



Life Group Leader Notes

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The Ten Commandments are incredibly famous, and incredibly unknown. Almost everybody in the UK today will have heard of them, and most will know that they represent God's commands to Israel. But almost nobody in the UK today will be able to list them all. The evangelist J. John tells of a woman he met who said she was a Christian because she kept the Ten Commandments. So he asked her: What's number six? "Hmmm. I don't know that one." OK, how about number four? "I don't know that one." All right, let's make it simple: what's number one? "Oh," she said, "adultery's in."

Given our post-Christian culture, that isn't really surprising. But even among Christians, the Ten Commandments can be very confusing. Practically, what does it mean for us to "have no other gods," or "not make any images," or "honour the Sabbath"?

For example, Paul says we are "not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14), and we have just spent a term exploring that point in our Grace Works series from Galatians. Does that mean we can ignore the Ten Commandments altogether? On the other hand, when Jesus is asked what the most important commandment

is, he summarises the Ten: love God, and love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:35-40). Does that mean we should still keep them all? Then again, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus seems to raise the bar even higher: you were told not to murder, but I'm telling you not even to be angry (Matthew 5:21 and so on). This makes it look like the Ten Commandments are a floor, not a ceiling, for Christian living. So how do they apply to us?

In this series we will answer those questions, bearing in mind three contrasts. Firstly, the Ten Commandments are given in Sinai (a mountain between Israel and Egypt), out of slavery, but not yet in the Promised Land; they are not a condition Israel has to meet to get rescued, but a response to the fact that she has already been rescued. Secondly, our obedience is motivated by love, not legalism: the Ten Commandments are ultimately aimed at our hearts, and we keep them out of love for God, not a desire to tick boxes or earn credit. Thirdly, we are powered by the Spirit, not flesh, which means that even the ability to obey God comes from him, rather than from us. If we keep our eyes on the big picture—what God has done in Christ by the Spirit—it will help us learn from, follow, and delight in the Ten.

# Week One

*Exodus*  
*20:1-21*

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*“You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me”*

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we apply it

- a. Think back to before you were a Christian (if you are). What was the “god” that was most central to your life? e.g. family, career, money, sex, health etc
- b. Now consider your life today. What “god” or “idol” are you most tempted to worship, other than the true God?
- c. If either of those seem abstract, or difficult to answer, here’s how you can tell: What did/do you pursue with your time and attention? What did/do you make sacrifices for? If you had/have an ideal dreamworld—a heaven, if you will—what was/is at the centre of it, bringing joy to you? What did/do you most fear losing, or never achieving?
- d. What practical steps have you found helpful in fighting the temptation to idolise and worship these things (giving our time, energy, effort and money)?

# Week Two

*Exodus*  
*32:1-35*

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## *“You Shall Not Make For Yourselves a Carved Image”*

### 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

### 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

### 3. How we apply it

- a. Israel obviously struggled with the idea that God was invisible. Having spent centuries in Egypt, they were very used to the idea of gods being represented physically. So when Moses disappeared for a while, they immediately made an image to worship. What motivations for making images of God (in books, stained glass, on wood, in church buildings, etc) do you think there are in the UK today?
- b. In this story, God is very angry about what Aaron has done. What dangers are there to making images of God (other than the fact that he told us not to)? What does it imply about his nature, when compared to other gods? How might it distort our picture of who he is?
- c. Rather than carved or painted images, what physical symbols did Jesus give his Church to remember him (bread, wine, baptism)? What benefits are there to remembering him through them, rather than through a more static representation?
- d. How do you think all this applies to crosses, crucifixes (an image of Jesus on the cross) or icons in churches? Illustrations of the Trinity (water, ice, vapour)? Kids Bibles with pictures of Jesus? Are there differences? Why / why not?

# Week Three

*Leviticus*  
**24:10-16**

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*“You Shall Not Take the Name of the LORD Your God in Vain”*

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we apply it

- a. This is a scary story! Obviously, since Jesus came, we don't execute people today for breaking God's law (people in the New Testament are occasionally struck down by God for their disobedience, but we are never told to do this ourselves). But it is worth asking: why was this such a terrible offence, that it had such a severe punishment? What would have happened to Israel, over time, if the third commandment was not enforced like this? What can we learn from that?
- b. What other ways are there of “taking the name of the Lord in vain,” other than direct blasphemy? Do you think false claims that God has said X or Y qualify? Curses? Perjury?
- c. Why do you think Scripture takes speech so seriously relative to our culture, in which free speech is an absolute? (Perhaps consider James 3 here)
- d. What about swearing oaths (“I hereby swear by Almighty God that the evidence I give shall be the truth ...”)? Is this prohibited in Scripture (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12)? Are there any exceptions (Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Hebrews 6:16)? How do we reconcile all this? So what? Should we even need to swear oaths if we consistently tell the truth?

# Week Four

*Exodus*  
*16:22-36*

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*“Remember the Sabbath Day, to Keep it Holy”*

## 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

## 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

## 3. How we apply it

- a. It is interesting that this story comes before the Ten Commandments are given. Where did Israel get the idea that they should take one day off in seven (Genesis story of creation), if not from Moses? What implications does this have for us?
- b. Do you take one day off in seven? Why / why not?
- c. Consider a person for whom a day off is impossible (a mother of young children, a carer for a sick spouse, or equivalent). What would observing the Sabbath look like for them? How can the rest of us help?
- d. The Heidelberg Catechism\* (1563) explains the application of the fourth commandment like this: “First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I diligently attend the assembly of God’s people to learn what God’s Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.” Is that right, do you think? Is it helpful? Is anything missing?



