The Ten Commandments
Family Devotional
Written by: Russ and Stephanie Jackson

Introduction

The Ten Commandments are the most famous set of laws in human history. They have guided the laws of governments and the lives of people for thousands of years. What makes these ten rules so important?

Purpose

Most people think that the Ten Commandments are God’s “No” list of laws not to break. It is true that eight of the ten begin with “Do not . . .” This has led some to think that God’s intent is to be controlling – but that is actually the opposite of what is true.

Think about the rules of your favorite sport. For me, that is soccer. If I was to list out the rules of soccer there would be a lot of “do not’s.” Do not be off sides. Do not foul the other players. Do not touch the ball with your hands. Do not kick the ball out of bounds. Do not let the other team score. Do not hog the ball.

As you can see, all of those “do not” rules do not take the fun out of the game, but actually help to focus the game on the having fun, teamwork, and scoring points to win.

Deuteronomy 4:1 “Israel, listen to the rules and laws I’m going to teach you. Follow them. Then you will live.”
Deuteronomy 4:26 “I’m calling out to heaven and earth to be a witness against you this very day. If you do those things, you will quickly die . . . “

God is clear that these rules are meant to, like the rules of a game, to direct us to what is best.

That is not all. While God gives us rules as gifts to give us better lives, God does not want us following them only because they make our lives better. Like all gifts from God, He wants us to take the good things He has given us and share them with our neighbors.

Deuteronomy 4:6 “Be careful to keep them. That will show the nations how wise and understanding you are. They will hear about all of those rules. They’ll say, “That great nation certainly has wise and understanding people.”

Following God’s rules well will give us great lives. When people see our great lives, they will want to know what we are doing to make them great. This gives us an awesome opportunity then to direct our neighbors to the great God who has given us so much!

Our Responsibility: Know and Show

What then are we supposed to do with the Ten Commandments? The answer is easy – know them and show them!

Deuteronomy 5:1 “Israel, listen to me. Here are the rules and laws I’m announcing to you today. Learn them well. Be sure to follow them.”
Deuteronomy 6:6 “The commandments I give you today must be in your hearts.”

God clearly wants us to know His commandments. After all, if you are going to play a game, you have to learn the rules first!

Once we know them, we can show them through obedience to them. Then, when people ask us about our great lives, we can be ready to tell them about our great God.

Deuteronomy 6:7-9 “Make sure your children learn them. Talk about them when you are at home. Talk about them when you walk along the road. Speak about them when you go to bed. And speak about them when you get up. Write them down and tie them on your hands as a reminder. Also tie them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses. Also write them on your gates.”
God does not only want us to learn His commandments. He wants them on our foreheads, doors, and city gates – on display where the world can see them.

**Structure**

When asked which commandment was the most important, the Ten Commandments were summarized by Jesus.

Matthew 22:37 “Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all of your mind.’ This is the first and most important commandment. And the second is like it. ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ Everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets is based on these two commandments.”

Jesus had mastered how to know and show. He knew that all the commandments of God were based on loving God and loving your neighbors, and quickly quoted scriptures on both (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18).

The Ten Commandments are structured just like Jesus’ answer. The first five are about loving God and the last five are about loving your neighbors.

**The Commandments**

Deuteronomy 5:7 “Do not put any other gods in place of me.”

Deuteronomy 5:8-10 “Do not make states of gods that look like anything in the sky or on the earth or in the waters. Do not bow down to them or worship them. I am the Lord your God. I am a jealous God. I punish the children for the sin of their parents. I judge the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who hate me. But for all time to come I show love to all those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Deuteronomy 5:11 “Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will find guilty anyone who misuses his name.”

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 “Observe the Sabbath day. Keep it holy, just as the Lord your God commanded you. Do all of you work in six days. But the seventh day is a Sabbath in honor of the Lord your God. Do not do any work on that day. The same command applies to your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen, your donkeys and your other animals. It also applies to any outsiders who live in your cities. I want your male and female servants to rest, just as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. The Lord your God reached out his mighty hand and powerful arm and brought you out of there. So he has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”

Deuteronomy 5:16 “Honor your father ad mother, just as the Lord your God commanded you. Then you will live a long time in the land he is giving your. And things will go well with you there.”

Deuteronomy 5:17 “Do not commit murder.”

Deuteronomy 5:18 “Do not commit adultery.”

Deuteronomy 5:19 “Do not steal.”

Deuteronomy 5:20 “Do not give false witness against your neighbor.”

