sabbath?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Lead adults to consider ways they can "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy," by summarizing some observations and suggestions from author and educator Dorothy Bass (see suggested online articles above).

As is true for most of us, Bass reached a point where she realized that her approach to the fourth commandment was different from her observance of the others. Though she was in the habit of going to church on Sundays, she concluded that she was not really keeping it holy.

Work and its demands, paired with feelings of indispensability, seemed to have pushed the meaning of Sabbath from her mind. Bass has since thoroughly researched and explored the ancient practice of Sabbath-keeping and has written extensively about it.

“When we keep a Sabbath holy, we are practicing, for a day, the freedom that God intends for all people. We are practicing life outside the frantic pace set by financial markets and round-the-clock shopping and entertainment venues. We are practicing independence from the forces of injustice. We are trying on a new way of life as we begin to allow our weeks to be changed in response to God’s promises. We are practicing—pun intended. Like a novice learning to play a musical instrument, we may be off-key at times. It may be years before we are in harmony, and we will never get it perfect. But that need not stop us” ([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/11/41.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/11/41.0.html)).

With that thought in mind, Bass offers some practical suggestions to help Christians reclaim God’s gift of Sabbath, including rest from commerce and rest from worry. Activities like paying bills, preparing tax returns and making to-do lists for the coming week can cause stress and worry. One point of the Sabbath, she stresses, is to “cause shifts in weekday priorities.”

Another suggestion Bass offers for reclaiming Sabbath is to spend the time in a way that is good for creation. For example, she enjoys gardening. For some people, that would be “work,” but for her, it is a form of meditation.

Cessation from work, the most obvious form of Sabbath-keeping, may also be the most difficult to keep because, as Bass notes, “work comes in many varieties and can take on many guises.”

Perhaps the Sabbath habit most familiar to us is worship. “Sunday worship is a way of taking part in the activity by which God is shaping a new creation,” Bass writes. She cautions us against allowing worship to become just another measured appointment during which we watch our clocks and doodle on the worship bulletin and recalls that many observant Jews, realizing how the clock can control us, do not wear watches on Shabbat.

► Close by challenging adults with the following from Dorothy Bass: “This gift of time (the Sabbath) is not meant to be nibbled at in bits and pieces as our convenience allows. It is a gift that has ancient roots, and it is a gift best received in community. Opening it, we find not only time but also the stories, the meals, the gatherings, and the songs that prepare us to cherish creation, to resist slavery in all its forms, and to proclaim new life all week long.”

# Honoring Parents Leaders Guide

## **Exodus 20:12**

*Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

**Theme: Showing honor to parents connects us to those who have lived before us and who gave us life.**

## **Before You Teach**

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ Recognize that talking about relationships between parents and adult children may be difficult and even painful for some in your group. You will likely not be aware of the history and current status of many of these relationships; exercise care in how you phrase questions that require personal response and application. Encourage honesty, but respect privacy.

## **As You Teach**

### **Introduce the Lesson**

- ▶ Engage adults in dialogue about the ways movies and television portray relationships between adult parents and children. Ask them to cite specific characters and examples of both positive and negative relationships. Then ask:

- *Do movies and television reflect our culture accurately in terms of how they portray relationships between adult children and their parents?*
- *How do your experiences as an adult with your parents compare with those portrayed in movies and on television?*
- *What is the most realistic portrayal of adult parent/child relationship you have seen in a movie or television show? Why?*

▶ Recall for adults the 1989 movie “Dad,” starring Jack Lemon, Ted Danson and Olympia Dukakis. Danson’s character, a busy executive, learns that his father is very ill and rushes home to be with him. He ends up becoming his father’s primary caregiver, and in the process, becomes closer to him than he has ever been. In one very poignant scene, Lemon’s character, the father, is in a hospital bed and dying. He tells his son that he regrets not having hugged him more when he was a child. The scene ends with the son getting onto the hospital bed next his father and hugging him.

Also recall a moving scene from an even earlier movie, “The Color Purple” (1985). The character Shug Avery is a traveling blues singer who has been estranged from her pastor father for years. In a visit to her hometown, she decides she wants to sing, so she opens the local juke joint and begins singing, soon gathering a crowd. The scene shifts to her father’s church, where at the same moment, he is preaching. Sounds of Shug’s singing come in through the open windows of the church. Someone in the church’s congregation encourages the choir to sing “God Might Be Trying to Tell You Something.” The choir’s singing grows louder and louder. Shug hears them and begins singing

along. She leads everyone from the juke joint to her father's church, where she approaches her father, embraces him and says, "See, daddy, even sinners have soul."

► Acknowledge that as these and other movies suggest, relationships between parents and adult children are sometimes estranged and often difficult but usually salvageable. Even Christian adults struggle with relating to their parents as they age and the nature of the parent/child relationship must change.

Lead adults to make a list of issues they face as they deal or have dealt with aging parents. Write their suggestions on a chart or board. Include such issues as:

- Finances
- Legal issues and essential documents (wills, power of attorney, estate, etc.)
- Health care and medication
- Diet, nutrition and exercise
- Hospitalizations, surgeries, extended and/or chronic illnesses
- Where to live: moving in with children, live-in companions, home health care, hospice care, nursing homes, assisted living facilities
- Home safety
- Driving
- Quality of life
- Sharing care-giving responsibilities with siblings
- Only children and care-giving
- The "sandwich generation": adults who simultaneously care for parents and children
- Balancing career responsibilities with care-giving

As you dialogue, note as appropriate the following facts related to the health and life expectancy of older Americans (see [www.agingstats.gov](http://www.agingstats.gov)):

- In 1900, life expectancy was 49 years. Today, it exceeds 79 years for women and 74 years for men.