# Week Five

*Matthew*  
*5:21-26*

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## *“You Shall Not Murder”*

### 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

### 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

### 3. How we apply it

- a. How would you define “murder”? Is it different from “killing”? How does it connect to ethical questions around warfare, capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia, manslaughter and so on? (Bear in mind that this will not be hypothetical for some people—they or their relatives may well have participated in one or more of these—so be sensitive here)
- b. Now consider Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 5. What does it reveal the root of murder to be? Why is it so dangerous?
- c. Anger is usually a result of trying to protect something we really love. This can be good or bad, depending on what we are trying to protect. What makes you angry? (Be honest: don’t just list the things that are meant to make us angry.) What does that reveal about your heart, if anything?
- d. What can we do about it, both individually (in forming new habits: forgiveness, honest acknowledgement of anger) and corporately (in helping and encouraging one another: confession, accountability)?

# Week Six

1 Cor  
6:9-20

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## *“You Shall Not Commit Adultery”*

### 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

### 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

### 3. How we apply it

- a. There are two ways of being sexually pure and faithful (or “chaste”), according to Scripture. What are they? (Abstaining as a single person, or marriage between one man and one woman.) What does the Bible say to us if we have missed the mark on either or both of them? (Again: be sensitive here, given that some in the group will almost certainly be in this position)
- b. Why is the Bible so concerned with sexual ethics? What bigger story connects sexual intercourse with creation, worship, the gospel and the future? (Ephesians 5:22-33 may help here)
- c. How does our answer to (b) help us make sense of (a)?
- d. What are the most common questions we ask, or get asked, when it comes to biblical sexuality? How can we best answer them? How can the Church best respond to those who are asking them?



# Week Seven

*Ephesians*  
*4:17-32*

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## *“You Shall Not Steal”*

### 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

### 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

### 3. How we apply it

- a. What have you stolen? (This could range from funny stories about sweet shops, to more serious equivalents if appropriate.) Why do we steal? What are we hoping to achieve? What is at the root of it?
- b. Paul's response to theft is not just negative (don't steal) but positive (work, and give). How do his instructions here help us, especially if we are inclined to think the eighth commandment doesn't really apply to us?
- c. The Heidelberg Catechism\* (1563) applies the eighth commandment like this: “God forbids not only outright theft and robbery, punishable by law. But in God's sight theft also includes all scheming and swindling in order to get our neighbor's goods for ourselves, whether by force or means that appear legitimate, such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God. In addition God forbids all greed and pointless squandering of his gifts.” Which of these are most challenging to you personally?
- d. How does giving crush greed? What practices can we cultivate that develop generosity in our hearts?

*\*A question and answer paper from German Christians during the Reformation*

# Week Eight

*Acts*  
*5:1-10*

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## *“You Shall Not Bear False Witness”*

### 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

### 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

### 3. How we apply it

- a. What motives might prompt someone to tell a lie? Try and think of at least ten, of varying levels of severity.
- b. Are any of those motives ever acceptable? Are there circumstances in which lying might be the godly thing to do? (Rahab and the Spies, Joshua 2; Hebrew Midwives, Exodus 1; Schindler's Factory: Protecting Jews in WW2). If so, why? How do you tell the difference?
- c. What usually motivates lying, whether in your life, your friends' lives, or the lives of your children or grandchildren (if applicable)?
- d. Given the answer to (c), what practices and habits can help us cut lying off at the root, and resist the temptation to bear false witness?
- e. Jesus calls the devil “the father of lies” (John 8:44). Why are lies so important to him, and why is truth so important to God?

# Week Nine

*Ephesians*  
*6:1-4*

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## *“Honour Your Father and Mother”*

### 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

### 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

### 3. How we apply it

- a. Paul makes the striking point that this is the first commandment with a promise: “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Why is this point important for him? What implications does it have for us, if any?
- b. What happens to our understanding of God if, as a society, we lose a sense of honour for our parents? (Does it make it more difficult to experience both awe and affection for the same person, for instance?) How do you see this played out in Britain, and/or the Church?
- c. What does it look like to honour parents who did not do their job well, or whom we do not even know? What challenges does this present, and how can we help one another here?
- d. What implications do the fourth commandment and Paul’s instructions have for those of us who are parents?

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## *“You Shall Not Covet”*

### 1. What it says

Have one person read the passage aloud in an accurate translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV or equivalent). If anyone has a translation that is significantly different on any section, compare the two versions.

### 2. What it means

Now go back through the text, one sentence at a time, and see if any words, phrases or sentences are obscure or difficult. Are there theological words, names, places or cross-references we need to look up? Do we all understand what the passage means? How would we paraphrase it in modern English? How would we explain it to an eight year old?

### 3. How we apply it

- a. It is striking that the first and last commandments refer to the posture of your heart (do not worship any other gods, do not desire what belongs to someone else), whereas the middle eight refer to actions (making idols, blasphemy, murder, and so on). What do you think this shows us?
- b. It is probably possible to keep the middle eight commandments by willpower alone, but when it comes to #1 and #10, willpower alone is useless. What is the solution, according to Scripture? (Have a look at Deut 30:11-14; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27; etc.)
- c. In our deeply materialistic society, in which almost all of us are richer (in worldly terms) than the man in Jesus’s parable, what steps can we take to ensure that we do not normalise covetousness or greed?
- d. What does it look like to be genuinely radical with our finances, do you think? What stops us? How can we respond?