Deuteronomy 5:21 “Do not long for our neighbor’s wife. Do not long to have anything that belongs to your neighbor. Do not long to have your neighbor’s house or land, male or female servant, ox or donkey.”

Those commandments are often shortened (to make memorizing them easier):

1. Only worship God.
2. Do not worship idols.
3. Do not use God’s name carelessly.
4. Keep the Sabbath holy.
5. Honor your parents.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not give false witness.
10. Do not desire other people’s things.

**Commandment 1 – Only worship God**

God does not want us to worship any god other than Him. He has to be first in our lives. If you are mailing a package the most important part is not what is in the box, but what is on the address label. If your worship is being sent to an address other than God’s, then nothing else about your worship is important.

**Commandment 2 – Do not worship idols**

God made animals, plants, the world, the sun, the moon, and the stars. They are all beautiful and wonderful. It is foolish to worship anything in creation, when we could instead be worshiping the God who created them. God also does not want us to make pictures, states, or images of Him. He does not want us to get confused and think that the image has any value – when only God himself is worthy of our worship.

**Commandment 3 – Do not use God’s name carelessly**

God listens to us when we call out to Him in prayer. Therefore, we need to be careful not to abuse that awesome privilege. Also, when we call out to God carelessly others who hear might think that God is not listening or that He does not care.

**Commandment 4 – Keep the Sabbath holy**

God worked six days making the world and then He rested (Genesis 2:2). God knows that we also need rest and renewal. Therefore, we should always keep one day a week free from work to rest on. God thinks this is important and that we should not expect others to work on the Sabbath either, even if they do not yet know God.

**Commandment 5 – Honor your parents**

God wants you to honor your father and mother. This means more than just doing what they ask. It also means that you should make sure that your life is one that makes them proud. God including this commandment in the half about loving Him, because He knows that the way you love and obey your parents is the way that your will love and obey Him.

**Commandment 6 – Do not murder**

It is hard to show love to your neighbor and tell him about God if he is dead. It is not right for your to take another’s life. Murder is always a selfish act where someone believes that something in their life is more important than someone else’s life. God calls us to give up our lives for others, not take others lives for ourselves (John 15:13).

**Commandment 7 – Do not commit adultery**

God sees marriage as a very important commitment. In marriage, two people of different families come together to become one family. It is very similar to an adoption – like God’s adoption of us, and just like God’s adoption of us is lifelong, so is marriage. You know that no matter what, God will always love you and will never give you up. That is how God wants us to see marriage. Therefore, God does not want married people to be unfaithful to each other.

**Commandment 8 – Do not steal**

God promises to provide for all of our needs and if we steal things from others we are denying God’s ability to provide for us. We also lose the opportunity to be a good neighbor, because you cannot be friends with someone you steal from – you will always be to frightened of getting caught to be a friend. God wants us to work for what we have (2 Thessalonians 3:7-15).

**Commandment 9 – Do not give false witness**

God does not want us to give untrue testimony. We should not put our own blame on others, nor should we cover up the blame of others. If you do something wrong, you should not blame your brother or sister. Instead, you
should admit to what you have done. If you know of someone else who has done wrong, you should not cover it up. Helping others get away with doing wrong keeps them from getting right with others and with God.

**Commandment 10 – Do not desire other people’s things**

God wants us to be content with what we have. If we spend our lives wanting what other people have, then we will waste our lives trying to get those things. Also, that jealousy of others makes it hard to be their friend and neighbor. God gives us so much, we should rejoice in all that we have – not compare it to others. After all, happiness is never found in the things we own, but in the God who owns us.

**Closing**

We have taught our dog to sit, to come when called, and to walk on a leash. We did not teach her to obey those commands because we do not like her. Instead, they are there to keep her safe when we take her for a walk. She does not always want to obey, but when she does, she gets to walk with us – which is the greatest happiness in her life. We protect her, we provide for her, and when she is obedient, she is safe and gives us more opportunities to love on her.

Our obedience to God and His commands is just like our dog Daisy. Sometimes we don’t want to obey, because we are distracted by things that seem important at the time (like a tasty squirrel running across the yard). If, however, we follow the commands of the God who provides for us and protects us, we will not only be safe, but will give Him more opportunities to love on us.

**Application Questions:**

1) Which of these commandments do you struggle most with obeying and why? How can your family help with it?
2) What 2 principles did Jesus say were behind all of the commandments?
3) Who can you share these commandments with and tell about Jesus this week?
4) How many of the commandments can you recite from memory? If you don’t know them all yet, work on memorizing these this week!