- People who live to the age of 65 can expect to live an average of nearly 18 more years. Women who live to age 85 survive an average of 7 years more; men who reach 85 live an average of 6 more years.

- The leading causes of death for people 65 or older are heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, pneumonia and influenza and diabetes.

- Chronic diseases—long-term illnesses that are rarely cured—become a significant health and financial burden to those who have them, as well as to their families. Arthritis, diabetes and heart disease negatively affect quality of life.

- Memory impairment is a primary factor for those entering a nursing home.

- Women ages 65 to 84 are more likely than men to have severe depressive symptoms. Among those 85 and older, the prevalence of these symptoms is about the same among men and women.

► Note that though the challenges are great and the circumstances often difficult, scripture is clear that we have a responsibility to honor our parents. Drawing from the Students Guide, elaborate on the idea that each of the Ten Commandments identifies a potential moral problem within our most important relationships: with God and with each other. Suggest that in trying to name the top ten potential moral problems of humanity, few of us would likely include "honoring parents" on the list. Yet this potential problem is

the first of the Ten Commandments that deals with God's requirements for our relationships within the human community. God requires that we treat people a certain way, beginning with the people who gave us life.

### Explore the Bible

► Read aloud Exodus 20:12 and lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as:

- *When do you first remember becoming aware of this commandment?*
- *What were you first taught that this commandment means?*
- *What does honor actually mean?*

► Point out that God originally gave this commandment to adult children of mothers and fathers. The idea of honor is much more than obedience. It carries with it elements of esteem, respect and affection, as well as the quality of one who is highly prized and valued. Then ask:

- *Can we honor our parents while disagreeing with them? How?*
- *How can we honor our parents when our choices do not represent their desires for us?*
- *How are adult children whose parents have been physically, verbally and/or emotionally abusive to understand and keep this commandment?*

► Call attention to the second part of the commandment: "so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you." Then ask:

• *How do you personally interpret or understand that promise? What did it mean for the people who heard it first? What does it mean for us today?*

• *How does keeping God's law related to honoring parents make our lives better? Should that result be the motivation for our doing so? Why or why not?*

Encourage adults to view the Ten Commandments as rules God designed to help us prevent problems resulting from poor moral choices. Keeping God's laws sets us on a path where we can avoid many of those problems and helps us align our lives with God's will and plan for our lives. Both scripture and history remind us that good things happen when we do this; problems arise when we don't.

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud one of the Gospel accounts in which Jesus answered the man's question about which is the greatest commandment (Matt 19:19; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20). Note that Jesus reinforced the fact that honoring parents is an ethical equivalent to abstaining from murder, adultery, stealing and bearing false witness.

Then ask someone to read aloud John 19:26-27 and note Jesus' care and concern for Mary.

### Apply Biblical Truth

► Call attention to the list of issues the class developed earlier related to aging parents. Beginning with the first item on the list, ask adults to suggest ways we can show honor to parents as we deal with that issue. For example, in talking to parents about their finances, suggest things such as:

- Thank parents for the sacrifices they have made.
- Commend them as appropriate for the careful ways they have earned and invested money throughout the years.
- Assure them that you want to participate with them in making financial decisions, not rob them of the opportunity to make those decisions for themselves.
- To the fullest extent possible, respect their wishes when it comes to their money, house and other possessions.
- Caution them about giving out personal financial information to anyone over the phone; advise them never to give money to someone they do not know, even if they promise something in return.

Allow adults to select various other items on the list, according to their needs, and suggest ways to show honor to parents in dealing with that issue. Continue down the list as time permits.

► Close by referring to the story which concludes the lesson in the Students Guide, or relate a story from your own life or that of someone you know. Challenge adults to show honor to parents in practical, caring and substantive ways.

## You Shall Not Murder Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:13

*You shall not murder.*

**Theme: Because human life belongs to God, we must respect it and work to enhance and protect it.**

### Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

► Prior to teaching this lesson, for several days collect local newspapers as well as those from areas including several major cities. Also collect current newsmagazines and print copies of pertinent articles and editorials from Web sites. Become familiar with the contents of the resources you gather. Plan to use these to generate discussion about murder.

► Structure your comments to allow adequate time for adults to discuss the scope and intent of this commandment. While your personal preparation time for understanding this commandment and guiding discussion about it may be no different from other Bible studies you lead, you may actually say less during this Bible study than you normally do. Provide adults a safe environment to raise issues, voice concerns, ask questions and hear from others who may agree or disagree with them.

► Note the extensive list of questions suggested to prompt discussion. Use these and/or develop your own as you plan ways to lead your class in dialogue.

► Recognize that adults in your group may have differing opinions as to the application of this commandment today. Encourage healthy, honest dialogue that respects the rights of each person to come to his or her own understandings about the divine plan for human life. Remember that effective Christian education helps people learn to think for themselves instead of telling them what to think.

► The following Web site includes some excellent examples of individuals who are actively working to pursue peace in a world plagued by violence:

[www.thirdway.com/peace/stories.asp?offset=10](http://www.thirdway.com/peace/stories.asp?offset=10).

You may want to refer to it as you prepare for and lead this Bible study.

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

► Assign each person one of the following categories: movies, books, music, editorials, local, national, international, teenagers, families. Adjust the assignments as necessary to fit the scope of resources you have collected, and add categories as you see fit.

Distribute sections of the newspapers, magazines, editorials and other columns among adults. Ask each person, depending upon his or her assigned category, to find examples of murder in that category. For instance, adults who are assigned “movies” should look for examples of

current movies that include murder. Those who are assigned “teenagers” should look for reports of teenagers who commit murder.

► After several minutes, ask volunteers representing each of the assigned categories to cite examples they found. Lead adults to draw conclusions about the pervasive attitude of disregard for human life based on these examples.

Point out the statistic from the Students Guide indicating that by the time the average child reaches age 18, he or she will have witnessed depictions of more than 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 murders. Suggest that the use of violent murders as entertainment in television, movies, video games and music not only sends a strong message; it also reflects a horrifying truth about our culture.

## Explore the Bible

► Note the extreme brevity of the fifth commandment: four words in English; only two in Hebrew. Then ask:

- *Does the lack of additional commentary with this commandment imply that it is easy to keep?*
- *Is there a difference between “do not murder” and “do not kill”? If so, what?*
- *How do you interpret this commandment as it relates to war, capital punishment, self-defense, unintentional killing and suicide?*

► Call attention to the many instances from Hebrew scripture that justify the taking of human life, as listed in the Students Guide. Then ask:

- *At the bare minimum, what does this commandment prohibit?*
- *Does this commandment mean something different for Jews and Christians than it does for others?*
- *Did God intend for this commandment to be part of a universal moral code?*
- *What is the scope and intent of this commandment in terms of God's redemptive purposes for and relationship with creation?*
- *Is taking a human life ever justifiable? If so, is this a responsibility of an individual or a community?*
- *Whose prerogative is it to take a human life?*
- *How is this commandment related to and intertwined with the other commandments related to adultery, stealing, lying, coveting and honoring parents? Do these commandments illumine our understanding of this commandment? Does this commandment illumine our understanding of the other commandments?*

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:21-22. Then ask:

- *How do Jesus' teachings change or further enlighten our understanding and application of the fifth commandment?*
- *What do Jesus' teachings reveal about the connections between attitudes and actions?*

- *How do we follow Jesus' teachings while living in a violent world?*

Acknowledge that it is easy for most people to uphold this commandment in terms of committing premeditated murder. Ask:

- *How far are you willing to extend the application of this commandment in terms of harmful thoughts, attitudes and words?*
- *In what ways are we guilty of breaking this commandment by the things we say and do apart from physical violence?*
- *How do we contribute to others' harm by our indifference?*
- *How does our indifference diminish the lives of others?*
- *If we are not actively working to enhance and protect life for others, are we in effect contributing to their destruction?*
- *What does it mean to preserve and protect life?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Repeat the fifth commandment: You shall not murder. Then ask adults to formulate a series of positive re-statements of this commandment in light of Jesus' teachings and your discussions. Encourage them to suggest practical ways we can respect human life and work to enhance and protect it. Prod their thinking by offering a few suggestions of your own.

If they have difficulty getting started, suggest that they think in terms of conditions and issues that dehumanize and marginalize people, such as poverty, health care, housing, nutrition, unemployment, etc.

► Close by challenging adults to become avenues through which the lives of others are enriched and enhanced, rather than cheapened and destroyed. Cite the story of Hildah Birungi as an example. Birungi works for Mennonite Central Committee in Uganda as a peace networker and mediator and trains others in peer mediation.

“I come from a family that has been adversely affected by war,” she writes. “We have lived our lives in a quagmire of pain, fear and trauma. My father was abducted during Idi Amin’s regime in the 1970s. We have never heard from him or even buried him. My family had high hopes for him since he was educated. I grew up with a need to find peace not only for myself but also for my family. I opted to do an International Relations and Diplomacy course at Makerere University in Kampala. That was the only course with subjects closely linked with peacebuilding” ([www.thirdway.com/peace/story.asp?S\\_ID=67](http://www.thirdway.com/peace/story.asp?S_ID=67)).

Birungi participated in the Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 2000, where she was able to enhance the practical application of skills she acquired during her university studies.

“My most important dream,” she says, “is to remain a genuine peacemaker, working for my people and my country. ... It is people’s inhumanity to people that creates an unjust world. My vision in life is to make others aware that we are all human beings of one maker and judge. We should therefore strive to ensure the safety and well being of all others.”

## You Shall Not Commit Adultery Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:14

*You shall not commit adultery.*

**Theme: Fidelity in marriage engenders relationships of mutuality and respect that are life-giving and nurturing.**

### Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

► From your local newspaper, cut out the advertisements and listings for movies currently playing in your area. If your newspaper has a weekly entertainment section that includes movie, book and music reviews, save that and plan to use it during your Bible study time as well.

Also save the weekly television guide provided in your local newspaper, or obtain a recent copy of *TV Guide*.

If possible, visit a large bookstore in your area and obtain a free promotional magazine listing available books. Before your Bible study group meets, review the book titles and summaries and circle or highlight all that include themes of sexual activity outside the marriage relationship.

► The following online articles can enhance your preparation and provide additional insights to stimulate class discussion:

“The Sermon On The Mount: American Style”  
([www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=3055](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3055));

“Dropping Our Stones” ([www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=2949](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2949));

“Laws of Attraction” ([www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=4119](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4119));

“Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”  
([www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=3981](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3981)).

## As You Teach

### Introduce the Lesson

► Begin by calling attention to the grave publishing error in what became known as “The Wicked Bible,” as described in the Students Guide. Note the results of that error for the publishers.

Suggest that while many people in our culture would also negatively react if the word *not* were left out of the seventh commandment, just as many live as they no longer believe it is relevant or as important as the other commandments.

► Review the list of current movie titles from the newspaper advertisements you brought. Ask adults who are familiar with them to identify story lines from these movies that portray sexual activity outside the marriage relationship.

Next, review the television shows offered by major networks during prime time Monday through Friday, using the printed television viewing guide. As you name a specific show, ask adults to indicate whether it includes or has included in-

stances of sexual activity outside marriage, with what frequency and under what circumstances.

As time permits, review the list of books you identified that also include such themes. Do the same for music.

Then ask:

- *With the pervasive nature of adultery and other sexual acts outside the marriage relationship on television and in movies, books and music, why do you think churches as a whole are hesitant to discuss sexual ethics?*
- *What do you think a healthy discussion of sexual ethics in a church setting should include?*

### Explore the Bible

► Read aloud the seventh commandment, Exodus 20:14, and note its brevity and lack of corresponding instruction.

Then ask:

- *How did the Israelites understand this commandment? What did God mean when God told them they were not to commit adultery?*
- *Does the straightforward and succinct nature of this commandment lend itself to a very narrow definition by people today? How do you think people in our culture define adultery?*
- *Is the church’s definition of adultery any different from our culture’s definition? How should the church define adultery?*

► Point out that the sin of adultery in ancient Israel was committed by the man against the husband of the woman involved. Because women were viewed primarily as property, a man who committed adultery with another man's wife had unlawfully violated his property rights.

Call attention to the efforts of some who argue for a "return" to the Ten Commandments and the social, moral and spiritual values they promote. Then ask:

- *Are these individuals, in their very public demonstrations and displays, also arguing for the commandments' original meaning and thus relegating women to property status?*

Also note that sexual affairs involving unmarried women were not considered adultery in ancient Israel. Then ask:

- *Do you think that most people in our culture consider "casual sex" between unmarried persons to be "adultery"? Why or why not?*
- *How do you personally define adultery? Is it only between people who are married to other people? between a person who is married and one who is not? between two unmarried people?*

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:27-28. Then ask them to recall Jesus' response to the woman who was brought to him after having been caught in the act of adultery. Ask:

- *What did Jesus say to the accused woman?*
- *What did he say to her accusers?*

- *Where was the man involved with the accused woman?*

Next, lead adults to formulate what they consider to be Jesus' definition of adultery. Write their statements on a chart or board.

► Read aloud the following statement from the Students Guide and ask adults to respond to it, indicating whether they agree or disagree: "Any relationship that replaces the marital one as the primary place where value, affection and sharing take place is an adultery."

Note the origin of the English word *adultery*, from the same root as a word that means "to corrupt by adding something from the outside." Suggest that while this is not the same as the Hebrew meaning of the term, it clearly corresponds to Jesus' definition.

► Lead adults to talk frankly and openly about the consequences of adultery. Remind them that though the Ten Commandments do not include any prescribed punishment, later Hebrew scripture does. Leviticus 20:10 states that both the man and the woman involved in adultery should be put to death.

Suggest that while we shudder at such punishment and express horror and outrage at incidents in conservative Muslim states where adulterous women are sentenced to death under Sharia law, we know that adultery carries with it serious consequences. Then ask:

- *Does the fact that we have no punishment or prospect for criminal litigation for adultery suggest that our culture no longer views it as a danger to the social order?*

- *Why do you think adultery is the only sexual activity the Ten Commandments address?*
- *Who and what are most harmed by adultery?*
- *If you had to build a case against adultery, what arguments would you present?*

### Apply Biblical Truth

▶ Ask adults to recall from recent television shows and movies examples that promote fidelity in marriage relationships and/or encourage relationships of mutuality and respect. Note that this will likely be much more difficult than the earlier request to identify those that include themes of sexual activity outside of marriage.

While any suggestion might be a stretch in this case, offer for debate the 2004 film “Laws of Attraction” starring Pierce Brosnan and Julianne Moore. This story features two opposing divorce attorneys who contemplate making a commitment to each other following their own alcohol-induced wedding vows.

Or, ask adults to consider “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” a story told in unconventional way but one that deals with two people who have fallen out of love and consequently destroy trust.

▶ Reinforce the idea that while marriage may be for many people nothing more than a social or legal contract, God considers it a spiritual union. Anything that disrupts or destroys this union breaks a promise to God and is even more dangerous to the individual’s spiritual well-being than it is to society’s foundation.

## You Shall Not Steal Leaders Guide

**Exodus 20:15**  
*You shall not steal.*

**Theme: Obedience to God’s prohibition against stealing enhances the life of the community and helps ensure a meaningful existence.**

### Before You Teach

▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

▶ Prior to leading this Bible study, obtain statistics for your city or area related to shoplifting, burglary, theft and other forms of stealing.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

▶ Poll adults by asking them to indicate if they have ever had:

- their wallet or purse and/or money stolen;
- a bicycle, lawnmower or other item stolen from outside their home;
- something stolen from inside their vehicle;
- a part or accessory stolen from their vehicle;

- their vehicle stolen;
- personal property stolen from inside their home;
- personal property stolen at work;
- a less-tangible service or commodity stolen from them or their business.

Ask several volunteers to describe the circumstances of their experiences as theft victims.

► Suggest that how we define *stealing* or *theft* probably grows largely out of our personal experiences as victims. Store owners tend to think of theft in terms of shoplifting, for example. Not only does it contribute to significant retailer losses each year, it also means increased prices for consumers. The National Retail Federation has estimated that shoplifting costs retailers in excess of \$10 billion each year; other research indicates that the figure may be even higher.

► Review statistics you discovered related to stealing where you live. Or, note facts such as these:

- A motor vehicle is stolen in the US every 27 seconds.
- Only 14.1 percent of vehicle thefts were cleared by arrests in 2000.
- From 1995 to 1999, the average comprehensive insurance premium in the US rose 9.0 percent.
- Of the most-stolen vehicles during 2003, six of the top ten were Acura Integra models. The vehicle most often stolen that year was a 1995 Saturn SL.

- An estimated 7 million larceny-theft offenses occurred in the US during 2002, with property losses estimated at \$4.9 billion.

► Next ask adults to identify other perhaps less tangible forms of theft. List their suggestions on a chart or board. Include with their suggestions ideas such as:

- Identity
- Credit card
- Time (in the workplace, for example)
- Productivity (workplace)
- Data and information
- Ideas
- Services
- Expense accounts
- Music from Internet sites
- Cable television
- Tax loopholes
- Computer programs
- Research papers from Internet sites

Using a scale of one to ten, with one being “not so bad” and ten being “the worst,” ask adults to rank each of the forms

of theft on the list. Allow them time to cite examples and opinions about why this form of stealing is wrong, how it is wrong and its affects.

## Explore the Bible

► Note the eighth commandment from Exodus 20:15: “You shall not steal.” Ask adults to define *stealing*.

► Provide an overview of stealing from biblical texts. Involve adults by asking them to locate the various texts and identify the warnings and prohibitions.

- Proverbs 1:11-19
- Leviticus 19:13
- Proverbs 22:22
- Proverbs 28:24
- Ezekiel 18:10-13
- Proverbs 21:7

Remind adults that robbery and theft were prevalent throughout Israel’s history. Judges 9:25 records how the residents of Shechem resorted to highway robbery as a form of vengeance. Hosea accused the priests of his day of being robbers who looked for opportunities to commit crimes (Hos 6:9).

Israel’s prophets such as Isaiah and Ezekiel accused leaders and others of using oppression and making unjust laws so that they could steal from widows, orphans and others who were poor (Is 10:2; Ez 22:29). Amos, Micah and

Hosea also painted grim pictures of the people as robbers and thieves. In a strong condemnation, Jeremiah chastised the Israelites for stealing and turning God’s house into a “den of robbers” (Jer 7:9-11).

Israel’s neighbors were guilty of theft as well. Nahum 3:1 describes Ninevah as being full of robbers; Isaiah 10:13 describes Assyria as a nation that enjoyed plundering.

Robbery was prevalent during Jesus’ time as well. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates how cruel it could be (Lk 10:30-37). Paul was attacked on one of his trips (2 Cor 11:26). John 10:7-10 reports robbers entering sheepfolds.

Point out that not only have people historically robbed and stolen from each other, they have also robbed God. Malachi saw the Israelites’ actions of withholding their tithes as the same as robbery (Mal 3:8-9). Isaiah 61:8 records God’s desire for justice and displeasure at being robbed. Jesus denounced the merchants in the Temple for turning God’s house into a den of thieves and robbers (Matt 21:13). He equated the Pharisees’ obsession with outward rituals to robbery and wickedness (Lk 11:39).

► Suggest that this fairly extensive record of theft and robbery from biblical accounts reminds us that people have historically and habitually stolen from others and from God. Even people of faith are tempted and often succumb to the temptation to take things that belong to someone else.

Ask:

- *What motivates a person to steal?*
- *What thoughts and attitudes generally precede the act of stealing?*

- *What other sins often follow when someone steals?*
- *What effects does stealing have on the person who steals? on his or her family? on the community?*

► Remind adults that God’s original prohibition against stealing ensured that the life of the community, the covenant people, would be enhanced and that the people would have a meaningful existence. Most people at that time had very little personal property to begin with; day-to-day existence was difficult at best. Taking something that to us would be fairly insignificant, such as a knife or some other tool used to grow or gather food, had huge ramifications for the family.

Note that while we normally think of theft in terms of household burglary and white-collar crime, more subtle forms of theft also exist that rob people of meaning existences and of their futures. Children born into poverty, those struggling in developing countries and people in abusive relationships are also victims of theft. Ask:

- *What is our responsibility to people such as these?*
- *Does our indifference indirectly contribute to others becoming victims of theft?*

**Apply Biblical Truth**

► Acknowledge that most adults in your group probably have no problem living the eighth commandment in its strictest sense. Most, in fact, likely have few gray areas when it comes to stealing.

Encourage adults to follow the spirit of this commandment in light of Jesus’ example and other New Testament teachings. Read aloud James 2:5-6 and lead them to identify ways we dishonor the poor and fail to enhance their lives and ensure a more meaningful existence for them.

Note that though US welfare rolls have been cut in half since reforms went into affect in 1996, poverty has increased. “Close to 35 million people currently live under the \$18,400 poverty line for a family of four,” according to Bethany Spicher, a legislative assistant in the Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington Office (“Giving Up On Welfare,” [www.thirdway.com/wv/article.asp?ID=334&Submit=Go](http://www.thirdway.com/wv/article.asp?ID=334&Submit=Go)).

Economic downturns and rising unemployment mean that former welfare recipients find it more and more difficult to get jobs. Housing, childcare and healthcare costs are rising, Spicher notes, and soup kitchens, food banks and shelters can hardly keep up with demands for their services.

Ask:

- *What is the church’s responsibility in light of these facts?*
- *What is our church’s responsibility?*
- *What is the individual believer’s responsibility?*

Suggest that stealing is more than forcefully taking something that belongs to someone else. It is also keeping more than we need, hoarding what we have and failing to advocate for those who are powerless, voiceless and hopeless.

# You Shall Not Bear False Witness

## Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:16

*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

**Theme: Healthy, stable relationships and community life are built upon honesty and trust.**

### Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

► A week or so before you plan to lead this Bible study, contact several adults in the group and ask them to help you collect examples from television and print advertising. Ask them to include particularly some that deceive or appear to distort the truth. Encourage them to write down or cut out the examples they find and bring them to the Bible study. Also compile your own list of examples to use as you introduce the Bible study.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

► Ask those you enlisted to display or repeat the advertising examples they found. Ask others to suggest examples they have recently seen or heard as well. For each, ask adults to evaluate the degree of truthfulness or honesty in the advertisement's claims.

Acknowledge that one of the goals of advertising is to persuade people to consider a new idea or change their

mind. In attempting to do that, advertisers tend to “spin” facts to the advantage of the product, person or idea they are promoting. Ask:

- *How would you rate the honesty of most advertising claims?*
- *Which products, services or ideas seem to you to advertise with the highest degree of honesty and truthfulness?*
- *Which do you think compromise truth the most?*
- *If healthy, stable relationships and community life are built upon honesty and trust, what does the world of advertising say about our culture?*

► Read aloud each of the following statements and ask adults to indicate whether they agree or disagree. Allow time for discussion and debate.

- “The truth is always the strongest argument” (Sophocles).
- “Liars when they speak the truth are not believed” (Aristotle).
- “Piety requires us to honor truth above our friends” (Aristotle).
- “Truth is generally the best vindication against slander” (Abraham Lincoln).
- “The truth is more important than the facts” (Frank Lloyd Wright).

- “Truth is always exciting. Speak it, then. Life is boring without it” (Pearl S. Buck).
- “Get the facts first. You can distort them later” (Mark Twain).
- “When in doubt, tell the truth” (Mark Twain).
- “The victor will never be asked if he told the truth” (Adolf Hitler).
- “There’s a world of difference between truth and facts. Facts can obscure truth” (Maya Angelou).
- “Humankind cannot bear very much reality” (T.S. Eliot).
- “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. That is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant” (Martin Luther King, Jr.).

► Lead adults to consider the concepts of truth, reality and honesty versus deception, lying and distortion by asking such questions as:

- *How do you define truth?*
- *How have your understandings of truth and reality changed over the course of your life?*
- *What role does your faith play in your understanding of reality?*
- *When does a statement become a lie?*

- *In what ways do we compromise truth?*

### Explore the Bible

► Call attention to the ninth commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Note that throughout scripture, the concepts of *truth* and *reality* are virtually the same.

Briefly review the list of commandments, beginning with the first. Then ask:

- *What is the connection between this commandment and the first commandment?*
- *What is the connection between this commandment and each of the others?*
- *Do you see a particular correlation between this commandment and the one immediately preceding it? If so, what?*

Note the idea from the Students Guide that “the distance between ‘you shall not steal’ and ‘you shall not bear false witness’ is not great at all.” Also read aloud the quote from Sherron Watkins, the whistle-blower in the Enron Corporation’s scandal, who said, “It’s the slow steps to disaster we must all pay attention to.”

Then pose this question:

- *Could it be that all sin begins with our willingness to believe what is false?*

Lead adults to explore this idea completely. Suggest that the spirit of this commandment encompasses with more

than spoken words and extends to embracing what is false or unreal, including ways we deceive ourselves. Any misrepresentation of reality is actually a violation of the ninth commandment.

► Remind adults that each of the Ten Commandments flows from God’s character; together the ten form guiding principles for an orderly society. It was this group of commandments that held together a group of former slaves and helped them develop into not just a society, but a covenant community.

Using information in the Students Guide, review the probable origins of this commandment and note that it was likely given to insure the integrity of the legal system. Remind adults that in this culture, accused persons were presumed guilty until proven innocent. God’s commandment for this new community requires that everyone seek the truth: judge, accuser, advocate and witnesses, a concept on which our legal system also depends.

► Guide adults to consider the spirit of this law. Read aloud William Barclay’s conclusion about this commandment, as found in the Students Guide. Then ask:

- *How do we, in our choices to remain silent, break this commandment?*
- *Do you agree with Barclay’s conclusion, that “the sin of silence is as real as the sin of speech”?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Encourage adults to apply this commandment in its fullest sense in their personal lives, families, careers, church,

community and other spheres of influence. Ask them to think about and respond to the following questions silently:

- *How often have my words been truthful but my actions been deceitful?*
- *How truthful am I with myself?*
- *How real and authentic am I in terms of the “self” I allow others to see and know?*
- *How often do I “spin” the facts to make myself look better?*
- *How careful am I to avoid slander and gossip?*
- *How often do I distort the truth by using innuendo?*
- *How often do I repeat hearsay or pass along misinformation?*
- *How frequently am I guilty of misquoting someone?*
- *How well does my commitment to honesty and truthfulness contribute to healthy relationships with my family, friends, coworkers and others?*

# You Shall Not Covet

## Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:17

*You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

**Theme: God prohibits unbridled desire for what we do not have because it can diminish another person and become more important than doing the divine will.**

### Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

► Begin by relating the following example:

John Woolman was born in Burlington County, New Jersey in 1720, into a family with strong Quaker roots. Early in his life he displayed sensitivity for spiritual things. Prior to his marriage in 1749 to Sarah Ellis, he worked with a local tailor, and his success there led him to start his own business in Mount Holly, New Jersey. He also managed a large farm, occasionally wrote legal documents and taught. His business grew and prospered in large part due to his reputation for honesty and industry.

But Woolman became concerned that excessive wealth and large amounts of time devoted to his business would take his attention away from spiritual things and move it toward worldly things, thus endangering his soul. He decided early in his marriage to limit his business activities to what was necessary to support his family, eventually giving up his mercantile business altogether. He became a noted Quaker spokesperson and writer, and the main focus of his ministry became the abolition of slavery, which he described as an injustice and a “dark gloominess hanging over the land.”

Unlike most businessmen of his day, Woolman refused to buy or use any sugar, cotton or dye supplies produced by slave labor. When he traveled and stayed in homes where slaves worked, he insisted on paying them. He was instrumental in convincing the Philadelphia Quakers in 1759 to pass the first resolution in the American Colonies not to own, deal or sell slaves.

► Lead adults to draw connections between Woolman's example and the concepts of covetousness, neighbors, mercy and community by asking such questions as:

- *Is John Woolman's example unique, or are there people you know whose example is similar to his?*
- *What does Woolman's story teach us about the relationship between wealth and spiritual life?*
- *What does his story teach us about wealth and influence and our responsibility to our neighbors?*
- *How do our culture's definitions of success and emphasis on “getting ahead” and “keeping up with the Joneses” affect us spiritually?*

- *How does our desire for what we do not have affect us? How does it affect others?*

- *How much pressure do you feel to live life a certain way because it is a cultural norm?*

► Note that some 250 years before Woolman lived, Martin Luther noted, “Among themselves the merchants have a common rule which is their chief maxim . . . I care nothing about my neighbor; so long as I have my profit and satisfy my greed, of what concern is it to me if it injures my neighbor in 10 ways at once? There you see how shamelessly this maxim flies squarely in the face not only of Christian love but also of natural law.”

Suggest that our attitudes toward things affect our attitudes and actions toward our neighbors, and all are rooted in our relationship to God. Covetousness is at the heart of human selfishness. The tenth commandment causes us to go full circle back to the first. When we fail to allow God to be the only God in our lives, we quickly begin to desire other things to fill the void.

### Explore the Bible

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 20:17, the tenth commandment. Then lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as:

- *How is this commandment different from the others?*
- *What does it mean to covet?*
- *Is covetousness defined differently for us than for the Israelites who originally received this commandment from God? If so, how?*

- *Why is covetousness dangerous? What can it lead people to do?*

Note that this commandment addresses not only actions, but also attitudes. The stronger the desire for something one does not have, the more likely that individual is to act in ways that are not only sinful but also harmful to others.

► Call attention to the translations of this commandment from the New Jerusalem Bible and the New Century Version as noted in the Students Guide. Guide adults to work together to write a definition of coveting based on your discussion and their understandings. Challenge them to consider these elements to include in their definition: *desire, discipline, people, possessions, productivity, community, attitudes, actions.*

Write their definition on a chart or board. Then ask:

- *How is coveting an affront to God?*
- *How does coveting reveal a lack of faith?*
- *How does coveting interfere with an individual’s responsibility for what God has entrusted to the community?*

► Note the progression in this commandment that moves from the physical (house), to relationships (wife), to matters of economics and productivity (slave, ox, donkey), to anything else. When covetousness leads a person to take something from someone else, he or she deprives that person of life’s essential needs, relationships and means of being productive. This, God says, is strictly prohibited. It not only has terrible consequences for the one from whom something is taken, it also disrupts community.

► Acknowledge that it is probably easier for us to understand this commandment in personal terms, but God originally gave it communally to the newly-forming nation of Israel. Suggest that at the heart of this commandment lies this fundamental question:

• *How should we relate to those who live with us in this world?*

We most completely understand this through the life and teachings of Jesus, who modeled mercy toward everyone. As his followers, the platform from which we relate to others should likewise be one of mercy. Then ask:

• *How easy is it for you to display consistently an attitude of mercy toward others?*

• *How can we cultivate the quality of mercy we need to live faithfully as God's people?*

• *In what ways does our culture run counter to this quality and thwart our attempts at developing it?*

► Remind adults that the quality of mercy is rooted in God's character and grows out of God's love. Because we have experienced God's love and mercy, we can display them to others. God prohibits covetousness not only because it damages us spiritually but also because it so consumes us that we neglect our responsibilities to other people.

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Refer to a column titled "The Simple Life" by Melodie Davis, a staff writer for Mennonite Media (see [www.thirdway.com/aw/?AID=160&Submit=Go](http://www.thirdway.com/aw/?AID=160&Submit=Go)).

In it, Davis recalls the popular reality show "The Simple Life," which plucked two excessively pampered and wildly

wealthy young women from their lives of parties, glamour and fame and deposited them on an Arkansas farm for five weeks. Viewers of the show followed the women as they lived with a host family. The apparent appeal of the show was in the disparate differences between the lives to which these young women were accustomed and the lives of their host family.

Though the truth was probably wasted on a vast majority of viewers, Davis noted that perhaps "some people discovered the truth that the simple life and its values are usually far more fulfilling than a shallow life of chasing wealth, looks and hook-ups. ... Most of us are wrapped up in a never ending search for more goods and material possessions."

She goes on to recall a 1973 book by religion professor Vernard Eller with the same title as the reality show. The book, however, "espouses the extreme opposite of the television show, and points us to the original author of 'simple living,' Jesus. But you know, if we look at Jesus' own commentary on wealth and riches we are reminded that people have always chased after money, possessions, status, position. It is nothing new. And we can't blame it on the TV producers and Madison Avenue."

Read aloud Jesus' words in Matthew 6:19-21.

Close with Davis's conclusion: "There is no value in 'the simple life' just for the sake of simple living. I don't care if you shop at Wal-Mart or Macy's, or live in Hogback, Arkansas or 100 Pennsylvania Avenue. The question I'd leave with you is, 'What is my real treasure? What do I value most?'"

## Fear God Alone Leaders Guide

### Exodus 20:18-21

*<sup>18</sup>When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, <sup>19</sup>and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." <sup>20</sup>Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." <sup>21</sup>Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.*

**Theme: God bridges the huge moral gulf that exists between God and people. Our proper response to God's moral supremacy is holy reverence.**

### Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ In the weeks prior to leading this Bible study, collect articles from newspapers, newsmagazines, Web sites and other sources that describe terrifying experiences and personal accounts of those who survive them. Plan to use these to help introduce this lesson.
- ▶ Obtain at least eight pieces of poster board or poster-sized paper. Label each sheet with one of the following categories: childhood, adolescence, college, early career,

marriage, early parenthood, middle age, older adulthood. If you prefer, identify other life ages/stages in place of or in addition to these, and label posters for them.

- ▶ Before your Bible study begins, attach the articles and posters to walls and bulletin boards in your meeting room. Provide bold markers for adults to use.

### As You Teach

#### Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Call attention to the articles you collected that describe terrifying experiences and the personal accounts of people who survived them. Review and summarize each of them.
- ▶ Note the posters that identify various life ages and stages. Ask adults to move from poster to poster, and under each category, identify fears characteristic of that age/stage. Supply bold markers and encourage adults to write in large, clear handwriting.

After several minutes, review the lists adults have made and engage them in dialogue about people's fears by asking such questions as:

- *What made you most fearful as a child? As an adolescent? As a young adult?*
- *What provokes fear in you today?*
- *When was the last time you were truly afraid or terrified? What were the circumstances? How did you overcome your fear?*

- *How have the events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent terrorist threats and activities increased your level of fear?*

► Read aloud this quote from Oswald Chambers: “It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God’s grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics. . . . The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.”

Ask:

- *Do you agree with Chambers’ conclusions? Why or why not?*
- *If you agree, how easy do you find it to live as though you believe this?*
- *What does it mean to fear God?*
- *How can fearing God enable us to fear nothing else?*

## Explore the Bible

► Provide an overview from scripture of the theme of fearing God using information from the Students Guide. Point out that fear of the Lord was used as a motivating factor for obedience and faithfulness to God’s commands. Most often within scripture, fear of God refers to reverence toward and worship of the Almighty.

Select several of the following scriptures and ask volunteers to read them aloud:

Psalm 2:11; 19:9; 25:12-14; 33:18; 34:7, 9; 85:9; 96:9; 111:5; 112:1; 115:11, 13; 128:1, 4; 145:19; 147:11.

Proverbs 1:7; 3:7; 8:13; 13:13; 14:26-27.

Note Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 10:28: “Do not fear those who kill the body but who cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

► Point out that while the biblical witness is full of admonitions to fear the Lord, it also includes more than 60 occasions where the Lord or a representative of the Lord encourages people *not* to be afraid. In fact, many of the same people who feared the Lord were also told “do not be afraid” on other occasions, including Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the people of Israel, Joshua and David.

Ask:

- *Why is fear of the Lord desirable?*
- *Why should we not be afraid of anything or anyone else?*

► Read aloud Exodus 20:18 and note that this verse recalls Exodus 19:16-19. Remind adults of the preparation the people made prior to this experience (see Ex 19:10-15).

Point out the various physical events that occurred; then ask:

- *Why were the people so frightened?*
- *Had they ever heard the voice of God before?*

- *Would they ever directly hear the voice of God again?*
- *What did the experience of being in God's holy presence do to the people?*
- *Why do you think God chose to appear before the people at this time and in this way?*
- *Have you ever felt the presence of God so keenly that you became acutely aware of the huge gulf between God's holiness and your sinfulness? What were the circumstances?*

► Read aloud Exodus 20:19 and note the people's response to this experience. Then ask:

- *What permanent effect did this experience have on the people?*
- *What did they ask Moses to do, and why?*
- *How do you think this experience compared with occasions when Moses told them what God required, when he gave them other commandments? What experiences have you had that you can compare with this?*

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 20:20-21. Lead adults to discuss what Moses meant when he essentially said, "Do not be afraid, but fear God."

Suggest that life lived God's way, following God's instructions, results in a life that is not characterized by sin and disobedience. Those whose lives are free from such patterns have no reason to fear.

## Apply Biblical Truth

► Close by challenging adults to discuss the validity of the conclusions of Alan Wolfe, a sociologist, professor and author. Wolfe, a Jew, teaches at a Jesuit university, Boston College, where he serves as director of the Center for Religion and American Public Life. In his book *Moral Freedom*, he wrote, "There is a moral majority in America. It just happens to be one that wants to make up its own mind."

"Welcome to the Morality Supermarket," declared Christianity Today, in an article referencing Wolfe's book ([www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/006/25.28.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/006/25.28.html)).

In researching his book, Wolfe asked people about the rules that govern their lives, things like loyalty, self-discipline, honesty and forgiveness. Among other things, he concluded that Americans view themselves and others as basically good people. We tend to assume the best about others because it promotes tolerance and acceptance.

He notes, however, that it is not a huge leap from believing that people are born without radical evil to "believing that the best place to turn for moral guidance is to themselves." If we believe people are basically good and each person can seek moral guidance for himself or herself, then we naturally also must believe that each person is free to "determine for themselves what it means to lead a good and virtuous life." Wolfe concludes that this idea is both "radical" and "disturbing in its implications."

► Ask:

- *To what degree do you agree or disagree with Wolfe's conclusions?*

- *What role do you think the Ten Commandments play in forming the foundation for the moral decisions that most people make?*
- *What role should they play?*
- *What role do the Ten Commandments play in bridging the moral gulf that exists between God and us? What does our obedience of them acknowledge?*
- *What is the best way for Christians to honor the Ten Commandments today?*

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